

Tracking the Implementation of Forest Rights Act, 2006 and Its Impact on the Livelihood of Forest Dependent People in the State Of Tripura, India

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Abstract: *The Schedule Tribe and Other Traditional Forest Dwellers (Recognition of Forest Rights) Act, 2006 (FRA) was passed by the Indian Government to recognize rights of forest dwelling tribal communities. The Act aims to positively impact the livelihood of the forest dependent tribals, but due to the lack of clear understanding and irregular implementation this goal was not fully achieved. The present study was conducted in Tripura, where FRA was implemented to achieve sustainable land utilization and to strengthen the socio-economic status of the tribals. This study attempts to throw light on the relevance and progress of implementation of FRA in Tripura along with initiatives and benefit schemes of the government agencies to provide sustainable livelihood option through convergence with FRA. The assessment of impact in terms of livelihood improvement and socio-economic conditions was based on primary survey of 300 FRA beneficiary households in two tribal dominated districts, Gomati and Dhalai. There are indications of positive outcomes regarding, socio-economic status, change in mindset towards sustainable farming, and impact on income but there are issues with decentralization of governance, implementation of land rights and benefit schemes, and sustainability in farming practices. There is no empirical study conducted on the implementation and impact of FRA in Tripura and therefore such field oriented, policy study would be useful for further implementation and research in regions where forest and tribals are co-existing.*

Keywords: *Forest Rights, Forest Governance, Tripura, Tribal livelihood, Socio-economic development, FRA 2006*

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INTRODUCTION

Tribals or “adivasis” or forest dependent people, constitute 104 million people or 8.61% of the total population of India [1]. They mainly reside in forest or forest adjacent areas. The relationship of tribals with the forest is that of mutual co-existence, where historically their relationship was considered integral to the survival and sustainability of the forest ecological system. This symbiotic relationship was considered to be their customary right over the forest resources but these rights were not formally recognized by the Indian Government, during the colonial era or after Independence. Ever since, they have been living under the threat of eviction, because of the Indian forest legislature was inadequate in addressing the rights of the tribal [2]. They have been labelled “encroachers” and evicted from the forest in the name of industrialization and scientific forest management [3][4][5]. This “historical injustice” has also led to alienation of tribals from their ancestral land which has weakened their social and economic status [6] [7].

However, in December 2006, a bill seeking recognition of forest rights of Scheduled tribes and other traditional forest dwellers was passed in the legislative assembly that came to be known as “The Scheduled Tribes and Other Traditional Forest Dwellers (Recognition of Forest Rights) Act, 2006” [8] (hence forth referred to as FRA). The FRA, 2006 was enacted on 31st December 2007, by the Government of India and the Ministry of tribal Affairs is the Nodal agency for implementation. At the State level the responsibility of implementation lies with the Tribal welfare department (ibid). The Act is revered as a major milestone in empowering the tribal community for self-governance and undoing the “historical injustice” brought onto them [3][4][9] [10].

It has been ten years since the Act came into being but the progress of implementation has been slow all over India [11]. The correct and timely implementation of the Act would have made the forest dwelling tribals a major stakeholder of forest management and also improved their socio-economic conditions. But the results of the implementation in terms of management of forest resource and improvement in living conditions of forest dwelling tribal communities is far from what was initially conceived as the implementation is marred

with various issues [6][11][12][13]. Thus it becomes important to critically assess the progress of implementation of FRA in various states in India so that the implementation process can be improved and can contribute to the welfare and development of the tribal communities.

The present study examines the implementation of FRA in in the state of Tripura, which has high percentage (30%) of tribal population and has also been ranked foremost since 2013 in terms of “percentage of titles distributed over number of claims received in each State” by Ministry of tribal affairs[14][15][16][17]. The paper is based on the results of empirical study undertaken in Tripura and throws light on whether a right based regime can contribute to livelihood improvement by assessing the impact on the socio-economic development of the tribals after the implementation of the Act. At present, there is no comprehensive study that analyses the implementation of FRA and its impact on livelihood of tribals in Tripura thus it becomes important to bring forward the ground realities and issues which can be the possible causes of poor implementation and can form basis of learning for other states in India.

Forest Rights Act, 2006 (FRA)

FRA is based on decentralized model of governance and it was expected to change the landscape of the forest by making the forest dwelling tribal communities a major stakeholder in forest conservation and management [11][18]. The rights of forest dwelling Scheduled Tribes (ST), who have been notified under the Indian Constitution, and other Traditional forest dwelling communities [8] are recognized under the Act. The Act empowers these communities by establishing clear property rights at the *individual level* and *community levels* (Fig. 1) for their socio-economic development [8][19]. The Act also recognizes, community tenure, right over ownership and collection of non-timber forest produce¹, right to sustainable co-existence even in protected areas (including tiger reserves) and any other right, which is recognized under any other customary or regional law [8][20]. FRA also gives these communities the “responsibilities and authority for sustainable use, conservation of biodiversity, and maintenance of ecological balance” (ibid) while providing a sustainable source of livelihood.

