

# Asserting Forest Rights

Stories of Women's struggles and Successes

MAKAAM

Forum for Women Farmers' Rights

Forest Rights Group

2023





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# Contents

Preface from our fellow-traveller The Bastion  
Aspiring for forest rights: Genesis of the series

The Bastion Team  
Dr. Soma kishore parthasarathy

## ***Stories of Struggles and Successes***

1. *Women of Sania Basti Khatima: Awaiting justice*
2. *Your development, Our Annihilation: Pen taluka, Raigad*
3. *Mansi Devi's valiant efforts for womens forest rights: AaBorod, Sirohi,*
4. *Long jouney for Asserting Forest Rights of Single women from Sabarkantha*
5. *Korchi Adivasi Association opposed minning amid forests to protect their livelihoods*
6. *Food security from forest produce: Struggle of Mahakoni Community for forest rights*
7. *Korchi Adivasi Association opposes minning in Forest Area*
8. *Vanraji Tribal Community Gains Land Rights. Far Cry From Forest Rights*
9. *Balki Devi Garasia is a ray of hope*
10. *Saleh Women's Group Runs Van Dhan Kendra Amidst Covid Crisis*
11. *Seeds protectors of Uttarakhand : nature's precious heritage*

*Uttarakhand  
Maharashtra  
Rajasthan  
Gujarat  
Maharashtra  
Chhattisgarh  
Maharashtra  
Uttarakhand  
Rajasthan  
Maharashtra  
Uttarakhand*

*Hira Jhangpani  
Gauri, Meenal, Shweta  
Chandrakanta  
Megha Seth  
Kumaribai Jamakanta  
Durga/Kaushalya  
Kumaribai Jamakanta  
Khima Jethi  
Ranchod Devasi  
Padma Uike  
Hira Jhangpani*

## **Conclusion: Women's Involvement with Forest Rights – Concerns and Strategies**



## FOREWORD

### Message from our Co Travellers: THE BASTION

Through our journalism, we constantly try to look for the “impact” that the stories we write and help produce might be bringing to the world. One of our favourite kinds of impacts are those which are a result of a collaborative exercise, much like what you currently hold in your hands—a compendium of case studies.

In 2021, Soma and us at The Bastion had sparked off the idea of having a media training session with Netri’s on ground activists and group leaders. The objective was simple—how could our participants use tools of story-telling and journalism for the many stories of *jal-jangal-jameen* that they came across daily, to carve out a niche in various media platforms?

We wanted to make it a collaborative experience: what are the skills that our participants would need the most in their work? How do we make the sessions exciting and interesting? What kind of group activities should we have, so that our participants, across states of Rajasthan, Uttarakhand, Chhattisgarh, Gujarat, and Maharashtra could resonate with each other? For us, this was a new experience, because the story-teller in this context—women and men across various organisations—were often embedded in the story themselves. After multiple discussions with Netri, we had a 4-day workshop ready to be put into implementation.

This compendium of case studies is the result of the hard work by participants and insightful discussions that came alive during the workshop. Even though the pandemic and subsequent lockdowns soiled our plans of making this an in-person workshop, the energy of the participants, their eagerness of bringing out stories of conflict, and their commitment to centering their stories with voices of Adivasi and Dalit women flowed smoothly from one state to the other, interrupted only by healthy debates, and the occasional patchy network connection. We strongly believe that the unique personalities of participants—whether it was Hira ji’s enthusiasm and resilience, Durga ji’s calm and precise inputs, or Gauri, Mansi, and Shweta’s team with shy yet sharp observations—all found a way into the stories that they present in this book, making each case unique in itself.

The participants, through their fearless writing, bring to this book ten stories of forests, lands, and agriculture from the forefront of their work, where they interact with hyperlocal realities of a ‘developing’ India. A national highway being developed in Maharashtra, a forest being barred from access in Uttarakhand, women fighting against tree felling in Chhattisgarh, widowed women in Gujarat claiming their rights in using and managing forests—this book brings such stories together. Keeping women at the centre, the stories navigate not just the economic relations with the natural resource in question, but also the cultural, religious, and social ambits, the symbiotic relationship with which builds their everydayness. And so, when these resources arrive at conflicts, whether with members of the community or governments and private companies, the women in these stories lay bare the elements of their fights—protests, constant negotiations with the Forest Department and District Offices, and accessing their rights through central policies like the Forest Rights Act, 2006 and the Land Acquisition and Right to Fair

Compensation and Transparency in Land Acquisition, Rehabilitation and Resettlement (LARR) 2013 amongst others. These stories are as much about natural resource conflicts that form a different side of the same coin of 'development', as much as they are about courage and resilience to redefine this development.

With that, the authors and the stories they bring in close an essential gap in current journalism—they bring in not just the incidents that often don't make it to the headlines or prime-time news, but also the essential voices that too are a part of India's development journey.

*The Bastion -*

Sourya Reddy and Vaishnavi Rathore



<https://thebastion.co.in>





### ASPIRING FOR FOREST RIGHTS - GENESIS OF THE SERIES

*Dr. Soma Kishore Parthasarathy*  
*National Facilitation team Member*

**MAKAAM** is a forum and a platform for women farmers. Forest rights for women has emerged as a significant area of work of the MAKAAM forum. Our efforts have been directed towards enhancing our capacities to engage with the agenda of forest rights from a women centred perspective so that women can claim their rights to forest lands and to forest resources; and women gain recognition and space in the governance of forest resources as knowledge holders and effective managers and conservers of forests

This volume of case studies emerges from our efforts in the NETRI program to build women's leadership among women forest dwellers in partnership with the POWER UP! Global Program. Our aim is enable women to claim rights to resources, assert their voice and agency in discourse and debates and assert their opinions about what they consider as priorities for them to be able to live within the forest regions and to sustain their ecologically rich and embedded practices as forest dwellers.

Since the first convention of the forest rights groups of MAKAAM in Nagpur in 2018 where a wide diversity of issues were discussed and efforts were made to build awareness on the potential for collective feminist action on forest rights and forest governance, we defined a pathway towards grounding our work with women within forest dweller and dependent communities to understand their concerns and deepen our engagement with them. We have travelled the path together to organize, understand the provisions of the law, seek opportunities for dialogues with government agencies at state and national levels to acquaint them with the women's issues in the context of forests, to acknowledge their demands for forest rights and for a recognition of their role in forest governance. Our work with the NETRIs or women leaders who have emerged from our efforts has been concentrated in the four states of Chattisgarh, Maharashtra, Uttarakhand and Rajasthan

with women for staking their traditional claims to the forests as well as asserting their voices and presence as decision makers in the realms of forest governance.

The CASE STUDIES showcased in this book are an outcome of a workshop to enhance skills and capacities to women and men grassroots workers - some of whom are from the communities of forest dwellers themselves - to write their own stories of the struggles and success they have witnessed at close quarters, or were part of as they attempt to bring the voices of the women who they work most closely with for the claiming of these rights within the communities. Training and learning and decisionmaking processes within forest communities tend to exclude women or assume women's participation as instrumental to the purpose of forest governance. By presenting the stories of their struggles we hope to amplify their voices as significant actors in the forest scenario and as citizens claiming spaces within forest governance. We hope that these stories will inspire women everywhere to organize for their claims and assertion of their voices and interests.

Simultaneously we are also eager to engage with state agencies to enhance their outreach and effective inclusion of women in forest governance and decisionmaking processes, based on the knowledge and embedded stakes of women as central and inseparable to the forest economy and ecology. It is by investing in their capacities that the of ecological wellbeing and the future for all of us can be built. This continues to be a challenging path, as we continue to hear voices in positions of authority ask, "What are the women's issues, why do they need a specific focus?" and others resistant to women's emerging voices even within ally movements. We have a long way to forge ahead, but our alliances at every level and the support we have received along the way also energises us with hope for the journey ahead. We are indeed excited that this booklet of case studies of women's voices as forest dwellers is being released at the 75th year of India's independence at a time when an Adivasi woman has been elected as the leader, which gives us greater hope for the future of India's forest Dwellers and especially for women!

A word of acknowledgment to all those who have worked dedicatedly bring about this volume:

- To Vaishnavi and Sourya of Bastion for walking this journey from scratch with us to organizing the workshop for grassroots case writers and giving us hope in our own capacities to produce our stories "Apni zabaani, apni kahaani"
- The team of case study writers, all of whom were unfamiliar with the task of journalistic reporting but worked valiantly to learn and absorb and produce their own stories, and tolerated the repeated reminders and provocations to dig deeper to enhance the details of their stories. Apart from the Bastion facilitators, the case writers themselves undertook peer review of each others case studies to help in the finalization of these case studies

The responsibility for the content of each case study lies with the authors. The process of production of this volume has been a collective journey and we hope that it will energise readers to delve deeper into the women's Question in forest rights and ecological governance and draw them in as co-travellers in our mission.

Any flaws in the document may be attributed to the fact that this is a novice attempt and we hope that the media will support us in carrying the voices of the women and their concerns far and wide and into the echelons of decision making, such that women can claim a stronger representation in the domains of policy and discourse on forest rights and governance.

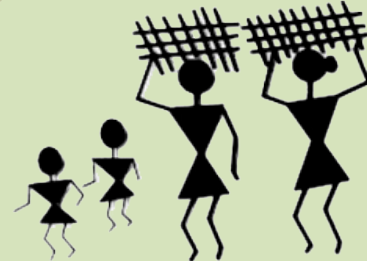
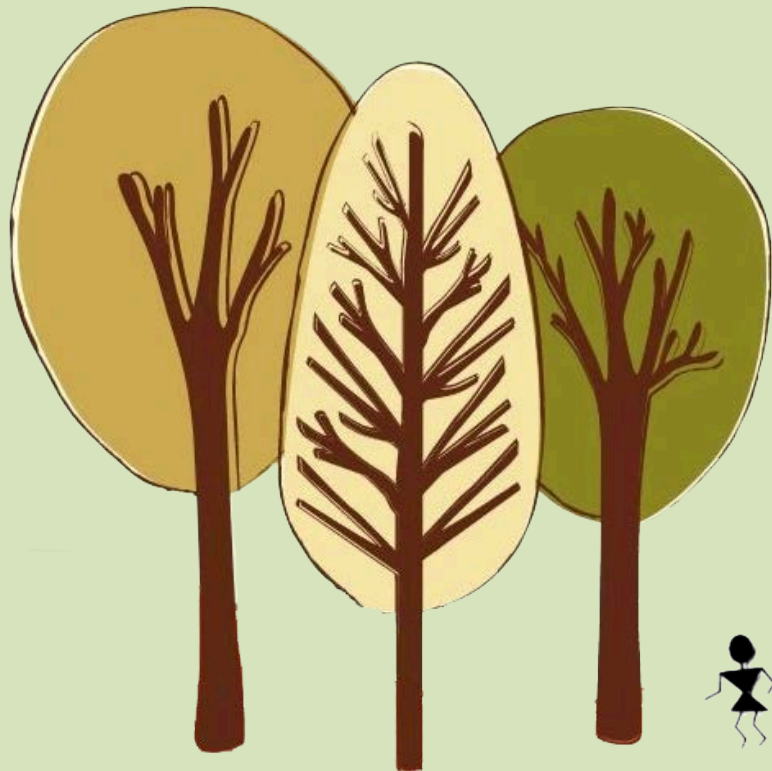
**Dr Soma Kishore Parthasarathy, Co-convenor Makaam Forest Rights Collective**





# Asserting for Women's Rights

Womens stories of Struggles and Success





## Case Study #1

## Women of Sania Basti Khatima: Awaiting Justice

Uttarakhand  
Hira Jhangpani

*In year 2014, people of Sania Basti filled up 101 individual and community claim forms under the Forest Rights Act. Since then, their struggle has been on.*

### Background

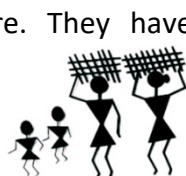
Sania Basti, Gram Panchayat Bilhari, Block Khatima, District Udham Singh Nagar, Uttarakhand. People from indigenous tribes live in this



village. The village is located near the border of Nepal. The natives of this land are known as Kumaoni in the local dialect. There are 135 families living in Sania Basti. Their means of livelihood is daily wages, as they work as labourers. 15 families live in the adjacent Vanraji settlement. This village is connected to Sania Basti. Vanrajis are called Vanrawat in the local language and they live in Tehsil Didihat of Askot region of Pithoragarh district of Uttarakhand and Naugaon in Dharchula.



Due to poverty and illiteracy, some families have migrated here. They have small land holdings and the forest department officials threaten them



continuously that their land belongs to forest. They live in the forests, but remain under the terror of forest department officials, as they are abused, beaten up and molested regularly.



These people live in fear. This is the situation even after filling the claim form. The government has not yet accepted their claims, and has not given leases. They cannot even work as labourers due to the unavailability of have job cards, are not registered with the labour department, and do not have Jan Dhan Yojana account

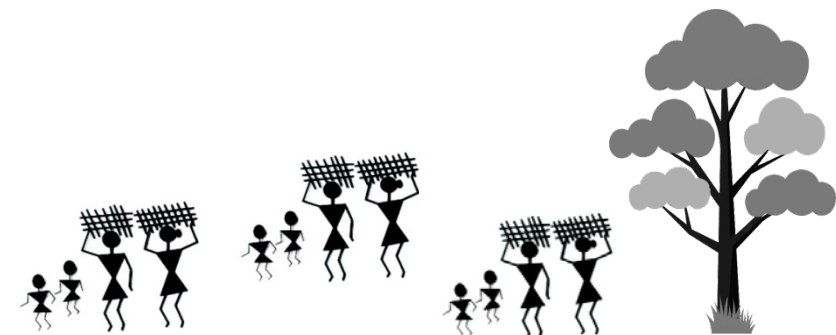
In year 2016 women were mobilised in Van Raji Basti and a women's group was formed by Women Welfare organisation The organization worked on women's rights issues, by keeping the government in loop, worked on building awareness through various programs, job cards were made in the village and people were registered with the labour department. In 2014, the people of Sania Basti, along with other organisations, filed 101 individual claim forms and



community claims under the Forest Rights Act, struggle for the same is still on.

**Population/ Number of Families – Scheduled Castes, Other Indegenious Forest Dwellers, and Tribal Families – 150**

- Individual Claim forms Submitted 101
- Claim in Women's Name 28
- Claims in the names of single and women in suffering 5
- Personal claims submitted in the name of men 68
- सामूहिक दावा भी जमा किया गया 1



## Ground Reality

The women have been battling for years to save their farming fields and land. For many years people have prepared forest land for cultivation <sup>1</sup>



As those fields started yielding, suddenly on November 24, 2018, forest department officials and some politically-economically influential people came and lay siege to Sania Basti, and started ploughing the fields. In the name of removing encroachments forest department started destroying the crop. On facing protest by people officials threatened them to vacate the place immediately. Women's group had to intervene and stopped the officials, but the officials misbehaved with women and abused them.

