Original Article

Indian Journal of Research in Anthropology
Volume 10 Number 1, January – June 2024
DOI: http://dx.doi.org/10.21088/ijra.2454.9118.10124.9

Socio-economic Impacts of Forests Rights Act on the Individual Title Holders: An Analytical Study among the Lanjia Saoras of Odisha

Kalandi Singh[1], Prasant Kumar Sahoo[2]

How to cite this article:
Kalandi Singh, Prasant Kumar Sahoo. Socio-economic Impacts of Forests Rights Act on the Individual Title Holders: An Analytical Study Among the Lanjia Saoras of Odisha. Ind J Res Anthropol 2024;10(1):71-76.

Abstract

The present study examines the socio-economic impacts of the Forest Rights Act (FRA), 2006 on Individual Forest Rights (IFR) title holders from the Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Group (PVTG) of Lanjia Saora in the Gumma block of Gajapati district, Odisha. It analyses the socioeconomic status, land use patterns, occupations, and convergence of government schemes for IFR households across 4 villages through household surveys and focus group discussions covering 52 households. Key findings *i.e* reveal livelihood dependence on agriculture, agricultural wage labour and lack of basic amenities like pucca housing, electricity and toilets for majority of households. While some support have been provided through rural housing, land development and horticulture schemes, the coverage remains limited. The study therefore recommends increasing awareness about FRA, promoting cash crops, horticulture, Non Timber Forest Products (NTFP) collection and marketing, skill development for off-farm livelihoods, improving connectivity and public infrastructure etc. It conlude the need to address developmental gaps of tribal IFR holders through appropriate policies and convergence of government schemes at the district level.

Keywords: Socio-economic impacts; IFR title holders; Lanjia Saora; PVTGs; Odisha; Forest rights.

INTRODUCTION

Since the colonial times forest policies were dominated and carried out by the profit-maximizing elites as (Edmunds & Wollenberg, 2001). In order to fund the colonial state, taxes were instituted. 'Natives' were promised not to compete with colonial merchants through the establishment of concessions (Harris, 2011). Governments first instituted quotas and licences to help distribute production and use rights (Ribot, 2001). The end effect is a sector where extractive policies are quite prevalent. In this background, in an efffort to boost forest inhabitants' benefits and local involvement, a flurry of reforms has been sweeping the country over the last 20 years, especially in India. Several Scholars have made the case that woods can help improvise the rural populations to enhance their quality of life and reduce their poverty. Forest products, small businesses, wage employment, and environmental health are only a few of the many ways in which communities gain from forests (Kaimowitz, 2003). With the use of the sustainable

Author's Affiliation: [1]Research Assistant, Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes Research and Training Institute, Odisha 751012, Bhubaneswar, India, [2]Assistant Professor, Department of Anthropology, F.M. Autonomous College, Balasore 756001, Odisha, India.

Corresponding Author: Prasant Kumar Sahoo, Assistant Professor, Department of Anthropology, F.M. Autonomous College, Balasore 756001, Odisha, India.

E-mail: sahoopk1989@gmail.com

Received on: 01.04.2024 **Accepted on:** 22.06.2024

livelihoods framework, Dubois (2003) argues that forests help people make a living by providing for their material, political, social, and spiritual requirements.

In this context, one of the historic pieces of legislation that seeks to right the wrongs committed against the forest dwellers by colonial and post-colonial forest policies is the Scheduled Tribes and Other Traditional Forest Dwellers (Recognition of Forest Rights) Act, 2006 or the Forests Rights Act (FRA). This is a rights based legislation where the forest dwellers are not considered as a subject of welfare. Rather it is their basic natural right to live, to earn livelihood and to sustain and thrive within the forests premises. In addition, this Act gives them the right to be properly rehabilitated and resettled in case a displacement occurs, as they shall be now provided with permanent land *pattas* (records).

FRA implementation in India

In India, 8.6% of the population belongs to the tribal communities. Of India's 104.3 million Scheduled Tribe (ST) populations, 94.1 million live in the rural and outlying areas, as per the 2011 Census. India's total forests cover hovers around 71.38 million hectares or 21.71% of the country's landmass (ISFR, 2021). More than half of India's tribal people make their living off the forest land and its abundant forest resources (TRIFED, 2019). In this context, a glimmer of hope has emerged for these indigenous peoples with the implementation of Forest Rights Act, 2006. It has the potential to bring about long-term forest regeneration and conservation efforts in addition to opening up vast alternatives for Tribal livelihood and development.