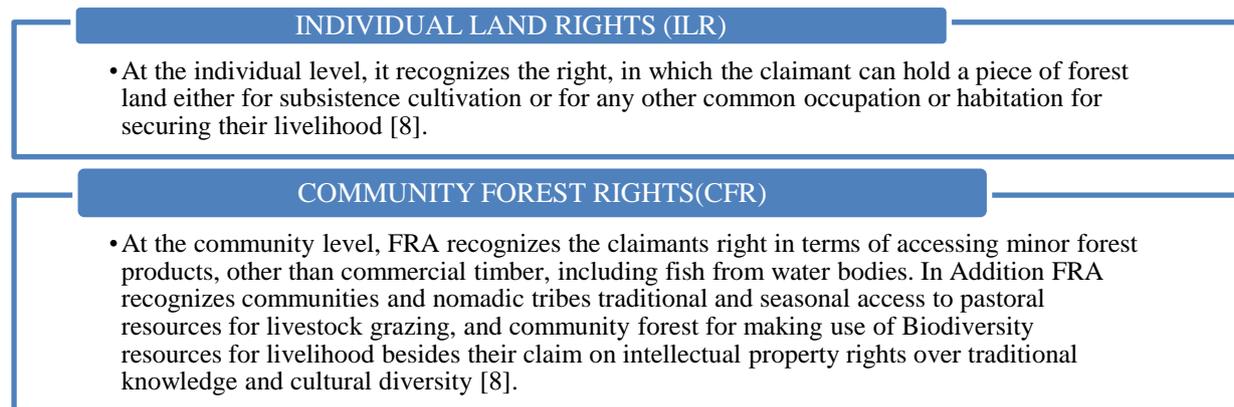


Figure 1: The Individual Land Rights and Community Forest Rights under FRA

Study Area

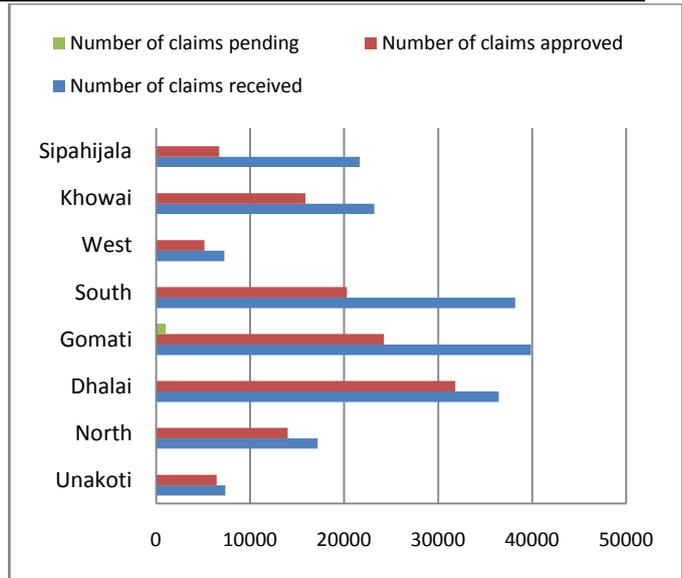
Tripura is a North Eastern Indian state (Figure 2) with rich floral and faunal diversity with total forest and tree cover of 76.71% [21]. The state has a tribal population of over 30% [22][43] with over nineteen recognized Scheduled tribes [23].

In Tripura, FRA was implemented in the year 2008 with the aim of empowering the forest dependent tribal communities and recognizing their rights. The study was conducted in two districts of the state, namely Gomati in the South-West region and Dhalai in the North-East region of the state. These districts were chosen, out of the eight districts, due to the high number of rights vested in the districts (Fig 3). The distribution of titles has been completed in Dhalai with 31843 claims approved and is reaching its completion in Gomati with 24230 claims approved and 949 pending [24] claims as depicted in Fig. 3.

¹Earlier harvesting and trade of these NTFPs was done by the state controlled Forest Development Corporations (FDC). Local people used to get the meager labour used for harvesting the NTFPs, whereas middlemen and FDCs share the largest share of revenues. It has been proposed to decentralize NTFP trade, provide price and policy support, and build the capacities of the local people to manage the NTFPs in the changed scenario [42].



Figure 2: Study Area Map



(Source: Status Report May 2015, Tribal Welfare Department, Tripura)

Figure 3: District wise status of FRA Implementation

Research Questions

The objective of the study is to understand the progress of the implementation in Tripura and the impact of the Act on livelihood of the tribals by addressing the improvement in their socio economic conditions after implementation of FRA. Since only a few Community Forest Rights (CFRs) are vested in Tripura, the focus of this study is on Individual Land Rights (ILR) which is mainly concerned with securing livelihood of the tribals. And the following research questions are raised for the study:

- (1) What is the progress and relevance of FRA in Tripura?
- (2) How FRA has impacted the livelihood outcomes and is there any change in the socio-economic conditions of the tribal after implementation of FRA?
- (3) What are the ground realities and issues that surfaced with respect to implementation of FRA during the study?

METHODOLOGY

The data for the study was generated through interactions with various stakeholders like the government officials responsible for the implementation at the state level including officials of the tribal welfare department , forest department , Revenue department, members of the Autonomous district council, and the tribals.

For the first part; secondary data for the study was collected from different departmental agencies, ministerial data at the Center and the state level, published literature, newspaper articles, government and non-government reports in addition to stake holder interactions.

For the second part; a primary questionnaire survey of the tribal households, vested with ILR, was conducted by the authors in the year 2015-2016. Data regarding the livelihood conditions of the tribals and the improvement in their socio-economic conditions after the implementation of FRA was collected. The parameters selected were, household size and composition, size of land holding, literacy household occupation, income per annum, change in income after FRA and benefit schemes implemented for the livelihood improvement of the households and the schemes availed by the beneficiary households. The target populations for the primary questionnaire survey were FRA right holding households, a total of 300 households were surveyed in the twelve villages selected from the four blocks of the selected districts, and the list of the twelve selected villages is given in Table 1. The household selected were on the basis of random sampling, having 10% sampling intensity of the block. The basis for selecting the village are; number of Scheduled tribe residing in the area, vested FRA land titles, prevalent benefit scheme by various line departments, and safety and accessibility to conduct the study.

For the third part; in addition to stake holder interactions, focused group discussion and face-to face interviews were conducted with government officials and ground staff from the forest department, tribal welfare department, revenue department, FRA committee members and villagers. Structured and semi structured questionnaires were used for this study and the various issues and ground realities of the implementation in Tripura were recorded based on the interactions. After the primary survey, field data was analysed using Microsoft Excel 2010 and data tabulation and interpretations were made.

