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Securing Rights, Enabling Futures

**Policy Lessons from Forest Rights Act
and Future Pathways**



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SECURING RIGHTS ENABLING FUTURE

Policy Lessons from
Forest Rights Act and Future Pathways

**TWO DECADES OF
FRA IMPLEMENTATION IN INDIA**

(Special Focus On Chhattisgarh, Maharashtra And Odisha)

FOREWORD



It is with great pride and a deep sense of purpose that I present this comprehensive report, *Securing Rights, Enabling Futures: Policy Lessons & Pathways from FRA for Accelerating Tribal Development*. This report comes at an opportune moment, marking nearly two decades since the enactment of the Forest Rights Act (FRA), a landmark legislation that has the potential to transform the lives of forest-dependent tribal communities across India by securing their tenurial rights and affirming their role as custodians of forests.

The FRA stands as a powerful tool to address historical injustices and enable inclusive, community-led forest governance. The journey of FRA implementation so far reflects important strides, with room to build on these achievements and deepen its impact. This report offers a critical reflection on its implementation, with a special focus on the experiences of Chhattisgarh, Maharashtra, and Odisha. These states have demonstrated remarkable innovation and leadership in recognizing and operationalizing forest rights, while also confronting complex challenges that continue to shape the journey toward sustainable tribal governance and development.

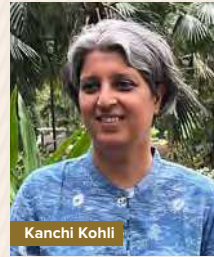
At the heart of this report is a recognition that securing land and resource rights is not only a matter of equity, it is foundational to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), reconciling conservation and livelihood, advancing gender equality, and building climate resilience. The report highlights the need for continued efforts to bridge gaps in institutional capacity, reconcile legal and procedural overlaps, and address regional disparities in implementation. Through detailed analysis, state-specific innovations, and actionable recommendations, this study advocates for a whole-of-government and whole-of-society approach, one that places tribal communities at the centre of development.

At UNDP, we are proud to support the initiatives of Ministry of Tribal Affairs and the State Tribal Welfare Departments in implementation and monitoring of the Forest Rights Act and other flagship programmes for tribal empowerment. UNDP remains committed to working alongside national and state governments, civil society organizations, and communities to strengthen institutional capacities, foster convergence across sectors, and promote policies that are inclusive, equitable, and sustainable. We hope this study serves as a roadmap for turning commitment into action, offering insights for policymakers, practitioners, and stakeholders dedicated to realizing the full potential of the FRA and building a just, resilient future for India's tribal communities.

I extend my heartfelt gratitude to the research team for their rigorous and insightful work. My appreciation also goes to the Ministry of Tribal Affairs, State tribal departments of Chhattisgarh, Maharashtra, and Odisha and all other stakeholders who contributed their expertise and perspectives.

Angela Lusigi
Resident Representative,
UNDP India

PREFACE



Kanchi Kohli



Shyama Kuriakose

CAN SECURE FOREST RIGHTS CREATE A PATHWAY FOR TRIBAL ORIENTED SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT?

A governance architecture that enables empowerment of tribal communities is fundamental for India. In practice this requires navigating historical roots, culture and socio-economic contexts within constitutional mandates and legal frameworks. The existing institutional, policy and academic work on these themes is a critical repository to address the complexities. At the same time, new and emerging technologies must adopt formats and language that align with and integrate tribal wisdom.

This study has been an opportunity to appreciate the power of secure tenures and emphasizes that governance is not only about recognizing rights but equally about grounding decentralized institutional structures for long-term systemic change. The attempt has been to place normative understanding of tribal governance within legal boundaries of a rights-based law to analyse its limits and opportunities.

The study flows through five sections.

The first looks at why tenurial security in general and forest rights specifically can provide a pathway to strengthen tribal governance and create sustainable futures. In the second section, the study presents the legal framework of the FRA and its evolution. It gathers trends on themes that have preoccupied two decades of implementation. It also helps understand how the FRA intersects with other environment, forest and land laws and affect the exercise of rights.

Section three onwards, the study builds on three themes i) Reconciliation and Record of Rights ii) Exercising and Sustaining of Rights and iii) Institutional Capacity and Interdepartmental Coordination to gather the national and regional experience. This background is essential to learn from the innovative work carried out by tribal institutions, local and state governments, CSOs and multi-lateral agencies, to overcome challenges. Section four highlights these innovations through the work carried out in states of Odisha, Maharashtra and Chhattisgarh.

The in-depth conversations from villages to the senior government offices have acknowledged that tribal led future is critical to shape socio-economic policy of a country. It requires untangling inter-departmental partnerships, unlearning and learning to create innovations, especially to integrate cross sectoral questions of gender, sustainable development, biodiversity and climate change with the application of rights. The fifth and final section presents recommendations around legal clarifications, strengthening Gram Sabhas, foregrounding women's forest rights and creating space for innovative financial support.

The study links everyday questions that preoccupy FRA implementation and locate them within forest histories to shape forest futures emphasizing that solutions need to draw upon plural knowledge systems or different 'ways of knowing' to address both global and local problems. We hope that the frameworks, ideas and suggestions presented in the study do justice to this reasoning.

Kanchi Kohli & Shyama Kuriakose
Authors

MESSAGE



India's tribal communities have historically maintained a symbiotic relationship with forests—anchored in stewardship, sustainability, and cultural reverence. The enactment of the Forest Rights Act (FRA), 2006 marked a watershed moment by formally recognizing these communities not as passive beneficiaries, but as rightful custodians of forest landscapes. It affirmed their legal and moral agency in conservation, governance, and sustainable management of forest resources.

Nearly two decades since its enactment, this study—undertaken by UNDP in collaboration with stakeholders across Chhattisgarh, Maharashtra, and Odisha—assesses the on-ground realities of FRA implementation. It offers critical insights into what has worked, where gaps remain, and what further steps are necessary to translate rights into real and lasting empowerment.

The study underscores that FRA can be truly transformative when supported by proactive state mechanisms, empowered community institutions, and sustained multi-stakeholder partnerships. The case studies from the three tribal-dominated states demonstrate encouraging examples of inclusive development, gender-sensitive governance, and enhanced ecological resilience made possible through effective FRA implementation.

However, persistent challenges remain. These include inadequate post-rights support, limited convergence among departments, gaps in institutional capacity, and the need for deeper integration of Gram Sabha-led governance into broader policy frameworks. The report lays out a pragmatic roadmap to address these issues and calls for a renewed focus on building robust institutional ecosystems that allow rights holders to fully realise the promise of the Act.

This study makes a timely and compelling case for positioning forest rights not as an isolated policy intervention, but as a foundational pillar for tribal empowerment, participatory governance, and sustainable development. As India grapples with the twin imperatives of environmental sustainability and social equity, the full realization of FRA offers a powerful pathway forward.

I hope this report serves as a valuable resource for policymakers, implementing agencies, civil society, and tribal communities alike. Its recommendations are grounded in both policy analysis and lived realities—offering actionable guidance to take forward the unfinished agenda of FRA.

I commend UNDP for its leadership in undertaking this important study and for its continued efforts to bring forest rights to the center of the development discourse in India. By anchoring the analysis in both policy and lived experience, this report strengthens the case for a more inclusive and rights-based governance model. It stands as a valuable contribution to ongoing efforts to realize the full potential of the FRA and to ensure that tribal communities are at the forefront of shaping sustainable futures.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, consisting of several loops and a long horizontal stroke.

Prof. A. B. Ota, IAS (Retd)
Senior Advisor, Study Team

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This report has been developed with the objective of reimagining the Forest Rights Act (FRA) as a powerful instrument for advancing forest governance and accelerating progress on the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). It advocates for a shift from a narrow focus on title distribution toward a more comprehensive and transformative approach—one that views FRA as a development strategy and not merely a legal entitlement. The report outlines actionable recommendations to support this shift and strengthen the role of FRA in forest-based sustainable development.

This report is a result of a strong collaboration between UNDP and our invaluable partner Foundation for Ecological Security (FES). We deeply appreciate partnership with FES and their commitment to inclusive and sustainable tribal development.

We deeply appreciate the intellectual leadership of the lead researchers, Ms. Kanchi Kohli and Ms. Shyama Kuriakose, for their thoughtful analysis and unwavering commitment throughout the process. We are especially grateful to Dr. Akhil Bihari Ota, former IAS officer and Senior Advisor to this study, whose deep insights and extensive experience in tribal rights added depth and direction to the report.

Our sincere thanks go to the Principal Secretaries and senior officials of the State Tribal Welfare Departments of Chhattisgarh, Maharashtra and Odisha, whose guidance and engagement were instrumental in shaping this report. We also acknowledge the valuable perspectives shared by officials from the Forest, Revenue, and Panchayati Raj Departments, which contributed to a richer and more grounded analysis. Special thanks to the Director, FRA Division, Ministry of Tribal Affairs, for her valuable insights.

At UNDP, this report was led by the Tribal Development Team, SDG Acceleration Unit, steered by Ms. Sreetama Guptabhaya, with dedicated support from Ms. Divya Saini and Ms. Upasana Sikri, from conceptualisation to completion with consistency and focus.

This report has also greatly benefitted from the knowledge, coordination, and field-level insights of UNDP state project teams—Ms. Shweta Mishra, Mr. Binay Kishore Dash, and Ms. Shradhanjali Hota (Odisha); Mr. Bibhore Deo and Mr. Rajesh Kumar (Chhattisgarh); and Mr. Prasad Bhosale (Maharashtra). Their contributions helped ground the report in field realities and local context. Additional thanks to the FRA Coordinators, whose in-depth field-level insights greatly enriched the learnings drawn from implementation experiences.

This report is the result of a collective effort—and a shared vision to realise the full potential of the Forest Rights Act in building a more just and sustainable future.

Meenakshi Kathel
Chief Advisor, UNDP India



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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ACF: Assistant Conservator of Forest	GO: Government Orders
BDA: Biological Diversity Act, 2002	GoI: Government of India
CA: Compensatory Afforestation	GPDP: Gram Panchayat Development Plan
CAMPA: Compensatory Afforestation Fund Management and Planning Authority	GPM: Gaurela-Pendra-Marwahi
CFJ: Call for Justice	GPS: Global Positioning System
CFR: Community Forest Rights	GR: Government Resolution
CFR-LA: Community Forest Rights Learning and Advocacy	IEC: Information, Education, and Communication
CFRR: Community Forest Resource Rights	IFA: Indian Forest Act, 1927
CFRMC: Community Forest Resources Management Committee	IFR: Individual Forest Rights
CFRMP: Community Forest Resources Management Plan	IP: Intellectual Property
CRISP: Centre for Research in Schemes and Policies	IPCC: Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change
CSO: Civil Society Organizations	IPLC: Indigenous People and Local Communities
CSS: Centrally Sponsored Schemes	IPT: Indian People's Tribunal
CTH: Critical Tiger Habitats	ITDA: Integrated Tribal Development Agency
CWH: Critical Wildlife Habitat	ITDP: Integrated Tribal Development Project
DA-JGUA: Dharti Aaba Janjatiya Gram Utkarsh Abhiyan	JFM: Joint Forest Management
DFO: Divisional Forest Officer	JFMC: Joint Forest Management Committee
DC: District Collector	LAO: Land Acquisition Officer
DLC: District Level Committee	LCW: Land Conflict Watch
DLMC: District Level Monitoring Committee	MFP: Minor Forest Produce
DMF: District Mineral Foundation	MGNREGA: Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act 2005
FAQ: Frequently Asked Questions	MJJY: Mo Jungle Jami Yojana
FCA: Forest Conservation Act, 1980	MoPR: Ministry of Panchayati Raj
FCR: Forest Conservation Rules, 2017	MoSPI: Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation
FES: Foundation for Ecological Security	MoTA: Ministry of Tribal Affairs
FRA: Forest Rights Act, 2006	MoEFCC: Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change
FRC: Forest Rights Committee	MoRD: Ministry of Rural Development
FR Rules: Forest Right Rules, 2008	MoU: Memorandum of Understanding
FSI: Forest Survey of India	MPR: Monthly Progress Report
GIM: Green India Mission	MSME: Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises
GIS: Geographic Information System	MSP: Minimum Support Price
GMPI: Global Multidimensional Poverty Index	

- NFP:** National Forest Policy, 1988
- NGO:** Non-Governmental Organizations
- NIF:** National Indicator Framework
- NRLM:** National Rural Livelihood Mission
- NRM:** Natural Resource Management
- NTFP:** Non-Timber Forest Produce
- NP:** National Parks
- OTFD:** Other Traditional Forest Dwellers
- PA:** Protected Areas
- PES:** Payment of Ecosystem Services
- PESA:** Provisions of Panchayat (Extension to Scheduled Areas) Act, 1996
- PF:** Protected Forests
- PMAY:** Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana
- PM-JANMAN:** Pradhan Mantri Janjati Adivasi Nyaya Maha Abhiyan
- PMVDVY:** Pradhan Mantri Van Dhan Vikas Yojana
- PPP:** Public Private Partnership
- PRADAN:** Professional Assistance for Development Action
- PVTG:** Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups
- RFCTLARR:** Right to Fair Compensation and Transparency in Land Acquisition, Rehabilitation and Resettlement Act, 2013
- RDC:** Revenue Divisional Commissioner
- R&D:** Research and Development
- RF:** Reserved Forest
- RFO:** Range Forest Officers
- RoR:** Record of Rights
- RPMC:** Resource Planning and Management Committee
- R&R:** Rehabilitation and Resettlement
- SC:** Scheduled Castes
- SCA:** Special Central Assistance
- SCSTRTI:** Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes Research Training Institute
- SDGs:** Sustainable Development Goals
- SDLC:** Sub-Divisional Level Committees
- SHG:** Self Help Groups
- SIF:** State Indicator Framework
- SLMC:** State Level Monitoring Committee
- SOP:** Standard Operating Procedure
- SPMU:** State Project Management Units
- ST:** Scheduled Tribes
- STC:** ST Component
- ST-SC Act:** Scheduled Castes and the Scheduled Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Act, 1989
- TDD:** Tribal Development Department
- TK:** Traditional Knowledge
- TLMC:** Taluka Level Monitoring Committee
- TRIFED:** Tribal Cooperative Marketing Development Federation of India Limited
- TRTI:** Tribal Research and Training Institute
- TSP:** Tribal Sub Plan
- UNDP:** United Nations Development Programme
- UNFCC:** United Nations Framework on Climate Change
- VLF:** Vidarbha Livelihood Forum
- VNCS:** Vidarbha Nature Conservation Society
- WLPA:** Wild Life Protection Act, 1972
- WLS:** Wildlife Sanctuary



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The intersection of tribal governance and sustainable development frameworks can provide a powerful lens through which both state and non-state actors can visualize the social, economic and political landscape of a country like India. Together they can also inform policy and programmatic priorities that can speak to tribal worldviews, deliver national development action and draw upon international best practices and standards. The socio-political context, legal framework and bureaucratic engagement with Forest Rights Act provides a systemic opportunity through which the intersections between tribal governance and sustainable development can be positioned and envisioned.

The Scheduled Tribes and Other Traditional Forest Dwellers (Recognition of Forest Rights) Act, 2006 also known as Forest Rights Act (FRA), is a landmark legislation in India that recognizes the rights of forest-dwelling communities, who have resided on forest lands for generations, by providing a framework for recording these rights and empowering Gram Sabhas as key decision-makers in the management and governance of forest resources, thereby addressing historical injustices towards forest dwellers. The Act aims to ensure sustainable livelihoods and ecological security. FRA recognizes that forest-dwelling tribal communities in India and their customary institutions have long histories and strong stakes to protect, use and manage forests.

Globally, it has been acknowledged that securing land and forest tenure for local communities, particularly forest-dwelling tribal communities, fosters better governance, supports adaptation solutions, and contributes to climate change mitigation. The IPCC (The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change) report, 2019 highlights land tenure insecurity as a key driver of deforestation and land degradation, while noting that decentralization of forest governance and community co-management have shown considerable success in slowing forest loss and aiding carbon mitigation. The IPCC Report has highlighted that historical injustices towards forest dwellers can be ameliorated with appropriate policy and mentioned FRA as a key legislation in this regard.

The Ministry of Tribal Affairs (MoTA) and the State Governments have bolstered FRA implementation through guidelines, clarifications, training programmes, and robust monitoring mechanisms, with states like Odisha, Chhattisgarh, and Maharashtra leading through innovative approaches.

Box 1: Status of FRA Implementation in India

till 31st May 2025 (Monthly Progress Report, MoTA)

Titles distributed
25,11,375

 **Individual**
23,89,670

 **Community**
1,21,705

Forest Land
23.2 million acres

 **Individual**
5.07 million acres

 **Community**
18.19 million acres

MoTA has also allocated dedicated budgets under the Dharti Aaba Janjatiya Gram Utkarsh Abhiyan (DA-JGUA)¹ to streamline the effective implementation of FRA and has put in place the mechanisms of convergence with other infrastructure and livelihood programmes for forest right holders. United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) is partnering with six state governments to support the implementation of the DA-JGUA. Additionally, UNDP has been working with the MoTA and state governments for over a decade to support the effective implementation of FRA.

However, challenges remain such as social biases, knowledge limitations, policy prioritisation and legal and administrative convergence gaps that continue to hinder the recognition and exercise of rights even after recognition. There are also geographical variations in the level of implementation at state and regional level as well as in other areas (urban or coastal areas) which show slow or limited implementation of the FRA.

It is in this context that UNDP undertook a study to understand how the recognition and vesting of rights enabled through the FRA can create innovative pathways by which tribal governance and sustainable development can be collectively addressed. The study intends to highlight key innovations and learnings at national and state level that have been critical in strengthening FRA implementation and broadening its outreach. A focused analysis was conducted in the states of Chhattisgarh, Maharashtra and Odisha, given that they are the leading states in recognition of rights and have addressed some key issues for exercise of rights in post recognition phase. UNDP's longstanding partnerships with these states further informed the study and its insights.

The rationale of the study can be summed up to:

- Highlight the importance of building on both community-led and government-supported initiatives to sustain the relevance and impact of the FRA.
- Explore new ways by which interconnectedness and interdependence of FRA with other laws, policies, and institutions can help achieve the broader objectives as set out in the preamble of FRA.
- Identify mechanisms to integrate recognition of forest rights within developmental, environmental, and governance frameworks to accelerate sustainable development.
- Capture the enabling conditions that are critical to bridge tribal governance with sustainable development pathways.
- Recommend additional measures required to connect forest rights and tenures with key issues such as gender equity, food and health security, environmental sustainability on one hand and poverty alleviation, tribal empowerment, and decentralized governance on the other.

The study affirms that recognition of rights under FRA is the foundation and legal base for forest-dwelling tribal communities for able to exercise their rights. The empowerment of forest-dwelling tribal communities to exercise their rights requires a strong governance framework, along with mechanisms that integrate forest rights recognition into broader developmental, environmental, and governance agendas to accelerate sustainable development. Such integration is crucial to enhance the agency of forest-dwelling tribal communities, strengthen their role in decision-making over critical natural resources, and ensure convergence with other programmes for their holistic development.

¹The Dharti Aaba Janjatiya Gram Utkarsh Abhiyan (DA-JGUA) is a mission launched by government of India which aims for the holistic development of tribal communities by bridging critical gaps in infrastructure, health, education, and livelihoods through convergence of government schemes across 17 ministries and 25 focus interventions

TWO DECADES OF FRA: Overview of Experiences

Two decades of FRA implementation presents a rich body of experiences that have practical lessons for law making and implementation. It also presents principal level learnings that can guide the overarching approach through which tribal governance and sustainable development can be mutually complementary. Further, State Governments play a crucial role in implementing the FRA by establishing committees, issuing notifications, and ensuring the recognition and vesting of forest rights. They are responsible for creating the State Level Monitoring Committee (SLMC), District Level Committees (DLC), and Sub-Divisional Level Committees (SDLC). These committees, along with the Gram Sabhas, are essential for the effective implementation of the FRA. Almost twenty years of FRA has presented multiple opportunities for State Governments to create innovations and reconcile challenges at multiple scales. The study attempts to present procedural, institutional and substantive challenges and how state governments have innovatively responded and demonstrated solutions. It also highlights aspects that continue to require urgent and focused attention.

Some of the key emerging experiences and challenges are:



Reconciliation and recording of rights:

There are certain overarching reasons which have enabled or constrained this aspect of FRA implementation. For instance, while FRA's legal framework clearly lays out the institutional mechanism and processes for recognition of rights, it offers limited guidance on exercise of these rights in the post-recognition phase. Further, there is a geographical variability in the way FRA has

been implemented across India due to several factors such as ratio of tribal population, policy prioritisation of tribal rights, delayed uptake and other socio-political factors that have been discussed in the study. Another overarching aspect is the effort to ensure meaningful participation of women in FRA processes, despite evidence of women already assuming leadership roles in the exercise of forest rights. This also manifests in the absence of gender disaggregated data that can inform action on rights recognition.

Further, these challenges are also accentuated due to the existing mechanisms through which land records, mutation and inheritance of rights are operationalized, characterized by quality of land records, incomplete or inadequate processes related to rights recognition, reconciliation and reporting of FRA rights. Specific challenges exist in exercise of rights and issues of relocation when it comes to the interface of FRA and Protected Areas (PAs) such as National Parks (NP), Wildlife Sanctuaries (WLS) or Tiger Reserves or areas designated for mining and other industrial activities.



Exercising and sustaining rights post recognition:

Ongoing and emerging challenges in the post recognition phase are around processes that precede recognition of community rights, habitat rights on the one hand, and how to exercise and sustain them after. For community rights, these challenges include delineation of community forest resource (CFR) from existing legal boundaries, setting up of Community Forest Resource Management Committees (CFRMCs) and preparation of CFR management plans (CFRMPs), integrating CFRMPs with forest and panchayat working plans and others. In the case of habitat rights some gap areas include

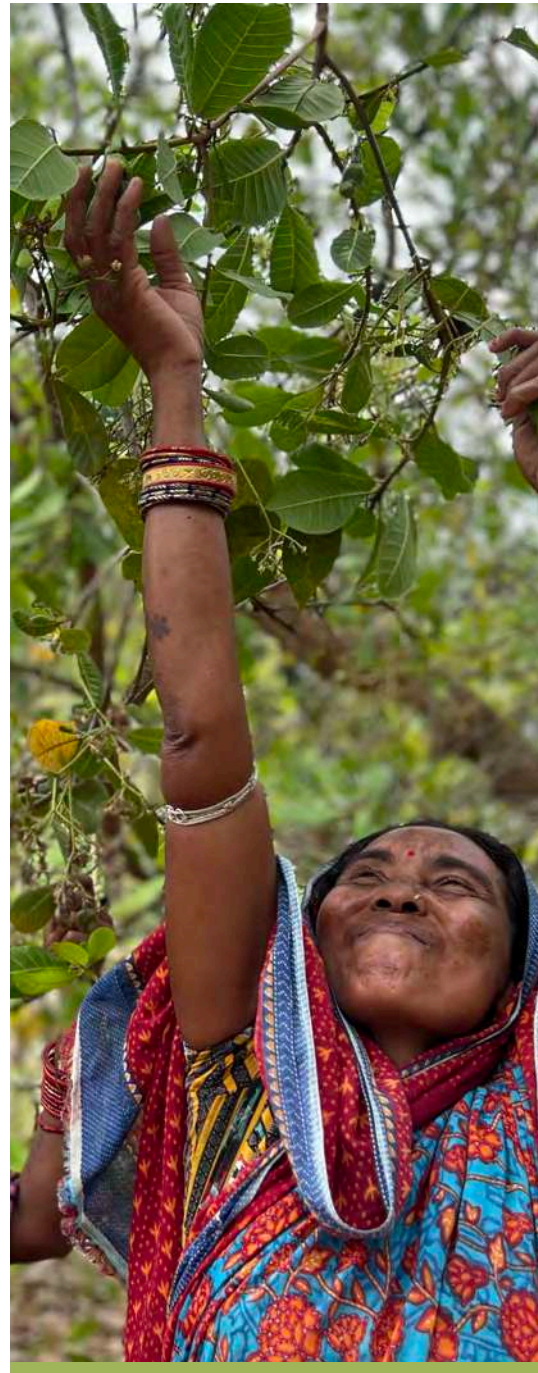
access to and involvement of Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups (PVTGs), procedural clarity, overlaps with individual forest rights (IFRs) and community forest rights (CFRs). Specific challenges also persist for livelihood link support for IFR holders including market linkages.



Institutional capacity and interdepartmental coordination:

A multi-layered understanding of institutional capacity and levels of interdepartmental coordination is essential to assess and address roadblocks that limit the implementation of any legal framework. These roadblocks include gaps in institutional capacity, both at the central and state levels, and inconsistencies in how various departments—such as Forest, Revenue, Tribal Affairs, Panchayati Raj, and Rural Development—interpret and prioritize their roles in the implementation of the FRA. Often, conflicting departmental visions and competing priorities result in fragmentation and delays. An area that requires specific attention is the functioning of Convergence Committees, which are meant to bring together multiple departments to ensure alignment of FRA-related activities with development and conservation schemes. Their functioning varies widely across states, with limited mechanisms to track or evaluate their contributions to forest rights recognition and post-recognition governance. On the ground, enabling interdepartmental coordination is further constrained by the absence of adequate support structures, particularly at the district and block levels. Gram Sabhas and CFRMCs, which are meant to anchor the FRA process locally, often lack the resources, capacity, and institutional backing to play their mandated roles effectively. Furthermore, monitoring mechanisms and grievance redressal systems need to be strengthened to ensure that right holders have a recourse when their rights are delayed or denied. Further, the absence of accurate and timely data hinders efforts to

monitor progress, resolve land record conflicts, and enable community planning and accountability indicating the need for digitization of records and the availability of open-access data.



RECOMMENDATIONS AND WAY FORWARD

To visualize forest rights as a pathway to tribal governance and sustainable development, it is essential to adopt a broader framework that addresses both everyday challenges and systemic reforms across four key action areas

UNDERPINNING FOREST RIGHTS AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT:

A Whole of Government Approach

“The future of FRA is a policy, law is only to recognise rights.”

RECOMMENDATION	ACTION POINTS	NEXT STEPS
<p>Integrating Forest Rights as a pathway for tribal governance in National and State Policies</p>	<p>A National Tribal Policy/ National Acceleration Plan for tribal development for next five years may be framed, integrating tribal governance and sustainable development as interconnected outcomes. State level policies and action plan may also be developed.</p> <p>Forest rights holders may be recognized as a category across all social protection and livelihood programmes.</p> <p>Policies and schemes related to forests, land, and natural resource governance must be designed to facilitate the actualization of these rights.</p> <p>A thorough review and harmonization of existing programmatic guidelines may be undertaken to empower tribal communities in decision-making processes and the governance of their resources.</p>	<p>MoTA or Parliamentary Committee on Welfare of Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes may set up an Advisory Committee to conduct countrywide consultation process and propose recommendations for National Tribal Policy.</p> <p>An interdepartmental committee may be formed to conduct a joint review of FRA implementation and to develop a comprehensive framework for the post-recognition phase</p> <p>MoTA and State Governments may initiate exercise to map different schemes where Natural Resource Management (NRM) based livelihood and conservation measures can be linked for development of tribal communities.</p> <p>Undertake studies to identify sectoral gaps with a focus on tribal women’s needs and challenges.</p>
<p>Need for dedicated and earmarked funds to enable forest rights as a means to strengthen tribal governance</p>	<p>Dedicated and earmarked funds in national and state schemes for forest right holders</p> <p>State governments can consider institutionalising dedicated budgetary provisions under the Scheduled Tribe Component (STC)/Tribal Sub-Plan (TSP) to support forest rights holders in sustainably governing their IFR and CFRs, ensuring long-term community-led resource management and convergence with FRA objectives.</p>	<p>Ensure all ongoing programmes and schemes systematically capture gender-disaggregated data, covering both process and impact-oriented outcomes.</p> <p>Document women-specific initiatives and highlight how various schemes and programmes have benefitted tribal women through targeted case studies.</p> <p>Organise consultations with NITI Aayog, Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation (MoSPI), MoTA and Ministry of Environment, Forests and Climate Change (MoEFCC) to identify data sets and develop indicators to capture community efforts in protection and management of natural resources.</p>
<p>Build Gender related parameters and indicators within policy, program and project design (realise SDG5 related to achieving gender equality at all levels of decision making)</p>	<p>Linking National Rural Livelihood Mission (NRLM) to the FRA with specific emphasis on addressing gender sensitive livelihood avenues</p> <p>Actively promote women’s leadership in the preparation design and implementation of CFRMPs</p> <p>Integrating IFRs and CFRMPs with schemes that are targeted at easing women’s work load</p> <p>Incentivising women led entrepreneurs in post rights recognition phases</p> <p>Integrate gender specific component into the programme/scheme design and ensure outcome indicators captures gender specific results with disaggregated data.</p>	<p>MoTA may collaborate with MoSPI to integrate social category-wise data on SDG indicators into the National Indicator Framework (NIF), with UNDP providing technical support for this exercise.</p>
<p>Monitor progress of tribal communities in achieving Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)</p>	<p>Incorporate indicators in the NIF for Goal 15-Life on Land to capture land/forest under community protection and management. Some of the data sets include status of FRA implementation across the country maintained by MoTA through Monthly Progress Reports (MPR)</p> <p>Enhance SDG monitoring to address data gaps for tribal communities. Collect and track disaggregated data on tribal communities in the National Indicator Framework (NIF) on SDGs.</p>	

ADMINISTRATIVE INTENT AND LEGAL CLARIFICATIONS

“PESA kay andar FRA active hai” (FRA is active within the PESA framework)

<p>Reconciliation and Recording of Rights</p>	<p>A common understanding and consensus may be facilitated on the issue of saturation of rights or a sunset clause, through seeking inputs from Gram Sabhas and civil society organisations (CSOs).</p> <p>A clear action plan needs to developed to address concerns related to Acquisition of Rights and Compensation.</p> <p>Legal position regarding recall/cancellation and “contested recognition” may be clarified by MoTA/State Governments</p> <p>Potentially overlapping regulatory, monitoring and reporting roles and responsibilities of committees like Forest Resource Committee (FRCs), Community Forest Resource Management Committee (CFRMCs), Resource Planning and Management Committee (RPMC), Joint Forest Management Committee (JFMCs), Biodiversity Management Committee (BMCs) and other local institutions in CFR and habitat rights areas may be clarified</p>	<p>Dedicated interdepartmental committee may be established to be facilitated by FRA cell at the state level to support in identification, drafting, and coordination of interdepartmental inputs for issuing timely clarifications related to matters that has intersection with FRA implementation.</p> <p>FRA Cells can evolve into Mahiti Kendras (Information and Knowledge Centres)</p> <p>State Tribal Departments through technical support may initiate a mapping of relevant laws, policies, and schemes to identify and address practical overlaps and interfaces between legal frameworks governing tribal and forest areas.</p> <p>MoTA and State Governments may update the existing CFR guidelines to provide clear guidance at what stage and level Community Forest Resource Management Plans (CFRMPs) should be integrated into Forest Working Plans.</p> <p>MoTA and MoEFCC can take a lead on issuing consolidated guidelines in consultation with other relevant departments.</p>
<p>Exercising and Sustaining Rights</p>	<p>Strengthen post-rights support by moving beyond a beneficiary-based approach to one that empowers tribal communities in planning and decision making related to governance of community resources and tribal areas.</p> <p>Reconcile operational integration and overlaps of FRA with PESA for exercising and sustaining forest rights.</p> <p>Strengthen the post rights recognition phase by integrating FRA holders within programmatic priorities such as MGNREGA, Social Forestry, Handloom, Women and Child Welfare.</p> <p>Creation of database of recording the nature of rights granted, schemes accessed and benefitted by the right holders to strengthen accountability and evidence-based planning</p> <p>Consolidated guidelines on management of MFPs may be issued, exercise of rights in CFR areas and CFR Planning including to ensure clarity on the role of forest, tribal and revenue department</p> <p>Pilot innovation can be initiated at state levels to demonstrate the potential of community-based forest enterprises, mechanisms for market linkages, ecosystem support required for entrepreneurship development. Develop site specific community led participatory models for landscape and eco-restoration planning for CFR areas and PVTG habitats</p> <p>Grievance redressal mechanisms are required to address wrongful rejections, violation of recognized rights and clarify the roles of Gram Sabhas in different stages of recognition and post-recognition of rights</p>	<p>State Governments may submit proposals regarding the suggested pilots to MoTA which can be taken up under DA-JGUA, PM-JANMAN, Article 275 etc. Successful site-specific models for landscape and eco-restoration planning may also be studied to identify how these programmes can be scaled up in tribal areas.</p> <p>State Tribal Welfare Departments can identify current mechanisms for grievance redressal and the gaps that needs to be addressed.</p>

FOSTERING PARTNERSHIP AND BUILDING CAPACITY

“Jab wo apna law bolte hain, to hum apna law bolte hain” (When they quote their law, we quote our law)

Interdepartmental coordination and institutional capacity for convergence and partnerships

Create a resource of master trainers from different levels of decision making, including members from the Gram Sabha.

Develop scenario-based training modules and practical guides which addresses multitude of overlapping issues and problem solving techniques which are bottlenecks for exercising of rights under FRA .

Build partnerships within and across government departments by facilitating interdepartmental exchanges and joint workshops.

Explore the role of the private sector, particularly in areas such as market linkages and value chain enhancement, ensuring alignment with community interests, safeguards and sustainability.

Establish a clear mandate, provide financial support and strengthen the capacities of Tribal Research and Training Institutes (TRTIs), enabling them to collaborate with training institutions of departments such as Forest, Agriculture, and Rural development.

High level coordination mechanism may be established between MoTA and MoEFCC at the national level and/or State Tribal, Revenue and Forest Department (through the Chief Secretary) at the state level to address the conflicts and complementarities between PAs and Forest Rights.

State Governments may commission a needs assessment to identify underexplored thematic areas, including deeper gender-related challenges beyond participation, and to explore gaps in navigating government and private market linkages.

State Governments can consider creating learning platforms at the state level to create special knowledge and skill exchange forums or shivirs/shibirs

MoTA and state governments can commission developing cohorts of master trainers with institutional and financial support for long term engagement at various levels

INNOVATIONS ENABLING FOREST RIGHTS PATHWAYS FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

- State governments can promote transparency by proactively making available the maximum amount of administrative data, including gender-disaggregated data and other records such as minutes of SLMC meetings, or other such decisions that influence tribal governance and implementation. This data should be aligned, where possible, with relevant SDG indicators to support informed decision-making.
- MoTA may commission a policy paper to outline mechanisms for strengthening tribal empowerment and governance in the exercise and sustaining of rights, alongside ensuring beneficiary-level access to relevant schemes and policies.
- Article 275 (1) of the Indian Constitution may be leveraged by to financially support the initiatives at the state level that can integrate elements of FRA and PESA for tribal empowerment.
- State governments through the Chief Secretary can bring together relevant departments to support practice-oriented initiatives on the ground to integrate eco-regional and landscape planning models. Lessons learnt from existing or past landscape programmes/restoration programmes can be integrated into the post rights planning and management related to community resource and habit rights.
- MoTA and State Government may consider technical partnerships that can help strengthen market linkages and present potential and risks of linking market-based models with post rights processes. This can include carbon markets, biodiversity offsets, Access and Benefit Sharing, and Environmental, Social and Governance (ESG) frameworks.
- Training Institutes of MoTA, MoEFCC or other departments, with support from technical agencies can convene a series of workshops related to schemes like Accredited Compensatory Afforestation or Green Credits to leverage these schemes for forest right holders as well as ensure protocols of safeguards and protection for these communities.
- A collaborative and participatory study may be commissioned to examine ways to operationalise Intellectual Property (IP) rights recognized under the FRA, enabling forest rights holders to meaningfully benefit from them.
- The mechanism to set up a dedicated fund to support technological innovations and creation of GIS platforms that are accessible to right holders, Govt functionaries, CSOs at all levels of FRA implementation.



CONCLUSION

Over the past decade, the recognition and implementation of forest rights have increasingly emerged as a transformative lever for sustainable development and inclusive governance. However, forest rights must be understood not merely as a legal entitlement, but as a policy imperative that has the potential to realign the governance of natural resources with the constitutional vision of tribal self-rule and ecological sustainability. When anchored within a broader development agenda, forest rights can become a pathway to empower forest-dwelling tribal communities, enhance conservation outcomes, and ensure long-term ecological and livelihood security.

MoTA has demonstrated leadership through its Whole-of-Government approach—most notably via the DA-JGUA scheme, to address gaps in social infrastructure, healthcare, education, and livelihood opportunities by converging efforts across 17 ministries. Such programmes can be enhanced to include conservation, climate and social development and welfare measures for forest-dwelling tribal communities integrating and upholding the constitutional role of Gram Sabhas to ensure a tangible impact on sustainable development of the tribal communities.

