

## Anti-Forest, Anti-forest dweller



- Minister of State for Environment, Forests and Climate Change informed Parliament that his Ministry has collected over ₹ 50,000 crore in a **Central compensatory afforestation fund (CAF)** and this is to be used through the Compensatory Afforestation Fund (CAF) Act, 2016 or CAF, a purported mechanism to offset forest loss.
- Before issuing forest clearances to a mine, dam or industry, the Ministry fixes a monetary value for the forest that is to be destroyed and collects this as **“compensation”**.
- The funds are to be then used to “afforest” alternative land.
- But the **present issue** is: The **Draft rules of CAMPA Act 2016** are in conflict with the provisions of the Forest Rights Act, 2006. There is conflict of Interest between Forest Rights Act and CAMPA, Act.

### **Concerns of CAF Act, 2016:**

- Greater powers in the **forest bureaucracy** than to resident tribals and Gram Sabha. The areas selected for improving the forests are coming are the areas of forest dwellers and Tribal lands.
- Official records show that 19.4 million hectares has been afforested by the forest department over the last decade but forest cover has barely increased.

- The possible **violation of tribal rights** under Forest Rights Act (FRA) 2006
- **Gram panchayats** not having the final say in deciding what kind of forests could be grown.
- Even though both the **Kanchan Chopra Committee** and the **IIFM Committee on Forest NPV** (value of loss of forest ecosystem) clearly mention that communities must be compensated for the loss of forests, the CAF bill is totally silent about their rights and compensation.
- Doubts on whether it would lead to an **ecologically-sustainable** replenishing of forests.
- A **2013 CAG report** noted that state forest departments lack the planning and implementation capacity to carry out compensatory afforestation and forest conservation. With the share of funds transferred to states increasing from 10% to 90%, effective utilisation of these funds will depend on the capacity of state forest departments.
- The CAF Act is a **deeply flawed piece of legislation** because it reduces their displacement, hardship and loss of livelihood and food sources to a **monetary value** — to be paid to the state. The law, and now its draft rules, spells further **capture of Adivasi lands** in the name of compensatory afforestation.

### **CAF Act Conflict with FRA,2006:**

- It gives unchecked powers to undertake plantations on private and common property resources.
- It will have poor ecological and social consequences as well as corruption, because powers are given to forest bureaucracy.
- There are no safeguards against the forest bureaucracy. Implementing compensatory plantations in dense forests, where FRA claims are pending or have to be filed are the major problems.

- The rules provide for only consultation with communities in the planning of compensatory afforestation.

Since the CAF Bill was floated, forest rights advocates report that over 2,500 gram sabhas across India have opposed it. But resource rights movements by Adivasi and forest-dwelling communities are marginal in our public discourse, except during momentous events like the recent Nashik-Mumbai march.

**Way Forward:**

The implementation of the **Forest Rights Act, 2006** has been opaque and there is serious lack of awareness about its provisions not only among the beneficiaries but also among the officials in charge of implementing it. Given the complaints from either side, it is time the government reviewed the law and also looked at the objections raised when it was first tabled as a bill.

**Infrastructure facilities** like road connectivity will improve the quality of life in tribal areas, in terms of quick access to health services, better education, and social service. Promotion of the local indigenous methods for the increase and promotion of the forests.

The **Inclusive Development of Tribals** in the areas like Promotion of Tribal Education like Ekalavya model of residential Schools, Promoting Minor Forest produce like Vanabandhu Kalyan Yojana, TRIFED etc. For the capacity building of the all round development of the tribes.