

STATUS OF CONVERGENCE IN IFR¹ TITLE LANDS IN ANDHRA PRADESH

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Introduction

The Scheduled Tribes and other forest dwellers have always faced the catastrophe of poverty, hunger, and lack of livelihoods in our country. To end this state of affliction, Government of India came out with the Forest Rights Act (FRA) in 2006, which envisages for providing legal land rights to forest dwellers who hitherto were considered to be encroachers in or on their own lands. The Act confers land rights to the forest-dwelling tribal communities or other bona fide traditional forest dwellers by providing them land title on forest lands which they have been cultivating since generations until 13th of December 2005, the cut-off date.

But the recognition of the rights on land, alone, will not suffice for the actual purpose of empowering the tribals through FRA Act 2006. The tribals have remained excluded from the mainstream development process with little or no access to government schemes and programmes. They face the apathy of the government, which is not responsive to their needs, thus demonstrating lack of political will. Improved quality of life also falls within the mandate of the Act wherein the tribals require scientific knowledge and institutional investments to enhance soil productivity and access good quality seed, irrigation facilities and low external input systems along with diverse livelihood options such as livestock and fisheries.



Recommendation of National Advisory Committee (NAC) on FRA, 2010.

- The overall development of the forest-dwelling communities is contingent on their enjoying a higher “Happiness Index”. This can be achieved through the convergence of various developmental schemes operating in the areas of education, training, health, employment, etc.
- Develop the forest lands granted under FRA so that such lands are utilised to the optimum level of production on a sustained basis, and also create basic infrastructure.
- Make it a priority to provide vocational training for the titleholders and their family members. Emphasis should be given to such trades which can get them better employment opportunities in and around their habitation.
- Put in place such monitoring systems both at the district and state level as well to deliver all proposed services to the right holders speedily and smoothly

¹ IFR: Individual forest rights

² This brief is based on the study report “Status of convergence in Individual Forest Rights title land in Andhra Pradesh”.

As per the recommendations from the National Advisory Committee on Forest Rights Act, it was discussed in New Delhi, 2010, that there is a need for post-implementation support to title holders to ensure that they are integrated into all government schemes. Further, in the amended Rules of FRA notified in September 2012, rule 16 was inserted emphasising on the need to bring in convergence of schemes for the benefit of the titleholders. The rule reads as follows: **“16. Post claim support and handholding to holders of rights:** *The State Government shall ensure through its departments, especially tribal and social welfare, environment and forest, revenue, rural development, panchayati raj and other departments relevant to upliftment of forest dwelling scheduled tribes and other traditional forest dwellers, that all government schemes including those relating to land improvement, land productivity, basic amenities and other livelihood measures are provided to such claimants and communities whose rights have been recognised and vested under the Act.”*

The Centre for People’s Forestry (CPF) and many other NGOs in the state worked hard in advocating and liaisoning with government officials towards providing land to the landless forest dwellers. Today over a lakh forest dwellers are legal titleholders of their land. The time has now come for gauging the efficacy of the Forest Rights Act in ameliorating the livelihood conditions of forest-landholders.

In the above context, a study was conducted in the state of Andhra Pradesh. The study was focused

Table 1: Status of IFR in Andhra Pradesh: Source – Tribal Welfare Department, AP

State/Districts	Total IFR recognised as per Government records	Extent of land in acres
Andhra Pradesh	81,800	170,731
Srikakulam	15,823	32,074
Vishakhapatnam	28,808	54,061

towards the measures proposed to develop forest lands under IFR title after the recognition of the rights under FRA 2006 and its actual status on the ground in terms of implementation of the FRA according to the amended guidelines of Ministry of Tribal Affairs (MOTA) on convergence. As per Government records, 81,800 IFR titles were issued across the state of Andhra Pradesh for an extent of 170,731 acres. Of the 13 districts, Vishakhapatnam and Srikakulam districts recorded maximum recognition of Individual titles.

To assess the convergence of different schemes for the development of IFR title lands on the ground, CPF conducted a field study during November 2014 and February 2015 in Srikakulam and Vishakhapatnam districts (see Table 1). Of the total 44,631 titleholders from both the districts, 1002 IFR titleholders³ (2.2% of the total) were surveyed (see Table 2).