Table 1: List of villages selected for the Study

GOMATI DISTRICT		DHALAI DISTRICT	
KILLA BLOCK	OMPI BLOCK	AMBASSA BLOCK	MANU BLOCK
Ria Bari Village	Melchi Village	Bagmara Village	SK para Village
E.Khupilong Village	Dhanlekha Village	Jeolcherra Village	E.Kathalcherra Village
KillaVillage	Chechua Village	Balaram Village	Karaticherra Village

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

This section has been organized in 3 parts, the first part deals with the first research question of relevance of FRA in a Sixth Schedule state, like Tripura and what has been the progress of implementation of FRA in terms of rights vested and benefits schemes/ assistance provided under various initiatives of the state government. The second part analyses the results of primary survey pertaining to the socio-economic conditions of the households that have been vested ILR, it gives details of the socio-economic profile of the households and thereby assesses the change in income of the households livelihood status and the benefit schemes that are most prevalent. The last section shares the issues and various ground realities of the implementation of FRA in Tripura.

Relevance and progress of FRA in Tripura

Tripura was a princely state until the last King acceded to the Indian Union in 1949 [22] and attained statehood in 1972. The newly formed state was in a political turmoil, as the tribal population was decreasing due to the ethnic strives with the predominant immigrant Bengali community [25]. The tribals were alienated and living in poverty [7][26]. The state government first responded by passing the Tripura Tribal Areas Autonomous District Council Act, 1979, which would apply to areas with a predominantly tribal population [27]. To strengthen the position of tribals even further and to secure their customary rights, council powers were granted under the Sixth Schedule² along with the formation of district councils (Sixth Schedule Articles 244(2) and 275(1), Constitution of India). Such policy and legislative changes brought some relief but were not able to uplift the socio-economic condition of the tribals and they were dependent on shifting cultivation for livelihood [28].

Table 2: Status of FRA Implementation

State	No. of land claims received from forest dwellers	No. of titles distributed	No. of claims rejected	% of claims rejected	No. of claims pending
TRIPURA	1,91,653 (ILR-1,91,376 & CFR-227)	1,22,583 (ILR-1,22,528& CFR-55)	65,680	34.36%	949

(Source: Status Report May 2016, Ministry of Tribal Affairs, Govt. of India)

In 2008, when the FRA was implemented, the government of Tripura seized the opportunity for improving the socioeconomic conditions of tribals. Some customary rights were already granted to the tribals, but FRA through its provision of individual land rights could help in improving livelihood, by fulfilling their aspiration of the engaging in market oriented farming practices in addition to farming for subsistence livelihood needs [29]. Since 2008 there are 122583 individual land titles recognized and distributed [30] (Table 2), with over 90% of the rights being vested in the first year of implementation. All the eight districts have the Act implemented with maximum number of claims approved in Dhalai (Fig. 3).

FRA also provides a governance framework for implementing benefit and land development schemes under section 16 of FRA amended rules 2012. The benefits schemes provided include, improved variety of seeds for agriculture and horticulture, monetary assistance for raising plantation, assistance for agroforestry, bamboo and rubber plantations, support for cattle, poultry and pig rearing, and ponds for pisciculture, assistance for house building, etc. Two externally aided bilateral projects; the Tripura Japan international co-operation Agency (JICA) Project called the "Tripura forest environmental improvement and poverty alleviation project" (2007) [31] and the Indo-German Development Cooperation Project (IGDC) called "Participatory Natural Resource Management in Tripura Project" (2009) [32], were also implemented in convergence with FRA. These schemes are intended to improve the socio-economic conditions and of the tribal population and forest land

²A structural change in the administration, that provides framework of autonomous decentralized governance with legislative and executive powers over subjects like water, soil, land, local customs and culture. These areas fall within the executive authority of the state, but have provision for the creation of the *District Councils and regional councils* for the exercise of the certain legislative and judicial powers. The Legislations passed by the Autonomous councils come into effect only after the assent of the Governor

improvement, through a self-governance model with the “Gram-Sabha” or the village council at the helm of implementation.

Initiatives for the livelihood improvement of FRA beneficiary

This section examines the various initiatives and schemes converged with FRA. Tribals were engaged in primitive techniques of cultivation, like shifting cultivation [28][33]; with 37% of the tribals having the occupation of cultivator and 26% were marginal farmers (fig. 4)[24]. Since shifting cultivation was extensively practiced in the state it was important to provide alternate sustainable livelihood options to reduce the number of shifting cultivators. To provide alternate sustainable livelihood source to the FRA right holder, benefit schemes were converged with FRA right distribution, to diversify livelihood sources and to increase the production and productivity of food grains, so as to bring their economy in a sustainable growth pattern.

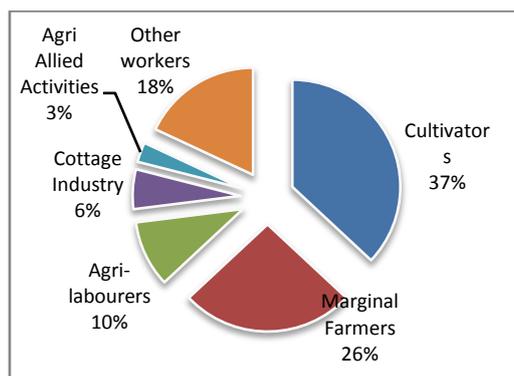


Figure 4: Occupational Categories of tribals in Tripura

(Source: Tribal welfare department, Tripura, 2015)

