



Training Workshop on CFRMP and CFRMC Formation under FRA, 2006*

Dates: August 28 and 29, 2025

ABSTRACT

A two-day workshop in Golashrot, Uttarakhand with the Van Gujjar communities for legal literacy, participatory mapping, and ecological knowledge sharing to initiate inclusive, community-led forest governance under the Forest Rights Act, 2006.

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Overview

Over two days, Kalpavriksh and the Van Gujjar Tribal Yuva Sangathan (VGTYS) facilitated a series of comprehensive participatory sessions on the formation of Community Forest Resource Management Committees (CFRMCs) and the preparation of Community Forest Resource Management Plans (CFRMPs) under the Forest Rights Act (FRA), 2006. These sessions combined legal literacy and participatory mapping, and applied forest governance exercises, engaging Van Gujjar community members - including elders, youth, and women - from five Forest Rights Committees (FRCs).

Context and Rationale

The Forest Rights Act (FRA), 2006, recognises the rights of forest-dwelling Scheduled Tribes and other traditional forest dwellers to manage, protect, and conserve their customary forest resources. Among these rights, Section 3(1)(i) grants communities the authority to protect and regenerate forest areas traditionally used for sustainable livelihood and cultural practices. To operationalise this right, the Gram Sabha may constitute a Community Forest Resource Management Committee (CFRMC) responsible for preparing and implementing a Community Forest Resource Management Plan (CFRMP).

In Uttarakhand, where the Van Gujjar pastoral community has a long history of seasonal forest use and stewardship, the process of claiming and governing Community Forest Resources (CFRs) remains both complex and crucial. Many Gram Sabhas have filed CFR claims but await final titles. However, the FRA does not prevent these communities from initiating management planning and documentation in anticipation of recognition.

This workshop was therefore conceived as a capacity-building intervention to:

- Strengthen community understanding of CFRMC formation.
- Initiate participatory planning and documentation for the preparation of CFRMPs.
- Foster cross-generational dialogue on forest use, ecological change, and traditional governance.
- Support community readiness for CFR implementation once titles are granted.

Through the combined facilitation of Kalpavriksh and VGTYS, the training sought to ground the FRA's legal provisions in community-led processes, ensuring that future CFRMPs reflect both statutory compliance and local ecological knowledge systems.

Key Objectives

- To strengthen the understanding of the legal basis and governance structure under the FRA.
- To initiate the process of participatory mapping for CFR management planning.
- To introduce a step-by-step framework for developing CFRMPs.
- To encourage intergenerational and gender-inclusive participation in community forest governance.



A Van Gujjar hamlet in Golashrot

Methodology

The workshop design was based on a participatory, experiential learning approach that emphasised collective discussion, visual mapping, and shared reflection. Each session was structured to allow participants to relate legal frameworks to lived experiences of forest use and governance.

1. Structure and Approach

Day 1: Focused on understanding institutional roles under the FRA and clarifying distinctions between Gram Sabha, FRC, and CFRMC.

Day 2: Emphasised practical application through participatory mapping and initiation of CFRMP components such as baseline assessments, seasonal-use mapping, and rule-making for sustainable forest use.

2. Participatory Tools and Techniques

- Group mapping exercises with separate sessions for women, youth, and elders to ensure inclusivity and capture diverse spatial and ecological knowledge.
- Legal-literacy sessions linking FRA provisions to real examples of community practices.
- Ecological walk-throughs in nearby CFR areas to identify land-use zones, grazing sites, and plantation patches.
- Template-based learning, where the CFRMP format used in other states was reviewed and discussed for local adaptation.

3. Inclusion and Representation

There was a concerted effort to ensure intergenerational and gender-balanced participation. Women and youth in the Van Gujjar community were encouraged to present their maps and perspectives, leading to rich discussions on resource use, conflict avoidance, and traditional ecological knowledge. The elder community members contributed historical insights into changes in forest cover, wildlife presence, and community migration routes.

Session Summaries

1. Legal Literacy and Institutional Roles

The opening session on the first day introduced two key components of forest governance under the FRA (2006):

- Community Forest Resource Management Committee (CFRMC)
- Community Forest Resource Management Plan (CFRMP)

The session facilitators delivered an introduction to Chapter II, Section 3(1)(i) of the FRA, under which forest-dwelling communities possess the right to protect, regenerate, conserve, or manage community forest resources they have traditionally safeguarded for sustainable use. In order to operationalise these rights, the Gram Sabha may constitute a CFRMC, a democratically elected body responsible for preparing and implementing the CFRMP, responsible for planning and overseeing the sustainable use and protection of forest commons.

