

Maharashtra chief secretary sells first bag of tendu leaves

Vijay Pinjarkar, TNN May 22, 2013, 05.56PM IST

NAGPUR: It was a fabulous occasion for gram sabhas of 12 tribal dominated villages in Armori and Gadchiroli when Maharashtra chief secretary Jayant Kumar Bantia handed over first bag of tendu leaves, procured by the tribals under Forest Rights Act, 2006, to the Tribal Corporation.

In April 2011, Mendha (Lekha) in Gadchiroli became the first village to sell bamboo under community forest rights (CFR). Now 18 gram sabhas turned out to be the first in the country to sell tendu patta under CFR.

On May 18, a group of gram sabhas including Naroti Chak, Tembha Chak, Kurundi Mal, Kurundi Chak, Dongartamashi, Mendha, Kukadi, Mohatola, Maregaon, Chambharda, Moushi Chak, and Naroti Mal took control over community forests under FRA and started managing collection and sale of tendu leaves for this season.

These gram sabhas have completed their target of 55% out of estimated yield of 2,700 standard bags of tendu leaves. At a colourful function held at Naroti-Chak, Bantia handed over first bag of tendu leaves to purchaser state tribal development corporation. Chairman of group of gram sabhas Giridhar Kumare, principal secretary (forests) Praveen Pardeshi, facilitator NGO Vidarbha nature conservation society (VNCS) Dilip Gode were present.

Bantia lauded efforts of the gram sabhas in managing affairs of tendu leaves by becoming its absolute owners. He emphasised the need for

managing various forest produce, so that sustainable livelihoods could be generated locally.

"This would not only add to better protection of resources but also improve economic condition of the poorest of the poor in the tribal belt," said Banthia. He assured of government's support to the gram sabhas for proper marketing of forest produce and handholding.

Pardeshi said that the government would play a proactive role in making gram sabhas self-reliant in dealing with collection and marketing of forest produce. He appreciated the joint and collaborative role of NGOs, forest, revenue and tribal departments for scripting Narati Chak's success.

Gode, who facilitated entire process, said it was the result of long struggle of villagers to gain community rights over natural resources. He said entire transaction will fetch Rs 1 to 1.2 crore. In return people protected the forest areas from fires and illicit felling in the last six years.

The villagers vowed to utilize money from tendu leaves sale to address forest, water soil and moisture conservation, creating local business based on non-timber forest produce, fisheries and value addition to the medicinal herbs.