The forest department, along with the mafia and local police, harassed people. Women and girls were wronged and molested many times which

created a feeling of fear in the village. When women tried getting FIR registered police administration refused to do so, on the contrary along with the forest department and politically economically influential people abused and molested women to such an extent which would embarrass humanity. When the women protested against this, the forest department filed a case against the women. Cases were filed under various sections in the name of 15 women. F. Mother. The FIR accuses women of obstructing government work, and pushing forest department staff (for preventing government officials from performing their duties, and



<sup>1</sup>As Meenal Talpati and Neema Bhatt of Kalpavriksh recorded in their Case Study "Forest Land Rights Struggle and Sexual Harassment of Women – Case" . 2020



physically assaulting forest officials on duty). A woman who had delivered a baby five days ago and names of two undergraduate girls was also included in the report. They were threatened, intimidated, and included in the case. Asha Didi was contacted and consulted by Mahila Kisan Adhikar Manch (MAKAM) due to her acquaintance. Fighting their case with her support, facing all the officers and visiting court on several times a stay was brought from Nainital High Court on the report filed against 15 women.

Thereafter, with the support and in collaboration of MAKAM women of Sania Basti pleaded at the State Women's Commission; National Commission for Women; Scheduled Castes Commission; Scheduled Tribes Commission and at Mota (Ministry of Tribal Affairs) – submitted letters seeking for help. When the women boarded the buses for travel, they were scared, as there was high possibility of being arrested by police, still they continued courageously.



The families of women are living in crisis. Mothers state that they "We cut our expenses for educating our daughters so that they would get a job. But now the forest department has filed a false case against him. When the government says from one side 'Beti Padhao Beti Bachao', then why such injustice?" But despite so many theartening issues, the courage of these women to fight has not diminished.

Skipping a day's work also takes a rural person's evening meals but they are going to local, dehrahdoo and delhi court regularly for pushing their appeal for justice. For this fight, legal help has been provided by the colleagues of MAKAM (Mahila Kisan Adhikar Manch) and together they have even launched an agitation.

The women did not give up, the women took the legal initiatives to take the lawsuit and managed to get a stay order from the High Court. During this stay, women advocated for justice, from the state to the national level, forged unity among themselves and took initiatives for their case.



In Sania Basti, women protested after a report was filed in the name of 15 women with the efforts of the women's organization. Demonstrations were also held at the office of Upazila Officer Khatima.



### What Should the Next Steps be

Parvati Devi, president of the women's organization, said, "We were given posters, pamphlets and training about the Forest Rights Act by the Women's Rights Forum. We were explained upon the procedure of getting information through using Right to Information Act.

"After meeting in the village, it was decided by the villagers that when the forest department commits violence against women and girls, we will immediately report it, and if the FIR does not get registered, we will take the help of the law."

"After we launched a massive agitation, the forest department officials have not subjected women to violence and impolite treatment. "Information was sought under the Right to

Information Act on 101 claims, in which the reply was that these claims are under consideration. These are the same claims that the government had earlier reported to be missing some time ago. "We earn our livelihood from the forest, and have been living in the forest for years. Bay leaf, curry leaves, kochu, bitter gourd, fish and all the vegetables etc. are found in forest, which we use at home, and also sell in the market."

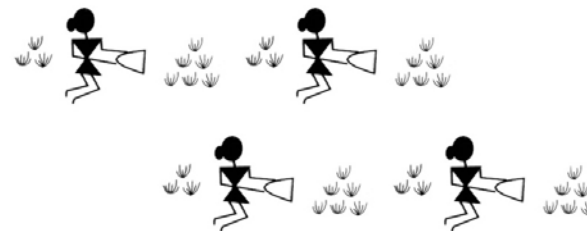
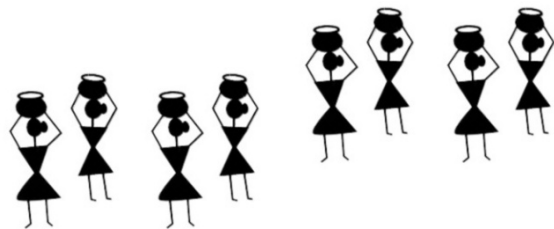
Ashadidi further adds, "Our culture is connected to the forest. We have been living in the forests for years. We take care of the forest. We recognize, and know what grows in the forests: herbs, vegetables and greens. We feed our families by selling dry wood from the forests. It is our responsibility to conserve and save forests, as we have been living here for years."

The fight to save land is really long and ages old as capitalists are always eying to grab the forest land. Tribals and forest dwellers are the real owners of these lands. Everyone's eyes are on these lands. Therefore, the fight to save the land is becoming more difficult.



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In such a situation, the women of Sania Basti have decided that they will give their lives, but will not let their land go into the hands of capitalists. Women are determined to breathe peace only after securing their forest.



## Case Study #2

## Your Development, Our Annihilation

Penn Taluka, Raigarh, Maharashtra  
Gauri, Meenal, Shweta

*The Mumbai Goa National Highway passes through the vicinity of Shitole Wadi village. The men and women forest dweller farmers living in this region are now compelled to cultivate vegetables on the margins of the highway as much of their agricultural forest land has been forcibly acquired and brought under the highway widening project, causing them to be displaced. Women from the Adivasi Katkari community have raised their voices against these destructive development policies that have led to grave injustice.*

### The Katkari PVTG Tribe in Raigarh, Maharashtra

This narrative of struggle is located in the Penn taluka of Raigarh district of Maharashtra. The Katkari people of Shitole Village are descendents of the Sahyadiri people. they are verily referred to as Katodi, Yakthodi kathwadi as well. this community is among the most vulnerable and marginalized tribal communities, also known as the Particulatrly Vulnerable Tribal Groups in polciy perspective.

The tribal population of Maharashtra comprises 12% of the total population. Traditionally their occupation was to extract the barks of trees such as babool and khair, as well as to extract the katthaa from the tree and selling this for a living, due to which they acquired their name. they were also engaged in hunting and preparation of charcoal, and gathering wood for sale from forests as well as collection and sale of honey. However their present mainstay occupation is the cultivation of vegetables and agriculture.



A view of Shitole Wadi, Penn Taluka, District Raigarh in Maharashtra







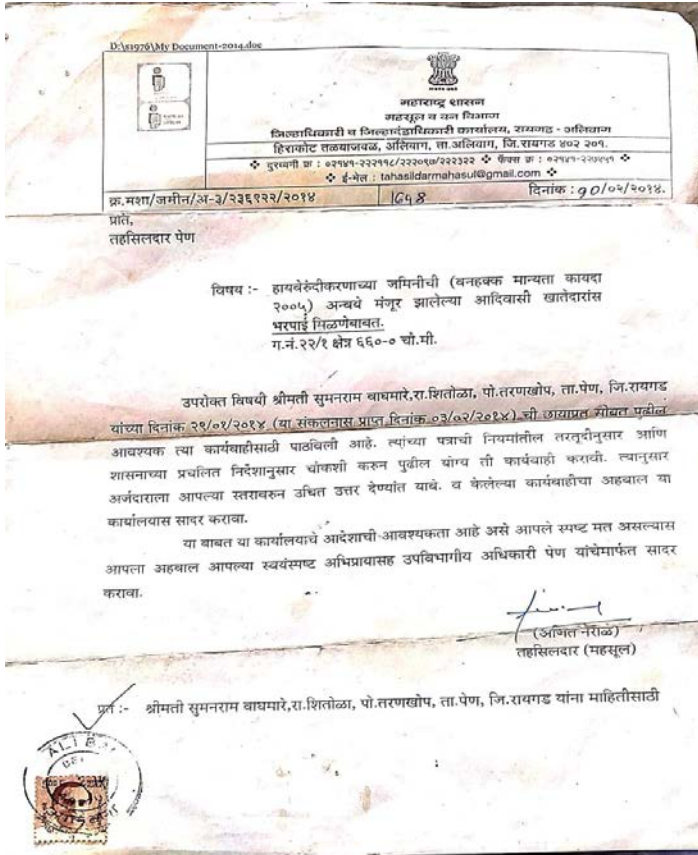
### Womens Roles in Vegetable Cultivation

The Katkari community has been living in Shitole wadi since many decades. Some homes are made of wood in their traditional style, while others are temporary kuchha shelters. There are 70 households that are living here and are dependent on the forest lands for their daily livelihoods needs through agriculture and related activities. The katkari community grows millets, sama and vegetables in their forest lands. Vegetables such as radish, spinach, beetroots, sweet potato and other tubers are harvested and sold or consumed.

Women are primarily involved in the cultivation of vegetables for which they prepare the fields, manure the soil with natural humus and dung and ash and prepare the soil for planting. Tasks of managing irrigation, harvesting and marketing are efficiently managed by the women. After the vegetables are harvested during the months following the monsoon in October to December the women and menfolk seek wage work in the brick kilns and in coal quarries.

Shoitole wadi's residents are primarily involved in vegetable cultivation along the margins of the highway which runs through their area. This is the busy Mumbai National Highway Number 17. The land diverted for the highway was their agricultural land and had been claimed by them under the Forest Rights Act of 2006. Ankur trust had played a support role in creating awareness and spaces for discussion on the provisions of the Act for individual and collective claims as a community. The Katkari tribal community had filled their claim forms and undertaken the required process to submit their claims in Penn, Raigadh area. Ankur trust that has been working with them for many years is supporting the





**Correspondence by the Katkari community members with the government**

the highway in 2014. According to this notice the households were informed that government had completed the process of acquisition of their forest lands.

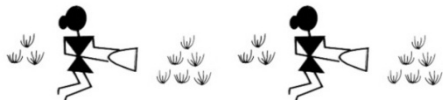


**These forest lands were destroyed to give way to the highway construction project**

effort, and have been trying to liaise with the Tribal Department for registration of their claims and has worked towards motivating the community to register the claims in both women and men's names jointly.

The majority of people in Shitole have lost their lands due to the forced acquisition of the land and subsequently diversion of land to the construction project. Notice was sent to 12 households for the acquisition of their lands for road widening of

the highway in 2014. According to this notice the households were informed that government had completed the process of acquisition of their forest lands.



The affected households applied for compensation under the National Highways Act 1956 clause 3 G for the lands acquired by the government. However only 4 of the 12 households did eventually receive compensation. The remaining 8 households, of which several were female headed households, were informed that their land titles were located elsewhere and not at the site where their claims documents indicated.

Hence, they were not entitled to compensation according to the government.

Due to the erroneous statement by the government those 8 katkari families were denied the land compensation despite their forest lands being acquired, causing them distress and their means of livelihoods, while the highway construction work continued on their lands. Single women bore the brunt of the distress and another 22 other households were also displaced, who had not even received any notification of acquisition. The loss of livelihoods and the hardship they suffered due to loss of their lands resulted in a crisis of survival for these households.

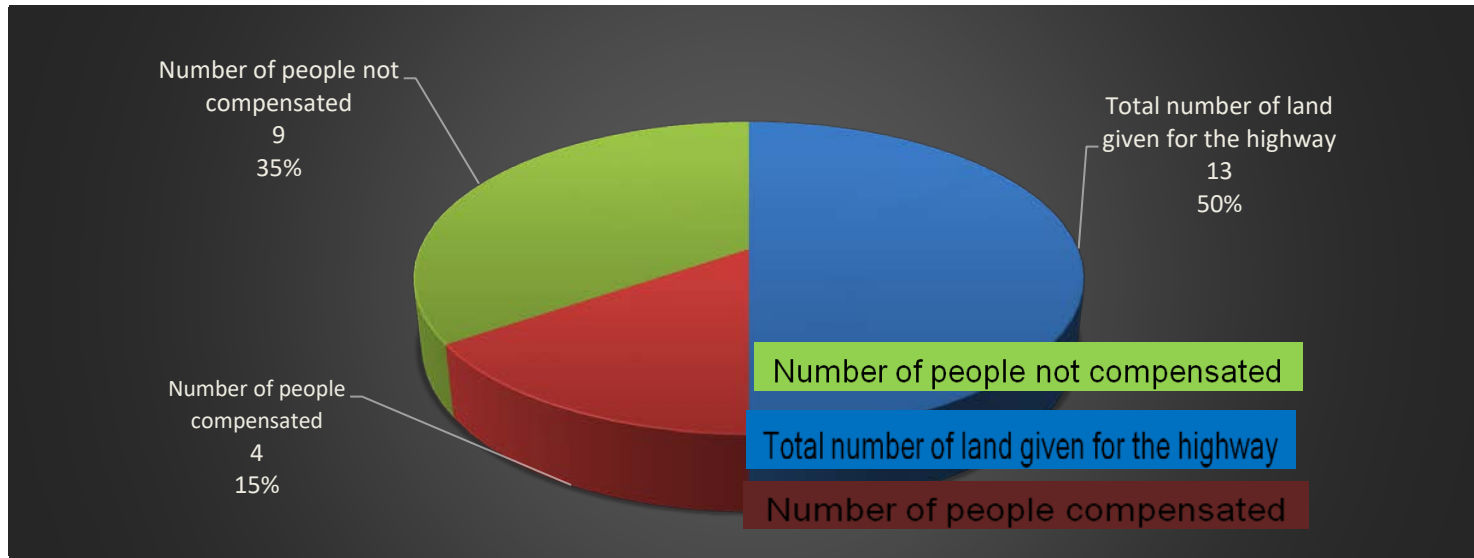


**an adivasi man stands reminiscing about the land which was once his forest land and is now the highway**



**This single and homeless Katkari woman is one among those who lost their land to the highway and have not received any compensation**

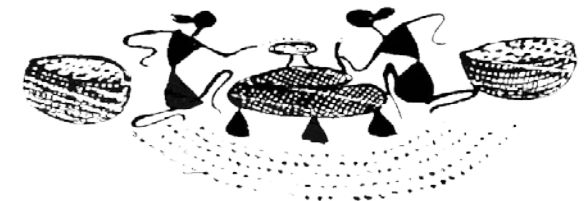




The following demands were put forth by the victims of the National Highway No. 17 widening project.

1. The measurement of the affected tribal areas has gone up significantly. The objections of the tribals should be taken into consideration to clear the confusion.
2. No heed was paid to the 3G notice in compliance to the demands and statements of the concerned tribals.
3. Houses and land within 15 minutes of the highway should be compensated according to the current market rate. Arrangements should be made for the rehabilitation of the project affected people by amending the National Highway Act.
4. All Project Affected Tribals should be given Project Affected Certificate.