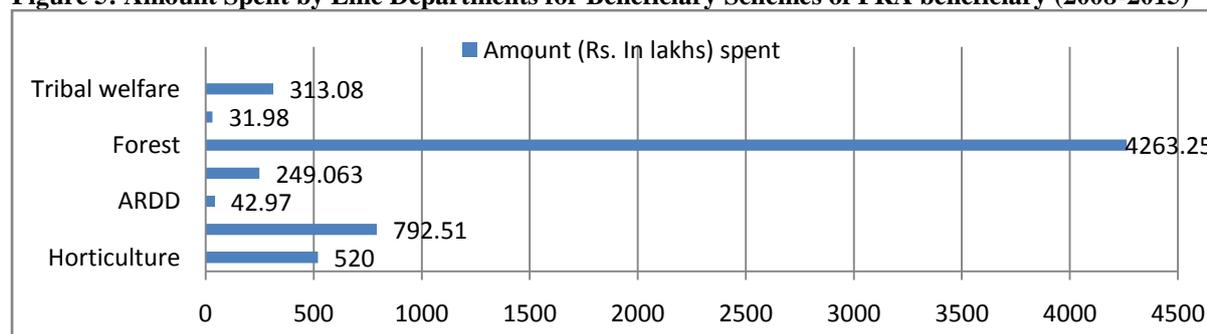
The various benefit schemes provided to FRA right holders are divided into two parts; the schemes provided by the line departments (including JICA and IGDC project schemes) and that provided under Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA). As per the Tribal welfare report of 2015, the number of FRA right holder families given benefits under line department are 73148 with the total amount spent for the schemes are Rs. 6212.87 lakhs. A total of 20201 FRA families benefited by schemes of MGNREGA with a total amount spent for the benefit at Rs. 7199 lakhs, as given in table 3. Till 2015 benefits were provided to 75% of the FRA right holding households (Table 3).

Table 3: Summary of schemes implemented for FRA right holders in Tripura

Scheme	No. of forest rights vested	Number of families cover	Amount involved
Line department	-	73148	6212.87
MGNREGA	-	20201	7199
TOTAL	122583	93349	13411.371

(Source: Status Report May 2015, Tribal Welfare Department, Tripura)

The funds for the schemes are allocated from the states Tribal Sub-plan and other budgetary allocations, the funds for MGNREGA are also converged to provide for the best livelihood outcomes. In terms of expenditure for the upliftment of FRA beneficiary in Tripura, it was found that the forest department is the biggest spender at Rs.4263 lakhs, and the horticulture department has spent the least amount at Rs.520 lakhs (Fig. 5). The other line departments that provide benefit schemes include, Agriculture department, Animal Resource and Development Department (ARDD), Fisheries Department, Handloom Handicraft and Sericulture Department (HH&S) and Tribal Welfare Department along with MGNREGA the respective amount spent on initiatives for FRA beneficiaries is given in Fig. 5

Figure 5: Amount Spent by Line Departments for Beneficiary Schemes of FRA beneficiary (2008-2015)

(Source: Tribal welfare department, Tripura, 2015)

The data collected from the state tribal department was further substantiated with the data from the two districts under study, Gomati and Dhalai. Interviews were conducted with the village council to understand the mechanism of providing the benefit schemes; it was found that economic benefits were provided to the FRA right holder on the basis of a priority list prepared by the village council. The benefits are provided as per the requirement of the right holder; the list once prepared by the village council is then forwarded to the Tribal welfare department, which then coordinates with other departments and releases the funds for the various benefit schemes to be implemented. During the course of the study it was found that the distribution of the schemes is highly politicized; i.e. the tribals right holders in support of the current political governing body are given the benefit of the scheme before anyone else. Also the powerful tribal community members get benefited from more than one scheme while the vulnerable ones do not get their share of support. Moreover, the distribution system is based on equal distribution rather than equitable distribution of benefits which again negatively impacts the more vulnerable tribals.

Table 4: Number of households provided with assistance in Dhalai and Gomati

Name of district	No. of forest rights vested	Horticulture	Agriculture	Animal resource development	Fisheries	Forest	Handloom handicraft & sericulture	Tribal welfare	Total households covered
Dhalai	31843	3641	7306	120	597	11132	60	0	22856
Gomati	24230	2425	5231	118	396	1549	25	0	9744

(Source: District Tribal welfare department, Tripura, 2015)

As per the number of right holders provided assistance by various departments, Dhalai showed better results with 22856 or 71% households with some benefit scheme, whereas in Gomati only 9744 or 40% of the households (Table 4) had received some assistance in the form of benefit schemes. In Dhalai district, maximum households were provided benefit schemes, from the schemes and initiatives of forest department (including IGDC project), which includes Bamboo plantation, horticulture plantations, etc. In Gomati district, Agriculture Department provides assistance to maximum households, the department provides seeds for cultivation, assistance for mixed farming, etc. Undoubtedly the reach of benefit schemes is better in Dhalai district than Gomati district, major difference being the implementation of IGDC project under forest department, in Dhalai district, which has a separate committee overlooking the implementation and monitoring down to the village level. The percentage of FRA right holders receiving benefits in each of the districts is lower than the overall state percentage of 75%, with Gomati lagging far behind, highlighting the failure of the government machinery in fulfilling the needs of the tribals.

Socio economic profile of FRA beneficiary

The implementation of benefit schemes gives only half the picture of the impact on the livelihood outcomes and socio-economic growth of the FRA beneficiaries. To fully understand the impact of FRA an assessment of socio economic profile for the selected villages (Table 1) was undertaken and data was analysed for the two districts.

