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Forest Rights and Cultural Survival: Safeguarding South Goa's Tribal
Folklore Through Effective FRA Implementation

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Abstract

The tribal communities of Goa Gawda, Kunbi, and Velip have a rich cultural heritage profoundly embedded in folklore, expressed through festivals, folk dances, songs, handicrafts, and traditional lifestyles. These traditions are vital for preserving cultural identity and social cohesion, passed down through generations. However, modernization, globalization, and urbanization pose significant threats, leading to challenges in preservation, revival, and promotion. The survival of these cultural practices is Strongly connected to forest rights, making the 100% recognition of the Forest Rights Act (FRA) 2006 crucial for safeguarding Goa's tribal heritage. Most of the tribals peoples in South Goa not own the land while the land is owned by the Elites and the Companies. The FRA aims to empower marginalized communities, alleviate poverty, and promote sustainable forest management. This is very important to safeguard the South Goa tribal folklore. However, despite its progressive intent, implementation across South Goa faces bureaucratic delays, lack of awareness, and resistance from authorities.

Keywords:

Forest Rights Act (FRA), Cultural preservation, Goa Tribal folklore, Tribal Empowerment

1: Introduction

The Gawda, Kunbi, and Velip communities are the original inhabitants of Goa, residing across both North and South Goa, including all 12 talukas (Gawas and Velip 564). When it comes to south goa only five talukas majorly Canacona, Quepem, Sanguem, Ponda and Dharbandora has the more number of tribals who are depended on the forest areas for their survival. These tribal groups have maintained a deep-rooted connection with nature for centuries, depending on forests for their survival, livelihoods, and daily needs. Over generations, they have preserved rich cultural traditions, folklore, and traditional knowledge systems that play a major role in maintaining their identity and social cohesion. While, rapid modernization, globalization, and urbanization have increasingly threatened these traditions, leading to challenges in their preservation and revival.

The survival of these cultural practices is intrinsically linked to forest rights, as land ownership remains a major concern in South Goa. Many tribal villages continue to be under the control of private companies, elites, and the forest department, creating challenges for these communities to claim their ancestral land. Secondly, displacement, migration, and limited legal recognition have played a role in the reduction of folklore traditions, weakening the cultural essence of these indigenous groups. Ensuring land rights for South Goa's tribal communities is not just about economic security but also about preserving their way of life, heritage, and identity.

The acknowledgment and successful enforcement of the Forest Rights Act (FRA) 2006 are crucial for safeguarding south Goa's tribal heritage. The FRA acknowledges the rights of forest-dwelling communities over land and resources, aiming to correct historical injustices by granting legal rights to traditional forest dwellers. Beyond livelihood security, the Act holds a crucial role in protecting cultural heritage by providing Indigenous communities with a legal foundation to sustain their traditions.

This study critically examines the difficulties encountered by the Gawda, Kunbi, and Velip communities in securing their rights under the FRA in South Goa. It explores the FRA's role in preserving tribal folklore, indigenous knowledge systems, and sustainable forest practices. Furthermore, it proposes legal and administrative reforms to strengthen the enforcement of the FRA, ensuring both sustainable development and the protection of South Goa's rich tribal heritage. Additionally, the Research emphasizes on identifying the difficulties encountered by

tribal communities in state in claiming their rightful entitlements and explores probable solutions for the successful implementation of the Act. By addressing these issues, the study aims to safeguard tribal culture and traditions, Securing their existence for future generations while promoting inclusive growth, environmental conservation, and the recognition of indigenous rights in South Goa. Since every aspect of folklore, culture, and tradition is deeply connected to the forest, securing land and resource rights is important for their preservation and revival.

1.1 : The Research Gap: Beyond the Paper Trail

While the Forest Rights Act (FRA) of 2006 was born from a promise to right historical injustices, for many, that promise remains unfulfilled. On the ground, the "noble intent" of the law often crashes against a wall of red tape and systemic resistance. This isn't just an administrative failure; it is a continued displacement of people who have been the primary guardians of the forests for generations.

In Goa, this silence is even louder. The stories of the Gawda, Kunbi, and Velip communities are frequently missing from the academic and political spotlight. As their land rights remain in limbo, their cultural soul expressed through ancient folklore and indigenous wisdom is quietly eroding. We aren't just losing data we are losing a way of life. Bridging this gap is about more than policy it's about documenting a struggle for survival and ensuring that "conservation" doesn't come at the cost of human dignity.

