

Analyzing the Effectiveness of the Forest Rights Act in Mitigating Displacement Issues Among Forest-Dependent Communities: A Case Study of the Dudhwa-Katarniaghat Tiger Reserve in Uttar Pradesh

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Introduction:

The Dudhwa-Katarniaghat Tiger Reserve is a protected area situated in the Terai region of Uttar Pradesh, India, which has caused the significant displacement of indigenous communities, particularly the Tharu indigenous group. The Tharu community has lived in the Terai region for centuries, but their displacement from their lands and homes due to the establishment of the Tiger Reserve has resulted in the loss of traditional livelihoods, cultural practices, and a sense of identity (Paul & Bahuguna, 2015).

According to the International Work Group for Indigenous Affairs (IWGIA), the Tharu people have faced significant challenges due to the establishment of the Tiger Reserve, including displacement from their traditional lands and homes, loss of traditional livelihoods such as agriculture and fishing, and a decline in their standard of living. The Tharu community has a unique culture and identity, which is closely connected to their traditional lands and forests. The loss of these lands and resulting displacement has caused a significant cultural shift for the Tharu community, leading to disconnection from their traditional way of life. The establishment of the Dudhwa-Katarniaghat Tiger Reserve has also been marked by human rights violations, highlighting the need for greater attention to the rights of indigenous communities in conservation efforts (IWGIA, 2016).

The Forest Rights Act (2006) provides a legal framework for the recognition and vesting of forest rights and occupation in forest land for forest-dwelling communities in India (Ministry of Tribal Affairs, 2007). The act aims to recognize and vest forest rights and

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occupation of forest-dwelling Scheduled Tribes and other traditional forest dwellers who have been residing in forests for generations but whose rights could not be recorded (Ministry of Tribal Affairs, 2007).

In the case of the Dudhwa-Katarniaghat Tiger Reserve, the Tharu community and other forest-dwelling communities utilized the FRA to reclaim their traditional rights over forest land and resources that were taken away from them due to the establishment of the reserve. The FRA played a crucial role in enabling these communities to regain their traditional rights and assert their ownership over the forest land and resources that had been taken away from them (Paul & Bahuguna, 2016).

However, the implementation of the FRA has faced several challenges, including inadequate support for communities to file their claims, inadequate documentation of forest rights, and opposition from vested interests. Despite these challenges, the FRA remains a crucial legal framework for the protection of the rights of forest-dwelling communities, including the Tharu community, in India (IWGIA, 2016).

This essay will examine the background of the displacement of the Tharu indigenous group from the Dudhwa-Katarniaghat Tiger Reserve, the role of the Forest Rights Act in helping the Tharu community regain their traditional rights, and the challenges faced in implementing the FRA (Kumar, 2016) It will also suggest ways to overcome these challenges to ensure the protection of the rights of forest-dwelling communities, including the Tharu community.

Problem Statement and Research Questions:

The FRA was introduced as a legal mechanism to address the issue of displacement of forest-dependent communities in protected areas. However, there is limited empirical evidence on the effectiveness of the FRA in mitigating displacement issues. There are also challenges in implementing the FRA, including resistance from state governments, lack of awareness and capacity among forest-dependent communities, and conflicting interests between conservation and development.

Therefore, this study aims to analyze the effectiveness of the FRA in mitigating displacement issues among forest-dependent communities in the Dudhwa-Katarniaghat Tiger Reserve in Uttar Pradesh, India. This paper is the biproduct of research project sponsored by TRI, Ministry of Tribal Affairs, Government of India, New Delhi. This study aims to address this research gap by answering the following research questions:

1. What is the extent of displacement of forest-dependent communities in the Dudhwa-Katarniaghat Tiger Reserve?
2. How has the implementation of the FRA impacted the displacement of forest-dependent communities in the reserve?
3. What are the perceptions of forest-dependent communities regarding the effectiveness of the FRA in mitigating displacement issues?
4. What are the challenges and opportunities in implementing the FRA in the Dudhwa-Katarniaghat Tiger Reserve?