To that end, there is a need to empower networks of individuals and Gram Sabhas as long-term grassroots governance structures. These networks should be equipped with the tools, knowledge, and platforms necessary to exercise forest rights meaningfully. Support must include tailored training programmes, opportunities for peer learning, scenario-based exercises, and interdisciplinary cohorts that foster convergence across sectors and government departments. These approaches can bridge communication and collaboration gaps by promoting problem-solving that acknowledges the complex, interlinked nature of exercise of rights, governance, conservation and livelihood.

Given the complex, multi-jurisdictional nature of forest governance, convergence across sectors—including Forest, Environment, Tribal Affairs, Panchayati Raj, and Rural Development—is imperative. A coherent institutional infrastructure must be built at the block, district, and state levels to provide technical, legal, and administrative support to Gram Sabhas and other community institutions. Knowledge support and grievance redressal mechanisms are required at block, district and state levels to create a backbone infrastructure to sustain and responsibly exercise forest rights across generations. Such an infrastructure can service a range of challenges such as record corrections, innovative pilots, interdepartmental learning alongside being the first line of support for Gram Sabhas. This can also lead to the development of frameworks and guidelines on various pressing topics, including those related to land acquisition and diversion that affect the rights of forest-dwelling tribal communities.

A major enabler of forest rights governance is the digitization and real-time monitoring of community-level data. This demands not only robust and context-sensitive technology but also a commitment to capture indicators that reflect sustainable development outcomes, particularly in the domains of gender equity, conservation impact, and livelihood resilience. These efforts need to culminate in the development of open-access knowledge platforms that support evidence-based planning and decision-making across community, implementation, and policy.

Special attention must be directed towards bridging persistent uptake gaps—particularly in geographies where forest rights remain under-implemented due to historical conflict, policy oversight, or jurisdictional tensions. This includes reconciling departmental conflicts in PAs with high conservation value or areas demarcated for industries or infrastructure. The



same is important for coastal areas, urban areas or remote access areas in hills or islands.

Gender equity must be placed at the heart of forest rights implementation. The post-rights governance landscape demands dedicated, gender-responsive programming that ensures women's leadership and participation in all stages—from policy design and implementation to conservation and economic advancement.

Training programmes, conservation schemes, and livelihood opportunities must be tailored to address women's unique roles and challenges within forest economies. Furthermore, robust monitoring frameworks are needed to assess the gendered impact of forest rights implementation. Equally, mechanisms to ensure prior informed consent must be institutionalized with an emphasis on women's active and informed participation.

The recognition of habitat rights under the FRA, especially PVTGs, requires a multidisciplinary and community-led approach. This approach can draw lessons from landscape and eco-regional planning that have been successfully implemented even prior to the enactment of the FRA. Special programmes can play a key role in strengthening habitat rights recognition. They can enable community-led and participatory rural mapping techniques, and convene multi-actor platform discussions at various levels of decision-making. These efforts can support the creation of innovative pilots, including participatory mapping, to strengthen processes for habitat rights recognition and to reconcile mechanisms for exercising these rights across jurisdictions.

The CFR planning and management process can qualitatively benefit from documenting and building on the knowledge that rights holders have gathered through their history of engagement with the forest area. This could be done by facilitating multi-actor platform dialogues aimed at converging traditional practices and methods with modern ecological knowledge. At another level, the 2023 MoTA guidelines could be updated to include the

specific stage at which CFRMPs need to be integrated and reconciled with forest micro plans and working plans. All these can create an enabling mechanism to integrate working plans designed for larger landscape with site specific CFRMPs within the same landscape.

Special attention is needed for rights such as "rights of access to biodiversity and community right to IP and traditional knowledge" (Section 3(1)(k) of the FRA) of tribal communities which are yet to be operationalized. A nuanced understanding of IP frameworks at international and domestic level can guide pilot models that safeguard traditional knowledge and cultural expression while fostering climate resilience, food security, and agricultural innovation. This can go a long way to support and incentivize conservation for tribal communities. This can be through mechanisms such as biodiversity access and carbon markets or any other bio/climate finance. However, it requires systematic assessment of risks and opportunities for individual and private sector engagement, while upholding strong protections for forest rights holders. The process must ensure Gram Sabha leadership plays an equal role alongside sustainable businesses, government bodies, and technical experts in shaping outcomes.

The exercise of forest rights is a dynamic and ongoing process—one that must evolve in response to the aspirations of tribal communities, ecological imperatives, and development goals. A rights-based, gender-equitable, and multi-sectoral approach, anchored in grassroots governance and supported by enabling infrastructure and knowledge systems, offers the most promising path forward. By reimagining forest rights as a vehicle for tribal development and empowerment, India can lay the foundation for empowered communities and resilient ecosystems—now and for generations to come.





01

INTRODUCTION

INTRODUCTION: FOREST RIGHTS AS A PATHWAY TO STRENGTHEN TRIBAL GOVERNANCE

Tribal governance and sustainable development are frameworks that are separated by the formats, forums and languages through which they are understood. Their intersection, however, can provide a powerful lens through which both state and non-state actors can visualize the social, economic and political landscape of a country like India. Together they can also inform policy and programmatic priorities that can speak to tribal worldviews, deliver national development action and draw upon international best practices and standards.

Studies have pointed out that despite being a “numerical minority” (Haque, 2020) tribal communities are deeply rooted in the country's constitutional and federal structure of Indian democracy. The special governance frameworks under the Fifth and Sixth Schedules of the Constitution, legal protection and reservations administered through dedicated ministerial and targeted schemes demonstrate the significance of tribal communities for the socio-political fabric in post-independence India. While there have been several attempts to address the human development, cultural expression and aspirational challenges for tribal communities in India, the challenges to address these continues to vex both state action and developmental practice.

The socio-political context, legal framework and bureaucratic engagement with the FRA provides a systemic opportunity through which the intersections between tribal governance and sustainable development can be positioned and envisioned. The law recognizes that forest-dwelling tribal communities and their customary institutions have long histories and strong stakes to protect, use and manage forests. However, in reality there are clear lessons on how the scope of FRA has been embraced and broadened in places, where there has been long term experience of

community forestry practices or schemes. This understanding also presents lessons on what role local, national and state governments have and will need to play to facilitate and regulate the process. At the same time, structural gaps like gender oversight, limited prioritisation of social sector laws and policies need to be addressed beyond the piecemeal narrative of representation in committees and participation in schemes.

Two decades of FRA implementation has brought to light the strengths and limits of the law in being able to foreground tribal governance along with managing conflicting visions of how forest lands should be conserved and utilized. It has required a range of innovations to support the everyday enforcement of the law. It has also been challenged on how to align processes and interdepartmental priorities, while recognising worldviews and aspirations of different tribal communities whilst carving out developmental, ecological pathways across the country.



Rationale of the Study

It is in this context that the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) initiated a study to understand how the recognition and vesting of rights enabled through the FRA can create innovative pathways by which tribal governance and sustainable development can be collectively addressed. UNDP recognizes that while it is essential to map the challenges related to recognition of rights as an ongoing exercise, there is a need to pre-empt creative intersections through which post-rights livelihood and ecological futures can be secured. The study intends to highlight key innovations and learnings at national and state level that have been critical in strengthening FRA implementation and broadening its outreach. This study also highlights and explores the need to build on both

community-driven and government-supported initiatives to ensure long-term relevance of the FRA framework. Further, it identifies newer ways by which interconnectedness and interdependence of FRA with other themes, laws, institutions and policies can achieve the preambular objectives of the FRA. Finally, the study is designed to locate the recognition of forest rights within developmental, environmental and governance frameworks and explore its potential for accelerating sustainable development for all.

With a closer look at the experience in states of Chhattisgarh, Maharashtra and Odisha which continue to navigate the distinct frameworks, the study tries to capture the underlying conditions that are critical to bridge tribal governance and sustainable development. This approach can inform the reasons behind challenges that have emerged during the implementation of the law. It can also bring to light the additional measures that may be required to link forest rights and tenures to gender, food security, health, environment on the one hand and to poverty alleviation, tribal empowerment and decentralized decision making on the other. As a forward-looking study, the attempt is not just to understand forest and tenurial rights as an outcome. It also aims to examine their potential to serve as a pathway for accelerating sustainable development. This pathway is envisioned to deliver empowerment of tribal communities, both in intent and in practice.



Research Methodology

The study has relied on multiple research methods, both for data collection and analysis. This included focussed group discussions, interviews, participant observation, household surveys, secondary literature review alongside feedback of technical experts. The methodology has also included analytical tools such as legal mapping, and policy analysis to draw up present thematic trends that represent challenges, innovations and way forward. The research team's experience in the fields of

social science, socio-legal studies and public policy has also helped in integrating an intersectional approach to the study and analysis.

In the initial phase, the researchers undertook a detailed secondary literature review which included official government documents like circulars, Government Orders (GOs), guidelines, notifications that have legally interpreted and carved the way forward for the implementation of FRA in the last two decades. The secondary material relied upon subsequently includes, court appointed and parliamentary committee reports, studies undertaken by civil society organizations (CSOs), journalists and academicians. While a large amount of material was collected, only the material directly or indirectly used in the study has been cited. This material, along with ongoing analysis being carried out at state levels has helped substantiate challenges, innovations and recommendations shared by rights holders, FRC members, government officials and CSOs.

In the second phase of the data collection, while secondary data collection continued, the researchers undertook individual and group discussions and individual conversations at different levels and themes related to the drafting and implementation of the FRA. At the village level the researchers spoke to Gram Sabha, right holders (both individual and community forest rights) and CFRMC members, Range Forest Officers (RFOs), Beat Guards, women only Self Help Groups (SHGs) and Producer Groups along with focussed groups who have led innovations at both pre and post rights recognition phases. At the block, district and divisional levels, discussions were carried out with District Collectors and/or Revenue Divisional Commissioners; Tribal Commissioners, Tahsildars, officials of Integrated Tribal Development Agency/ Integrated Tribal Development Project (ITDP/ ITDA); Members of FRA Cells, Divisional Forest Officers (DFO), Assistant Conservator of Forest (ACF), Panchayat members, Welfare Officers, to name a few.



At state level, several meetings were conducted with senior and mid-level officials from Tribal, Forest, Revenue, Panchayati Raj, Women and Child Welfare, and Handloom and Textiles departments. Researchers also spoke to representatives of some CSOs such as Vasundhara, Khoj, Vidarbha Nature Conservation Society (VNCS), Foundation for Ecological Security (FES), Professional Assistance for Development Action (PRADAN), Samarthan, and Centre for Research in Schemes and Policies (CRISP).

After almost two decades of FRA enactment, a large body of formal and informal literature and experiences of practices has also informed the data and analysis across the length of the study. The study uses government documents, judicial decisions, parliamentary committees, studies by CSOs and academic papers to highlight some of the key themes through which the journey of the FRA can be understood at the central and state level.

As part of the study, UNDP India conducted a dipstick survey to highlight the benefits arising out of the rights recognized both at the individual and community level. The survey captured the responses from 123 households, out of which 119 were Scheduled Tribes (ST) households. This survey was conducted in 22 villages from 5 districts spread across Odisha, Chhattisgarh and Maharashtra.



Limitations of the Study

The study does not claim to be a comprehensive analysis or an impact assessment of national or state FRA implementation. Rather, it aims to position FRA as a critical instrument to strengthen tribal governance and accelerate sustainable development. While doing so, the framework is subject to the following four key limitations:

- **First**, the scope of both primary and secondary data is limited to STs. Consequently, the study does not adequately reflect the experiences, challenges, or innovations related to Other Traditional Forest Dwellers (OTFDs), who are also recognized as rights holders under the FRA. It is acknowledged that very limited studies and evidence exists to assess how the implementation has benefitted or affected the OTFDs. A dedicated and comprehensive assessment is required to understand the specific needs, perspectives, and administrative challenges related to OTFD rights recognition which is a separate subject.

- **Second**, the overall challenges and state level innovations highlighted in the study are indicative but not exhaustive. The intention is to provide a representative picture rather than a full inventory of developments across all states.

- **Third**, the thematic insights and field-based perspectives captured in this report are based on consultations and discussions with a diverse range of stakeholders, including government officials, representatives from Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) at various administrative levels, forest rights holders and members of various committees under FRA. While attempt has been made to capture diverse themes and experience, it does not claim to be all-inclusive.

- **Fourth**, the dipstick survey conducted as part of the study is based on a small sample size, which limits the ability to generalize findings to the larger population. As with most primary surveys, there is potential for respondent bias and recall errors. These factors may influence the overall representation of community perspectives on the implementation of FRA.





02

BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT



India is home to one of the largest tribal populations in the world, with over 104 million people constituting 8.6% of the total population, (Census of India 2011). Recognized as ‘Scheduled Tribes’ (STs) under Article 342 of the Indian Constitution, there are currently 705 notified tribes, including 75 Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups (PVTGs) residing mainly in forested and rural regions across the country. Historically, tribal communities have been the custodians of forests, biodiversity, and traditional knowledge (TK), playing a crucial role in environmental protection and conservation. It is estimated that nearly 50% of the tribal population resides in forest areas (GoI, TRIFED, 2019). More broadly, approximately 300 million people in India depend on forests for their livelihoods (FSI, 2019), while forest cover accounts for 21.76% of the country’s geographical area (FSI, 2023).

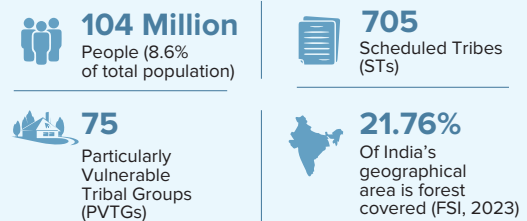
The 2021 Global Multidimensional Poverty Index (GMPI) reveals that 50.6% of tribal households live in multidimensional poverty, showing the highest deprivation rates in health, education, and living standards compared to national figures. Tribal communities continue to be marginalized in decision making processes increasing their vulnerabilities. (PRADAN, 2021) Practitioners engaged in implementation of the FRA have also pointed out that the absence of tenurial rights continues to influence social, economic and political hierarchies in forest areas. Add to these, the triple planetary crisis of climate change, pollution and biodiversity loss (UNFCCC, 2022), makes them a highly

vulnerable segment amongst the country’s population.

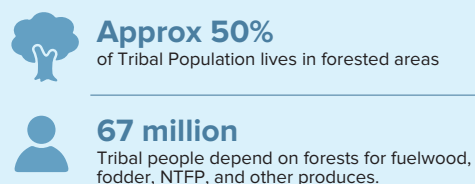
Over 67 million tribal people depend on forests for fuel, fodder, medicinal herbs, non-timber forest produce (NTFP) or minor forest produce (MFP), fish and other aquatic produce (Padmanabhan, 2011). Forest-dependent communities, especially STs and PVTGs also have deep rooted spiritual, cultural and religious links with the forests around them (Kuriakose, 2017).

Box 2: India’s Tribal Communities and Forest Cover Stewards of Biodiversity, Culture, and Conservation

Tribal Population in India



Connections to Forests



These links, in turn, have in many instances and can aid in conservation and sustainable use of forests (ibid). The colonial association with India's natural resources is understood to have a production and industrial approach to forests (Kohli and Menon 2021; Lele and Menon 2014). This paved the way for migrant labourers to work and eventually settle on officially recorded forest lands. Even though such areas may be few in number (approximately 431 in a tribal dominated state like Chhattisgarh), their existence remains an important question for forest governance. After independence, policy makers continued with the colonial legislation and adopted the internationally accepted notion of 'fortress conservation' models which aimed at keeping out forest dependent communities in the interest of conservation (Rai et al, 2021). The process of carving out Protected Areas (PA) for wildlife and Reserved Forests (RF) for production forestry ignored the bona fide interests of the tribal community from the legislative framework in the regions where tribal communities primarily inhabit (Lok Sabha Secretariat, 2006). At the same time forest lands continued to be used for commercial plantations and other silviculture practices that required continuous engagement of labour or participation of forest dwelling communities.

It is only in recent times that forest governance and management systems have started to recognize the rights of forest dwellers, including their occupation of forest land. Policy processes are beginning to acknowledge that tribal communities, who depend heavily on forest resources, must be included in how forests are managed. Their participation is not optional—it is essential. There is a recognition of the fact that forests have the best chance to survive if communities participate in its conservation and regeneration measures, while also ensuring their tenurial security over the forest lands traditionally occupied by them (Lok Sabha Secretariat, 2006). The relevance of forest rights has been recognized by both national and international policy frameworks, including Sustainable Development Goals (SDG), with its potential to enhance tribal

governance and development in particular poverty alleviation, access to water, food security, health and livelihood security (CFR-LA, 2016; Haque, 2020).

2.1. EVOLUTION OF FOREST RIGHTS ACT, 2006

The evolution of FRA is entrenched within the vexed history of colonial forest governance in India, including attempts to reconcile it at various points of time. This history has driven the processes of how the law came into being, the institutional barriers in recognition of rights and the scope of governance in a post rights context.

Historically there are a set of laws that have governed rights, responsibilities and regulated diversion, felling of trees, and wildlife conservation. The application of these laws led to the acquisition and creation (forest labour) of rights, and the processes have been documented to be either incomplete or unjust.² Constitutional amendments and forestry programmes like Joint Forest Management (JFM) have aimed to address these, but without addressing one root problem of rights recognition. The FRA sought to address the core questions of creating agency and devolution of powers through rights recognition and support required thereafter, with the objective of addressing 'historical injustices' (Lele and Sahu, 2025).

The bureaucratic governance of forests has seen several waves through which participation of forest dwelling communities was attempted through policies, laws and design of schemes.

²This is not to say that there was no acknowledgement of forest dwellers in Indian forest policy. The category of village forests in Indian Forest Act, 1927 (IFA), the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution, the recognition of Van Panchayats in Uttarakhand as a managing institution, and the Chhota Nagpur Tenancy Act are examples. However, overall, the IFA and the 'rule' of the forest department has dominated the governance scene as the primary controlling agency until recently.

One of the first clear articulations of it can be seen in the National Forest Policy, 1988 (NFP). In 1990, the then environment ministry put in place guidelines on JFM which was a mechanism to move towards a more participatory and inclusive model of forest protection and management. However, throughout this period the vexed question of recognizing or denying rights of forest dwelling communities and decision-making controls of the Forest department continued to remain unresolved issues (Lele and Menon, 2014; Kohli and Menon, 2021). The 73rd Constitution Amendment Act, 1993 aimed at decentralising governance to Panchayats (village councils) and Urban areas and the subsequent legislation of Provisions of Panchayat (Extension to Scheduled Areas) Act, 1996 (PESA), marked a significant shift and devolution of powers including those related to forests. Gram Sabhas (village assemblies) and traditional village institutions in constitutionally recognized Fifth Scheduled Areas of the country were empowered in different ways including decision-making roles within their areas of jurisdiction (Bijoy, 2012). The follow through of PESA at state level was slow as many states had not formed their State Rules, until recently, even after PESA Act had come into effect 28 years ago. (National Conference Report on PESA, MoPR, 2024). The delays in realisation of the objectives of the 73rd Amendment³ and judicial interventions on forest governance regularly brought to light that both parliamentary will and bureaucratic follow through were required to address a systemic gap. In 2005, the Ministry of Tribal Affairs (MoTA), among other background points, justified the need for a new law by stating that

“ The rights of forest-dwelling Scheduled Tribes, who have been inhabiting forests for generations and occupying forest land, have not been adequately recognized so far, resulting in historical injustice to these forest-dwelling Scheduled Tribes who are integral to the very survival and sustainability of the forest ecosystem. (MoTA, 2005).

From this point onward, the processes that led to the enactment of the FRA reflect a series of negotiations and compromises (Anon, 2007).

There are three ways in which these can be understood:

- First, on whether the proposed rights-based law should be limited only to Scheduled Tribes (STs) or also include Other Traditional Forest Dwellers (OTFDs). The earlier versions of the FRA framework, discussed within the Ministry of Tribal Affairs, were designed to address the rights of forest-dwelling tribal communities. The final version of the law introduced different criteria for rights recognition for both STs and OTFDs to secure their rights.
- The second negotiation was around addressing potential risks of forest and wildlife conservation, in the light of misuse or unsustainable use of Individual Forest Rights (IFR) and Community Forest Rights (CFR). The inclusion of duties of rights holders and specific mechanisms like Critical Wildlife Habitats (CWH) represent the outcomes.
- The third concerns the cut-off time period within which the existence of rights needs to be proven, to avoid “eviction and denial of rights to millions of forest dwellers who depend on forests and forest land for their bona fide livelihood.” This sunset clause was a key aspect, and the cut-off date was shifted from the initially proposed 25th October 1980 (the enactment of the Forest Conservation Act, 1980) to 13th December 2005.

³The 73rd Constitutional Amendment Act of 1992 provided constitutional status to rural local self-government in India and established the Gram Sabha as the foundation of the Panchayati Raj System.

All these three aspects continue to present structural and co-ordination challenges of pre and post recognition of forest rights, which are discussed further in this study. It is with this background that the FRA Bill was drafted in early 2005, tabled in the Parliament on 13th December 2005, and passed on 18th December 2006 under the aegis of MoTA. The Scheduled Tribes and Other Traditional Forest Dwellers (Recognition of Forest Rights) Rules, 2007 also known as Forest Rights Rules (FR Rules) came into effect in 2008. Even before the law was being enforced, judicial, bureaucratic and narrative challenges presented themselves which continue to influence the implementation at various points of time and scale.

2.2. LEGAL AND INSTITUTIONAL FRAMEWORK AND SCOPE OF THE FRA

The preamble of the FRA defines the objective of the law as addressing “historical injustice” arising from the fact that “forest rights on ancestral lands and their habitat were not adequately recognized” during the colonial period and after independence in India. Therefore, there is a need for a legal framework that recognizes, records and vests rights in order for forest-dwelling STs (Section 2 (c), FRA), and the OTFDs (Section 2 (o), FRA) to exercise their rights and authority towards

“

Sustainable use, conservation of biodiversity and maintenance of ecological balance and thereby strengthening the conservation regime of the forests while ensuring livelihood and food security.

The FRA framework sets itself the task of delivering this intent, and presents a series of actions to enable the same.

FIGURE 1: SALIENT FEATURES OF FRA



Define types and nature of rights i.e. Individual, community, habitat and for village.



Defines institutional & decision-making structure, to verify claims, recognize, vest rights.



Clarifies process to initiating recognition, making claims and vesting, recording of rights



Lists the type of evidence required for determination of forest rights.



Specifies empowered roles of right holders for conservation and protection. Defines process of creation of Critical Wildlife Habitats



Clarifies that rights can be acquired and settled by the state through specified laws only after recognition of rights



Addresses rights of forest dwellers displaced without alternate land/compensation



Provides institutional framework for monitoring and grievance redressal



Mandates post-claim support by state including for planning, management



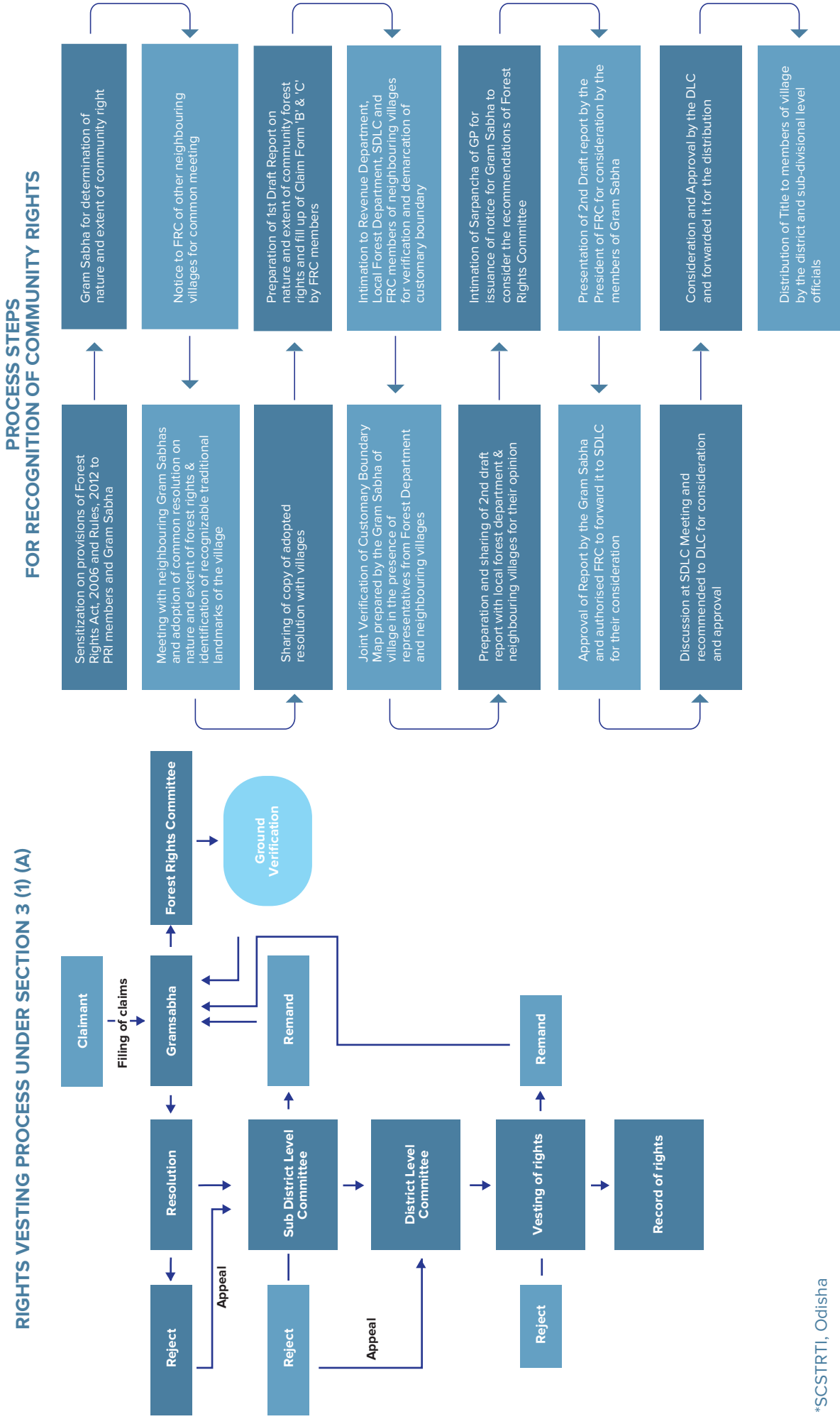
The legal framework to achieve the above-mentioned objective is laid out through procedures in the 2006 law, along with a series of rules, guidelines, letters and circulars. These have collectively shaped the multilevel action led by central and various state governments to deliver the intent of the law. The MoTA is the nodal agency for the implementation of FRA (Section 11, FRA) with Tribal departments at the state level being responsible for implementation. A more detailed analysis on the challenges, potential and innovations related to the intended outcomes of the FRA are discussed further in the study.

RIGHT RECOGNITION PROCESS

Gram Sabhas through Forest Rights Committees (FRC) are responsible for verifying claims based on customary practices and evidence of long-term occupation. Claims are then reviewed by the sub-divisional level committees (SDLC), and district level committees (DLC), While the DLC is the final “approving” authority, the State Level Monitoring Committees (SLMC) plays a crucial role in the implementation and oversight of FRA. The DLCs subsequently send the details of right holders to the Revenue department or any other concerned state department for updating in the records. A similar process is adopted for demarcation and record correction in case of land under control of the Forest department.



FIGURE 2: FLOWCHARTS DEPICTING THE PROCESS OF RIGHTS RECOGNITION UNDER FRA*



*SCSTRTI, Odisha



Post Rights Recognition Process

Once the rights are recognized, the FR Rules provides post-claim support and handholding to the holders of forest rights. The concerned Gram Sabha has to constitute committees for the protection of wildlife, forest and biodiversity from amongst its members to carry out conservation and management of wildlife, forest and biodiversity (Rule 4(1)(e), FR Rules). These committees also known as the Community Forest Resource Management Committee (CFRMC) have to prepare a Community Forest Resources Management Plan (CFRMP) for which rights have been conferred. Gram Sabhas have to ensure that the CFRMPs are integrated with the micro plans/ working plans/ management plans of the Forest department along with the modifications considered necessary by the CFRMC (Rules 4(1) (f) and (g), FR Rules; MoTA Guidelines, 2023 on CFR management).

The FR Rules also specify that the state government must ensure support through its various departments. These include Tribal and Social Welfare, Environment and Forest, Revenue, Rural Development, Panchayati Raj, and other departments relevant to the upliftment of STs and OTFDs. The state government must ensure that all relevant government schemes are made available to eligible claimants and communities. This includes schemes related to land improvement, land productivity, basic amenities, and other livelihood measures. These provisions apply to those whose rights have been recognized and vested under the Act (Rule 16, FR Rules).

The activities under the above-mentioned schemes can be financed not only through regular departmental budgets but also through convergent funding sources such as Tribal Sub Plan (TSP), Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act, 2005 (MGNREGA), Compensatory Afforestation Fund Management and Planning Authority (CAMPA), Article 275(1), Special Central Assistance (SCA), and others, particularly during the initial phase of implementation.⁴ In addition, the funds under

the Dharti Aaba Janjatiya Gram Utkarsh Abhiyan (DA-JGUA) comprise 25 interventions implemented by 17 line ministries who have been allocated budgets and targets under the Abhiyan. As per the MoTA website, convergence of these resources to enhance health, education and livelihood opportunities is designed to benefit “more than 5 crore tribals in 549 districts and 2,911 blocks in 30 States/UTs in 5 years. These financial overlaps have clear lessons on how interdepartmental coordination can be designed in the future, as discussed in Section 5.



Overlaps and Intersections with other national and state laws

Studies and information dissemination material (Bijoy, 2017; Kalpavriksh, 2015) have pointed to various ways in which laws related to forests, land, biodiversity and tribal governance have a direct interface with the FRA framework and implementation. Although the FRA framework recognizes that the legal framework will prevail in case there is a conflict, at a practical level there are several intersections and jurisdictional overlaps that have a direct bearing on how processes related to recognition, record keeping and exercise of rights (to secure livelihoods, cultural expression or conservation) are implemented. Some of the national laws which have a direct interface with the FRA process and outcomes include the Indian Forest Act, 1927 (IFA), FCA, PESA, Biological Diversity Act, 2002 (BDA), MGNREGA, Wildlife Protection Act, 1972 (WLPA), Scheduled Castes and the Scheduled Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Act, 1989 (ST-SC Act) and the Right to Fair Compensation and Transparency in Land Acquisition, Rehabilitation and Resettlement Act, 2013 (RCFTLARR) or the other state and national laws related to land acquisition, as the case may be. At state levels, the forest rights related processes are also directly linked with the gram panchayat plans, state MFP laws, revenue codes and related administrative infrastructure.

⁴MoTA Office Memo: (OM) No. 23011/16/2015-FRA dated 23.4.2015

TABLE 1: THEMATIC OVERLAPS OF FRA WITH FOREST AND LAND ACQUISITION LAWS

(Note: This is an indicative list of thematic overlaps to enable interdepartmental coordination. This does not include mapping overlaps with state panchayat acts and land revenue codes)

Themes/ Laws	IFA Indian Forest Act	WLPA Wildlife Protection Act	FCA Forest Conservation Act	PESA Provisions of Panchayat (Extension to Scheduled Areas) Act, 1996	BDA Biodiversity Act	RCFT-LARR Right to Fair Compensation and Transparency in Land Acquisition, Rehabilitation and Resettlement Act (RCFT-LARR)
Reconciliation & Recording of Rights	<p>Lands on which rights recognized are RFs or protected forests (PFs) under IFA.</p> <p>Rights recognized in PAs, Tiger Reserves require reconciliation.</p>		<p>Diversion and tree felling related and may require prior permission under FCA depending on the nature of use or partnership.</p> <p>Compensatory afforestation (CA) provisions can impact existing rights.</p> <p>New schemes such as Accredited CA can impede or support the exercise of rights (details in Section 5 of this report).</p>	<p>The right of access to biodiversity and community right to intellectual property (IP) and TK related to biodiversity and cultural diversity overlaps with the governance provisions of PESA and regulatory provisions of the BDA.</p> <p>Rights recognized in BHS require reconciliation.</p>		<p>In areas already demarcated for acquisition, the recognition and recording of rights may be impacted as FRA Implementation process is not taken up, even though it should not legally be so.</p>
Exercising & Sustaining Rights	<p>Requirement of Transit Passes for MFP.</p> <p>Permissions to access forest areas.</p> <p>Rights Holders can be engaged in forest management, soil conservation, wildlife tourism and other related programmes of the Forest department.</p> <p>Exercise of rights can support conservation or harm wildlife</p>			<p>Overlaps in forest and forest produce use and management (Gram Sabha and Resource Planning and Management Committee (RPMC) under PESA and Biodiversity Management Committee (BMC) under BDA.</p>		<p>Acquisition of land directly impacts the continuation of rights.</p>
Institutional Jurisdiction	<p>Overlaps in jurisdiction and institutional objectives, methodologies of forest management, conservation and use.</p> <p>Tools and processes for forest management conservation are different and have historically been in conflict.</p>		<p>Rights of management and felling of trees can conflict with prior permission provisions under FCA.</p>	<p>Both FRA and PESA have different definitions of Gram Sabha.</p> <p>PESA and FRA can have overlapping provisions for institutions involved in conservation, management and facilitating access to schemes.</p> <p>Both laws empower Gram Sabhas to protect natural resources within their jurisdiction.</p> <p>The roles of RPMCs can overlap with FRCs/ CFRMCs. This is also the case with BMCs.</p>		<p>The District Collector has the role of settling rights under the RFCTLARR or WLPA; alongside defined roles to oversee and facilitate recognition of rights</p>

Themes/ Laws	IFA Indian Forest Act	WLPA Wildlife Protection Act	FCA Forest Conservation Act	PESA Provisions of Panchayat (Extension to Scheduled Areas) Act, 1996	BDA Biodiversity Act	RCFT-LARR Right to Fair Compensation and Transparency in Land Acquisition, Rehabilitation and Resettlement Act (RCFT-LARR)
Offences and Dispute Resolution	<p>FRA does not have distinct provisions for managing offences and disputes related to using and managing forest produce. These practices and customary law regulations may exist in different areas. The offences and dispute resolution in different laws applicable on forest areas are likely to overlap and prevail during and after recognition of rights.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Offences on RF and protected forests enforced through IFA. ❖ Offences in PAs and Tiger Reserves enforced through WLPA. ❖ BMCs have the rights to report access, claim benefits and charge fees for access under BDA. 					Grievance redressal processes mechanisms for RFCTLARR during the time of acquisition of rights will be as per this law.
Regulating Land Use Change	<p>Declaration of any new RFs or PFs under IFA may have direct overlaps with pending or already recognized rights.</p> <p>CFR or habitat rights areas may overlap if existing or proposed boundaries of PAs and Tiger Reserves.</p> <p>Forest land diversion and regulating tree felling is processed under FCA including in areas where there are existing forest rights.</p>			Land Use change in Fifth Schedule areas requires prior consultation with Gram Sabhas.	Forest rights may be affected during the declaration of BHS.	If land use change requires acquisition of rights, that may be administered under the RFCTLARR.
<p>The procedures of acquisition and forest land diversions and processes for consultations/consent followed by nature of compensation requires detailed review, as they are subject to executive, judicial, and institutional interpretation.</p>						
Compensation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ IFA: Right holders to be compensated before declaration of RFs. ❖ WLPA: Landowners or right holders to be compensated before declaration of PAs or Tiger Reserves. ❖ FCA: Compensation against tree felling and diversion of land affecting forest rights. ❖ PESA: Role of the Gram Sabha to determine compensations (subject to state rules) ❖ BDA: People affected by declaration of BHS to be compensated ❖ RFCTLARR: Forest rights holders are equivalent to landowners. 					
Financial Support	<p>Resettlement or alternative package for voluntary relocation from PAs.</p> <p>The funds available under CAMPA can directly be used to support forest management and conservation by rights holders.</p>				State & Local Biodiversity Fund can support exercise and sustaining of rights	Resettlement and Rehabilitation Plan & Allocation are directly applicable to rights holders whose rights are being acquired.

2.3. ENABLING AND FACILITATING IMPLEMENTATION OF FRA

Since the Act and its Rules provided broad frameworks, several aspects required clarifications and innovations to enable and expedite the implementation. This was done based on several guidelines, clarification letters and circulars issued by the MoTA, Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change (MoEFCC) and other relevant ministries.

It is useful to thematically understand the evolution of these executive instruments.