1.2 : Research Questions

1. What are the real-world barriers that prevent the Gawda, Kunbi, and Velip families of South Goa from holding the legal titles to their ancestral lands?
2. How do forest rights help in preserving tribal culture and traditions in Goa?

1.3 : Objectives

1. To Study the Gawda, Kunbi, and Velip communities and understand the specific legal and social roadblocks they face when trying to claim their rights under the FRA.
2. To explore how the FRA can do more than just grant land how it can provide the physical and psychological space needed to keep indigenous knowledge and folklore alive.

1.4: Scope

This study focuses on the South Goa region, centering on the voices of the Gawda, Kunbi, and Velip peoples. We aim to move the conversation from "administrative reform" to tribal empowerment. By connecting the dots between legal rights and cultural heritage, this research seeks to advocate for a future where sustainable development honors the people who lived here first.

1.5: Methodology

To capture the full picture of what's happening on the ground, this study uses a blend of hard data and personal stories. On the quantitative side, we conducted a systematic audit of official records, including the 2024 MIS status reports and information gathered through the Right to Information (RTI) Act to see exactly where land claims stand. To add a human layer to these numbers, we sat down for in-depth interviews with the people who know the struggle best community leaders, folk artists, and academic experts.

I specifically reached out to 50 people including members of Forest Rights Committees members from South Goa and tribal residents to understand the real-world hurdles they face every day. To ensure our research was thorough, we also combed through academic databases like JSTOR and tracked over a decade of local news archives from 2012 to 2024. This allowed us to see how policies have shifted over time, focusing entirely on the lived experiences of the Gawda, Kunbi, and Velip tribes as they navigate the Forest Rights Act.

2: Goa Tribal Communities

The Gawda, Kunbi, and Velip communities are the original inhabitants of Goa. As the region's earliest settlers, they share a profound, historic connection with Mother Nature, living in close harmony with the land, the forests, and the local wildlife (Gawas and Velip 564). According to the 2011 census, these indigenous communities make up 10.23% of Goa's population. While they are spread across all 12 talukas of the state, their presence is most strongly concentrated in the forested belts of South Goa, particularly in the Canacona, Quepem, Sanguem, Ponda, and Dharbandora talukas.

Despite their deep roots in Goan soil, the Gawda, Kunbi, and Velip have historically been among the most marginalized and disadvantaged groups in the region. For generations, they have endured severe poverty and systemic neglect from both the State and Central governments, particularly when it comes to the equitable distribution of developmental resources (Gawas 5).

Their official recognition as Scheduled Tribes did not come easily; it was the result of relentless advocacy by community organizations. Groups like the Gomantak Goud Maratha Samaj, Gawda Vikas Mandal, Goans Organiser's Association, GAKUVED, and the Goa State Schedule Tribe Action Committee fought tirelessly for their rights. Their collective struggle finally bore fruit in December 2002, when Parliament approved the SC and ST Amendment Bill. The bill received the President's assent on January 7, 2003, officially granting constitutional Scheduled Tribe status to the Gawda, Kunbi, and Velip communities—though, notably, the Dhangar community was excluded from this list.

3 : South Goa tribal communities' folklore

The tribal communities of Goa Gawda, Kunbi, and Velip have a vibrant cultural heritage that is firmly rooted in their folk dances, festivals, sacred groves, handicrafts, and traditional lifestyles. Their festivals, such as Shigmo, Dhalo, Dhillo, Sawsar Padyo, and Zagor, hold a crucial role in safeguarding their cultural identity. Shigmo is celebrated by male members who perform folk dances like Taalgadi, Goff, Tonyakhell, and Divli Nach while visiting different villages. The festival includes rituals such as Jatra, where Diwaj and Gudi ceremonies are observed also more rituals are performed during these festivals it depends on village to village.

