



Process and Lessons Learnt in Facilitating the Community Forest Resource claims in Himachal Pradesh supported by Foundation for Ecological Security

Context

Government policy formulation and implementation in the federal structure of the Country is not a smooth task and the same was seen happening with the acceptance and implementation of Forest Rights Act in the state of Himachal Pradesh. The context of tribal forest dwellers and other forest dwellers is distinguished in the Act for recognition of claims but the State Government took a stand that all rights have been settled long ago and some token work was initiated in the tribal districts leaving the context of other forest dwellers untouched. Himalaya Niti Abhiyan took the onus along with Environics Trust to challenge this understanding and moved ahead to began consultations with the communities, government and experts to take the route or process to embed the very understanding of the Act in letter and spirit. One of the important conscious decisions of the team was that Community Forest Rights will be taken up in the process which makes communities understand the importance and collective assessment of their dependence on resources surrounding them. It is nearly a year that the process has moved deep into the communities in 6 districts and slowly the Government is also beginning to accept lack of capacity building of officials, understanding of the Act and how they are legally bound to implement the Act. This has resulted in engagement with the Government at all the tiers of local self governance.

Process & Learnings

It has been an important phase in terms of juxtaposing Government's development paradigm and risks to communities dependent on resources which could be sacrificed and for those who have already lost once should take this as an outstanding chance to regain some grounds.

The step wise process is as follows;

1. **Selection of area (In the first step the selection process of the area for the implementation of the project) in the selection process following areas were selected for undertaking activities:**
 1. Displaced communities of Bhakhra Dam
 2. Communities living inside and dependent on National Park and Sanctuaries area
 3. Communities living inside the forest sanctuaries
 4. Tribal communities – Gujjar and Gaddi's
 5. Pastoral communities other than Gaddi and Gujjars
 6. Communities highly dependent on forest Resources – DPF & PF
2. **Selection of field facilitators:**

After the selection of the area the team selection was the major task for which the robust selection process has been carried out and selected a team for the implementation of the project
3. **Interaction with State Government**
 - Meeting with Chief Minister on FRA implementation and difficulties communities are facing at village level
 - Meeting with Forest Minister and Panchayati Raj Minister to speed up the process of FRA Implementation

4. Interaction with State Administration

- Meeting with Chief Secretary to speed up the process of FRA implementation – Issue of letter for the SLMC meeting and setting of agenda of SLMC
- Meeting with Director Tribal Department
- Meeting with Secretary Forest, Revenue and Paanchayati Raj

5. Interaction at DLC, SDLC Level (Orientation workshops)

- Orientation workshops of District Administration –DLC members – Kangra, Kullu , Chamba, Sirmour,
- Orientation workshops of SDLC – Baijnath, Kangra, Chowari, Chamba, Banjar

6. Training program at Development Block Level

- Orientation workshops
 - Panchayat Secretaries of Jhanduta, Sinhunta, Chowari, Chamba,
 - Forest Guard and Patwari's – Baijnath, Bhawarna, Kangra, Sinhunta forest sub divisions
 - PI and BDO's of Kangra, Jhndaduta, Chamba, Baijnath, Banjar
 - DFO & RO of Kangra, Chamba, Baijnath, Palampur & Banjar

7. Facilitation at Gram Sabha level for the formation of FRC's

- Total habitation covered in the FRC – 915

8. Process at field level on FRA implementation (FRC's and Gram Sabha's members)

- Orientation workshops on filing the claims – Form B and Form C
- Collection of Supportive documents
- Training on the developing forest maps to file the community claims
- Filing of claims

9. Dialogue with SDLC by FRC on Claim process

- The process of filing the claims begins with the filling of claims form A, B, C as per the claimants' category.

10. Approval of FRA Claim forms by SDLC: (Claim Form A, B, C forms for the filing of claims by the communities)

- Forms category
 - For Individual claims – Form A
 - For Community claims – Form B
 - Claims on Management and conservation – Form C

11. Collection of the supporting documents from the SDLC and allied departments

- Supplementary documents and Maps
- Copy of Waz-Bul-Arz
- Forest working plan
- Compartment history of Forest
- Revenue settlement
- Jamabandi
- Map of forest to be claim under any category

12. Identification of area to be claimed for different use – Forest Map Village wise

- Training and facilitation process for the formation of FRC's and record keeping
- Dialogue establishment with SLMC, DLC, SDLC and their training on the FRA implementation process
- Training of the Panchayat representatives, Panchayat secretaries, Revenue department and Forest department field staff and official regarding the implementation of the Forest Right Act 2006 and exclusive role of the departments
- Collection of the supporting documents for the filing of claims
- Training of filing the CFR to the FRC's and Gram Sabha members
- 150 habitation filed their CFR claims and rest are in pipeline and will be filed very soon

In continuation of the project activities following activities required at field level

- Follow up of the CFR filed claims with SDLC and DLC till the recognition of community claims
- Facilitating remaining FRC's and Gram Sabha for filing of claims
- Facilitation for the joint verification process for the rest of the FRC's
- Follow up activities till the community claims recognized by the SDLC and finally recorded by the DLC
- Initiate the process of developing the forest working plan
- Initiate the process of conservation and management of CFR by the communities / FRC's / Gram Sabha
- Regional level federation for the conservation and management of CFR for better management and use of the CFR.
- Identification of the pastoral communities and facilitate them for the CFR claims and induction in the process of Forest working plan, forest resources conservation and management.
- Regional level workshops for the preparation of Forest working plans and guidelines for the conservation and management of forest resources
- State level workshop to involve the state government in the process of conservation and management of forest resources.
- Workshop at regional level with forest department and SDLC on conservation and management guidelines.
- Documentation of forest management and conservation practices in the western Himalayan region for the learning and applicability of the practices at field level
- Establish a GIS system based on the MIS already developed.

For more detailed information and collaborations contact

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