

Tribal and Forest Development

Dr Naresh C. Saxena, a career civil servant with the Government of India, made a presentation at UNIFEM's (part of UN Women) inaugural session of the Gender Colloquium. He discussed the issues related to the indigenous people (commonly known as tribals) of India and their deep connection to the issue of forest development.

Dr. Saxena spoke extensively on what are some of the major concerns of the tribals:

- lack of access to forest land and resources;
- the very low levels of literacy especially among tribal women as a result of which they are unable to make use of employment schemes which in turn affects their livelihoods;
- government initiatives have been 'soft' on tribal issues and tribal development acts have not been rigorously implemented;
- there is a major issue of displacement of tribals especially in Central India because of deforestation;



In conclusion, Dr Saxena mentioned that thus far government ministries had been scheme oriented, but need to be more people oriented in order to achieve effective implementation of programmes for tribal development and welfare. He suggested that the Panchayat Extension to Scheduled Areas (PESA) Act can be used positively and work needs to be done to understand how the Act can be used to help the tribals.

UNIFEM can play a critical role in advocacy over the issue of why welfare programmes were not reaching the tribal population?