

(For the media)

FRA Committee members say that comments of the Director-General Forests on the Committee's Report are based on selective misreading and ignore key recommendations

The undersigned members of the MoEF-MoTA Committee on the Forest Rights Act have sent a response to the comments of the Director General of Forests to the Committee's report. The members feel that the DGF's comments are based on a very selective misreading of the report, and do not respond to most of the actions that have been recommended for MoEF. In particular:

- the DGF's reading of what constitutes non-tribal forest-dwellers is not as per the Act, and he wrongly reports what the Committee has said;
- his explanation that villagers have not claimed community forest rights (CFR) because they already have such rights flies in the face of widespread evidence collected by the Committee, especially that lack of information and deliberate misinformation, including by forest officials, is the main reason for the inadequacy of CFR claims;
- his continued advocacy of JFM is contrary to the Act's requirements that all such institutions would be replaced by committees set up by the Gram Sabha, empowered to manage and protect forests;
- he does not respond to the report's recommendations on MoEF's obligations to act against illegal evictions and fresh encroachments, ensure the Act's implementation in proposals to divert forest land, ensure that forest officials do not obstruct implementation, take measures to make forest-dwellers the primary beneficiaries of non-timber forest produce by de-nationalising them, and ensure that critical wildlife habitats are declared and protected area management reoriented through due democratic process.