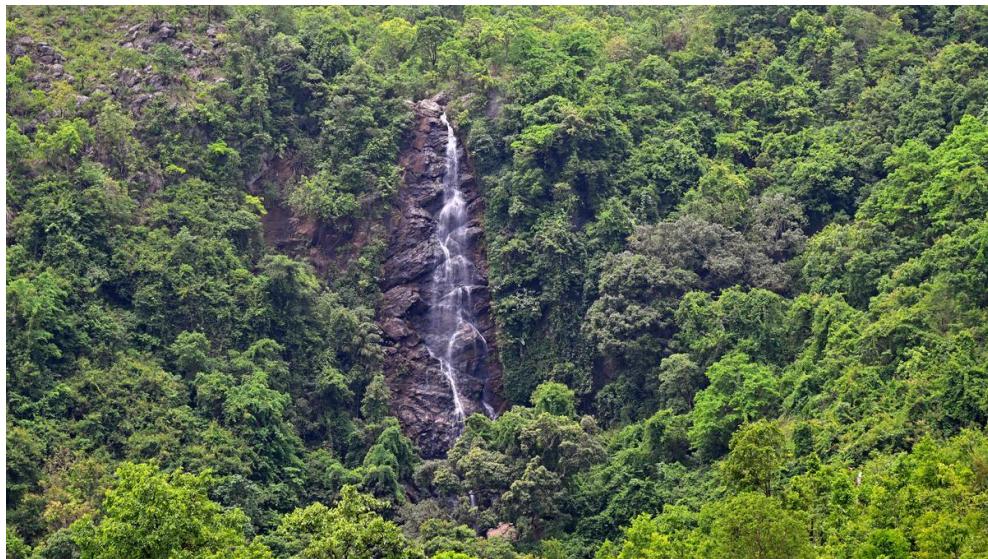


Strengthening Forest Rights Implementation: The Rise of FRA Cells under DAJGUA

Introduction

For the first time since the enactment of the Forest Rights Act (FRA) in 2006, the **Union government has begun directly funding mechanisms** to facilitate its implementation. This marks a shift in policy where the Centre now plays a more active role in accelerating forest rights recognition for Scheduled Tribes and Other Traditional Forest Dwellers (OTFDs).



Background: The Forest Rights Act, 2006

- The FRA empowers Gram Sabhas to initiate and manage forest rights claims.
- Implementation was traditionally left to State and Union Territory (UT) governments through statutory bodies:
 - **Forest Rights Committees (FRCs)**
 - **Sub-Divisional Level Committees (SDLCs)**
 - **District Level Committees (DLCs)**
 - **State Monitoring Committees**

New Initiative: Dharti Aba Janjatiya Gram Utkarsh Abhiyaan (DAJGUA)

- Launched: **October 2024** by the Ministry of Tribal Affairs.
- Objective: **Convergent tribal development** through 25 interventions of 17 ministries.
- Includes creation of **FRA cells at district and state levels** to:
 - Assist claimants in documentation and paperwork.
 - Help Gram Sabhas compile and digitize claim files.
 - Facilitate conversion of forest villages into revenue villages.
 - Expedite pending claims, especially post-DLC approvals.

Authority & Location:

- Located in **Tahsildar/Sub-Division/Collector offices** within **Tribal Sub-Plan areas**.

- Headed by ADM or Sub-Collector at respective levels.

Status of Implementation

- 324 district-level FRA cells** sanctioned across **18 States/UTs**.
- 17 State-level FRA cells** approved.
- Funding:** ₹8.67 lakh/district FRA cell and ₹25.85 lakh/State FRA cell from Central grants.
- Top states with approved FRA cells:**
 - Madhya Pradesh (55)
 - Chhattisgarh (30)
 - Telangana (29)
 - Maharashtra (26)
 - Assam (25)
 - Jharkhand (24)

Concerns Raised

- Parallel Mechanism?** Activists argue FRA cells function outside the statutory FRA structure, potentially leading to **duplication and confusion**.
- Overlapping Roles:** Many functions of these cells (e.g., helping with claims documentation) already fall under existing statutory committees.
- Structural Issues Persist:**
 - Infrequent meetings** of SDLCs/DLCs.
 - Delays by Forest Departments** post-approval.
 - Need for deeper reforms rather than new administrative layers.

Significant Departure from Past Policy

- Previously, the Centre only:
 - Issued advisories.
 - Funded training programs.
 - Collected data from States.
- Now, with DAJGUA, **active structural support** is provided, changing the **Centre-State dynamic** on FRA.

Way Ahead

- Clear delineation of roles** between statutory bodies and FRA cells to avoid overlap.
- Capacity building of statutory committees** to ensure regular meetings and timely decisions.
- Accountability mechanisms** for FRA cells to ensure they remain support units, not decision-makers.
- Independent evaluations** to assess effectiveness and community response.
- Greater involvement of tribal communities** in planning and monitoring FRA implementation.

Conclusion

The Union government's move to establish FRA cells under DAJGUA represents a notable shift towards proactive support for forest rights implementation. While it aims to reduce pendency and assist claimants, its success hinges on **harmonizing roles, strengthening statutory committees, and ensuring transparency**. For real impact, these cells must serve as enablers—not substitutes—for the democratic and decentralized ethos of the Forest Rights Act.