

# MADRAS SCHOOL OF SOCIAL WORK CENTRE FOR SOCIAL JUSTICE AND EQUITY

(Established by the Adi Dravidar and Tribal Welfare Department, Tamil Nadu)



# NEWSLETTER

NOVEMBER - DECEMBER

| 2023

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Centre for Social Justice and Equity (CSJE) at MSSW, Chennai, engaged in intensive research and field work during November–December 2023, anchored by two flagship undertakings: a pilot study on Forest Rights Act (FRA) implementation in Erode district, and a government-commissioned Habitation Survey of Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups (PVTGs). November was devoted to building civil society partnerships through NGO orientations, expert consultations with Dr. Dushar Mehta and C.R. Bijoy, an FRA Roadmap Workshop, a civil society consultation in Trichy, and a transformative three-day field visit to Erode's tribal hill ranges.



December was defined by the large-scale PVTG habitation survey – finalised at the Secretariat on 8 December and launched across 14 districts on 11 December – with all CSJE researchers deployed as district nodal officers coordinating hundreds of enumerators from colleges, tribal schools, and NGOs. Despite technical and logistical challenges, the team completed over 2,136 habitations. Complementary activities – the SDLC meeting observation in Talavadi and student-supported survey in Thiruvannamalai – reinforced the Centre's ground-level commitment, firmly establishing CSJE as a key institutional partner in tribal rights research and policy in Tamil Nadu.

The NGO Orientation Meeting was successfully convened on 6 November 2023 at MSSW, bringing together a cohort of empanelled non-governmental organisations to formally engage with the Centre for Social Justice and Equity's ongoing research initiatives. Originally scheduled for an earlier date, the meeting was designed to introduce CSJE's programme objectives and explore pathways for collaborative field-level partnerships across Tamil Nadu.

Prof. Antony Stephen led the orientation, presenting the scope of the Centre's work – particularly the Forest Rights Act implementation study and the broader tribal welfare research agenda – and outlined the various ways community-based organisations could contribute as field partners, co-investigators, or regional resource networks in upcoming activities.

The meeting drew a notably enthusiastic response. Participating NGOs expressed strong and genuine interest in working alongside MSSW, recognising the Centre's academic credibility and on-ground commitment to tribal communities. Several organisations indicated readiness to facilitate community access, share local knowledge, and mobilise grassroots networks within their operational areas. This orientation proved foundational, as the relationships established on 6 November directly supported the civil society consultation in Trichy and the large-scale PVTG survey conducted in December.



## NGO Orientation Meeting

**Directorate of Tribal Welfare , Govt. of Tamil Nadu**  
In collaboration with Centre for Social Justice and Equity ( CSJE ) , Madras School of Social Work.

**One day Orientation on Livelihood Projects for Empanelled NGOs.**  
**Date :** 6<sup>th</sup> Nov. 2023      **Venue :** Hall of Fame , MSSW .  
**Time :** 4 pm .to 7 pm

S.No	Session	Person concerned.
1	Welcome	Dr.S.Raja Samuel Principal , MSSW
2	Need for Empanelment and expectations from NGOs.	C.Anna Durai, CLS Director , Tribal Welfare Directorate
3	Key note Address	Ms.C.Laxmi Priya IAS Secretary, Department of Adi Dravidar and Tribal Development Government of TamilNadu.
4	<b>Session One</b> Role of start up TN AND Start up Eco System in Tamil Nadu.	J.Stalin Jabob Associate Vice President, Start Up TN
4	<b>Session Two</b> TN SC/ST Start up Fund	R.M.J.Ramajeyam Project Lead, Start Up TN.
5	Introducing NGOs and their work on livelihood initiatives with Tribal communities in their working areas.	Prof.M.Antony stephen Assistant Professor cum Program Coordinator , CSJE, MSSW
5	<b>Session Three</b> Opportunities and way forward for sustainable Livelihood development among tribal communities.	S.Ponvaithyanathan Consultant Directorate of Tribal Welfare, Govt. of Tamil Nadu.
6	Vote of Thanks	Ms.Priya Chitra Project Assistant CSJE,MSSW.

**DIRECTORATE TRIBAL WELFARE**  
GOVERNMENT OF TAMIL NADU  
IN COLLABORATION WITH  
**CENTRE FOR SOCIAL JUSTICE AND EQUITY**  
MADRAS SCHOOL OF SOCIAL WORK

CORDIALLY INVITES YOU TO PARTICIPATE IN THE  
**ONE-DAY ORIENTATION SESSION ON**  
**LIVELIHOOD PROJECTS FOR EMPANELLED NGOS.**

**INAUGURAL ADDRESS**  
**Ms. G. Laxmi Priya IAS**  
Secretary,  
Adi Dravidar and Tribal Welfare Department, GoTN

**KEY NOTE ADDRESS**  
**Thiru S. Annadurai, CLS**  
Director  
Directorate Tribal Welfare, GoTN

**FELICITATION**  
**Dr. S. Raja Samuel**  
Principal - MSSW

**Date & Time: 06-11-2023 (4PM – 7PM)**  
**Venue: Hall of Fame - MSSW**



On 8 November 2023, the CSJE team participated in an online consultation meeting with Dr. Dushar Mehta, a specialist whose expertise is relevant to the Centre's tribal and forest rights research. The session was coordinated by the team and held via Google Meet.