In the context of the highway project, it is apparent that the Forest Rights Recognition Act has given special rights to the tribals, which are being violated by the forest department. Due to the negligence of the government, all the Katkari tribals have 7/12 of their forest land, but some of them have been given 7/12 as survey number 2 (survey number 18 instead of survey number 22). 8) are showing and they have not received any compensation.





Due to the widening of the highway, the Katkari tribal forest lands moved to the highway project, which was a major source of employment for these people, and they had to leave agriculture and go to other places for wages. It seems that displacement has taken place rather than a development process.

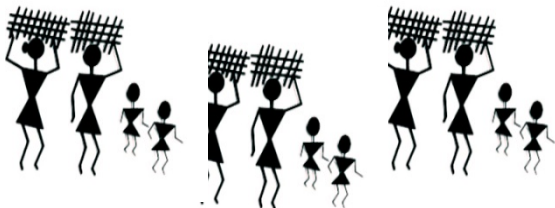
Due to the widening of the highway, the land on which women used to grow vegetables was lost. The Katkaris now have to rent land at higher cost and grow vegetables there. As a result, the women who are the backbone of this work spend more on land and vegetables and get less returns.

At present, the Katkari tribals are earning their livelihood through miscellaneous activities, and the forest land they were cultivating is gone for this highway project, forcing them to rent land from other places and Vegetables have to be grown on them. Due to such development projects, the Katkari tribes who have been living there for generations are moving away from their roots to find new means of subsistence



Katkari community in Penn is thus an example of the collateral costs that communities pay for development that accrues benefits to others, but destroys the means of their existence. The roots and heritage of this communities' capacity to live well are destroyed for future generations, compelling the Katkari to move to other locations in quest of work. they now neither have the land to survive nor the means to feed themselves in their traditional locations.

**An elder Katkari tribal leader, Parvati Bai from the community laments "this highway project, which you celebrate as a symbol of modernization and development has become our tombstone".**





### Case Study #3

## Mansi Devi's Valiant Efforts for Womens Forest Rights

Abu Road, Rajasthan  
Chandrakanta

***"A lot has changed in the last 20-25 years. Now when we go to the forest, the forest department officials prevent us from entry. It seems as if they have control over the forest."***

Mansidevi lives in Bahadur pura village of Sirohi district in Rajasthan with her two sons and three daughters. Mansi has never attended school. She is the owner of three goats, and two male goats. Male goats are sold when they age and mature and serve as a bankable asset. Mansi has a Bigha of farming land on which she grows there is no farming related work she works in NREGA as a laborer. She keeps a part of the agricultural crop for her family, and sells the rest of the crop in the local market in order to earn some money. Along with this she does mix cropping of local variety of leafy vegetables and various varieties of cucumbers.

On recalling her life journey so far, from being born in this tribal village and wedded here too she has strong ties and feels a strong connection to the region. Her maternal family, great grandfather everyone belongs to this forest only, she narrates. Even her inlaws, her father-in-laws father and even before that everyone has lived and resided in this forest.

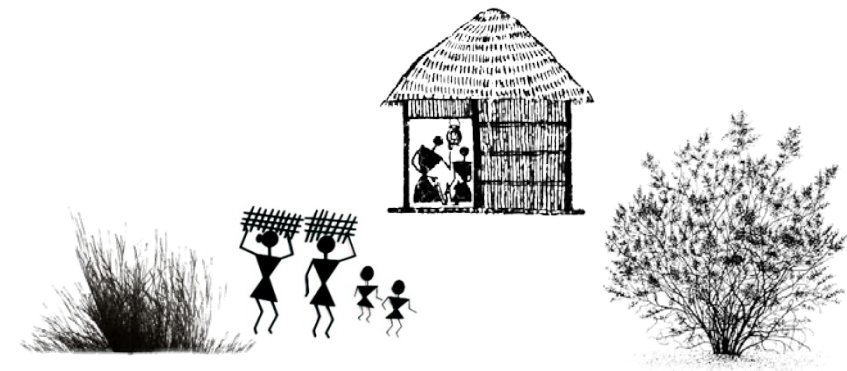
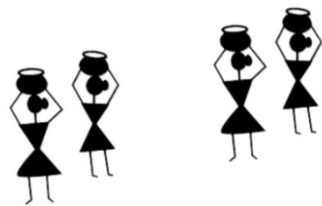
Mansi said she used to go to the forest with her mother, and specifically enjoyed taking goats for grazing in the forest – because there were a lot of trees, a lot of shade in the forest; There were fruits, flowers and animals, we would spend all day in the forest and come home in the evening. There was never anyone to stop us from entering the jungle, and from these very forests

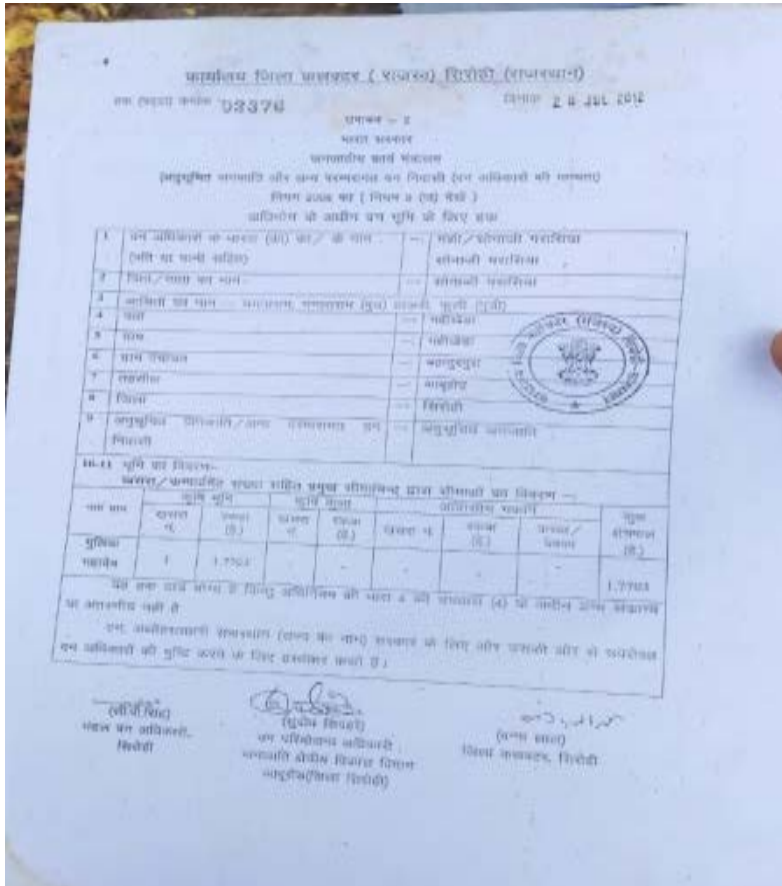


we took forest- produce such as tendu leaves, wood, honey, berries, dates, mahua, keri, amla, tamarind, timru, kesula, white muesli, bark of trees etc to use in daily life. They would take animals for grazing and would even procure fodder grass from the forest. Children would do go the forest and bring back difereent kinf of forest produce and sell it on Gujrat Road to the passerbys and tourists. These children would then use the money earned for buying ration for their homes



Mansi further explains **“We would spend hours in the forest, sit in the shade, enjoy the cool breeze, take chapati with us – eat it there in the forest, and drink water from the pond. In the woods one would hear sounds of leaves and crickets in the forest, which would be pleasurable. There is this temple of our Bawasi (goddess of the community) in the same forest, which we go to. When our first crop ripens, we go there and offer.”**





Mansi Devi states that "we are from the forest, forest is from us" she says that "We have a soulful relationship with the forest. Earlier the whole forest was ours. The people of the village had an affinity with forests, animals, ponds, rivers, streams, trees and plants. If there was a fire in the forest, the village heads would gather the village by playing drums, and run to the forest to extinguish the fire. They poured soil, water into the fire, removed dry leaves from all sides, this was done to stop fire from moving towards the forest..

Mansi tells, "earlier we had made a Kucchi (mudwall) wall, but now there is a bigger and stronger wall, because of which we cannot take animals also to the forest for grazing. And there is a wired wall too which ends up wounding us and cattle. Forest officials scold and threaten us When we see people in the jungle, they threaten us that "Does The forest belongs to your father, that you come here – the whole forest has been destroyed."

"we say forest is ours from the time of our forefathers, we women only bring dry wood, we never chop wet branches or wood, as our Caste Panchayat has decided long back that no one can take wet wood or tree logs from the forest, if anyone does then she/he would be penalized."


**"There are 200 families like Mansi who had submitted individual claim forms under the Forest Rights Act, out of which 150 families have received individual rights letters. Out of which 35 women could get claim forms under the joint name in which the name of the woman has been written first, and her husband's name later. Individual rights letters have been received in the name of single women as well.**






Jan Chetna Sansthan has been making continuous efforts in the direction of getting individual and community claims arranged for the community under the Forest Rights Acts since the year 2006. 6500 claims were filed, out of which 4200 personal claim forms were received by the people, and 2300 claims were made online. The women-led organisation is making continuous efforts for 150 community claims, out of which 7 were received, the rest have received no attention and the process of has been currently sluggish. The people of the community have decided that they will continue submitting claims until they get the right to live in the forest, and will also motivate the people of their tribal community to do this work. Regarding those whose claims have been rejected, the Secretary told that *"online submission of claims is going on, work is going on at the district level in the process of giving personal rights letters."*

Mansi devi reports that "Until we got the authorisation letter, we were scared that the government might come up with a new rule, after which they would start talking about evicting us from the forest. Therefore, we kept trying since 2006, as a result of which we got individual rights letters in 2012. The challenge still remains for those whose claims have been rejected, our organization will work forward under the leadership of women, so that community rights letters can be included along with individual rights letters, which will benefit our lifestyle and livelihood, and there will be no restriction in the forest.



**Scheduled Tribes and Other  
Traditional Forest Dwellers  
(Recognition of Forest Rights) Act  
2006 and Rules 2008 and Revised  
Rules September 2012 Objective of  
the Act - Scheduled tribes living in  
forests and other traditional forest  
dwellers who have been living in  
forests for generations, but their rights  
The act has been brought for the  
purpose of recognition and vesting of  
forest rights and occupation in forest  
land, which could not be recorded.**



**"Once we get community claims, we will devise further strategies to thicken our forest, conserve it and increase the forest yield then manage and store the same, contribute towards afforestation in total."**





## Case Study #4 Food Security from Forest Produce: Mahkoni Community's Struggle for Forest Rights

Chhattisgarh  
Durga / Kaushalya

*The People of Mahakoni village struggled for forest rights, and were able to secure their food and livelihood security*

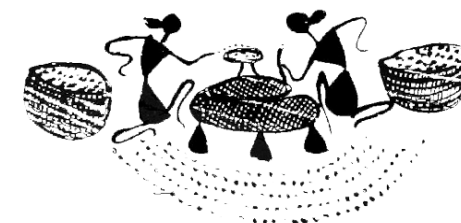
In 2015, after being trained by the Dalit Adivasi Manch, people from Mahkoni village in Chhattisgarh's Baloda Bazar district filed a community claim under the Forest Rights Act, 2006. The form for this was received in 2019.

After being trained by Dalit Adivasi Manch in Forest Rights Act, 2006 a community claim was filed in year 2015 by the people of Mahakoni Village of Baloda district, Chattisgarh for which a form was received in 2019.

1	Total number of families cultivating forest land and forest rights form	52
2	Number of tribal families farming on forest land	42
3	Number of Forest Rights Forms for Single and Abandoned Women's Family	6

The men and women of the village were made aware, informed and trained about the Forest Rights Act and their rights under the Forest Rights Act by the Dalit Advivasi Manch and the Saraswasti Mahila Group. The training focused on enhancing understanding of their own role towards the forest. This was followed by community claims on about 1,830 hectares of land by the Forest Rights Committee in 2015, with an equitable participation of women and men in the village.

Mahkoni village got ownership rights for the expansion of the community in the forest after the community forest rights form was received. In spite of all this forest department continues to cordon off areas and log trees to be sold elsewhere. This would be done without the formal permission of the Gram Sabha.



In September 2018, without the consent of the inhabitants of Mahkoni village and the forest rights committee there, teak trees in the fields in Compartment No. 382 (which is about 10-12 kilometres of forest cover) were axed down by forest officials. The forest rights committee, Saraswati Mahila Group and Dalit Tribal Forum colleagues came to know about the incident only after the forest department had hacked more than 100 timber trees. Sensing that their forest was under threat, the villagers immediately reached the site and stopped further chopping of trees, seized the saw machine and wood logs. They pressurised deputy ranger to stop further felling of trees. Women's groups of the village engaged effectively in a dialogue with forest department officials during this time to save their forest and their livelihood. They participated at par with men in the fight of seizing the wood cutting machine and chopped wood. It was a commendable act.



Apology statement received by the forest conservator.



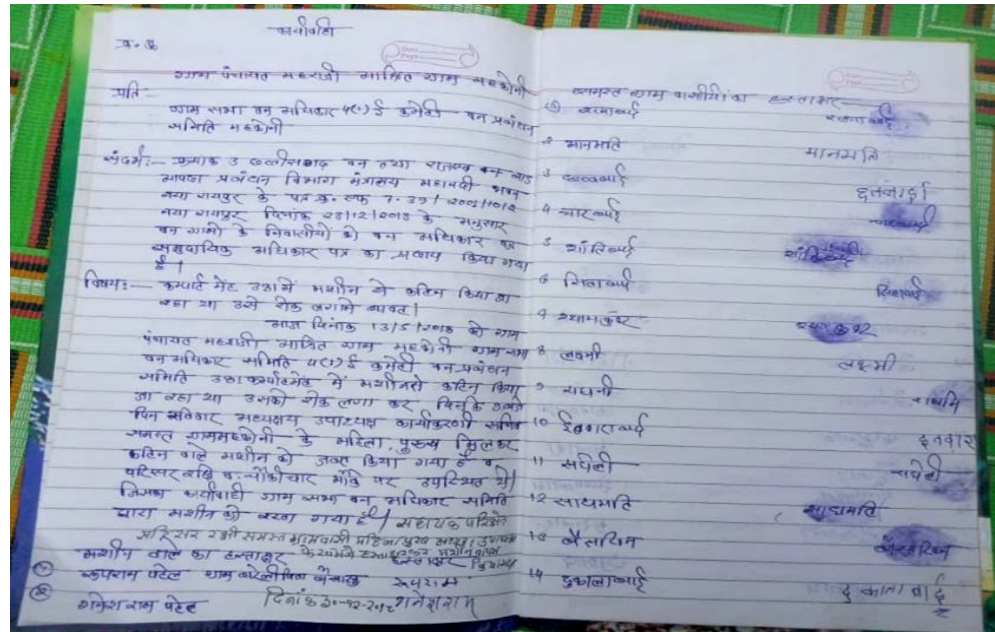
The location where women have been practicing farming near the felling area



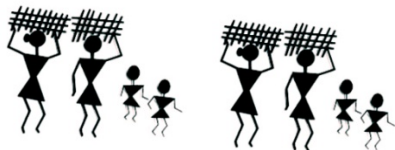


Women collecting their food security from forest and processing the same for their livelihood from the forest

The seized tree cutting machine and logged wood were brought to the village under the direct supervision of Mr Juram Pekra. This seize continued for three days. The Gramsabha decided that the seize will only be over when the forest officials submit a written apology. Senior forest officials like forest conservators, DFOs and rangers visited the village and submitted their apology to the Gramsabha. Only then were the tree cutting machine and the empty truck released. The wood logs were not returned to the forest official, they were distributed among the families of the village for effective consumption of the same. The women say that such rampant and mindless tree cutting drives damage the biodiversity, fertility and regenerativity of the forest. This in return, affects food security and livelihood of the community in general and of women specially.