The results of the survey revealed that, Dhalai, is a socio-economically backward district, with shifting cultivation as a major source of livelihood. Gomati district has 32% of cultivable land and agriculture is the major occupation. During the survey, it was found that all 12 villages are under Tripura Tribal Autonomous

District Council (TTADC) and 100% of the rights vested under FRA are Individual land rights, vested to the Scheduled Tribes (ST). The majority of rights are given to Jamatia Tribe, who are plough cultivators, in Gomati district and to Reangs and Tripuras, who are shifting cultivators, in Dhalai district. The literacy rate in Tripura is over 90% ("Economic review of Tripura 2013–14) but the results of sampled household exhibited a lower rate; 74% in Dhalai district and 83% in Gomati district. Majority of rights have the male member as the primary right holder even though the Act does not specify to make the male member the primary holder and the right is jointly owned by a married couple. In the study the maximum right holders are in the age group of 50-70 years (38% in Gomati and 34% in Dhalai) which can cause an issue of inheritance among the children of the right holder in the future, as the rights are inheritable and there is more than one child's to inherit it (average household size is 5). The average ILR land holding for the sampled households is 1.3Ha. The results are summarized in Table 5 for Gomati district and in Table 6 for Dhalai district.

Table 5: Profile of District-Gomati FRA Beneficiary

Criteria/ village	Killa block			Ompi block		
	Riyabari	Khuilong	Killa	Dhanlekha	Melchi	Chenchua
Right holders Age (yr)						
40-50	26.09%	20%	14%	25%	36%	42%
50-70	39.13%	28%	45%	54%	32%	31%
<70	0.00%	12%	0%	0%	0%	0%
% female patta holders	13.04%	4%	23%	17%	16%	15%
Major tribe	Jamatia 100%	Jamatia 96.00%	Jamatia 100%	Debbarma 63%	Jamatia 96%	Jamatia 100%

Source: Primary study

Table 6: Profile of District -Dhalai FRA beneficiary

Criteria/ village	Manu block			Ambassa block		
	Kathal-cherra	Karati-cherra	Sk Para	Bagmara	Jeolcherra	Balaram
Right holders age (yr)						
40-50	33%	17%	19%	38%	26%	40%
50-0	42%	58%	27%	21%	22%	36%
<70	0%	13%	8%	8%	13%	0%
% female patta holders	8%	13%	8%	21%	9%	20%
Major tribe	Reang 50%	Marak 38%	Tripura 92%	Halam 83%	Reang 100%	Halam 44%

Source: Primary study

Major Income source of the FRA right holders

The data for household occupation of the FRA right holders was collected to find the major source of income in each block. The results of the study revealed that Agriculture was the major source of income in Gomati districts; with 60% of the FRA right holding households in Kill and 50.56% of FRA households in Ompi, practicing plough cultivation or flat land cultivation (Table 7). In Dhalai district the major occupation is shifting cultivation; with 41% of the ILR holding households in Manu and 39% of ILR holding households in Ambassa (table 7), practice shifting cultivation on forest land and is an important source of income, as the terrain is predominantly hilly. There is some diversification of income but the households in the study area don't consider plantations on ILR under FRA as a major income source and only use the land under FRA to augment the household income, as the area is very small and is not sufficient for sustaining livelihood. Moreover, land development of ILR is dependent on the assistance and benefit schemes provided by government and non-government agencies.

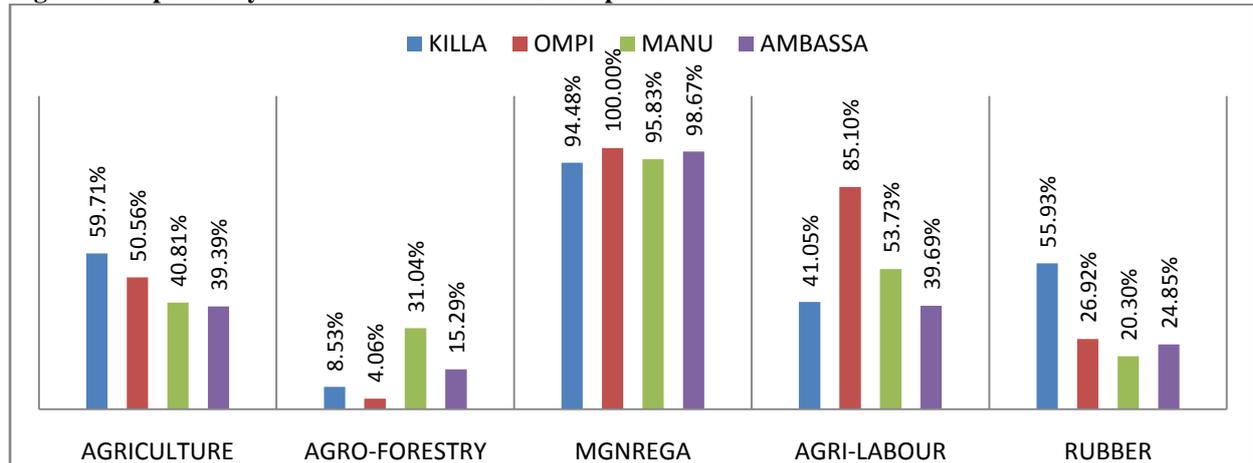
Table 7: Household Occupation of FRA Beneficiaries

Occupation	Agri-culture	Agro-forestry	Jhoom	MGNREGA	Agri-labour	Non-agri labour	Govt employ	Rubber	Other
Killa	60%	8.53%	15%	94%	41%	6%	5%	56%	7%
Ompi	50.56%	4.06%	2.78%	100.00%	85.10%	4.11%	8.06%	27.00%	8.00%
Manu	41%	31%	21%	96%	54%	3%	11%	20%	10%
Ambassa	39%	15%	28%	99%	40%	18%	10%	25%	31%

Source: Primary study

The households that do take up plantations on ILR are households that have been given some form of assistance and the most popular plantation, as revealed by the survey, was Rubber plantation. Rubber plantation is undertaken by over 20% households in both the district undertaking the plantation on ILR under FRA (Fig 6). The scheme for rubber plantation was initially started by Tripura Forest Development and Plantation Corporation Limited to rehabilitate that degraded land [34] but as demand grew, other government department also followed suit and gave financial assistance and raw material for raising rubber plantation. It was observed that about 50% of the households in the survey had mature plantation and only these mature rubber plantations have the capacity to support the economies of the household which in turn has reduced their dependency on agriculture but not completely eliminated it.