The responsibilities of CFRMC were outlined to the participants, and it was clarified that Gram Sabhas awaiting formal CFR titles, after the submission of Community Forest Resource (CFR) claims, may begin preparing their CFRMPs. Such proactive steps enable communities to document their traditional conservation practices and assert their management rights, especially in response to external allegations of forest degradation.

Participants sought clarity on the respective functions of the Gram Sabha, Forest Rights Committee (FRC), and CFRMC. Through participatory discussion, the following distinctions were established:

- The Gram Sabha functions as the primary decision-making body for the community, responsible for constituting the Forest Rights Committee and all other sub-committees for specific tasks, which would report to the Gram Sabha. The Gram Sabha will also initiate the claims process, finalise the final claims and pass all resolutions.
- The FRC, appointed by the Gram Sabha, undertakes claim preparation, verification, and coordination with the Sub-Divisional Level Committee (SDLC) for further processes.
- The CFRMC, once established, assumes responsibility for managing the forest resources and drafting and implementing the CFRMP.

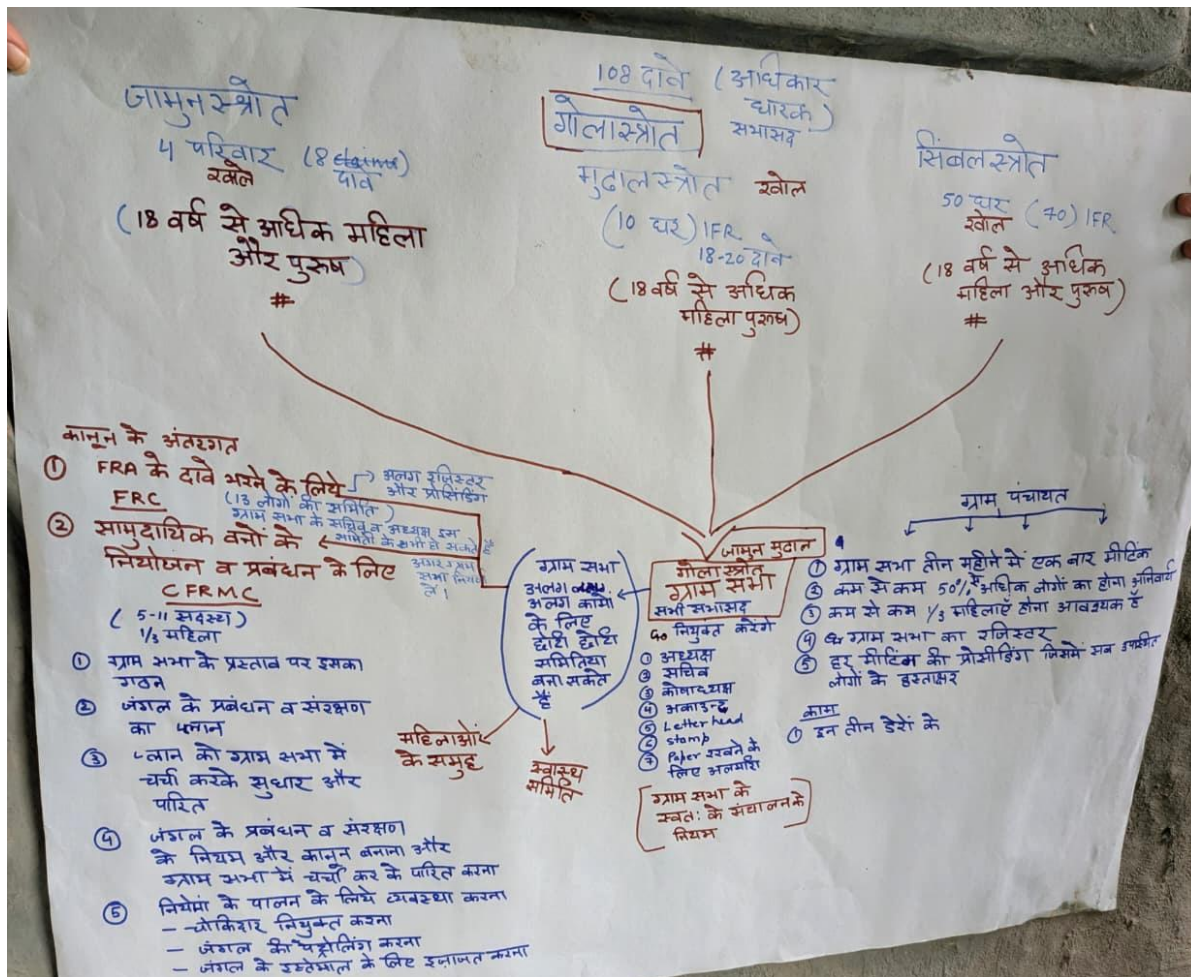


Chart outlining the distinct roles of the FRC, CFRMC, and Gram Sabha in CFR areas

2. Participatory Mapping and Ecological Knowledge

After the introductory session, a participatory mapping exercise was facilitated by VGTYS, during which women, youth, and elders collaboratively depicted their relationship with community forests and identified areas of ecological and cultural significance, followed by an expression of their vision for the community forests.

Women marked sites for fodder collection, river-based activities, resting, and areas where they gather mud for home painting or observe elephant movement. Youth and elders delineated CFR boundaries, grazing zones, river courses, and plantation sites, while also identifying areas associated with elephant and leopard sightings.



Van Gujjar women presenting a hand-drawn map of the CFR area

The resulting maps reflected not just spatial use but also a layered understanding of coexistence, mobility, and stewardship. During the map presentations, discussions revealed:

- Decline in grass cover and tree density.
- Shifts in settlement patterns due to climatic and landscape changes.
- Historical accounts of forest conflict and displacement.
- The absence of culturally significant areas in official forest records.

These collective insights laid the groundwork for integrating community knowledge into the forthcoming CFRMP.

3. Training on CFRMP Preparation

The second day centred on developing a practical understanding of the process of preparing Community Forest Resource Management Plans (CFRMPs). A template, prepared for other regions in India, was shared with Sangathan and community members to facilitate follow-up planning and documentation. The facilitators guided the participants through the following key components:

- Conducting a baseline ecological assessment.
- Completing the People's Biodiversity Register (PBR).
- Mapping forest use and seasonal resource patterns.
- Establishing rules for grazing, fuelwood collection, and forest protection.
- Incorporating strategies for conflict resolution, community monitoring, and community-based enforcement.

The session was interactive and highly participatory, while being grounded in community experience and shaped by the questions and reflections of the community members who brought lived experience and ecological insight into every discussion. The women and youth of the community raised questions on data collection, intergenerational knowledge sharing, and the role of the CFRMC in enforcement.



Workshop participants engaging with the Community Forest Resource Management Plan (CFRMP) template

4. Field Visit to the Community Forest Resource Area

The participants visited a nearby CFR area guided by Van Gujjar elders and youth. During the walk, one youth initiated a spontaneous birdwatching session, identifying local species and sharing observations of seasonal movements. The group members compared two contrasting plantation sites: one established by the Forest Department, and the other, a community-led initiative undertaken during the Sela Parv cultural festival with mixed native species.

This comparison prompted reflections on soil health, grazing access, and ecological outcomes of different plantation models, particularly the broader differences between externally imposed schemes and knowledge rooted in community practice. Participants also shared their understanding of elephant movement and coexistence practices, emphasising respect and avoidance of conflict.

The forest walk captured everyday interactions with the landscape - buffalo cooling in ponds, children chasing dragonflies, and youth recalling traditional foods, wild vegetables, and seasonal recipes. The interactions of the community members with their surroundings reflected how deeply their relationship with the forest is embedded in lived experience - a part of knowing the forest intrinsically.

Challenges and Recommendations

1. Procedural and Legal Complexities

Challenge: Limited legal literacy and inconsistencies in administrative interpretation of FRA provisions continue to hinder effective implementation.

Recommendation: Conduct sustained legal literacy workshops at the hamlet and range levels, using materials in Hindi and local dialects.

2. Mapping and Documentation Capacity

Challenge: Communities lack access to technical tools such as GPS units and mapping software to complement their participatory maps.

Recommendation: Provide GPS devices and basic training for youth members in spatial documentation. Collaboration with technical partners (universities, NGOs) can strengthen map validation.