TABLE 2: THEMATIC MAPPING OF MoTA GUIDELINES, CIRCULARS AND OTHER RELATED ORDERS (2006-2025)

Time Period/ Themes	Recognition, Vesting and Record of Rights (RoR)	Institutional Roles and Capacity	Financial Allocation and Support	Post Rights Support
2006-2011	<p>Compliance with FRA before displacing tribals from PAs.</p> <p>Disposal of petty forest offence cases of tribals and other deprived sections of the society.</p> <p>Categorizing the reasons of rejection and improving the quality of implementation</p> <p>Establishing clarity of basic interpretations vis-a-vis intersections with other regulations</p>	<p>Constitution of committees for implementation of the act and conducting awareness and capacity building.</p> <p>Taking free, prior and informed consent of Gram Sabha when it comes to diversion of forest land for non-forestry purposes .</p>	<p>Convergence of existing welfare and development initiatives of the Ministry of Rural Development (MoRD) under MGNREGA for the title holders under FRA.</p>	<p>State Forest departments directed to respect community rights over MFP/NTFP.</p>
2012-2017	<p>Clarifying the evidence required for recognition of rights.</p> <p>Harassment and eviction of forest dwellers without settlement of rights, and rejection of claims.</p> <p>Consultations with Gram Sabha before declaration of NPs or WLS.</p> <p>Conversion of forest villages and other such settlements into revenue villages.</p>	<p>Convening of Gram Sabha meetings.</p> <p>Inadequate awareness about the Act and Rules.</p> <p>Clarification of roles of institutions such as FRC, CFRMC, DLC and SLMC.</p> <p>Taking free, prior and informed consent of Gram Sabha when it comes to diversion of forest land for non-forestry purposes.</p>	<p>Funds under MGNREGA, TSP, Gram Panchayat, CAMPA, District Mineral Foundation etc. to be used for title holders.</p>	<p>Complete freedom for forest right holders or their cooperatives/ federations to sell their MFP/ NTFPs to anyone without restrictions.</p> <p>Directions to states to modify their transit permit rules so that Gram Sabha can issue them instead of Forest department.</p> <p>Envisaging the need for post claim support required by rights holders through various state level departments.</p>

Time Period/ Themes	Recognition, Vesting and Record of Rights (RoR)	Institutional Roles and Capacity	Financial Allocation and Support	Post Rights Support
	<p>Mapping of potential FRA areas in the country and re-examination of rejected claims under the FRA using Geographical Information System (GIS) technology.</p> <p>Recognized rights and titles to be updated within the forest and revenue records.</p> <p>Prioritising and expediting the recognition of CFR.</p> <p>Clarification of process related to recognition and vesting habitat rights of PVTGs.</p> <p>Applicability FRA in Municipal Corporation Areas.</p>	<p>Institutional and procedural requirements for recognition of forest rights in municipal/urban areas.</p>		<p>Preparation of conservation and management plan for CFR areas by CFRMC.</p> <p>Marketing of MFP through Minimum Support Price (MSP) and development of value chain for MFP.</p> <p>Clarification on JFMC vis-a-vis CFR rights and management under FRA.</p> <p>Clarification regarding interrelationship between PESA and FRA with reference to MFP.</p>
2017-2022	<p>Guidance on compensation in instances of land acquisition for diversion of forest land recognized and vested under the FRA.</p> <p>Chief Wildlife Wardens instructed to settle rights in Critical Tiger Habitats (CTH) in accordance with FRA provisions.</p> <p>Guidelines for Notification of CWH.</p>		<p>Financial support from department of Financial Services, department of Land Resources, department of Rural Development, department of Animal Husbandry, Dairy Farming and Fisheries, department of Agriculture, Cooperation and Farmer's Welfare, and MoEFCC for title holders.</p> <p>Pradhan Mantri Van Dhan Vikas Yojana (PMVDVY) launched for financially supporting MSP for MFPs and value addition of MFPs.</p>	<p>MSP for MFPs hiked.</p> <p>Guidelines for Mechanism for Marketing of MFP through MSP & Development of Value Chain for MFP.</p>
2022-till date	<p>Recognized rights and titles to be updated within the forest and revenue records within 3 months.</p> <p>Relocation from PAs and Tiger Reserves only possible after compliance with FRA provisions regarding free, prior and informed consent of Gram Sabhas.</p>	<p>Any existing committee for forest resource management or a non-statutory committee to be replaced by the CFRMC.</p> <p>Constitution of District Level Monitoring Committee (DLMC).</p>	<p>Opening of current bank account in the name of Gram Sabha for operation of CFRMP.</p> <p>Financial support from Ministry of Fisheries, Animal Husbandry and Dairying and Ministry of Agriculture and Farmers Welfare for title holders.</p>	<p>Further clarity on CFRMP.</p> <p>Guidelines for CFR Management.</p> <p>DA-JGUA Scheme to facilitate a whole of government approach towards livelihood and social welfare support to forest rights holders under FRA.</p>

Time Period/ Themes	Recognition, Vesting and Record of Rights (RoR)	Institutional Roles and Capacity	Financial Allocation and Support	Post Rights Support
	<p>Convergence of various schemes and initiatives through DA-JGUA.</p> <p>Sanctioning of 324 district-level FRA cells across 18 States and Union Territories through the DA-JGUA to implement FRA. In addition, State Level FRA cells for 17 states and UTs.</p> <p>Clarification on compliance of provisions under FRA wrt to wildlife clearance under FCA for implementation of developmental facilities under Sec 3(2).</p> <p>Clarification on various issues related to IFR such faulty/missing title.</p>	<p>Training/ sensitization/ awareness sessions for functionaries under FRA including CFRMC and panchayat members.</p> <p>Emphasizing the convergent role of Forest department in rights recognition and post rights interventions .</p>	<p>Suggestions to states from MoTA regarding using of DA-JGUA for several FRA components starting from rights recognition to post rights support.</p>	

As evident from above, there has been a clear progression—from initial challenges related to definitional clarity and the impetus for implementation of the Act in the early years. Over time, the focus has shifted toward addressing more complex legal and interpretative issues, moving towards greater institutionalization, policy convergence, and enhanced financial and livelihood support mechanisms in recent years.





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TWO DECADES OF FRA: OVERVIEW OF EXPERIENCES





TWO DECADES OF FRA: OVERVIEW OF EXPERIENCES

Two decades of enactment of FRA, 2006 present a rich body of experiences that have practical lessons for law making and implementation. It also presents principal level learnings that can guide the overarching approach through which tribal governance and sustainable development can be mutually complementary.

This section reflects on and draws from the enabling factors and obstacles that have influenced the implementation of the FRA across different states in India. Some of the discussions and challenges related to Chhattisgarh, Odisha, and Maharashtra may overlap with the analysis in Section 4, which highlights state-level innovations aimed at addressing challenges and demonstrating decentralized processes that empower rights holders.

This study recognizes that there has been slow or limited implementation of the FRA in some regions due to historical, administrative and socio-political factors. This includes several states in Northeast India, Western Himalayan states, coastal areas of states. There have also been challenges for rights recognition in urban areas, areas where mineral extraction is proposed or ongoing and parts of the country that are demarcated as being affected by left-wing extremism (IPT, 2016; Lele and Sahu, 2025).

The study discusses experiences and challenges of the FRA through three broad themes:



Reconciliation and recording of rights



Exercising and sustaining rights (post-rights recognition phase)



Institutional capacity and interdepartmental coordination

This thematic formulation of issues and challenges is built further in Section 4 which highlights state innovations through ongoing institutional processes, policy and programmatic design and legal interpretation. Section 5 on the way forward expands on the gap areas and refers to specific actions that can be taken to bridge the gaps and new areas of innovation which can enhance the intersection of tribal governance and sustainable development.

3.1. RECONCILIATION AND RECORD OF RIGHTS

There are **three broad aspects** which are necessary to understand, before detailing specific sub-themes that have emerged through the administrative implementation of the FRA. These are:



Limitation of the Legal Framework

FRA and associated rules are limited to the rights recognition process; it has limited guidance on institutional and administrative processes needed after rights are recognized. In particular, the optimum architecture required to support the rights holders to sustain and responsibly exercise their rights, needs to be understood. Over the years, national and state governments (with inputs from NGOs and community level institutions) have clarified and enforced different requirements through guidelines, orders and circulars. These, once read along with the FRA framework can be binding or provide guidance depending on how they are articulated. State governments have also highlighted that the principal law does not have a 'sunset' or 'saturation' clause for recognition of rights. While the State Governments from the three states covered in this study have argued that setting a timeline is necessary to avoid a never-ending rights recognition process, there are questions about whether this approach is tenable or even desirable, especially if it interferes with the core intent of the law as stated in its preamble.



Geographical Variability

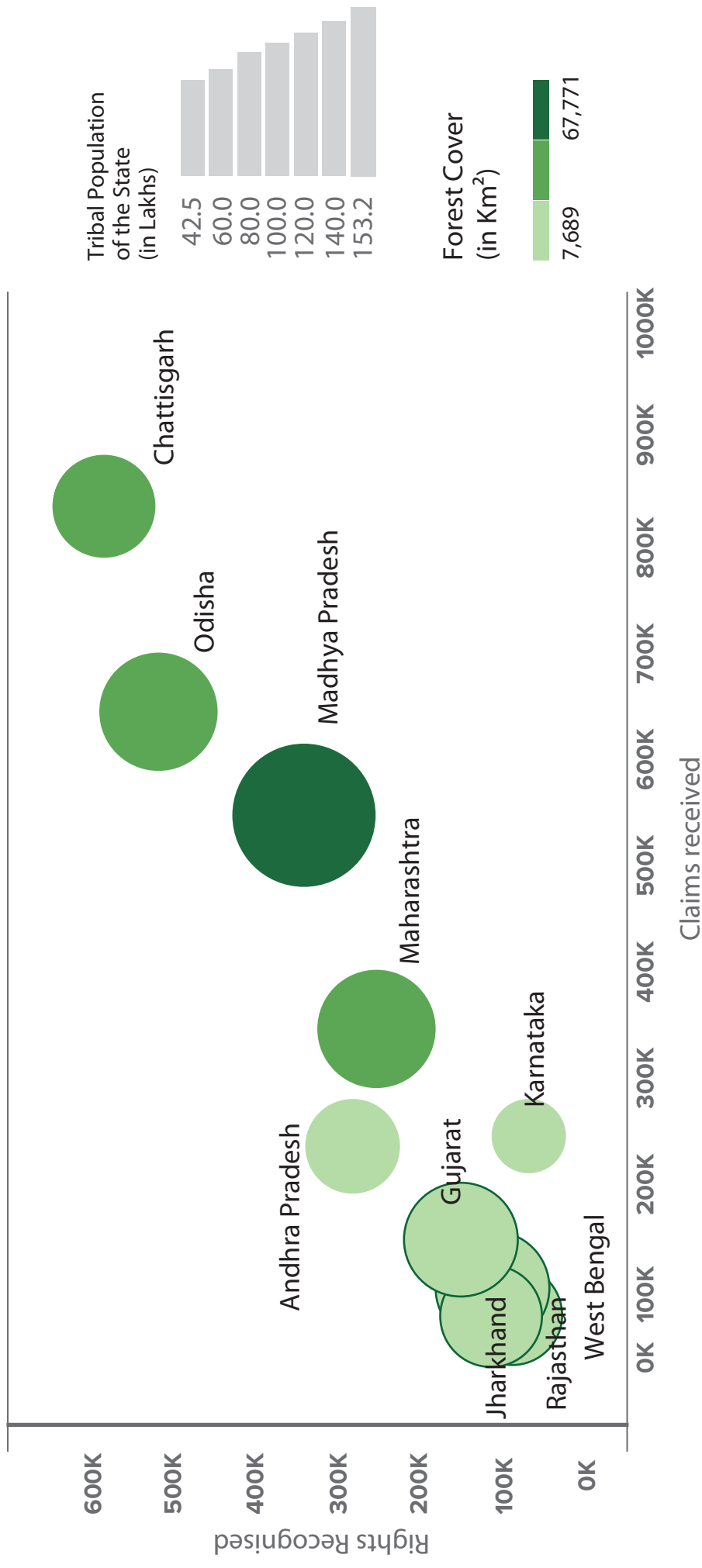
The central government has directed all State governments to implement provisions of the FRA (Lok Sabha, 2025). However, as discussed in the Monthly Progress Report (MPR) of the MoTA⁵, the implementation has been uneven across different states. This is

due to various factors including slow uptake, prioritisation, relevance or other socio-political factors. This also extends to how states have prioritized IFRs, CFRs and Community Forest Resource Rights (CFRRs) recognition and distribution of titles. MoTA maintains data on how states have progressed on rights recognition based on reporting by the state governments. However, this data does not necessarily reflect the quality or strength of rights holders to sustain and exercise rights (MoTA, 2025). States with large tribal populations, or where tribal communities had pre-existing customary practices and rules to safeguard forests, or where there were strong, community-led grassroots movements, have been better able to leverage the full potential of the FRA (Vyawahare, 2023). The successful process of claiming rights has also empowered Gram Sabhas in some places, and geared them for financial dividends in the post recognition phase (discussed further in section 4), e.g.: Gadchiroli and Amravati in Maharashtra.



⁵MoTA, MPR, March 2025

FIGURE 3: FOREST RIGHTS CLAIMED AND RECOGNIZED VIS-A-VIS TRIBAL POPULATION AND FOREST COVER*



* Top 10 states with high tribal population taken into analysis



Lack of Gender Disaggregated Data and Limits to Women's Leadership

Both the FRA and PESA emphasize the role of women's participation in decision-making needs. However, the practical implementation of the same remains challenging for a variety of socio-political reasons, which range from patriarchal bias to access to education which can enable women's leadership. During the course of the study, it was also highlighted that except for a few instances, single women-headed households have not received titles, even though the need to address this has been emphasized upon by the MoTA and CSOs. Studies have pointed out that even when male members migrate to cities and are not present for rights recognition, the titles are not issued in the name of the spouse. This is despite the household being managed by the latter (SCSTRTI, 2019). One way to address this is to maintain gender disaggregated data while reporting on FRA implementation, which is not in place either at national or state levels except for a few states such as Maharashtra and Chhattisgarh, which will be discussed further in Section 4. Despite evidence of women effectively managing Community Forest Resources (CFRs) and assuming leadership roles, their contributions remain insufficiently acknowledged. Proactive institutional and policy measures are required to ensure meaningful participation of these groups, going beyond mere representation in committees or attendance at meetings. Furthermore, there is a notable gap in research and documentation regarding women's representation, and the exercise of their rights under FRA.

3.1.1. Land Records, Mutation, Inheritance

There are several procedural and administrative challenges that have emerged in the formal process of rights recognition. Some of these include:



Recording of Rights

The legal requirement for final mapping of forest land and incorporation of rights into relevant records is not systematized in most states. This can lead to confusion and conflicts when demarcating areas where specific rights can be exercised and in designing management processes.



Process of Rights Recognition and Reconciliation

In most states the processes followed for both IFR and CFR recognition have seen several challenges and inconsistencies. The field visits highlighted some new and emerging challenges, alongside assessing whether those recorded in previous studies continue to persist. Some of the key concerns that have emerged in the context of rights recognition include – the continued issuance of CFR titles in the name of entities such as FRCs, Joint Forest Management Committees (JFMCs), or Panchayats, rather than in the name of the rights-holding Gram Sabhas. This is despite the various clarifications and Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs), issued by MoTA, which emphasize that CFR titles must be issued in the name of the Gram Sabha or appropriate rights holders in accordance with the provisions of FRA. Further, there have been instances of IFR and CFR titles being recognized without following due process as required in the FRA framework. It has been pointed out that in some states CFR titles have been distributed forest compartment-wise rather than taking into account the customary boundary of the village. Similarly, IFR titles have been issued without duly verifying the actual claims of the claimants. There have also been instances in some states where titles were given suo motu without the involvement of the FRCs or the Gram Sabha. While some states like Odisha have issued clarificatory orders in this regard, these procedural questions remain a significant challenge.



Conversion of Forest to Revenue villages:

The identification and conversion of forest villages and un-surveyed settlements on forest land, to revenue villages have remained a challenge in several states. While this has been recognized by both national and state governments as a concern, and clarificatory, including joint orders by MoEFCC and MoTA have been issued, some peculiar challenges remain. Following the circular issued by MoTA⁶, Chhattisgarh State Government issued an order for converting existing forest village to revenue villages in 2013⁷ and approximately 428 were converted.

However, as pointed out by the FRA Cell Chhattisgarh, it was land leased by the Forest department to forest villagers which was converted into revenue villages. Also, temporary land leases were provided to the villagers in lieu of forest rights certificates⁸. CSOs have pointed out that there were also no consultations carried out with the Gram Sabhas, as required (Nandi, et.al., 2012). Further, inter-department coordination continues to impede the conversion process in states like Chhattisgarh. This reflects in the pilot project in Kohinpara village where the conversion process has been approved at the DLC but is still pending at the department of Land Records⁹.



Data inaccuracies arising out of interpretational challenges

There are also some reported instances where misleading or exaggerated number of CFR titles (Mokashi, et al, 2021) have been recorded. At this point there is limited or no mechanism to carry out an ongoing review when such a problem comes to light. Instances of reporting anomalies include – the misclassification of development facilities under Section 3(2) of FRA as CFR. Additionally, when distinct community rights such as grazing, fuelwood collection, and MFP collection, recognized within the same village, are reported as separate community titles, it can create inflated figures.

This can exaggerate not only the number of titles granted but also the area granted under CFR (Lele, et.al., 2020). Concerns have also been raised (Nitnaware, 2025) regarding the reliability of monthly data reported by states to MoTA, as these are largely compiled manually from the district and sub-district levels. Given that the MPRs maintained by MoTA are crucial for tracking trends, identifying implementation gaps, and serving as a baseline for linking rights holders with post-recognition schemes and programmes, there is a need to re-examine and strengthen the data validation and reporting processes.

The experience of FRA in areas officially protected for wildlife (PAs) is distinct and requires careful attention. Some long-term challenges have continued to prevail even despite government orders, clarifications and court interventions. This requires a specialized and nuanced intervention to demonstrate a whole-of-government approach. Some of the challenges are highlighted below:



Settlement of Rights Prior to Recognition

The conflict between settlement of rights in PAs and the recognition of rights under FRA continues to be an area of challenge which can exacerbate local conflicts and challenge interdepartmental coherence. This is despite clear provisions in the Act and subsequent clarifications from MoTA, specific state governments and court orders. This indicates the need for formal clarification that the settlement of rights in PAs or RFs should neither precede nor attempt to substitute the recognition of rights, under the FRA. To ensure this, operationalization through specialized policy directives and institutional mechanisms may be required.

⁶Letter No. 23011/33/2010-FRA, MoTA dated 08.11.2013

⁷Joint circular dated 13.12.2013, Forest, Revenue and Disaster Management departments, Government of Chhattisgarh

⁸Letter dated 17.07.2013, Office of PCCF, Government of Chhattisgarh

⁹Letter dated 11.03.2024 from Collector, Dhamtari, Government of Chhattisgarh



Procedural Requirement for Voluntary Relocation

The procedural requirement post the settlement of rights which include relocation and compensations, also remain a gap area, where the conflicts between government and non-governmental actors working on forest rights or wildlife conservation persist. Within the Achanakmar Tiger Reserve, the relocation of Baigas PVTGs and Gond tribals from the core area of the reserve in 2009 was reportedly without receiving any land or compensation for the first few years after relocation (LCW, 2017). During the field visits conducted as part of the study, a major concern that emerged was the risk of displacement for villages currently located within the core area. This concern has impeded their day-to-day living in some ways. For instance, in Chhattisgarh, construction of housing units under the Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana (PMAY) is prohibited within core areas, as per an order from the High Court of Chhattisgarh¹⁰. Similarly, in Simlipal Tiger Reserve, Odisha, the socio-economic conditions of Hill Kharias PVTGs from the core area have remained severely challenged, despite recognition of forest rights and access to basic facilities in the relocation site. This has further challenged the potential for convergence of interdepartmental collaboration.



Involvement of Gram Sabhas

With regard to notification of core and buffer areas of Tiger Reserves or CTH, there have been instances where consultations with Gram Sabhas were not carried out (Kalpavriksh, 2021). As a result, there have been several protests by local communities, seen in

Sathyamangalam Tiger Reserve in Tamil Nadu, Kawal WLS in Andhra Pradesh, and Biligiri Rangaswamy Temple WLS in Karnataka (ibid). In a case before the Chhattisgarh High Court, a public interest litigation to designate the Boramdeo WLS as a Tiger Reserve was dismissed on the grounds that the legal procedure of consultations with local Gram Sabhas and obtaining consent from the affected communities was not complied with (Behera, 2023). Even if the situation has improved, it can present an important area of interdepartmental conversation to build bridges.



Demarcation and Declaration of Critical Wildlife Habitats

Different states have initiated processes for declaration of CWH as allowed through the FRA framework, but there are reported instances that this may have been done without recognition of rights (Kukreti, 2020). Prior studies have highlighted that there is a need to generate synergy between WLPA and FRA when it comes to declaration of CWH and CTH as both may be declared within the same PAs (Kalpavriksh, 2015). This continues to be a concern, as mechanisms to address this gap are not readily available. This is also not included in the CWH guidelines of 2018.



Recognition of Rights Holders and Gram Sabhas for forest management in PAs

As highlighted in the course of the study, forest rights holders and Gram Sabhas in PAs were not being formally engaged for forest management activities, despite rights being recognized. This was also evident during a field visit in Maharashtra where even though the CFRMP was in place,

¹⁰Nithin Singhvi v. Union of India and others, High Court of Chhattisgarh, Order dated 27.08.2018

the communication between CFR title holders and the Forest department was severely challenged. Such instances were also discussed in Chhattisgarh and Odisha. There was a long delay and multiple levels of negotiations were required for the villages in the core area of Achanakmar Tiger Reserve, before their CFRR was recognized. During this waiting period, there were restrictions on selling MFPs to private traders, which was only allowed in 2022 when the CFRR could finally be exercised. Even then, bamboo extraction remained restricted. Similarly, within the Similipal Tiger Reserve, Hill Kharias are often restricted from entering the core area of the reserve to collect MFPs, despite recognition of their habitat rights.

3.1.2. Acquisition, Diversions, Compensation

The questions of acquisition, and compensation usually arise when there is declaration of PAs, Tiger Reserves, CTHs or CWHs or when land is required for industrial and infrastructure ‘public purpose’¹¹ projects. In both these instances, the requirement for land directly affects rights recognized under the FRA, giving rise to several legal and procedural complexities. Some of these have been discussed in the previous section and are distinctly reiterated here.



¹¹As defined under RCFTLARR



Preference of some Legal Procedures Over Others

There is a preference by different government departments to rely on laws and procedures that allow them primary control. This may create conflicts when multiple jurisdictions apply in the same context or land parcel. One such instance is simultaneous processes of recognition (FRA) and settlement of rights (WLPA). While FRA clarifies that rights modification cannot happen without completing the recognition process within PAs, in practice, there are reported instances where the concerned Forest department prioritizes the provision of WLPA over FRA. This may be possible as an interpretation of Section 13 of FRA which states *“the provisions of this Act shall be in addition to and not in derogation of the provisions of any other law for the time being in force”*, thereby enabling a concerned Forest department to foreground WLPA. The Section 4(1) also indicates *“Notwithstanding anything contained in any other law for the time being in force, and subject to the provisions of this Act, the Central Government hereby recognizes and vests forest rights...”* Therefore, standalone interpretation of these laws continues to challenge rights recognition in PAs, unless addressed on a case-to-case basis.



Forest Rights Holders as Landowners

There is some clarity that IFR title holders are being recognized as ‘landowners’ in instances of land acquisition or forest land diversion. However, a similar level of clarity is not evident for CFR or CFRRs areas. This directly affects compensations, relocation and rehabilitation related processes. Some state innovations related to this from Chhattisgarh and Odisha have been discussed in Section 4. However, this issue continues to affect both pre and post rights recognition processes across all states.



Gram Sabha Consent

The need for Gram Sabha’s consent in forest diversion continues to be a complex issue and demand from community-based organizations. From 2009 to 2022, the requirement of Gram Sabha consent was being practiced in line with a MoEFCC circular and Rule 6 (3) (e) (ii) of Forest (Conservation) Rules (FCR), amended in 2016 (FCR), even as the issue continued to be debated intensely between the MoTA and MoEFCC¹². Need for consultations with Gram Sabhas of villages bound to be affected by forest diversions was also reiterated in the Supreme Court judgement related to Odisha Mining Corporation commonly known as Niyamgiri judgement of 2013¹³. Since the amendments to the FCA and its Rules since 2022, the processing of forest diversion applications have been exempted from the requirement of Gram Sabha consent, with the 2022 Rules not reflecting the provision from the Rules amended in 2016 (Jha, 2022).

3.1.3. Rejection and Recall of Rights

The rejection and recall of rights have been an emerging challenge which needs to be recognized and prioritized across states. Some instances of how this issue manifests itself is discussed further.



Recording Reasons and Hearings before Rejecting Claims

The FRA framework requires recording reasons for rejections, communicating them to the claimants, and hearing their appeals in case a claim is rejected. Following the Supreme Court orders in *Wildlife First and Others¹⁴ v. Union of India and others*, some states like

¹²MoTA Letter dated 18.05.2009, 07.03.2014; MoEF Circular dated 03.08.2009; MoEFCC Circulars dated 05.02.2013, 05.07.2013, 09.10.2013, and 15.01.2014

¹³Supreme Court order in Orissa Mining Corporation and others v. MOEF and others dated 18th April 2013

¹⁴The issue of rejections has been raised within the Supreme Court case in *Wildlife First and Others v. Union of India and others*. Although the case was originally filed questioning the constitutional validity of the FRA, recent orders have required State Governments to provide details of accepted and rejected claims to the apex court.

Chhattisgarh have initiated a *suo moto* review process of rejected claims. While the veracity and accuracy of the process needs to be assessed, it demonstrates the need to prioritize the issue at state level.



Nature of Evidence

In some states, where reasons have been given, the most common cause for rejection is the lack of documentary evidence (even though the FRA Guidelines of 2012 clarify that the SDLC or the DLC should, if deemed necessary, remand the claim to the Gram Sabha for reconsideration instead of rejecting or modifying the same, in case the resolution or the recommendation of the Gram Sabha is found to be incomplete or prima facie requires additional examination). The guidelines further clarify that Gram Sabha should not insist upon any particular form of evidence for consideration of a claim as long as any of the two evidences including oral evidence as per Rule 13 has been submitted by the claimant. As pointed out during the study, Forest department in some states insist on satellite imagery to be essential, to verify claims, even though such imagery can help in supplementing the claim but not become a reason for rejection.



Possession and Occupation of Land

It has been highlighted that IFR claims have been denied on the grounds that the area for which the claim was made was not under occupation as of 13.12.2005, which is the required cut-off date under the law. This was despite the fact that in addition to usual documents such as Aadhar card, ration card, caste certificate, *punchnama* (record of observation), and a village elder statement, the claimant also submitted forest offence report i.e. receipt of committing of forest offences related to felling of trees prior to 13.12.2005 (CFJ, 2024). In Chhattisgarh, during the course of the study, some tribal people in Dhamtari district alleged that the Forest

department officials levelled all their long-term existing structures used for agriculture and habitation, and they were not able to file a forest offence report due to pressure. As result they could not prove their occupation before 13.12.2005.



Recall of Rights

The FRA framework does not provide for recall of rights after it has been recognized. However, there have been few instances where the rights, in particular CFRs have been cancelled in the light of them impacting other needs like mining. A decision and clarification about such instances requires clarity (PTI, 2024; Kohli, 2018). An order on cancellation of faulty IFR titles by the DLC was put aside by the Chhattisgarh High Court, on the grounds that the DLC cannot review its own order since it has no such power vested with it through FRA¹⁵. This situation presents a critical dilemma. During the course of the study, it was pointed out that following another petition before the Chhattisgarh High Court, the court directed the SLMC to review titles that were wrongly awarded, even though the FRA does not grant the SLMC any such power of review¹⁶. As discussed during the field visits, there is still no clarity on whether the recall or withdrawal of titles is legally permissible, and if so, under what conditions. This raises a larger question about the appropriateness of reopening rights recognition processes. While doing so may help rectify earlier irregularities, it also carries the risk of being misused against existing rights holders in the absence of proper procedural safeguards.

¹⁵Nirmala Toppo and others v. Government of Chhattisgarh and others, Chhattisgarh High Court order dated 14.03.2024

¹⁶Order dated 20.11.2023, High Court of Chhattisgarh in W.P.C. No. 4877/2023

3.2. EXERCISING AND SUSTAINING OF RIGHTS (POST RIGHTS FRAMEWORK)

This phase of the FRA poses certain critical challenges which can be summarized as follows:



The debate on whether the existing legal framework provides adequate clarity on options, monetizing or governing IFR and CFR in a post rights recognition scenario



Are there market- and non-market-based options and alignments currently available that incentivize rights holders or their collaborators?



Need for better clarity on the monitoring and grievance redressal mechanisms, for strengthening the post rights recognition phase



The limitations of the existing flagship programmes to address issues of conservation and governance. While provisions have been made for budgetary allocation and Gram Sabhas preparing the CFRMPs, institutional mechanisms are lacking on the ground for convergence with the Forest department.

3.2.1. Addressing Complexity of Community Rights

The FRA devolves powers to rights holders and Gram Sabhas to protect forest lands and resources in accordance with their traditional practices. However, even before the enactment of FRA, many forest-dwelling tribal communities had embraced custodianship of the forest to ensure ecological and livelihood security of the areas they resided in and accessed regularly for both cultural and usufruct needs. For instance: Women from the Kand tribal group from Dengajheri village in Nayagarh district, Odisha, had been regulating entry into forests based on customary rules and practices. These customary rights enabled them to take action to prevent tree felling and punish offenders (more details in Section 4) (Sahu, 2020). Within the Biligiri Rangaswamy Temple WLS in Karnataka, Soliga tribals who have received CFR titles wish to light customary litter fires to better manage the forests. However, this has been suppressed by the Forest department as being against the WLPA (Menon, 2020). While these customary practices and enabling provisions are critical to strengthening tribal governance and sustainable development, the exercise of rights of one set of rights holders can also impinge on the access of another more marginalized community. These dilemmas are important to flag, even as we foreground community stewardship of forest rights

Externally driven community empowerment plans and programmes to conserve and protect forests can encounter various practical realities and risks. These include a lack of confidence in traditional community conservation practices, concerns over revenue loss for government departments due to reduced control, or limited uptake of schemes and initiatives by specific communities. In contrast, some studies and field interactions reveal that Gram Sabha-driven forest conservation rules, created through an inclusive and participatory process, have reduced forest fire, illegal NTFP harvesting and tree felling, and wildlife hunting. However, these lessons can be adapted and strengthened in several states (Lele and Sahu, 2025).

Some experiences around exercising and sustaining rights that require priority attention include:



Community Forest Resource and delineation from existing legal boundaries

Overlap of CFR areas with JFMCs is prevalent across the states (Kohli, 2015). Different approaches have been taken to solve this confusion, whereby in Maharashtra, JFMCs and CFRMCs manage forests under the supervision of the Gram Sabha (Kohli, 2015). While MoTA- MoEFCC joint guidelines on CFR management, direct that any existing committee for forest resource management or a non-statutory committee is to be replaced by the CFRMC¹⁷, it continues to remain a challenge to practically implement. Despite these directions, Forest departments continue to work through the JFMCs, have delayed in transferring their funds to Gram Sabhas, and insisted on following older working plans (Lele and Sahu, 2025). In states like Chhattisgarh, the Forest department has expressed the need for a collaborative approach of CFR management which includes both communities and the department. This approach does not mandate dissolving JFMCs, but looks to create spaces to converge and strengthen joint efforts without disturbing the JFMC institutional mechanism.



Setting up of CFRMCs and Preparation of CFR plans

Very few states have set up CFRMCs and thereafter created CFRMPs to manage the areas. Where CFRMCs have been set up, CSOs have been engaged by State Governments to help facilitate discussions and completion of plan preparation. These processes are now being expedited through the union government's DA-JGUA scheme, where there is special financial allocation to support the preparation of CFRMPs. Yet multiple new and legacy challenges remain. In

some cases, it is being observed that given the timeline and deadlines to submit CFRMPs, due processes are being limited or bypassed.



Capacity limitations at Gram Sabha and CFRMC level for CFRMP preparation

During the field visits carried out during this study, CFRMC members in all the three states highlighted the need for trainings and capacity enhancement to understand formats, and comprehensively discuss plans and strategies on how to manage the CFR areas. It has been highlighted that it is important to recognize CFR management as a process to demonstrate tribal empowerment and governance, rather than an exercise in administrative compliance. The state field visits also highlighted the difference in capacity of CFRMCs and Gram Sabhas, where there was a huge knowledge, information and confidence divide between Gram Sabhas of the same district or block. Some of this was also due to their proximity to a PA, or limited access to governmental and non-governmental support.



¹⁷MoTA and MoEFCC, Guideline for Conservation and Management of CFR, 02.09.2023



Integrating CFRMPs with Working Plans and GPDP

Field observations and inputs received during the study, point out that in instances where CFRMPs have been duly prepared, they are yet to be integrated with relevant micro, working or management of the Forest department and the Gram Panchayat Development Plans (GPDP). As highlighted during primary data collection during the study, this integration will be important to realize the sustained and long-term potential to exercise CFR rights for multiple outcomes. In Maharashtra and Odisha, specific discussions also pointed to convergence of these plans with People's Biodiversity Registers being prepared under the BDA.



Overlapping use of CFR Areas

Earlier reports (Zumbish, 2022) and field observations from this study have highlighted that government departmental plans and CFRMPs prepared by communities can conflict—both in terms of specific activities and in how the area should be governed. This is also exacerbated by the overlapping use of CFR areas for wildlife conservation, plantations, cultural use and livelihood support. The lack of deliberative processes and the absence of a conflict-free coordination mechanism for CFR management have allowed historical clashes and hierarchies to influence the exercise and sustainability of rights.



Afforestation Programmes in CFR areas

Afforestation programmes administered through various social forestry, the Green India Mission (GIM)¹⁸ as part of achieving India's climate targets or CA to meet requirements of offsetting loss of forest land under FCA, have a direct interface for forest rights. These are being facilitated through a variety of social forestry and other schemes, including through funds received through

MGNREGA and CAMPA mechanisms. There are multiple challenges related to afforestation schemes that emerged during the field observations and secondary data collection carried out in this study. These challenges include limited or no involvement of CFRMCs or Gram Sabhas. In most instances, these are carried out by JFMCs, private parties or the Forest department on their own. This is despite guidelines and directions requiring a change of approach, having been in existence since 2025¹⁹. The first challenge directly affects the diversity in the plantation area and in several cases, forest dependent communities including rights holders being fenced off, thereby restricting access to CFR areas. Studies have also pointed out that this approach also directly impacts wildlife movements, thereby exacerbating human wildlife conflicts (Basu, 2023; Sushmitha, 2022).



Overcoming limitations of rights and PA governance

The issue of exercising rights in PAs and Tiger Reserves has been fraught with challenges. In PAs and Tiger Reserves where both IFRs and CFRs have been recognized, there is resistance from the Forest department officials in actual exercise of the rights. This includes curtailment of MFP access, grazing bans, prohibition of fuel wood collection, harassment of villagers, and evictions, according to the field respondents from the study states. Approach of conservation through co-existence is still not widely accepted and thus there is no elaboration in the policy space as to what coexistence with wildlife and biodiversity could look like (Kalpavriksh, 2021).

3.2.2. Habitat Rights and Rights of Pastoralist Communities

Unlike IFR or CFRs, habitat rights extend to larger landscapes covering areas that have been traditionally accessed by a specific PVTG for livelihood or cultural reasons. These

¹⁸Green India Mission is one of eight missions under India's National Action Plan on Climate Change (NAPCC) with the goal of protecting, restoring, and enhancing India's forest cover, and addressing climate change through adaptation and mitigation measures, with the help of local communities.

¹⁹MoTA Guidelines issued under Section 12 of the FRA by MoTA for the recognition, vesting and management of CFR, 23.04.2015

rights go significantly beyond village boundaries and can cut across state borders, and intersect with seasonal access of both pastoral and non-pastoral nomadic communities. As many PVTGs are nomadic, official verification of their rights has been difficult, since there is very rarely any written record of the same (Jha, 2025).

Box 3: Why Habitat Rights?

- ✦ To document the traditional rights and mechanisms of the community related to their distinct social systems and culture and provide support in their protection, conservation, and governance.
- ✦ To safeguard and promote traditional livelihood and ecological knowledge passed down through generations.
- ✦ To converge different government schemes and initiatives of various departments to empower PVTG communities to develop their habitats.
- ✦ To promote a sense of identity and ownership and improve participatory area development through governmental support.
- ✦ To assist in the development of community-centric infrastructural development through the PVTG Development Authority.