Dhalo is a week-long festival held in the month of Pousha, marking the onset of winter, and is celebrated by village women through various rituals and performances. Dhillo, another festival, sees women participating in the Fugadi folk dance for a duration ranging from one to three weeks, varying across villages. While some villages celebrate Dhalo, others observe Dhillo. Sawsar Padyo is an important festival that marks the tribal New Year, bringing communities together in celebration. Another major cultural event is Zagor, a folk drama performed between the months of Chaitra and Jyeshtha, typically on the first Tuesday or Saturday. The folk dances performed during these festivals include Taalgadi, Goff, Tonyakhell, Dhalo, Fugadi, and Divli Nach, each having its own significance in the tribal traditions.

Apart from festivals and dances, the Goan tribal communities have a deep Sacred bond with the natural world, In South Goa, sacred groves are referred to by various names, including Devrai, Devran, and Pann (Kerkar). These groves, located in forested areas, are considered divine spaces where cutting trees is strictly prohibited. Many of these sacred sites are deep within the forests and are visited by the tribals only for performing rituals and worship. Various trees in the forests are also revered as sacred, highlighting the intrinsic bond between the tribals

and their natural surroundings. Through these festivals, Folk dances, and sacred practices, the Gawda, Kunbi, and Velip communities continue to safeguard their distinct cultural heritage and spiritual traditions.

Traditional tribal societies share a deep and intrinsic connection with forests and nature, as the environment plays a central role in their spiritual, economic, and social lives (Gawas 3). The Gawda, Kunbi, and Velip communities have a rich natural heritage, reflected in their handicrafts and folklore. Living in forested areas, they maintain a harmonious balance between nature and tradition while leading self-sustained lives through various handicraft practices. These handicrafts are essential for meeting community needs and serve multiple purposes, with many artisans now selling their creations to generate income. The essential materials for these crafts are sourced from forests and cultivated resources such as coconut trees, bamboo, and areca palms, with a strong emphasis on sustainability and avoiding plastic use.

The tribal communities of South Goa practice shifting cultivation, and growing various crops during the rainy season, which is vital for their daily livelihood. Additionally, agriculture, including the cultivation of coconut, areca nut, cashew, and other crops, is widespread in forested areas, with many people relying on shifting cultivation. While, the Forest Rights Act, of 2006 does not currently recognize shifting cultivation. Given that this practice is widely followed in South Goa, it is essential to include it within the Act's framework. Granting tribal communities rights over forest land and resources would allow them to benefit from government schemes. So that Tribal Communities secure their livelihood, and live with stability and dignity.

The tribal communities of Goa specially Gawda, Kunbi, and Velip have a profound cultural heritage firmly deep-seated in their folk dances, festivals, sacred groves, handicrafts, and traditional lifestyles. Their festivals, such as Shigmo, Dhalo, Dhillo, Sawsar Padyo, and Zagor, Are crucial in safeguarding their cultural identity. However, the celebration of these festivals is strongly connected to the availability of forest resources and land, as many rituals, dances, and traditions depend on forest products and sacred spaces within the natural environment. The recognition of Forest Rights and Land Rights under the Forest Rights Act (FRA) of 2006 is crucial to ensuring that these tribal communities can continue celebrating their festivals, preserving their cultural identity, and maintaining their connection with nature.

By granting land rights to tribal communities, the FRA safeguards the availability of forest resources, which are vital for their traditional practices, rituals, and livelihoods. The protection of sacred groves like Devrai and the other tribal worship places in the forest, where tribals worship and perform rituals, further highlights the need for legal recognition of their customary rights. Additionally, tribal handicrafts, which are deeply embedded in their cultural and economic life rely on natural resources like bamboo, coconut leaves, and tree bark. These crafts serve both daily necessities and as a vital source of income for many tribal artisans. Ensuring land and forest rights not only secures their economic and social wellbeing but also strengthens efforts to revive and safeguard their vibrant cultural traditions for future generations.. Recognizing these rights is not just about providing land it is about upholding the dignity, heritage, and sustainability of Goa's indigenous communities.

Festivals and folk dances are closely related to the forest areas and their resources. Some folk dances are based on materials brought from the forest; some festivals are performed by the tribal community entering into the forest for worship as well as celebration. These festivals and folk performances are held in sustainable ways that do not cause harm to the forest in which they take place, and follow innovative cultural and ecological cycles. Tribes also earn an income by growing a variety of plants in forest land. Under the Forest Rights Act, 2006, land and resource rights need to be extended to South Goa's tribal communities in order to protect their traditions and revive them. Obtaining these rights allows tribal communities to sustainably utilize forest resources, protect sacred groves, and continue cultural practices that are intricately connected with the forest ecosystem.