Table 2: Sample size

Districts	Total IFR recognised in the district as per ITDA records	Extent of land recognised (in acres)	No of IFR titleholders surveyed	Extent of land in acres
Srikakulam	15,823	32,074	351	796.77
Vishakhapatnam	28,808	54,061	651	1196.32
Total	44,631	86,135	1002	1993.1

³ The sampling method adopted was “Multiphase Sampling”. In the first phase of selection, districts were selected taking help from secondary sources of Individual Forest Rights (IFR) database held with Tribal Welfare department. Mandals which show a greater number of IFR title holders were shortlisted and in the second stage, the number of villages taken as sample from each mandal is equal to five percent of total number of villages in each mandal. Further the villages were selected based on secondary data sources and from experience of field staff. Secondary data helped in assessing the work done in villages under various land development activities. A total of 27 villages were selected, which constituted the final sample. In Srikakulam seven villages were surveyed out of which five villages with 277 titleholders were getting support and guidance from a NGO. Similarly in Vishakhapatnam 20 villages are surveyed where 11 villages with 460 title holders were getting guidance from NGOs and nine villages with 191 title holders did not have any NGO presence.

Major Findings

Convergence: Only 28.8 percent of the total number of IFR lands are under convergence. The convergence of government schemes is only related to livelihood generation and is not directed to achieve higher “happiness index”⁴ among the rights-holders. It is noted that the convergence is more in Srikakulam district, i.e. 39.8 percent (of the sample households) whereas it is only 22 percent (of the sample households) in Vishakhapatnam. The convergence is mostly under MGNREGS (13.3 percent), and Cashew Rejuvenation Programme (9.5 percent).

Land Development (post the amendment of 2012): IFR title lands can be converted from a physical asset into a profitable asset through land development activities. It is therefore required to converge land assets with MGNREGS, which ensures the provision of land development activities on IFR lands. Of the IFR land, 22.9 percent has undergone land development activities in both the districts: in Srikakulam, 37.3 percent and in Visakhapatnam only 15.2 percent of land was developed. Among those who received support for land development activities, 15 percent stated that the work assigned was not the one they had asked for. The major land development activities include pruning, digging pits for horticulture plantation, stone removal, trenches, stone packing, stone bunding, etc. There is a great opportunity and need to expand the services and reach out to all the villages which are still not covered under MGNREGS. Moreover, it was also observed that the communities which got the benefit of land development under MGNREGS were those who demanded it from the

department with the handholding support of NGOs or such like organisations at the grassroots level, whereas the other communities did not get any significant benefit apart from wage labour.

Irrigation: Most of the farmers cited irrigation as the major obstacle in undertaking agriculture on forest land. In the survey it was clear that the water-shortage problem acted as a hindrance in agricultural farming. **Only 10 percent of the sample titleholders’ land is under irrigation.** In Srikakulam, there is almost no irrigation facility on IFR lands, which are mostly in a hilly region with sloping lands, and is a totally rain-fed area. **Only 0.85 percent of total numbers of IFR title land under study was under irrigation from a natural flowing stream.** In Vishakhapatnam it is mostly rain-fed agriculture

Vocational training and handholding support: It was observed that although there was some support in terms of land development from the government but there was no facilitation of handholding and capacity building for the farmers for effective plantation or agricultural activities. In Srikakulam, farmers follow their own self-acquired knowledge and practices in cashew plantation. While working with tribals it has been strongly felt that continuous handholding support is the backbone of any intervention until it reaches the stage of self sustainability. It was seen that for the farmers who received support and training from KVK (or similar organisation) in partnership with NGOs, there was a visible increase in the yields in comparison to others. This substantiates the need for consistent capacity development of farmers and institutional strengthening of CBOs.

⁴ Happiness index: Source: National Advisory Council, report on FRA, December 2010. It denotes overall well-being of the individuals.

Monitoring System: There is a recommendation from the National Advisory Committee on FRA to set up a monitoring system at district and state level to evaluate and monitor post-title linkages facilities but no such system is in place as of now.

Lack of Financial Support: Before the implementation of the Forest Rights Act (2006), forest dwellers did not have any legitimate rights on their agricultural land; they were devoid of credit linkages since they were not the titleholders. It is believed by the State that people have gained strength in mobilising finances after possessing land titles but in reality **less than one percent of titleholders** of the sample respondents had access to financial support from the banks. Mostly large farmers with revenue lands could access credit facilities from the banks. Farmers who did not get loans claimed that the

bank does not consider forest *patta* but revenue land for giving loans.