3. Gendered Participation

Challenge: While women's participation has increased, structural barriers such as limited mobility and domestic responsibilities still constrain consistent engagement.

Recommendation: Schedule training sessions at times accessible to women and include specific modules on women's forest-based knowledge and resource use.

4. Data Integration and Baseline Preparation

Challenge: Absence of comprehensive ecological data and oral histories limits the depth of CFRMP content.

Recommendation: Combine ecological assessments with oral history documentation, biodiversity registers, and community observation logs to create multi-dimensional baseline data.

Reflections

1. Institutional Clarity and Governance Structures

Many participants initially expressed uncertainty about the distinct roles of the Gram Sabha, Forest Rights Committee (FRC), and Community Forest Resource Management Committee (CFRMC). This confusion was addressed through detailed discussion and visual diagrams. The community collectively recognised the Gram Sabha as the apex decision-making body, with the FRC and CFRMC serving as its operational and implementation arms. This clarification was a crucial step toward establishing functional and legitimate community institutions under the FRA framework.

2. Ecological Knowledge and Land Use Mapping

The participatory mapping exercise revealed a layered understanding of the forest landscape. Participants identified grasslands, grazing routes, water bodies, elephant corridors, and culturally significant sites. This mapping not only demonstrated the community's ecological literacy but also highlighted spatial trends such as declining grass cover and altered tree density, which could inform the baseline ecological assessment of the CFRMP.

The inclusion of women's and youth perspectives diversified the map content, adding details often overlooked in formal cartography. Women's participation in mapping and discussion sessions also reflected growing leadership and stewardship roles in resource management. The participatory format enhanced confidence among youth and elders alike, strengthening intergenerational learning. The community demonstrated strong ecological knowledge and motivation to develop CFRMPs even before title issuance, indicating a readiness for self-governance.

3. Knowledge Integration and Cultural Continuity

The discussion around traditional foods, wild vegetables, and seasonal patterns underscored how ecological knowledge is embedded in cultural practice. These exchanges reinforced that management planning should recognise both tangible (forest produce, fodder) and intangible (customs, songs, stories) aspects of resource relationships. Field reflections revealed a desire to reconcile traditional knowledge with formal planning frameworks, ensuring that community practices form the foundation of CFRMPs. The sharing of such knowledge provided a basis for developing culturally informed management rules.

4. FRA as a Living Process

Reflections from senior community members highlighted the role of FRA as an instrument of both empowerment and contention. Many people recalled earlier episodes of eviction and conflict, situating the current training within a broader trajectory of legal struggle and rights assertion. The group collectively agreed that continuous learning and awareness-building are essential to safeguard community rights and prevent external misinterpretations of the Act.

Follow-Up Actions

1. Training and Capacity Building

- Organise dedicated training sessions for Gram Sabha and FRC members on using the CFRMP template.
- Facilitate legal awareness workshops for youth, focusing on documentation and claim follow-up procedures.

2. Ecological and Spatial Data Collection

- Begin systematic baseline ecological assessments of CFR areas, including vegetation, wildlife use, and seasonal dynamics.
- Support community-led mapping using GPS-enabled devices and integrate data with hand-drawn participatory maps.
- Identify and engage community elders (70+) to record oral histories and traditional ecological knowledge, to be digitized and mapped.

3. Women's and Youth Engagement

- Strengthen women's Self-Help Group (SHG) linkages with CFRMC processes, particularly in seed preservation and plantation monitoring.

4. Knowledge Exchange and Exposure

- Organise an exposure visit for Van Gujjar fellows to the Yawal Wildlife Sanctuary, Maharashtra, to observe functional CFRMCs and learn from established management practices.
- Encourage inter-community exchange between CFRMCs across Shyampur and nearby ranges for peer learning.

5. Institutional Strengthening

- Develop simple operational guidelines for Gram Sabha meetings, claim documentation, and CFRMC reporting.
- Kalpavriksh to explore funding for technical support (GPS units and mapping tools) under the next project cycle.

Conclusion

The two-day workshop marked a significant step toward institutionalising community-led forest governance. By blending legal literacy with lived ecological understanding, the process initiated the groundwork for Community Forest Resource Management Plans that reflect Van Gujjar knowledge, values, and conservation ethics.

The sessions reaffirmed that effective CFRMPs must emerge from within - from communities that not only depend on the forest but also sustain its continuity through daily acts of care, observation, and coexistence.