

Down To Earth



Regional Media Briefing Workshop

THE FIGHT OVER A RIGHT

How forest communities are using the Community Forest Resource Rights (CFRR) provision in the FRA to reclaim their ownership rights

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The rush for CFRR

- In Chhattisgarh, Gram Sabhas pushed for CFRR as it is an important right, which not only gives them the land title, but also traditional rights to forest dwellers.
- We learnt this was the case from the beginning but unfortunately the state and Central governments never really focused on that.
- Of the state's villages recognized under CFRR, in the last 4 years, 3,646 villages received CFRR, as per government claim.





- The recorded forest area in the state is **59,772km²**, which is 44.21% of the geographical area.
- In a relatively new phenomena against states like Odisha and Gujarat, Chhattisgarh identified 12,500 of its 20,000 villages for granting CFRR.



- Chhattisgarh government, during these few years, has shown political will in regard to granting CFRR.
- UNDP is working towards it in close coordination with the government.
- Civil society groups, as observed, were instrumental in spreading awareness about CFRR.
- In August 2021, Chhattisgarh became the first state to recognise CFRR in an urban area in over 4,127 hectares of forests area. In a first, three nagar panchayats received CFRR.
- In 2021, five villages in a tiger reserve in the state—Udanti Sitanadi got CFRR. Later, this year, 10 more villages in protected area including another tiger reserve Achanakmar received the right.



Nagar Panchayats—Nagri, Tumbhara and Churiyara



Photograph
by
Purusottam
Singh
Thakur

In Nagri, the area within traditional boundary determined by the local residents initially was higher than what they received.

They got NOC from four neighbouring areas — Chhipli Gram Panchayat, Bilbhadar Gram Panchayat, Tumbahra Nagar Panchayat and Churiyara Nagar Panchayat.

They got three NOCs but met with resistance at Tumbahra for an area around a bridge, said Naresh Chhedaiha, president of CFMC. They struck a peaceful chord letting go of the area and excluded it when they claim CFRR.

The mapping for Nagri was done in a day. It was an expensive affair —and wards sabha had to hold about 47 meetings with authorities for that. Nagri had a mixed population of Adivasis, Other Backward Classes and Muslims.



Tumbhara and Churiyara



Women of Tumbahra nagar panchayat holding the CFRR. Photo: Purusottam Singh Thakur

- The residents of Tumbahra, who received CFRR for 2,746.722 hectares, attributed this victory to their unity.
- Only Gonds live in Tumbahra.
- In contrast to this, in Churiyara, the residents are not united.
- The mixed community of Kamars, Gonds, Muslims, Satnamis and Sahus are not on the same page on CFRR here. The nagar panchayat was granted 678.180 hectares under CFRR.
- Vishnu Bhaskar, a resident of Churiyara ward sabha complained about the lack of unity even among the Kamars and Gonds.



CFRR story—A contrast between Dhamtari's and Gariaband's core zone villages

- It was also observed during field visits in Chhattisgarh that only in the areas where civil society groups or independent activists are more active on ground the process of forming Van Prabandhan Samiti, also known as CFMC has been speeded up.
- Unlike Nagri, Tumbahra and Churiyara in Dhamtari, Karka, Jorataraai, Masulkhoi and Karhi villages that are located within Sitanadi Tiger Reserve are yet to form the CFMC.
- A living example of struggle for CFRR in core zone areas in Chhattisgarh was witnessed during field visits to Gariaband district.
- On June 20, hundreds of protestors from Nagesh, Koiba, Bamhaniyhola, Kurrubhata and 14 other villages in Chhattisgarh blocked a part of the National Highway 130C. They refused to go home till their demands for CFRR were heard.

They were protesting the delay by the state forest department in issuing the titles to the 18 villages located in Udanti Sitanadi Tiger Reserve's core zone. Their protest was inspired by the CFRR victory of Jorataraai, Masalkhoi and Karhi, CFRR villages in Dhamtari under the same tiger reserve in 2021.





Photograph of Karhi residents holding CFRR patta from June, 2022.





Photo of
Chakka
Jam,
June
20.

Of these 18 Gariaband villages, 12 have successfully applied for CFRR and the rest are in the process of applying. But none of them have received the titles yet.

Instead, they say they have become victims of police harassment for demanding the basic facilities or protesting against forest department officers.



The taking over of JFM committees and the Kamepur example

- In 2021, Kamepur village in Gariaband district got CFRR for forests that were under JFM.
- When the forest officials recently came to the village to fell the trees, the villagers did not allow they have CFRR.





KAMEPUR

- Stopped tree felling by forest department
- Studied their forest's biodiversity using forest department's data

Photo representing Kamepur's united fight for forest rights, taken by Richard Mahapatra.



- The forest in Kamepur under community control has 3, 02, 000 tendu and 2, 54, 288 sal trees.
- For a community that earns 70 per cent of its livelihood from forests, the CFRR is an economic freedom as well.
- JFMCs are promised a 20 per cent share in timber revenue, as per the National Forest Policy of 1988, while the rest goes to the forest department. However, activists say once CFRR is accepted, JFM system lapses.
- Residents of Tumbahra Nagar Panchayat, for instance, are demanding at least 80 per cent of the share.



Economic benefits

- While reporting in six villages in Dhamtari and Gariaband districts and three nagar panchayats, it was found that economic boom after receiving CFRR and getting much more control over forest and resources has not started for most.
- However, Chargaon Naya Basti in Dhamtari was found to be an exception.

CHARGAON VILLAGE, DHAMTARI

- Migration has drastically reduced here due to economic benefits after getting CFRR
- Success in improving quality of tendu leaves with better management practices, increasing income.





- The village is utilising forest rights to generate livelihood. It received CFRR in August, 2021 & has already streamlined growing and selling of forest produce.
- In a unique example, the village has set up a nursery that houses saplings to be planted in forest.
- Tumbahra and Chargaon are among many in Dhamtari prevented even a single fire incident post CFRR. Nagri—a modern NP and Tumbahra are still in the process of forming CFMC and couldn't quantify economic benefits. But they since nobody can enter forest without their permission and with the extent of conservation of resources taking place now, they are benefited.