Significance and scope of the study:

This study focuses on the effectiveness of the Forest Rights Act (FRA) of 2006 in mitigating displacement issues faced by forest-dependent communities in the context of the Dudhwa-Katarniaghat Tiger Reserve in Uttar Pradesh, India. The significance of this study lies in its potential to contribute to a better understanding of the challenges in implementing the FRA and protecting the rights of forest-dependent communities. The findings of the study may have broader implications for other forest-dependent communities facing displacement issues in India. Although the scope of the study is limited to the Tharu community and the Dudhwa-Katarniaghat Tiger Reserve, the insights gained from this research may be useful in formulating policies to protect the rights of other forest-dwelling communities in the country.

The scope of this study is to analyze the effectiveness of the Forest Rights Act (FRA) of 2006 in mitigating displacement issues faced by the Tharu indigenous community in the context of the Dudhwa-Katarniaghat Tiger Reserve in Uttar Pradesh, India.

The study's findings can provide insights into the effectiveness of the FRA in mitigating displacement issues and inform policymakers and other stakeholders working towards securing the rights of forest-dependent communities in protected areas. The study's recommendations can contribute to the development of better policies and practices to mitigate displacement issues and promote sustainable development in protected areas.

Review of Literature:

❖ Overview of forest conservation policies and displacement issues in India:

India has a long history of forest conservation policies that have resulted in the displacement of forest-dependent communities. Forest conservation policies were introduced during British colonial rule in India and continued after India's independence in 1947. These policies aimed to protect forests and wildlife, but they also led to the displacement of millions of forest-dependent communities from their traditional lands and livelihoods (Baviskar, 1995; Guha, 2000; Kothari et al., 2011).

The Forest Conservation Act (1980) and the Wildlife Protection Act (1972) are two key legislations in India that have contributed to the displacement of forest-dependent communities. These acts have given the government the power to declare protected areas, including national parks, wildlife sanctuaries, and tiger reserves, where human activities are restricted or prohibited. These protected areas have been created on lands traditionally used and inhabited by forest-dependent communities, leading to their displacement (Guha, 2000; Kothari et al., 2011).

Additionally, the government of India has implemented several policies and laws to protect the forest land and its resources. The Indian Forest Act of 1927 aimed to regulate the use of forests, and the Wildlife Protection Act of 1972 was enacted to safeguard wildlife and their habitats (Tushaar Shah et al., 2016). However, these policies have often led to the displacement of

forest-dependent communities, who are often viewed as encroachers on forest land and are consequently evicted without adequate compensation

The Forest Rights Act (2006) was introduced as a response to the historical injustice faced by forest-dependent communities in India. The FRA recognizes and secures the rights of forest-dwelling communities over forest land and resources. The FRA provides a legal framework for recognizing and vesting forest rights to Scheduled Tribes and other traditional forest dwellers who have been residing in and using forests for their livelihoods for generations (Government of India, 2006).

However, the implementation of the FRA has been slow and challenging, with resistance from state governments and conflicting interests between conservation and development (Saberwal et al., 2010; Pathak et al., 2014). Despite the enactment of the FRA, forest-dependent communities in protected areas like the Dudhwa-Katarniaghat Tiger Reserve in Uttar Pradesh, India, continue to face displacement and eviction (Singh et al., 2019).

Despite the FRA's potential to mitigate displacement issues among forest-dependent communities, several challenges persist. One such challenge is the lack of awareness among forest-dwelling communities about their rights under the FRA. Many communities are unaware of the FRA's provisions and have not been able to avail of its benefits. Furthermore, the implementation of the FRA has been slow and uneven, with reports of resistance from forest officials and local elites who have vested interests in forest resources (Hegde et al., 2018).