Figure 6: Dependency of Household on various occupations



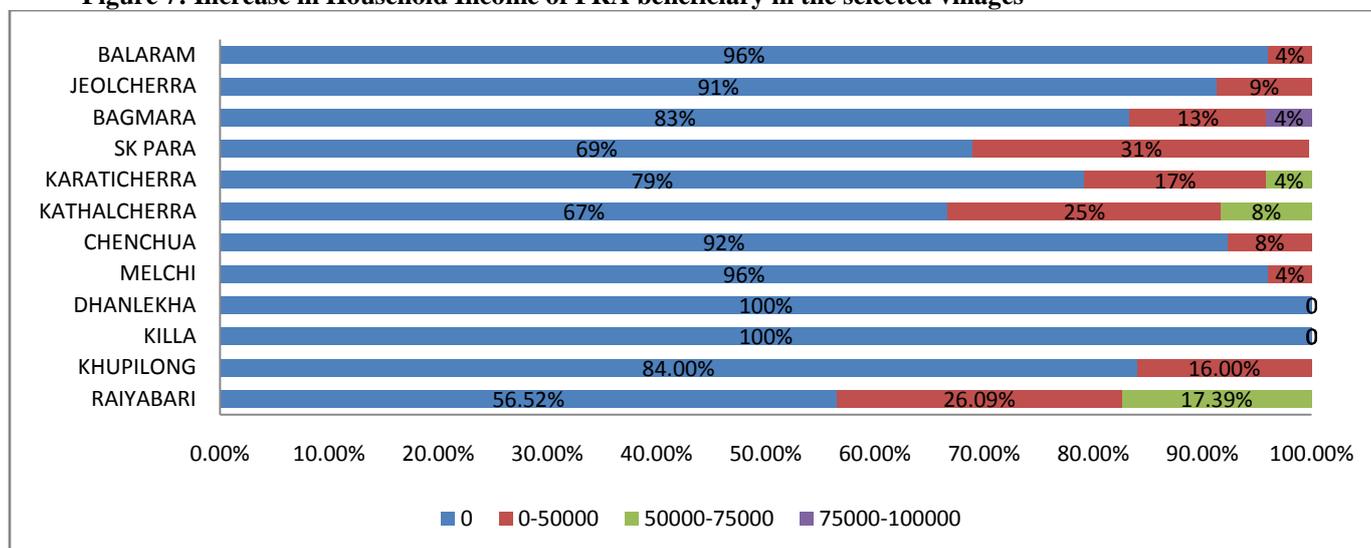
Source: Primary study

In the last few years another plantation which is has shown an upward trend is Agroforestry plantation and horticulture plantation on ILR under FRA(Fig. 6). Agroforestry has been promoted as a sustainable form of cultivation, with the internationally aided projects (JICA and IGDC) playing a major role in raising awareness. But the households taking these plantations remain low; only 8.5% households in Killa and 4% in Ompi and 31% of households in Manu and 15% in Ambassa (Fig. 6). More number of households undertakes agroforestry/horticulture activities in the blocks of Dhalai districts due to the implementation of plantation schemes of IGDC project.

The other major household occupations are compared in Fig. 6 and it is seen that the dependency on MGNREGA or wage labour is very high and it contributes about 20%-40% to the household income, which gives hundred days of assured employment to all the adults of the household. And a few households engage in Agri-Labour activities to help supplement the household income.

Change in Household Income

The household income of sampled ILR holder households was analyzed and results of survey revealed, that income of most households lies between INR 50,000 to 75000 per annum and on correlating their income and household occupation, it was found that these households were mainly dependent on agriculture activities and only a small percentage of the income is contributed by activity on the ILR (if any). The households with income between INR 75000-100000 have adopted horticulture activities or agroforestry plantations on ILR land along with agriculture activities hence the difference in income. Households with incomes greater than INR 100,000 either have large plantations on Individual FRA land, mainly mature Rubber plantations, or family member(s) is (are) employed with government agencies or have private employment. Therefore, to study the change in the annual income of ILR holders, the change in the income of these three income groups was analysed to observe the impact on economic status of the ILR holding households. The data was analysed for each of the village and are depicted in Figure 7.

Figure 7: Increase in Household Income of FRA beneficiary in the selected villages

Source: Primary study

The key observations about the change in income and their drivers are discussed below

