Protecting the Rights and Livelihoods of
Indian Forest Dwelling Communities

In the Indian states of Odisha and Jharkhand, Cadasta Foundation is working in partnership with the local non-profit organization **Professional Assistance for Development Action (PRADAN)** to strengthen the livelihoods of marginalized forest-dwelling communities.

Indian forest dwelling communities rely on having access to forests for their food, resources, and livelihoods. However, many of the forest communities do not know exactly which land belongs to whom nor where the exact village boundaries lie. This lack of clarity has created discrepancies in land rights and use.

Through the Recognition of Forest Rights Act of 2006 and the Community Forest Resources Rights (CFRR), PRADAN works with eligible local communities to apply for government recognition of rights to forest reserves. PRADAN began working with Cadasta in 2017 to map and demarcate agreed-upon forest boundaries to develop a system of protection for the community forest areas.

Using the data collected with Cadasta's mobile tools and geospatial platform, two communities have received government-recognized Community Forest Rights, allowing them to develop their own land use and management plans, governance processes, and local mechanisms for forest protection. Furthermore, over 700 individuals have now received government-recognized Individual Forest Rights (IFRs).

Cadasta was selected as a recipient of the United Nations International Fund for Agriculture Development (IFAD) **Innovation Grant Program** to scale and continue to provide services for mapping indigenous peoples' and local communities' land in Jharkhand and Odisha States with PRADAN.

With the IFAD grant, Cadasta staff worked with PRADAN in Baliguda Block, Kandhamal District to provide training and data collection support prior to completion of the work in three additional villages in Odisha and Jharkhand. Together, we expanded from 1,400 to 7,200 project participants, as well as the number of individuals trained in collecting land use data in vulnerable communities.

Preliminary results from a third-party assessment show that 95 percent of project data collectors reported that they would not be able to find a good alternative to Cadasta's tools, suggesting that Cadasta is providing a much-needed service in these rural areas of operation. Furthermore, data collectors also reported that the tools were easy to learn and use and improved the efficiency of their work and their workflow processes.

When asked to reflect on their experiences using Cadasta's tools for data collection, the respondents stated;

"Whoever has invented Cadasta has been a huge help. A lot of people from our side are not educated. But with this, people are able to calculate easily without much work. It takes less time and does more work. The accuracy of my work has increased a lot... The efficiency of my work has increased. My interest in helping people has also increased."

"My workflow and process has improved because I used to do the chain system. It was slow and inaccurate...The efficiency has improved a lot for me. Now when I reach the plot, with one click, I get all the details.."

"When I was using WayPoint, sometimes I used to forget the names and certain data was left out. In Cadasta, everything gets saved. This has made things easier for me."

"The workflow has improved because Cadasta is faster. In GPS, sometimes we were not able to view latitudes and longitudes. But in Cadasta, this problem does not happen. We just set the location names and keep going accordingly and finally press the 'send' button. This saves a lot of time and is faster."

"We had not earned our livelihood through any other means before this. It is through this app that we are earning our livelihood. That is why I would give it a 10."

Dinabandhu Malik

Dinabandhu lives in Odisha state's Jaikikia forest village with his family of seven. Like many in the village, he uses his land to farm and cultivate crops. He has a title for the three and a half acres of land that he owns.

However, Dinabandhu's challenge is that his title is not geospatially referenced, so he does not know which piece of land his title covers. In his village, as in many across India, there is a lack of clarity around who owns which plots of land and how much land is available to each land owner under their current titles. Additionally, there is a lot of uncertainty among farmers in the village on whether they have an available title for land currently being cultivated.

To bring clarity and transparency to the process, PRADAN and the Cadasta team are working to help landowners like Dinabandhu identify and document their specific plots. This is critical to help the village families secure their tenure and maximize the use of the land to support their families.

Dinabandhu described the process, saying:
"Once we measure the land, demarcate the land, and get the total area, we can identify [the plot boundaries]. Then we will be able to know how much land is available for cultivation."

Clarification of land ownership and increased land documentation will alleviate concerns of land insecurity for Dinabandhu and his family while increasing their agricultural crop yields.

Describing the project impact on his life, Dinabandhu expresses a driving motivation for many Indian families to formalize land rights for their childrens' inheritance, **"It is good because I also have a son and daughter. So it's good."**