Overall, while the Indian government has introduced several policies aimed at protecting forests and wildlife, these policies have often led to the displacement of forest-dependent communities. The FRA is a significant step towards addressing displacement issues, but its effectiveness remains unclear. The next section will discuss the research questions and the significance and scope of this study.

❖ **Critiques and challenges of the Forest Rights Act:**

One of the key critiques of the FRA has been its slow and inadequate implementation. Despite being in force for over a decade, the process of granting community forest rights has been slow and fraught with bureaucratic hurdles, resulting in only a small fraction of claims being recognized and settled (Ghosh, 2018; Kothari et al., 2011). There have also been instances of harassment and intimidation of forest dwellers by forest officials and other powerful actors (Bhatnagar, 2018; Saberwal et al., 2010).

Another critique of the FRA is that its scope and coverage are limited, and it does not adequately address the rights of all forest-dependent communities, especially those living in non-forested areas (Kashyap et al., 2019). The FRA only applies to Scheduled Tribes and other traditional forest dwellers, leaving out several other vulnerable communities that rely on forests for their livelihoods (Kashyap et al., 2019; Singh et al., 2015).

Furthermore, the FRA has been criticized for not adequately addressing conflicts between conservation and development goals. Protected areas like national parks and wildlife

sanctuaries have been created on lands traditionally used and inhabited by forest-dependent communities, leading to their displacement (Kothari et al., 2011). The FRA does not provide clear guidance on how to balance conservation and development goals, leading to conflicts between the two (Saberwal et al., 2010).

❖ **Case studies of Forest Rights Act implementation in other Indian states:**

some case studies of Forest Rights Act implementation in different Indian states:

1. **Chhattisgarh:** In Chhattisgarh, the implementation of the Forest Rights Act has been successful in recognizing and vesting forest rights to more than 1.5 million forest-dwelling households. A study conducted by the Centre for Policy Research found that the implementation of the Act has led to an increase in agricultural productivity, income levels, and access to government schemes among forest-dwelling communities in the state (Mehta & Singh, 2015).

2. **Maharashtra:** In Maharashtra, the implementation of the Forest Rights Act has been slow and challenging, with many forest-dwelling communities facing resistance from forest officials and local elites. A study conducted by the Indian Institute of Technology found that the implementation of the Act in the state has been uneven, with some communities receiving recognition of their forest rights while others have been left out (Karmakar & Bhagat, 2016).

3. **Odisha:** In Odisha, the implementation of the Forest Rights Act has been successful in recognizing and vesting forest rights to more than 3 million forest-dwelling households. A study conducted by the Indian Council of Forestry Research and Education found that the implementation of the Act has led to an increase in forest conservation efforts and a reduction in conflict between forest officials and forest-dwelling communities (Behera et al., 2016).

Methodology:

The research design for this study was a qualitative analysis, which explored the role of the Forest Rights Act in addressing the issues of displacement in the Dudhwa-Katarniaghat Tiger Reserve in Uttar Pradesh, India. An exploratory approach was used to identify the challenges faced by forest-dependent communities in the area and the effectiveness of the FRA in mitigating displacement issues.

A combination of data collection methods was used, including semi-structured interviews, focus groups, and document analysis. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with key stakeholders, including forest department officials, members of forest-dependent communities, and NGOs working in the area. Focus groups were also conducted with representatives of forest-dependent communities to gain a better understanding of their perspectives and experiences. Document analysis was used to review relevant policies and reports related to forest conservation and community displacement in the area.

Purposive sampling techniques were used to select participants who had direct experience with the issues of displacement and the implementation of the FRA in the Dudhwa-Katarniaghat

Tiger Reserve. Forest department officials, members of forest-dependent communities, and NGOs working in the area were invited to participate in the study. The selection criteria for participants were based on their knowledge and experience in forest conservation policies and their impact on forest-dependent communities.

About the Study area:

The study area includes two villages, Surma and Golabazi, which are located in the core zone of the Dudhwa Tiger Reserve in the Terai region of Uttar Pradesh, India. These villages are predominantly inhabited by the Tharu Tribal group, who have a unique culture and way of life.