When researchers interacted with the bank manager, he said that they provide loans only to the large farmers who have the potential to repay the loan amount in due time. He emphasised that the bank has no problem in giving loans to forest-landholders as long as the borrowers keep repaying the loan, but the bank is not willing to take risks as the forest land title is a provisional title which may be taken away anytime.

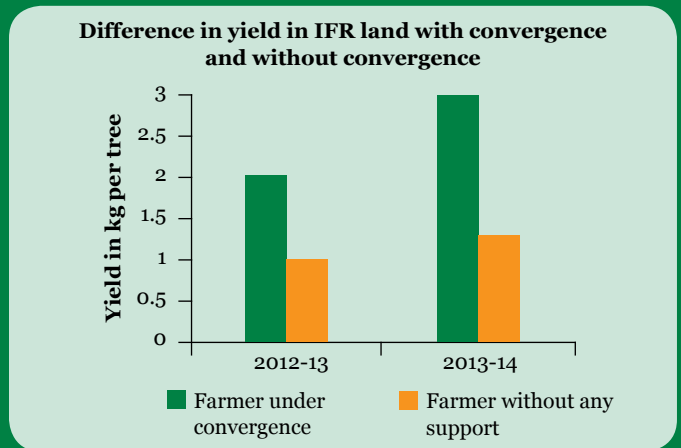
It is therefore imperative to scale up the financial inclusion process for greater outreach and to provide credit facilities to the IFR titleholders. The banks need to bring more clarity in their mind on the legality of the titleholders’ land rights where provisional title does not mean that it can be taken anytime.

Case Study

Arika Pagadalamma of Titukupaiguda village, Seethampeta mandal, Srikakulam district, is one amongst 45 IFR farmers who have cashew plantations on FRA land. Her land is under cashew plantation since 2000. In 2012, her land was brought under convergence with ITDA Cashew Rejuvenation Programme. She was given training on preparation of pits, spacing (distance between two trees) and pruning techniques, methods of using organic fertilisers and manure, and sustainable harvesting techniques by KVK, facilitated by a local NGO. In 2012–13, she had 107 trees on one acre of land, which yielded 223.55 kg cashew, which gave an income of Rs 13,413. In the following financial year the yield increased to 323 kg from the same number of trees, giving an income of Rs 22,610. The average yield per tree was 2.09 kg in the year 2012–13 and 3 kg in the year 2013–14. For other farmers, who did not receive any technical and hand holding support, the yield ranged from 1 kg to 1.3 kg.

It was seen that because of handholding support from a government institution and an NGO, there was an increase in income level.

Table: Difference in yield per tree in IFR land, with and without convergence



Conclusion

With the introduction of Forest Rights Act 2006, communities received the rights to their forests of which they were earlier deprived. Many guidelines, clarifications and circulars have been released by MOTAF to strengthen the implementation of the Act but there are serious gaps in comprehension of these documents by the State and lack of political will, which is undermining the true spirit of FRA. It has been observed that all the stakeholders need to proactively work towards strengthening the implementation of the Act and not be a deterrent. At the community level, handholding and constant monitoring is required at every successive stage for achieving the desired results. In order to improve their status, wholehearted efforts towards convergence with adequate financial allocations is essential. There are places where support has started trickling down at the community level but unless that support is accompanied by monitoring and handholding, the actual benefits will not reach the tribals. It is necessary that Government and locally based NGOs should replicate best practices in strengthening the process of convergence.

Recommendations

- The rights of the tribals that fall within the purview of FRA 2006 should be implemented at the earliest.
- There should be an increased awareness amongst the government agencies on convergence that can be taken up in IFR lands.
- Convergence activities should be locale-specific instead of being generic.
- Constant handholding support should be provided to IFR landholders.
- There should be convenient access to credit linkages for IFR titleholders.
- Awareness and capacity-building programmes should take place for the community to know and avail the government schemes. A monitoring mechanism should be in place to pursue post-title follow-up.
- The revenue department should take proactive measures to incorporate the IFR title records in revenue records as per the amended rule of 2012, Clause 12 (A) (g), which states *Post recognition of title, within three months the revenue and forest department should incorporate forest right so vested in the revenue records.*