Source: Tribal and Scheduled Caste Development Department, Government of Chhattisgarh and UNDP. 2023. Process of recognizing the habitat rights of Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups (PVTGs) under the Forest Rights Act, 2006

It is only more recently that few State Governments have initiated processes related to the identification, demarcation and declaration of habitat rights. The processes followed by these states provide important insights on both challenges (discussed further) and innovations from states like Odisha and Chhattisgarh (discussed in Section 4). Even though efforts have been made by the MoTA to clarify the legal framework and necessary processes related to vesting of habitat rights, there remain practical challenges which have been observed during the course of the study. These have been highlighted by both government and CSOs who have attempted to bring habitat rights to life. Some of the key areas of concern include:





Access to and Involvement of PVTGs

The process of working with PVTGs to map and secure habitat rights require overcoming historical marginalisation on the one hand, reliance on oral and cultural knowledge and minimum access to formal paperwork on the other. In addition, the levels of literacy, access to their homesteads and reserved nature of PVTGs create practical difficulties during the habitat rights processes.



Procedural Clarity

While there is some clarity on the legal requirements and broad guidance on the identification and existence of habitat rights, there is limited access to good practices that allow step by step methodology that can be followed. In the absence of these, there is limited or no guidance to address issues such as reconciling customary norms with institutional responsibilities, regulating and restoring access where possible. This clarity is also required to reconcile the prioritisation of areas for use of PVTGs in relation to demarcation of areas for commercial or conservation purposes.



Overlaps with IFRs and CFRs

There is a need to develop greater clarity on how much habitat rights overlap with existing IFRs and CFRs. In Mayurbhanj, it was observed that even though habitat rights were recognized for the Hill Kharias (PVTGs), other right holders objected to exercise of these rights on account of an overlap of areas over which both habitat rights and other rights have been recognized. Moreover, what would be the steps required to reconcile and address these overlaps and what grievance redressal mechanisms exist to enable it, needs to be elaborated.



Institutional, Financial and Technical Support Structure

There is limited institutional, financial and technical support structure to enable the processes to research, map and execute habitat rights at all levels of implementation of

the FRA. In the absence of this, state governments may not be in a position to incentivize the processes of recognition of habitat rights.

Even as the practice to strengthen habitat rights is an emerging area of work in most states, the existing innovations (discussed in Section 4) and lessons from work with PVTGs that pre-date the enactment of FRA can together provide important guidance on processes towards rights recognition and creating governance frameworks post recognition. These are elaborated further in Section 5.

3.2.3. Individual Forest Rights and Livelihood Linkages

There are three clear aspects that link IFR and livelihoods which have come to light:



Livelihood Support Schemes for IFR Holders

Despite guidelines and circulars, and high-level programmes directed at saturating schemes for forest rights holders, they are yet to achieve their required intent in most states. Beyond Rule 16 within FR Rules, which offers post claim support and handholding to holders of forest rights, any further guidance on convergence is all enmeshed within the executive instruments such as guidelines. While initiatives for convergence have and continue to be experimented with, these are largely aimed at land levelling, irrigation, planting of cash crops, building houses and related facilities. They are also primarily directed at benefitting IFR holders. There is limited innovation on conservation and ecological restoration endeavours, especially on CFR and habitat rights areas. At the same time some conservation and restoration initiatives tend to be either blind to the FRA framework or do not recognize ways in which IFR rights holders can be integrated, as beneficiaries or partners within schemes and programmes related to forestry, biodiversity, restoration etc. This aspect is also relevant when it comes to linking tenurial security and implementation of climate solutions.



Collection, Transportation and Sale of MFPs by Rights Holders

There are a number of challenges related to the collection, transportation and sale of MFPs which continue to require attention. The work of national, state and district level government departments and innovations by specific Gram Sabhas have informed this challenge over the years, including demonstrating solutions. However, some aspects still remain unresolved. For instance, extraction, sale and transit of certain MFP/ NTFPs such as tendu, mahua, bamboo, etc., continues to be regulated by the State Forest department through the provisions of IFA and other relevant state laws (MoTA, 2019). The field work and discussions carried out as part of this study brought to light that despite the enabling frameworks of FRA and PESA, Gram Sabhas and IFR title holders continue to face multiple constraints. These include restrictions on working capital or arbitrary freeze of Gram Sabha accounts on allegations of mismanagement (Lele and Sahu, 2025). Even though certain states have sought to amend their regulations to empower Gram Sabhas, market valuations, skills to navigate market infrastructure and competition with private traders are important challenges, which IFR title holders and most Gram Sabhas continue to face. While the scheme of MoTA on MSP for MFPs is an important enabler, its outreach and uptake has not been realized to the desired potential to translate into securing livelihoods.



Valuation and Marketing of MFPs

Another major issue pointed out during the study is the lack of analysis of the economic potential of MFPs/NTFPs to determine its cumulative value. Such an analysis could have enabled effective budgetary and institutional planning. This along with secure market linkages and support directly impact the potential to realize livelihood linkages. While schemes like DA-JGUA will enable some of these, there is still a serious limitation on how private sector engagement can be enabled without disempowering rights holders.



Marketing Support by Tribal Department

Even though Tribal Cooperative Marketing Development Federation of India Limited (TRIFED) and MoTA had come out with multiple schemes aimed at creating marketing and value addition opportunities for local communities (refer to Section 2.3), right holders are yet to be able to convert these schemes into sustainable and profitable business ventures. Even facilities to store and process MFPs/NTFPs for sale at a later date, are limited in most places. In remote parts of Simlipal Tiger Reserve in Odisha, forest-dwelling tribal communities informed that absence of such storage and processing facilities lead to degeneration or spoilage of the produce and affect the sale value.

3.3. INSTITUTIONAL CAPACITY AND INTERDEPARTMENTAL COORDINATION

A multi-layered understanding of institutional capacity and levels of interdepartmental coordination is essential, to assess and address roadblocks that limit the implementation of any legal framework. Over the last two decades, the depth of engagement with the FRA has presented numerous challenges, many of which have been recognized and thereon been either partially or fully resolved. However, given the long term and widespread relevance of the FRA framework, legacy questions around institutional arrangements continue to persist and the need to strengthen interdepartmental coordination and reconcile differences is crucial. At a practical level, without these interconnections, it would not be feasible to deliver the intent of the FRA. While several efforts for convergence are already underway, there is scope to strengthen and upscale efforts to bridge the gaps. Two new institutional mechanisms to address these at the state level were pointed out during the study; one was through a coordinated mechanism at the Chief Secretary level and the other through the SLMCs.

Some of the key challenges related to these themes include:



Capacity and Functioning of Institutions

It has been pointed out during the course of the study, that there continue to be limitations of capacity of institutions mandated to recognize rights and support post rights processes. This cuts across all scales and levels of institutions from Gram Sabhas to state and national level functionaries. In the absence of a detailed review of gaps and needs assessment, the case-to-case responses to challenges can appear to be necessary but not sufficient. It has also been pointed out that there continues to be basic questions of vacancy fulfilment, regularity of meetings and time required for grassroots engagement (as pointed out by several FRA Cell members) that hinder the implementation of the law.



Conflicts Related to Departmental Visions and Priorities

Given the legacy of forest governance in India, there are numerous factors that hinder interdepartmental coordination and priorities. Some of these continue to affect how much and in what form the recognition of forest rights has been embraced or resisted by different departments. This has been reflected in the challenges related to reconciliation and recording of rights as well as exercising and sustaining rights discussed earlier. In particular, the coordination between Forest departments, Tribal departments and the Panchayati Raj departments was flagged during the course of the study.

An overarching coordination mechanism possibly at the level of Chief Secretary of a state or through regular interdepartmental/inter-ministerial clarifications is required, on the critical issues that impede the implementation of the FRA and exercise of rights. While there have been some joint communications that have been issued by MoTA-MoEFCC, several other issues discussed in the earlier sections continue to require attention.



Prioritisation of FRA Related Aspects in Convergence Committees

Even though convergence committees exist at the district levels in various states, FRA becomes one of the many agenda items for different beneficiaries linked programmes. It has been pointed out during the course of the study that in some instances, neither the recognition of rights nor post rights is prioritized for discussion or resolution. There are several questions related to definition of Gram Sabhas, clearing bottlenecks for convergence of plans, coordination between village committees set up by various ministries or departments, remain as unresolved questions.



Limited Ground Level Structures to Enable Interdepartmental Coordination

There continues to be a need to bring together multiple departments' interventions on an everyday basis at the ground level, where FRA is being implemented. At present, there are no ground level structures that can create everyday interdepartmental synergies, to address practical problems emerging during the implementation of the law and related processes. FRA cells which have been constituted, serve as important platforms through which this can be addressed. But they would require training, capacity development and sustained funding support.



Strengthening Grams Sabhas and CFRMCs

There is a clear need to strengthen and support these institutions to be able to carry out tasks like preparation of CFRMPs, lead specific management and protection activities on CFR and IFR lands, preparing sale of NTFPs or even basic bookkeeping. While this is partially being covered through programmes like DA-JGUA, there is a need to create networks and exchange programmes at the most decentralized levels of FRA implementation, along with assessing models through which tribal governance is realized.



Limited Monitoring and Grievance Redressal Systems

There is large scope to create systems through which both claimants and title holders can seek grievance redressal and have regular access to information to strengthen the exercise of their rights. Currently, the Pradhan Mantri Janjati Adivasi Nyaya Maha Abhiyan (PM-JANMAN) mission with respect to PVTGs and DA-JGUA scheme have detailed provisioning for monitoring mechanisms that can ensure last mile service delivery to every tribal beneficiary. However, without the existence of indicators for monitoring, it will get difficult to ensure and assess whether preambular and other objectives of the FRA are being achieved. For grievance redressal as well as monitoring of CFR activities, the CFR Guidelines of 2023 provides for constituting District Level CFR Monitoring Committee and the provision for Gram Sabhas to approach SDLC for resolution of disputes²⁰. During field interactions, it was evident that both right holders and statutory bodies require awareness regarding the above.



Digitization of Records and Open Access to Data

MoTA's website acts as a repository for information pertaining to implementation of FRA including MPRs on the number of CFR and IFR titles distributed so far. MoTA has also developed a mobile application and dashboard to integrate scheme specific portals of relevant ministries on PM Gati Shakti portal in order to monitor progress of the PM-JANMAN mission with respect to PVTGs and DA-JGUA scheme by the State Governments²¹. While the portal serves as an important tool, feedback from government officials during the course of this study indicates that there is scope for strengthening its functionality, particularly to ease data entry and improve accessibility for intended operational use. Further, through the DA-JGUA scheme, FRA Cells have been made responsible for digitization of the FRA claim process. However, this work is at its initial stages or yet to be initiated in several states and can benefit from being strengthened. The

MoEFCC has also issued its own instructions for RoRs to be integrated in the PARIVESH portal and other web GIS platforms of central and State Government departments (Jha, 2022). There is no publicly available information on whether steps in this direction have been taken or not. State experiences on digitization and other FRA related aspects are also discussed in Section 4 below.



²⁰Guidelines on Conservation, Management and Sustainable Use of CFR, issued by MoTA on 12.9.2023

²¹Operational Guidelines for Pradhan Mantri Janjati Adivasi Nyaya Maha Abhiyan, 2024; Operational Guidelines for Dharti Aaba Janjatiya Gram Utkarsh Abhiyan, 2024



04

**UNDERSTANDING
STATE LEVEL EXPERIENCES**





UNDERSTANDING STATE LEVEL EXPERIENCES: CREATING INNOVATIONS AND RECONCILING CHALLENGES

Two decades of the FRA has presented multiple opportunities for state governments to create innovations and reconcile challenges at varied scale. In the previous section, this study captured the length and breadth of procedural, institutional and substantive challenges which tested the capacity and strengthened the possibility of demonstrating innovative approaches across states and administrative levels. This section captures and analyses the experience and innovations of Chhattisgarh, Maharashtra and Odisha to implement and operationalize the intent of the FRA.

For each of the states, we discuss the experience under three broad themes:

- Reconciliation and Recording of Rights
- Exercising and Sustaining Rights
- Institutional Capacity and Interdepartmental Coordination

Two decades of FRA has presented multiple opportunities for State Governments to create innovations and reconcile challenges at multiple scales.

Given the critical role of Tribal Departments in implementing the legislation—beyond their traditional focus on schemes—it was imperative for these departments to establish long-term knowledge and implementation partnerships. This includes working with organizations like UNDP and civil society organizations (CSOs) to strengthen the FRA and support tribal governance in the three states.

A positive outcome of such partnership is reflected in the innovation of FRA Cells set up by UNDP in collaboration with State Tribal department of Odisha and Chhattisgarh and this has informed state level FRA mission in Odisha and national convergence programmes like DA-JGUA by MoTA.





BOX 4: DIPSTICK SURVEY IN THREE STATES: KEY FINDINGS

UNDP undertook a dipstick survey in 22 villages, covering 123 households from 5 districts in Chhattisgarh, Maharashtra and Odisha. The aim of the study was to assess the benefits arising out of the implementation of the Forest Rights Act to the right holders. The key findings include:



Access to economic opportunities:

- More than 80% of households surveyed in all three states said that FRA recognition has resulted in additional income for the family. Other benefits of FRA include increase in sense of identity and ownership. More than 75% households in Odisha and Chhattisgarh reported that the accessibility to MFP has increased post recognition of land rights. The percentage is lower in Maharashtra at 17%. People have reported construction of houses and have been able to repay loans after recognition of rights. Households reported an increase in assets after recognition of Forest Rights in these states.
- 78% of all the households surveyed reported that they are able to take up multiple crops in a year post recognition of land rights. These crops include Paddy, pulses and vegetables in Odisha, Bajra, Soybean, Groundnuts, corn, pulses and vegetables in Maharashtra and horticulture produce, paddy in Chhattisgarh.



Better accessibility to government schemes:

- Households were able to access government schemes post FRA titles across the three states, majorly, MGNREGA, PMAY and land development interventions.
- More than 45% of households surveyed responded that the agricultural period has increased post FRA titles. 78% of all the households surveyed reported that they are able to take up multiple crops in a year, post recognition of rights, as they were able to access agriculture services and invest own resources for land improvement.



Empowering Women:

- Despite law requiring joint ownership titles, around 87% of households in the entire sample reported joint title with their spouse, except in Odisha where it was reported to be 100 percent of the Sample. This percentage was 96% for Chhattisgarh and 71.7% for Maharashtra.
- All the women members of the households surveyed in Odisha reported that they participate in village meetings related to the FRA process. Similar percentage was observed in Chhattisgarh at 96% and Maharashtra at 83%.

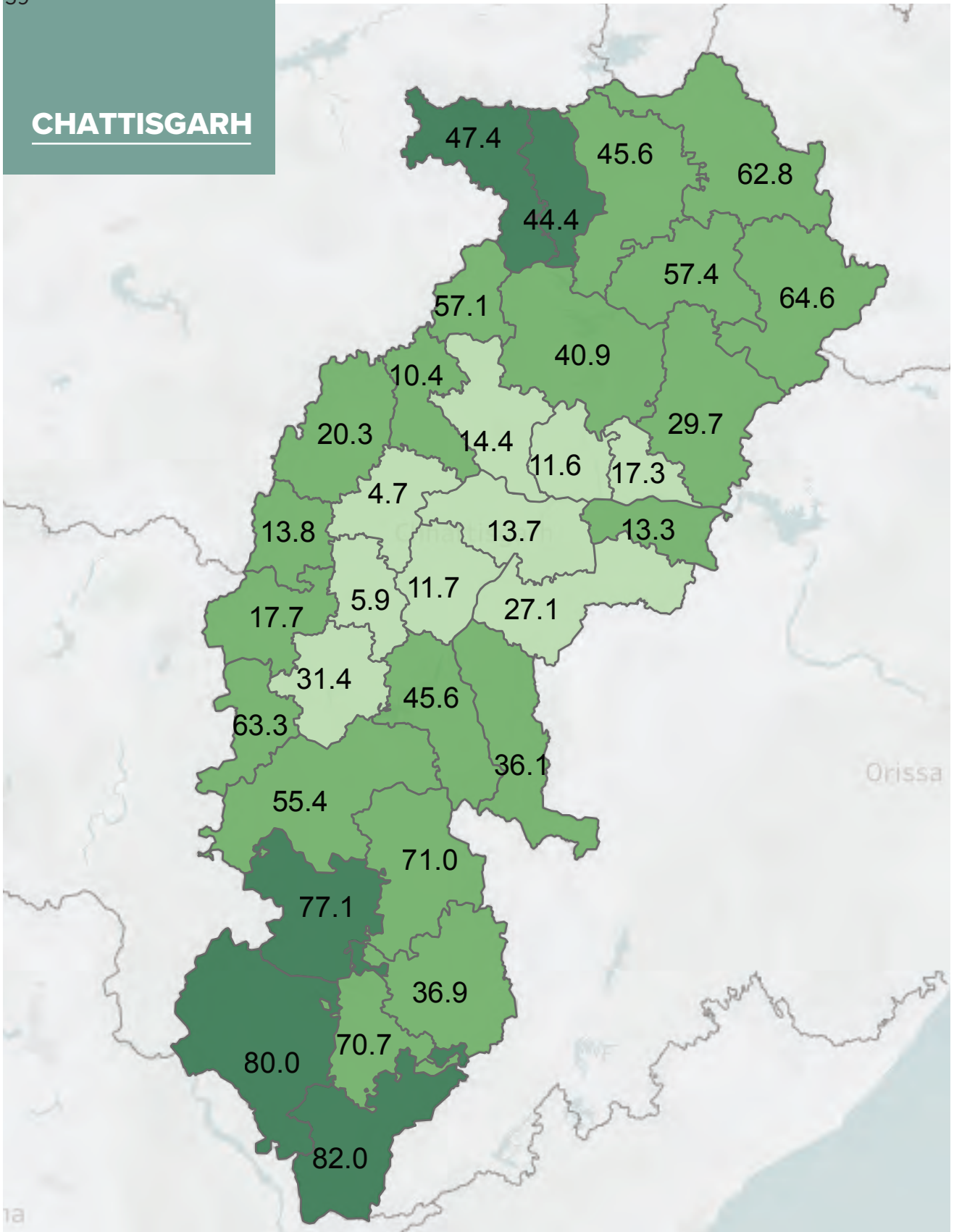


Community Forest Rights:

- All the households surveyed reported that they are aware of the CFRMP in Odisha. This percentage is 77% in Maharashtra and 68% in Chhattisgarh. However, around 60% of all surveyed households reported that there are no CFRMPs currently in place in their village.
- Many community-led initiatives or activities are being carried on CFR land for its protection, development, or sustainable use including Protection & Conservation activities, afforestation and management & sale of MFP



CHATTISGARH



Orissa



Figures on the map represent the percentage of the Scheduled Tribe (ST) population as percentage of total District population (Census 2011).

The colour shading indicates forest cover as a percentage of the total geographical area, based on the Forest Survey of India (2023). For the five newly formed districts (2024), data from their respective parent districts have been used due to the unavailability of disaggregated information in the FSI dataset.

Chhattisgarh, with a substantial tribal population dependent on forest resources, has seen significant activity in the recognition and processing of Individual Forest Rights (IFR) claims, particularly between 2008 and 2018. This trend is supported by studies conducted by civil society organisations, which used government-reported statistics with field-level data collection efforts. (Mokashi, Lele, 2021; Tatpati, 2015) During the first decade of FRA implementation, one state government official centrally involved with FRA implementation stated that this was because “The law did not fully and properly reach the ground.” These aspects were also confirmed during primary interviews and interactions undertaken with government and non-governmental stakeholders as part of this study. One observation during the discussion with civil society organisations pointed out that “prior to 2012, political attention was given to IFR and in many cases due process of recognition was not followed, which led to conflict in villages. This even led to cutting down of trees in vengeance.”

As observed in several other states and reflected in broader national trends, Chhattisgarh, too, placed emphasis on the implementation of Community Forest Resource (CFR) processes primarily during the second decade following the enactment of the Forest Rights Act (FRA). Given that approximately 31 per cent of Chhattisgarh’s population is tribal and heavily reliant on forests—which cover nearly 45 per cent of the state’s geographical area—the significance of CFRs and Community Forest Resource Rights (CFRRs) is particularly pronounced.

A study by Mokashi and Lele (2021), focused on the implementation of CFRs in Chhattisgarh, highlighted that both official and journalistic accounts often presented a misleading picture by categorising all forest rights uniformly as CFRs. Recognizing this gap, the state government took deliberate steps to enhance the quality of CFR implementation processes and to address the shortcomings in communication and classification.

In recent years, Chhattisgarh has also taken leadership in demonstrating innovations in mapping and recognizing habitat rights of

PVTGs. While the process and way forward are discussed in detailed later in the section, here is an upfront acknowledgment that in 2023, it is the first time that habitat rights of Kamar PVTGs (TIE, 2023)²² across 22 villages of Magarlod Pali (sub-territory of Kamar Habitat) in Dhamtari district have been recognized. State government officials involved in the process were quoted in newspapers (TIE, 2023) as saying that it “would help in the protection of their culture and means of livelihood, and enable the government to work for their development.” They further stated, “The recognition of habitat rights under the Forest Rights Act (FRA) would not only help in the protection and promotion of customary arrangements, culture, traditions, means of livelihood, and the habitat of the PVTGs by officially documenting them, but also enable the government to work toward their empowerment and the development of their areas through the convergence of schemes from various departments.”

At the same time, the rights of Baiga tribals who were reportedly facing eviction threats in GPM District of the state, were recognized following a six-year process, from the time the claims were made in 2017. (Nandi, 2023).

Over the years the state government issued more than 50+ circulars/directive on CR-CFR, forest village conversion, CFR management, habitat rights of PVTGs, recognition of rights in PAs, RoR, convergence, land diversion, judicial & quasi-judicial matters, other legal compliances etc. (as pointed out by the State FRA cell).

Chhattisgarh has also come out with gender disaggregated data while reporting on FRA implementation, which is an important innovation from the state. This reporting was introduced to the MPR system after 2020. As highlighted during the course of the study, the FRA Online Portal of the state developed by Tribal Department also has a specific section on gender disaggregated reporting. As per this data on March 2025, 18,476 (2,401 for Homestead & 16,075 for Agriculture) IFR titles to Single Women have been conferred over 10,600.2 Ha (1,026.8 Ha for Homestead & 9,573.4 Ha for Agri) of forest land (as pointed out by State FRA cell).

²²“The Kamar tribe members mainly reside in Gariaband, Dhamtari, Mahasamund and Kanker districts. Their population as per the 2011 census was 26,630.”

Table 3: A THEMATIC MAPPING OF GUIDELINES, CIRCULARS AND OTHER RELATED ORDERS IN CHHATTISGARH (2006-2025)

TIME PERIOD / THEMES	RECOGNITION, VESTING AND RECORD OF RIGHTS (ROR)	INSTITUTIONAL ROLES AND CAPACITY	FINANCIAL ALLOCATION AND SUPPORT	POST RIGHTS SUPPORT
2017-2022	<p>Guidelines to review rejected IFR claims</p> <p>Recognition of forest rights in PAs</p> <p>Recognition of forest rights in CWH, WLS, NPs and Tiger Reserves</p> <p>Recognition of forest rights in Urban (Municipal) Areas</p> <p>Declaration of CWH in NPs & WLSs and relocation of villages</p> <p>Explorative study on Kamar PVTG to initiate habitat right recognition.</p> <p>Pilot intervention on recognizing habitat right to Kamar PVTG</p>	<p>Consultation with Kamar traditional leaders and training of field implementing stakeholders for initiating recognition of habitat right</p>		
2022-2025	<p>Eviction/relocation of forest-dwelling communities from their occupied traditional forest land</p> <p>Compensation for land acquisition in CFRR areas</p> <p>Land acquisition in CFRR areas and compensation to Gram Sabha</p> <p>Pilot intervention on conversion of forest village to revenue village</p> <p>Review of recognition of Para/Tola Gram Sabha for recognizing Kamar PVTG habitat right</p>	<p>Training of Master Trainers on CFR Management</p> <p>Guidelines on CFR protection, conservation, regeneration and management for sustainable use</p> <p>Recognizing Para/ Tola level Gram Sabha for recognizing habitat right</p> <p>Clarifications on specific issues of FRA implementation</p> <p>Guidelines for initiating habitat right recognition process</p>	<p>Budget expenditure on CFR management related activities</p>	<p>Convergence of IFR Title holders</p> <p>Declaration of selected Adarsh Gram under FRA by Hon'ble CM for benefits under convergence</p> <p>Initiating pilot project on PVTG habitat-based conservation cum development of CFR</p> <p>Initiating pilot project on CWH-based CFR conservation cum development plan highlighting human-wildlife co-existence</p>

Figure 4a: Status of Individual Forest Rights in Chhattisgarh as of May 2025

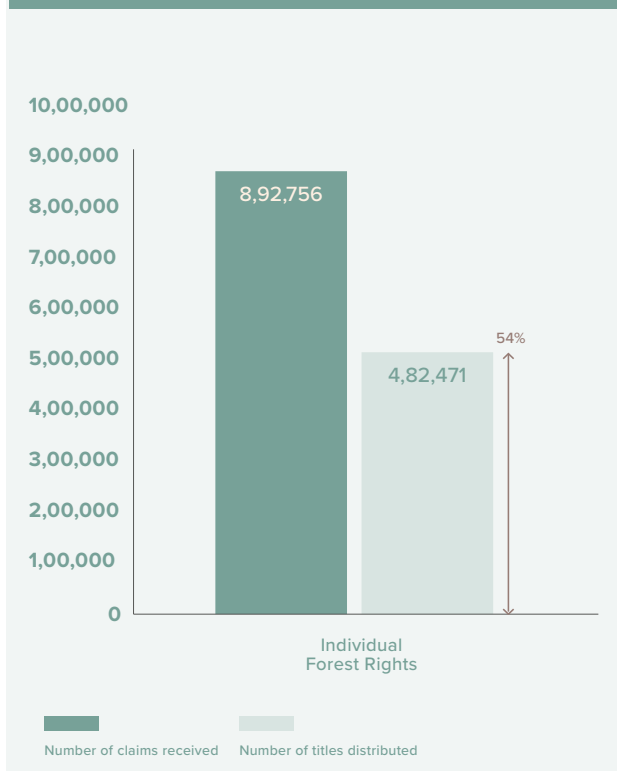


Figure 4b: Status of Community Forest Rights in Chhattisgarh as of May 2025

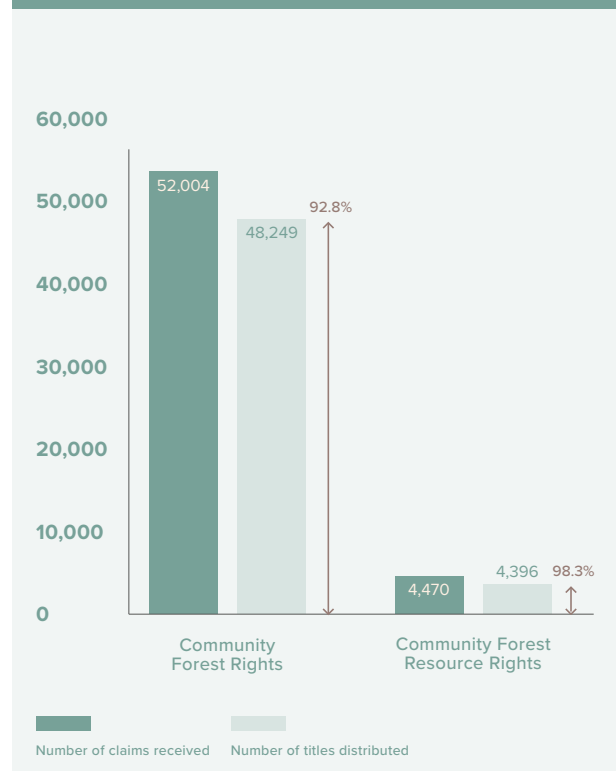
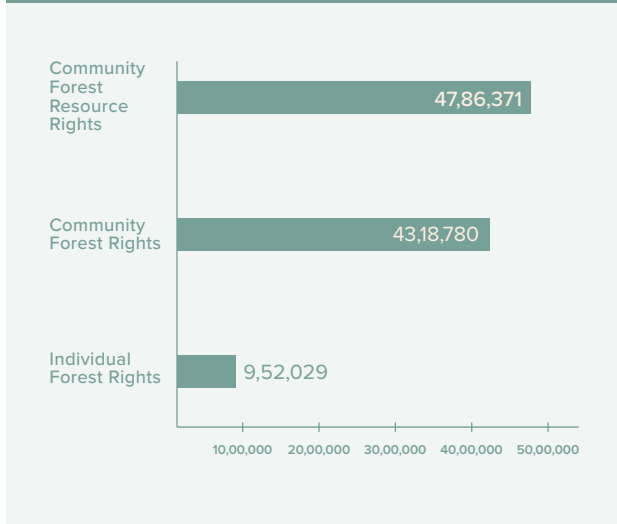


Figure 4c: Extent of forest land for which titles distributed (in acres as of May 2025)



Conversion of forest villages into revenue villages



431 forest villages

are notified by the Forest department as revenue village

Recognition of habitat rights



Habitat rights recognized for Kamar and Baiga PVTGs comprising of **41 villages**

*Source: Department of Tribal and Scheduled Caste, Govt. of Chhattisgarh

4.1. RECONCILIATION AND RECORDING OF RIGHTS



Land Records, Mutation, Inheritance

The Chhattisgarh experience has also shown that there has been a need to innovatively address the recording of rights. This is particularly important as the FRA, 2006 framework which concludes with the recognition and vesting of rights, does not explicitly lay out the administrative procedures required for RoR. In Chhattisgarh there has been emphasis given to various levels and reasons for which rights reconciliation and recording needs to be addressed. These include: *Mutation, Inheritance, Record Correction* each of which has presented challenges that have been discussed in Section 2, and which have required creative responses.

Both the Revenue and Forest departments of state adopted systems by which IFRs are recorded within their respective land record system. A discussion with State Forest department officials²³, during the course of the study, revealed that since 2018-19, IFR and CFRR areas are being incorporated within the Forest Maps of the state and also being digitalized. Currently a digital certificate of the RoRs are being given to IFR holders. A copy of the map will also be provided to IFR rights holder in future. Guidelines were also issued in 2024 pertaining to land mutation, transfer, corrections, mapping and record of rights by the State Tribal department²⁴. However, “reconciliation is a long process” especially for larger community forest and habitat rights areas. Therefore, the concern remains on how to reconcile new rights that are being recognized, when old records are still a challenge and potentially contested.

Chhattisgarh is one of the few states in India which has finalized its state PESA Rules, 2022 (No. 4879/Pangravivi/22/2022). While there is an overarching need to clarify the intersection between the two laws (see section 4.3), it is important to highlight that state PESA Rules has made direct reference to FRA through one clause related to MFP. Section 30 clarifies that the MFPs and other village level forest produce collection will be according to the provisions of the FRA and FR Rules. The Panchayati Raj Department of the state has also acknowledged the relevance of CFRRs as a mechanism through which the application of FRA can strengthen PESA (Government of Chhattisgarh, 2023). At the same time some community-based organisations have raised concerns that the state rules do not uphold or rather dilute the intent of the national PESA of 1996 (Droliia, 2022).

The Chhattisgarh government has recognized that although the FRA framework understands that forest rights can be inherited, there was no clear framework in place when there is a demise of a rights holder. In this regard the Tribal and SC Department, Government of Chhattisgarh in its July 2024 circular²⁵ directed all District Collectors in the state to expedite the process to register the rights of 9,739 legal heirs of the deceased rights holders, including through the coordination with the concerned revenue and forest department officials.

²³ Discussion with Shri Sanjay Gaur, PCCF on 21.4.2025

²⁴ Joint Circular dated 15.07.2024 from Tribal, Revenue and Forest Departments, Government of Chhattisgarh.

²⁵ Letter No. F.10-11/2007 /25-2 dated 23.7.2024 from Principal Secretary, Tribal and Scheduled Caste Department, Government of Chhattisgarh to all District Collectors of the state.

The guidelines issued for this purpose laid down the manner in which transfer, partition, correction of errors in records, demarcation, appeal etc. can be done by both revenue and forest departments²⁷. The guidelines mandate that the title should be made in the name of both husband and wife which is a positive step since FRA only mentioned spouses. The tehsildar and range forest officer (RFO) have been given responsibilities in these guidelines. For land under revenue department control, procedure under Chhattisgarh Land Revenue Code will be followed and for forest department land, RFO will scrutinise as well as do joint verification with the help of concerned Circle Forest Officer, Patwari, Revenue Inspector, Panchayat Secretary, and other concerned officials. Separate *khasra* (land plot) numbers will be allotted to different right holders, which will be marked on the revenue map and for forest department land, separate compartment, beat and partition number will be given which will be marked on the forest map. As for conversions of forest villages to revenue villages, circulars were issued in 2013 and approximately 428 villages have been converted as of 2017 (Government of Chhattisgarh, 2017) but these were all land leased by the forest department to forest villagers. In this backdrop, a pilot intervention of converting a forest village to revenue village was initiated in 2023 in Kohinpara Village in compliance with FRA and the guidelines issued by the MoTA, which is pending as of date²⁸.

In the matter of rejection of forest rights claims, the Tribal Department in its affidavit²⁹ to the Supreme Court has committed to conduct *suo-moto* review of all rejected claims as on 31.12.2017. As shared during the course of the study, the department has taken steps for suo-moto review by issuing circulars, conducting training, organising multi-level review meetings, appointing nodal officers for overseeing the process, constituting central level teams for sample verification on field, extending technical

assistance to the DLCs etc. With this background a review of rejected claims was conducted as per the procedures and out of 4,52,275 rejected claims as on 31.12.2017, 34,999 number of claims were approved by DLC and titles were conferred to the claimants, (as pointed out by the State FRA cell).



Acquisition, Diversion and Compensations

Another important aspect linked to these themes is the relationship between land acquisition proceedings and the recognition of forest rights, particularly in determining appropriate compensation mechanisms for rights holders. A specific case from Kondagaon district in Chhattisgarh—where forest land was diverted for non-forest purposes under the Forest Conservation Act (FCA)—raised critical questions around how forest rights holders should be adequately and fairly compensated. This led to detailed communications between Bunagaon Gram Sabha and district authorities as well as between the District Collector and DFO, raising multiple concerns relating to prior consent of the Gram Sabha before felling of trees as this was a Fifth Schedule Area and also involved impact on CFR area. The construction of a pipeline would impact 308 trees located within the Bunagaon CFR areas, out of which 67 of them are to be felled. An additional layer of complication was that 55 trees were felled without the knowledge or consent of the Bunagaon Gram Sabha³⁰.

²⁶ Order dated 15th July, 2024, Tribal Department, Government of Chhattisgarh

²⁷ Joint circular dated 13.12.2013, Forest, Revenue and Disaster Management Departments, Government of Chhattisgarh

²⁸ Letter dated 11.03.2024 from Collector, Dhamtari, Government of Chhattisgarh

²⁹ Affidavit filed by Tribal Department, Government of Chhattisgarh in *Wildlife First and Others v. Union of India and others.*, WP (C) 109/2008, Supreme Court of India

³⁰ Letter dated 6.7.2024 by Bunagaon Gram Sabha to Commissioner, Tribal and Scheduled Caste Department, Government of Chhattisgarh

The Bunagaon (Kondagaon) experience informed the issuance of a circular³¹ by the Principal Secretary, Tribal and Scheduled Caste Department, Government of Chhattisgarh which aims at addressing key aspects related to compensation to forest rights holders in instances where there is felling of trees under FCA, RFCTLARR or any other law related to acquisition of rights. The circular clarifies compensation procedures through interpretation of constitutional safeguards and legal provisions related to ownership and management of community forests and MFPs. These are also discussed in Sections 1 and 2 of this study. For instance, using the mandate under Article 243 of the Indian Constitution (which defines the Panchayati Raj System for rural areas), the Chhattisgarh Panchayati Raj Act, 1993 gives forest management rights to Gram Sabhas. Then PESA and corresponding state rules of 2022, conferred ownership and management rights to Gram Sabhas related to MFPs in 5th Schedule Areas. Relevant provisions of FRA and corresponding FR Rules and the RCFTLARR have also been cited in the circular. The three significant conclusions in response to the questions raised by Gram Sabha Bunagaon, while relying on the above mentioned laws are:

- The Gram Sabha has the ownership rights over MFPs.
- The compensation needs to be calculated and processed as per the provisions of the RCFTLARR and the said amount needs to be deposited in the bank account of the CFRMC.
- The necessary support and funds should be provided for plantations as per the CFR Management Guidelines of the central government.

The circular issued to the District Collector, Assistant Commissioner (Tribal), and Chairperson of the Bunagaon Gram Sabha

clarifies all the concerns except one which dealt with the question of determining whether Gram Sabha consent is required prior to forest diversion or acquisition of rights.

With regards to relocation from PAs, Tiger Reserves or CTHs, the tribal department came out with a letter reiterating what has been stated within the FRA and the WLPA with the bottom-line that relocation cannot happen without completion of the rights recognition process within FRA and without the Gram Sabha consenting to the resettlement and compensation package³².