During the study, 124 families from Surma village and 47 families from Golabazi village were consulted. The purpose of the study is not mentioned, but it is possible that it was related to understanding the socio-economic and cultural conditions of the villages and their inhabitants, or to assess the impacts of living within the core zone of the tiger reserve.

The community activism of the Tharu Tribal group, using the Forest Rights Act (FRA), played a crucial role in preventing displacement and claiming their rights over the land. The FRA recognizes the rights of forest-dwelling communities over the land they have been living on and using for generations. It provides for the recognition of individual and community forest rights and also recognizes the rights of communities to protect and conserve forests.

The success of community activism and the use of FRA in preventing displacement and claiming rights is noteworthy, given the challenges faced by indigenous communities across India and the world. The study provides insight into the resilience and agency of the Tharu Tribal group and highlights the importance of recognizing and respecting the rights of indigenous communities.

Table 1.01: Socio-Demographic detail of the study population:

Displacement status	Displaced	00.00	00.00
	Non displaced	171.00	100.00
Age	18 -30 yrs.	42	24,56
	31. 45 yrs.	58	33.92
	46 – 60 yrs.	71	41.52
Gender	Male	165	96.49
	Female	06	03.51
Religion	Hindu	168	98.24
	Buddhist	03	01.76

Caste Category	SC	05	02.92
	ST	166	97.07

The table provided shows the socio-demographic characteristics of the participants in the study. The study included 171 respondents, all of whom claimed that they had not been displaced from their original habitat.

Regarding the age distribution of the participants, the highest percentage (41.52%) belongs to the age group of 46-60 years, followed by the age group of 31-45 years (33.92%) and the age group of 18-30 years (24.56%). This indicates that the study included a diverse range of age groups, with a significant proportion of participants being in the late adulthood stage of their lives.

In terms of gender, the majority of the participants (96.49%) were male, while only 3.51% were female. This suggests that the study was likely to be skewed towards male perspectives and experiences, and may not provide a comprehensive understanding of the situation for both men and women in the study area.

Religiously, the vast majority of participants (98.24%) identified as Hindu, while only 1.76% identified as Buddhist. This may reflect the dominant religious beliefs and practices in the study area.

Caste-wise, 97.07% of the participants belonged to the Scheduled Tribe (ST) category, while only 2.92% belonged to the Scheduled Caste (SC) category. This indicates that the ST community is likely to be more dominant in the study area compared to the SC community.

Overall, the socio-demographic characteristics of the participants in the study suggest that it was conducted among a predominantly male, Hindu, and ST community, with a significant proportion of participants being in the late adulthood stage of their lives. However, the low participation of women in the study raises questions about the representativeness of the findings, and further research is needed to explore the perspectives and experiences of women in the study area.

Scenario before Implementation of FRA:

The study area comprises of two villages, Surma village and Golabazi village, located in the core zone of a protected area. The forest officials had overall control over the forest land, and the forest dwelling communities were perceived as illegal intruders. The communities lived in traditional small huts without basic amenities like roads, water, and electricity. The fear of eviction and the destruction of their houses by the forest officials in the name of the protected areas prevented them from constructing pukka houses.

The forest dwelling communities had been residing within the protected area for generations, but their land ownership was never recognized by the forest department. In many instances, the forest department uprooted their crops in the name of plantation. The communities had to bribe

the forest officials with a fifty percentage share of their crops or other items to protect their crops from destruction. The forest dwelling community always lived with insecurity and the threat of eviction from forest land, and they had to hide their harvest from the forest land to avoid being caught by the forest officials.

Overall, the community members faced many challenges before the implementation of the Forest Rights Act (FRA). They lived in fear and insecurity, and their land ownership was never recognized by the forest department. The implementation of FRA has provided the forest dwelling communities with legal recognition of their land ownership, and they can now cultivate their land without any fear of eviction.

