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Title: Framing the institutional complexity in the Forest Rights Act's (FRA) implementation in India: Making sense of how FRA interacts with the other parallel forest management institutions.

Forest policy in India has served as a platform for institutional innovation for many decades since independence. Coupled with conservation and development goals, community based Forest Protection Committees (FPC) started functioning in large number during the early 90s and continued functioning till recently. This helped the local communities to gain livelihood security, visibility and social development along with access to the much needed forest resources. These community based participatory institutions aimed at facilitating better and sustainable livelihoods and conservation practices. These efforts established the FPCs as a strong parallel institutional set-up, next to the already existing local governance bodies, and the traditional norms and customary institutions around resource use and access, thereby allowing continuous and complex interaction among various marginalized and power-laden groups across forest dependent communities. This existing institutional bricolage of the forest dependent communities was further complicated through implementation of the Forest Rights Act (2006) across the country. FRA aimed at recognition of their forest rights (both individual and collective) of the forest dependent tribes and non-tribes people with a valid proof of cultivating the forest land for past 3 generations. The implementation of FRA is carried through designated Forest Rights Committees (FRC), with members of the local community working in liaison with various line department personnel such as the foresters, tribal development officials among the others.

This paper is based on an ongoing comparative qualitative case study within the Indian Council of Social Science Research (ICSSR) sponsored project (2017-19). In this paper we discuss the intricacy of the FRC functioning across 3 states of India (West Bengal, Gujarat and Telangana) to analyze the actual practices of institutional interaction at the ground level, and how the 'bricoleurs' (local actors) see these multiple institutions (as opportunities/challenges) while negotiating their forest based livelihoods. Our findings are indicating that given the complexity of institutional interactions, and the lack of clear-cut functional boundaries, the FRA implementation is losing-out its edge, resulting in dilution of its objective of providing legal property rights to the deserving forest dependent communities, indicating the need for ascribing a better responding functional boundaries to the FRCs.