Digitization and Record Keeping

The Chhattisgarh government has been working with CHIPS (State nodal agency for IT enabled services) and UNDP on two different portals- CGvanadhikar portal³³ (See figure 6) for legacy data digitalisation and Hamarvanadhikar portal³⁴ (See figure 7) for online claim filing, tracking and monitoring of the recognition of rights process at different levels and dashboards for report generation³⁵. The former is ready for pilot testing, however is the latter is facing issues of integration with the legacy data portal. The access to the portal can be strengthened to include rights holders, Panchayats, CFRMC, FRC and other local institutions which can help in better monitoring and planning. The state also released its CFR Potential Atlas in 2024 to help identify potential villages and CFR areas that can be recognised under the FRA. The data used in this Atlas is based on the State of Forest Report, 1999, Census, 2011 and other relevant government records³⁶. A web-based GIS portal is also under development to integrate the CFR potential ATLAS and the two portals for seamless alignment of legacy and real-time online data.

³¹ Letter No.730/528/2021/25-2 dated 18.2.2025 issued by Commissioner, Tribal and Scheduled Caste Department, Government of Chhattisgarh

³² Letter dated 10.2.2025 issued by Tribal department, Government of Chhattisgarh

³³ For more details, please visit: <https://cgvanadhikar.cgstate.gov.in>

³⁴ For more details, please visit: www.hamarvanadhikar.cgstate.gov.in

³⁵ Letters dated 22.5.2024 and 22.11.2024, issued by Tribal department, Government of Chhattisgarh

³⁶ Community Forest Resource Potential Atlas, 2024, Government of Chhattisgarh

Image 1: Screenshot of CG Van Adhikar Portal

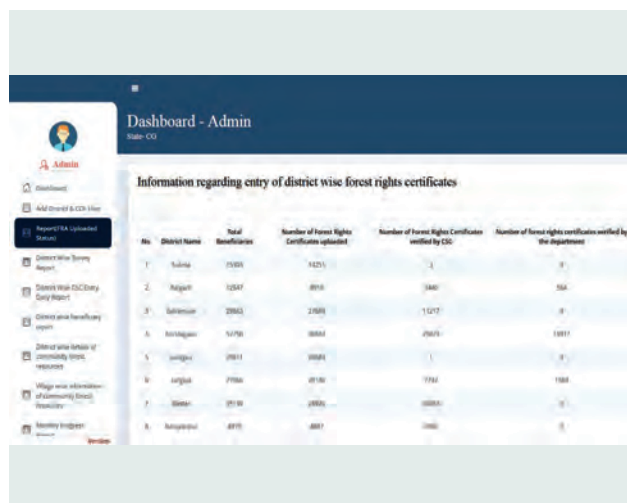


Image 2: Screenshot of Hamar Van Adhikar Portal (under development)



4.2. EXERCISING AND SUSTAINING RIGHTS (POST RIGHTS)

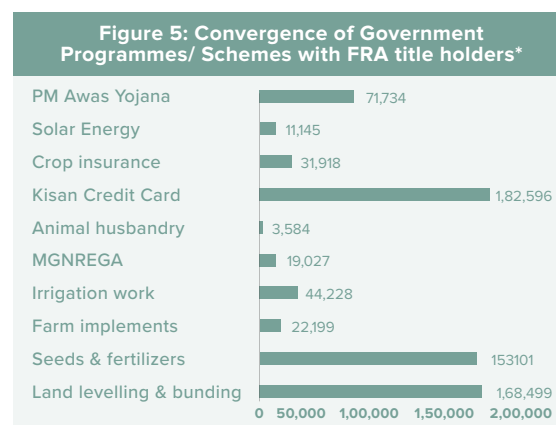
The discussions carried out as part of this study brought to light that the State Government has undertaken steps to:

- Provide livelihood linkages for IFR holders
- Strengthen governance models for CFRRs to ensure livelihood security and address conservation outcomes
- Demonstrate processes to foreground the importance of habitat rights

As discussed earlier, IFRs were the focus of the FRA implementation in several states including Chhattisgarh. According to the state government various measures and livelihood support innovations are underway to strengthen post rights recognition through fund provisioning, extending benefits to various state welfare and forest development schemes. These include schemes aimed at land levelling, development of water resources and maximum benefit to the beneficiaries through convergence of schemes of relevant departments. This has allowed for an increase in agricultural production, and household income. Majority of the right holders surveyed were able to take benefits like agricultural loans, land development inputs, solar pumps which resulted in additional income, better loan

repayment, enhanced cultivation potential and extension of the agricultural period (as per UNDP dipstick survey, 2025). In addition, the State Government has declared MSP of 69 species of MFP found in forest areas³⁷. Above-mentioned survey also discovered that accessibility to MFP and its marketing has increased post recognition of land rights. Improvement in marketing has been attributed to increased involvement of SHGs over middlemen while dealing with MFPs in the survey villages of Dhamtari district.

The table below lists the title holders who benefitted through convergence as post-claim support for land development and other benefits –



*Source: Department of Tribal and Scheduled Caste, Govt. of Chhattisgarh

³⁷ List of MFPs supported by MSP, Chhattisgarh State Medicinal Plant Board. 2023.



Addressing Complexity of Community Rights

In 2021, there were two important innovations that were reported from Chhattisgarh. The first was about Chhattisgarh being the first state in the country to recognize CFRRs in an urban area in Dhamtari district. According to a news report (IE, 2021), “The rights recognized in municipal areas are spread over 707.41 hectares for Nagari ward, 678.18 hectares for Churiyara, and 2,746.74 hectares for Tumbahara ward.” After rights recognition, right holders have faced challenges from the Forest department when it came to profit sharing from timber harvest in the area, which was instead reportedly transferred to the existing JFMC and not to the CFRMC (Zumbish, 2022).

Chhattisgarh has also shown leadership in addressing the complex question of recognition of CFRR and habitat rights in Tiger Reserves which have the highest level of restrictions for human activity. These are crucial examples of the state’s effort to address the complex question of recognition of rights. As the State Government has recognized CFRR for select villages in Sitanadi-Udanti (IE, 2021) and four villages in the core zone of Achanakmar TR, these are yet to demonstrate the livelihood and ecological outcomes in a post rights phase. For villages that remain inside the core area, there are constant tussles with the Forest department when it comes to collection of MFPs, and exercise of other kinds of traditional rights, as was revealed during this study. Tribals in these villages were restricted from selling the MFPs they collected to private traders and it is only after asserting their CFR rights, that the restriction has been lifted. Interestingly, they are still not allowed to extract bamboo from the CFRR areas (Zumbish, 2022).

As the processes prior to the recognition of rights have themselves been conflict ridden. Several state departments recognize the need to carefully create pathways that allow the demonstration for tribal governance and leadership in wildlife conservation. While

these processes have fostered greater involvement of community leadership and community-based organizations in advancing the objectives of the FRA, the full potential of rights realisation will only become evident once rights are fully reconciled, formally recorded, and creatively exercised for forest management and conservation (Zumbish and Jha, 2022).



Image 3: Sketch map of Khudurpani CFRR area

The Chhattisgarh experience also highlights some examples of how a few Gram Sabhas have taken leadership towards livelihood generation initiatives following recognition of their CFRRs. One such village is Khamdodgi in Kanker district of the state where rights holders have started bamboo rafting as a part of their forest and resource management. A similar initiative for kayaking and bamboo rafting is afoot in the Dhudmaras village in the Kanger Valley NP in Bastar district as well (Gautam, 2024). In Khudurpani village in Dhamtari district, fire protection work carried out by CFRMC members have resulted in return of the tussar silk cocoons to their forest areas, which is now being collected by them and sold to private traders. The discussions with CSOs as part of the study indicated that state and local tribal empowerment initiatives have been conducting training programmes at village levels. This has generated interest to claim, secure rights and also generate income through management measures post the recognition of rights.



A pilot project to examine possibilities for co-existence in the CFRR area of Achanakmar Tiger Reserve is being planned through a collaboration between UNDP, FES, WWF-India, and the State Tribal department. This initiative aims to reframe the relationship between humans and wildlife through an inclusive and participatory conservation approach. By leveraging the FRA and empowering local communities, the intervention will create a robust model of landscape-based and inclusive conservation and management in Achanakmar Tiger Reserve of Chhattisgarh along with wildlife corridors linking Kanha NP in Madhya Pradesh and Guru Ghasidas NP and Tamor Pingla Tiger Reserve in Chhattisgarh. This collaboration seeks to ensure the integration of ecological, social, and economic goals, driving sustainable development along with conserving biodiversity.



Habitat Rights

Box 5: Expected benefits/outcome post recognition of habitat rights to PVTGs

- Documentation of traditional rights and socio-cultural attributes of Kamar PVTG community in the government records and provide support in protection, conservation, and promotion of such rights
- Promote sense of identity and ownership and improve access and usage of forest resources along with their traditional socio-cultural and livelihood practices in their habitat
- Assist in empowering Kamar PVTG community through community-centric infrastructural development within their habitat through convergence of schemes of different Department
- Government support will motivate community driven promotion of traditional livelihood along with enrichment of biodiversity and ecology of their habitat in a participatory environment

The decision to implement habitat rights in Chhattisgarh was undertaken through a pilot process initiated in a SLMC meeting chaired by the Honourable Chief Secretary on 06.03.2021. As part of this pilot process and based on the draft guidelines issued by MoTA, Government of India, the community of Kamar PVTG, residing in the district of Dhamtari, was selected, to initiate the process of habitat rights. Thereafter, an exploratory study by the Tribal and Scheduled Caste Development department, Government of Chhattisgarh and UNDP was

conducted to document the process of mapping and recognizing habitat rights of the Kamar PVTG in Dhamtari. Accordingly, an explorative study was conducted in Dhamtari district with Kamar PVTG for mapping their customary habitat and understanding their traditional socio-cultural as well as livelihood and knowledge practices through consultations with their traditional leaders. The empirical findings were further corroborated with the detailed socio-economic profiling through secondary data that were sourced from Chhattisgarh TRTI.

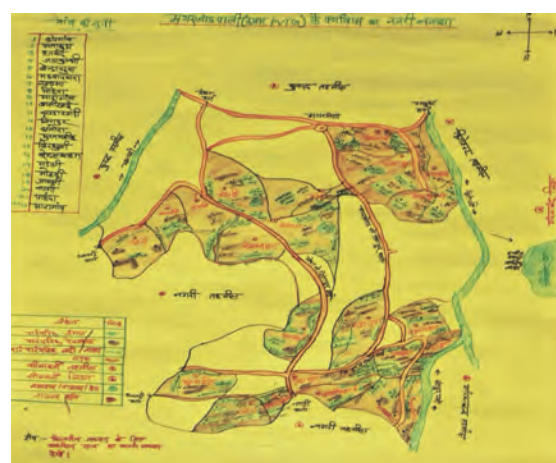


Image 4: Map of Kamar PVTG (Saini, 2023)

The habitat right recognition of *Magarlod Kamar Pali* took close to two years with a multi-layered process which included several steps to ensure that the vision and leadership of the process can be vested with the rights holders, to the extent possible. The process involved detailed consultations and discussions with identified traditional leaders from Kamar villages, knowledgeable community members, and other relevant individuals. It also required relying on historical records and research papers that were important to understand the life, social structure, culture, livelihood, and other significant aspects of the Kamar tribes. Meetings and capacity building workshops involved bringing together community leaders with institutions like the DLC to deliberate on the habitat rights boundaries. Further, as part of the process, Gram Sabhas and FRCs were formed in 22 Kamar Para/Tola of Magarlod Kamar Pali as per FR Rule 12 (B)(1) and then Gram Sabha meetings were held. Thereafter selection of their chairpersons and secretaries was finalized. Documentation of the rights

related to demography and geographical spread out, distinct social and cultural, religious, economic, livelihood, biodiversity, TK, and environmental aspects was completed for all 22 Kamar Para/Tolas.

The habitat right recognition process for two more PVTGs is under way and procedural guidelines have been shared with all the DLCs in 19 districts to identify the traditional leaders and engage in consultation with them (as pointed out by the FRA Cell representatives working with the State Tribal department). While this process presents a model, which can be adopted to bring to life, habitat rights in different contexts, CSOs have cautioned that effective implementation remains to be witnessed, as these rights could be impinged upon by other priorities or provisions of different departments due to jurisdictional overlap or proposed landuse change. It also brings to light that habitat rights' processes may limit themselves to specific administrative boundaries for a variety of practical, operational and jurisdictional reasons including access to evidence related traditional habitats of specific PVTGs or state boundaries.

After successful process of recognition of habitat rights for Kamar communities, the habitat rights for Baiga PVTG has been recognized (19 Baiga villages with a population of 6,505 people/ 2,095 families) under Gaurela Block of GPM district. This effort received further impetus through judicial intervention, wherein the Chhattisgarh High Court directed that the recognition of habitat rights for PVTGs be expedited. This also demonstrated collaborative approach bringing together district administration, CSO and community leaders.

Box 6: Status of Habitat Rights Recognition of Baiga and Birhor PVTG habitat rights (Under process)

PVTG COMMUNITY	TOTAL VILLAGE	TOTAL FAMILIES	TOTAL POPULATION
Baiga (Extended Habitat)	525	24589	88317
Baiga (Sub-habitat) Pandriya Block (Kabirdham)	78	4625	17140
Birhor (Extended Habitat)	78	1116	3490
Birhor (Sub-habitat) Dharamjaigarh Block (Raigarh)	17	219	681

*Source: Department of Tribal and Scheduled Caste, Govt. of Chhattisgarh

A pilot project to initiate a habitat-based conservation cum development model in the recognized habitat area of Baiga PVTG under Gaurela-Pendra-Marwahi district is being developed by the State Tribal department, FES and UNDP. Two rounds of exploratory study have been conducted to develop a conservation cum development plan for the habitat through this partnership and the department has issued necessary letters to initiate the process³⁸.



Individual Rights and Livelihood Generation

The securing of forest rights along with conversion of forest villages into revenue villages in districts like Dhamtari, have allowed for title holders to not just overcome the imminent prospects of relocation but also gain access to government schemes, especially those to strengthen cultivation (Verma, 2022). One of the Gond farmers interviewed by a journalist has been reported to say, "Agricultural productivity has increased as now he has access to subsidized seeds and fertiliser support under the FRA-2006 convergence." (ibid) In Madeli Gram Panchayat, Dhamtari, there is a visible positive difference in the lives and social status of PVTG members after granting of IFR titles. They carry out agriculture on their lands and have managed to build pucca homes just with the income made from agriculture (UNDP dipstick survey, 2025).

³⁸ Letter dated 11.03.2025, SC & ST Department, Government of Chhattisgarh

While these examples highlighted that individual farmers either from a PVTG group or a non PVTG tribal may have benefited as IFR rights holders, it is yet to be determined whether the conversion of villages or increased farm inputs have had any inadvertent damage to neighbouring forests. At the same time, observations during the study indicate that there have been some instances of inter-community conflicts that may have risen based on the kinds of rights

that have been recognized. Furthermore, consultations with CSOs, conducted as part of the study, revealed that gaps in the recognition of IFRs continue to create disparities in access to schemes and benefits intended for rights holders. This is an aspect which needs further attention both in terms of rights rectification and access to livelihood opportunities and has been discussed in Section 5 related to the way forward to FRA.

4.3. INSTITUTIONAL CAPACITY AND INTERDEPARTMENTAL COORDINATION

Both institutional capacity and interdepartmental coordination have been the backbone of the administrative implementation of the FRA across all states, including Chhattisgarh. These are not just influenced by histories of forest governance but also how much and to what extent the FRA is prioritized at a state level. In Chhattisgarh, the lack of dedicated funding mechanism and a dedicated grassroots institutional structure has and continues to limit all aspects from rights recognition to reconciliation to post rights convergence processes. The funding support of the Forest department is also largely through the JFMC infrastructure.



Institutional Capacity

Since 2019, the State Government through a partnership with UNDP has relied on state FRA Cells as a dedicated human resource structure for the implementation of the FRA. These cells report to the Commissioner, Tribal Development department. The FRA Cells are functional in 30 districts of the state where FRA is being implemented. The FRA Cells have adopted a practice of video conferencing with CSOs and Gram Sabhas for

ensuring better coordination, monitoring and operationalisation of the field work required for strengthening grassroots processes. There is also a non-financial partnership of the Tribal department with organizations such as FES and ATREE specifically for capacity building and technical support. It also includes bridging the information gap between field and administration.

The State Government through its TRTI in collaboration with UNDP has taken the initiative to produce Information, Education, and Communication (IEC) material and manuals. Several positive steps have also been taken by the State Government aided with the better implementation of FRA (Mokashi and Lele, 2021) which includes a detailed step-by-step manual with instructions on recognition of rights. The department has also raised financial resources through the state and central budget for interventions to support capacity building, financial assistance for CFRMC for management, and publishing of knowledge products. Efforts have also been made to create special budgetary provision for sustenance of district and sub-district FRA cells. This is also being integrated through DA-JGUA.



A very important circular by the Tribal department in 2024 clarifies aspects with regard to CFRMCs. It speaks of setting up DLMCs to monitor work done by CFRMCs; requires CFRMCs to set up their own bank accounts; proposes Gram Sabha as the bona fide implementing agency to receive funds for several schemes, especially for forestry related activities; and significantly replaces any non-statutory committee for management of forest resources with CFRMCs³⁹. This circular paves way for the existing JFMCs to be replaced by the CFRMCs and thereby resulting in additional funding support for CFRMC work.

Discussions during the study and secondary literature indicates that preparation of information material and conducting training programmes were led by the CSOs, many of which are supporting state level initiatives through financial and non-financial MoUs. These trainings cut across different districts and deal with understanding the rights recognition and community forest planning procedures, as well as technical skills related to agricultural processing and marketing as well as various districts.



Interdepartmental Coordination

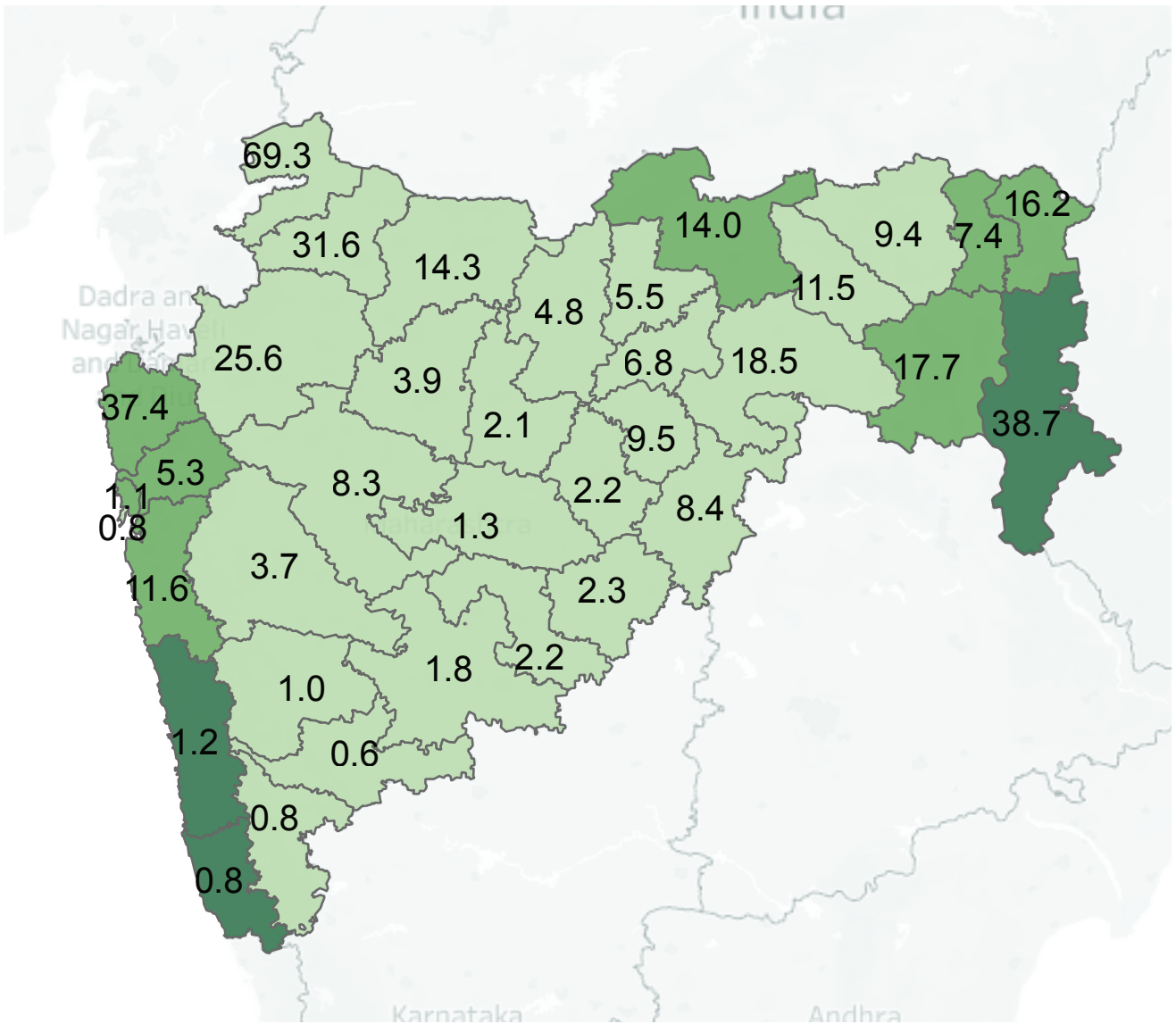
The habitat rights process in the state presents important examples of both conflicts and complementarities needed for inter-departmental coordination to achieve a common outcome. However, there are several layers of contradictions and complementarities which have emerged during the study that will be required to be addressed to strengthen thematic level interventions in the state. For instance, a pilot around forest village conversion to revenue villages has been approved by DLC and sent to the Revenue department for survey and settlement, described in detail in Section on Land Records, Mutation, Inheritance⁴⁰. Similarly, models that showcase cooperation reconcile jurisdictional overlaps and foreground Gram Sabha leadership to achieve ecological and livelihood security outcomes will be critical to showcase for the state. Clarifications are also needed on the reconciliation of CFR management with the Forest department's working plans. This alignment is essential to advance implementation and reduce policy bottlenecks and administrative impasses.

³⁹ Letter dated 7.3.2024, Tribal department

⁴⁰ Letter dated 11.03.2024 from Collector, Dhamtari, Government of Chhattisgarh



MAHARASHTRA



Figures on the map represent the percentage of the Scheduled Tribe (ST) population as percentage of total District population (Census 2011).

The colour shading indicates forest cover as a percentage of the total geographical area, based on the Forest Survey of India (2023)

The priorities and approach to the implementation of FRA in Maharashtra brings out significant lessons. According to Census, 2011 Maharashtra has 1.05 crore tribal population which constitutes over 9.35% of its population. As highlighted by respondents in the course of the study, the extent of dependence of tribal communities on forests in Maharashtra may have affected the geographical distribution of forest rights implementation, amidst other factors.

At the same time, some of the first innovations of the FRA including those which reflect intersections between tribal governance and sustainable development through Gram Sabha led initiatives, continue to be visible in parts of Maharashtra. Similarly, Maharashtra was the first state to set up FRA Cells, and from then on, this concept has been adapted in several other states. Today, it is recognized by the MoTA as an important institutional mechanism and special financial support has been allocated for the same (Lakshman, 2025). Maharashtra also continues to be one of the few states to collect and present gender disaggregated data, while reporting on FRA implementation, as can be seen from the figure 6 below. This allows for either male or female to file as a claimant under FRA. Way back in 2012, the

state had mandated the recording of rights in the names of both husband and wife⁴¹.

Few factors that stand out, which enabled FRA implementation from early on, are as follows:

- History of social movements pertaining to control over forest and land resources
- Setting up district level institutional structures like the FRA Cells, convergence committees, etc. and introduction of convergence schemes for post rights livelihood support
- Several initiatives taken to synthesize the existing law and policy framework in the state with FRA
- Push and support from CSOs to the state government

Like all other states being discussed in this study, the first phase of FRA implementation was around IFRs, 95% of which have been recognized according to discussions with officials as part of the study. The successful CFR and CFRR processes go back to 2009, many of which have sustained till date (Sahu, 2020). While the State Government has prioritized access to schemes and benefits for both IFR and CFR areas, the idea of habitat rights' recognition is at present at the level of deliberation.

Image 5: IFR online case registration form in Maharashtra⁴²

⁴¹ Letter dated 11.03.2025, SC & ST Department, Government of Chhattisgarh

⁴² <https://aadvanmitra.org>

Table 4: A THEMATIC MAPPING OF GUIDELINES, CIRCULARS AND OTHER RELATED ORDERS IN MAHARASHTRA (2006-2025)

TIME PERIOD/ THEMES	RECOGNITION, VESTING AND RECORD OF RIGHTS (ROR)	INSTITUTIONAL ROLES AND CAPACITY	FINANCIAL ALLOCATION AND SUPPORT	POST RIGHTS SUPPORT
2006–2011			Formation of FRA Cells at Sub-Divisional and District levels.	
2012–2017	<p>Directive for inclusion of names (both men and women) in land records (RoR 7/12) under FRA.</p> <p>Governor's Notification expanding permissible community facilities (godowns, warehouses, cold storages, cremation grounds).</p>		Appointment of Managers for CFR implementation	
2018–2021	<p>Vanmitra Abhiyan launched to clear over 60,000 pending FRA claims.</p> <p>Divisional Level Committees formed for facilitating FRA claims, especially in Scheduled Areas.</p>	<p>State-level Steering Committee for CFRMP convergence.</p> <p>Formation of District-level Convergence Committees.</p> <p>CFRMC formation guidelines issued with defined roles.</p> <p>Reconstitution of convergence committees at all levels.</p>		<p>Launch of CFR Diploma Project to enhance academic engagement and build capacity around CFR.</p> <p>MGNREGA linked with CFRMCs for implementation of forest-based livelihood activities.</p>
2022-2025	Vasti Vistar Government Resolution to include forest hamlets (vastis) within gaathan area to enable access to infrastructure schemes.		Dedicated budget head created for FRA implementation.	Cluster-Based Convergence Policy launched ensuring coordinated benefit delivery to FRA rights holders from all relevant schemes in selected clusters.

Figure 6a: Status of Individual Forest Rights in Maharashtra as of May 2025

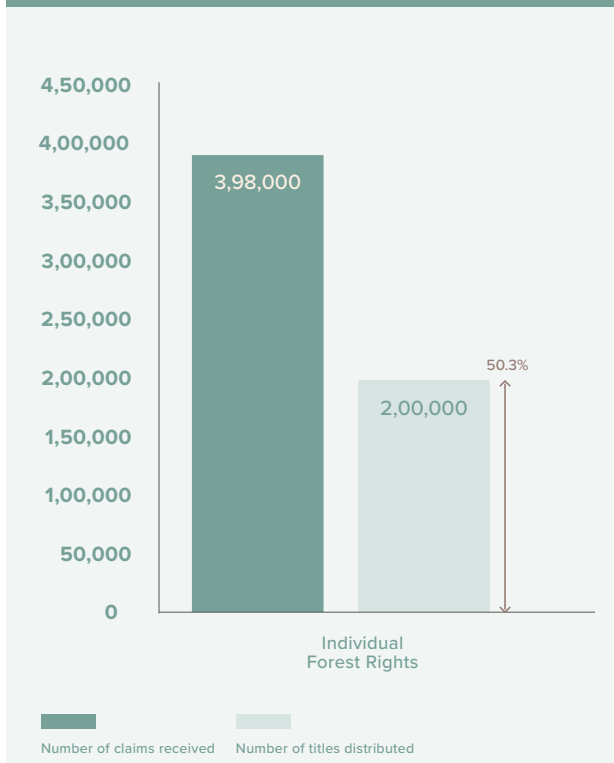


Figure 6b: Status of Community Forest Rights in Maharashtra as of May 2025

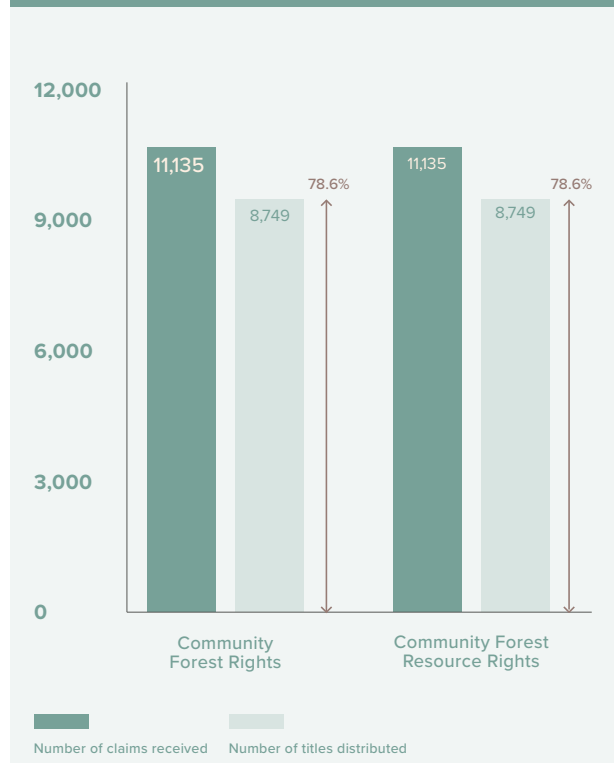


Figure 6c: Extent of forest land for which titles distributed (in acres as of May 2025)



Conversion of forest villages into revenue villages



73 forest villages are notified by the Forest department as revenue village

Convergence of different govt. programmes/schemes with title holders



Total **2 lakh plus forest rights** holders are linked with various government schemes as per GR issued on 13.03.2024.

*Source: Tribal Development Department, Govt. of Maharashtra

Notwithstanding their design and implementation level limitations, the State Government has introduced several legal and policy changes that are necessary for the operationalisation of one or the other approaches discussed above. By 2018, the State Government had already issued 87 orders and circulars *“related to the forest rights claim recognition process and support to be provided to the forest rights beneficiaries in the post-forest rights claim recognition process between 2008 and 2018.”* (Sahu, et al. 2019). CSOs in the state have also worked with specific government departments to both bring the ground level issues to light, as well as help in framing the contours of these notifications.

The capacity building processes to enable Gram Sabhas empowerment as well as access to government schemes have been the priority areas of the state till date. In 2020, the Governor of Maharashtra issued a

notification which was understood as modifying rights which then enabled both tribals and OTFD families to build houses in the neighbourhood forest areas (Anon, 2023). Circulars regarding commercial utilization of mahua (2024), clarification on compensation for acquisition of IFR lands (2023), list of benefits that facilitate convergence of schemes on both IFR and CFR lands (2024), to name a few, were brought out recently.

Another important aspect of the FRA experience in Maharashtra is the influence of judicial orders and directions, which was pointed out at different occasions during the discussions carried out as part of the study. These cases cut across different themes and issues including adequacy of rehabilitation for forest rights holders⁴³, controlling *tendu patta* sale (Pinjarkar, 2023), transit permits and others (UNDP, 2015)

4.4. RECONCILIATION AND RECORDING OF RIGHTS

The emphasis on effective and time bound implementation of FRA from the highest offices (Governor of Maharashtra, 2015-2025) of the government is an important lesson that has allowed for the early level innovations to emerge from the state. This mechanism of engaging with divisional commissioner and Governor’s office has been regularized and ongoing. Recently, the Revenue Minister spoke about the importance of a time-bound programme for *“resolving forest rights claims and providing land surveys and maps to tribal communities.”* He said: *“The tribal community continues to struggle for their rights. Their standard of living remains unstable. Officials must ensure land surveys are completed and maps are provided. The Settlement Commissioner should explore the feasibility of a financial and technical policy for land measurement.”* (PTI, 2025).

However, this has also presented challenges for the reconciliation and recording of rights, rooted in the historical complexities of interdepartmental conflict. Discussions with officials from the Tribal Development

Department, conducted as part of this study, revealed that in many instances, *“due to the high value of land, you see that the tribal rights holders are not visible, but others are. They set up commercial ventures where tribal rights holders are invisibilized.”* As highlighted during the study, while official data indicates that 93.11% of claims have been disposed of (MoTA, 2025), there have been requests and appeals for claim reviews by the DLC.

In Maharashtra, mechanism of record of rights including mutation, inheritance and record correction has been developed and is functional in most instances. The IFR is entered into the land record as “Other Rights” while the ownership remains with the Government of Maharashtra. In cases where the land is unsurveyed and currently classified as compartment land, Form J has been issued as the RoR for the recognized forest rights claimants. One of the government officials clarified that even with IFRs, *“they have limited rights; the land belongs to the state.”*

⁴³ Committee for Monitoring of CWH process under FRA in Melghat Wildlife Sanctuary. 2020. Ensuring a Fair and Sustainable Process in Critical Wildlife Habitat (CWH) Identification in Melghat Wildlife Sanctuary: Interim Report, Tribal Development Department, Government of Maharashtra

4.5. EXERCISING AND SUSTAINING OF RIGHTS (POST RIGHTS FRAMEWORK)

There are several innovations in Maharashtra which showcase two distinct approaches to post rights recognition of both IFRs and CFRs. One approach is directly oriented towards empowering Gram Sabhas to independently secure, manage and diversify their rights with finances generated from sale and management of MFPs directly by the Gram Sabhas. These models present processes which allow for limited or no dependence on external agencies including government departments once rights are recognized. The second approach is driven towards provisioning welfare schemes to rights holders who are understood to be beneficiaries. In both these situations, the underlying conditions and nuanced levels of coordination are important to be able to deliver outcomes. In both instances, what has enabled—and continues to enable—both processes and outcomes, even if limited to specific regions and themes, is a series of policy measures and clarificatory orders issued on a regular basis.

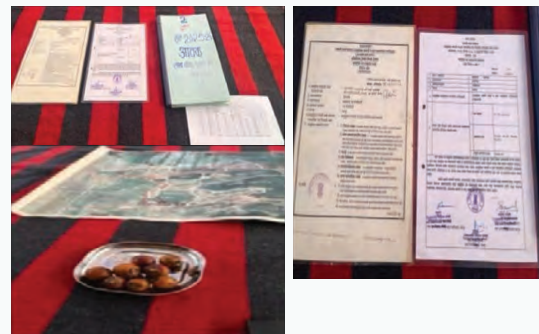


Addressing Complexity of Community Rights

The Vidarbha region, especially Gadchiroli and Gondia showcase several Gram Sabha led initiatives where forest rights holders have been able to combine IFRs and CFRs to harvest, transport bamboo and other MFP systematically. This has not just allowed villages to address out migration, but also ensures long term income generation along with sustainable management, and conservation of the forests. Panchgaon is one such village, where a three-year process of filing for claims, securing them

and preparing management plans not just strengthens village-led tribal development, but highlights the potential of Gram Sabha driven tribal governance (Haque, 2020) It also addresses the assumptions that villagers lack capacity to create sustainable business models, based on conservation and collective action based rural development. (Agarwal, et. al., 2018)

Image 7: CFR process in Panchgaon Village



Gram Sabha Led Community Forest and Outcomes in Panchgaon Village

Scholars have highlighted that Maharashtra's "Amravati experience provides another example on how the village communities in Nayakheda, Upatkheda, Payvihir and Khatijapur regenerated degraded forest lands and are growing species such as bamboo, amla and teak along with intensive soil and moisture conservation and wildlife protection." Villages like Payvihir are also an important example of the creative use of MGNREGA and other funding sources. This has enabled villagers to invest heavily in degraded forest regeneration even while generating substantial wage incomes, enough to reduce outmigration. Villages in Gondia district of Maharashtra have also used government funds for the desilting of tanks situated in forest lands, and increased agricultural productivity. (Kohli, 2015)

Another interesting innovation from Maharashtra is the idea of Federation of Gram Sabhas which is understood to have been experimented first in Vidarbha region, and then spread to several other parts of the state. One of the main objectives for block level Gram Sabha Federations was to increase the negotiation and bargaining powers related to sale of NTFPs. As per studies, *“Each gram sabha federation is organized as a multi-tiered network at the taluka level and has provided a platform to thousands of forest dwellers to voice their concerns about the NTFP governance process. These associations, through their executive committees that consist of two representatives from each gram sabha, identify contractors, bargain with them about price and payment, and engage with district administrations to address the hurdles that gram sabhas face. Along with NGO alliances and grassroots organizations, gram sabha federations have challenged conventional NTFP governance processes and have shown great interest in the introduction of scientific approaches to harvesting NTFP and the sustainable conservation of forest sources. However, gram sabha federations think beyond just NTFP and work towards the overall development and empowerment of communities.”* (Sahu, 2020)



Individual Forest Rights and Livelihood Linkage

There are also few instances where IFR rights have enabled individual holders in securing sources of income generation. One such experience is related to jasmine farming where the IFR Holders belonging to Katkari and Kokani tribes in Shahpur block in Thane district (neighbouring Mumbai) have secured access to agricultural extension schemes to cultivate and sell a commercial crop. This has been enabled through partnerships with CSR initiatives and CSO support. (Singh, 2025)

An online report documenting the experience quotes one farmer, who said that the process of securing IFRs since 2017 *“has created livelihood options for people like him who lost jobs during COVID-19.”* He added, *“We lived in fear of eviction. Now we can farm peacefully.”* (Bose, 2025) Similarly, it was revealed through this study that IFR holders in Nashik have been successful in growing bajra, soybean, groundnuts, corn, pulses, chillies, jasmine, turmeric, pumpkin, and other such crops (as per UNDP dipstick survey, 2025) on their lands with help from schemes started by the Agriculture department. Additionally, 91% of households surveyed in Maharashtra as part of the study reported an increase in income, 26% reported an increased ability to repay loans, 19% reported ability to construct home and 49.06% reported ability to build household assets post recognition of land rights (UNDP dipstick survey, 2025).