4: Protecting Goa's Tribal Folklore Through Strengthened FRA Implementation

Goa's tribal communities Gawda, Kunbi and Velip possess rich cultural customs that are deeply connected to the land and forests. To safeguard these traditions, it is crucial to ensure land rights for tribal people. But with growing interest from builders and companies in rural areas, along with forest lands not being recognized in the name of tribals, there is an urgent need to grant these lands to tribal communities according to the Forest Rights Act.

This is made much more urgent by the Supreme Court and Ministry for Environment, Forests and Climate Change (MoEF&CC) have directed Goa to establish eco-sensitive zones and tiger reserves. Before implementing such measures, it is essential to secure land rights for tribals, allowing them to protect their culture and traditions. Many tribal customs and livelihoods are tied to forest areas, but due to land insecurity and a lack of economic opportunities, people are

migrating to cities. Granting land rights to tribal communities will guarantee their continuous ties to their ancestral lands and aid in the preservation of their cultural heritage.

The Forest Rights Act of 2006, also known as the Scheduled Tribes and Other Traditional Forest Dwellers Act, recognizes the rights of tribal people and other forest-dwelling communities over forest resources. It is crucial to understand the historical relationship between forests and these communities, thus their life and sustenance are reliant on woods. In Goa, the tribal population makes up only 10.23% of the total population. The state has about 33% of its area covered by government forests, with 62% of this land set aside as national parks and wildlife sanctuaries, or protected areas. Additionally, there are private forests and plantations, contributing to a total 56.6% of the state's total land area is covered by forests and trees. The magnificent Western Ghats woods, which are home to six wildlife sanctuaries and one national park, are renowned for their varied flora and fauna, these forests are well protected under the Wildlife (Protection) Act of 1972. (Vijay M. Gawas, 2018,1019) Since independence, tribal people in Goa have faced ongoing issues such as land alienation, debt, forced relocation brought on by development projects, government control over non-timber forest products, and poor rehabilitation following eviction from their ancestral forest homes. The Scheduled Tribes and Other Traditional Forest Dwellers (Recognition of Forest Rights) Act of 2006 was created to address these problems by recognizing and recording the rights of Scheduled Tribes and forest dwellers in forests. This Act aims to verify and record the rights of Scheduled Tribes on During colonial times, forest land was not acknowledged (Bandi, 2013). Even after India's independence and Goa's liberation, Indigenous communities continue to face historical injustices and are often labeled as encroachers on forest land. However, due to the non-implementation of the Act by the state, tribal communities have been restricted from accessing forest produce in the areas where they live.

The implementation of the Forest Rights Act (FRA) 2006 in Goa began in 2012, driven by the efforts of the GAKUVED (Gawda, Kunbi, Velip, and Dhangar) organization. Through protests and petitions, they pushed for its enforcement, as many were unaware of the Act. According to the Times of India (July 27, 2012), former Tribal Minister Ramesh Tawadkar acknowledged Goa's slow progress compared to other states. With assistance from officials from Bangalore and Chhattisgarh, forest dwellers' committees were set up in four talukas, with plans to expand further. Tawadkar aimed to grant land rights by December 2013. Despite initial efforts, progress was slow and beneficiaries did not receive lands until 2019.

4.1: Boost in the Process of Implementation of the Forest Rights Act, 2006

In 2019, the Supreme Court judgment (W.P.(C) No. 000109-000109 – 2008) played a significant role in accelerating the implementation of the Forest Rights Act (FRA) in Goa. The court, after reviewing an affidavit filed by the State of Goa, noted that 6,094 claims had been submitted by Scheduled Tribes (STs) and 4,036 claims by Other Traditional Forest Dwellers (OTFDs). The court directed the Chief Secretary of Goa to submit an affidavit detailing the number of claims adjudicated, the finality of eviction orders, and whether evictions had been carried out. It also mandated the submission of a compliance report, which led to an increased focus on issuing sanads under the FRA. (Supreme Court of India. Writ Petition (Civil) No. 109/2008. Daily Orders, main.sci.gov.in/daily-order.)