Twenty Indian states have adopted FRA since its inception in 2008 and 1,964,894 forest rights covering 1,29,38,762 acres of forest land have been officially recognised (MoTA, 2019). Scheduled tribes and other traditional forest inhabitants have fourteen forest rights recognised by the FRA, 2006 (MOLJ, 2007; CFRLA, 2016). The FRA is the sole legal mechanism in the nation that verifies the identity of right holders and their forest rights. The acknowledged rights provide access to forest resources, such as non-timber forest products. Community Forest Resources (CFR) pertain to the governance, use, and management of forests within traditional boundaries for sustainable use; Individual Forest Rights (IFR) pertain to the right to inhabit and cultivate one's own land, which helps the right holder's sustainable development; and Community Rights (CRs) pertain to fishing, grazing, and nomadic activities.

The tribal population of Odisha is 9,590,756, making it the third largest in the country (Census, 2011). Odisha is home to 64 distinct tribal communities, including 13 PVTGs, dispersed among 1,683 villages and settlements in 14 districts. As per the Census (2011), 9.17% of the nation's tribal population are living in the state, making up 22.85% of the state's overall population. With a total forest cover of 58,136 sq. km., it accounts for 37.34% of landmass of the state and 7.53% of the country's overall forest cover. Odisha is among the top states in implementing FRA 2006 as it has distributed around 4.56 lakh IFR titles covering 6.07 lakh acres of forest land (as of August 2021). Of all the IFR title holders in the country, 23.2% are in Odisha. It is a matter great achievement.

Table 1: Details of FRA Beneficiaries in Odisha (as of 30 June 2023)

Titles	Claims Received	Claims Approved by DLC	Claims Rejected	No. of Titles Distributed	Forest land Distributed
Individual	6.32 lakh	4.64 lakh	1.43 lakh	4.57 lakh	2.71 lakh Ha.
Community	0.15 lakh	0.10 lakh	0.01 lakh	0.08 lakh	1.51 lakh Ha.
Total	**6.48 lakh**	**4.74 lakh**	**1.44 lakh**	**4.65 lakh**	**4.22 lakh Ha.**

Source: *Department of SC & ST Development, Govt. of Odisha*

When compared to the FRA across India as a whole, Odisha's implementation is far superior. Table 1 shows the FRA status of 30 districts in Odisha. The *Gram Sabhas* received a total of 6.48 lakh claims of which 6.32 lakh were on individual rights and 0.15 lakh were on the community rights. On a whole, a total of 4.74 lakh claims (both individual and community) were approved by Dist. Level Committee (DLC). There were 4.64 lakh individual claims allowed while 0.10 lakh community claims were approved. Individual claims received 4.65 lakh titles, while community claims received 0.08 lakh titles. Approximately 4.22 lakh hectares of forest land were transferred to the FRA recipients. Of this, 2.71 lakh ha were allocated to individual beneficiaries and 1.51 lakh ha were subject to community rights.

METHODOLOGY AND OBJECTIVES

In order to evaluate the impact of FRA on the *Lanjia Saora's* socio-economic status and the land's vested IFR status, this study will establish criteria and indicators. Data were collected from both primary as well as secondary sources. For household samples, A total of 52 houses were surveyed, 13 from aech village. In order to collect information about the households and the villages as a whole, we held focused group discussions and village meetings in each of the chosen villages. Prior to embarking on fieldwork, suitable instruments were developed and tested for data collecting. The main tools employed for data gathering were the Village Schedule, the Household Schedule, observation techniques, focus groups, key interviews and in-depth interviews. Prior to finalisation, all of the tools underwent field pilot testing. Excel and SPSS software were used for data analysis. The study was undertaken with the following objectives.

1. To examine the *i.e* socio-economic status of *Lanjia Saora* tribe of Gajapati district.
2. To study the impact of convergence programmes on the lives and livelihood of the FRA title holders.

Area and People

Gajapati district, covering an area of 3,850 square km, is situated in the south-eastern corner of Odisha. It shares the northern border with the Kandhamala district, southern border with Andhra Pradesh, eastern border with Ganjam, and western border with Rayagada. The history of the district still echoes the long gone days of the history of Gajapati monarchs in the District. The district is structured with seven tahasils, fifty-seven revenue circles, *i.e* 145 *gram panchayats*, and 1534 villages for the purpose of revenue management. The exact coordinates of this area are 83°.48 to 84°.08 degrees east longitude and 18°.6 to 19°.39 degrees north latitude. The *Mahendragiri* bio-sphere presents the Gajapati district with a wealth of flora and animals, covering an area of about 470,955 hectares. The indigenous people inhabit the mountainous and undulating terrain that makes up the majority of the area.

