
PRESS RELEASE

NCST and BRLF sign MoU to strengthen tribal rights and livelihoods

The NCST and BRLF have signed a three-year agreement to strengthen tribal rights and livelihoods in Scheduled Areas. The pact pairs the Commission's constitutional oversight with BRLF's reach across more than 13 lakh tribal and rural households. Both sides will jointly monitor laws such as the FRA and PESA, conduct field research, and build capacity on the ground.

New Delhi, June 16, 2026 — The National Commission for Scheduled Tribes (NCST) and the Bharat Rural Livelihoods Foundation (BRLF) on Tuesday signed a Memorandum of Understanding to work together on safeguarding tribal rights and improving livelihoods in Scheduled Areas, bringing the country's constitutional watchdog for tribal affairs into a structured partnership with one of its largest grassroots development bodies.

The agreement, signed at the office of the Secretary, NCST, in New Delhi, sets out a three-year framework for joint work on research, knowledge sharing and capacity building, with a particular focus on the implementation of the Forest Rights Act (FRA) and the Panchayats (Extension to Scheduled Areas) Act, or PESA — two laws widely seen as central to tribal self-governance and resource rights.

Under the pact, the two institutions will jointly design monitoring frameworks for government programmes in tribal areas, conduct field-based research, organise consultations and workshops, and develop training materials for government officials, civil society organisations and community institutions such as Gram Sabhas. The MoU is non-financial and non-binding, with each side meeting its own costs and specific activities to be agreed through annual work plans.

The collaboration pairs two bodies with very different vantage points. The NCST is a constitutional body established in 2004 under Article 338A of the Constitution, mandated to investigate and monitor safeguards for Scheduled Tribes and to advise the government on their development. BRLF, established by the Union Cabinet in 2013 and registered with the Ministry of Rural Development, works through civil society partners across the Central Indian Tribal Belt. It currently reaches more than 13 lakh households across 11 states — of which over 9 lakh are tribal households — in 117 districts, 385 blocks and 23,204 villages.

Officials say the arrangement is intended to close a long-standing gap between policy oversight and field realities, allowing the Commission's recommendations to be informed by ground-level evidence while keeping development work aligned with constitutional safeguards.

Shri Antar Singh Arya, Hon'ble Chairperson of the NCST, said the partnership would sharpen the Commission's ability to act on what is actually happening on the ground. "Our constitutional duty is to ensure that the rights and safeguards guaranteed to Scheduled Tribes are not merely on paper but are realised in every village," he said. "Reliable evidence from the field is essential to that task. Working with BRLF, we expect to strengthen the monitoring of laws such as the FRA and PESA, and to ensure that the voices of Gram Sabhas and tribal communities reach the institutions meant to protect them."

Shri Kuldip Singh, Chief Executive Officer of BRLF, said the agreement gave the Foundation's field experience a direct line to constitutional oversight. "A large majority of the households we work with are tribal, and we see every day how implementation succeeds or falls short," he said. "This partnership lets us bring that experience to the Commission's attention and connect rights with livelihoods. Constitutional safeguards and economic opportunity are not separate goals — for tribal communities, they reinforce one another, and this MoU is a step towards delivering both."

The MoU provides for a Joint Coordination Group, drawn from both institutions, to approve work plans, review progress and meet at least twice a year. Research and knowledge products prepared for the Commission's reports to the President of India will rest with the NCST, while jointly developed material intended for the public domain will be shared, with due acknowledgement to both sides.

The agreement runs for three years and may be extended by mutual consent.

About the National Commission for Scheduled Tribes: The National Commission for Scheduled Tribes is a constitutional body established on February 19, 2004, under Article 338A of the Constitution of India to safeguard the rights and interests of Scheduled Tribes and to monitor the implementation of constitutional and legal protections.

About BRLF: The Bharat Rural Livelihoods Foundation is an autonomous society established by a Union Cabinet decision in 2013 under the Ministry of Rural Development, Government of India. It works in partnership with civil society organisations, community institutions and state governments to strengthen livelihoods in tribal and vulnerable communities, primarily across the Central Indian Tribal Belt.

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