Record and signatures of the Apology received from various forest officials for the illegal tree felling in their community forest rights area



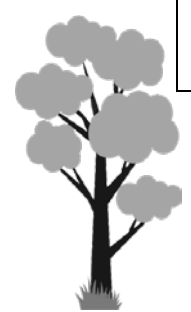
Women's livelihood depends on the forest as they forage for mahua, honey, gum, tendu and sihal leaves for making various products to be sold in the local market.



*women forage and collect the forest produce to process it and sell, in order to earn an income*

S.No	Forest Yield	Previously estimated Quantities yielded	Yield these days	Usage
1	Harra	12 Kg	5 kg	Used for sore throats and colds
2	Mahua	4 quintals	2 quintals	Making laddu, oil and alcohol
3	Dashra futtu	10 Kg	1kg	Use it for preparing curries or sell it in open market.

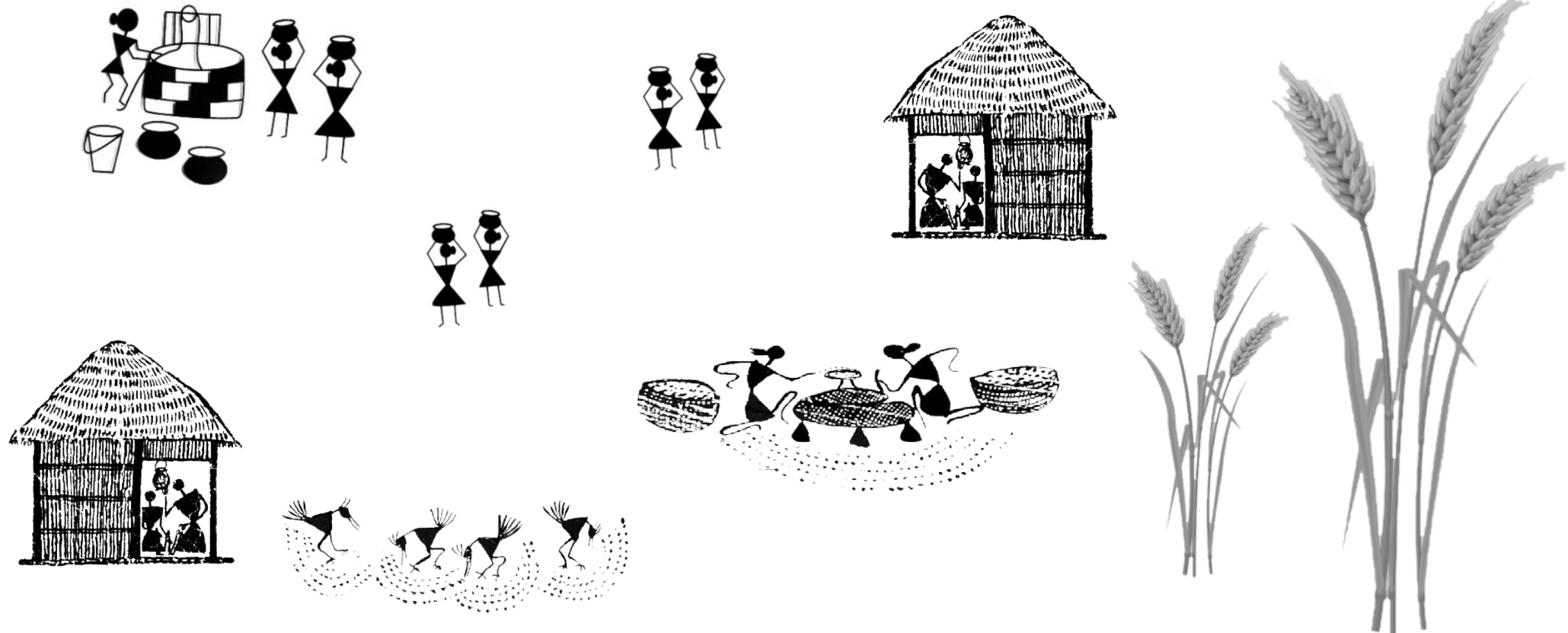
*Women stated that we conserve the forest in our own indigenous ways; we use it but we don't exploit it. We take produce from it for food and livelihood. Forest is the basis of our lives, we exist because the forest exists. Cutting forests is going to adversely affect birds, animals, humans and rainfall too. We tribals have been living in these forests for years now, our culture is rooted in the forest; our traditions, plants, trees, mountains, plains and gods/ goddesses reside here.*





Forest right committee Vice Chairman Juram Paikra said that our livelihood, fruits, vegetables, timber wood and even medicine depend on our forests. It is our lifeline in most ways and the forest is our way of life. Women specifically have a great role to play in forest conservation, they collect forest yield and forage the forest in a non-threatening manner; they ensure food security and livelihood, all thanks to the forest. The women of this village are trained in Forest Rights Act 2006 to preserve it and are working sensitively towards forest conservation.

**Mr. Rambhaji, vice-chairman of the Forest Rights Committee, stated: "This forest is ours, it is our responsibility to save it, if we do not save the forest, who will? The forest department which is supposed to protect the forest is bent upon destroying this forest, consequently we have to take the responsibility and our intervention is essential for saving it."**



## Case Study # 5 Long Journey for Asserting Forest Rights Of Single Women From Sabarkantha

IN SABARKANTHA, GUJARAT  
Megha Sheth

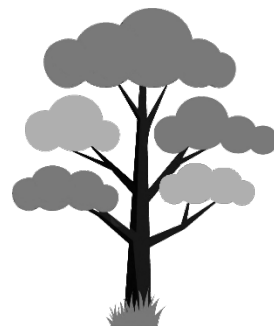
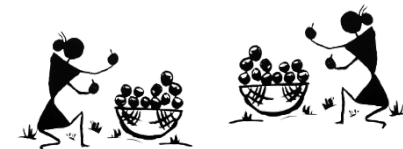
*Women have had to overcome insurmountable odds to own the Forest Rights Titles and had to deal with a tediously slow pace of responses from the institutions involved. This structural lethargy and social impediments along the journey towards rights has caused single women especially to contend with severe hardship even as they emerged as leaders for land rights struggles*

### Introduction

With the aim of correcting the historical injustice that has occurred in respect of the forest dwelling communities, Indian Parliament passed the historic Scheduled Tribes and Other Traditional Forest Dwellers (Recognition of Forest Rights) Act, 2006, popularly known as the Forest Rights Act (FRA), which came into effect from 1<sup>st</sup> January 2008 for implementation following the notification of its rules across the country.

The Act has many positive aspects viewed from women's perspective which include inclusion of their names as primary holders to ensure land rights, rights to NTFP which serve to strengthen their forest related livelihoods; and has the potential to strengthen food security. It includes Individual and Community Forest rights for men and women and recognized forest dweller claimants as rights holder.

The law also provides for community rights and for habitat rights, and provides for an equal representation of women in the decision making bodies responsible for the governance of community forests and implementation of the FRA in Gram sabha and at other levels.



Individual Forest Rights(IFR)	Community Forest Rights(CFR)	Community Rights(CR)	Habitat Rights Specifically for PVTGs and Pre-Agriculture Communities
Hold on Forest land	Forest Resources	Diversion of forest land by Central government	tenures for customary habitat
Habitation	Own, access, use and dispose Forest produce	Village management facilities	Recognized livelihoods, social, economic, spiritual, and cultural
Self-Cultivation	To Protect, Regenerate, conserve and manage forest resources		
	NTFP collection		

### National Data

Since Implementation of FRA began in 2008, 190056 claims have been filed and after 14 years of individual and community struggle, 95379 titles are distributed over 13,17,697.59 acers of forest land. (Ministry of Tribal Affairs-2021) However the gender disaggregated data is not available.

Individual	Community	Total	Land Area in Acres
<b>Claims filed and accepted at Gram Sabha level</b>			
182869	7187	190056	Data Not Available
<b>Titles distributed</b>			
91686	4597	96,283	13,93,414.74



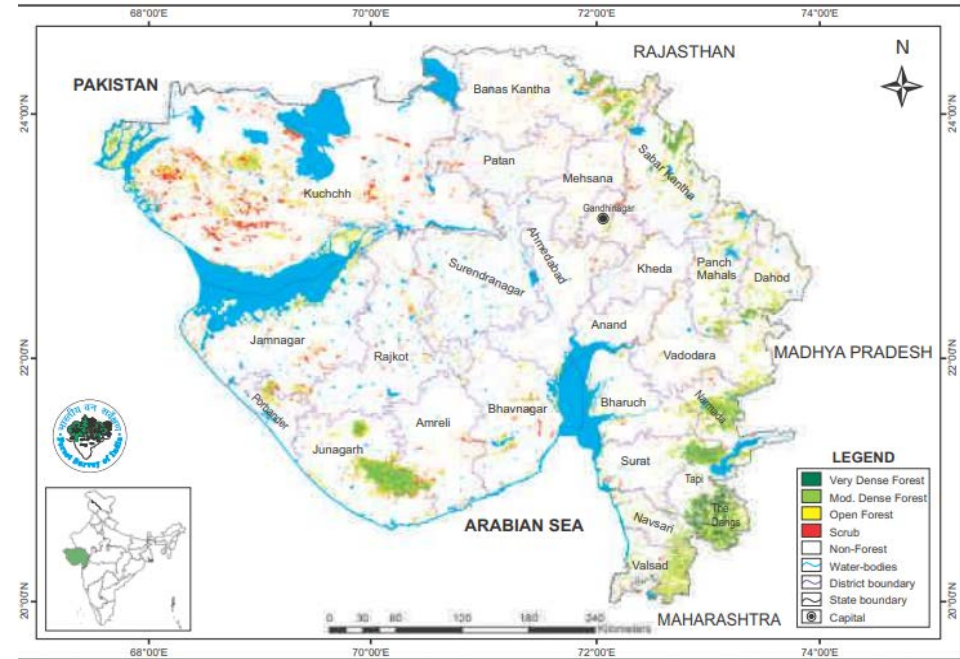


## The situation in Gujarat

Recorded Forest Area (RFA) in the state is 21,647 sq km of which 14,373 sq km is Reserved Forest, 2,886 sq km of Protected Forest and 4,388 sq km of Unclassed Forests including very dense forest, moderately dense forest, open forest, and Scrubs.

Gujarat accounts 8.1% (89.17 lakh in total) of the Scheduled Tribe population of the country, which constitute 14.8% of the state's population. This population occupies 11.14% of total geographical area of State<sup>2</sup>.

The scenario changed in Gujarat, under the context of FRA after 2013 judgement by High court on WRIT PETITION PIL NO. 100 of 2011 with Civil application no. 5630 of 2012 and writ petition PIL no. 168 of 2012, the overall approval rate has been increased till 40% within 3 years. but it is also to be noted that the Gujarat government has not updated the claims data since the year 2016, and that they have stopped processing new claims. The work on the old claims has been undergoing at the snail's pace, however new claims are accepted at Gram Sabha/FRC level or maximum to SDLC level. The following analysis and status are largely based on the numbers of the year 2016.



स्रोत: fsi.nic.in-isfr-2019 गुजरातरिपोर्ट



<sup>2</sup> (Census 2011)

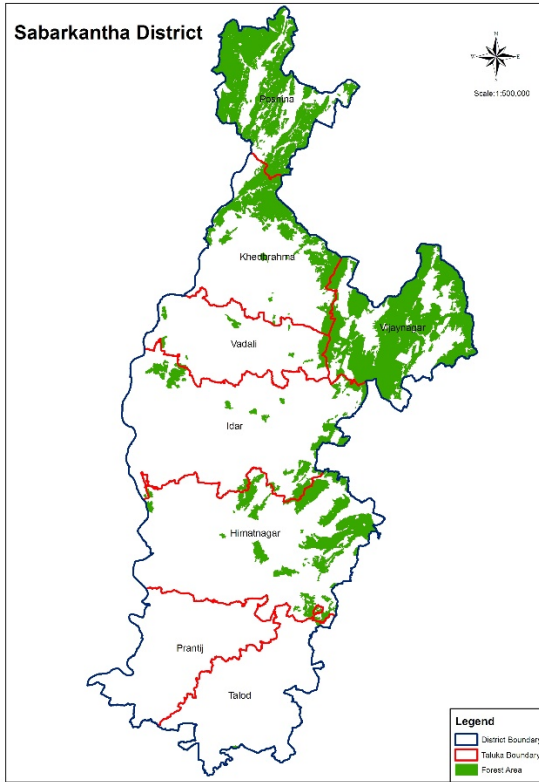


June 2011	An additional 19,000 claims approved taking total approved claims to 36,860 (20%) and about 113,000 claims rejected on grounds that they were not supported by evidence as required by Rule 13 of FRA and by satellite images of 2005
June 2011	Writ petition (No. 100/2011) filed by Arch Vahini against Gujarat Government because of wide-spread rejection of claims
3 <sup>rd</sup> May 2013	High Court accepted the petitioners' arguments and, in its judgment, gave stringent directions to the GoG to reconsider and review all rejected claims in a time bound manner.
June 2016	Number of approved claims increased to 80,540 which is 44% of the total filed. In effect 102,329 claims (56%) still pending. Almost all claims of OTFDs rejected on inadequate grounds. LC/DLC meetings not been held in the last two years (2015, 2016). Prior to that they relied only on the opinion/ recommendation of FD for approval and area to be approved.