The meeting served as an academic consultation on research methodology and thematic directions for the Centre's ongoing work, including the Forest Rights Act study and the emerging plans for a nomadic tribes research framework. Dr. Mehta's engagement brought an external scholarly perspective that helped the team sharpen its analytical lens and programme design. In parallel, this period also saw the team engage with geo-spatial methodologies for studying nomadic tribes. The team shared C.R. Bijoy's write-up published in The Hindu, which examined the complexity of Community Forest Resource rights under FRA and the inter-departmental challenges that hinder effective implementation. This article served as a critical reference point for the team's research planning and was circulated to all members for reading and discussion. Together, these engagements on 8 November oriented the team towards a more data-informed, spatially aware approach to understanding tribal habitation and rights landscapes in Tamil Nadu – a direction that would later feed directly into the PVTG survey design and FRA field studies.

## Online Consultation – Meeting with Dr. Dushar Mehta & Geo-spatial Analysis of Nomadic Tribes



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### FRA Roadmap Workshop – MSSW Chennai

On 16 November 2023, the Centre for Social Justice and Equity organised a full-day programme titled 'Roadmap for Mission of Implementing FRA, 2006 in Tamil Nadu: Approaches, Activities and Architectures' at MSSW, bringing together field experts, resource persons, and practitioners with deep experience in Forest Rights Act implementation across Tamil Nadu. The programme was conceived as a strategic planning exercise to map practical pathways for FRA implementation – drawing on legal frameworks, community experiences, and administrative challenges. Three key resource persons contributed substantively to the day's discussions, which combined presentations, group exercises, and open dialogue to build a consensus roadmap.

Key thematic areas included the status of individual and community forest rights claims, the role of Gram Sabhas, challenges of documentation and recognition by revenue and forest departments, and the need for convergence across tribal welfare, forest, and revenue administrations. Evidence-based advocacy and the importance of field-level data for policy dialogue were also discussed. Despite some team members being unavailable, those present – including Prof. Antony Stephen – ensured robust engagement with field supporters. Plans were made for detailed field visit schedules, making this workshop a direct precursor to the Erode pilot study and a foundational event in CSJE's FRA research trajectory.



## Civil Society Consultation – Bharathidasan University, Trichy

The three-day FRA pilot field visit to Erode district from 27 to 29 November 2023 marked the CSJE team's first direct immersion into tribal habitations for the Forest Rights Act implementation study. Erode's three major hill ranges – Thalavadi (27 Nov), Kadambur (28 Nov), and Bargur (29 Nov) – together host 120 tribal settlements, making them a representative sample of the diversity of FRA contexts in Tamil Nadu.

The field visit was structured around three analytically distinct categories of FRA status: communities that have successfully received land title deeds (patta), those that have submitted claims under individual or community forest rights but are awaiting decisions, and those that have yet to initiate the claims process at all. This typology guided the team's interactions and ensured a comparative, evidence-based understanding of implementation barriers at different stages.

The team met with village communities, local forest officials (including the DFO of Sathyamangalam Tiger Reserve), Block Development Officers, the Special Tahasildar of Sathyamangalam, and most significantly, the veteran tribal rights activist and researcher V.P. Gunasekaran – a figure whose three decades of work with Sholagar and Oorali communities in Erode has been foundational to the region's FRA movement. Steffan Ajay of WWF, who works on FRA alongside Gunasekaran, also participated.

The team stayed at the Bannariamman Institute of Technology guesthouse in Sathyamangalam, arranged through the Special Tahasildar's facilitation. The visit generated rich field notes and direct community testimonies, and identified three specific villages – Nagalur (Kadambur), Pejaletti (Thalavadi), and Cholakkanai (Bargur) – as key study sites for deeper research. The learnings from this visit directly shaped the CSJE's subsequent FRA action plan.



On 11 December, the PVTG Habitation Survey was launched across 14 districts, with all CSJE researchers deployed as district nodal officers. A video conference with the Tribal Directorate, led by Mr. Saravanan, oriented teams on the survey application and data entry protocols. District assignments included Dr. Ilavarasi (Villupuram, Cuddalore), Ms. Suseendhira (Nilgiris, Coimbatore), Prof. Antony Stephen (Ariyalur, Dharmapuri), Ms. Priyachitra (Chengalpattu, Kancheepuram, Thiruvallur), Mr. Ramkumar (Thiruvannamalai, Krishnagiri), and Mr. Sankara Pandi (Vellore, Ranipet). Simultaneously, an internal meeting at MSSW addressed the FRA pilot study work plan, questionnaire finalisation, and financial settlement of the Erode pilot study.



### PVTG Survey – All Districts



The Madras School of Social Work (MSSW), founded by Mary Clubwala Jadhav in 1952, is one of India's premier institutions for social work education and research. It stands as the first social work institution in South India. Located in Chennai, Tamil Nadu, MSSW is a NAAC-accredited autonomous institution committed to fostering social justice, community development, and inclusive welfare through quality education and collaborative research.



The Centre for Social Justice and Equity (CSJE) at MSSW was established under the financial grant-in-aid of the Adi Dravidar and Tribal Welfare Department, Government of Tamil Nadu, vide G.O. (MS) No. 87 dated 12 July 2023. The Centre was formally inaugurated by the Honourable Minister N. Kayalvizhi, Adi Dravidar and Tribal Welfare, on 16 August 2023, marking a significant step towards advancing research, advocacy, and policy support for tribal and marginalised communities in Tamil Nadu.

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