The *Lanjia Saoras*, also known as *Saura, Sabara, Sahar, Saur*, and *Sora*, is an ancient tribe in Central India, especially found in Jharkhand, Orissa, Andhra Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, and West Bengal. They speak an ancient Mundari dialect, the '*Sora*'. In Odisha, they account for 5.81% of the state's total tribal population. The tribe has similar appearances to pre-Dravidian tribes, with flat noses, long craniums, and prominent facial prognathism. Physical appearance look weaker than the *Kondh* but stronger their northern Orissa tribes. The *Lanjia Saora* survives on land and woodland, focusing on slash-and-burn agriculture, particularly terrace cultivation. Their social structure lacks exogamous totemic clans, phatries, and moieties. They possess complex magico-religious traditions. A *Lanjia Saora* village is a self-sufficient socio-political unit with exceptional unity and continuity, based on democratic principles (Ota & Mohanty, 2020). Their artistic abilities are demonstrated through dancing, music, and wall paintings (Ota & Mohanty, 2020).

RESULT

The majority of households in the studied villages, such as Bantalada, Luhar, Tidasing, and Bhubani, are PVTGs of *Lanjia Saora* tribe. In two *Gram panchayats* in the Gumma block, PVTG households make up 100% of the population. The details of the land area of the villages along with the proportion of households having IFR land titles are given in Table 2. The peak is at 61.82% in Tidasing while the lowest recorded of 27.50 in Lunar.

Table 2: IFR title households of *Lanjia Saoras*

Block	Name of the GP	Name of the Village	No's of HHs IFR title holders	House Patten Pucca/ Asbestos (%)	Land Area (In Acre)	% of HHs Having IFR Land title under FRA
Gumma	Ajayagarh	Luhar	22	40.0	9.13	27.50
		Bantalada	90	16.75	28.85	45.69
	Bhubani	Tidasing	68	54.55	17.23	61.82
		Bhubani	58	12.90	14.55	37.42

Source: Field Study

Asbestos or tile houses, pucca houses with RCC roofs, and other similar housing patterns were common among the households surveyed in the research villages. Out of the four villages, Luhar has the most *pucaa* housing at 40.00%, Bantalada at 16.75%, Tidasing at 54.55%, and Bhubani at 12.90%.

Locals' access to power (94.47%), toilet facilities (73.26%), and toilet usage (51.8%) in each community were all documented. In the four villages of Gumma block, the percentage of HHs with electricity connections is such as Luhar (85.71%), Bantalada (72.0%), Tidasing (90.91%), and Bhubani (93.55%). In Tidasing village, 90.91% of families have access to toilets, and every single one of them is making full use of them. Those who received toilets, the following percentages are reported for the rest of the villages of Luhar, Bantalada, and Bhubani at 81.25%, 76.14% and 34.19% respectively while it is 37.50%, 21.32% and 32.26% respectively for the suitable use of toilets, showing a disliking trend.

Table 3: Occupational structure of IFR title holders of *Lanjia Saora* Tribe

Block	Name of the GP	Name of the Village	Agriculture (%)	Agri. Wage (%)	Non-Agri Wages (%)	Govt. Job (%)	Private (%)	Animal Husbandry (%)	Business
Gumma	Ajayagarh	Luhar	53.75	0.0	37.50	5.00	3.75	0.0	0.0
		Bantalada	42.64	17.7 7	32.99	6.09	0.5	0.0	0.0
	Bhubani	Tidasing	44.55	22.7 3	10.91	6.36	4.55	9.09	1.82
		Bhubani	75.48	0.65	13.5	8.39	0.65	1.29	0.0

Source: Field Study

Table 3 show that the main occupations of members fall into one of seven distinct occupational categories. While the majority of households work in agriculture, the percentage of households engaged in non-agricultural wage labour ranges from 10.91% in Tidasing households to 22.73% in Bhubani household. The percentage of households employed in the government sector ranges from 8.39% in Bhubani to 5% in Lunar Similarly, as far as agriculture is concerned, (the highest percentage is found in Bhubani at 75.48%, while the lowest percentage is 42.64% in Bantalada). At 1.82%, people in only Tidasing households engaged in business enterprises. In animal husbandry, 9.09% people in Tidasing and 1.29% in Bhubani village are employed with zero employment in the other two villages.