Status of FRA claims of Gujarat upto 31st march 2022, as extracted from MoTA

Individual	Community	Total	Land Area in Acers
<b>Claims filed and accepted at Gram Sabha level</b>			
182869	7187	190056	Data not available
<b>Titles distributed</b>			
91686	4597	96,283	13,93,414.74
<b>Total Rejected</b>			
2243	57054	59297	





### About Sabarkantha

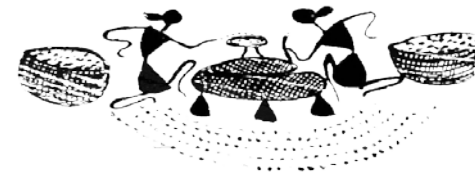
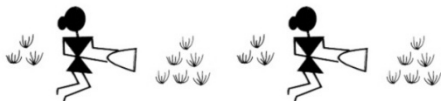
Sabarkantha District is situated in Northeastern part of Gujarat State and has a population of 14,73,673 as per last census 2011. District is divided in 4 Revenue Sub-Divisions & 8 Talukas. Poshina, Khedbrahma & Vijaynagar Talukas are mainly tribal Talukas and comes under the PESA of the district. These Talukas are hilly and forest areas. ([sabarkantha.nic.in](http://sabarkantha.nic.in)) Remaining Talukas are mainly flat areas.

In Sabarkantha out of 409 villages total 19625 IFR and 953 claims were received, but the approval rate is very low 34% for IFR and 16% of CR/CFR. And whether Claimed IFRs are on Joint name or the first land owner as a women is questionable. Cumulatively in three blocks Vijaynagar, khedbrahma and Poshina the ratio of approved claims is just 12.85% with respect to sabarkantha district, which is almost 1/4<sup>th</sup> of the overall claims approval rate in Gujarat. Individual claims & Community claims for forest land in these talukas of Sabarkantha district of Gujarat have been approved in different phases since 2008 but the struggle is still on.

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स्रोत:<https://forests.gujarat.gov.in/gis-eng.htm> Source:  
<https://forests.gujarat.gov.in/gis-eng.htm>

District	No. of villages	IFR claims received	IFR approved	Approval rate (%)	CR/CFR claims received	CR/CFR approved	Approval Rate
Sabarkantha	409	19625	6679	34%	953	153	16%



Cumulatively in three blocks Vijaynagar, khedbrahma and Poshina the ratio of approved claims is just 12.85% with respect to sabarkantha district, which is almost 1/4<sup>th</sup> of the overall claims approval rate in Gujarat. Individual claims & Community claims for forest land in these talukas of Sabarkantha district of Gujarat have been approved in different phases since 2008 but the struggle is still on.



HDRC (Human Development and Research Centre) is an Ahmedabad based organization started in 1969 with the core objective of promoting and strengthening people's movements and organizations of the marginalized communities such as Dalits, Tribals, Other backward classes, religious minorities, women and children to achieve social justice and dignity within human rights framework within 37 blocks of 16 district in Gujarat. Expertise in Individual and Community Forest rights with legal and technical support.

HDRC has been one of the core group members since the onset of WGWLO (Working Group for Women and Land Ownership) Network started working on Women and Forest Rights theme and facilitated all the technical, legal and people

mobilization support to WGWLO for starting their journey under the Forest Rights initiated in Aravalli, Banaskantha and Sabarkantha District with tribals for their growth and fundamental rights.

WGWLO with their member organization's individual expertise sees Women *WGWLO PLW conducts awareness meetings at Village level* and Forest Rights as a part of the larger gamut of women's land rights issue. There was a need to go case by case and find out at what level the claims were rejected or kept in abeyance, and the reason for the same. This information was crucial in order to support the claimant so that he/she could be helped to get the relevant proofs that would enable them to file the claim again. A special focus was on the single and widowed women, bringing gender perspective, deciphering the law, and facilitating for her claim.

Together with HDRC's facilitation for technical support, lawyer based legal support, training and association in campaigns and other mass movements, through community support and building on WGWLO network's gender perspective and advocacy expertise, a cadre of Paralegal Workers (PLWs) is trained with a set of modules and trainings about the Forest Rights Act and they work together to facilitate the communities

to claim the IFR and CFR Rights across three blocks of sabarkantha district since 2017. Building a cadre well versed with the act and adequate support, communities are sensitized as well as mobilized to claim their rights over the forest land.

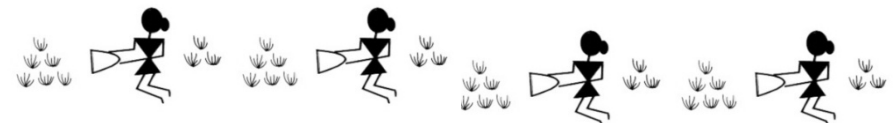
After the judgement of High Court, Gujarat in May 2013 the govt put pressure on Forest department to meet minimal target. Few NGOs working on FRA and field level NGOs particularly HDRC play an important role in implementation of the FRA on field. During that period, they worked diligently towards increasing awareness of villagers on Forest rights and specially supported them in filling the forms of IFR on joint name of men and women within families and to strengthen livelihood rights of each villager by providing technical support. **HDRC is thus creating awareness on rights, supporting communities to file claims for the IFR, CFR accurately and ensuring that claims are filled under joint name for IFR and on the name of Gramsabha for CFR. Such a systematic process of intense mobilization** has enabled them to achieve a good response so that significant numbers of IFR and CFR claims were submitted and have been approved after the 2013 HC Judgement and 45 single women have also been enabled to secure their individual forest rights thereby.

#### How Women Claim their Rights:

While the law makes provision for Legal recognition of the forest rights, there are multiple challenges which women have had to surmount to reach the stage for approval of their claims. Even before the struggle for legal rights begins, and the legal and technical battle is launched, they contend with the rules and norms and structures of patriarchy in their families and in society on the one hand and the aggressive behavior of functionaries of the forest department on the other. Below we examine a few cases to understand the nuances of women's struggles:

Veena ben from kanadar village of Vijaynagar block says "... we don't feel any fear while sowing the crop on our land where we used to cultivate since our generations to generations, but we all feel the threats from the Forest department as harvest time approaches, as they come and drive the heavy vehicle over the ripened crops."

Rekha ben a single woman from kotda village of khedbrahma block said the fear from the villagers itself is not any less than the fear from forest department. "I can fight against Forest department easily but how can I fight against my own people, who are not allowing me to cultivate my approved land. It's difficult for a widow to fight against the patriarchy."



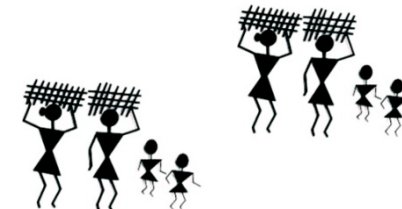
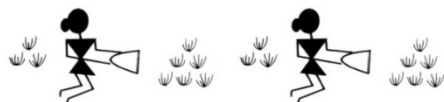
After the HC's order in May, 2013 on clearing pending IFR claims through reverification process, 45 Single women IFR have been approved. On the other hand, there is issue with the single woman claimant whose claim has been rejected by DLSC giving the reason being the land is GOCHAR LAND.

Geetaben from mahuana khetra village of Vijayanagar Geetaben used to collect Mahuva-Kesuda Flowers, Timru Paan, Honey, dry wood and other NTFP and selling them at decent price and managing their daily life throughout the year. "My claim was rejected as it was the Grassland in 2013, I am aged single woman, and all my livelihood has been connected to the forest only. The forest department trouble me with digging the pits on my claimed land, do the plantation on my field, used to threaten me for speaking against them....But now, our village's CFR has been approved, which helped me to survive within the village. "

### Dealing with Rejections

There is a very long journey of struggle for forest dweller community from applying for the rights, and especially for women. Many of the claims are rejected so far, on very flimsy and unfounded grounds even after the Gram Sabha and FRC has scrutinized and approved them. Some of the responses espoused for rejection are due to i) Cases filed for title without attaching the information of occupation or encroachment prior to 1980-92. li) GPS maps were not attached iii) Claims for Gauchar land (grazing land) which were considered as non-legitimate. In the case of women claimants, there is the additional aspect of family claims; if the land is claimed by the family or husband, then woman may not claim a title in her name individually. "Now we at an organization level, FRC level and community level need to strategize our work on checking the legitimacy of such rejection reasons to help community women to assure their land Ownership rights." Says Kishor bhai, a senior member of HDRC.

In view of the high level of rejections, the NGOs in the region realized that the resistance was from the govt department and upon understanding the govt.'s behavior they adopted a strategy to enable women to come to a common level of strength to be able to negotiate for their IFR, and then to work on advocacy for their cases. Where the land recognized is below the actual claim amount, or plantation of trees, digging pits in their farmlands have been undertaken by Forest department to trouble them they would also need to push back and challenge such acts. The struggle is ongoing to radually enable single women and other women to stake their claims to forest rights through collective strategy.



**The scenario regarding CFR** is not so different from the IFR status in Vijaynagar area as the FRCs have largely become redundant. In many committees, either the chairperson (pramukh) or the secretary (mantri) had died, many of the members were old and forgotten about the committee and women were not active in gramsabhas or committee meetings, their name were added as proxy. Being a Forest Rights Committee Member of kanadar village of vijaynagar Kokilaben knew the process of individual forest rights claim and list of documents required and so on. So she regularly followed up at District /panchayat and Block level offices regarding the status of her claim application, and she finally received the claim approval in 2012. Meanwhile she asked other villagers and Forest Rights Committee members, Paralegal workers from HDRC for further support to understand the steps and decided to work under their guidance to strengthen the women perspective within village and managing post CFR Rights. She helped Women in claiming IFR, on filling the form A. She, along with other women of the village, would collect Mahua flower, Timru patta, honey, white musadi and flowers of kesuda. The community decided to work collectively to work to collect the forest produce so that the income generated through it could be deposited in the account of the Gram panchayat and then could be used for the betterment of village and women and youth.

**Anitaben from kanadar, says that “Due to the leadership of Kokilaben, we have got a lot of understanding about our forest rights, and our livelihood has also increased, so we used to go to kokilaben in case of any doubt or trouble”** Even after receiving the community claim for 1100 Hector of Forest land for more than 1000 families, when women go to collect forest produce they have had to contend with the beat guard and his demands for a supply of mahua alcohol; they found the forest department digging pits on their CFR forest land and had to that theirland was being prepared for construction of a check dam and for plantation for the dam, for which funds had already been allocated.

The mass awareness created and support provided with training regarding rights and the consequent emergence of women’s leadership has led to the capacities within communities to resist pressure from the contractors for collection of undue commissions from income of NTFP and other forms of exploitation and everyday harassment. But the exploitation of women by Contractors, NTFP Profit sharing and utilization, low labor cost vs profits earned for the same produce by govt agencies for collecting NTFP for livelihood and competition between JFM and FRC continue to be contentious issues that are constant at village level. As a network, WGWLO recognizes the reality of such issues across the state and seeks to work towards addressing them from the gender lens.







## Case Study #6

## Korchi Adivasi Association Opposes Mine in Forest Area

Maharashtra  
Kumaribai Jamakanta

*Women self-help groups/organizations start in Korchi by saving money, towards the objective of building a just society. Samuhik Mahila Bachat Parisar Sangh has strived to fulfill this belief, and has stood strong to support firmly the struggle of communities against the destruction caused by the mining development projects in the jurisdiction.*

Self-help groups in Gadchiroli district were initiated in 1990 by **Aamhi Amcha Arogyasathi (AAA)**. After women's self-help groups were started in Korchi and some more nearby villages, the organization encouraged the women from the SHGs groups that they should themselves work on issues related to dealing with the institutions that are meant to support them such as bank and try to address the problems faced by women in government offices regarding schemes, etc. The vision was that women should have their own coalition/ association that they could run themselves and take decisions and actions collectively to address their issues, with AAA as its support organization.

### Establishing Samuhik Mahila Bachatghat Parisar Sangh Korchi - 1996

Initially Self-help women savings groups faced a lot of resistance from bank employees while opening bank accounts or seeking loans from banks etc. It was for this reason, that the Parisar Sangh Sanghathan was formed, with the aim to challenge the subordinate position given to women by society through collection of their own savings in Self-help groups. They sought to challenge stereotyped notions that women are considered good only for household chores and raising children, can have no property in their name and cannot participate in any decision-making process as well as to challenge patriarchal views about their status. In order to empower women, the foundation of their own organization has to be strong and therefore establishing the Sangh was crucial as a source of collective solidarity and support in their struggles and efforts to give strength to assert for their own rights. This was the entire thought behind creating the Sangh.



## Women's access to gram sabha

Problems faced by women in the village were presented through self-help groups, such as water problems, alcoholism in men, economic abuse due to it, cases of domestic violence issues related to housing schemes, questions about children's education in the gram panchayat. Thinking about this, women started joining the gram sabha. In about year 2000, the decision of 'Governance of Organizing Women Gram Sabha' was taken in Maharashtra. Based on this, the women started going to the Gram Sabha with their questions. Shortly thereafter, under the Scheduled Tribes and Other Traditional Forest Dwellers (Recognition of Forest Rights) Act, 2006, Rules 2008 and The Amended Rules 2012, that the title of ownership rights for water, forest and land should be with the Gram Sabha a law was passed.

It is the tribal community living in the forest that has protected the forest, and the women have a close bond with it – in which they consider the forests as their maternal home. Everyday morning to night, women engage with the forests, so the owners of water, forest, land are not only men, but also women.

## Conservation of forest

Today in 2022, 95 villages of Korchi block have received Community Forest Rights (CFR). Since 2010-2011, when the forest rights have been recognized, the community has claimed the role to guard their forest, to plant fruit trees and other essential trees in some places of the forest, to protect the forest from fire, and to prevent theft from the forest (outside contractors who build buildings, build dams, etc., and stealthily sell forest wood, bamboo, etc. in the guise of their contractual works) The gram sabha is doing this work. Women have been actively involved and engaged in this.

## Money from tendu leaf sales in women's bank accounts

It is important that all the work and transactions in the Gram Sabha remain transparent, and everyone should be aware of the economic activities. Keeping women on board in the decision-making process has become a practice, collecting minor forest produce, selling it, and even tendu leaf sales money to be deposited in the bank in the name of women, so that they can use that money for the important



work at the right time . One of the benefits of repeatedly discussing these issues is that now the money of tendu leaf has started coming directly to the women's account. Now, they has been using that amount judiciously and as per the requirement.

