

<https://www.thehindu.com/sci-tech/energy-and-environment/tribal-affairs-ministry-in-talks-with-environment-ministry-to-fund-community-forest-resource-management-committees/article70482858.ece>

# Environment Ministry funds sought for forest management committees

Move necessary to 'correct the perception' that the forest bureaucracy was at odds with the goals of community-led forest resource management, officials say

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ABHINAY LAKSHMAN



As per the 2023 community forest resource rights management guidelines issued by the Tribal Affairs Ministry, CFRM Committees of the gram sabhas are entitled to receive funds in their bank accounts from Forest Departments "for forest development work if any". Image shows a gram sabha meeting in progress. File photo: Special Arrangement

The Ministry of Tribal Affairs is in talks with the Ministry of Environment, Forests, and Climate Change, for funding the management of community forest resources, for which rights have been vested in gram sabhas of tribal communities and other forest-dwellers across the country under the Forest Rights Act (FRA), government officials said.

Officials of both Ministries met over it recently, and the Tribal Affairs Ministry is also planning to write to the Environment Ministry formally on this matter, a top official told *The Hindu*, adding that this was necessary to “correct the perception” that the forest bureaucracy was at odds with the goals of community-led forest resource management.

For the last 20 years, the FRA has recognised the historical rights of Scheduled Tribe communities and other forest-dwellers on the forests they have lived in and around and vested these rights in them through FRA titles for specific sets of rights. Under the FRA, gram sabhas are entitled to include **community forest resource rights** (CFR) over areas “they have been traditionally protecting, regenerating, conserving and managing for sustainable use”.

In 2023, the Tribal Affairs Ministry issued guidelines for the management of forests for which CFR rights had already been granted to gram sabhas. These guidelines provided for setting up CFR management committees under the title-holding gram sabhas, mandating that conservation and management plans be drawn up by the communities before the Forest Department is called in to align them with the Environment Ministry’s working plan codes.

The Union Government is now looking to rope in the Environment Ministry to fund the CFR management committees that are being set up under the FRA. One senior official said, “The CFRM committees will need resources and help in functioning. They will need the funds to hire officials, prepare plans, and even train their own community’s people in running the day-to-day operations. The idea is to get funding help from the Environment Ministry for this as well.”

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However, when the 2023 CFR management guidelines were being implemented in Chhattisgarh, the Forest Department intervened to stop it last year (2025), citing concerns that any community forest management plan needs to be first aligned with the Environment Ministry’s working plan code. The forest department’s intervention was withdrawn after protests from dozens of Gram Sabhas in the State.

A meeting at the level of Secretaries of both Ministries was held over the last month on the topic of exploring the possibility of the Environment Ministry allocating funds for the CFR management committees, officials said, adding that further dialogue is

expected to continue in this direction. “If needed, safeguards can be built in to ensure that the planning of forest conservation and management remains community-led and is not necessarily taken over by the forest department,” one of the officials said.

As per the 2023 CFR management guidelines issued by the Tribal Affairs Ministry, CFRM Committees of the gram sabhas are entitled to receive funds in their bank accounts from Forest Departments “for forest development work if any”.

The official explained that there is a “perception” of forest officers and local communities being at odds with each other, even though in most cases they work together to protect the forests, adding that this needed to be “corrected”.

While the FRA has been implemented for close to 20 years now, with the maximum number of titles being in the category of Individual Forest Rights (IFR) titles, there is no disaggregated data on the number of CFR titles issued across the country. Mandated monthly reporting of FRA title records shows that over 1.2 lakh community forest rights titles have been granted across the country, but this includes aggregated data on all different kinds of community rights, including but not limited to CFR titles.

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