The study area consists of Surma and Golabazi villages, located in the core zone of a protected area. The forest department had overall control over the forest land, and the forest dwelling communities were seen as illegal intruders. These communities lived in small huts without access to basic amenities such as roads, water, and electricity. They were hesitant to construct permanent structures, such as pukka houses, for fear of eviction and the destruction of their homes by the forest officials.

The forest dwelling communities had been living in these areas for generations and inherited the land from their forefathers. However, the forest department did not recognize their land ownership. The forest officials often uprooted the crops grown by these communities in the name of plantation. As a result, these communities had to resort to bribing the forest officials with a portion of their harvest or other items to protect their crops.

The Forest Rights Act (FRA) was implemented to address the issues faced by these forest dwelling communities. The FRA recognized the land rights of these communities and allowed them to cultivate their land without the fear of eviction. The implementation of FRA has provided the forest dwelling communities with legal recognition of their land ownership. They can now cultivate their land without any fear of eviction, and their crops are no longer at risk of being destroyed by the forest officials.

Formulation of Forest Rights Committee and Implementation of FRA:

The formation of the Forest Rights Committee (FRC) was an important step towards ensuring that the marginalized tribal communities of the Golabazi and Surma villages had access to their forest rights. The committee was constituted with the purpose of facilitating the claim process and ensuring that the claims were processed in a transparent and accountable manner. Before the formation of the Forest Rights Committee, the people living in the Golabazi and Surma villages had no knowledge about the Forest Rights Act until 2016. It was only through the efforts of the civil society organization, Nagarik Manch, that the community members were sensitized and made aware of the act. Through a community mobilization process that emphasized building awareness, the organization educated the community members about the Forest Rights Act and mobilized them to claim their forest rights.

Through a continuous sensitization process, the community members of the two villages were able to grasp the importance of the act and took it upon themselves to initiate the process of

claiming their forest rights. They conducted a Gram Sabha, which is a village assembly, and established a Forest Rights Committee (FRC) to facilitate the claim process. The FRC was made up of community members who were elected through the Gram Sabha. They were responsible for identifying the forest land used by the community members and verifying the traditional rights claimed by them. They were also responsible for ensuring that the claims were submitted to the appropriate authorities and following up on the processing of the claims

The formation of the FRC was significant because it gave the community members a sense of ownership and control over the claim process. It also ensured that the claims were processed in a manner that was fair and transparent, which increased the chances of success for the community members.

The implementation of the Forest Rights Act (FRA) was not an easy task, and it required the participation and cooperation of the community members, civil society organizations, and government officials. The sensitization and mobilization efforts of the civil society organization were instrumental in creating awareness among the community members about the act and their rights. The establishment of the FRC helped to facilitate the claim process and ensured that the community members had access to their forest rights.

Management of the Forests under FRA, 2006:

The Forest Rights Act (FRA) of 2006 is a landmark legislation that empowers forest-dwelling communities to manage and conserve their local forest resources. The act recognizes the rights of forest-dwelling communities to own, use, and conserve forest resources, including land, water, and biodiversity. The act also seeks to address historical injustices and ensure the livelihoods of forest-dependent communities.

Under the FRA, the Gram Sabha of villages is responsible for preparing a management plan for their local forest resources through Community Forest Rights (CFR). The Gram Sabha is the primary decision-making body of the village and consists of all adult members of the village. The Forest Protection Committee (FPC) is entrusted with the responsibility of implementing the management plan and ensuring the conservation and sustainable use of forest resources.

In the case of Surma and Golabazi villages, the Gram Sabha reconstituted the Forest Protection Committee and entrusted it with the responsibility of preparing a detailed forest management plan. The plan was developed with the technical support of the Nagarik Manch and was accepted by the Gram Sabha meeting.