### Leadership and conflict issues in the mining process

Women played a crucial role in the process of conservation, promotion, reconstruction and management of areas with community forest rights by the Gram Sabha and in dealing with struggles of various minning projects. After getting community forest rights, the gram sabhas also did some work in their forest area. In Jhandepar, Nandli village, 50 hectare to 40000 Bamboo tree. Ferorestation was undertaken in graded clumps; While the gram sabhas are protecting the forest they also plan forest-based development by managing community forest rights However they are confronted by the governments interventinos in the forests which have the potential to cause forest destruction.



In 2009, local forest department employees and some strangers were seen in the forests near Gram Sabha Sohale, and communities observed their presence and discussed it in the village. For a day or two, some people of the village also went to cut small trees on the call of forest staff.

But when their behavior raised doubts about their intentions, the people of Gram Sabha Jhandepar contacted some prominent people of Sohale Tola and simultaneously spoke to the organisation workers to alert them to the facts. People from neighbouring villages rallied forth and gathered together to discuss the matter with organization workers in depth and decided to write to the District Magistrate seeking clarity on their presence. A letter was written inquiring what the strangers interests were from the District Magistrate, and seeknig clarificatino as to why their community forest land was being given to other people when the Gram Sabhas has staked their claims as per the law. They did not receive any clear response to their queries but soon the villagers learnt that the land was about to be allotted for iron or mineral mining.



Whenever women representatives attended the Sangha gatherings or some new information surfaced, a meeting of the “Samuhik Mahila Bachat Parisar Sangh” was promptly held and everyone was made aware of it.

### **Public hearing for mining**

There are 133 villages in 30 gram panchayats of Korchi block, where PESA law and forest rights law are in force. On the strength of this, sarpanches, deputy sarpanches, panchayat samitis, and zila parishad members of these 30 gram panchayats called a meeting of political leaders, representatives of social organizations, members of women savings group and other organization representatives etc. in Korchi block. The discussion was centred around the means to protect their forest rights and the need to strengthen their collective Sangathan in order to resist such threats to their forests such as the proposed mining project for iron and mineral exploration. The leaders emphasized the importance of a collective voice and opposition so that no one person, organization or institution could take credit, but it would be viewed as community work, in which everyone will get credit. Hence it was decided that no banner will be raised, irrespective of the institution, organisation or state party involved. They also decided that no political leaders will be invited to participate. This fight will be entirely of the local people and the leadership will also be local. Amhi Amcha Arogyasathi has been in the role of a social institution, and has been informing about the law and supporting the implementation of the law and policy from the very beginning, so it was determined that they will also be included. A rule was made and a strategy was decided upon that one rally or social protest will not solve this problem therefore repeated communication, meeting, discussion and brainstorming will be required for the traditional rights of water, forest and land to be protected. “The Samuhik Mahila Bachat Ghat Parisar Sangh” took the responsibility of involving women in this entire process.

In August 2011 (by which time some villages had received recognition of their Community Forest Rights), during the rainy season, when streams on all sides were flooded, a public hearing was convened by the Maharashtra Pollution Control Board. However, gram sabha officials and some women reached the Gadchiroli district collector's office at 2.00 pm after arranging vehicles through the gram sabha. There, the women from gram sabha and women’s saving group raised their concerns and rejection of mining in the area and stated that, “**Water, forest, land are ours under the Forest Rights Act 2006 and the PESA Act [Extension of Scheduled Areas] Act, 1996], this is our slogan.** At the same time, one of the women from the village, a tribal woman, spoke to represent the concerns of their sisters before the Collector and said, “We don't want an iron mineral mining project in this area”; she spoke unequivocally and at length in Gondi language for about 15 minutes, reiterating their concerns, and this was later translated. The entire statement was also video recorded.



In September (2011), a month after the public hearing of the Environment Protection Board at the district level, at the Korchi Taluka level, Korchi taluka through the Anti-Iron Mineral Mining Struggle Committee, gram sabhas, citizens, people from the political parties, traders, sarpanches, etc. Women of the savings group etc. united and once again protested and submitted a demand statement to the Chief Minister of the state through tahsildar. For this public hearing and protest, the private vehicle driver owners provided free travel facilities to women and other people from remote villages. Local traders made arrangements to provide water and food to the people. On that day, people from all over the taluka gathered in solidarity for this issue. Statements were made in the public meeting that mining will affect our agriculture, destroy our land, hinder secondary forest produce, as well as cause air and water contamination.

**They also pointed to the imminent threat of atrocities upon women and children from their communities and the potential for the disruption of the prevailing peaceful happy and prosperous life prevalent in the region right now. They asked, “What will we get from mining? Our culture and tradition will also be destroyed by the encroachment of outsiders”. Thus, people decided that they should not leave their forest to others, but claim it and protect it as their legacy and as per the law.**

After the 2011 public hearing, villagers met people in areas where mining projects were going on to understand the potential outcomes of mining. Workers of AAA took prominent men and women from Korchi to Ghuggus in Chandrapur and introduced them to the people there (where coal mining had taken place). It had been a long time since the mine began in Ghuggus, people there had evidently not benefited. Some people got some short term monetary benefit in the form of money for compensation, but the prosperity which came from a safe forest and land was no longer there. Coal mining work has also been done in Raigarh, Chhattisgarh, and the situation there revealed similar situations and evidence that could not be ignored. Based on these evidences and understanding of potential threat, and in the interest of upholding customs, traditions, social and religious order, forest wealth and keeping in view the rights on property that gram sabhas have got under the FRA, a proposal was created and written, which opposed mining, and it was clearly stated that no work could be done there without the consent of the Gram Sabha.

### **Connecting with Cultural Heritage: Raopat Gangaram Ghat Yatra**

For many years, tribal deities have been worshiped at Jhandepar, the site where mining site is being planned, It has been decided that the jatra should be organized at the same place, all the people of the block will come to one place and worship the deity, and will not remain confined to individual worship alone. After the 73<sup>rd</sup> amendment to the Constitution, it was also decided to discuss the rights and management of tribal



communities from the Panchayat Raj Act, tribal self-governance law, forest rights and PESA law perspective, so that the young women and men of future generations become aware and understand their rights in these contexts. It was decided that young people should also be with the elders to work together with them in fulfilling the responsibilities of community work and cultural guidance.

Since then, every year on the full moon day of February, the Jatra and Adhikar Sammelan of Raopath Gangaram Ghat is regularly organized by Gram Sabha Jhandepar and Mahagram Sabha Korchi. “The forest is associated with our culture, so all the young people of the village and block, youth groups who create any play, song, dance in the the local culture and tradition, and present it there. They are also given some rewards. Earlier, cultural groups were called from outside, which has been completely stopped as it offered only entertainment, at the cost of lot of expenses”. Following the day of the Jatra, on the next day early morning, they go to the the hill where village deity is, a place which is near the mining site, and worship. Along with the worship, issues of water, forest, land rights are brainstormed and discussed. At the time of this fair Jatra, along with worship items, sweet shops are also set up kept. Children and all others enjoy the celebratio of this day as '**Rights Day/ Adhikar Diwas**.

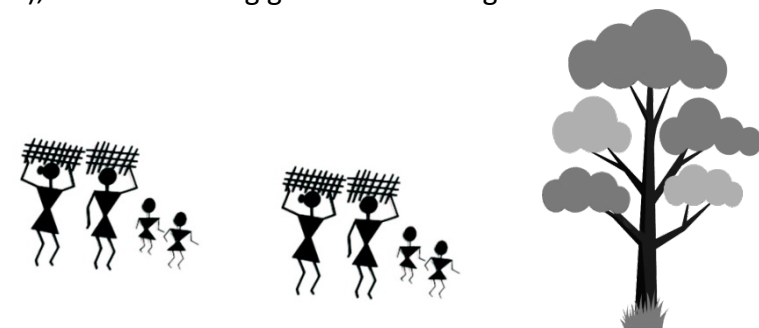
On the third day in the morning, an independent meeting on women's rights issues is held. There are women from all the villages of the block and advisors of<sup>3</sup> Mahagram sabha, other dignitaries, village priests etc. also join the meet. Here suggestions on women's rights issues are given. Sisters from the Bachat Sangh association conduct the meeting there. This has helped in increasing the understanding of forest rights law among women. This discussion also makes women realize their responsibility. People from 133 villages of Korchi block, sisters representing Bachat Sangh Korchi, representatives of social organizations, leaders of all political parties of Korchi block together discuss about the provisions of PESA Act (1996) on those areas under Schedule 5 of the Indian Constitution. Efforts are also made to involve officials like BDO and others in these discussions, But it has not been successful yet to involve them.

### **Public hearing and struggle because of mining project for the second time in the year 2017**

Again, the administration and iron mineral mining companies together called for a public hearing in the district in 2017 to seek permission for mining a total of 46.5 hectares of land in Zhendepar, which fell under the CFR (Community Forest Jurisdiction), without seeking gram sabha recognition.

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<sup>3</sup>Mahagram Sabha is a coalition of block SHG groups in which both men and women participate equally.



In 2011, there was an application of a single company in a large area, in 2017 it was divided into small areas. The reason for this was in the opinion of knowledgeable people that the state government itself can give approval for small areas whereas for a large sector, the approval from the central government is necessary, and the small mining sector does not seem to have a significant impact on the environment. But today, in Korchi taluka itself about 12 mining projects are proposed on 1017 hectares in these areas – Sohle, Sohale Tola, Bharritola, Agari, Bodena, which when summed up will have a major impact on the environment, livelihood sources and health of the people.

**"Even today, we women from Bachat Sangh and women of the block are opposing mining, and will continue to do so."**

We tribals – women, elderly, small children, women and men – have been protecting and conserving forests, taking forward the learning from our ancestors. So, it is our responsibility to keep the forest completely green, and the relationship between the giver (forest) and our maternal home remains safe forever. We will not allow this to be destroyed – this is the statement of thousands of women from Bachat ( saving) Sangh.



## Case Study # 7 Vanraji Tribal Community Gains Land Rights. Far Cry from Forest Rights

Pithoragarh, Uttarakhand  
Khima Jethi



*When the forest law came into force in Uttarakhand in 2008, 55 families, through members of the gram panchayat, applied for a total of 300 hectares of land for personal claims – i.e. agriculture and housing. Five years after the process began, 26 families got ownership rights over the land. Action was taken since 2015 to get housing and agricultural land rights in the name of 29 families. After a long time, in 2021, the government took action on these claim forms, after which on June 7, 2022, ownership rights were given in the name of 28 families.*

### Introduction

To carry out the above work, a strategy was prepared to carry forward this work with the village forest committee, village head, village development officer, revenue department and forest department people.

From these forests, the people of the community get grass, wood, fodder, leaves, herbs, tubers, fruits etc. These communities use these products of forests to increase their livelihood. People of the Raji tribe community live in the forests, in which they protect and take care of the forests. Grass, wood, etc they take from the forests to earn some money.

An application was submitted to the government and administration to turn the acquired forest land into revenue land. But in the end, it was found that without following the process of forest rights law, the rights that people get are actually incomplete. A lot of efforts were made to fill the collective claims of the raji tribe people. But their claim forms were rejected. Repeated efforts are being made to complete these collective claim forms.

The forest department and other departments do not seem to have the intention to approve the collective claims of the Raji tribe. Because the forest department is demanding the same amount of land from the revenue department as much land is to be given to the Raji tribe. At the district level officials, district social welfare department and D.F. O. should take the matter seriously, in accordance with the forest law. In







order to get collective claims successfully the Raji tribe should come together to pressurise the system. A strategy is being made to go to the district headquarters and put forth their problem.

Audio and video recordings of the work done at the village level have been made to reach out to the media and government departments. And attention is also being drawn to the tasks which remain undone for a long time, such as the completion of collective claim forms. Under the Right to Information Act, in Uttarakhand, information was obtained on the status of forest rights claims of Forest Act 2006. Information was sought about how many families of how many tribes have been allotted land till the present time, and in how many hectares of land.

The following are the individual claims filed at the village level under the Forest Act in 2009-10	Claim letters were given in 2013
Bhaktirava 10 Personal Claims	bhaktirva 9
Kimkhola 35 personal claims	Kimkhola 16
Kuta Chaurani 28 व्यक्तिगत दावे	Kuta Chaurani 12
Madanpuri 17 personal claims	Madanpuri 8
aultadi 10 personal claims	was given to the land with government grant.

**Out of the above claim forms, 45 families have been given claim documents in 2013.** 10 claims of Aultari village were filed. Due to being revenue land, the claim forms were rejected by the sub-division committee Didihat. After lobbying with the government administration for 10 families in Aultari village, the land of government grant was given, in which those families have been given maps and account khatauni.



## Process

It took a lot of time to carry out the above process, in which success was achieved by meeting with the officials from time to time, and lobbying for the public. Proposals were made from time to time by the people of the community to get ownership rights to the Raji community. Issues were raised in gram panchayats, and voices for rights were raised. After receiving personal claims, there is an atmosphere of happiness among all the people. And people are also taking advantage by filling the application under the Prime Minister's Pension. Now the women have decided to fill the collective claims. For this, the process of applying to government departments has been started. All the people have started fighting to get their rights. With the slogan of "We will take our rights" they are moving forward.

## Benefits and future actions

People have realised that the land belongs to them. Women also learned about their rights. However, it emerged that the claims and measurements were not done by the process that should lead to entitlements under the Forest Rights Act. The government wanted to satisfy the people by giving them small plots of land, and did not cooperate properly on the demand for community rights. The claims which were filed earlier have been rejected by the Sub-Clause Committee. Now the process of filing collective claims is being carried out in 5 villages.

**Submitting their documents at the village level forest committee meeting, with the members of the village forest Committee**





**Assesing the evidence of personal claims and village in Kimkhola.**



**Meeting with members of Revenue, Social Welfare, Forest Department and Village Forest Committee.**





## Case Study # 8

## Balki Devi Garasia is a Ray of Hope

Rajasthan  
Ranchod Devasi

***Balki Devi has faced enormous challenges: In the face of pressure from the domestic space, she contested sarpanch elections in the panchayat, and was confronted by patriarchal resistance. Despite the resistance she ultimately won the election, and formed the Forest Rights Committee. 40 claims were prepared and physical verification was done by the committee; those claims were delivered to the subdivision committee, and the families received individual claims.***

I am Balki Devi Garasia, a resident of Kotda village of Gram Panchayat Achapura in Pindwara block of Sirohi district. I am 33 years old, I have studied up to BA. My father had 80 goats. Sometimes, I would also go to graze goats in the forest with my father. During that time, I had experienced many things in the forest. At that time, the forest was lush green, the families living there used to bring things according to their need. Tribal families had deep rooted connection with the forest, and the forest was guarded by tribal families.

