

Responsibilization in natural resource governance: Does responsibilization lead to better forest management under FRA? -Dr Sailaja Nandigama

Forest Rights Act (FRA), 2006 of India initiated a novel approach towards granting forest access rights to the deserving forest dependent communities of India. The process to accomplish this goal involves verification of the proofs of traditional, long-term, customary forest user rights- both at the individual household level as well as the local community level. The Act centers around the claims-making process that allows the forest dependent communities and the households to ascertain their forest user rights through the submission of appropriate set of proofs, as stipulated by the Act. It is mandatory for the claimants to take the responsibility of proving their historical usage of the forests. The ownership of the forestlands is in the hands of the local government and the forest departments, while only the user rights are granted to communities under FRA. Through our comparative case study, we observe that this responsibilization process is exclusionary in nature owing to the existing loopholes in the claim making process, that adversely affect the forest dependent communities' rights over their traditional livelihood sources. Additionally, the prospects of better forest management have been documented to be on the decline due to these exclusions.