

1. Taking up improved agricultural practices on lands granted under FRA is a big challenge

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Abstract

The Scheduled Tribes and Other Traditional Forest Dwellers Act specifies a package of rights for a claimant family that has customarily used forestry patches for good use and forest-dependent community across a certain area recognised as forests in government records till now. The Act was passed by Parliament in December 2006 and came into force from 2nd January 2007. In general, the implementation of the Forest Right Act in Odisha over the years shows that, when compared to the other two provisions, such as Community Forestry Rights (CFR) and Habitat Rights, of particularly vulnerable tribal groups (PVTG), priority attention was given to settling individual forest rights (IFR). The paper is the result of an October and November 2016 study on IFR beneficiaries, particularly single-headed tribal homes in 6 villages, which were sampled using a convenient and deliberate sampling strategy, under the two Gram Panchayats of Potangi block in Koraput District. The research tried to explore and the challenges and concerns of land usage and livelihood of sample populations belonging to the Kondh, Gadaba, and Paraja ethnic groups. The study highlighted the earlier use of land and the current use of land in the IFR lands, the changes in the household economy, development intervention, and the shortcomings, concerns, and problems to achieve the objectives of the FRA. The report suggests that there should be unique programmes for the development of IFR lands to support specific tribal families in meeting their lives and economic goals.

Key Words: FRA, IFR, CFR, PVTG, Individual Forest Rights, Land Act



Introduction

Over the years, since the implementation of FRA has been expedited in Odisha, in general, it is observed that priority attention has been provided to the settlement of Individual Forest Rights (IFR) compared to the two other provisions such as Community Forest Rights (CFR) and Habitat Rights of Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups (PVTG). Within the framework of IFR, it is observed that the claim settlements have by and large gone in favour of the tribal communities as compared to similar provisions for Other Traditional Forest Dwellers (OTFDs). It seems that larger attention has been provided to IFR in order to help individual families in going for better and sustainable land-use practices with a sense of ownership and thereby accelerate economic development at the household level. Further, as a later course of action, the State Government and the Central Government have been expediting community-oriented as well as beneficiary-oriented welfare and entitlement schemes and programs in the larger interest of the people who have accessed their entitlements under FRA. Furthering the State's commitment to the betterment of the FRA beneficiaries, the convergence of schemes and programs has been prioritized. In the context of the IFR claimants, NREGA, NRLM, Watershed development programs have been considered important for better and productive land use, enhancement of yield, micro-enterprise, and market access, etc. Land being the most important asset for the tribal people, public investments on the inalienable land allocated to the FRA beneficiaries is very meaningful in the context of their food security, economic empowerment, and development.

The study was carried out in six villages under two Gram Panchayats of Pottangi Block in Koraput district. The percentage of tribal population in the district is 50.56%, reveals the District Primary Census Abstract, 2011 (Census, 2011). Among the category of workers in the district, 29.88% are cultivators, 41.91% are agricultural labourers, 2.08% are workers in household industries and 26.13% belong to other categories. The Pottangi block is thickly populated with tribal communities that figure out to 66.63% of the total population of the Block. The major tribal inhabitants include ethnic groups like Kondh, Paraja, and Gadaba.

The findings of this paper have been the output of fieldwork conducted in October and November 2016. For purpose of the study two Gram Panchayats namely Kotia and Chandaka under Pottangi Block of Koraput district were selected. Chandaka Gram Panchayat is located relatively in the mainstream while Kotia Gram Panchayat is remotely located. The geographical location of the two

Gram Panchayats concerning the block headquarters was felt ideal for sake of comparison of the developments after the settlement of a claim for Individual Forest Rights (IFR) under the provisions of the Forest Rights Act (FRA). In terms of the ethnic composition of the population covered the villages under Kotia Gram Panchayat is predominantly inhabited by Kondhs, the villages under Chandaka Gram Panchayat are a mix of Gadaba and Paroja communities, with Gadaba assuming higher in number. The difference in the ethnic group composition also provided another layer for comparison.