Table 4: Land use pattern of the households of IFR title holders of *Lanjia Saoras.*

Block	Name of the GP	Name of the Village	Paddy (%)	Millets (%)	Spices (%)	Plantation Cashew (%)
Gumma	Ajayagarh	Luhar	90.91	9.09	0.0	0.0
		Bantalada	48.54	51.46	0.0	0.0
	Bhubani	Tidasing	29.56	30.54	38.42	0.0
		Bhubani	9.49	14.56	0.0	75.95

Source: 1 Field Study

Overall, 34.18% of the land in the study villages was devoted to paddy cultivation, 31.94% to maize cultivation, 18.91% to millet cultivation as shown in Table 4. The percentage of land utilised for paddy cultivation ranged from 9.49% in Bhubani to 90.91% in Luhar villages. Interestingly, it was found that 51.46% of the land in Bantalada village was used for millet cultivation, with 30.54% of the land in Tidasing also being used for this purpose. Only in Tidasing there were pulses and spices cultivation. It was also discovered that 75.95% of the land in Bhubani village was planted with cashew trees.

Table 5: Convergence Status of Govt. Schemes for IFR title holders among the *Lanjia Saoras*

Block	Name of the GP	Name of the Village	No. of HHs in Rural Housing	No. of HHs in Land Development	No. of HHs in Horticulture
Gumma	Ajayagarh	Luhar	4	7	9
		Bantalada	10	8	2
	Bhubani	Tidasing	7	1	4
		Bhubani	8	1	2

Source: Field Study

Table 5 shows that ten households in Bantalada village, while 8 households in Bhubani village received rural housing support. Bantalada village had also the most land development beneficiaries with eight households, followed by the Luhar village with seven households. Nine out of ten houses in the Luhar village has horticultural plantations.

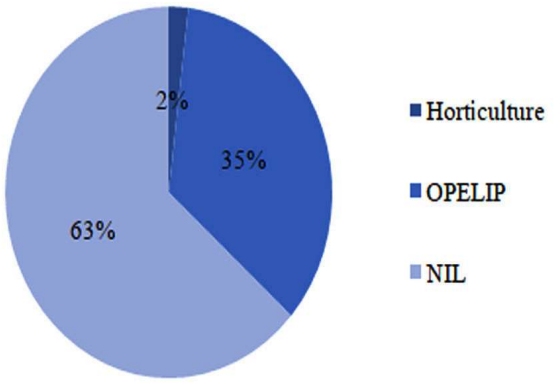

Fig. 1: Plantation works benefited through Govt. schemes.

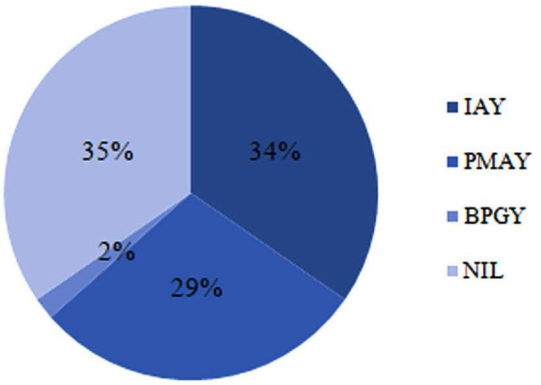

Fig. 2: Rural housing benefited through Govt. schemes

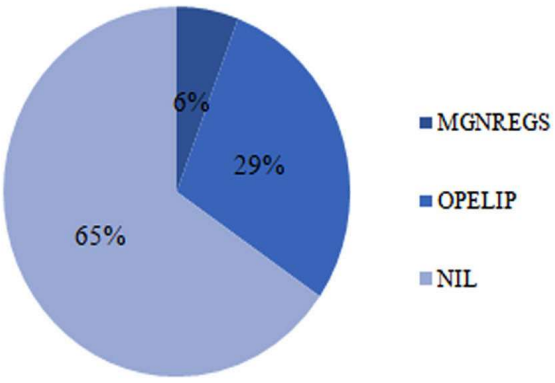

Fig. 3: Land levelling benefited through Govt. schemes

DISCUSSION

Inherent forest rights titles are called as deeds that acknowledge indigenous peoples' ownership of forest land and resources for subsistence and housing. In forest regions of the world, rights recognition is seen as essential for reducing poverty, promoting social inclusion, ensuring food security, promoting gender equality, and achieving environmental sustainability (Carter, 2003). A number of studies have shown that FRA can help with tribal economic and social issues Khosla and Bhattacharya, 2019) and also safeguard forest resources (CFRLA, 2016).

One distinctive feature of the FRA is its consideration of the realities faced by tribal peoples residing in Indian forests. Due to a lack of knowledge and resources, the indigenous people have been unable to change their living conditions on their own (Anitha, 2019). Consequently, the government offered post-implementation support to the right holders in order to achieve sustainable development for the tribal. This support came in the form of acknowledgment of rights, as well as a convergence of land development and livelihood improvement plans (Rule 16 of FRA modified regulations 2012) according to Dash & Kothari (2013).