Despite this push, the implementation remained slow. According to *The Times of India* (March 16, 2021), by 2021, only 46 land titles had been distributed out of the 10,136 claims filed by STs and OTFDs—less than 0.5% of the total claims. The process faced several challenges, including prolonged delays in claim processing across three levels of verification: the Gram Sabha, the Sub-Divisional Level Committee (SDLC), and the District Level Committee (DLC). The Forest Rights Committee (FRC) played a key role in conducting on-ground verifications alongside the Forest Department. In response to these delays, Chief Minister Pramod Sawant announced that the government would seek an extension of the Supreme Court's June 30 deadline for settling FRA claims and instructed officials to address the shortage of surveyors.

As reported by *The Navhind Times* on February 2, 2023, the State-Level Monitoring Committee (SLMC), led by the Chief Secretary, decided to introduce standard operating procedures (SOPs) to improve FRA implementation. Private members Upasso Gaonkar and Soiru Velip stressed the need to consider shifting cultivation in claim evaluations. The committee also reaffirmed that no official, including forest staff, could reject claims without conducting spot verification. Despite these measures, progress has been slow. As per *The Navhind Times* on February 2, 2023, 10,136 claims filed, only 485 beneficiaries that is just 4.78% have received land titles, while 5,411 claims have undergone spot verification. The SLMC rejected 45 claims, leading to demands for an appeals process.

Till now south goa is concerned As per the RTI (Mis Performa Status Report of Forest Rights Claims, Special Committee, January 2024) South Goa District has received the 7654 claims. 6048 of ST (SCHEDULE TRIBES) and Other Traditional Forest Dwellers 1606 claims. Out of these 402 Sanads given Tribal people they got 221.08 hectares land given under this Forest

Right Act in South Goa. (Mis Performa Status Report Of Forest Rights Claims, Special Committee, January 2024).

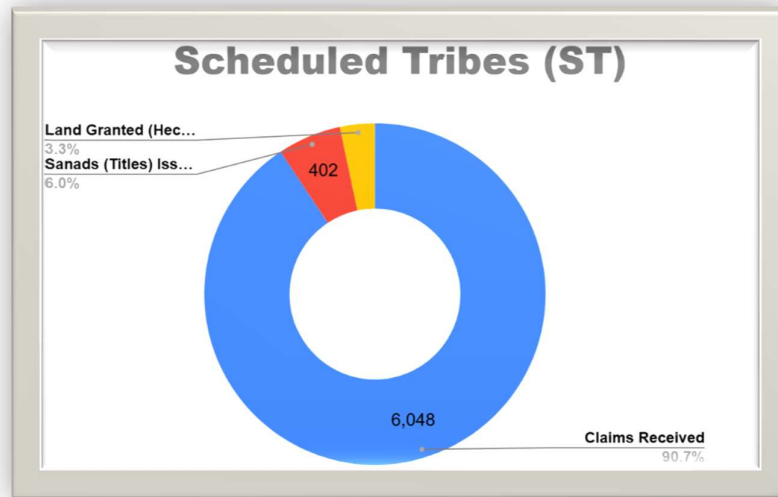


Figure – 1.1

(Mis Performa Status Report Of Forest Rights Claims, Special Committee, January 2024).

In South Goa, the tribal heartlands of Sanguem, Canacona, Ponda, Quepem, and Dharbandora are facing a quiet crisis. Currently, the success rate for land claims sits at a staggering 6.65%, with only 402 out of 6,048 claims approved. These talukas are more than just geographical areas; they are the soul of Goa's cultural heritage. They are the stage for ancient folk dances, songs, and festivals that have been performed under the forest canopy for centuries. Today, because of ongoing land disputes and forest restrictions, this heritage is at risk of fading away.

The Forest Rights Act (FRA) 2006 is the true lifeline for these communities. It's important to understand that the FRA isn't a permit to cut down trees; rather, it provides a path for sustainable growth and legal land ownership. By granting these rights, we allow the people who know the forest best to protect it while keeping their traditions alive. To ensure these vibrant cultures aren't lost to time, we must prioritize giving these communities the land rights they deserve. Securing their land is the only way to make sure their songs and stories reach the next generation.