The study covered single-headed households who have been provided with IFR patta. Convenient and purposive sampling methods were followed to decide the cases for study. The cases have been selected from the list of beneficiaries who have been granted IFR pattas in different villages under the Gram Panchayats covered. It has been attempted to examine their comfort in terms of legally owning forest land which they had been cultivating for years but had no tenurial rights, the independence in options that they have for land-use changes, the changes in the income generation patterns from such lands, their access to entitlements under other government schemes, and above all the new challenges that have come up with the granting of IFR. The observation is based on 20 single-headed households distributed in two villages of Kotia Gram Panchayat and four villages under the Chandaka Gram Panchayat. A semi-structured schedule and interview method were employed in eliciting the information. The sample includes 9 single-headed female households and 11 single-headed male households.

The villages where the study has been undertaken are dominated by two ethnic communities; the Kondh and Gadaba. The villages under Kotia Gram Panchayat are dominated by the Kondh community while in Chandaka Gram Panchayat the Gadaba are numerous. While the Kondh, a Dravidian tribe, speak Kuvi, the Gadaba speaks Mundari or Kolarian language. The Kondh are divided into two linguistic groups; Kui and Kuvi. Kuvi is spoken mainly in the Koraput district (Daspatnaik, 2004). According to Thurston and Rangachari, the Gadabas are primitive agriculturists, coolies, and hunters (Padhi, 2011). Communal life with strong ties and solidarity among the community members is one of the core salient features of both Kondh and Gadaba. Traditionally they have set their settlements on high elevations and hillside forest patches with a preference for streamside locations in the vicinity of hills. Both Kondh and Gadaba worship Mother Earth Goddess and in every village a heap of stones represent the seat of the goddess.

Livelihoods, Agriculture, and Land use by the Ethnic Communities

Agriculture is the mainstay of the Kondh and Gadaba households inhabiting the villages. Agriculture is mainly subsistence-based. The villages are located relatively at a higher elevation and hence the lands under cultivation are located at different slope levels. In consideration of the condition and location of lands, the cropping is organized. Agriculture is by and large rain-fed and hence Kharif is the main agriculture season. There are three categories of land available in the village; rain-fed upland, semi irrigated foothill or valley lands and irrigated or waterlogged low lands. However, low land holding, poor land quality, and decreasing productivity cumulatively impact the food security of the community. On average the households in the villages have food security for six to nine months. For ages, the communities have been cultivating the hill slopes under the system of shifting cultivation. At one point in time, the land to man ratio in the area under shifting cultivation was favourable for the communities and the production was optimum. However, due to the growing population, the interval between two successive cropping cycles in the shifting cultivation was reduced to one to two years and along with that the production and yield also reduced. There came a time when the slashing and burning as it used to be under shifting cultivation were out of place and the plots became like permanent plots for cultivation. In these plots, the community members grow varieties of upland crops like millets (Ragi, little millet, pearl millet, maize), pulses (black gram, pigeon pea, and cowpea), spices (chilli, ginger), tubers (yam, cassava, and sweet potato), oilseeds (niger, mustard, castor) and some vegetables. In some places, people also used to cultivate paddy during the Kharif season. Almost all households in the villages possess one or more plots in the nearby hill and have been cultivating in such lands for years together. However, the community members do not have titles on said lands as they lie on higher slopes for which the settlement process has never been carried on.

The gentle slopes or plain lands on the foothills surrounding the village are the areas where paddy, maize, niger, spices, and vegetables are cultivated. Some patches in this zone have got some provision for irrigation from perennial streams flowing through or by the villages. Such patches where critical irrigation facility is available are mainly reserved for vegetable cultivation that provides cash income to the cultivator family. The High Altitude Research Station (an initiative of OUAT) located at Pottangi is also helping the farmers with the package of practices for improved agriculture, more particularly the intercropping, to maximize production from the unit area.

The low lands are mainly cultivated with paddy. Low lands are not to be confused with irrigated lands. However, even at the stream side low lands paddy cultivation is taken up twice i.e in Kharif and Rabi season. In the summer season, paddy usually fails. Some farmers, therefore, have been taking up vegetable cultivation on such lands during the rabi season using potable water from the streams for critical irrigation to the crops. However, vegetable cultivation on the stream banks in dry seasons is taken up by such households who have a good labour force at the household level.

