

## National Workshop on Women and Protected Areas

24th-25th April 2025, Hyderabad

*We are threatened every day, our voices crushed, but we will continue to fight. - Soni Sori, Adivasi activist*

The National Workshop on Women and Protected Areas, held in Hyderabad on April 24-25, 2025, brought together women from diverse forest regions to share their lived realities and address the mounting challenges of displacement, restricted resource access, and inadequate rehabilitation in Protected Areas. Organized by MAKAM, Dhaatri Trust, Keystone Foundation, Centre for People's Forestry, and Kalpavriksh, the workshop fostered a critical dialogue between Adivasi women, forest-dwelling communities, civil society organizations, and legal experts to explore the gendered dimensions of conservation governance.



With increasing pressure from the government, expanding already existing Protected Areas, promoting tourism, diversion of forest lands for non-forestry purposes, and private plantations, many communities face forced relocations, intimidation, and shrinking access to entitlements. Women, particularly those from Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups (PVTGs), experience loss of livelihoods, forced migration.

While the Forest Rights Act (FRA) of 2006 recognizes women's right to forest land, allowing for Individual Forest Rights (IFR) and Community Forest Rights (CFR), in practice, many claims are rejected due to bureaucratic hurdles, systematic discrimination, and lack of transparency in decision-making. Women are often excluded from direct land ownership and compensation, making them especially vulnerable during displacement.

Some women shared that their communities face relentless pressure to abandon their homes, with relocation processes with deep flaws. Compensation, when provided, is often granted solely to men, leaving women financially dependent and vulnerable. Some women also highlighted that the land provided during relocation is often of poor quality, making it difficult to rebuild their lives.

Many communities have strong cultural and ecological ties to seasonal migration, making it impossible to confine their traditional livestock, such as the Uttarakhand Van Gujjar's Gojri buffaloes and Telangana's Poda Thurpu cattle, to fixed plots of land. These animals, adapted to forest landscapes and migratory patterns, struggle to survive in a restricted environment, further exacerbating the hardships for displaced families.

These challenges were echoed by women from Achanakmar Tiger Reserve, Barnawapara Wildlife Sanctuary, Sitanadi Wildlife Sanctuary, Udanti Wildlife Sanctuary (Chhattisgarh), Rajaji National Park (Uttarakhand), Tadoba-Andhari Tiger Reserve, Bhimashankar Wildlife Sanctuary, Melghat Tiger Reserve (Maharashtra), Nagarhole National Park (Karnataka), Mudumalai Tiger Reserve (Tamil Nadu), Similipal Tiger Reserve, Satkosia Tiger Reserve (Odisha), Panna Tiger Reserve, Kanha Tiger Reserve, Rani Durgavati Wildlife Sanctuary, Kanha-Achanakmar Corridor (Madhya Pradesh), Amrabad Tiger Reserve, Maisampet Forest Area, Malial Forest Area, Donga Palli Forest Area (Kawal Tiger Reserve, Telangana), who shared firsthand accounts of relocation pressures, community rights struggles, and discrimination.

Throughout the two-day discussions, participants emphasized the need for sustained engagement, collective forums, and networks where affected women can regularly exchange concerns, share strategies, and access legal and policy support. The consultation reinforced the demand for greater recognition of women's leadership in conservation governance, improved transparency in relocation procedures, and a commitment to continuous dialogue between communities and institutions.



Beyond sharing their struggles, many women expressed deep gratitude for having a platform where they could speak freely about their lived realities. They emphasized the importance of holding such workshops regularly, as they serve as safe spaces for open conversations and collective problem-solving.

For some women, this was the first time they had stepped forward to share their experiences. On the first day, many remained quiet, hesitant to speak in a room full of people. But by the second day, a noticeable shift occurred, women gained confidence, stood before the group, and voiced their concerns fearlessly. Many left with a renewed sense of purpose, vowing to take these conversations forward, encouraging more women from their communities to step up, speak out, challenge the discrimination they face, and actively engage in forest governance.

