



Press Release

A Public Hearing to audit two decades of the Forest Rights Act (FRA) implementation in the Konkan Division was held at the Y.B. Chavan Centre on 24th February 2026 by Shoshit Jan Andolan (a grassroot level federation of mass organisations working for the rights of tribal and other forest dwellers), the Yashwantrao Chavan Centre and the Peoples' Union for Civil Liberties, Maharashtra.

FRA aims to reverse historic injustice and protect traditional forest dwellers from eviction, even in urban landscapes. Thousands of tribals and forest dwelling families filed their claims under the FRA with the hope that they would be able to establish their rights and make their lives secure. The Hearing was organized to bring forth the difficulties and hurdles faced by them to establish their rights and to present these before the eminent Jury panel and the Authorities responsible for FRA implementation. It was hoped that solutions would be found to address the problems.

The Jury included Justice Abhay Thipsay (Retd. High Court Judge), Shri Vasant Purke (former Minister), Shri Laxmikant Deshmukh (Retd. IAS Officer and Author), Ms. Ujjwal Masdekar (former Professor, Karve School of Social Work), and Ms. Meena Menon (Journalist and Author).

Key officials from the Tribal Development Department including the Tribal Research and Training Institute (TRTI), the Revenue Department including the Konkan Divisional Commissioner, and the Forest Department were invited to attend. The officers from the Forest Department were conspicuous by their absence. Some officials including a Deputy Collector representing the Konkan region, and officials from the Tribal Department (Thane and Raigad) remained present through most of the Hearing.

Around forty impacted Adivasis and Other Traditional Forest Dwellers (OTFD) from Mumbai, Palghar, Thane, Raigad and Sindhudurg districts testified before the Panel. The testimonies centred around both Individual Forest Land Rights (IFRs) and Community Forest Rights i.e. rights relating to access to forest produce and management of forests.

- One of the most common experiences emerging from the testimonies was that people had submitted their claims (along with evidence) multiple times, but that the claims had gone missing ! The Revenue department (as the Sub Divisional Level Committee operates from the office of the Sub Divisional Officer) needs to be made accountable, and action needs to be taken against the errant officers.

- In cases where claims were not lost, there has been an inordinate delay in deciding both on claims and appeals, stretching to as many as 15 years !

- Many claims have been rejected despite having concrete documentary evidence.

- Even where claims have been approved, the area of land approved is a fraction of the area claimed. Thus these claims are actually “partially rejected” claims. Thus the data published by the government that 51.5% of claims have been approved, gives only a partial picture.
- When certain forest areas are acquired for development projects people staying therein are evicted even before their claims have been decided upon, leaving them completely without any resources for survival. There have also been cases of illegal eviction of people even after their rights have been recognized .
- Under the FRA the Gram Sabha is a central actor in the recognition of rights process. But the Authorities have by and large disregarded the Gram Sabha in the entire process, including taking its consent prior to diversion of forest land for projects.
- In some areas, without any consultation with Gram Sabhas, the process or recognition of rights in the entire district has been contracted out to a private Non-government body by the District Collector and Tribal Department who has entered into an MOU, in complete violation of FRA.
- One blatant violation is that except for a few exceptions, FRA is just not being implemented in urban areas .
- In Raigad district, the recognition of rights over Dali land has been fraught with errors and irregularities. In 2011 the authorities erroneously rejected 90% of the claims. Following a major agitation, the State Level Monitoring Committee issued directions to review the claims. Even so the District Collector granted rights not as per the provisions of law. Thereafter, on the intervention of the Hon’ble Governor, the Konkan Commissioner was directed to rectify the decision. But till date the revised certificates have not been issued.

Overall, the Forest department exercises undue influence in the implementation process. Most officials misinterpret the law. Their deliberate lethargy and apathy ensures that rights are not recognized.

In Maharashtra, over the past 18 years a total of 1.48 lakh claims have been approved. However, when one considers that 3.99 lakh claims have been filed, the approval rate works out to be only 37.1%. The rejection of claims in Raigad is as high as 64%. The rejection of OTFD claims in the Konkan region is over 90%. When claims are approved, the area of approved land ranges from 0.2 to 0.59 hectares, thus making the plot economically non-viable.

The Jury Panel gave full attention to each of the depositions. In some cases they offered assistance in following up the matter with the higher authorities and gave legal advice to secure justice. The Panel will soon come out with a Report and Recommendations that will be submitted to the Government authorities.

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