Some of the lands on high slopes were permanently abandoned because of severe soil erosion and low productivity resulting from continuous cultivation. Such lands are gradually being converted under plantations of fruit-bearing trees; important among them being mango and cashew nut. With the plantations, economic crops like ginger and niger are also taken up. Usually, the very poor families in the village continue cultivating the hill slopes immaterial of choice of crops – for cash or subsistence.

Season wise cropping pattern in respect of types of land

Season	Crops Cultivated with Different Degree of Water Availability		
	Rain fed	Semi Irrigated	Irrigated
Kharif	Paddy, Raggi, Suan, Kandula, Biri, Kangu,	Ginger, Vegetables, Paddy	Paddy
Rabi	-	Vegetables	Vegetables
Summer	-	Vegetables	Paddy

Source: Primary survey

Supplementary Livelihoods

Non Timber Forest Produce (NTFP)

NTFPs to some extent supplement their income from other sources. Decades ago the contribution of NTFPs to household economy was appreciable. Status, situation and availability of non-timber forest produce as a supplementary livelihoods option has undergone changes over time. About two decades ago the people were able to gather good lot of forest produces for both domestic consumption and market requirements. The supply of NTFPs from the local forests reduced dramatically due to massive exploitation and indiscriminate felling by the local communities. However, there is still good availability of certain NTFPs especially the food source biodiversity that are collected for domestic

consumption. The tubers in particular are still available in plenty which are harvested by the very poor Kondh and Gadaba families. Adding to that the scrubby forests around also provides many seasonal leafy vegetables, bamboo shoots, buds, flowers, berries, fruits, mushrooms, etc. Part of the gathered forest produce is sold in the weekly market of Pukali and Kunduli and a larger part is consumed at domestic level.

Labour force participation and wage earning

Labour force participation and wage earning is a major supplementary income apart from agriculture and NTFP. Their labour force participation is of two types – wage earning and cooperative labour. For the poorest sections wage earning is the second best option to agriculture for attaining food security for the whole year. The wage earning is again of two types – wages as they get working under construction contractors, government works, MGNREGS etc. and the wage earning from agricultural work. On a preference side some community members prefer wage earning from agricultural work though the amount they get is almost half of that what they get from government work such as MGNREGS.

However, such a preference is attributed to the timeliness in payment terms. By participating in agricultural work they get their wage at end of the day while in other cases the worker has to wait for a long time till the bills are cleared and wages disbursed. At a closer look, it provides to understand that participation as agriculture wage earners is a round the year activity, available at door steps, hassle free payment on time although less compared to formal systems, considered one of the best options for very poor families, and above all utilizes the traditional skills in which the people are very adept. On the other hand the formal wage earning options like participation in development works and MGNREGS fetch them good income but after a long waiting period. In the formal wage earning options, the families who can wait for a while for wage usually participate in higher number. Thus wage earning options available and the preferences taken depends upon individual ability, work availability and timeliness of wage disbursement.

Cooperative labour system

Traditionally the community members make use of cooperative labour system. Irrespective of the ethnic identity the cooperative labour system operates at the village level. In the system for any work requiring many labourers especially the agricultural work, house construction, land development of

any household they seek the cooperative labour for completion of the work. In turn, the person who availed the cooperative labour in the village contributes labour when the other households need it. Cooperative labour system has undergone no change over the years and still is very well-exhibited in agriculture work. In distant past when all the households were engaged in shifting cultivation, the cooperative labour system was mainly used in slashing, debushing, clearing forests to enable cultivation there. Now there is no shifting cultivation anymore and hence the cooperative labour use is seen in field preparation, hoeing, transplantation, weeding and reaping type of agricultural work. The continuation of cooperative labour system in the village stands testimony to the solidarity within the community.

In cooperative labour system the participants are paid only a token amount in the range of Rs. 20/- to Rs. 25/-. The household who sought cooperative labour provides a lunch to the participants at the site of work. The villagers attach considerable priority to such cooperative work so that the agricultural operations in all the cultivable fields of the village can be completed on time and turn basis.