5: Findings and Suggestion

This study highlights several critical findings regarding the implementation of the Forest Rights Act, 2006 (FRA) in South Goa. While a superficial 90% "yes" was the common answer to the survey question, "*Are you aware of the Forest Rights Act?*", the data reveals that most forest dwellers severely lack a comprehensive understanding of its actual provisions. This knowledge gap severely limits their ability to secure their land rights.

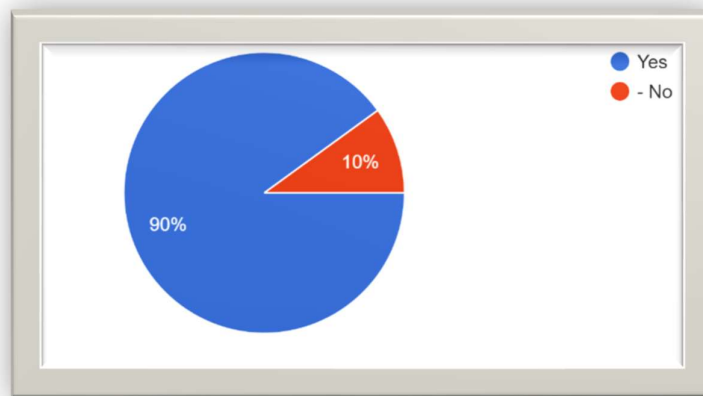


Figure- 1.2

Are you aware of the Forest Right Act 2006?

Alarming, even members of the Forest Rights Committees (FRCs) often do not know the exact legal procedures and remain heavily dependent on government officials to navigate the process. Consequently, there are major discrepancies in land allocations. For instance, in Nune village (Sanguem taluka) South Goa, survey responses showed that some individuals claimed 10,000 square meters of land but were granted only 1,000 square meters. Although the Act includes a provision to appeal or re-apply in such cases, the survey reveals that most applicants did not do so simply because they were unaware of their legal right to appeal.

Additionally, the responses indicate that a sluggish implementation process driven by bureaucratic inefficiencies and poor coordination between the Forest Department and local communities further hampers the realization of these rights. The role of individual bureaucrats is undeniably crucial here. This was clearly evident during the tenure of Ajay Gaude, the then-Deputy Collector of Sanguem. Hailing from the tribal community himself, his administrative

efficiency and cultural understanding significantly accelerated the distribution of land titles. However, the frequent transfer of such effective officials actively disrupts the process. Political interference plays a major role in these disruptions, as key bureaucrats are often transferred for political or electoral convenience, ultimately delaying justice for the tribal communities.

A deeper, systemic concern raised by this study is the denial of political reservation for Goa's Scheduled Tribes in the State Assembly. With very few ST Members of Legislative Assembly (MLAs) to voice their concerns, the community's political representation is critically weak. This strongly highlights the urgent need for political reservation for Goan tribal communities, ensuring they have the legislative power to advocate effectively, secure their rights under the FRA, and live with dignity.

Furthermore, the primary data collected shows a concerning lack of Community Forest Rights claims. The responses yielded only 40% community claims compared to individual ones. Because securing collective rights under the FRA ensures broader access to forest resources, tribal populations must be encouraged to apply collectively. Community claims not only simplify the bureaucratic procedure but also benefit the entire village rather than just isolated individuals, allowing these groups to strengthen their collective control over their traditional lands.

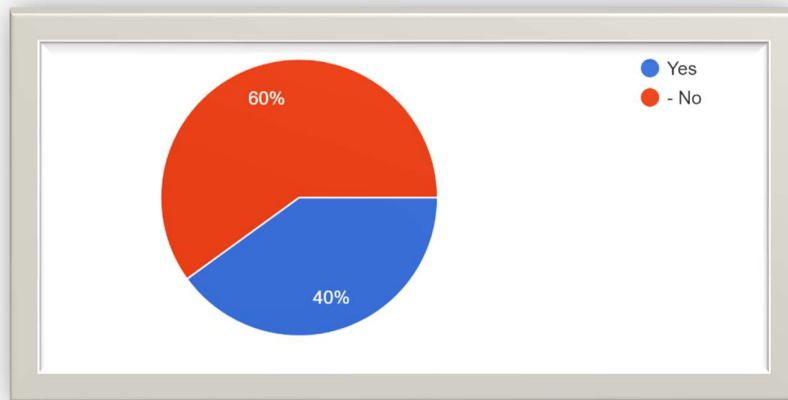


Figure -1.3

Have you filled community claims under the forest right act for forest land right?