The above figures showing socio-economic improvement among the *Lanjia Saoras* are a testimony to the fact that the FRA, 2006 and its implementation have a direct and positive response from the people. The major take away is that, as it provides the land rights with records, it fulfils the basic primary needs of housing, electricity connections, toilet facilities, provisions of water connectivity etc. A reign without the FRA is irreversible. Once the names of the IFR title holders are updated in the land records of the revenue department, other line departments would automatically fit in to provide the Govt. services. This is the reason in many urban areas the slum dwellers face the issues of primary amenities. It is because they lack the rights over the land. Hence, in the context of FRA, 2006, tribal are gradually gaining their momentum with better lives, livelihoods, and MFP collections. However, a lot has yet to be done. For example, there should be proper convergence between central and state schemes so that locals could understand their benefits and can claim the facilities. Besides, cent percent housing has not been achieved as shown in Fig. 2, which is cut off from the mainstream due to geographical inaccessability or

other issues. Similar amenities ought to be urgently provided in the most backward regions of the tribal world that are in dire need of our assistance.

CONCLUSIONS

The *Lanjia Saoras* are in the backward stage of developement. This study looked at how the Forest Rights Act has impacted their socioe-conomic status. Key findings include that most households rely on agriculture, agricultural or non-agricultural wage labour as primary occupations; land use patterns show cultivation of paddy, maize, millets, with some plantation crops like cashew; convergence of government schemes has provided some rural housing, land development and horticulture support to IFR households, but coverage is limited. Research suggests that more people should know about FRA and that PVTGs should be facilitated to assert their rights to forest land and resources so that they can improve their livelihoods. Raising their income is possible through fostering horticulture, cash crops, non-timber forest product collecting, and marketing. Better access to markets and training for non-farming jobs is essential; suitable public health infrastructure and programmes to influence people's behaviour are necessary. To Conclude, the research shows that district level government programmes should converge and suitable policy actions should be taken to meet the developmental demands of tribal IFR title holders.

Acknowledgements

The authors would like to thank all the research participants and the director of Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes Research and Training Institute (SCSTRTI) who volunteered and guided in the study.

REFERENCES

1. Anitha, S. (2019). Understanding economic abuse through an intersectional lens: Financial abuse, control, and exploitation of women's productive and reproductive labor. *Violence against women*, 25(15), 1854-1877.
2. Carter, M. R. (2003). Designing land and property rights reform for poverty alleviation and food security.
3. CFRLA, P. Performance: Ten Years of the Forest Rights Act in India. Citizens' Report on Promise and Performance of The Scheduled Tribes and Other Traditional Forest Dwellers (Recognition of Forest Rights) Act, 2006, after 10 years of its Enactment. Produced as a parfitt of Community Forest Rights-Learning and Advocacy Process (CFRLA), India, 2016.
4. Dash, T., & Kothari, A. (2013). Forest rights and conservation in India. *The right to responsibility: resisting and engaging development, conservation, and the law in Asia. Natural Justice and United Nations University, Institute of Advanced Studies, Malaysia*.
5. Edmunds, D., & Wollenberg, E. (2001). Historical perspectives on forest policy change in Asia: an introduction. Environmental History, 6(2), 190-212.
6. Dubois, O. (2003). Forest-based poverty reduction: a brief review of facts, figures, challenges and possible ways forward. *Forests in Poverty Reduction Strategies: Capturing the Potential. T. Oksanen, B. Pajari and T. Tuomasjukka* (eds.) pp, 65-81.
7. Gajapati District, Government of Odisha | Website of Gajapati District Administration, Odisha | India.
8. Kaimowitz, D. (2003, June). Not by bread alone… forests and rural livelihoods in sub-Saharan Africa. In *Forests in poverty reduction strategies: capturing the potential. EFI Proceedings* (No. 47, pp. 45-63).
9. Khosla, A., & Bhattacharya, P. (2019). Assessment of Socio-Economic and Livelihood Conditions Post Forest Rights Act Implementation: A Comparative Study of Two Tribal Districts in Tripura. *Indian Journal of Social Work*, 80 (4), 477-500.
10. Ministry of Tribal Affairs - Government of India, (2019)
11. Harris, C. (2011). Making native space: Colonialism, resistance, and reserves in British Columbia. ubc Press.
12. Ota, A. B & Mohanty, S. C. (2020). Handbook on Lanjia Saora, SCSTRTI, Bhubaneswar
13. Ribot, J. (2001). Science, use rights and exclusion: a history of forestry in francophone West Africa.
14. ST & SC Development, Minorities & Backward Classes Welfare Department (odisha.gov.in)