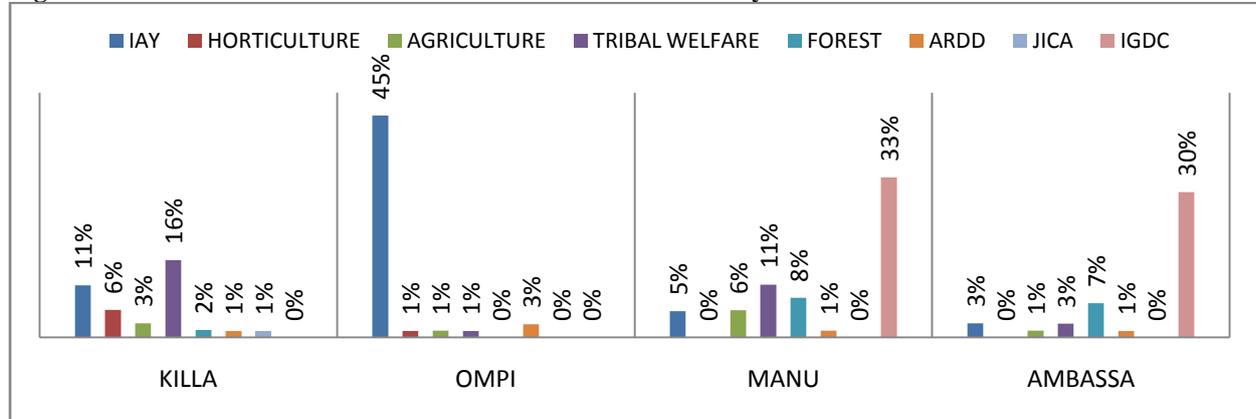
- In all the villages under study the income did not change for over 50% of the households.
- The households do not show a change in income as land (ILR) given under FRA for the purpose of habitation or cultivation to support their livelihood is not being used. This land remains unused due to the distance between land and homestead which can be over 5-6kms, or the land vested under FRA is under dense forest, making it unfit for cultivation in the present state.
- Some households do not utilise the ILR for cultivation as they are habitual of undertaking shifting cultivation or certain economic activity (e.g. collection of NTFP) and are therefore unwilling to put in the extra effort to use the land for cultivation.
- In other cases, there was no change in income even after undertaking plantation or cultivation activity on ILR, as the plantations are new and have not started yielding produce. These are mainly rubber plantations which reach maturity for yielding latex in 5 to 7 years.
- In village Khupilong and Riyabari, in Killa Block, few households that show an increase in income are due to mature rubber and bamboo plantations.
- In villages of Ompi block (Chenchua, Melchi, Dhanlekha) the increase is observed in only a total of 10% of the households as most of the ILR vested under FRA are not in use as the block administration has not been able to provide assistance for the land development.
- In villages of Ambassa Block (Bagmara, Balaram, Jeolcherra), about 20% sampled households show increase in income due to ongoing economic schemes of IGDC. A few households in Bagmara show greater increase (4%) because they undertake mixed horticulture activities along with rubber.
- In villages of Manu block (Karaticherra, Kathalcherra, SK para) about 28% households show an increase in income due to the implementation of schemes of IGDC project. The households also show an inclination towards horticulture plantation or mixed plantations with bamboo and/or rubber.

Implementation of benefit schemes

As depicted in the previous sub-section the implementation of the economic benefits scheme have a major impact on the household income, as there are no major industries in this region. The households that record an increase in income are because of benefit schemes for rubber plantation, bamboo plantation or horticulture plantation. Thus it becomes important to find out the various schemes that are implemented for the households in the study area, Figure 8 shows the survey results of benefit scheme provided to households at the block level. The survey results revealed the most dominant benefit scheme in the two blocks of Gomati District was “Indira Awas Yojana” (IAY), at 11% and 45% respectively, which provides monetary benefit or building material, for building a house on the ILR vested. Other benefits schemes do not have much presence in the two blocks and thus their impact is limited. There is demand for schemes for rubber plantations and horticulture crops in Gomati district and households are added to the “wait-list” but the disbursement is very slow due to

lapses at the administrative level. In Dhalai district-Manu and Ambassa block, the IGDC project schemes are the most prevalent benefit scheme for FRA beneficiary households, the reach of the scheme is higher than other government schemes with over 30% of households in each block. There are other schemes of the line departments in the district but their impact is very small.

Figure 8: Block wise various Benefit Schemes for FRA beneficiary



Source: Primary study

Issues and ground reality

The implementation of FRA is a complex bureaucratic process and requires utmost coordination among the stake holders to make the Act beneficial. In Tripura, there is seen some improvement in the economic condition of the tribals but it is still a long way ahead to achieve sustainable socio-economic growth. The growth is lacking due to some issues and misinterpretation of the Act during implementation at the ground level. Some issues that were identified while undertaking research in the study area are discussed in this section.

Aim of Decentralized Governance not achieved

The aim of FRA was to decentralize the governance of forest resource so as to make the village dwellers responsible for making decisions for sustainable use and management of forest resources. The village council plays a very significant role in such a decentralized model of governance [11][34][35]. FRA has a provision to elect the Forest Rights Committee (FRC) members from the village to oversee the implementation of the Act at the ground level. The FRC members are to be elected in a democratic and participatory way[8] but during the group discussions with village councils and FRC members it was found that the members were “selected” by a few leaders in the village, this was observed in all the villages under study. This selection process completely disregards the participatory, democratic process of the Act and encourages nepotism by selecting a few favourable members to the committee. The participation of the village members is lost in this process and the implementation goes into the hands of a few powerful community members, who may not appropriately represent the interest of all the community in the village. It was learnt that this process has been implemented due to lack of correct interpretation of the law and low awareness on the part of the village members.

The FRC members interviewed from the twelve villages were ambiguous about their responsibilities and lacked clarity about the provisions and purpose of FRA, as a result the relevance of the decentralized governance is lost at the implementation level and it is merely reduced to another benefit scheme. The gap is further widened as poor training is extended to FRC members and community leaders, which questions the effectiveness of the Tripura tribal state department as they are responsible for conducting trainings as per the rules of FRA.

Hurried implementation of Individual Land Rights (ILR) under FRA

In the study area, ILR were vested to 90% of the households during the first stage of implementation in 2008. Interviews with officials of government departments revealed that the implementation of ILR in many parts of Tripura was done hurriedly to gain political support during the 2008 legislative assembly elections and 2009 general elections. As a result the process of verification was bypassed and 70% of the ILRs vested in the study area are incorrectly recognized on previously unoccupied forest areas, which completely disregard the statute requirement for vesting rights [8]. Also, ILRs have been vested to households, which do not dependent on forest resources directly for livelihood; 8% of the sampled households are Government employees and another 12% have private sources of income.

Another important observation was that, 23% of the ILR vested were not utilized for any plantation or habitation as the land vested under FRA are covered with dense forest making it unusable for economically viable activity. There is also observed a decrease in the number of claims filed under FRA as the tribals are

dissatisfied with the implementation of the Act. About 60% of the respondents in the study area rated the implementation of the Act as “average” and wanted improvement in disbursement of benefit schemes for land development.

