

## **FOREST RIGHTS ACT: ENVIRONMENT**

**NEWS:** In forest rights push, Centre sanctions over 300 FRA cells to 'facilitate' implementation

### **WHAT'S IN THE NEWS?**

The Ministry of Tribal Affairs has set up FRA Cells under the Dharti Aba Janjatiya Gram Utkarsh Abhiyaan to expedite implementation of the Forest Rights Act, 2006, particularly in areas with high pendency of claims. However, concerns are raised about their lack of legal backing and potential overlap with statutory bodies like SDLCs and DLCs.

#### **Context**

- The Union Ministry of Tribal Affairs has recently sanctioned the creation of **324 district-level** and **17 state-level FRA cells** to aid in the implementation of the **Forest Rights Act (FRA), 2006**.
- These cells are being set up under the **Dharti Aba Janjatiya Gram Utkarsh Abhiyaan (DAJGUA)**.

#### **What Are FRA Cells?**

- FRA Cells are **administrative units** meant to facilitate the implementation of the **Forest Rights Act (FRA), 2006**.
- They are **not a statutory provision** under the FRA itself, but created under an **administrative scheme** initiated by the Ministry of Tribal Affairs.
- These cells are designed to work **at the state and district levels**, particularly in areas with high pendency of claims.

#### **Objectives and Functions of FRA Cells**

- **Facilitate the FRA implementation process** where a large number of land claims remain unresolved.
- Provide **technical and logistical support** to claimants and **Gram Sabhas** for:
  - Preparing claim documents.
  - Managing and verifying data records.
  - Assisting in understanding legal procedures.
- Aim to **expedite the disposal of claims**, especially those stuck even after approval by **District Level Committees (DLCs)**.
- They will help in **capacity building**, training officials and Gram Sabha representatives.
- These FRA cells are meant to **support** but **not interfere with statutory decision-making bodies** such as:
  - Gram Sabhas

- Sub-Divisional Level Committees (SDLCs)
- District Level Committees (DLCs)
- State government departments

### Current Status of FRA Claim Pendency

- Of the **51.11 lakh FRA claims** filed across **21 states/UTs**, **14.45% remain pending**.
- **States with least pendency:** Chhattisgarh, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Jharkhand.
- **States with high pendency:**
  - Assam: Over **60%** of claims pending.
  - Telangana: Around **50.27%** of claims pending.
- **Most FRA cells sanctioned** in: Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Telangana, Maharashtra, Assam, and Jharkhand.

### About the Forest Rights Act (FRA), 2006

- Officially titled the *Scheduled Tribes and Other Traditional Forest Dwellers (Recognition of Forest Rights) Act, 2006*.
- Aims to **recognize and vest forest rights** in forest-dwelling Scheduled Tribes (STs) and Other Traditional Forest Dwellers (OTFDs).
- Ensures **legal rights over forest land and resources**, enabling community management and biodiversity conservation.
- Potentially affects **150 million forest-dwelling people**, **40 million hectares** of land, and nearly **1,70,000 forest villages**.

### Concerns and Criticisms

- **Parallel Bureaucracy Risk:** FRA cells may create **overlapping roles and blurred accountability**, as they exist outside the statutory FRA structure.
- **No Legal Authority:** Unlike SDLCs and DLCs which are constituted under the FRA law, these administrative FRA cells have **no legal standing**.
- **Duplication of Work:** May result in **administrative inefficiencies**, confusion over responsibility, and **conflicts with existing committees**.
- Critics warn that this could **dilute community rights**, which are central to the FRA's spirit.

### Conclusion

- While the creation of FRA cells can help speed up claim processing and increase awareness, their role must be **clearly defined** and **legally harmonized** with the statutory mechanisms of the FRA.

- Any reform should aim to **empower tribal communities**, not substitute or weaken the **Gram Sabha-centric decision-making model** embedded in the Forest Rights Act.

Source: : <https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/in-forest-rights-push-centre-sanctions-over-300-fra-cells-to-facilitate-implementation/article69682679.ece>