Findings and Observations

As was envisaged while promulgating the Forest Rights Act tenurial security through granting of Individual Forest Rights to the legitimate claimants have brought about visible changes in the land use and livelihoods options of the communities. Further, the State Government in Odisha has also accorded high priority on land development and diversification in agriculture so as to increase the standard of living of the FRA beneficiaries through better land use and assured production from agriculture. The MGNREGS and the NRLM are two major programs, apart from rural housing, that are seriously expedited for betterment in livelihoods and economy of the FRA beneficiaries. In the study villages many beneficiaries have been benefited through the schemes and programs. However, a general observation is that the FRA beneficiaries who have more manpower at family level have been able to bank on the schemes and programs in a much better and meaningful manner as compared to the single headed households. The observations in this paper are based on assessing the status of single headed households, both men and women, who have been granted IFR under FRA. It has been tried to understand how the single headed households have been utilizing the lands in absence of any other helping hand at the family level, and the extent to which they have been able to access other entitlements under different schemes and programs. It also highlights the changes in the previous land use and current land use, the problems and emerging issues. The present analysis is based on

interviews and schedule survey on twenty single headed households. Altogether an extent of 46.90 acres of lands has been granted to them under IFR of FRA, making an average of 2.35 acres per household. Out of the lands only 17.40 acres i.e. 37% of land are located by streams or field channels and hence have some facilities for critical irrigation especially during Rabi season. The remaining land to the extent of 29.50 acres i.e. 63% has no irrigation facility. In the two villages under Kotia Gram Panchayat, out of 12 single headed household beneficiaries 10 have taken up land development works, over one acre of each beneficiary, through MGNREGS. In Chandaka Gram Panchayat, out of 8 single headed household beneficiaries 4 households have utilized the MGNREGS for land development and field channel construction on one acre of land each. Thus, out of the total 46.90 acres of land, land development has been taken up only on 14 acres i.e. about 30% of land.

It was understood from interviewing the beneficiaries that although there is provision under MGNREGS for land development still 30% i.e. 6 beneficiaries have not accessed the provision because of old age and lack of manpower at family level. The ones who have undertaken land development works have done it over about 80 to 120 days of manual work but in consideration to the work output they have qualified for about 40 to 60 days of full wages as entitled under MGNREGS. It is further observed that those families have been able to take up land development, especially land leveling works on moderate slopes as otherwise it is quite a difficult job to cut and level land with higher slopes and convert them into terraces. In the land development works they have earned total wages in the range of Rs. 7,000/- to Rs. 12,000/- (rounded up figures) at the rate of Rs. 174/- as daily wages. The other beneficiaries, who have not accessed the MGNREGS opportunities because of their old age and inability to do hard work also find it difficult to make use of community level cooperative system for land development. On one hand they are not able to pay for the nominal wages as prevailing under cooperative labour system and on the other hand they cannot contribute labour, when their turn comes, in order to compensate the labour input they availed. The changes in land use have thus been dependent on three factors land condition, labour input for land development and irrigation. In the lands which have not been developed and are unirrigated are cultivated in the traditional fashion. Because of cultivation on same patch of land year after year without fallowing the lands to regain fertility the productivity of such lands is very low. The lands also do not favour multiple cropping, as was being done under shifting cultivation system, any more. In the two villages under Kotia GP, such lands are only cultivated in Kharif with ragi, little millets, foxtail mellet, horsegram,

black gram as only crops. After the harvest the lands are not cultivated any further and remain open for grazing. In other words the families have been cultivating only once in a year. However, in the four villages under Chandaka GP, the lands have been found much degraded and hence only the ragi and little millet are grown there during Kharif only. The average income from the lands is very low. The average family income from one acre of such lands in villages of Kotia Gram Panchayat ranges between Rs. 3900/- to Rs. 4500/- only, whereas in the villages under Chandaka GP it is even lower and ranges between Rs. 2500/- to Rs. 3500/- only. The single headed households also finds the millet cropping possible on their part as it is relatively easier as agricultural practice that involves sowing and reaping only.

