

DownToEarth

Community forest resources: Sustainable use, state norms must

30 March 2020



State-level guidelines must be created for sustainable resource usage in areas where community forest resource (CFR) rights are given under the Scheduled Tribes and Other Traditional Forest Dwellers (Recognition of Forest Rights) Act, 2006 (FRA), the Energy and Resource Institute (TERI) noted in a study.

The study was commissioned by the Ministry of Tribal Affairs (MoTA) in February 2019.

Under FRA, a village can get its traditionally held forest land, legally recognised as CFR.

The FRA gives gram sabhas “right to protect, regenerate or conserve or manage any community forest resource which they have been traditionally protecting and conserving for sustainable use.”

“Around 1 lakh hectares has already been recognised from over 3.4 crore ha. But there are no guidelines for gram sabhas to conserve and manage these areas so far,” JV Sharma of TERI said.

He added that the 73rd Amendment to the Constitution of India empowered the third tier of democratic government (gram panchayats/ gram sabhas) for local self-governance. FRA and the Provisions of Panchayats (Extension to Scheduled Areas) Act, 1996 further empowered gram sabhas.

Sharma added that now, the gram sabha was supreme instead of the forest department.

“But this doesn't mean that the provisions of the national forest policy or the various court orders regarding resource usage from forest will not apply to them. It means that now they'll have to manage these areas themselves,” he added.

The study submitted to MoTA noted:

- MoTA must issue broad guidelines and principles for implementation of CFRs, mentioning specific role of the state forest department, state tribal/social welfare department, revenue department and gram sabhas
- State governments should prepare state-specific guidelines on the basis of MoTA's guidelines
- MoTa should focus on capacity-building of gram sabha members, assessment of the biomass stock and biodiversity conservation
- Focus on capacity building programmes to educate various stakeholder government departments about the acts/schemes/policies
- The micro-plans prepared by gram sabha for their respective CFR should be a part of the working plans of forest division concerned, so that forest staff could facilitate the implementation of sustainable forest management

Source: <https://www.downtoearth.org.in/news/forests/community-forest-resources-sustainable-use-state-norms-must-70078>