

Story of Gramsabha Mendha (Lekha) -

Community Driven Forest Based Sustainable Development

This is the unique story of the village Mendha (Lekha) in Dhanora Tehsil of Gadchiroli district in Maharashtra. A small 100% tribal village of 105 families and 550 population is making pioneering efforts in Forest conservation and management of forest produce. The village Gramsabha is supreme and implements all the acts on its own for the development.

Background:

All the decisions pertaining to village are taken by GS members, all the adult men and women in the village, collectively through consensus. Decentralised governance is achieved through active Mohallasabhas and vibrant 'Study group' in each wards. Every person contributes 10% of his/her income in cash to Village Fund. Each family contributes 2.5% of its produce in the Grain Bank. A team of youth has acquired technical skills to become 'Barefoot Engineers' to implement MNREGA through Gramsabha. Village is involved in Joint Forest Management Programme from 1992, protecting 1809.61 hectares of forest, within 5 compartments. Members from 4 families do the forest patrolling every day and record the observations. 80% households use Deenbandhu biogas plant for clean cooking. A women's Self-help group is running Fair Price Shop and Kerosene shop. A women's SHG is managing 'GittiKhadan' and Brick production also. SHG of youth is involved in non-destructive honey collection and recently started a Honey Processing Unit. Youth SHG has taken up Bamboo Value addition activity. Various machines and tools are being used for quality production. Gramsabha has established Computer training centre with audio-visual aids through its 'Village Fund'. Youth group is trained in Video shooting, script writing and editing. It has made short clips on Honey, Bamboo Struggle, Biodiversity mapping etc.

Forest Resource & MFP Management :

Mendha (Lekha) is one of the first villages in the country to secure Community Forest Rights over 1809.61 ha under Forest Rights Act 2006 on 28th August 2009. Records of rights were handed over to Gramsabha on 15th Dec. 2009 by Governor of State.

The people of Mendha (Lekha) deeply involved in Forest conservation for many decades, were equipped with holistic rights to manage forest in real sense. They had already prepared Micro plan, Biodiversity Register before. Now the study groups on different aspects were formed to develop 'Community Forest Management Plan'. To execute the roles assigned under Section(5) of FRA, GS evolved various rules and regulations also. Sustainable harvesting plan for forest produce was prepared. Convergence of NRM schemes of various departments was started. Effective MGNREGA implementation was taken up by GS as Agency under the guidance of revenue & forest dept.

Gramsabha made systematic efforts to exercise rights over MFP. Major MFP Bamboo was liberated for the communities when on 27th April 2011, then MoEF Minister and CM arrived in Mendha (Lekha) and handed over Transit Pass Book to Gramsabha. Then as per the working plan, execution done in Compartment No.471 having Bamboo Area of 220ha. All 100 families in village were involved in cutting of 90,000 bamboos and earned min.Rs.4,000 to max.Rs.20,000. Rate of Rs.23/- per pole was fixed through negotiation with Purchaser. Labour charges – Rs.9/- given per bamboo and remaining amount Rs.14/- deposited in 'GramsabhaKosh'. Total amount of Rs.8, 07,894/- distributed as labor charges while Rs.12,56,724/- deposited as 'GramsabhaNidhi (GN)' in Gramsabha account at SBI, Branch Dhanora. GS decided that 50% amount in GN will be used for Forest Conservation &Development, 50% would be utilized for community based innovative development projects. All the youth handled financial activity of Rs.21,96,274/-. The accounts have been kept accurately & transparently. Gramsabha also made legal registrations like PAN, TAN, VAT etc. & all the compliances were made in time.

In the next year 2011-2012, Gramsabha formed more 'Study Groups' to make MFP management more efficient. As per the working plan, bamboo harvested from Compartment No.468 and 470 having Total Bamboo Area of 685ha. For the first time, Tenders invited vide Notice published in 2 leading newspapers. Tenders were opened on 14th September 2011 in Gramsabha at Mendha (Lekha). GS sanctioned tender for Rs.8151/- per notional tonne for long bamboo (Rs.33 per pole), Rs.6000/- per NT for medium bamboo (Rs.16 per pole) and Rs.2100/- per NT for bamboo bundles.

In all 432 people from 32 villages were involved in harvesting, earned min.Rs.4,000 to max.Rs.40,000. Total quantity of Bamboo extracted was – 2,16,572 long ; 78,461 medium ; 17,800 bundles. Labour charges paid – Rs.13/- per long bamboo and Rs.9/- for medium, which includes cutting, clump cleaning and stacking at the depot. Remaining amount of Rs.20/- and Rs.7/- respectively deposited in ‘GramsabhaKosh’

The total quantity extracted - 2.95 lakh bamboos and Total Turnover of Rs.93.31 Lakhs, Total tax of Rs.6.61 Lakhs was collected from purchaser and paid to Govt. Total amount of Rs.37,66,000/- distributed as labour charges. Payment of Rs.32 Lakhs was made through money transfer to labourers’accounts ; other in cash. Amount of Rs.49.04 Lakhs deposited as ‘GramsabhaVikasNidhi (GN)’ in Gramsabha account.

As of now, GS has total fixed deposits of worth Rs.55 lakhs as ‘GramsabhaVikasNidhi’ in bank. As per the decision, GS is spending 50% fund Forest Management activities and other 50% on the innovative projects related to future generation in the village.