On the other hand, there is visible change in crop selection, cropping pattern as well as yield from the lands that have been developed. In both Kotia and Chandaka GPs, the single headed households who have undertaken land development have introduced new crop varieties and some have almost replaced the traditional crops with high yielding varieties. The lands which have some scope for critical irrigation have been taking up two crops in a year. In addition to some of the traditional varieties like ragi, foxtail millet, horse gram, black gram, etc. beans, rajma beans are being cultivated in the kharif season and in the Rabi season vegetables like chilli, tomato, brinjal, etc are cultivated. If irrigation facility is available then cauliflower and cabbages are also cultivated. According to estimates by the beneficiaries, the production from developed land have increased by about 30-35% and the income from such lands have increased by about 25-30% per acre. The beneficiaries are of opinion that if irrigation facilities are created along with land development it is possible that their income would increase by 50% and comparing the situation with families having adequate able manpower to cultivate the lands they believe that the income may be more than double from unit area of land. In the above context, the recipients indicated that the market is the main factor determining the household income increase. The individual households face the problem of the use of labour. They believe that they need to take livelihood crops and cash crops together to increase the household revenue. They realise from their experience that growing cash crops require more work for intercultural operations and for the marketing of farms. Therefore, they feel that if they do not have the money to use labour for land development and consequent production practises they cannot raise their income level. They have the marketing problem as well.

Issues and Concerns

Many tribal families have certainly been benefited by granting IFR under FRA. They have tenure security over the land they have used for generations. It has made people happy, but half-hearted, because many systemic problems still have to be dealt with.

Land Demarcation: The most important and pervasive problem is land demarcation. The land demarcation was only carried out for Chandaka Gram Panchayat study homes out of the 20 cases studied. Land demarcation of 12 households was not carried out under Kotia Gram Panchayat. The households know only the extent of the land they receive from the patta. Homes in Kotia therefore assume that rights have been conferred on the parcels of land they use since generations and have filed claims under the FRA. The Kotia GP beneficiaries believe that the relative accessibility of the Chandaka GP benefits from land demarcation. A chain of other problems relates to land demarcation. Since the recipients cannot develop their assets without land demarcation, are unable to apply to beneficiary-orientated programmes under farming and gardening schemes, are unable to make decisions on future land utilisation options, and especially do not know properly whether they are using their own land. Such a doubt is not unfounded as local citizens know the cases where investments have been made in land found by patta to be owned by others.

Land Development: In practice, the work order is assigned to the head of the family, who undertakes land development activities on his land, for land development under MGNREGS. Based on technical assessment by MGNREGS functionaries the approx. volume of work to be done and the number of mandates that may be required will be developed. On this basis the IFR recipients are responsible for the work and wages payable. However, if the household cannot work, it cannot demand MGNREGS land-building work. Thus, land development aspirations are still not fulfilled. In this connection, the MGNREGS implementing authorities must take into consideration incorporating the FRA land of single households in the common shelf of projects for land development so that other job-seekers can work on such land and earn their income. The single households would benefit, and they would fulfil their aspirations to improve their productivity and their income.

Integrated Management of Natural Resources (INRM) Planning: A number of programmes and programmes operate on village level, including particular beneficiaries-oriented programmes. The programmes are implemented in the village and Panchayat on the basis of microplans and

perspectives. These perspectives open the way for a convergence plan to be drawn up. However, it is realized that there is a misplaced priority on including the land development plans of the aged single headed households. It is expected that diversity in planning in an INRM perspective considering and envisaging short term and long term impact by reinforcing of resources can cover the land and land use issues of the single headed households. The farming community understands the criticality of resource linkages but is not able to properly reflect it in their plans (Habitation plan, *Pallisabha* plan, *Gramsabha* plan). Hence, preparation of an integrated plan at habitation or landscape level remains an issue and also a challenge. To meet the challenge better and mitigate the issues there is need of a holistic and inclusive time series perspective plan envisaging specific impacts on the farming system irrespective of the land ownership.

Conclusion

It is a major problem to take up improved agricultural techniques on land that has degraded under the IFR of FRA because these methods go against traditional farming. Due to being unable to cultivate the land due to no able manpower, these households, in particular, are at risk. Much of the land is uncultivated or under cultivated, or if it is cultivated, yields are disappointing. As communities start to see crop farming as an uneconomic choice, traditional crops, mainly planted on ridge tops, are going away. Therefore, in order to increase the economy of the individual homes, additional procedures and planning perspectives need to be in place following the farming system method. The administration is interested in IFR-granted land development standards. The district administration should establish development indicators and boundaries for routine inspection, and via that, streamline communication within departments to identify and respond to new developments quickly to give good coverage and benefit to those individuals who are older and disabled and who are designated as FRA beneficiaries, special plans must be developed and implemented.

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