

Report on the Two-Days consultation on Forest Rights Act (FRA) 2006

7 – 8 September, 2024 - Kolkata

Overview

A Two-Days consultation on Forest Rights Act (FRA) 2006 was held in Kolkata, on 7-8 September 2024 at Seva Kendra, 52B, Radhanath Chowdhury Rd, Seal Lane, Tangra, Kolkata, West Bengal 700015, bringing together **over 80 participants from North Bengal, Jungle Mahal, and Sundarbans**. The seminar included dignitaries like an ex-Minister of Govt of West Bengal, General Secretary of **Nagarik Mancha**, and various NGOs working in forest rights. This consultation aims to provide a platform for meaningful dialogue and collaboration among activists, community leaders, policymakers, and scholars, all working towards the common goal of ensuring the rights of forest-dependent communities in India. The consultation was coordinated by Pabitra Mandal (Secretary, SJSM), Abhijit Kundu (Vice President, SJSM), Sirsendu Dutta (EC member, SJSM), Sukesh Ghosh (member).

The consultation mainly focussed on key aspects of the Act, including:

1. **Understanding the Forest Rights Act:** Detailed analysis of the provisions of the FRA 2006, including individual and community rights.
2. **Challenges in Implementation:** Discussion on the obstacles faced in different states and regions regarding the recognition and enforcement of forest rights.

Day 1: Inaugural Session and Discussions

Distinguished Speakers –

- Inaugural speech by **Purnendu Basu**, Former Minister of Agriculture, Govt of West Bengal, Former Minister of Labour, Govt of West Bengal, Former Minister for Technical Education, Training & Skill Development, Govt of West Bengal, Chairman, Council of Technical Education, Training & Skill Development, Govt of West Bengal.
- Renowned Human Rights Defender **Naba Dutta**, General Secretary of Nagarik Mancha spoke on historical importance of FRA 2006 in securing rights for forest-dwelling communities and discussed in details with examples of his experiences for the policy's progress and challenges in West Bengal.
- **Current Status of FRA in West Bengal** Key presentations highlighted the lack of awareness, administrative hurdles, and the low number of Community Forest Resource (CFR) claims.
- **Challenges and Opportunities in Implementing FRA** Experts from NGOs and grassroots organizations facilitated interactive discussions. Major topics included:
 - The role of **Gram Sabhas** in claim processing.
 - Administrative delays and resistance from forest departments.
 - Successes and obstacles in securing individual and community claims.
- **Panel Discussions** held to discuss region-specific challenges.

Day 2: Action Planning and Capacity Building

- **Capacity Building for Gram Sabhas** This session focused on training Gram Sabha members on the FRA claims process. Experts provided practical guidance on how to submit individual and community forest rights claims and the role of Gram Sabhas in verifying these claims.
- **Planning Future Actions** Participants worked together to develop a roadmap for implementing FRA 2006 in West Bengal. The roadmap emphasized:
 - Organizing training and capacity-building workshops across the state.
 - Mobilizing Gram Sabhas to initiate the claim process.
 - Leveraging NGO support for legal and administrative aid.
- **Concluding Session** The seminar concluded with a summary of action points and commitments from various stakeholders to ensure the effective implementation of the FRA 2006 in West Bengal. Representatives from **Nagarik Mancha** and NGOs pledged their continued support in mobilizing communities and facilitating the claim submission process.
- **A state level committee** (Preparatory was elected through discussion in the session). This committee will continue to work for zonal meetings for awareness, training, capacity building and formation of Gram Sabhas and handhold the implementation of the Act.

Key Outcomes

- **A state level committee** (Preparatory) was elected through discussion in the session. Pabitra Mandal elected as Convenor of the State level preparatory Committee unanimously.
- Consensus was reached on the immediate need for **training and capacity-building** sessions at the local level.
- A detailed **action plan** for organizing Gram Sabhas across West Bengal was developed.
- Dignitaries and NGO representatives committed to facilitating awareness campaigns and offering administrative support to help streamline the FRA claims process.

Next Steps

1. **Organize training workshops** at the district level to empower communities.
2. Facilitate **Gram Sabha meetings** to initiate the claims process in every village.
3. Create a **monitoring committee** to track progress and ensure timely submission of claims.

This two-day seminar successfully brought together a diverse group of stakeholders, laying the foundation for more effective and widespread implementation of the Forest Rights Act in West Bengal.

Key Participant List:

Purnendu Basu, Former Minister of Agriculture, Govt of West Bengal, Former Minister of Labour, Govt of West Bengal, Former Minister for Technical Education, Training & Skill Development, Govt of West Bengal, Chairman, Council of Technical Education, Training & Skill Development, Govt of West Bengal.

Naba Dutta, General Secretary of Nagarik Mancha, Renowned Human Rights Defender.

Panel Discussion Participant List:

Nilanjan Mishra, PhD scholar,

Animesh Sinha, Researcher and writer,

Dr. Swapan Kumar Mandal, Professor,

Dr. Sanjit Jotdar, Professor,

Jayanta Bose, Renowned Journalist,

Ajanta Dey, Director, NEWS (Nature Environment and Wild Life Society),

Shankar Halder, Director, Mukti (NGO, Sundarban),

Dr. Barendu Mandal, Professor, Jadavpur University

Jyotindranarayan Lahiri, Teacher and Sundarban Researcher,

Dr. Partha Dey, Researcher,

Chandrachur Chatterjee, Engineer,

Debmalya Roy Chaudhri, WWF

Dr. R Tamal Goswami, Pro-Vice Chancellor, Adamas University (President, SJSM)

State Level Advisory Board: WBJSM

1) Purnendu Basu

2) Naba Dutta

3) Prof. S B Roy - IBRAD

4) Ajanta Dey

5) Shankar Halder

6) Dr. Sanjit Jotdar

7) Jayanta Bose

8) Dr. Barendu Mandal

9) Dr. R Tamal Goswami

10) Dr. Atanu Raha

State Committee (Preparatory) - WBJSM

1. Kishor Thapa
2. Shiva Summer
3. Dayeed Rabha
4. Sonam Lepcha
5. Ashoke Biswakarma
6. Mon Kumar Subha
7. Tej Man Rai
8. Kumar Bhujel
9. Santessar Rabha
10. Channat Gazi
11. Anukul Chandra Das
12. Krishnapada Mandal
13. Asutosh Sarkar
14. Ganesh Chandra Ray
15. Lakshmikanta Mandi
16. Gorachand Bauri
17. Bankim Bhokta
18. Balai Nayak
19. Sukesh Ghosh
20. Sirsendu Dutta
21. Abhijit Kundu
- 22) Dr. Nilanjan Mishra
- 23) Dr. Partha Dey
- 24) Debmalya Roy Chowdhury
- 25) Chandrachur Chatterjee
- 26) Animesh Sinha
- 27) Dr. Swapan Kumar Mandal
- 28) Basudev Banarjee
- 29) Pabitra Mandal - Convenor & Coordinator