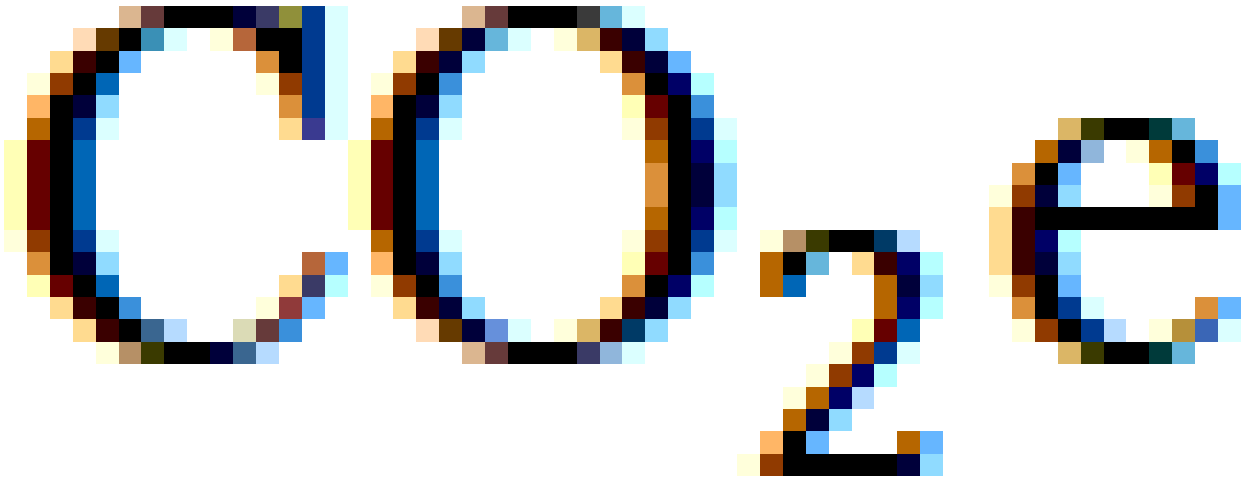
Chhattisgarh Forest Control Battle

Prelims : *Current events of National and International Importance*

Why in News?

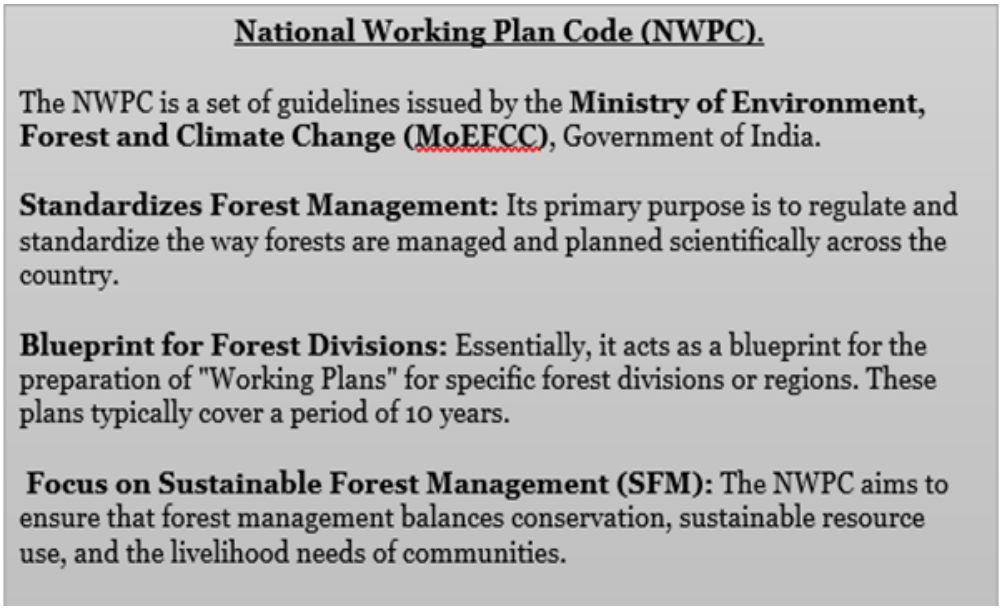
Recently, Chhattisgarh Forest department attempted to control over community forest management, contradicting the provisions of Forest Rights Act (FRA), 2006, leading to widespread protests.



- **Community Forest Resource Rights (CFRR) -** It is a transformative provision of the FRA, recognizes the right of gram sabhas to manage their customary forests.
- It seeks to rectify the injustices of colonial forest consolidation which dispossessed local communities and supplanted their traditional management institutions with centralised state control.
- **Issues with centralized control –** Chattisgarh Forest Department Attempting to declare itself the nodal agency for CFR management, usurping the role of Gram Sabhas.
- Gram Sabhas should follow a specific plan from Ministry of Tribal Affairs (MoTA).
- It means Gram Sabhas should follow the ***National Working Plan Code (NWPC).*** Thus, undermines local autonomy.
- **Prohibition -** It also prohibited other departments or NGOs from supporting gram sabhas in CFRR management planning.
- **Resistance -** Strong resistance from GS, local political representatives & Adivasi rights groups forced the forest department to retract its decision.
- The letter was withdrawn after a spirited grassroots mobilisation by gram sabhas,

local elected representatives, and Adivasi rights groups.

- **Historical context -** Forests under government control were traditionally managed through "working plans" rooted in colonial-era "scientific forestry."
- Aims to maximizing timber extraction by disregarding local ecosystems and community needs, leading to forest degradation and conflicts with forest-dwelling communities.
- **Challenges in FRA Implementation -** Despite over 10,000 GS receiving CFR titles nationwide, fewer than 1,000 have successfully developed their management plans due to persistent resistance from forest departments.
- **Dharti Aaba Janjatiya Gram Utkarsh Abhiyan** - A Central government program, offers a flexible framework for community forest management plans, which can be further improved.
- MoTA must firmly uphold the autonomy of GS under the FRA and resist pressures to impose NWPC on community forest management.
- Forest departments need to transit from timber-focused "scientific" approach to a people-centric forest management model, providing necessary financial and protective support to GS.



Reference

The Hindu | Future of forest governance

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