4.6 INSTITUTIONAL CAPACITY AND INTERDEPARTMENTAL COORDINATION



Institutional Capacity

The institutional capacity for both pre and post rights operationalisation of FRA remains an area that requires regular innovation. There are currently no dedicated government programmes focused on building the capacity of village-level institutions. The same gap exists for block- and district-level officials, as well as for other departments involved in policymaking. However, there are a few examples of capacity and skill development efforts that are worth highlighting.

In Jalgaon district of the state, the district administration has reportedly launched a Public Private Partnership (PPP) led 'spice cluster' to support the livelihoods of IFR rights holders. This initiative is directed at providing training on "modern farming knowledge" and marketing support to farmers. It also seeks to link farmers with the schemes of various government departments including Agriculture, Tribal Development, and Forestry. The district collector has been quoted by a newspaper to say: *"The FRA beneficiaries got land in remote areas, lacking market access and modern farming knowledge. Through this PPP, we aim to empower them by training them in modern agricultural practices, leveraging their organic farming expertise for sustainable income generation."* (Botekar, 2025)

There have been efforts also taken by CSOs and academic institutions to support real time and long-term training to Gram Sabhas in different parts of the state, to strengthen the capacity of the local institutions. The process of claiming and securing rights has led to Gram Sabhas being empowered in different ways, including becoming part of formal

systems of taxation like GST and income tax, given that they have large incomes from marketing of forest produce.

In Gadchiroli, the district administration has entered into a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with Gondwana University to undertake training and capacity building support for Gram Sabhas. This initiative is known as the Ekal Gram Sabha Empowerment programme, which also partners with pioneering villages like Mendha-Lekha that led and inspired community-based conservation and the CFRR narratives/efforts in many parts of the country⁴⁴. The explanatory material on the programme highlights, *"The field training has emphasized on the aspect of implementation of the forest rights acts, biodiversity act and MGNREGA at Gram Sabha level. During the field training, trained representatives constitute committees that were not constituted earlier, to make all people of the village aware about the rights. They exercise shivar feri or walk through their forest to assess its status and diversity and in the last two days of field training, they go through the records of Gram Sabha and see the scope of improvement, add records which earlier were not maintained."* This District Administration-led process also resulted in several Gram Sabhas registering themselves as implementing agencies under MGNREGA. A March 2024 study highlights, *"The response to the project Ekal was quite encouraging, a total of 531 Gram Sabhas entered into a MoU with the district administration, 1093 Gram Sabhas have been trained comprising of 1066 participants. In addition, 65 Gram Sabhas have registered under NREGA and godowns and storage facility have also been sanctioned by NREGA."* (CFJ, 2024)

⁴⁴ More details are available in this online brochure:

<https://dhepune.gov.in/wp-content/uploads/1964/11/Ekal-Gramsabha-Program.pdf>

The discussions undertaken during the study brought to light that the State Tribal department has been supporting FRA Cells from 2008. This is now being supplemented by the resources that are available under the DA-JGUA scheme, which is an important use of the funds to support the infrastructure that is necessary to enable the access to schemes. The coordination of this is being carried out by the office of the Chief Secretary of the State.



Interdepartmental Coordination

The Maharashtra experience has foregrounded both the importance and relevance of interdepartmental coordination at every stage of FRA's operationalization. The challenges discussed in Section 2 related to this sub theme were identified in Maharashtra as well. The systemic issues of coordination between Tribal and Forest department for post rights management or the gaps in RoR reconciliation between Revenue and Forest department remain foundational. Specific models and innovations discussed in the previous sections reflect the possibility of interdepartmental coordination, but these remain exceptions rather than the rule.

However, Maharashtra continues to remain an innovator many different ways. The principle of convergence has been formalized by the higher bureaucracy in the state. On 12th September, 2022, a State Government circular enabled convergence between schemes of sectoral departments like the Animal Husbandry, Alternative Energy, MGNREGA, Water Conservation, Fisheries, and others, with the CFR right holders with the purpose of enabling alternate livelihood opportunities. The setting up of "district-level convergence committees" has also enabled the flow of government funds to CFR Gram Sabhas. Further, in Gadchiroli and Amravati districts of Maharashtra, efforts have been made to

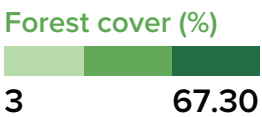
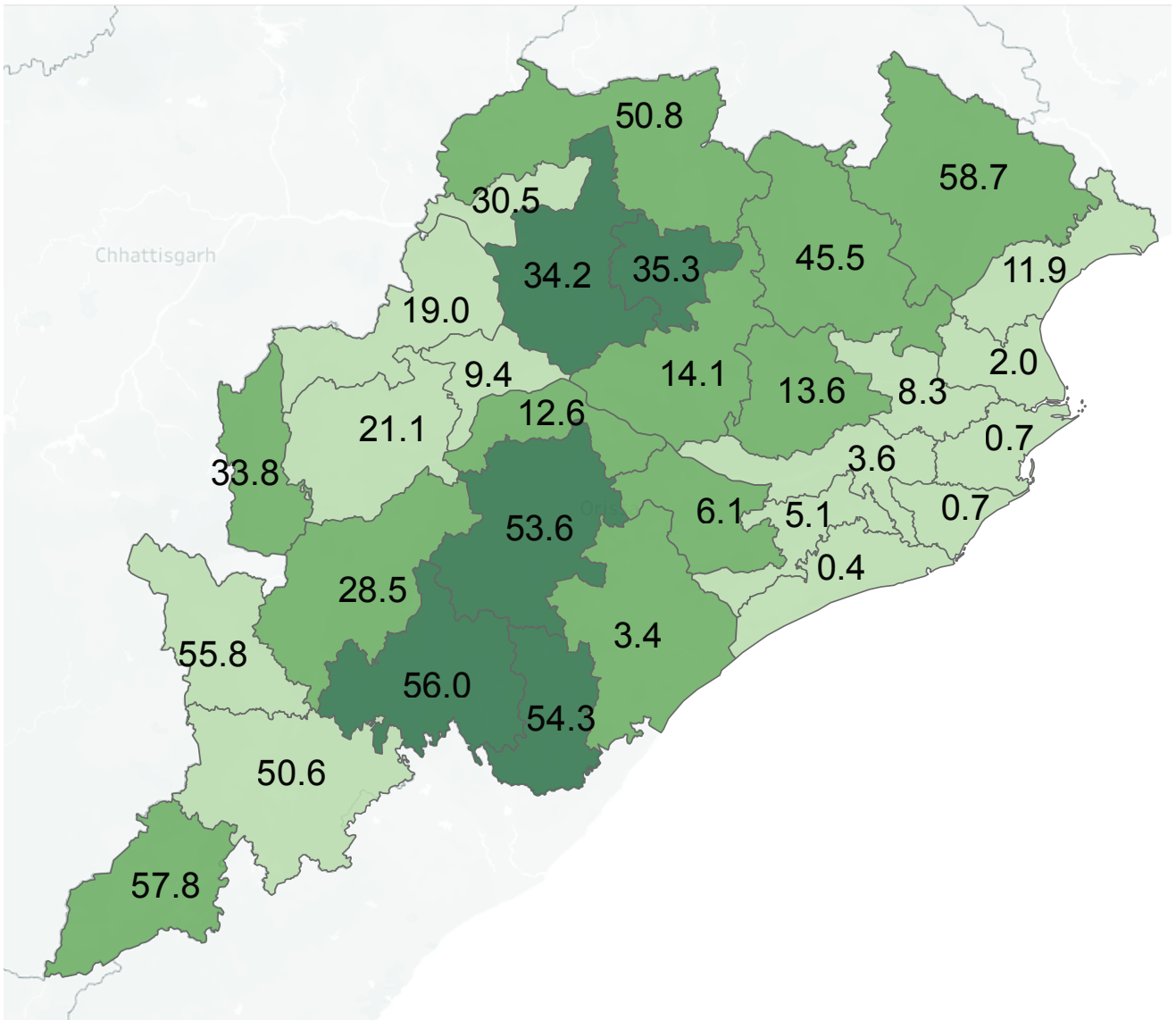
integrate the work of several committees at the village level to manage forests under the supervision of the Gram Sabha. The members of the Partners of the Vidarbha Livelihood Forum (VLF) in these areas have contributed significantly on a "convergence" programme with the State Government, which seeks to integrate the avenues available under various laws including the BDA, MGNREGA, FRA and JFM (Kohli, 2015). The outcomes of some of these have been discussed in the section on exercising and sustaining rights.

As part of institutional strengthening measures, the GR issued by the Rural Development department of Maharashtra formally designated the CFRMCs, constituted under Rule 4(1)(e) of the FR Rules, as implementing agencies for MGNREGA works.

The State Government has also initiated a cluster approach through a state cabinet intervention as there were restrictions on taking up schemes and programmes in forestry and conservation. Through a State Government order in 2024, 133 schemes and activities were listed out, which can be availed by the right holders that will support activities ranging from agriculture, aquaculture, horticulture to soil and moisture conservation works to forestry plantations. Awareness for right holders is stipulated within the GR and a time bound plan will be initiated by the taluka level convergence committee headed by the Project Officer, ITDP and approved by district level convergence committee headed by the District Collector⁴⁵.

⁴⁵ GR issued on 13.3.2024, Tribal Department, Government of Maharashtra

ODISHA



Figures on the map represent the percentage of the Scheduled Tribe (ST) population as percentage of total District population (Census 2011).

The colour shading indicates forest cover as a percentage of the total geographical area, based on the Forest Survey of India (2023)

Government (SCSTRTI, 2017) and non-governmental studies (Vasundhara, 2023) have highlighted the criticality of the FRA for Odisha. The state has as many as 64 scheduled tribes comprising 22.8% of the state's population, that is primarily dependent on forest lands. Official statistics indicate that 39.31% of the state's land is legally recorded forests. There are few major factors that were pointed out during state level discussions which created necessary conditions for FRA Implementation in the early phase of FRA, which are:

- The history of community forestry work in the state and robust studies which ensured that a feedback loop was created to strengthen the implementation of the law, and at the same time, create roadmaps to address institutional and substantive barriers for implementation.
- Long term and engaged partnership of both government and CSOs, has been central to the advancement of the recognition of rights and collaboratively overcoming challenges.
- The leadership of institutions like the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes Research and Training Institute (SCSTRTI) in developing practical resource materials, research studies and organising regular workshops and training programmes not just helped in keeping the FRA conversation alive but also ensured that best practices are highlighted.
- Regularity of follow up and monitoring from the highest levels of the government.

Odisha is among the few states that have acknowledged the importance of establishing baseline information through an assessment of FRA potential. In this regard, the FRA Atlas was developed to identify potential villages for FRA implementation. It was the first of its kind, enabling a more targeted and strategic approach. It was also one of the first movers in implementation of FRA when it called for a state-wide special *Palli Sabha* (equivalent to Gram Sabha) organized in 2008 to set up FRCs⁴⁶.

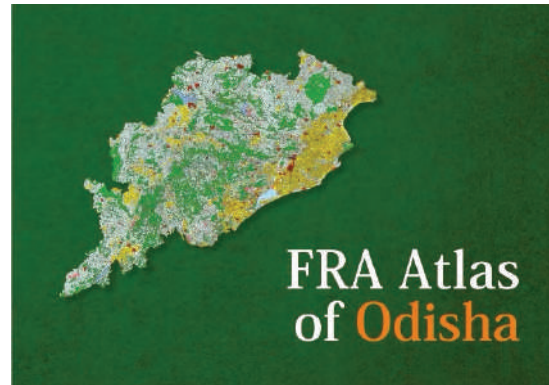


Image 8: FRA Atlas of Odisha, 2020 (32,500 potential FRA villages in Odisha)

Currently, the State Government has prioritized two aspects, the first being the saturation of rights recognition in the state and the other is intervention in various areas around post rights recognition. In order to achieve these objectives, in 2023, a dedicated state sector scheme was launched under the ST & SC Development, Minorities & Backward Classes Welfare Department with the intention of 'saturating' the recognition of all FRA rights over two years. The scheme was launched with a dedicated fund for two years (INR 75.5 Crores) and with the objective of supporting an institutional structure including FRA Cells created earlier⁴⁷ to deliver the objectives of the scheme. Discussion with CSOs during the course of the study highlighted that even if the scheme is successful in ensuring that titles are issued, the coordination of various departments, especially the Forest department, will be essential in creating both the RoR to ensure that right is duly recorded in the government land records as well as post rights processes. At the same time, it is important to acknowledge that Odisha has proactively taken up the correction of RoR, and both Revenue and Forest departments have issued guidelines towards it. These are going to be discussed further. As shared by the FRA Cell in Odisha, the correction of RoR has been done for around 78% of the FRA titles distributed⁴⁸.

⁴⁶ Letter no. 9153 of Panchayati Raj department, dated 26.02.2008

⁴⁷ ST & SC Development Department, Govt. of Odisha Letter No. 8774/SSD Bhubaneswar dated 29.6.2020

⁴⁸ For details on RoR, please see <https://mojangaljami.odisha.gov.in/>

Table 5: A THEMATIC MAPPING OF GUIDELINES, CIRCULARS AND OTHER RELATED ORDERS IN ODISHA (2006-2025)

TIME PERIOD/ THEMES	RECOGNITION, VESTING AND RECORD OF RIGHTS (ROR)	INSTITUTIONAL ROLES AND CAPACITY	FINANCIAL ALLOCATION AND SUPPORT	POST RIGHTS SUPPORT
2006 - 2011	<p>Settlement of the non-forest land under Odisha Govt Land Settlement & Odisha Prevention of Land Encroachment Act, 1972</p> <p>To treat the application in case of non-forest land under Vasundhra</p> <p>Adoption of 'Micro Planning Approach' for processing of Claims under FRA</p> <p>Guidelines for correction of RoR and maps for forest land in revenue villages for which title has been issued under the FRA</p>			<p>Coverage under MGNREGA for Land Development, Horticulture Plantation and Farm Pond in the Land of Beneficiaries under Forest Rights Act</p> <p>Hundred percent coverage of FRA rights holders under Rural Housing</p>
2012-2017		<p>Mechanism for marketing of MFP through MSP and development of value chain for 68 MFPs</p>		<p>Hundred percent coverage of the FRA beneficiaries through convergence with other programmes such as forest and environment, agriculture, fisheries, rural development etc.</p>
2018 - 2021	<p>Guidelines for correction of RoR and maps for forest lands in revenue villages for which forest rights have been granted</p>			
2022 - 2025	<p>Guidelines for correction of RoRs/ map in respect of the forest right titles vested with the claimants and uploading in the Bhulekh portal</p> <p>Correction of RoR and maps for forest lands on which forest rights have been granted under the FRA and FR Rules</p>	<p>Effective implementation of dedicated state sector scheme</p> <p>Expedite the process of determination and recognition of habitat rights of PVTGs under FRA</p>	<p>Financial allocation made for dedicated State Sector scheme for FRA as approved by State Finance Commission</p>	<p>Standard operating procedure (SOP) on development & execution of CFRMP</p>

Another useful intervention was to issue circulars and guidelines on aspects like settlement of pre-1980 encroachment cases under FRA; settlement of minor forest offence cases; settlement of non-forest land in favour of claimants deemed ineligible under FRA; or clarification over meaning of “forest land”. Thereafter, the state formulated a list of FAQs that clarified doubts and processes of the FRA, to help with seamless implementation especially during the initial years of the FRA rollout (Ota, et. al., 2023).

Figure 7a: Status of Individual Forest Rights in Odisha as of May 2025



Figure 7b: Status of Community Forest Rights in Odisha as of May 2025

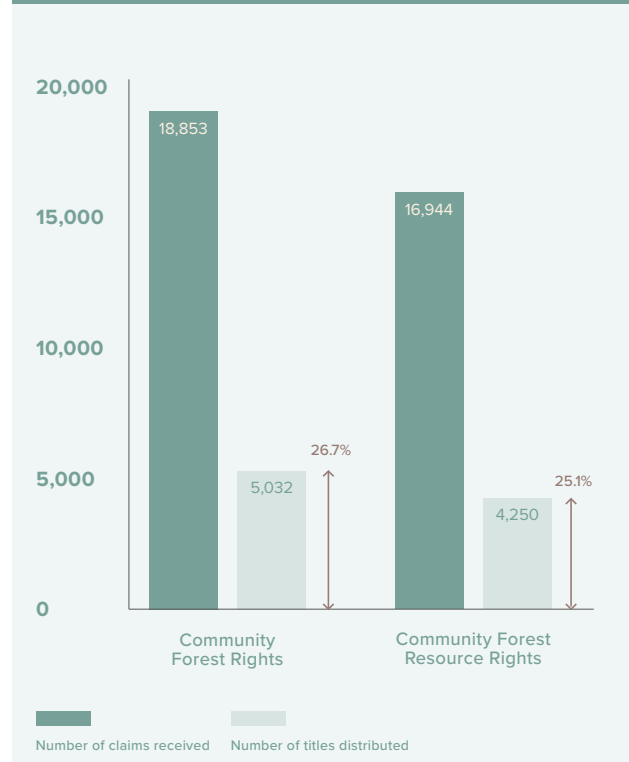
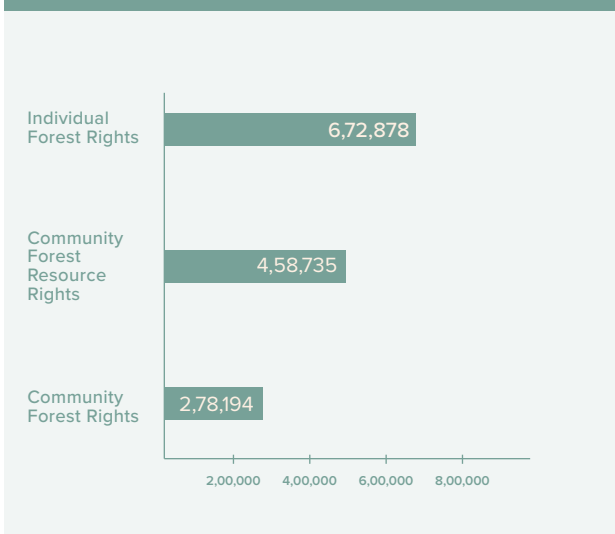


Figure 7c: Extent of forest land for which titles distributed (in acres as of May 2025)



Conversion of forest villages into revenue villages



178 claims were received
57 habitations declared as revenue villages

Recognition of habitat rights



Habitat Claims of **10 PVTGs** filed at SDLC after GS approval
9 habitat rights titles distributed covering 8 PVTGs

Convergence of different gov. programmes/schemes with title holders



3.59 lakh title holders have been linked to different schemes by the end of May 2025

*Source: ST & SC Development, Minorities & Backward Classes Welfare Department, Govt. of Odisha

4.7. RECONCILIATION AND RECORDING OF RIGHTS

The Odisha government has at different points of time issued several directions, circulars and guidelines that clarify and enable the process of reconciliation and recording of rights. As of 2024, guidance was provided by both Revenue department and Forest department, with regard to correction of RoR⁴⁹. These processes have been important to align with the joint communication issued by MoTA and MoEFCC since 2021 to reconcile rights within revenue and forest records as required. A 2022 letter of the MoEFCC⁵⁰ (to Chief Secretaries of all states) elaborates on this. *“Geo-referencing of all the record of rights under FRA, 2006 would eventually benefit in decision support systems at all level. The State Forest Department and State Tribal Welfare Departments can initiate specific projects and schemes for improving the livelihoods of the forest rights holders.”* (See the section on post rights further).



Land Records, Mutation, Inheritance

The creation and correction of RoR has been an important process in Odisha, especially with the state government taking a position regarding saturation of rights. During the course of the study, it was pointed out that while rights have been recognized and distributed, the creation of RoR has been a complex process. Amongst the various clarifications issued by the state to facilitate

the process of creating and correcting records, an office memorandum was issued in 2022⁵¹, specifically addressing the forest rights' titles issued inside any Notified Forest Blocks, as notified under various national and state forest laws. The guidelines specify a process of joint verification with Gram Sabha and concerned departments, and using of Global Positioning System (GPS) surveys that can enable reconciling CFR maps with forest working plans. As pointed out during the discussions related to the study, the appointment of retired administrative and/or Revenue Inspectors has been very effective to accelerate the process of joint verification and demarcation (Ota, et. al., 2023). A new mobile application called “Odisha Forest Rights: Mobile GPS Survey” has been designed through which this process can be carried out. Notwithstanding the challenges to implement the process, this correction of RoR and its inclusion in forest working plans and uploading it on the Bhulekh portal is an important step in closing the gap of land record creation. Separate reporting of PVTGs claims from the Micro Project area⁵² was done in the MPRs to track the progress of PVTG claims (Ota, et. al., 2023).

In Odisha, the IFR RoRs are created as a new khata (survey number) within the system. *“The land owner is mentioned as Government of Odisha”* and nature of rights is recorded in a separate section as “Nature of Forest Rights (Homestead/ Agriculture/ Allied Agricultural activities)”

⁴⁹ Office Memorandum No. PT1-FE-DIV-MISC-0010-2021 dated 1.11.2021 issued by Forest, Environment & Climate Change Department, Government of Odisha; Letter dated 28.06.2024, Revenue and Disaster Management Department, Government of Odisha.

⁵⁰ Letter dated 21.11.2022 by Director General of Forests, MoEFCC to Chief Secretaries of all States and Union Territories.

⁵¹ Office Memorandum No. PT1-FE-DIV-MISC-0010-2021 dated 1.11.2021 issued by FOREST, ENVIRONMENT & CLIMATE CHANGE DEPARTMENT, Government of Odisha

⁵² Micro-projects have been established in areas within Odisha wherein PVTGs reside and work towards the all round development of PVTGs through multi sectoral socio-economic programmes.

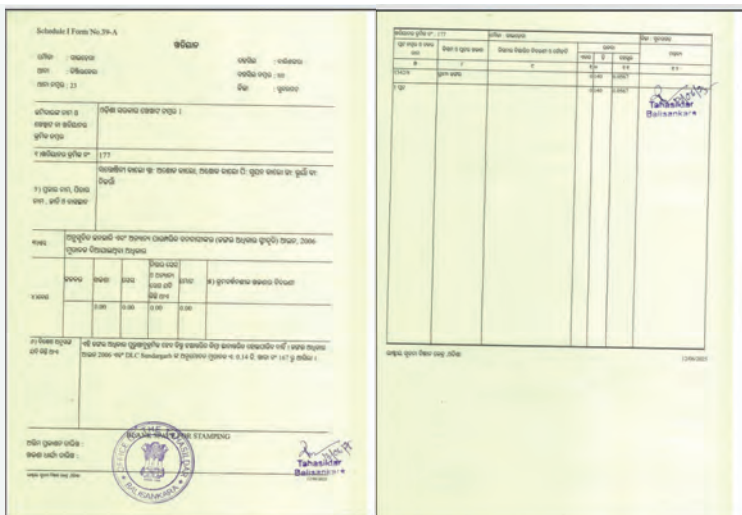


Image 9: Record of Rights Document for IFR of Odisha

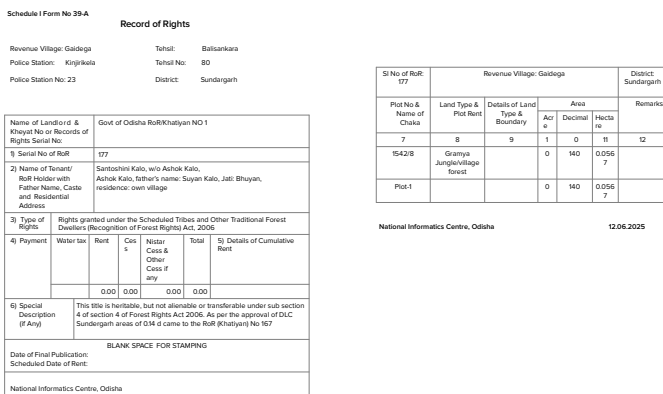
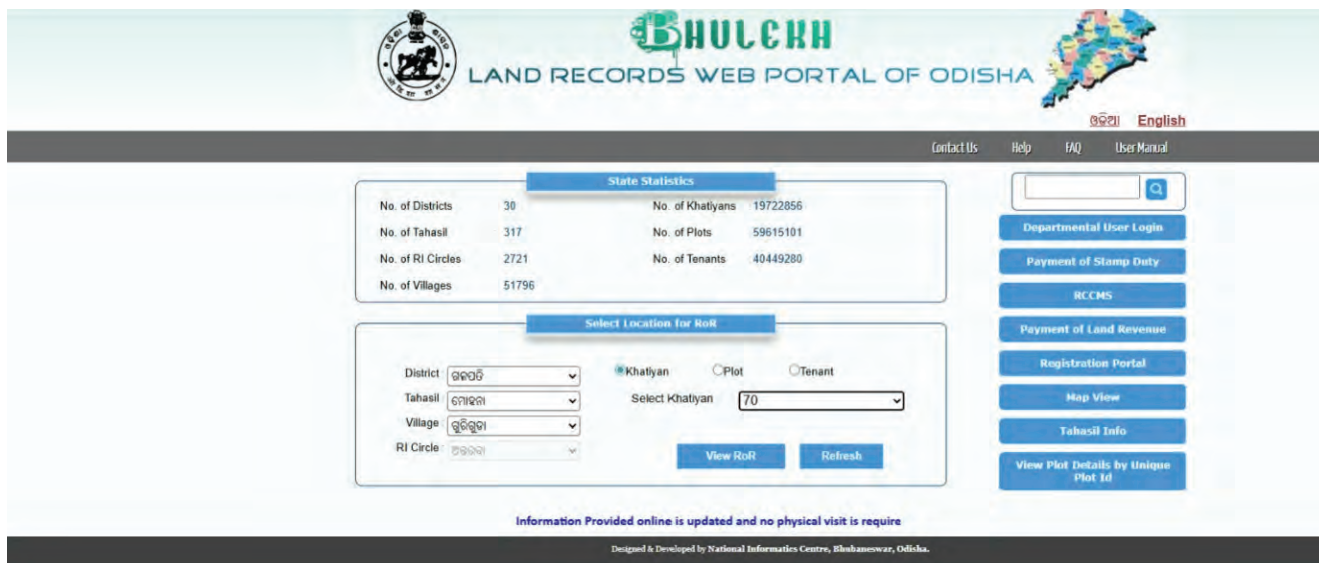


Image 10: English version of Record of Rights Document for IFR of Odisha

Image 11: Bhulekh Web Portal for Land Records in Odisha





Acquisition, Diversions, Compensation and Conversions

Like in other states, there is a discussion on what happens to forest rights when there is land acquisition or forest land diversion, as per procedures delineated under different laws. Odisha has taken steps in addressing this complex problem since 2013. They have done so with a set of four circulars that have been issued as an attempt to address the problem. The latest clarification from 2023 has received mixed reactions (Gupta, 2023)⁵³. The circular clarifies which procedures should be followed to compensate for the rights that have been affected if land is put to other uses, a process which currently does not require consent of rights holders. It also lays out how the valuation of the title can be undertaken and subsequently compensated for.

A 2023 letter of the department observes, *“if the said forest land is acquired, the ST or the Traditional Forest Dweller having the title to hold and live on the said land for habitation or self-cultivation for livelihood shall lose that right for ever and he/she will be deprived of his/her habitation as well as self-cultivation for livelihood forever.”* The delineated process will require a joint inquiry by concerned Land Acquisition Officer (LAO)/ Special LAO for the project along with other district level departmental officials like Forest department, Tahsildar, in the presence of the rights holders. There are two major critiques of this approach, first it does not argue the need for prior consent of the rights holders, which could have clarified a good practice. The second is that the approach does not take into account, any other form of rights e.g., grazing, fishing etc other than those which mirror individual landowners. Following

comprehensive guidelines issued by MoTA in 2013, the conversion of forest villages to revenue villages has been an important focus for Odisha. While this is an administrative issue which predates the FRA, the recognition of rights process has to some extent, facilitated the conversion process. The Odisha SLMC specifically directed for state level guidelines to be issued in 2015, for conversion of forest villages and other such villages into revenue villages. A set of comprehensive draft guidelines were issued. As of 2025, 165 forest villages have been converted to revenue villages with access to development facilities, schemes and programmes of the state government.



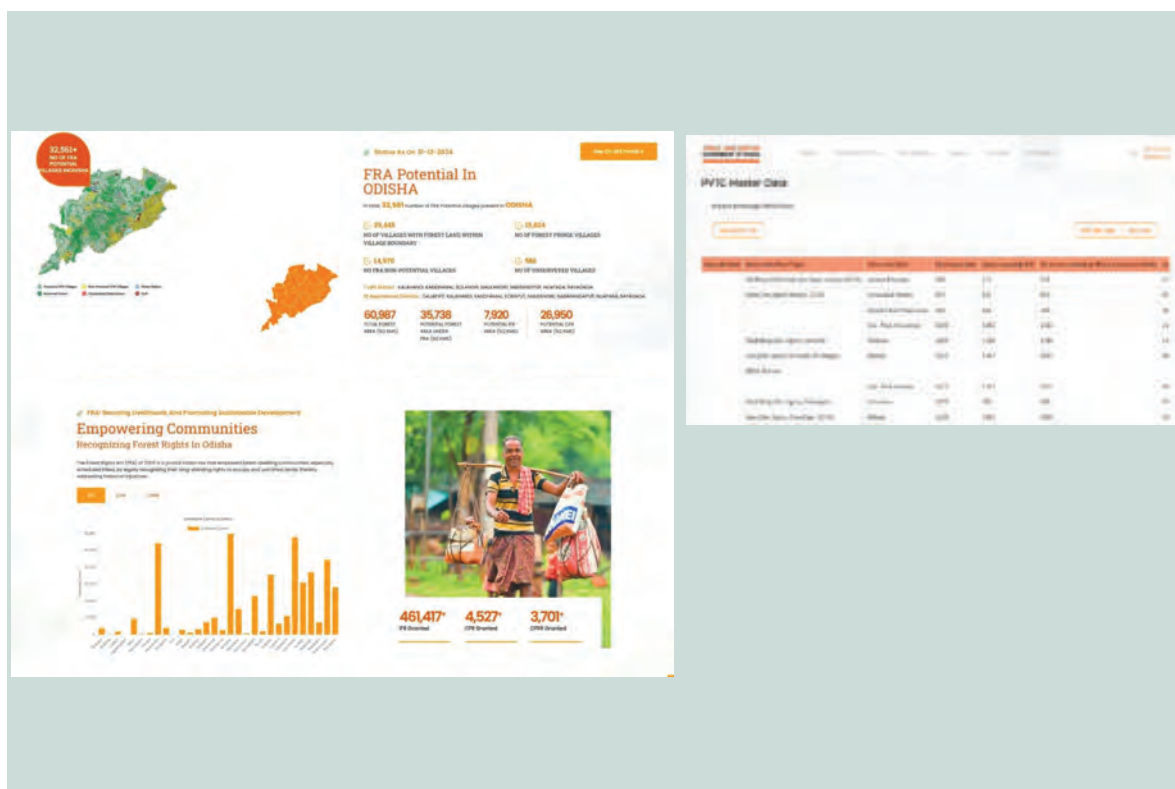
Digitization and Record Keeping

As discussed earlier in this section Odisha has adopted a mobile application called “Odisha Forest Rights: Mobile GPS Survey” to reconcile and correct RoR and its inclusion in revenue and forest records and upload it on the Bhulekh portal. Further, under dedicated state sector scheme, as pointed out during the course of the study, Odisha has a dedicated FRA portal⁵⁴ developed in collaboration with UNDP, which has all the detailed information on FRA processes, disaggregated data on title holders as well as online claim filing provision. Additionally, an FRA Atlas of Odisha was launched. It makes a preliminary assessment of the potential forest area over which rights can be recognized in Odisha, under the FRA. The estimate offers a baseline for informing implementation, planning, and setting targets for rights recognition under the FRA (SCSTRTI, 2020).

⁵³ Letter No. No. RDM-LAA-CLRFIC-0001-2017 by Revenue & Disaster Management Department Government of Odisha dated 29.4.2023

⁵⁴ FRA Portal link: <https://junglejamiabhiyan.teceads.co.in/>

Image 12: FRA Portal of Odisha



4.8. EXERCISING AND SUSTAINING OF RIGHTS (POST RIGHTS FRAMEWORK)

Both government and NGOs have shown their commitment to help and empower communities in Odisha, to exercise and sustain their rights. While insights gathered during the study reflect cautious optimism, with positive examples pointing to the potential for community empowerment and inter-departmental coordination, significant

efforts are still required to achieve a deeper and more sustained impact on the lives and livelihoods of forest dwellers. The process of rights recognition in Odisha is seen as a process which can make a difference, and can also enable community empowerment and interdepartmental coordination.



Addressing Complexity of Community Rights

As mentioned earlier, Odisha has had a strong history of community practices that have been integrated into government-initiated community forestry schemes. In some instances, the FRA has allowed for recognition and formal continuation of these practices. Kodalpalli village in Nayagarh had historically had a women-led forest stewardship and management system called ‘*thengapalli*’. It had been in place for about four decades. Under this system, women would carry out regular patrolling and look out for any illegal logging. They then charged a fine or apology under a communal law in any such instances. The recognition of CFRR title under the FRA helped strengthen and secure this practice (Vyawahare, 2023).

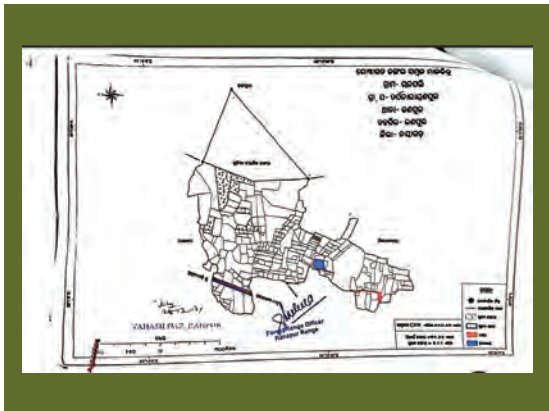


Image 13: CFRR Map of Charpalli village, Ranpur Tehsil, Nayagarh District

In another instance of Dhengajhari village in the same district, the CFRR has built on the strong history of a women led community forest protection and has enabled the village to secure direct livelihood benefits. Studies have highlighted that in Dengehajer, since late 1990, a women led forest protection committee named 'Maa Ghoda Dei Jungle

Surakhya Committee' reinstated the *thengapalli*⁵⁵ system. The president of the forest protection committee has been reported to have said “*We feel enactment of FRA was a reward for our long years of efforts.*” They further add, “*Before receiving our FRA title, there was less support from the government. Now with ownership rights, we have more responsibility.*” Conservation activities carried out by them include fire protection, patrolling against illegal felling, and conservation of water bodies (Sahu, 2020). Dengejhari is also seen as an example where the coordination between the Tribal Development and Forest department has worked, as pointed out during discussions, in the course of the study.

One of the significant milestones in the village’s journey has been the establishment of a Community Resource Centre for FRA. Initiated by the women’s group, the centre provides a space for community gatherings focused on forest stewardship, sustainable harvesting practices, and intergenerational exchange of TK. This resource centre established by the women groups is now being provided with the financial support by ST& SC Development Department, Government of Odisha since 2023. It marks a new chapter for Dhengajhari village in Nayagarh district, as the women-led forest protection group witnessed the culmination of their decade-long struggle for forest conservation with the recognition of 27 CFRRs.



Image 14: Inauguration of Jungle Kutir (Community Resource Centre) at Dengejhari

⁵⁵ Case study documenting the history of Dengejhari village titled A STORY OF FOREST PROTECTION AND CONSERVATION.

In terms of livelihood, CFR holders rely on sal leaves, tendu patta, amla, mahua, etc. amongst MFPs. They also grow cashew trees which are very lucrative and the Dengajheri Producer Groups in Nayagarh have been making consistent profits. Right holders stated during this study that *“The process of selling the cashews has become easier after receiving the title.”* The Forest department has also been supporting the villagers through training on creating briquettes made of dried leaves, as an alternate fuel source, and planting of native species of trees, which was witnessed during this study.