The forest management plan had five sections. The first section provided baseline data about the village, its geographical location, administrative and demographic information, and social composition of the village. The second section provided information about the current and past condition of the forest, including the plant varieties found in the forest. The third section provided details about the formation of the Forest Protection Committee and its responsibilities. The fourth section listed the Non-Timber Forest Products (NTFPs) collected by the community and their dependency on forest resources. The fifth section was the most important part of the

management plan and provided detailed rules for forest conservation, protection, and management.

The implementation of the Forest Rights Act has had significant outcomes for the Surma and Golabazi villages. The act has ensured the rights of the community to manage and conserve their local forest resources through the Gram Sabha and the Forest Protection Committee. The detailed forest management plan prepared by the committee has provided a clear roadmap for the conservation and sustainable use of the forest resources while also ensuring the livelihoods of the community members who depend on the forest for their survival.

The outcome of the Forest Right Act and Ensuring the Rights of the Community:

The Forest Rights Act has had a significant impact on communities in protected areas, particularly in the Surma and Golabazi regions. It has recognized the rights of forest dwellers, providing a legal framework for the protection of their resources and habitats, and ensuring sustainable livelihoods. The Act has empowered local communities by enabling them to participate in decision-making processes related to forest management, conservation, and socio-economic development. Additionally, the Act has reduced conflict between forest dwellers and the forest department, enabling effective implementation of conservation policies and programs through active community participation. However, effective implementation remains a challenge, and sustained efforts are necessary to ensure the rights and livelihoods of forest dwellers. The outcome of the implementation of the Act can be understood from the following perspectives.

Compensation for the past injustice:

The communities living in the forest areas before the enactment of the Forest Rights Act had a difficult life. They faced discrimination and injustice from the officials responsible for protecting the area. Their rights were violated on numerous occasions. However, the implementation of the Act brought new hope for them and served as compensation for the past injustices they had endured. The legal rights granted to the residents of Surma and Golabazi were not just a piece of paper, but a symbol of justice, fairness, and freedom. The households now have the ability to cultivate the same ancestral land without fear of being uprooted or having to bribe government officials to harvest their crops. The legal recognition of their rights under the FRA is not just a mere piece of paper, but a symbol of justice, fairness, and freedom. The forest dwellers are now able to cultivate their ancestral lands without fear of being evicted or having to bribe government officials to harvest their crops. The FRA has brought about a sense of security and stability to their lives, which was previously absent. It has helped restore their faith in the government and provided them with a platform to demand justice for past injustices. However, while the FRA has brought about positive changes, there is still a need for sustained efforts to address the historical injustices faced by these communities. The compensation for past injustices should go beyond legal recognition of their rights, and should also include measures to restore the damage caused by past violations. This could involve restitution, compensation, or rehabilitation measures, depending on the nature of the harm

suffered. Only then can true justice be served and the trust between the forest dwellers and the government be fully restored.

The Forest Rights Act of 2006 has been instrumental in providing dignity and freedom to the people of Surma and Golabazi villages. It has significantly reduced their fear of forest officials and enabled them to cultivate their land without any hindrance. The formation of village forest protection committees has empowered them by fostering a sense of unity. With community rights over the forest, they can now prevent outsiders from exploiting it. The sense of belonging towards their forest has grown stronger with the formal recognition of their rights over it. The FRA of 2006 has been a significant tool in enabling the people of Surma and Golabazi villages to live with greater dignity and freedom. With the implementation of the Act, the fear of harassment and injustice from forest officials has decreased to some extent. The villagers are now able to cultivate their land without the constant threat of eviction or having to pay bribes to government officials.