Implementation of Benefit Schemes and the question of sustainable farming practices on ILR

The tribals of Tripura have been shifting cultivators and many still practice the traditional methods of cultivation [36][37]. The age old practice has now started affecting the forest ecology negatively due to the reduction of cultivation cycle from 15-20 years to 3-7 years [37]. In the latest Indian state of forest report 2017, the forests cover of Tripura has actually decreased, mainly due to the practice of shifting cultivation. An average of 14% of the right holding households practiced Shifting cultivation and Jeolcherra has the highest number of shifting cultivation practicing households (57%). FRA intended to provide alternate farming practices and limit the expansion of shifting cultivation through convergence of benefit schemes. These schemes are important for land development vis-à-vis socio-economic growth of the tribals but the distribution of these schemes is not equitably and many vulnerable tribal groups, are left behind during the distribution of the benefits. In the study area, only a few affluent community members and those in support of the present political governing body are given the benefit of the scheme before anyone else. This affects the growth of the vulnerable and impoverished tribals groups and they have no choice but to engage in traditional farming practice like shifting cultivation. Also when schemes are given, no training is provided to undertaking the new farming practices under various implementation schemes, thus lowering their effectiveness. Therefore the traditional practice has not been completely eliminated and only a small number of ILR households have truly been able to diversify their source of livelihood.

Another important result of the primary survey was to delineate the most popular plantation i.e rubber (*Hevea brasiliensis*) plantation. The scheme was initially started by Tripura Forest Development and Plantation Corporation Limited to rehabilitate that degraded land and to provide livelihood to the shifting cultivators [33] but as the number of plantations grew its effectiveness decreased. These monoculture plantations also have many drawbacks and over a period of time they have undermined the biodiversity and also affect soil fertility and nutrient cycling [33][38][39]. And as is basic or no processing for the latex produced and the economic returns are very low [40]. The profit margins have also shrunk with the increase in supply, because the prices are linked to international markets (ibid). The decrease in profit margins have led many households have now opted for high return yielding horticulture plants like areca nut, pineapple, banana, lemon etc but the lack of resources make it difficult to implement new sustainable horticulture plantations[41].

There is also an increased interest of the tribals, towards bamboo plantation in agroforestry models, as some bamboo varieties like Barak (*Bambusa balcooa*), Bari (*Bambusa polymorpha*), Mritinga (*Bambusa tulda*), can be sold for high prices in the local market and require basic processing. The change in the mindset of people could be attributed to the popularity of agroforestry and horticulture projects by JICA and IGDC, which have been successful in making people aware of the different techniques of plantation for socio-economic development but their impact remains low.

CONCLUSION

The central theme of the paper was to assess the implementation of FRA in Tripura, and how a right based approach can impact the socio-economic conditions of the right holders by adopting and promoting sustainable practices with local governance at the helm of implementation. From studying the secondary data available at the state level and discussions with government officials it can be concluded that the focus of the implementation of FRA in Tripura has been vesting of ILR which are concerned with boosting the micro-economic of the forest dwelling tribal, and not CFR which have the potential to impact macro-economics of the state while conserving the forest resource. Moreover, the results of the implementation of ILR are not what were initially expected as the implementation did not account for the day to day vagaries and social inequalities of the local communities. Implementation of rights was expedient during the initial phase but has slowed down since and the disbursement of benefit schemes has also lost its pace. The socio-economic status of FRA beneficiary shows some improvement but the impact is too small to affect the overall development of the tribal population. The implementation of the Act has also been difficult as the process is extensive and complex and involves utmost coordination and participation all the stakeholders. Even the monitoring at the state level and assessment of implementation is very superficial and pertains to the number of rights vested and benefits schemes given. When after ten years of FRA, the focus should be on the impact of FRA on the land development and livelihood enhancement of tribal communities.

The primary study of this paper touched upon the changes in the mindset of people regarding sustainable land use and also revealed some hard hitting facts like how the beneficiaries are dissatisfied with the implementation, as they have not experienced economic growth. The lack of economic growth could be due to the lack of training or awareness building programme along with implementation of benefit schemes. Moreover

the schemes do not provide incentive to the beneficiary to take charge for long term land development and are based on short term hand-holding to achieve targets for the benefit providing agency or department. This has led to rapidly changing between different benefit schemes without realizing the full potential of each of the benefit schemes. Therefore only a handful of FRA beneficiary record some socio-economic growth. There is also the issue of participation of the villages in social-economic processes, as the community on a whole is not empowered to make decisions regarding their livelihood options and management of the forest resources.

Tripura being a Schedule Six state should be more inclined towards increase in local participation but a disinclination is seen among the authorities to pass the reins of forest management and decision making to the tribal communities. For the Act to be successful in Tripura it is required that the awareness of the Tribals should be enhanced with respect to the rights granted to them under the Act. The Government authorities, specifically the forest and tribal welfare departments, who work so closely with the forest dwelling tribals, should take up the role of aiding agency that supports in the capacity building and knowledge enhancement of communities for better FRA implementation. It is recommended that awareness programmes regarding the provisions of the Act and training programmes for the FRC members, the local tribal community and the ground staff should be the focus of the state tribal department. The local participation towards sustainable land development should be encouraged as Tripura offers a large potential for sustainable commercial use of forest resources, especially in the case of, Bamboo sp., horticulture crops and medicinal plants. This increase in participation will only be possible through collaboration of villagers, local NGOs, government departments of the state and local governance bodies. The monitoring of implementation, which is undertaken by the tribal welfare departments, should be more inclusive and include the results of change in land use; frequency of trainings provided, impact on the money spent and change in the economic status. The State government and agencies should independently undertake studies in the area so that further ground reality can be revealed.

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