From the applicability of FRA in PAs, it is important to acknowledge the CFR and habitat rights (for Hill Kharias who are PVTGs) recognition process which has taken place within the buffer and core areas of Simlipal Tiger Reserve. Conversations with CFR title holders residing within the reserve reveal that post recognition, CFRMCs have been constituted and training of its members is ongoing. This will enable them to create CFRMPs and do bookkeeping activities for the CFRMC. This has also been achieved through support of CSOs working in these areas. The community members have been engaged in activities such as MFP collection, fire protection and soil-moisture conservation work, being helped along by Forest department officials.

Around 75.6% of households surveyed in Odisha as part of the dipstick survey reported that accessibility of MFP has

increased post recognition of land rights and 20% of households said that marketing of MFP products has improved post recognition. Women members within the villages stated that *“income generated from MFP collection has made them self-reliant when it comes to taking care of health and education of their families”*. This can be said to be a positive development and an important state level innovation, following the long history of conflicts, between the Forest department and the community members residing within the Tiger Reserve.



Habitat Rights

Odisha is one of the leading states which has completed the mapping of all the 13 PVTGs residing within the state (Mishra, 2024) and as on date, habitat rights for 10 PVTGs have been recognized and titles distributed⁵⁶. The process for recognizing habitat rights was very detailed, as seen in the case of Kutia Kondh PVTGs (SCSTRTI, 2022) and through a relatively contained process in the case of Paudi Bhuiyan PVTG (The Statesman, 2024). Discussions undertaken as part of this study brought to light that in 2022, SCSTRTI, Odisha had taken up a study on ‘Recognition of Habitat Rights process’ and developed detailed process guidelines for each of the PVTGs (SCSTRTI, 2022). Post that, habitat rights’ claims were facilitated through the traditional institutions of PVTGs and claims for 11 PVTGs were filed. During meetings with civil society practitioners, undertaken as part of this study, it was brought to light that the government is keen on



⁵⁶ Please see details in <https://mojangajami.odisha.gov.in/>

recognizing habitat rights in most areas “except where there is human wildlife conflict or if the area is a Critical Tiger Habitat”. While these concerns remain, Odisha has demonstrated specific instances where habitat rights of Hill Kharias have been recognized within the Tiger Reserve. However, during field visits, interactions with rights holders made one thing clear. There is a strong need for awareness generation—both among the rights holders and the implementing officials. They need better understanding of what these rights actually entail and how they can be exercised in practice.

Further discussions during the field visit carried out as part of this study pointed out that the process and outcomes of how habitat rights of the Kutia Kondh PVTG were discussed, documented and mapped presents important lessons and innovations. A senior state government official who was deeply engaged with the process stated, “The institutional mechanism in the form of a District FRA cell existed in Kandhamal, which was a major factor that enabled the district to give a different shape to the Act.”

FRA was a top agenda in the district and there were monthly meetings involving both the District Collector and the Tribal department. As per the State Tribal department officials, these meetings helped recognize the limitation of CFRs and the need for habitat rights and it meant accessing 10000 hours of audio material which can be use to understand, “the tribal version of the origins of the world and how it works”. The process for securing habitat rights was long and detailed. It involved thorough documentation, community consultations, and mapping exercises. Importantly, the mapping was not limited by administrative boundaries. There was also a clear understanding that habitat rights for PVTGs would not stand alone. They would be linked to community and individual forest rights as well. In addition, how the habitat area would be managed and used had to be worked out as part of the process.

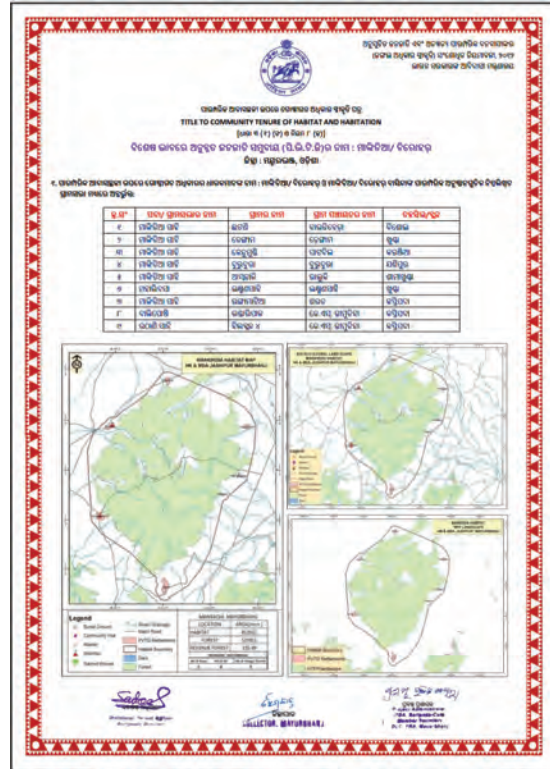


Image 15: Habitat Rights Title of Mankirdia PVTG, Mayurbhanj district

Individual Forest Rights and Livelihood Linkages

Podochuanpadar⁵⁷ Rayagada district has been recognized as one area where IFRs have resulted in creating livelihood linkages by creating tenurial security. This has led to “grassroots democracy, tribal self-governance, and the convergence of different development initiatives, highlighting the potential for replication in similar contexts.” (NITI Aayog, 2018)⁵⁸

Dipstick survey conducted as part of this study revealed that 58% of households surveyed in Odisha were able to access MGNREGA and 67% were able to access PMAY post recognition of land rights. Same survey revealed that 91.1% of households surveyed in Odisha were able to take up multiple crops in a year post recognition of rights.

⁵⁷ T Podochuanpadar is a small tribal community of 12 villages in the Budaguda Gramme Panchayat and has 27 households, comprising both STs and SCs.

⁵⁸ <https://www.nitiforstates.gov.in/best-practice-detail?id=102870>

4.9. INSTITUTIONAL CAPACITY AND INTERDEPARTMENTAL COORDINATION



Institutional Capacity

In 2023-24, Odisha was reported to be the first state in India to have allocated an exclusive budget of INR 2,600 lakhs for the implementation of the FRA (Tripathy, 2023). These initiatives by any state government are important to translate the intent of the government into action, including investing in institutional capacity.

The dedicated state sector scheme on FRA, discussed in the previous section, has played a key role in supporting implementation. It has enabled the continued presence of community volunteers on the ground. In particular, it has provided sustained support to FRA Cells over an extended period of time. As a result, 30 district-level and 217 Tehsil-level FRA Cells were constituted⁵⁹ to support with claim filing, facilitating joint verification, conducting SDLC and DLC meetings, title preparation and other coordination mechanisms. Since the constitution of these cells, the rights recognition process has been further streamlined. However, it was highlighted that support at the sub-divisional level needs to be further strengthened. This includes assistance with filing of claims, digitization of records, and ensuring convergence of FRA title holders with various government schemes. More recently, the DA-JGUA scheme is being used to set up more FRA cells or what are being called Dharti Aaba Units at the SDLC level. These will work in close coordination with existing FRA cell personnel, at the district and tehsil levels⁶⁰.

Odisha also has established District Level Monitoring Committee (DLMC) and Tehsil Level Monitoring Committee (TLMC) under the Chairpersonship of the District Collector

and Tehsildar respectively. They are responsible for monitoring the monthly progress of district and tehsil level FRA Cells. They have also established coordination amongst these committees. These committees track and monitor the implementation of various FRA-related activities and meet at least once a month. The proceedings of the meeting are shared with the concerned SDLC or /DLC and the State FRA Cell.

The joint verification calendar mentioned earlier ensures that the state FRA cell and the TLMCs are able to systematically address the challenge of pending claims, at various levels of decision making. This also includes consultation with key departments, specifically Revenue and Forest department to ensure synchronized visits for claim verification.

Image 16: Joint Verification in Nuagaon Block



⁵⁹ Letter No. STSCD-FRA-MISC-0006-2020 by ST & SC Development Department, Government of Odisha dated 13.01.2021

⁶⁰ Letter No. STSCD-TD-PLAN1-0005-2025 by ST & SC Development Department, Government of Odisha dated 23.05.2025

As discussed earlier, the leadership of institutions like the SCSTRTI in developing practical resource materials, research studies and organising regular workshops and training programmes, not just helped in keeping the FRA conversation alive but also ensured that best practices are highlighted. These have contributed significantly to the capacity building of officials and CSOs engaged with FRA implementation. The Odisha SCSTRTI has also provided a platform for exchanging innovations and challenges, across different states.



Interdepartmental Capacity

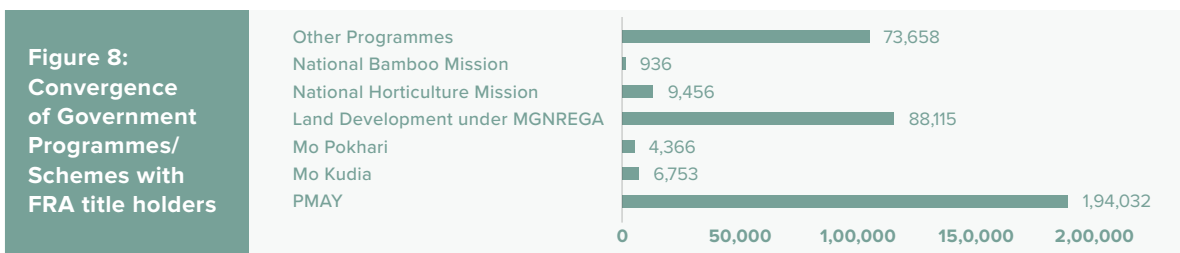
There have been specific innovations in the rights recognition process which would not have been possible without interdepartmental coordination. The state has institutionalized the practice of holding fortnightly meetings with District Collectors. It also uses mechanisms like video conferencing with senior bureaucrats. These tools have played an important role in enabling real-time monitoring. They have also helped create a feedback loop—at least to some extent—within the state administration.

Discussions during the study, however, pointed out that though the state has been working on the convergence of state schemes and funds for FRA, its true potential for post-rights tribal governance and development is yet to be realized. There are specific examples where the interlinkages and convergence has been strong, and can present lessons for future action. In the instance of Madhikol village in Kandhamal, Odisha, the planning process post recognition of both IFR and CFR directly

involved members of the Gram Sabha and the CFRMCs, including women. Through social and resource mapping processes, they proposed six different plans as per the needs of the community. Madhikhol has prioritized its demands for agriculture, irrigation, NTFP processing and training for forest fire protection etc., thereby clearly defining their requirements and needs.

District administration support was key to the Madhikhol convergence process, setting a precedent for other forest districts. As the FRA nodal agency, ITDA brought together six-line departments to implement the Gram Sabha’s plan. For the first time in Odisha, a district-level convergence committee was formed to oversee its execution. This has initiated a continuous effort among departments to support forest dwellers. To institutionalize this approach, the SC & ST Development department issued comprehensive guidelines prioritizing Gram Sabha-led convergence plans for livelihood and food security, emphasizing community-driven forest livelihood planning. The guidelines emphasize strengthening institutional mechanisms to anchor forest livelihood planning within Gram Sabha processes and prioritizing the needs of the communities these processes aim to empower.

Convergence of various line department schemes enabled through the DA-JGUA scheme should also be mentioned in this context. Most recently, Odisha has also issued an SOP on CFRMPs under the aegis of DA-JGUA, which is aimed at development and execution of the CFRMP in 100 CFR villages to begin with⁶¹.



*Source: ST & SC Development, Minorities & Backward Classes Welfare Department, Govt. of Odisha

STATE INNOVATIONS AND EXPERIENCES: CHHATTISGARH, MAHARASHTRA AND ODISHA

Two decades of FRA has presented multiple opportunities for State Governments to create innovations and reconcile challenges at multiple scales. The study attempts to present procedural, institutional and substantive challenges and how state governments have innovatively responded

and demonstrated innovations at various state levels. The study also highlights areas that continue to require urgent and focused attention. The study analyses and presents the innovations of Odisha, Chhattisgarh and Maharashtra to implement and operationalize the intent of FRA.

THEMES	ODISHA	MAHARASHTRA	CHHATTISGARH
Historical context enabling FRA	Community-led Forest stewardship and management system	Background of social movements pertaining to control over forest and land resources	Large percentage of forest-dwelling tribal communities and prolong left-wing extremism over issues of land rights and resources in the forest regions mostly inhabited by tribal communities
Long term partnerships	Government partnership with civil society organizations (CSOs) to help with implementation of FRA. Engaging retired administrative officials for facilitating FRA implementation.		
Institutional Leadership	<p>Creation of the FRA Cell model by Tribal department and UNDP</p> <p>Dedicated state sector scheme on FRA saturation with budgetary allocation and institutional mechanisms</p> <p>Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes Research Training Institute (SCSTRTI) leadership for developing practical resource materials, research and trainings and establishment of National resource centre with UNDP</p> <p>Creation of the FRA Atlas to identify potential villages for FRA implementation</p> <p>State-wide special Palli Sabha to set up Forest Rights Committees (FRCs)</p>	<p>Leadership in creating the FRA Cell model by Tribal department in 2008 and UNDP</p> <p>Pilot project for development of CFRMP was initiated with partnership of UNDP, Tribal Development Department (TDD) and CSOs in 2015. The guidelines developed from the experience of this project led to statewide issue of CFR guidelines</p> <p>Important role of grassroot CSOs and people's movements to shape Gram Sabha processes</p>	<p>Creation of the FRA Cell model by Tribal department and UNDP</p> <p>Long term technical partnerships at multiple levels with CSOs and Tribal Research and Training Institutes (TRTI)</p> <p>Enacted state Provisions of Panchayat (Extension to Scheduled Areas) Act, 1996 (PESA) Rules in 2022 to clarify the intersection between the FRA and PESA</p>

RECONCILIATION AND RECORDING OF RIGHTS			
THEMES	ODISHA	MAHARASHTRA	CHHATTISGARH
Land Records, Mutation, Inheritance	<p>Guidelines by both Revenue department and Forest department on correction of Record of Rights (RoR)</p> <p>Joint verification of claims with Gram Sabha and concerned departments using of Global Positional System (GPS) for creation of maps</p> <p>Separate reporting of PVTGs' claims from the Micro Project area</p> <p>Comprehensive draft guidelines for conversion of forest villages into revenue villages.</p> <p>FRA titles are made in the name of both husband and wife</p>	<p>Mechanism for RoR including mutation, inheritance and record correction</p> <p>Most IFRs entered into 7/12 records and digitized and format allows rights holders to access loans, welfare and agricultural extension schemes, The government has issued a separate "Form J" too as the land title, for land falling within the compartment area</p> <p>FRA titles are made in the name of both husband and wife</p>	<p>IFR and Community Forest Resource Rights (CFRR) areas being incorporated within forest and revenue maps of the state are also being digitized</p> <p>IFR records are being incorporated in Khasra Panchshala (Form P ii) in revenue records and beat book of Forest department</p> <p>Guidelines/notifications on land mutation, transfer, corrections, mapping and record of rights</p> <p>District Collectors directed to expedite the process to register the rights of legal heirs of the deceased rights holders</p> <p>Circular for converting forest villages to revenue villages issued</p> <p>FRA title and record of rights are made in the name of both husband and wife. However, there are instances from the past where titles have been issued only in the name of male member and the same has been entered in the books of records</p>
Acquisition, Diversions, Compensation and Conversions	<p>Circulars clarifying the procedures to be followed for compensating rights affected when land is put to other uses</p>	<p>Clarification on compensation for acquisition of IFR lands</p>	<p>Circular on key aspects related to compensation to forest rights holders (both IFR and CFR)</p> <p>Guidelines and instructions on relocation from Critical Wildlife Habitats (CWH) - Tiger Reserves, PA such as WLS, NPs, etc. mandating relocation only after duly recognizing the forest rights and consent of Gram Sabha on Rehabilitation and Resettlement (R&R) package</p>

RECONCILIATION AND RECORDING OF RIGHTS			
THEMES	ODISHA	MAHARASHTRA	CHHATTISGARH
Digitisation and Record Keeping	<p>Mobile application called 'Odisha Forest Rights: Mobile GPS Survey' to reconcile and correct RoR and its inclusion in forest records. Rights recognized on revenue land uploaded on the Bhulekh portal</p> <p>Dedicated FRA online portal developed in collaboration with UNDP to provide information on FRA processes, including disaggregated data on title holders and online claim filing provision</p> <p>Web based Geographic Information System (GIS) portal integrating FRA Atlas of Odisha to identify potential villages for FRA implementation</p>	<p>'AadiVanmitra' online portal for online claim processing and uploading of legacy data being developed.</p> <p>FRA Atlas under preparation</p>	<p>Two different portals- CGvanadhikar portal for legacy data digitization and Hamarvanadhikar portal for online claim filing of forest rights being developed</p> <p>CFR Potential Atlas has been prepared to identify potential villages for FRA implementation</p> <p>A web-based GIS portal is under development to integrate the CFR potential ATLAS and the two portals for seamless alignment of legacy and real time online data</p>
EXERCISING AND SUSTAINING OF RIGHTS (POST RIGHTS FRAMEWORK)			
Addressing Complexity of Community Rights	<p>Enabling community led forest management practices through recognition of CFR</p> <p>Involvement of members of the Gram Sabha and the CFRMCs, and women for post recognition planning</p> <p>Release of a standard operating procedure on CFRMP under the DA-JGUA scheme</p> <p>Engaging CSOs for help with preparation of CFRMPs</p>	<p>Gram Sabha led initiatives where forest rights holders have been able to combine IFRs and CFRs to harvest, transport bamboo and other minor forest produce (MFP) systematically</p> <p>Drawing from community level experiences where Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act 2005 (MGNREGA) funds has been used for forest regeneration, Government of Maharashtra has issued a government resolution (GR) recognising Gram Sabha appointed CFRMC as implementing agency for MGNREGA</p> <p>Creation of Federation of Gram Sabhas with the objective of increasing negotiating powers with respect to MFP in Vidharbha region</p>	<p>Recognition of CFRRs in urban areas</p> <p>CFRR rights for select villages in core areas of Tiger Reserves</p> <p>Livelihood generation in CFRR areas through community based eco-tourism and primary processing and selling of MFPs through community led self-help groups (SHGs)</p> <p>Pilot project to examine possibilities for co-existence in the CFRR area of Achanakmar Tiger Reserve proposed through CSO collaboration</p> <p>Circular clarifying aspects with regard to CFRMCs, setting up of DLMC to monitor CFRMCs</p>

EXERCISING AND SUSTAINING OF RIGHTS (POST RIGHTS FRAMEWORK)			
THEMES	ODISHA	MAHARASHTRA	CHHATTISGARH
Habitat Rights	<p>Research study to understand the potential habitat rights of PVTGs in Odisha</p> <p>Mapping of 13 PVTGs and habitat rights recognition for 10 PVTGs completed, and titles distributed</p> <p>Recognition of habitat rights within Tiger Reserves</p>		<p>Two habitat right (sub-habitat) titles have been recognized for Kamar and Baiga PVTG communities in Dhamtari and Gaurela-Pendra-Marwahi (GPM) districts respectively. Similarly, two more habitat right recognition process are under way for Birhor and Baiga PVTG communities in Raigarh and Kabirdham district respectively</p> <p>Habitat right procedural guidelines have been shared with all DLCs in 19 districts to initiate the right recognition process with the preparatory phase of identifying traditional leaders and mapping their customary habitat with all traditional practices through consultations</p> <p>Pilot project to initiate a habitat-based conservation-cum-development model in the recognized habitat area of Baiga PVTG community in GPM district is being developed as post-claim support to the community members</p>
Forest Rights and Livelihood Linkages	<p>Multiple circulars on convergence for government schemes that cover right holders</p>	<p>Circular regarding commercial utilization of mahua</p> <p>Listing of benefits that facilitate convergence of schemes on both IFR and CFR lands</p> <p>Judicial decisions on controlling tendu patta sale and transit permits</p> <p>IFR holders using agricultural schemes to grow economically viable crops such as chillies, jasmine, turmeric, pumpkin, and other similar crops</p> <p>Cluster approach through a state cabinet intervention with a list of 133 schemes outlining activities that can be taken up on forest land by the right holders ranging from agriculture, aquaculture, horticulture, soil and moisture conservation to forestry plantations</p> <p>State has created dedicated brand of 'Shabari Naturals' to market the MFP and agricultural products. FRA right holders through SHGs are also being linked for better access to markets</p>	<p>Schemes aimed at land levelling, development of water resources and maximum benefit to the beneficiaries of IFR holders</p> <p>Minimum support price (MSP) declared for 69 species of MFP found in forest areas</p>

INSTITUTIONAL CAPACITY AND INTERDEPARTMENTAL COORDINATION			
THEMES	ODISHA	MAHARASHTRA	CHHATTISGARH
Institutional Capacity	<p>Exclusive budget for the implementation of FRA</p> <p>Setting up of FRA cells at the SDLC, tehsil and district levels under state scheme and currently under DA-JGUA programmes</p> <p>Established the Tehsil Level Monitoring Committee and District Level Monitoring Committee to monitor monthly progress of FRA cells</p> <p>Regular capacity development programmes by SCSTRTI</p>	<p>State has created a dedicated budget head for FRA with an exclusive annual allocation to ensure continuous capacity building and sustained funding since the last 2 years. This is now being supplemented through DA-JGUA scheme.</p> <p>Training on “modern farming knowledge” and marketing support to farmers through Public Private Partnership</p> <p>Ekal Gram Sabha Empowerment programme- To support real time and long-term training to Gram Sabhas through a Memorandum of Understanding with Gondwana University</p>	<p>Setting up of State FRA Cells and district and sub-divisional level FRA cells.</p> <p>Non-financial partnership of the Tribal department with CSOs specifically for capacity building and supporting.</p> <p>TRTI initiative to produce Information, Education, and Communication (IEC) material and manuals in collaboration with UNDP</p> <p>Detailed step-by-step FRA manual with instructions on recognition of rights</p> <p>Financial resources raised by Tribal department for interventions to support capacity building, financial assistance for CFRMC for management, and publishing of knowledge products</p> <p>Special budgetary provision for sustenance of district and sub-divisional level FRA cells from the state budget and thereafter under DA-JGUA scheme</p>
Inter-departmental Coordination	<p>Joint verification calendar to systematically address the challenge of pending claims at various levels of decision making</p> <p>Involvement of officials working with Integrated Tribal Development Agency and Micro Project Areas Agency</p> <p>District level convergence committee to coordinate on post rights recognition</p> <p>Comprehensive guidelines prioritizing Gram Sabha based convergence plans</p>	<p>Circular enabling convergence between schemes of sectoral departments like the Animal Husbandry, Alternative Energy, MGNREGA, Water Conservation, Fisheries, and others</p> <p>Setting up of district-level convergence committees</p> <p>Gram Sabhas and CSOs have undertaken efforts to demonstrate the integration of several committees at the village level to manage forests under the supervision of the Gram Sabha</p>	<p>FRA Cells organizing video conferencing and periodic review meetings with CSOs and Gram Sabhas for ensuring better coordination, monitoring and operationalisation of the field work</p> <p>Setting up District Level Monitoring Committee to facilitate and monitor work done by CFRMCs</p>



05

RECOMMENDATIONS
AND WAY FORWARD





Can forest rights and the current legal framework supporting these rights be seen as fulcrum to connect tribal governance and sustainable development? This is one of the few questions that are being addressed in this section that is envisioning the way forward for the FRA to be able to deliver its preambular intent and spirit. This is important not just to the point of rights being recognized, vested and recorded but also how these processes can strengthen tribal governance in the longer term. This may require recognizing the limits to the current framework of the FRA and finding the intersections through multiple outcomes including that of the SDGs that support socio-economic rights, inclusivity, gender, tribal welfare and conservation. Recent studies (Haque, 2020) have highlighted the different ways, forest rights and secure tenures can achieve some critical SDGs like poverty alleviation (SDG1), elimination of hunger (SDG2), combating climate change (SDG13) and life on land (SDG15).

So far, this study has pulled together multiple challenges and state innovations under three broad themes (a) Recognition and Reconciliation of Rights (b) Exercising and Sustaining Rights (c) Institutional Capacity and Interdepartmental Coordination. These themes are also being carried ahead in this way forward section albeit in a cross-cutting manner. In order to visualize forest rights as a pathway to tribal governance and sustainable development, it has been important to broaden the framework where the everyday challenges

and big picture reforms are both captured through four areas of action. Doing this has also brought to light why exercising and sustaining rights post their recognition, as well as institutional capacity along with interdepartmental coordination is essential and unavoidable. Therefore, in this forward-looking section we embed the discussions of the first three sections into possible pathways that support four overarching themes discussed below.

5.1. UNDERPINNING FOREST RIGHTS AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

There are some fundamental questions which will need to be addressed if the futures of forest-dwelling tribal communities have to be secure. Some of these were highlighted by government officials who have and/or continue to work on the subject have emphasized the need to address the ‘taboos’ that fog tribal lives and cultures. While innovations like the Shabari Naturals brand created for MFP marketing and promotion in Maharashtra are in place, they will only be successful if any cultural biases are addressed. Embedding narratives of rights, community agency, and empowerment into the brand’s identity can play a pivotal role in affirming the Traditional Knowledge systems of the forest-dwelling tribal communities and their symbiotic relationship with the natural resources.

The ongoing and future work on the FRA can benefit if it is understood as a tool that delivers tribal development envisioned through governance led by tribal communities. Operationalising this would require both intent and financial commitment from the highest levels of decision-making. It is through this that a 'Whole of Government' approach as envisioned under programmes like PM-JANMAN and DA-JGUA or state level convergence innovations in Maharashtra, Odisha and Chhattisgarh can be operationalized.

Some of the specific suggestions which emerged during the course of the study include:



National and State Tribal Policies

A draft National Tribal Policy was circulated in 2006 but has not come into operation. National and state level policies can be instrumental to provide a broad framework to integrate tribal governance and sustainable development as interconnected outcomes for all schemes and programmes that are designed for tribal communities. The policy can also highlight that the recognition of forest rights needs to be both a process and outcome which can support the intended impacts on tribal communities' agency, lives and livelihoods, as well as strengthen community-based conservation and improve ecological security. This can help signal a formal intent which is essential for the sustaining of rights secured under the FRA and also make provision for longer term budgetary allocation in the national and state budgets. It was pointed out by a state level official responsible for tribal development and FRA implementation, "future of FRA is a policy, law is only to recognize rights." For instance, Odisha already has a draft Tribal Policy (SCSTRTI, 2009) which argues for incorporating state-specific needs of tribal communities with the intention of accelerating development within a specified time-span. FRA may also be positioned as a foundational

instrument for fostering participatory governance and enabling communities to effectively exercise their forest rights. To achieve this, it is imperative that forest rights holders are recognized as a category across all social protection and livelihood programmes. Moreover, policies and schemes related to forests, land, and natural resource governance must be designed to facilitate the actualization of these rights. This requires a thorough review and harmonization of existing legal provisions and programmatic guidelines to empower tribal communities in decision-making processes and the governance of their resources.



Dedicated and Earmarked funds

There is a need for dedicated and earmarked funds to enable forest rights as a means to strengthen tribal governance. Though recent schemes like DA-JGUA have provided impetus for strengthening the FRA implementation and allocated resources for post-rights convergence with other social protection schemes, these are mission-mode programmes to achieve specific results in a time-bound manner. To exercise and sustain rights, long-term dedicated programmes are essential. There is a need for dedicated and earmarked funds to enable forest rights as a means to strengthen tribal governance. Though recent schemes like DA-JGUA have provided impetus for strengthening the FRA implementation and allocated resources for post-rights convergence with other social protection schemes, these are mission-mode programmes to achieve specific results in a time-bound manner. To exercise and sustain rights, long-term dedicated programmes are essential.



Existing Centrally Sponsored Schemes (CSS) present opportunities for convergence. A dedicated component under SCA to TSP can support FRA-related activities, including infrastructure development and institutional support. Schemes like Development of Forest Villages, ITDPs, MGNREGA, and National Rural Livelihood Mission (NRLM) can be aligned to support land development, afforestation, and livelihoods under CFR rights. Additionally, Finance Commission Grants to Panchayati Raj Institutions can aid planning and implementation in FRA-recognized villages. Dedicated and earmarked funds are essential to enable convergence at the state level. State TSP funds—which are exclusively earmarked for tribal development—should include a dedicated and clearly defined percentage for FRA-related activities for pre and post forest rights recognition processes, including development planning, livelihood support, and community forest governance. State Forest departments through their existing schemes may dedicate funds for FRA to undertake mapping, land verification, and integrate forest rights into management plans. State Rural Development and Social Welfare departments could align their infrastructure, welfare, and employment schemes with the needs of forest right holders.

In mining-affected tribal districts, District Mineral Foundation (DMF) funds may be prioritized for rights-based development and infrastructure creation. CAMPA funds, as permitted under existing MoEFCC guidelines, may also be utilized for community-led forest conservation and management in areas where rights have been recognized. These are dedicated funds allocated for the development of STs in India and can be an important route through which forest rights pathways for tribal governance and sustainable development can be conceptualised. Additionally, bio-finance and climate finance resources, when channelled through international development agencies, can support innovations in strengthening CFR governance and developing scalable models for climate adaptation.



Building Gender within policy, programme and project design

While there is an acknowledgment that gender considerations are critical for social development, the programmatic focus is most often limited to creating space for representation (in committees or schemes) or participation (in consultations and meetings). There is a need to realize SDG5 related to achieving gender equality in addressing the barriers for economic participation, safety and increasing decision making in constitutionally recognized institutions like Gram Sabhas, Panchayats and or extension programmes and schemes. Specifically, this can translate into (a) Linking NRLM to the FRA with specific emphasis on addressing gender sensitive livelihood avenues and opportunities over and above the existing NRLM work with SHG groups (b) Necessitating women's leadership in the preparation and design of CFRMPs and integrating them with schemes that are targeted at easing women's work load (c) incentivising women led entrepreneurs and providing supportive ecosystems and innovative financing mechanisms that can empower tribal women and create sustainable models for forest based livelihoods in post rights recognition phases. However, this will be possible only if there is a strong stake created during rights recognition processes that will help build the necessary ground. This would require women centric capacity building programmes, defining clear indicators and outcomes and women led demonstration of models reconciling conservation and livelihood which can be scaled up.





Incorporate indicators on tribal rights and governance into the SDG Frameworks:

The SDG National Indicator Framework (NIF) is a comprehensive and universally accepted framework for measuring progress on SDGs in the country. This framework needs to capture the intersections between tribal governance and rights. At present the indicators on tribal rights, governance, and progress of tribal communities on various socio-economic parameters are not included in this framework. Integrating indicators that reflect the distinct social, economic, and environmental contexts of tribal communities- particularly in relation to forest rights (Goal 15: Life on Land) and justice and inclusion (Goal 16: Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions) would substantially improve the precision, targeting, and effectiveness of tribal development policies and schemes. MoTA may collaborate with Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation (MoSPI) to integrate social category-wise on SDG Indicators into the NIF.

Similarly, the SDG localisation process, which involves the development of indicator frameworks at the state and district levels through consultative processes, offers a valuable opportunity to ensure meaningful representation of tribal issues. Odisha's State Indicator Framework (SIF) provides a promising example, incorporating tribal-specific indicators such as the percentage of land titles (pattas) distributed to total claims received under the Forest Rights Act, 2006 under Goal 1 (No Poverty). Such practices demonstrate the potential for more inclusive and representative tracking of development outcomes.

Suggestions for Prioritising Action

- A National Tribal Policy/ National Acceleration Plan for tribal development for next five years may be framed, integrating tribal governance and sustainable development as interconnected outcomes. At the national level, this can be initiated either through MoTA or/and existing Parliamentary Committee such as that on Welfare of Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribes. State level Policy or Action Plan may also be developed. At the state level, the process can be initiated by either the Chief Secretary or the tribal department.
- An interdepartmental committee may be formed to conduct a joint review of FRA implementation and to develop a comprehensive framework for the post-recognition phase. This is important as the last joint committee of MoEFCC and MoTA to review FRA implementation was in 2010.
- Data systems for tribal communities may be strengthened by enhancing disaggregated data collection and improving institutional capacities at national and subnational levels. Indicators to track tribal development may be included in the NIF on SDGs. One of the priority areas of this technical support can be realized for SDG 5 related to achieving Gender Equality in addressing the barriers to economic participation through post rights recognition.
- A natural resource management (NRM) committee can be set up for a joint review and assessment of the impact of the FRA and need for a framework for post recognition. This is important as the last joint committee of MOEFCC and MoTA to review FRA implementation was in 2010.



5.2. ADMINISTRATIVE INTENT AND LEGAL CLARIFICATIONS

The study has pointed to the need for administrative and legal clarifications required at multiple scales. While some of these are to support the immediate needs emerging from State Governments, the others are to clarify processes and institutional roles for specific matters. This section is organized around the three overarching themes discussed in Sections 2 and 3. A key insight that emerged during the study is that while state-level leadership is crucial—especially in shaping and adapting state-specific schemes—the central government plays a pivotal role in signalling intent. This can be achieved through the issuance of clear guidelines and by facilitating cross-learning and knowledge sharing. As pointed out by senior State Government officials during the study, “emphasis should be on backward linkage of data, not doing this can indicate adjustment of data to justify actions rather than ensuring the previous and interlinked data sets or trends to inform the design and implementation processes”. This underscores a key challenge—when datasets or methodologies are inconsistent over time, establishing meaningful correlations becomes difficult, thereby hindering the ability to assess progress or trends accurately. Therefore, attempts can be made to build on previously recorded data over the years to map trends and draw lessons. One point worth noting is that innovations reflected in Section 4 from the states are only indicative and not exhaustive. Additionally, the way forward for aspects like interventions for OTFDs or improving implementation of FRA in areas like Northeast India or the Himalayas is beyond the scope of this report.

5.2.1. Reconciliation and Recording of Rights



Saturation of Rights or Sunset Clause

All three State Governments discussed in this study have raised the need for an end date for recognition and vesting of rights. While officials have recognized that there is a percentage of IFRs that would have been incorrectly recognized, they can potentially be rectified in the future as “record keeping and rectification is an ongoing exercise”. There is a need to build a common understanding and consensus on this issue including by seeking inputs of/ resolutions by Gram Sabhas and CSOs. As such, since the magnitude of work to be done for implementation of FRA has to be assessed by the Gram Sabha, it is the Gram Sabha which is in the best position to decide if the saturation of claims process has been achieved.



Acquisition of Rights and Compensation

An acquisition related concern that needs to be addressed is to clarify that prior ‘settlement’ of rights under IFA or WLPA does not supersede or substitute rights recognition process under FRA. Another key question to be resolved is whether forest rights can be recognized where people have been already relocated to another site as part of the settlement/ acquisition process under WLPA. This is especially in the case if people relocated have not been duly rehabilitated for necessary social needs or exercising customary rights which were linked to their homesteads (Kohli, 2015). When it comes to compensation, there is a need to develop mechanisms to compensate CFR title holders. In this regard the Chhattisgarh State Government’s directions (discussed in Section 4) can be used as a model⁶¹. Most importantly, the role of Gram Sabha and its consent before acquisition or forest diversions requires broader discussion and reconciliation. MoTA has also issued instructions⁶² regarding the same, which can be adopted by all states.

⁶¹ Circular dated 18.2.2025 issued by Tribal department, Government of Chhattisgarh aims at addressing key aspects related to compensation to forest rights holders in instances where there is felling of trees under FCA, LAA or any other law related to acquisition of rights through interpretation of constitutional safeguards and legal provisions related to ownership and management of community forests and MFPs.

⁶² Letter dated 10.1.2025, issued by MoTA



Recall and Cancellation of Rights

There are no provisions within FRA, which allow for a recall or cancellation of rights already conferred. However, it was seen in the case of Ghatbarra in Chhattisgarh, where CFRs were cancelled (Agarwal, 2016; Kohli, 2018). Instances have also been pointed out where “contested recognition” have also occurred. The legal position with regards to recall/cancellation through directions from MoTA may be established for cases where administrative error or contested rejection/acceptance has occurred. Further, directions may be provided either by MoTA or through the administrative remedies available at state level, including possible institutions that could step in (for example: SLMC), if such an eventuality occurs. (ibid).



Clarification of powers of the FRCs, CFRMCs, RPMCs, JFMCs, BMCs and other local institutions

Regulatory powers are not vested with either the Gram Sabha or the CFRMC. PESA related powers of the Gram Sabha also come into force in states where state rules are in place. Even Section 5 of the FRA which lists out duties of the Gram Sabha regarding conservation of forest resources, can only be implemented if there is an understanding that multiple laws such as IFA, WLPA, FRA, etc. operate in one place. All these laws have provisions on violations and the criminal procedures to be followed thereafter. Thus, when it comes to offences such as hunting, illegal felling, encroaching, to name a few, by anyone within the area over which rights are conferred, there could be a clarification within the CFRMP, including the role of different laws and the processes to be followed.