Currently, most villagers rely entirely on the FRCs to handle their paperwork. In areas where the FRCs are inactive or uneducated on the law, claims simply remain pending indefinitely. Therefore, it is absolutely essential to conduct targeted capacity-building and training programs for both FRC members and the general community, empowering them to actively track and fight for their rightful claims.

5.1 : Recommendations and Pathways Forward

To resolve the challenges surrounding the Forest Rights Act (FRA), several targeted interventions are urgently required.

1. **Administrative and Bureaucratic Reforms** First, comprehensive awareness programs must be conducted to educate both tribal communities and government officials about the specific provisions of the FRA, ensuring the Act is utilized to its full potential. To accelerate the sluggish distribution of land titles, the government must streamline its decision-making processes. Crucially, administrative stability is needed retaining committed bureaucrats in key positions prevents the disruption of ongoing claims. Furthermore, deploying officials who themselves belong to tribal communities to tribal-dominated areas would ensure more empathetic governance, better representation, and a deeper, intuitive understanding of the community's actual needs.
2. **Political Representation and Grassroots Autonomy** At the policy level, granting political reservation to Goa's Scheduled Tribes is absolutely vital. It would strengthen their voice in the state legislature and ensure they are represented in the highest tiers of governance. At the grassroots level, findings indicate that while Article 244 of the Indian Constitution permits tribal villages in Schedule V areas to operate through self-governing institutions, this constitutional provision has been largely overlooked. Strengthening these decentralized, self-governing bodies is essential to safeguard tribal autonomy and preserve their unique cultural folklore.
3. **Promoting Community Rights and Traditional Livelihoods** To make the legal process smoother and more impactful, authorities should actively encourage tribal communities to file Community Forest Rights claims rather than just individual ones. Securing collective rights maximizes the benefits for the entire village. Additionally, traditional agricultural methods, such as shifting cultivation, must be legally recognized and protected under the FRA to secure the daily livelihoods of these communities.

4. Preserving Eco-Cultural Heritage - The cultural survival of these tribes including their local festivals and folk dances is inextricably linked to the forest ecosystem. Many rituals require specific materials brought from the forest, and several festivals involve entering the woods for worship. Historically, these communities have managed these practices through sustainable, innovative ecological cycles that honor and protect the forest without causing harm. Extending comprehensive land and resource rights under the FRA is the only way to protect these sacred groves and revive fading traditions.

5. Economic Empowerment and Self-Sufficiency Ultimately, the FRA is not just about land; it is about socio-economic survival. By securing firm rights over their traditional forests, tribal communities can engage in uninterrupted cultivation, ensuring long-term food security. Furthermore, access to the forest allows them to legally collect minor forest produce, which is used to create and sell traditional handicrafts. This dual avenue of agriculture and craftsmanship fosters true economic independence. Therefore, the effective and urgent implementation of the FRA remains the fundamental cornerstone for the social, economic, and cultural well-being of Goa's tribal populations.

6: Conclusion

The Gawda, Kunbi, and Velip communities carry the heartbeat of the land within them, as their identity, songs, and survival are deeply woven into the forest. For these families, the woods are far more than just a resource; they are a home and a sacred space where their history remains alive. However, this ancient way of life is under immense pressure from modernization, land encroachment, and the frustratingly slow implementation of the Forest Rights Act (FRA). While the FRA was designed to right historical wrongs by granting legal land rights, it has often been stalled by bureaucratic red tape and a lack of clear communication, leaving many feeling like strangers on their own ancestral soil.

To protect this rich heritage, we need a system that truly works for the people. Strengthening the FRA means cutting through the bureaucracy to ensure claims are processed fairly and empowering these communities to take an active role in managing their own land. It is a common misconception that the FRA is a license to clear forests; in reality, it is a vital lifeline for sustainability. It provides a legal foundation for these communities to grow without losing

their roots, allowing those who know the forest best to protect it. By securing these land rights, we are doing more than just settling a legal claim we are safeguarding the folklore, sacred groves, and sustainable practices that define a culture. Ultimately, ensuring these communities have a secure place to call home is the only way to make sure their vibrant songs and stories reach the next generation.

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