From childhood till today, I have made a different identity in the face of struggles. I failed to study as a child due to the burden of family responsibilities, but the desire to pursue higher education encouraged me to continue my studies even after coming to my in-laws' house, and I studied till B.A. When faced with resistance and challenges, I noticed a change in myself - I felt I had to work for the interests of the tribal community. I was determined in my mind that I had to be a ray of hope for the tribal community. My dream was to be among these tribal communities and do some work for them. I got a golden opportunity for this work in the year 2010 when I was associated with 'Jan Chetna Sansthan'.

Their workers came and tried to convince my family again and again to encourage me to contest the sarpanch election. There were 5 influential candidates who had registered in contestation with me. Panchayati Raj elections came, I wanted to contest for the post of sarpanch, but the family members refused to let me contest. Somehow I managed to file my nomination. All the influential candidates were from the general category – they used to obstruct my election campaign. The former sarpanch was very influential, he himself would reach the place where I campaigned, but my high spirits gave me courage. Moreover, women of all communities and economically weaker sections also extended their full support. I fought the sarpanch election firmly, and I won the election, and my own strength motivated me to move forward.



This was followed by leadership development training in collaboration with Janchetna Sansthan; wherein I expanded my knowledge of the working of the Panchayati Raj System, understood the details of various Acts, MGNREGA, PESA, Forest Rights Act, and Gram Panchayat Vikas Yojana (GPDP). This helped me further to work towards development of the village. I was inspired to move forward and work for my community and village.

### Achapura Gram Panchayat

Forest area in Achapura Gram Panchayat	2968 Hector
Number of families	315
Population	1499
Personal claims submitted	120
Personal rights letters received	47
Individual claims filed in 2011-12	25
Their Followup	File proceedings at district level
Community claims submitted	02
Community rights letters received	0
Reasons for cancellation of claims	Lack of departmental reports and not updating online, there are delays

When I became sarpanch in 2010, 5 villages used to fall under the purview of the Achapura gram panchayat. Of these, 3 villages came under the purview of the Forest Department, in which about 40 families lived. My dream was to live among these tribal families and correct the injustice being done to them. Those who were being evicted from the forest might never again get their due rights over that forest. For this, I organized meetings in my gram panchayat several times, created the Forest Rights Committee, and presented the claims to the committee. Thereafter we prepared the complete documents of 40 claims, got those physically verified by the committee and sent those to the sub-clause committee. Of that, 31 families received individual claims. Some families were still far from getting the claims as their personal claims were rejected, which were later found to be due to gaps in documents provided.



I also demanded a community claim in view of the development of my village so that the tribal community could get their rights. Many families of the community, living in the forest for several generations, were entirely dependent on the forest as the main source of livelihood of those tribal families. They would go to the forest to bring tubers, herbs, grass, fruits and flowers, honey, wood as per the requirement, and used to make a living by selling these resources as well. But since the Indian Forest Act and the Forest Conservation Act came into force after Independence, Adivasi families' sources of livelihood has got severely deprived as they have been evicted from the forests. This situation needed to be set right and we had a law to ensure that this injustice was prevented now in the FRA 2006.

With the introduction of the Forest Rights Act 2006, the yield of forests will again ensure the livelihood of the community. They save grains for their families to eat for the entire year, and earns some money by selling the rest of the crop in the local market. Along with this, mixed crops like chibade (cucumber) , bathua, radish, etc. are done in the middle of cultivation along with other crops.

Under the 2006 Act, the gram sabha has the right to collect forest produce, but this right is being denied by the forest officials. Due to this and due to lack of other sources of livelihood, the families have started migrating from the forest, working as stone-pelters, etc., due to which they are suffering from the serious disease 'Silicosis'. Many newly married women are widows now, their homes are being destroyed. I am always disturbed to see the condition of these tribal families.



Despite not being in the post of sarpanch, I always gave priority to tribal families and was ready to help them. In the year 2015, I was not in any post, due to which I also failed many times, because I always stood with the tribal community. I succeeded in securing the post of sarpanch again in the Panchayati Raj elections in 2020.

In the face of all the challenges, due to my continuous work I came to win the post of sarpanch. As soon as I became sarpanch, I took charge again, and focused on the families which were living in the forest area. In the GPDP plan of my gram panchayat, I applied for the Prime Minister's Housing Scheme, and 35 families got approval under the scheme by the Zilla Parishad. Despite the opposition and conflict about this allocation, the houses were approved, but the forest department stopped them from being built. I raised the



issue at the general meeting of the Panchayat Samiti that the interference of the forest department should be stopped, so that the houses of the community can be constructed, I wanted the mud huts of the tribal family to be converted into pucca houses.



I worked day and night to get the promises fulfilled which I had made to the community at the time of the elections. Many jobs were sanctioned by the forest department on the land of 3 villages that fell under the forest area. A few important tasks completed were— the construction work of four walls at the cremation ground which fell under the forest department, the construction of ramps, the work of anicut, and the borwell work for water.

My dream is to get land registered in the name of women from the tribal community. For this, files of families were prepared for individual work to be approved under MGNREGA, so that land papers could be made in the name of women. By having women's names on the ground paper, the violence against them can also be reduced.

Balki Devi Garasia teaches us that we should never lose courage. Even in the most difficult times, we must act with our courage.



## Case Study # 9 Saleh Women's Group Runs Van Dhan Kendra Amidst Covid Crisis

Korchi Block, District Gadchiroli  
Padma Uike

*The gram sabha sought a solution to the situation worsened by the lockdown in difficult times like the epidemic through the local economy, this story demonstrates the pleasant results of the efforts of Ravpath Gangaram Ghat, Korchi block, Gadchiroli district and its effects on the community.*

### Introduction

On August 26, 1982, Gadchiroli district was separated from the former Chanderpur district. Chanderpur was located on the northeastern edge of Maharashtra, the district had its borders with the states of Telangana and Chhattisgarh. Naxalism had spread far and wide in Gadchiroli, and this district was sometimes marked as the "Red Corridor" affected by Naxalism.

### Demographic data of of Gadchiroli: 2011 Census data

Total Population -	10,72,942
Male population-	5,41328
Female population-	5,31,614
Scheduled Caste Population-	1,20754 (11.25%)
Scheduled Tribe Population -	4,15,306 (38.7%)
Literacy Rate -	74.4%



With more than 34% of the population of tribes in the district, and 76% of the area being rural and forest cover, the district has been placed in the category of tribal and semi-developed area. The district is famous for bamboo and tendu leaves; Paddy is the major crop of this district. Jowar, linseed, tur daal and wheat are other agricultural products grown here. Due to high biodiversity in the region, the livelihood of the people in this district is primarily forest based (minor forest produce/non-timber forest products) and there is high potential for strengthening such livelihoods.

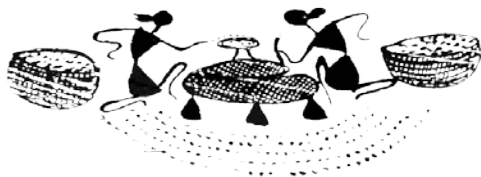




Two legal enactments- The Panchayati Raj Extension to Scheduled Areas PESA Act of 1996, and the Scheduled Tribes and Other Traditional Forest Dwellers (Recognition of Forest Rights) Act 2006, popularly known as the Forest Rights Act (FRA), legally empower the gram sabha to take decisions and make development plans. These enactments are an important means to empower rural and forest dwellers to meet their livelihood and household food and other needs especially for women who view the forests as a means for their sustainability. Forest rights Act has provided enabled women to have access and claim over forests, where the patriarchal social context and lack of recognition of individual land rights of women constrained their access for too long. As per the progress report of the Ministry of Tribal Affairs of February 2021, 19,24,417 individual forest rights and 77,502 community forest rights claims have been submitted so far. Out of the claims filed in Maharashtra, 1,65,032 individual forest rights and 7084 community forest rights claims have been approved. Maharashtra is by far the among the best performing states in the implementation of the Forest Rights Act, which is providing opportunities to the tribal community to earn a livelihood based on minor forest products.

The Tribal Cooperative Marketing Development Federation of India (TRIFED) is a government organization that provides small forest produce/minor forest produce in 307 districts of 27 states. Jan dhan programme is being implemented for the forest dependent tribal community in order to improve their livelihoods through collection and sale of non-timber forest produce. The collection and sale of non-timber products contributes to 40-60% of the income of the tribal community, and the value addition of these products has the potential to triple or quadruple their income. The Tribal Cooperative Marketing Development Federation of India (TRIFED) seeks to address the problems of the tribal community to earn an income even in circumstances where they are confronted by many problems – such as ownership of their own land/houses; restrictions on collection of minor forest products; exploitation by middlemen; displacement due to national parks or sanctuaries; or Lack of development in their villages etc.

Aamhi Amcha Arogyasathi (AAA) has been working among different communities in Gadchiroli since 1984. Working on the issues of health, education, livelihood, and women's empowerment of these communities, AAA is working to make them self-reliant, autonomous, and strong. The organization has identified to prioritize work on issues such as sustainable farming, strengthening forest protection and collective management systems, imparting information on scientific methods related to agriculture, and providing market related information for marketing of produce. The communities here are highly dependent on farming, and lack livelihood sources due to impacts of climate change. Moreover, the earnings from the sale of minor forest produce and crops are very low, due to which the ability of these communities to



withstand change is also very low. As a result, tribal economies are becoming more dependent on the market, which is adversely affecting their self-reliance and ability to earn a livelihood on their own.

### **Status of Rural Women in The Tribal Economy:**

Rural and tribal women are engaged in multiple economic activities, and work more physically hard than men. Women are also found to be more prone to physical burden than men in most agricultural activities such as kitchen gardening, animal husbandry, and collection and sale of minor forest produce. Despite this, when it comes to making decisions



related to home and community, they are often not heard or consulted for decisions.



### **Establishment of Van Dhan Kendra**

In the context of increasing linkage with the market, we started setting up Van Dhan Kendras in Korchi block, especially in those blocks to serve villages where local institutions are working efficiently at the local level. In the summer season of 2019, local representatives of the organization worked hard to ensure the success of this program. With community consensus it was decided that membership in the Van Dhan Samiti would be equal between men and women. Ravpath Gangaram Ghat Vandhan Kendra is located in Korchi block of Gadchiroli district. Before the establishment of this centre, middlemen, *arhtiyas* and shopkeepers from the neighbouring state of Chhattisgarh used to come to Korchi block to buy non-waste forest produce (minor forest produce). Often, the local people, sold their products at a lower price, because they did not know the actual value of their products. Illiterate families, mainly women, have been in weaker positions of negotiating a fair price under these circumstances. Due to restrictions on movement, and lack of access to markets, women suffered the most during the Covid pandemic, as outsiders were banned from entering rural areas, and the community was also unable to move out. The Van

Dhan Yojana was launched last year (2020) and fortunately, a Van Dhan Kendra in the area was also provided with a revolving fund to purchase non-timber forest products locally. In 2020, 4 Van Dhan Kendras were running in Korchi block.



Among all these centres, the Gangaram Ghat Vandhan Kendra started (and is running) mainly in collaboration with three Gram Sabhas – Salhe, Bharitola and Bodena. **These centres are also distinctive because of the provisions to ensure the participation of one male and one woman from every family, and representation of single women’s families. If there was only one woman or one man in the family, then the rules of membership were kept flexible even in that case.** Initially, Ravpath Gangaram Ghat Van Dhan Kendra received a grant of Rs. 5lakh for purchasing local non-timber forest produce. It was decided that only a few groups would collect these products, 2 groups from Bodena, 1 group from Bharitola, and 2 from Samuh Salhe would collect non-timber forest products at village level. In addition, the Bodena village group "Budhal Pen Group, whose



secretary and chairperson were women, decided to collect non-timber forest produce from other groups. Smt. Sumitrabai and Kumarobai Gota are the present secretary and chairperson of Budhal Pen Group respectively.

The Budhal Pen Group has the traditional knowledge and ability to collect, store and procure forest produce – especially mahua flowers, for which they have specialized their skills in picking, collecting, drying and storing them in sacks. They tell us that if they keep them for a few months, and sell them later, they get higher prices for these products. In 2021, 15 men and 15 women from the Budhal Pen group collected 15 quintals of mahua flowers. By selling those flowers later for Rs 45 per kg, they made a profit of Rs. 11 thousand. Women and men made joint efforts in this work, but women contributed more in using traditional knowledge in procurement and storage. It was also decided by them that the benefits received will be used for the emergency needs of the community.

This collectivity and autonomy has led to people who were supported during the Covid-19 pandemic to overcome the lack of money, wherein this money earned jointly was brought into use in the interest of

  
**“if we collect and sell the mahua sweet flowers (from which liquor is distilled) individually then the “adatiya’ agent makes the profit from the sale; if we sell collectively the benefits will flow to us” says KumarObai**  




the community. At the same time, it also became an example of how the community can take such steps for its overall benefit. These efforts were strengthened due to women's symbiotic relationship with forests., Because of their leadership and ability to profit from participation., And it was possible due to the ability to work with a sense of collective and moral responsibility.

Women not only took steps to rebuild communities affected by natural disasters, but also witnessed a sample of women's foresightedness and readiness during these disasters. Women showed examples of their spirit of moral dedication to the community, being alive, powerful and joint. When women acquire their rights and ownership of natural resources, they not only work for the conservation of these resources, but also struggle to promote the individual and collective activities associated with them for the enrichment of society.

This success is very short-lived, but still significant because it is a success achieved in the first year. The next year when other groups of this village came forward to buy forest products, the women of this group withdrew their decision to collect forest produce, because they felt it would be in everyone's interest. If people from the same small village group buy the forest produce collected, no one will benefit. Hence, they asked other forest paddy groups (mostly led by men) to buy the products from other groups.

After the financial success of the women of Budhalpen Van Dhan Group, they were pressurised to allow men to lead. From this, we learned that after bringing women into leadership, a lot of effort needs to be made to ensure their place, so that they can demand their rights on the basis of their ability and don't end up give up their position for others.

## Conclusion

In order to increase forest produce and its benefits for the tribal community and forest dependent communities, the process of value addition of the products, and to connect them directly to the market (so that they are not exploited by middlemen) needs to take more effective steps. Especially women– participate. After the passage of the successful Forest Rights Act, especially from the point of view of women, this story helps us better understand the needs of forest dependent communities. And also makes us aware of the need for greater efforts and investment for the growth of small forest products.



