

The Scheduled Tribes and Other Traditional Forest Dwellers (Recognition of Forest Rights) Act, 2006

Prelims (GS - I) - Indian Polity and Governance-Constitution, Political System, Panchayati Raj, Public Policy, Rights Issues, etc.

Mains (GS - II & III) - GS II (Government policies and interventions for development in various sectors and issues arising out of their design and implementation) | GS III (Conservation, environmental pollution and degradation, environmental impact assessment)

Why in news?

Ahead of the Supreme Court hearing (April 2, 2025) on the Forest Rights Act (FRA), 2006, Adivasi rights groups and environmental organizations have urged the Tribal Affairs Ministry to defend the law.

- **Scheduled Tribes and Other Traditional Forest Dwellers (Recognition of Forest Rights) Act, 2006** - Also known as Forest Rights Act (FRA), 2006.
- The Act aims to *legally recognize and protect the rights of tribal communities* and other traditional forest dwellers over the forest land and resources they have traditionally used.
- **Key Provisions**
- **Individual Forest Rights (IFR)** - Land titles for cultivation/habitation.
- **Community Forest Rights (CFR)** - Rights over forest resources and management.
- **Gram Sabha's Role** - Primary authority to initiate and verify claims.
- **Legal challenges** - In 2008, Wildlife First, an NGO challenged the FRA in the Supreme Court, arguing that it led to forest encroachments.
- The court later ordered the eviction of people whose FRA claims were rejected (2019).
- After protests, the Tribal Affairs Ministry intervened, pointing out wrongful rejections due to procedural flaws.
- The SC stayed the eviction order and asked for a review of rejected claims.

Current Concerns

- **Improper Review of Rejected Claims** - States conducted arbitrary reviews, leading to repeated rejections.
- **Undermining Gram Sabhas** - Gram Sabhas (village councils), which are supposed to be key decision-makers under FRA, were side-lined in many cases.
- Higher authorities such as Sub-Divisional Level Committee (SDLC) overruled Gram Sabha approvals (e.g., Gujarat: 98% approved by Gram Sabhas, but only 62% accepted by SDLC).
- **Over-Reliance on Satellite Imagery** - States like Gujarat and Madhya Pradesh relied heavily on satellite images to verify claims *without ground verification*, leading

to wrongful rejections.

- The Tribal Affairs Ministry had raised concerns about *misuse of technology*, as it bypasses the FRA's evidence requirements (e.g., community records, historical proof).

Reference

[The Hindu | Forest Rights Act \(FRA\), 2006](#)

