

Tribal communities seek hassle-free access to bamboo on Sathy hills

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Residents of tribal communities on Sathy hills in Erode district

plead for removal of impediments in cutting bamboo trees.

—Photo: M. Govarthan

Tribal communities on Sathy hills are unable to harvest bamboo as there is no clarity as yet in official circles on whether or not it could be treated as minor forest produce.

Traditionally, the tribal communities have been collecting amla and honey. Though bamboo thickets are in abundance in Thalamalai and Hassanur ranges, the tribal communities had not so far evinced interest in harvesting bamboo, official sources said. Organisations working for welfare of tribal communities say ignorance of the provisions of the Forest Rights Act 2006 is a reason for the people desisting from harvesting bamboo. In recent weeks, the tribal communities were sensitised to the inherent provision in FRA 2006 for improving their economic conditions through harvesting bamboo trees. The training was imparted to members of Village Forest Right Committees by Bhavani Sagar MLA P.L. Sundaram in Thalavadi and Thalamalai ranges. The reality that bamboo has been included in the list of minor forest product is not known to the tribal communities, according to S. Mohankumar, Sathy Taluk Convenor of Tamil Nadu Paznahgudi Makkal Sangam.

Green cover

In fact, cutting bamboo trees helps in sustaining green cover. The life span is increased only through constant cutting.

Else, after a certain duration, the trees would start flowering, slant and wither away, Mr. Mohankumar, said, explaining that the bamboo turns into a dense thicket formation only by constant cutting. Tamil Nadu is the only State where the FRA that envisages meaningful role for Village Forest Rights Committees in the area of conservation of forest wealth and wild life is yet to be implemented. The procedure for harvesting bamboo involves applying in a prescribed format for sanction by the Village Forest Rights Committees. The same is discussed in the meeting of Village Sabha and forwarded to the Divisional-level Revenue Department officer - the Sub-Collector of Gobichettipalayam - for approval. The final permission is granted at the level of District Collector. According to the organisations working for welfare of tribal communities, bamboo would fetch the residents high returns since it is used for erecting pandals, making furniture, and farming activities. Awareness about methodology of bamboo harvesting would be further intensified to cover T.N. Palayam, Sathyamangalam, Hassanur, and Bhavani Sagar ranges in the coming weeks, Mr. Mohankumar said. Forest Department officials, while acknowledging that access to bamboo has helped the economic conditions of tribal communities in other States, particularly in North-Eastern India, are apprehensive about vested interests attempting to profit through sourcing bamboo at cheap rates from the tribal communities on Sathy hills.

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