5.2.2. Exercising And Sustaining Rights

The life of forest rights beyond the recognition, reconciliation and recording of rights is an important area of work that needs to be prioritized for the future. The attention received so far reflects a “beneficiary” driven approach which is necessary but may not be sufficient in strengthening tribal governance and decision making. The allocation of funds for CFR management plans, digitizing records and livelihood linkages can be enhanced with

new thematic and decision-making models which are discussed further in this section. It is important to emphasize that CFRRs or habitat rights and preparation of plans or governance structures for the same need to be visualized as a pathway to empowering tribal communities and creating sustainable development opportunities.

In addition, there is a need to clarify legal and administrative frameworks as well as demonstrate models which move beyond the traditional partnership boundaries to create diversity of ideas for exercising and sustaining rights through leadership of forest rights holders and local institutions. In the long run, there is a need to strengthen bureaucratic and political commitments for exercising and sustaining tribal forest rights, like it is being done for rights recognition and distribution. The section below points out certain critical areas of intersection, interpretation and policy actions that are essential for exercising and sustaining rights.



PESA and FRA Intersections for Tribal Governance

An important question that needs clarification is the relevance of post-rights governance through FRA in states such as Chhattisgarh where PESA Rules are already being implemented. One feedback indicated “PESA kay andar FRA active hai” (FRA is active within the PESA framework). This is particularly relevant for CFR, CFRR and habitat rights as PESA has a wider mandate for tribal development and governance. A mechanism linking the two will be necessary at the Chief Secretary level whilst integrating Panchayati Raj, Revenue, Forest and Tribal Development departments’ jurisdiction and roles, along with the implementation framework to integrate roles and avoid conflicts. This will need to include aspects such as the role of the RPMC (under PESA) and CFRMCs (under FRA) along with any integration with JFMCs (through a forestry programme), along with other aspects such as definition of the Gram Sabha itself (see also next point). There have been attempts to develop model PESA villages in a few states (Governor of Maharashtra, 2025); it would be good to draw lessons from them and develop principles and parameters which can enable the interlinkage with FRA.



Role of the Gram Sabhas

While the FRA has emphasized the role of the Gram Sabha prior to rights recognition, there are a number of questions that have emerged post rights recognition that require greater clarity. These include:

- What is the formal role of the Gram Sabhas post the recognition of rights, especially if PESA Rules empowering Gram Sabhas are not in place at the state level? Does this need a separate recognition through rules or an amendment to the FRA? At the same time the definition of Gram Sabha may be represented differently in PESA Rules than in the FRA. It was pointed out that in states like Chhattisgarh where the Gram Sabhas are small, it may be more appropriate to apply the scope of the Gram Sabha as defined in PESA.
- Can Gram Sabhas continue to verify the beneficiaries of PM-JANMAN, DA-JGUA and other state level convergence initiatives? This is to address the point that those IFRs which have been wrongfully recognized are likely to be converted into “wrongful beneficiaries” as pointed out during the study.
- Laws such as IFA, WLPA and FCA must go from holding mere consultations with Gram Sabhas to obtaining their Free, Prior and Informed Consent to provide a greater role for the Gram Sabhas in forests and PAs from conception of plan for conservation to management and monitoring of these resources.



Programmematic Linkages to forest rights

Both Central and State Governments have taken time bound measures to create beneficiary linkages through schemes for rights holders, the post rights recognition phase can be strengthened through

integrating FRA within programmatic priorities. This will not just address the need for policy intent but also be able to allow for specific activities to be recognized as being programmatically important. For instance, land development, horticulture or soil conservation being carried out in CFRR and habitat rights can be formally integrated into MNREGA, Social Forestry, Handloom, Women and Child Welfare and other related programmes. While this has partly been addressed through the Dharti Aaba Janjatiya Unnat Gram Abhiyan (DA-JGUA)⁶³, it can be strengthened through formalising specific programmatic and departmental priorities. This will also allow for upscaling of convergence innovations seen at state levels discussed in previous sections. One specific suggestion for this which was discussed in Chhattisgarh was for the State Tribal department to send letters to all state departments requesting them to map the relevant schemes which can be linked to CFR and CFRR areas including labour, afforestation and build the same into the schematic design. This information, then can be captured through digital portals and dashboards for ease of access for all departments, including the Tribal department. While a policy on convergence has been formulated and there have been circulars issued by several ministries on the same, it is still not clear as to what activities can be allowed in forest areas. The Maharashtra example of issuing a GR through cabinet approval, where different schemes were listed that can be taken up in the forest areas, could be followed by other states⁶⁴. Youth and women in the three study states expressed interest in being actively involved with mapping, monitoring and marketing work, this potential should be utilized. Even at the planning stage for release of pending funds under central schemes⁶⁵ plans for post recognition support for confirmed IFRs and CFRs must be configured within the Gram Panchayat/ Village Development Plans to ensure that these activities are sustained.

⁶³ The DA-JGUA envisions the comprehensive development of tribal areas and communities by addressing critical gaps in infrastructure, healthcare, education, and livelihoods. Through a coordinated approach and convergence of various Government of India schemes, the mission aims to ensure holistic, sustainable, and inclusive growth, empowering tribal communities to thrive and flourish in a saturation mode. <https://tribal.cg.gov.in/sites/default/files/pm-juga-guideline.pdf>

⁶⁴ Maharashtra GR dated 13.03.2024

⁶⁵ Pradhan Mantri Aadi Adarsh Gram Yojana (PMAAGY), Pradhan Mantri Janjatiya Vikas Mission (PMJVM), Pradhan Mantri Janjati Adivasi Nyaya Maha Abhiyan (PM-JANMAN), Dharti Aaba Janjatiya Gram Utkarsh Abhiyan (DA- JGUA)



Creation of database for Rights Holders

Some states like Chhattisgarh are already working on a proposal to allocate a "Van Adhikar Pustika" (Forest Rights Book) for rights holders. Other than record of titles, this document can reflect formal recognition, grant and nature of the forest rights. In addition to what is already being proposed this booklet can also record the different schemes and benefits through government schemes or through grants/investments by private sector or civil society.



Community Forest Rights Planning and Management

The CFR planning and management process can benefit from documenting and building on the knowledge that rights holders have exercised through their history of engagement with the forest area. The point of valuing and upholding tribal knowledges during planning and building the same into the forest working plans, could be considered. As a respondent stated during the study, while the working plan or management plan is for a larger landscape, a CFRMP is to manage a local area within that landscape. Thus, the process of developing the CFRMP, could be done in a coordinated manner by the CFRMC members and the Forest department officials. This could include a dialogue between modern ecology and traditional management. Currently, the 2023 MoTA Guidelines stipulates that after the CFR management plan is finalized, it shall be integrated into the micro plan or working plan or management plan of the Forest department⁶⁶. These Guidelines could be supported by a clear clarification from MOEFCC and State forest depts to specify at what point of the planning process, the integration of plans can take place. Issues of sustainable harvesting, extraction and ecological monitoring can be included in the plan (Kohli, 2015).

Even though, the Guidelines state that CFRMCs will replace any non-statutory committees in the same area, this needs to be followed through with respect to JFMCs. A joint communique or circular could be issued by both MoTA and MoEFCC to clarify this issue.



Clarifying ownership, transit, harvest and sale of MFPs

There have been multiple circulars issued by MoTA on aspects of MSP for MFPs, issue of transit permit, fair return to MFP collectors, directions to align state laws on MFPs with FRA and PESA, among others⁶⁷. Despite the same, several states have held back on de-regulating certain forest produce as a result of which forest right holders continue to face difficulties when it comes to collection and sale of MFPs. This is particularly the case of the nationalised commodities such as bamboo, tendu, mahua, etc. It would be helpful for MoTA to issue consolidated guidelines on management of MFPs by FRA right holders so that application of laws within the states become more uniform and lead to less scope for discretion. In addition to fresh guidelines, a direction that state laws on MFPs could be amended in a time bound manner to align with FRA may also be issued. Within these guidelines, the transit permit issue may also be simplified to address whether an IFR title holder can sell their collection to a private trader and not the Gram Sabhas if they so choose. Often, CFR recognized might not be for the entire forest area where a Gram Sabha might be collecting MFPs; in such instances there needs be clarity on how the various mechanisms of transit permits would operate within the same area. Within the three study states, a cluster approach by bringing together several Gram Sabhas for an effective landscape level conservation and management endeavour, is being discussed. This may be supported so that successful models could emerge. The guidelines need to

⁶⁶Guidelines on Conservation, Management and Sustainable Use of CFR, issued by MoTA on 12.9.2023

⁶⁷MoTA letters dated 12.07.2012, 04.04.2013, 06.08.2013, 02.01.2014, 12.01.2014, 10.04.2015, 06.07.2021, 24.01.2022; MoRD letter dated 09.08.2012

specifically include that MFPs can be collected from all forest areas including PAs and Tiger Reserves, and that the collectors need to have choice to sell the MFPs to forest development corporations or any other agency (CFR-LA, 2016).



Developing community-based forest enterprises and good market linkages

CFRs granted for extraction of MFPs/NTFPs have the potential to be developed into profitable business ventures provided that adequate facilities are provided to the right holders. An assessment needs to be made of the existing schemes by MoTA and TRIFED to see where the shortfalls exist. A specific MFP/NTFP sector support network, that draws lessons from both failed and successful initiatives, needs to be facilitated. Potential enterprises must be supported with value addition, marketing as well as Research and Development (R&D) so as to ensure that beyond government or CSO handholding, these enterprises are able to sustain themselves (Kohli, 2015).



Developing pilot models for site specific interventions

There are successful CFR models all over the country; similarly for women led enterprises. As mentioned above in the Chhattisgarh related innovations, a pilot for co-existence is being planned within Achanakmar Tiger Reserve. The pilot initiatives could cover a range of aspects from developing and implementing management plans, eco-restoration projects, involvement of youth and women, to securing a whole basket of sustainability-based livelihood options for the right holders. It could also demonstrate creative partnerships with different government departments, including the Forest department, and even private players for strong and Gram Sabha led CFR management including developing innovative forest working plans.



Grievance Redressal

Directions may be issued to clarify the process to deal with wrongful rejections, violation of recognized rights, power of Gram Sabha to enforce Section 5 of FRA. Further, directions may also address conflicts between different community members during exercise of rights, jurisdiction of CFRMCs over other statutory committees in the same area and any resultant conflicts. The role and responsibilities of administrative officers in charge of FRA cell, micro-projects for PVTGs, monitoring committee's setup at the district or taluk levels, and the SLMC may be clearly laid down and the process of grievance redressal needs to be clear and carried out in a time bound manner.



SUGGESTIONS FOR PRIORITISING ACTION

- Dedicated interdepartmental committee can be set up to support the identification, drafting and coordination of interdepartmental inputs for issuing timely clarifications related to matters that has intersection with FRA implementation. The following aspects amongst others require clarifications: (a) procedural and institutional interface for acquisition of rights or rights affected during forest diversion (b) validity of recalling and cancellation of rights and grievance redress related to the same (c) Reconciling the immediate powers of CFRMC and other committees like BMCs and committees under PESA
- The current FRA Cells' infrastructure can evolve into being Mahiti Kendras (Information and Knowledge Centres) set up to demonstrate a 'Whole of Government' Approach. These kendras with a financially supported outreach plan could act as a resource for Gram Sabhas for online, phone and in person consultations on navigating complex issues. In regions where there are Gram Sabhas with specific thematic skills and capacities, they can be co-coordinators or technical members of these centres. These centres can also develop special guidance material in local languages for aspects like ownership, transit, harvest and sale of MFPs or how to connect rights to schemes and programmes including those related to handlooms, skill development, health, Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSME), forestry and others.
- State Governments may submit proposals to MoTA for piloting innovative initiatives under schemes such as DA-JGUA, PM-JANMAN, Article 275 etc. These include those related to developing community-based forest enterprises and mechanisms for market linkages, ecosystem support required for entrepreneurship development; site specific models related to landscape and eco-restoration planning that ensure tribal leadership and local knowledge integration. Special focus within these pilots needs to be on upscaling and sustaining tribal women and youth led enterprises throughout the forest to market cycle.
- A mapping of laws, policies and schemes can be initiated by State Tribal departments to address specific practical interface between legal frameworks governing tribal and forest areas. This can help overcome the limitation of every government department responding through an "our law-your law" perspective. Some of the emerging aspects highlighted during the study include: (a) the intersection of PESA and FRA to post rights processes including planning and mapping, overlaps of committees (RPMC-CFRMC) or roles of sarpanches and chairpersons of RPMCs; (b) further clarification on the stage at which CFRMPs needs to be integrated into micro plan or working plan or management plan of the Forest department along with time frames for the same (c) clarification on the minimum time period for RoR creation prior to the initiation of land acquisition proceedings.
- State Tribal Welfare departments can identify current mechanisms for grievance redressal and gaps that need to be addressed for post rights recognition processes. These can draw upon legal pluralism that is inspired from customary and formal best practices. Looking at such mechanisms present best practice and frameworks for governance, mediating diverse worldviews, truth and reconciliation or restitution and compensation.
- MoTA and State Governments may update the existing CFR guidelines to provide clear guidance at what stage and level CFRMPs needs to be integrated into forest working plans. This may also require the Forest department to review its working plans before the completion of the five-year cycles to allow for seamless integration.

5.3. FOSTERING PARTNERSHIP AND BUILDING CAPACITY

This is the second theme which was emphasized for immediate action. Both interdepartmental coordination and institutional capacity have been critical challenges around which different states are trying to innovate and build functional strategies to implement FRA. The need for a more comprehensive intervention has been expressed. This can:

- Create capacity building opportunities which necessarily foster partnerships rather than siloed outcomes.
- Address intersectional aspects such as gender, health, poverty alleviation and collaborative governance into the structure of any training and capacity building initiatives.
- Build partnerships within and across government departments e.g., social forestry and territorial wings of the Forest department for creating conservation outcomes that embrace community embedded decision-making or the cooperation between Tribal, Forest and Panchayati Raj departments for post rights planning and management.
- Sustained collaborations with CSOs in Odisha and Maharashtra have been very effective in building the capacity of Gram Sabhas and bringing important lessons before state governments for effective state action.
- Explore the role of the private sector especially when it comes to market linkages, value chain enhancement on the one hand and build platforms to negotiate tenurial security in the light of any proposed land use change.

Training and educational inputs have been sought by Gram Sabhas, FRCs, FRA Cell members and specific line departments for better:

- Implementation of convergence schemes and mission programmes like DA-JGUA and other state convergence programmes.
- Understand laws and policies of departments which share jurisdiction or mandate to work with tribal communities. For instance, a sharper understanding of forest laws or schemes can create an equal footing for other departments to negotiate any roadblocks for collective action.
- Design of capacity building initiatives that target special needs and carry out scenario mapping so that engagement is not a repetitive but a constructive exercise.

Based on the primary inputs received during the study and secondary material where suggestions have already been made, the following immediate and long-term steps need to be undertaken:



Training Needs Assessment

Several training and capacity building exercises have been already undertaken to facilitate the implementation of the law, building a common language for tribal governance and sustainable development as well as skill enhancement for livelihood linkages. In order to understand (a) What are the context specific needs of Gram Sabhas and district, block and village level institutions specific to exercising and sustaining rights as well as ensuring tribal governance (b) What have been the factors that have ensured the success or failure of the past initiatives, including gender blindness,



interdepartmental cooperation (c) What practical training and skill mapping is required to build partnerships including those with the private sector.



Facilitate Interdepartmental Exchanges

Officials from each government department approach the forest rights based on their mandate and training. There is a need to break these silos for each department to understand the language, intent, persuasion and jurisdiction of the other. One way this can be achieved is to build exchange programmes that allow officials of one department to spend a few weeks or months (decided on a case-to-case basis) in other related government departments, to build rapport and address the institutional question related to forest rights in real time. For instance, one observation during the study highlighted that some State Tribal Development officials. "Don't have a problem with JFMC, as long as the money of the JFMC can be transferred to the CFRMC. Once there is an agreement and clarification on this the CFRMC plan can be integrated into the forest working process as well". Interdepartmental exchanges can create communication opportunities to address gaps.



Resource Base of Master Trainers

There is a need to create a resource of master trainers combining specialized and conceptual understanding of linking tribal governance and sustainable development. This will be required at different levels of decision making and tapping on the skills in such a way that empowered Gram Sabha, members of local committees and institutions (FRC, CFRMC, BMC, JFMC, SHGs) are not just recipients of trainings but can be considered as master trainers for specific kinds of capacity building needs. Similarly, a pool of master trainers can also be built at block and district level college and universities for resources to be available at various levels and geographies.



Scenario Based Training Modules and Practice Guides

In order to achieve practice oriented, problem based, non-siloed training modules there is a need to (a) combine cross cutting thematic knowledge around gender, food security, health etc along with intersections of laws and policies (e.g. forest, tribal, panchayat, labour) (b) Build on good practices that are already available with the FRA practice across states and similar experience at the international level. This is possible when scenario-based training modules and practice guides are developed which are address existing practice needs and envisage situations which are likely to emerge in the future. This will help interdepartmental training outcome based and attempt to resolve roadblocks to collective action. For instance, one suggestion was need for a guide on how the Revenue and Forest departments can work together for recording of rights and post-rights convergence.



Strengthening of TRTIs and enabling collaborations with administrative and forest training institutes

There is a need to create mandate and financial support for strengthening TRTIs and creating their potential for collaborations for training institutions of other departments like Forest, Agriculture, Panchayat, Revenue and Administrative Institutes. For instance, one suggestion emerged during this study is around the capacity building needs of CFRMC and Gram Sabhas. For this, it was suggested that the Forest Department provide technical support, while the Tribal Department serve as the knowledge partner in developing the plans. For such instances, state TRTIs and departmental training institutes can jointly convene such workshops, trainings with the support of state government. Similarly, these forums can also be the space for refresher courses including but not limited to full-time block-level FRA Coordinator, ITDA officials, SDLC and DLC members.





Clearing House mechanism⁶⁸ for coordination (Research and Data)

There has been a suggestion to create a helpline or CFR query clearing house mechanism at district and state levels. This can be a support mechanism for a range of technical and legal queries for Gram Sabhas, different forest rights committees, FRA Cell Members. Based on the availability of funds and human resources this mechanism can include legal and documentation support as well as technical support around convergence with schemes, ecological inputs, market access, monitoring, legal clarifications, marketing mechanisms, land demarcation methods and so on. (Kohli, 2015). It can also include scoping the feasibility of developing a Chatbot or any other online tools that can offer a real-time response mechanism.



Specialized trainings for private sector engagement and markets

This thematic area was highlighted at different points of time, during the course of the study. While this can be converged with needs assessment discussed in this section, the approach is to address both soft and hard skills along with knowledge enhancement for Gram Sabhas and rights holders to engage with markets and the private sector. The existing Gram Sabhas like in Gadchiroli, (Maharashtra) Nayagarh (Odisha) and Dhamtari (Chhattisgarh) can be one resource, along with building content and conversational skills on themes including but not limited to value chains, carbon markets, registration, bookkeeping, determining compensations, benefit sharing. This can also be built into the six recommendations discussed above.

⁶⁸Clearing House Mechanism provides a web-based platform for sharing information, knowledge, and technologies related to FRA

SUGGESTIONS FOR PRIORITISING ACTION

- A High-Level coordination mechanism needs to be established between MoTA and MoEFCC at the national level and/or State Tribal, Revenue and Forest department (through the Chief Secretary) at the state level to address the conflicts and complementarities between PAs and FRA. The same coordination mechanism can enable the process through which there is a fair and non-hierarchical coordination between rights holders and the Forest department in the preparation and integration of CFRMPs.
- State Governments may promote transparency by proactively making available the maximum amount of administrative data, including gender-disaggregated data and other records such as minutes of SLMC meetings, or other such decisions that influence tribal governance and implementation. This data needs to be aligned, where possible, with relevant SDG indicators to support informed decision-making.
- State Governments may commission a needs assessment to identify unexplored thematic areas including deeper gender related challenges beyond ensuring participation, navigating government and private market linkages, pressing areas for updating knowledge (intersectoral laws and policies; international best practices), sectoral convergences including with tourism, handloom, education, etc. and decentralising digitization and data management. This process can also assess different training and capacity needs across geographies within the state.
- State Governments may consider creating learning platforms at the state level to create special knowledge and skill exchange forums or shivirs/shibirs for Gram Sabha representatives, traditional tribal institution representatives and members of committees such as CFRMC, RPMC or BMC with the objective to create a sustainable and decentralized mechanism for enabling processes post the recognition of rights and to deliver the intent of FRA. These academies can be spaces for learning, practice and innovation, by using culturally appropriate language, tools and teaching methods.
- MoTA and State Governments can commission developing cohorts of master trainers with institutional and financial support for long term engagement at various levels. Audio-visual and written manuals can be developed for use by State Project Management Units (SPMUs), Tribal departments, and other relevant government departments. The objective is to build a cohort of Master Trainers equipped with knowledge of specific local contexts and to communicate methodological approaches, across regions and states.



5.4. INNOVATIONS ENABLING FOREST RIGHTS PATHWAYS FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

There is a rich pool of projects, programmes and approaches from both national and international levels that pre-date the FRA but may have the potential of being adapted to demonstrate the intersection of tribal governance and sustainable development, whilst strengthening forest rights. At the same time, there are new and emerging concepts and policy solutions which need to be understood and mapped out for addressing the vulnerability of tribal communities, despite the recognition of forest rights. In this section, we highlight some new areas of innovation and intersections including those which may be worth reviving. During the course of the study, some of these ideas were discussed with both government and non-governmental practitioners as well as civil society representatives. These rich conversations have already informed the limits and potential of what is being discussed further. The furtherance of these will require a combination of needs assessment, whetting of socio-ecological consequences, financial considerations and potential for practical demonstration.

FRA

Leveraging Article 275 (1) of the Indian Constitution to support FRA

This suggestion was repeatedly highlighted during the course of the study to access financial resources needed to strengthen the post rights recognition phase of the FRA. MoTA Guidelines for allocation of funds and implementation of Programmes/Activities under Proviso to Article 275(1) of the Constitution may include the post rights recognition activities related to CFR management in priority areas identified. The guidelines also emphasize that proposals targeting women beneficiaries will be accorded priority and States to ensure that

33% of beneficiaries are women. Therefore, State Government may leverage this provision to support the women led CFR processes in identified areas. The suggestions from the field also highlighted that these grants can contribute significantly to the address planning, demarcation and capacity building initiatives by which forest rights can be demonstrated as a pathway to deliver both tribal governance and sustainable development.



Integrating landscape planning with habitat rights

Habitat Rights of PVTGs is not just about recognizing historical territories of special tribal groups, it is a recognition of their unique cultural practices, knowledge systems and traditions that are associated with the habitat. One critical question that has emerged during the study is – What is the pathway for habitat rights once formally recognized? As it will trigger the need for demarcation, interactions with other actors presently using and occupying the habitat as well as multiple jurisdictions which may exist due to land use change or administrative boundaries. The experience with Landscape Planning understands large areas as “socio-ecological constructs that thrive on relationships and interconnectedness can be useful to adapt for habitat rights” (Rathore, et al, 2019). One such model is that of the Satpuda-Maikal Landscape mapping and planning experience⁶⁹ that highlights it as both a process and a policy outcome. In addition to this, the experience with the mapping and demarcating of Ecologically Sensitive Areas, Biodiversity Heritage Sites, can provide inclusive pathways to sustain and revive PVTG Habitats. In addition to these, global concepts like and Other Effective Area Based Conservation Measures (OECMs) can also be assessed to envision models which are anchored towards both conservation and livelihood security.

⁶⁹The Satpuda-Maikal Landscape mapping and planning exercise was undertaken keeping in mind the existence of PVTG communities (Bharia tribe) in the area following traditional practices alongside a rich repository of biodiversity. A process of decentralized planning was adopted to reach out to all actors: government agencies, CSOs, and Panchayati Raj institutions at the grass-roots level. Further, capacity building initiatives centered around integrating biodiversity conservation into all sectors of production and programmes of development were organized



Envisaging conservation and livelihood outcomes through the Accredited Compensatory Afforestation (ACA)

The ACA guidelines were introduced in 2023 as a follow up to the amendment to the FCR. The concept encourages private landowners or government institutions to carry out afforestation on lands under their control. These will create a land bank of forested lands which can be taken by user agencies in lieu of providing compensatory afforestation, which is mandated against forest land diversions. Once the lands have been afforested, owners can apply for the ACA scheme with the local Forest department and thus earn a revenue for developing a forest land. If such lands will be required by a user agency, the agency can directly negotiate financial details with the person holding the ACA. A need and social impact assessment can be carried out to explore whether the ACA scheme can benefit both IFR and CFR title holders who have title over more than 10 hectares of land. As pointed out during the discussion with a senior forest official during this study, this can be assessed and piloted in an area where there are possibilities of collaboration between communities and the department. It is important to clarify that this process will be likely to work provided that the legal clause and guidelines support and protect decision and control of the rights holders. At present, the ACA guidelines stipulate that the lands eligible for this scheme should not come under the definition of "forests" or "forest land" as understood under the FCA. If such a condition is relaxed especially for forest right holders, then they can benefit from such a scheme.



Developing the right to Community Intellectual Property

Section 3 (1) (k) has prescribed the right of access to biodiversity and community right to IP and TK related to biodiversity and cultural diversity. There is no information available as to whether claims have been made for this right or not, and what is the process through

which this can be done. It would be worthwhile to understand what community IP entails, what are the international best practices around it and whether there is any potential to monetize the same. This is required, given the existence of TK in both ecological conservation and medicinal plants. BDA is the complementing legal framework which can be utilized to explore the potential and at present, there are many instances of the law being applied in forest areas. There is a need to undertake a comprehensive design assessment which includes research and developing a risk management strategy.



Interface with international treaties on conservation and climate change

All forest rights futures can draw upon and inform policy frameworks emerging from international treaties such as the Convention on Biological Diversity, United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification. These conventions give importance to indigenous people and local communities' (IPLC) rights over their lands and resources to combat biodiversity loss, pollution, climate change and land degradation. Thus, the targets under the Kunming Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework, India's Nationally Determined Contributions and other such global agreements should be read in alignment with FRA and tribal governance. Even schemes like the Green Credit Programme or creation of Carbon Sinks under India's climate targets have a direct interface with forest rights and tribal governance. This allows the possibility to build on existing models and co-design pilot projects, with rights holders that can mitigate risks and enhance possibilities of creating locally embedded sustainable development models .



SUGGESTIONS FOR PRIORITISING ACTION

- The Parliamentary Committee on Welfare of Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes and the MoTA can set up a special committee to assess potential and strengths of leveraging Article 275 (1), Constitution of India, to financially support the integration of FRA, PESA and processes that support tribal development and empowerment. This committee can make an open call for proposals that present innovative and feasible innovations to help achieve this.
- A Policy Paper can be commissioned by MoTA to outline mechanisms for strengthening tribal empowerment and governance in the exercise and sustaining of rights, alongside ensuring beneficiary-level access to relevant schemes and policies. This policy paper can map the 'Whole of Government' approach to enable the dual objectives of benefitting rights holders and strengthening institutional infrastructure where tribal communities are equal drivers of developmental decision making.
- State Governments through the Chief Secretary can bring together relevant departments to support practice-oriented initiatives on the ground to integrate eco-regional and landscape planning models. Lessons learnt from existing or past landscape programmes/restoration programmes can be integrated into the post rights planning and management related to community resource and habit rights. Such a process can also integrate new international conservation models such as OECMs.
- MoTA and State Government may consider technical partnerships (multilateral, NGOs, management institutions and private sector consultancies) that can help strengthen market linkages and present potential and risks of linking market-based models with post rights processes. This will help both Gram Sabhas and government departments navigate existing spaces like carbon markets, biodiversity offsets, payment of ecosystem services (PES), Access and Benefit Sharing, that are widely in use in various environment and trade treaties. This partnership can also link up with private sector ESG.
- Training Institutes of MoTA, MoEFCC or other departments, with support from technical agencies can convene a series of workshops related to schemes like Accredited Compensatory Afforestation or Green Credits to leverage these schemes for forest right holders as well as ensure protocols of safeguards and protection for these communities. This process can also consider necessary legal changes that may be required to demonstrate a pilot where rights holders are empowered to work with Forest and other departments to deliver sustainable income generation and conservation outcomes.
- A collaborative and participatory study may be commissioned to examine interlinkages between forest rights related to community IP with international IP frameworks on the one hand and India's IP infrastructure including patent laws, biodiversity act and other related mechanism. This exercise can result in presenting a framework for Community IP for forest rights holders.
- There is a need for a dedicated fund to support technological innovations and creation of GIS platforms that are accessible to right holders, Govt functionaries, CSOs at all levels of FRA implementation. This will help enable access to tools for better planning, monitoring and convergence.



CHARTING THE PATH FORWARD

The journey ahead calls for a shift from a transactional implementation of the FRA to a truly transformational approach—one that places tribal communities at the centre of forest governance, sustainable development, and climate resilience. This means going beyond title distribution to strengthening institutions, ensuring long-term financing, integrating rights into development and climate policies, and investing in community capacities—especially those of women and youth.

This can only be made possible through coordinated action across law, policy, finance, and institutions, backed by a strong political will and interdepartmental collaboration. As this study shows, forest rights are not just legal entitlements, but a strong imperative to deliver justice, dignity, and development - rooted in equity, ecology, and culture. This study offers recommendations to realize the full promise of the FRA and build a future where tribal communities are equal partners in shaping an inclusive, just, and sustainable India.



ANNEXURE I

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ANNEXURE II

LIST OF INTERVIEWS AND DISCUSSIONS (In person and Online)

CHHATTISGARH

Meetings and Discussions

1. Shri V. Srinivasa Rao – PCCF and Head of Forest Force (HoFF), Department of Forest & Climate Change, Government of Chhattisgarh
2. Shri Arun Kumar Pandey – PCCF, Development and Planning, Department of Forest & Climate Change, Government of Chhattisgarh
3. Smt. Shammi Abidi – Secretary, Women and Child Development Department, Government of Chhattisgarh
4. Shri Taran Prakash Sinha – Commissioner, MGNREGA, Panchayat & Rural Development Department, Government of Chhattisgarh
5. Shri Sanjay Gaur – Additional Director, Tribal & Scheduled Caste Development Department, Government of Chhattisgarh
6. Shri Dinesh Agarwal – Joint Director, (Directorate) Panchayat and Rural Development Department, Government of Chhattisgarh
7. Shri Shrikant Verma – Additional Director, (Directorate) Panchayat and Rural Development Department, Government of Chhattisgarh
8. Shri Sanjay Kumar Yadav – Divisional Forest Officer, Mungeli
9. Shri M. R. Sahu – Assistant Director (Wildlife), Udanti Sitanadi Tiger Reserve, Gariyaband
10. Shri Vimal Kumar Sahu – Assistant Commissioner, District Tribal Development, Dhamtari, Chhattisgarh
11. Shri Karuna Sagar Patel – CEO, Janpad Panchayat, Nagri Block, Dhamtari, Chhattisgarh
12. Shri Ashwani Kange – Representative, Sarv Adivasi Samaj, Chhattisgarh
13. Ms. Payal Bunkar – Representative, Pradan, Chhattisgarh
14. Shri Manish Jha – Representative, Samerthan, Chhattisgarh
15. Smt. Manjit Kaur Bal – State Head, Chhattisgarh, FES, Chhattisgarh
16. Shri Neeraj Dewangan – Project Officer, MIS, FES, Chhattisgarh
17. Shri Benipuri Goswami – Secretary, Khoj Evam Janjagriti Aamiti, Mainpur (Gariyaband), Chhattisgarh
18. Shri Sohan Lal Netam – President, Kudurpani Gram Sabha, Village – Kudurpani, Nagri Block (Dhamtari), Chhattisgarh
19. Shri Dev Lal Markam – President, FRC, Kudurpani Gram Sabha, Village – Kudurpani, Nagri Block (Dhamtari), Chhattisgarh
20. Shri Ashwani Aghan Singh Marawi – Member, DLC, Mungeli, Chhattisgarh
21. Shri Prahlad Singh Uike – Member, CFRMC, Nivaskhar Gram Sabha, Lormi (Mungeli), Dhamtari
22. Shri Jon Singh Baiga – Member, CFRMC, Rajak Gram Sabha, Lormi (Mungeli), Dhamtari
23. Ms. Jyoti Markam – District Coordinator, District FRA Cell, Dhamtari
24. Shri Gopesh Netam – Field Coordinator, SDLC FRA Cell (Nagri & Magarlod), Dhamtari
25. Ms. Kavita Jagat – District Coordinator, District FRA Cell, Mungeli
26. Shri Dilharan Tekam – Field Coordinator, SDLC FRA Cell (Lormi), Mungeli

Village Visits

1. Bhaisamunda, Dhamtari
2. Madeli, Dhamtari
3. Nivaskher, Core area of Achanakmar TR, Mungeli
4. Razak, Core area of Achanakmar TR, Mungeli

MAHARASHTRA

Meetings and Discussions

1. Shri. Vijay Waghmare, Secretary, Tribal Development Department, Government of Maharashtra
2. Shri B. Srinivas Rao, PCCF (Wild Life), Forest Department, Government of Maharashtra
3. Shri. Yatbon W.I., APCCF (Social Forestry), Forest Department, Government of Maharashtra
4. Smt. Leena Bansod, Commissioner, Nashik, Tribal Development Department, Government of Maharashtra
5. Shri Samir Kurtkoti, Commissioner, Tribal Research & Training Institute, Pune
6. Shri. M.R. Shelke, Joint Secretary, Tribal Development Department, Government of Maharashtra
7. Shri. Digambar Chavhan, Deputy Commissioner, ATC, Nagpur
8. Shri. Siddhesh Sawardekar, DCF, Nashik
9. Shri. Nitin Isokar, Project Officer, ITDP, Nagpur
10. Shri. Vikas Rachelwar, Project Officer, ITDP, Chandrapur
11. Shri. Pandurang Pakhale, Assistant Commissioner of Forest, Forest Department, Government of Maharashtra
12. Mr. Mahesh Jamdade, Deputy Collector, (Land Acquisition) Nashik
13. Shri. Anup Khande, Resident Deputy Collector, Nagpur
14. Siddhesh Sawardekar, Deputy Conservator of Forest, Nashik
15. Ms. Sneha Dadgal, Coordinator, Forest Rights Cell, Chandrapur
16. Ms. Vaishali, FRA Cell Member, Chandrapur
17. Shri. Vikram Kadam, Manager FRA cell, Nashik
18. Shri. Dilip Gode, Representative, VNCS
19. Ms. Ekta Khode, State Head FES, Nagpur
20. Shri. Keshav Gurnule, Member, Vidarbha Livelihood Forum

Village Visits

1. Pahami, Chandrapur
2. Panchgaon, Chandrapur

ODISHA

Meetings and Discussions

1. Shri Sanjeeb Kumar Mishra, IAS Principal Secretary, ST & SC Development, Minorities & Backward Classes Welfare Department
2. Shri Santosh Rath, Nodal Officer, Mo Jungle Jami Yojna (MJJY)
3. Ms. Pranati Patro, Joint Director, ST & SC Development, Minorities & Backward Classes Welfare Department
4. Smt. Poonam Guha, IAS, Commissioner cum Secretary, Handloom and Textiles
5. Shri. Manas Ranjan Samal, OAS, Additional Secretary, Department of General Administration and Public Grievance
6. Shri. Rajkishore Das, Odisha Welfare Service (Rtd)
7. Shri. Manas Mishra, Odisha Welfare Service (Rtd)
8. Shri. Prafulla Majhi, Former MLA
9. Shri. Prasant Ray, Mayurbhanj District FRA Coordinator
10. Ms. Sasmita Nayak, Nayagarh District FRA Coordinator
11. Shri. Himanshu Shekar Behra, Jashipur Tehsil Level FRA Coordinator
12. Shri. Jagadananda, Founder, Centre for Youth and Social Development
13. Ms. Meena Das Mohapatra, FES, Odisha
14. Ms. Sailabala Panda, PRADAN, Odisha
15. Shri. Aurobindo Rout, Vasundhara, Odisha
16. Dr. Mihir Jena, CRISP, Odisha
17. Shri. Bishwaroop Sahu, Independent FRA Expert
18. Shri. Y.Giri Rao, Independent FRA Expert
19. Shri. Sandeep Patnaik, Researcher
20. Shri. Balakrushna Sahoo, State Coordinator, MJJY
21. Shri. Kirti Kumar, IT Expert, MJJY
22. Shri. Pradyumya, MIS expert, MJJY

Village Visits

1. Kapand, Mayurbhanj
2. Sana Jhilli, Buffer Area of Simlipal TR, Mayurbhanj
3. Dengajhari, Nayagarh

MINISTRY OF TRIBAL AFFAIRS

1. Ms. Samidha Singh, Director FRA



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