## CASE STUDY#10 SEED PROTECTORS OF UTTARAKHAND: NATURE'S PRECIOUS HERITAGE

Diistrict Udham Singh Nagar, Uttarakhand  
Hira Jhangpani



### Introduction

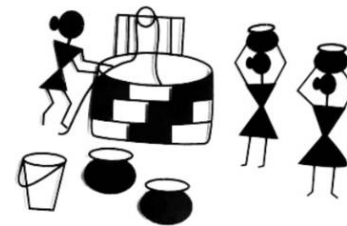
The work of the women of the Buxa primitive tribe is primarily dependant on manual wage labour. Women joined the self-help group after being introduced to the idea by an NGO, the Women's Welfare Organization -Mahila Shakti Kendra- after which the group was further expanded and organized by expanding to include two women from each of the 20 villages around it. The organisation worked to create awareness on issues of women's rights, even as women would participate in the programs and continue to work as a labour gang. They tried to grow vegetables with organic manure in their respective kitchen gardens. During that time, they began to plan collective activities to reduce their input costs by undertaking local seeds collection and protection, and organizing a camapign and rally to "Save Seeds".





The soil is brought from the forest to make the earthen pots to store seeds. The Buxa community has kept the traditional method of seed bank alive. Seeds are collected from different villages and exchanged and kept safe. At the same time, the people of the community are also propagating this method of traditional seed bank, and are also trying to protect their seed saving tradition.

After that, at a village in Jaganpuri, a "seed bank" was also formed. During the lockdown, the traditional seed bank (seed protection center) was operated. Such seed banks are now operational in 5 villages.





*Gradually, this art of making earthen pots is disappearing, and the knowledge associated with it.*

Seed banks perform the task of keeping the seeds of various traditional crops safe for the future. The Buxa community combines soil and straw to create small and large-sized seed-bearing structures, which are then dried. All types of **seeds** are kept in 'cells' made of clay and straw. They are kept where the stove burns, so that they do not remain moist. By doing this, insects do not develop in those seed pots for years.



## Some key points - connection with the seed bank

- It is an attempt to create and organize the strength and identity of women through the traditional seed bank.
- This effort of women has led to an understanding on the seed bank protection program.
- The opportunity to create a seed bank has fostered a sense of collectiveness in the community.

Seed banks have been formed in villages with women's groups to save traditional seeds, the spirit of working together and the adoption of seeds has also increased among them.

Women have been organized for keeping intact the traditional things that are disappearing







**“Pride of our Sisters;  
Our identity is the traditional seed bank.”**



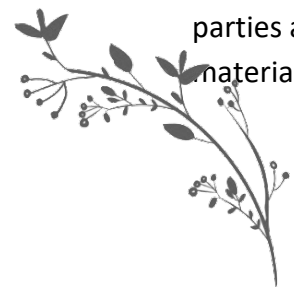
## Conclusion and way forward

Women have been the backbone of the forest economy. They are recognized as the environmental warriors and forest protectors across the country from the mountains to the Deccan and indeed the world over. Their contributions and significant role has been documented and acknowledged by many researchers and social activists across the world, and especially in the global South.

Feminists have sought to highlight and bring attention to their role as environmental protectors and to ensure that they are acknowledged as knowledge bearers for environmental care and protection. In fact this is one aspect of care work which often gets ignored in the care work discourse, that women perform eco system services through their everyday role in environmental care and maintaining the balance even as they forage for food and other forest resources. They self organize practices of forest protection and manage resources and replenish them to enhance the environmental health of regions within their ambit. They also seek recognition and representation for women forest dwellers within the forest governance regimes so that their knowledge capabilities and voice can inform the decisions and frameworks for restoration management and protection of forests more effectively.

Each story contained in this compilation tells a tale of women's critical role in the forest dweller community in ensuring forests and forest dwellers are sustained. Women's narratives speak of the symbiotic relationship of forests and forest dwellers; every story is about their roles and their lives in living deeply embedded lives with their ecological heritage and how disruptions in the natural resources or denials can cause irrevocable upheavals in their lives. The stories also speak of their valiant and relentless efforts to restore the forests, and protect them from wanton and unwarranted destruction and exploitation along with protecting their own right to live with the forests as they have for centuries. The narratives tell of the everyday nature of the relationship with forests as well as the fact that there is also a symbolic and spiritual relationship. The men and women forest dwellers rely on the forests for their every need on a daily basis, and their social and economic relationships have evolved with the rhythms of the ecology encompassing them.

Their social patterns of frugal consumption, celebration, and social practices have evolved with the forests and their health. Women speak through these narratives about their struggles for restoration of their rights when these have been challenged by encroachments by external parties and destructive forces, or denied to them by way of policy or predator encroachers. They speak of protecting and restoring not only the material resource but a way of life and the socio cultural relationships embedded within; many of the symbols of this relationship that were held



sacred are now being eroded or destroyed due to the inroads that anthropocentric developmentalism and patriarchal values have made; such processes neither recognize nor honour the symbols and practices of everyday environmentalism embedded in the living practices of these communities, and instead criminalize such communities for causing natural environmental destruction while imposing their inappropriate practices of fortress forestry. Indeed many of the practices making inroads are but financial tools posturing as environmental measures but causing greater and greater destruction.

Contrary to the prevalent world view that Adivasi and forest dweller communities practice gender equality, these stories reveal how patriarchy prevails within the Adivasi societies to maintain hierarchies, subordinate and deny women an equal status. Women are forging ahead to create spaces and assert leadership to raise these issues, and are struggling to make their demands for equality, rights and justice.

while Adivasi and forest dweller communities acknowledge women's role in the struggles for rights in public domains, women are confronted by multiple barriers and constraints to claiming spaces and rights within their households. Patriarchal control keeps them dependent and denied assets, and they are driven to work for tedious hours for care work as well as for foraging for NTFP produce to be able to sustain their families as well as to earn a petty income from the sale of these NTFP to be able to make small purchases more autonomously. Forests and their NTFP wealth have also provided a recourse to secure themselves with food and health security and some means to survive and sustain at times of crisis, and even in the times of COVID. Their food and health security needs as well as the availability of fuel from dried wood enabled them to remain isolated as well as sustain their needs through the tough times. It also meant that young people who had migrated out or become alienated from the cultural moorings have now become increasingly aware of the richness of their ecological existence as a community and have sought to learn from the experiences of their elders and those who are living embedded lives at present. Hence access to forest resources and wellbeing of the forests are an important gender consideration for security of life, ways of life and livelihoods among forest dwellers, and particularly for Adivasi people.

The PESA legislation provided the space for Adivasi communities to govern their forest regions autonomously, but the application of these provisions remains confined to areas designated as Schedule 5 areas alone. Nor does this law make any explicit provisions for women in the realms of governance or of decision making. PESA is an effective legislation to the extent that it accords recognition to Adivasi peoples' traditional rights and practices as well as knowledge, but from a gender lens it stops short of any specific provisions or explication of roles or rights for women. The argument that gender the PESA Act is gender neutral and therefore does not constrain arenas of engagement for women does not take into account the structural barriers that women are confronted with in the form of traditional and customary



practices that delimit their role from decision making and resource rights or social means by which their subordinate status is subtly maintained.

Forest Rights Act 2006 has expanded the space for application of law to protect the rights of forest dwellers to have access and rights over their resources and their community forests as well as a progressive law that addresses the issue of historical justice; for women this law has marked a breakthrough to provide space for women. This law has further recognized the rights of both Adivasi and non Adivasi forest dwellers – termed as other traditional forest dwellers- as being ecologically embedded in their lives and practices in the forest regions, and recognizes womens rights to claim their rights independently as members of their households, it recognizes nomadic and particularly vulnerable tribal groups, previously known as primitive tribal groups, in its ambit for recognition of rights and to habitats for the latter. The act recognizes forest rights as well as rights to habitat as a spiritual economic and social entity. Further the law recognizes the critical role that communities play in the sustaining forests and considers them as *“integral to the very survival and sustainability of the forest ecosystems” and therefore invests such communities with “responsibilities and authority for sustainable use, conservation of biodiversity and maintenance of ecological balance”*. Therefore, while the pre-existing forest and wildlife laws have sought to ‘settle’ rights by compensating and extinguishing the same, the FRA seeks to recognise and vest forest rights in such a manner that these continue to subsist in order to ensure livelihood and food security of the forest dwelling communities”<sup>4</sup>.

While the law makes many progressive provisions, its implementation has been far from adequately implemented for PVTG groups, as our case studies of the Katkari in Maharashtra and the Vanraji and Buxa tribe of Uttarakhand reveal. The PVTG groups have been recognized in the hill areas of Pithoragarh, however their forest rights have been ignored and subvertesively interpreted in a narrow sense rather than in the true spirit of ‘habitat’ as the ministry has clarified and hence the community is compelled to struggle on . Womens rights too have not been recorded as per the provisions of the law.

In this as well as other cases, the next step of ensuring these recognized claims are registered in the revenue records of rights under clause 7/12 is also far from adequately addresses. Such interpretive delimitation has meant that rights recognition has been manipulatively as a measure of appeasement rather than accorded with the dignity of the spirit provided in the law. Struggles will have to continue and be

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<sup>4</sup> <https://tribal.nic.in/FRA/data/FAQ.pdf>



strengthened for demands for recognition as rights endowed citizens to be recognized holistically, rather than the welfarist provisions that have been meted out. The situation for OTFD communities is further complicated by attempts to sabotage claims as non valid in grasslands or that the proof is not admissible or adequate for 75 years of continuous residence. The irony is that the recognition demand is for documentary evidence of illegality which will then be considered as bonafide proof for the claim to be coconsidered as valid.

Hence, negotiating their rights is proving to be a complex web of challenges for women from marginalized forest dweller communities, when the marginalized situation located within multiple intersectionalities is confronted by the systemic barriers of patriarchy and other power relations and systems of the family, community, politics and rules laws and structures of the state. This situation is most evident in the case of single women as they battle these patriarchal, oppressive systems for decades, as vividly illustrated in the story of HDRCs work in Sabarkantha district in Gujarat. Yet women who have learned/understood the power of the Act are eager to claim their rights and occupy representative places, they are making persistent efforts. Despite resistance at various levels, single women, women as husband and wife, widows, old women and other categories of women have sought to register their claims. Where such claims have been dismissed or women have not been adequately included, they have mobilized community organisations, non-governmental organizations in their respective areas to raise their voices and assert and re-submit their claims. Government Organizations and CSOs support is sought.

The story of Mansi Devi of Rajasthan speaks to the continuing efforts of other women to gain recognition as claimants and to reconcile themselves to the forests while claiming autonomy, to a degree, for their existence as forest dwellers. It is an important identity that gives them some status of access to resources, if not available, women find their lives and livelihoods at risk. Women have also faced difficulties ranging from violence within their families, to structural harassment and putting their lives at risk during the process of pursuing their claims; But they are adamant because the forest gives them protection and gives a special identity to their existence. A fact documented in our previous series on women forest workers (released on YouTube with GAATW in 2019) bears testimony to this.

PESA and FRA provide the windows for redressal of indigenous forest dwellers rights and they are now seen demanding the implementation of these enactments This fact testifies that women recognize the potential of F.R.A. to empower themselves, not only in terms of their capacity to practice traditional knowledge systems but also to define pathways for the future and nature of conservation and forest and human interface through conservation and management practices. Women in our collectives and in our wider interactions have always prioritized the potential of CFR over IFR to claim rights as well as to ensure the sustainability of their livelihoods practice and of forests. C.F.R represents the



potential to sustain a way of life embedded in the community practice of ecological environmentalism, whereas IFR gives them the security and safety net as women to strengthen their capacity to battle the onslaught of patriarchal dominance

Their expression of commitment to claim CFR rights particularly Adivasi women is located therefore in the environmental worldview of protective claims and towards sustaining themselves as well as the biodiverse environment within which all species coexist in the wild. As one woman Bod Bai, of Chhattisgarh expresses this view, “we are called wild as if it is an abusive word. But we are proud to claim that identity of being “jangli” because it gives us the associated connectinos with other species in the wild and expresses how we have and will always fiercely from the h as the case of Mahakoni FRCs battle to protect their forests where women fought shoulder to shoulder with other members of the Gram Sabha and F.R.C. asserted their rights to protect their forests as members and claimants.

These forests are being looted by the timber mafia and these tribal communities continue to live lives of scarce resources and with their lowest needs. Many documents and reports show how forest-dwelling communities have been displaced from their traditional lands by kings and invaders in pre-colonial times, and the plunder of forest resources by colonial rulers - claiming land for mineral wealth, energy or industrial projects, etc. is being done. Stories like this have been around for a long time about the colonial extraction approach. However the post colonial era has not lacked in such authoritarian footprints in their areas. Communities have had to resist, reclaim, rally and resort to campaigns , and women have been at the forefront of these efforts to protect, conserve, use and access their forests

Women have also defied entrenched patriarchal attitudes by venturing forward to lead in environmental movements. Their efforts to run seed banks, undertake afforestation, resist mining, pursue claims and protest encroachments and launch campaign against destructive development and to establish a balanced system are seldom visible or taken cognizance by polciy makers, lest their lands need to be bestowed back or their control over these communities is reduced.

Women have understood the anthropocentric approach has limited scope and have put forward a feminist approach based on ecological thinking, in which the sustainability and well-being of the earth is important , and seek to maintain the balance and relationships between each species of human and nature. The same approach of feminist environmentalism has been adopted by grassroots rural women in their everyday initiatives and have adopted ecologically restorative strategies.





# MAHILA KISAN ADHIKAAR MANCH

## महिला किसान अधिकार मंच

### ABOUT MAKAAAM FOREST RIGHTS COLLECTIVE



The Forest Rights Collective has emerged within MAKAAAM to address the specific needs and undertake efforts to influence and drive policy to recognize women forest dwellers' rights. We seek to acknowledge and foreground women forest dwellers rights and recognize them as ecological warriors integral to ecological protection and conservation of forest regions and ways of living and being.



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**मकाम** 25 राज्यों की महिला किसानों का एक साझा मंच है, जो महिला किसानों के मुद्दों एवं प्राथमिकताओं के लिए नीति परिवर्तन एवं पारिस्थितिकी/पर्यावरण विकास के लिए प्रयासरत है।

वन अधिकार समूह वन आश्रित एवं आदिवासी महिलाओं की विशेष रूप से जरूरतों एवं चिंताओं पर कार्य करने की मंसा से बना है। इसका मुख्य उद्देश्य पर्यावरण एवं वन संरक्षण में महिलाओं के साझे प्रयास, नेतृत्व, और उनकी क्षमताओं का पहचान एवं पोषण से वन संरक्षण एवं अधिकारों को मजबूत करना है। आप हमारे कार्य के बारे में हमारी वेबसाइट [makaan.in](http://makaan.in) पर और अधिक जानकारी प्राप्त कर सकते हैं।

