



DAILY EDITORIAL ANALYSIS

TOPIC

**UNLOCKING AGRI POTENTIAL
OF FRA LANDS**

www.nextias.com

UNLOCKING AGRI POTENTIAL OF FRA LANDS

Context

- The potential of pulses and oilseeds cultivation on Forest Rights Act (FRA)-recognised lands can strengthen tribal livelihoods, promote climate-resilient agriculture and reduce India's dependence on edible oil imports.

Forest Rights Act, 2006

- The **Scheduled Tribes and Other Traditional Forest Dwellers (Recognition of Forest Rights) Act, 2006 (FRA)** aims to correct the historical injustice suffered by forest-dwelling communities by acknowledging their rights to the forest land and resources.
- Its key provisions include:
 - ♦ **Individual Forest Rights (IFR):** The recognition of the rights of individuals to forest land on which they are occupying it for the purpose of habitation or for their own cultivation, provided that statutory conditions are met.
 - ♦ **Community Forest Rights (CFR):** The recognition of the communities' rights regarding the use of their customary forest resources.
 - ♦ **Community Forest Resource Rights:** The rights of the community forest resources should include the recognition of the authority of the Gram Sabhas to protect, regenerate, conserve and manage the community's forest resources.
- Land recognition is the basis of livelihood security; yet its economic advantages rely on having access to water, the use of good agricultural inputs, institutional support and markets.

Current Status of Tribal Districts and Their Potential

- Tribal regions across **33 States and Union Territories** in India display considerable geographical, ecological and socioeconomic diversity.
- An assessment covering **244 tribal districts** identifies:
 - ♦ There are **60 districts** with substantial potential for oilseed production.
 - ♦ There are **31 districts** with a strong potential for pulse production.
 - ♦ There are **23 districts** having favourable conditions for both pulses and oilseeds.
- These districts indicate opportunities for targeted agricultural interventions, although potential does not automatically translate into higher production.
- The overlap between tribal and aspirational districts also makes agricultural development relevant to inclusive growth.

Productive Use of FRA-Recognised Lands

- **Pulses and Oilseeds:** These can be used to transform established land rights into more productive and profitable sources of livelihood. The possible advantages are:
 - ♦ **Climate Resilience:** Several varieties are capable of growing under rain-fed conditions and therefore are appropriate for certain areas where irrigation is limited.
 - ♦ **Income Diversification:** By growing appropriate pulses and oilseeds it is possible to decrease reliance on a single crop and thus diversify farm income.
 - ♦ **Nutritional Security:** Pulses offer a plant source of protein, and oilseeds are important for the production of edible oil.
 - ♦ **Import Substitution:** Improving the productivity of oilseeds produced at home can help reduce India's need to import edible oils.
 - ♦ **Sustainable Agriculture:** Sustainable agriculture can lead to better efficiency in the use of resources if crop rotation, intercropping and conservation of soil moisture are adapted to local conditions.
- However, crop selection needs to consider soil fertility, rainfall, water availability and the suitability of individual varieties.

Regional Diversity and Untapped Agricultural Potential

- An analysis based on information from the **Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) soil map** indicates that some of the tribal areas have conditions suitable for growing crops such as soybean, groundnut, sunflower, mustard and chickpea.
- Existing cropping patterns further illustrate regional diversity:
 - ♦ **Kharif:** In many tribal areas paddy and maize are important.
 - ♦ **Rabi:** Wheat, gram, mustard, lentil and other pulses are important.
 - ♦ **Crops grown in other regions**, such as millets, cotton, sesame, spices and horticultural crops, are in keeping with the local agro-ecological conditions and provide possibilities for diversifying crops.
- A uniform national cropping policy would therefore be unsuitable and measures should take into account local farming systems, traditional knowledge, the preferences of the community and the ecological conditions.

Challenges and Concerns

- **Limited Resources:** Crop yields can be restricted by poor soil fertility, inadequate irrigation, and low moisture retention.
- **Input Gaps:** There are input gaps since farmers do not have timely access to certified seeds, better varieties and scientific farming methods.
- **Weak Market Infrastructure:** There are insufficient storage, drying, grading and processing facilities, which in turn lead to greater post-harvest losses.
- **Institutional Barriers:** Farmers have limited access to extension services, affordable credit, insurance, and opportunities for collective marketing, which in turn affects their ability to make investments in their farms.
- **Environmental Risks:** There are environmental risks involved in selecting inappropriate crops and in using too much water or chemical inputs.
- **Regional Disparities:** The situation varies from region to region because of differences in the landscape, the way settlements are distributed, and the amount of resources available and this calls for solutions that are specific to each location.

Related Government Initiatives

- **Pradhan Mantri Krishi Sinchayee Yojana (PMKSY):** Supports irrigation development and water-use efficiency.
- **National Food Security Mission (NFSM):** Promotes agricultural production and productivity, including pulses under the relevant programme components.
- **National Mission on Edible Oils:** Supports domestic edible-oil production through initiatives covering oilseeds and, under separate components, oil palm.
- **Pradhan Mantri Annadata Aay Sanrakshan Abhiyan (PM-AASHA):** Provides mechanisms to support farmers' prices under applicable guidelines.
- **Van Dhan Yojana:** Promotes tribal livelihoods through value addition and marketing of forest produce.
 - ♦ Convergence with these initiatives can strengthen livelihood opportunities, subject to scheme eligibility and implementation guidelines.

Way Forward: A Region-Specific Development Strategy

- **Develop Crop Clusters:** Identify high-potential tribal districts and promote crops suited to local agro-climatic conditions.
- **Improve Farm Productivity:** Ensure timely access to quality seeds, soil testing, watershed development, appropriate irrigation and agricultural extension.
- **Strengthen Community Institutions:** Empower Gram Sabhas, Farmer Producer Organisations (FPOs), cooperatives and self-help groups to aggregate produce, undertake value addition and improve bargaining power.

- **Build Local Infrastructure:** Establish suitable drying, storage, grading and primary-processing facilities to reduce losses.
- **Improve Market Access:** Expand institutional credit, crop insurance, market linkages and access to procurement mechanisms wherever applicable.
- **Promote Scientific Planning:** Use GIS-based crop suitability mapping alongside traditional knowledge, participatory planning and climate-resilient farming practices.

Conclusion

- The journey from forest rights to livelihood security begins, rather than ends, with land recognition.
- Linking FRA-recognised lands with suitable pulses and oilseeds, supported by sustainable resource management, community institutions and better market access, can strengthen tribal incomes, ecological resilience and India's food and nutritional security.

Source: TH

Daily Mains Practice Question

- [Q] Discuss how pulses and oilseeds cultivation on FRA-recognised lands can promote sustainable agriculture and improve tribal livelihoods.