Ensuring Livelihood and Food Security:

The implementation of the FRA has enabled the community to exercise their power and control over the forest and its resources, thereby ensuring their livelihood and food security. The recognition of their rights has provided them with the opportunity to own minor forest produce and engage in its collection, which has opened up livelihood opportunities for them. With legal rights over their land, households are now practicing different types of horticultural and floricultural practices, animal husbandry, and growing traditional crops like paddy, millet, and maize. This has ensured food security at the individual household level.. Furthermore, the FRA has provided opportunities for the communities to develop and implement sustainable forest management practices, which in turn has contributed to the conservation of the forest ecosystem. The forest protection committees formed under the Act have played a significant role in protecting the forests from illegal logging, poaching and other destructive activities. The Act has also enabled the communities to develop alternative livelihood options such as ecotourism and non-timber forest products, which not only provide economic benefits but also contribute to the conservation of the forest. This has helped in promoting sustainable development in the region and improving the overall well-being of the communities.

Entitlements of social security schemes through FRA:

The forest protection committee plays an active role in ensuring the proper implementation of the various government programme. The FRA provided an opportunity to the village leaders to ensure selection of the proper beneficiaries and implementation of the government programme like MGNREGA. Before implementation of FRA, the households could not avail the benefits of housing scheme like IAY, since they did not have private property rights over land. Having obtained the legal *patta* over their ancestral homestead land, the households could apply for receiving support to construct *pucca* houses under IAY.

Empowerment of the tribal community:

The implementation of the FRA has been a key factor in the empowerment of tribal and other forest-dwelling communities, leading to significant social transformation. This has not only boosted their self-confidence but also facilitated leadership development, enabling them to assert their rights and fight for their cause. The empowerment brought about by the implementation of FRA has led to significant social transformation in the tribal and other forest-dwelling communities. This transformation has resulted in an increase in their self-confidence and leadership development, allowing them to articulate and fight for their rights with greater effectiveness. As a result, they have become more aware of their legal rights and the importance of their involvement in decision-making processes, leading to their active participation in the management and conservation of the forests. This empowerment has also enabled the tribal community to raise their voice against discrimination and social injustices, promoting greater social equality and justice

Future Challenges:

While the implementation of the FRA has been successful in ensuring grassroots democracy and the entitlement of rights for tribal and other forest dwelling communities, there remain several challenges to be addressed in the future. The challenges faced by the tribal and forest-dwelling communities in the Surma and Golabazi regions go beyond the implementation of the FRA. Even after the recognition of their rights, they continue to face several issues related to their basic needs and well-being. Many villages in the area lack access to basic amenities like water, electricity, healthcare, and education. This makes it difficult for the people to lead a decent life and fulfill their aspirations. The lack of proper infrastructure also hinders their economic development and opportunities for livelihood. Additionally, the communities face social and cultural discrimination, which further exacerbates their struggles. Despite the legal recognition of their rights, the communities still face marginalization and exploitation, and there is a need for sustained efforts to address these issues and ensure their overall development and well-being.

One of the primary challenges is the lack of basic amenities and development in the villages, which are often situated in remote areas. Additionally, the implementation of the FRA has been slow and inadequate in some areas, which has resulted in the exclusion of many forest dwellers from the legal recognition of their rights. The lack of awareness and education among the forest dwellers about the FRA has also been a hindrance to its effective implementation

Conclusion:

In conclusion, the Forest Rights Act has played a crucial role in empowering the Surma and Golabazi villages by giving them the legal right to exercise control over their ancestral lands and forest resources. Prior to the implementation of the act, the community faced discrimination, injustice, and fear from forest officials. However, the formation of the Village Forest Protection Committee provided them with a sense of unity and empowerment. With

legal rights over their land and forest resources, the households now engage in various agricultural practices, ensuring their livelihoods and food security.

Despite the positive impact of the act, there are still challenges to implementing it effectively, particularly in terms of providing basic amenities and infrastructure to remote forest-dwelling communities. However, the success of the Surma and Golabazi villages in obtaining their rights can serve as a model for other forest-dwelling communities facing similar challenges. It can encourage them to unite and fight for their rights, promoting social transformation and empowerment. Therefore, the Forest Rights Act can be considered a significant step towards ensuring social justice and sustainability for forest-dwelling communities in India.

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