

How ‘Green’ Narratives Are Used to Dismantle Indigenous Rights in India

Laws like the Forest Rights Act have been systematically eroded by the very state institutions responsible for implementing them.

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In 2025, the Indian government announced its efforts to “saturate forest rights” for Indigenous Peoples and forest-dwelling communities under its new national campaign, “Pradhan Mantri Janjatiya Unnat Gram Abhiyan (PM-JUGA).” The aim is to realize and implement the rights embedded within the Forest Rights Act (2006) (FRA).

Rather than signaling progress, however, the very need for such a campaign exposes a deeper institutional failure.

It confirms what activists have documented for years: that the laws like the FRA – envisioned to rectify the “historical injustice” against India’s Indigenous communities – have been systematically eroded by the very state institutions responsible for implementing them. The promise of the FRA, for instance, remains largely unfulfilled even after nearly two decades of being in effect.

The fundamental issue lies not in an absence of legal protections but in their active subversion. Behind the rhetoric of “green growth” and “climate action,” state and corporate actors have employed climate disinformation as their primary instrument to render these hard-won rights unenforceable.

This deliberate strategy forms the core finding of the Asia Centre’s latest report – [“Climate Disinformation in India: Subverting Indigenous Peoples’ Rights”](#) – which demonstrates how disinformation reinforces the comprehensive assault on legal protections and ecological integrity.

The report identifies four forms of climate disinformation in India: one-sided environmental data obscuring ecological decline; promotion of false climate solutions, including

destructive solar parks and monoculture plantations; strategic denialism of climate-linked mortality and glacial melt; and outright rejection of climate science and climate change's anthropogenic causes.

These disinformation narratives are the product of an information landscape increasingly shaped by state-corporate power, not civic empowerment. When government agencies and private actors rebrand environmentally harmful projects as “green,” climate communication is reduced to a public relations exercise. This alliance not only obscures environmental harm to the public, but it also facilitates the selective enforcement of laws that privilege economic interests over the rights and survival of Indigenous Peoples.

A clear example is how state and corporate entities legally advance their economic interests by limiting Indigenous Peoples' access to information. By creating hindrances during consultations, Indigenous Peoples engage in these meetings in a tokenistic manner, thereby having their Free, Prior and Informed Consent (FPIC) rights undermined. Climate disinformation further shields these powerful actors from accountability by diverting public scrutiny. This reinforces the power imbalance between those upholding economic interests and Indigenous Peoples, paving the way for the erosion of the latter's rights.

Climate disinformation also poses a threat to traditional stewardship by promoting state-led, technocratic agricultural policies as “modern” and preferable. This is achieved by conversely labeling traditional agriculture as

“backwards” and misrepresenting the Indigenous Peoples’ climate adaptation efforts. The resulting focus on external intervention effectively strips communities of their statutory rights to manage resources.

The same narratives also enable the state to monopolize conservation and restrict Indigenous Peoples’ role in forest management. By deliberately misrepresenting state-led afforestation initiatives, political actors exaggerate their role as environmental protectors. This, however, masks the erosion of Indigenous Peoples’ climate resilient systems in favor of unsustainable, top-down conservation efforts.

Furthermore, climate disinformation creates political cover for forced evictions. Environmental and “green” justifications are instrumentalized to legitimize displacement, with others in urban settlements driven out under “beautification” drives. This systematic misrepresentation of Indigenous Peoples as “encroachers” on their own ancestral lands allows for the selective enforcement of colonial-era wildlife legislation, effectively overriding and nullifying the protections guaranteed under the FRA.

Meanwhile, when Indigenous Peoples speak up for their rights, climate disinformation is also leveraged to mislabel them and justify harassment, baseless charges, and militarized suppression. This persecution exhibits particularly gendered dimensions, with women advocates facing not only arbitrary charges but also gendered slurs, a calculated strategy to break resolve and silence leadership.

This context explains why progressive legislation has consistently failed to deliver its intended protections. The

PM-JUGA campaign represents an effort to obscure bureaucratic resistance and legal violence through renewed rhetoric rather than enforcement. Climate disinformation supplies the narrative camouflage for this subversion, creating the public impression of progress while actively facilitating the transfer of land and resource control from indigenous communities to state and corporate interests.

A truth-based climate future is unattainable in the absence of legal accountability. Without the political will and courage to administer and defend existing laws against sustained efforts to undermine them through climate disinformation, neither legislative reform nor government campaigns can meaningfully protect Indigenous Peoples.

What India requires is therefore not new “saturation” initiatives, but the resolve to enforce its current legal framework by centering the rights embedded within it as the cornerstone of ecological governance.

With such action absent, rhetoric around the “saturation of rights” will remain performative, while climate disinformation continues to enable the systematic erosion of India’s indigenous rights and environmental security.

This op-ed is based on Asia Centre’s report, “Climate Disinformation in India: Dispossessing Indigenous Peoples’ Rights.” Download the full report [here](#). For more information about Asia Centre, visit asiacentre.org.