

Khammam village gets forest rights deed

Written by Janyala Sreenivas | Hyderabad | Published: July 14, 2014 12:34 am



36 bidders participated in the first bamboo auction on May 19. Source: Express Photo

Sirsanapaali village of Bhadrachalam Division in Khammam district became the first village in Telangana and undivided Andhra Pradesh to get a community forest rights (CFR) title deed in the gram sabha's name for its forest boundary.

After a 10-year struggle, Sirsanapalli villagers were able to harvest and sell bamboo from the forest where they live. A Fellow of the Prime Minister's Rural Development Fellowship Scheme (PMRDF), Prathima Nalabolu, who has been working with the gram sabha since May 2012, played a key role as the village got its title deed on June 21.

On May 19, the villagers conducted their first auction in which 36 bidders participated. The gram sabha, which was not prepared to deal with such a high turn-out was afraid that the bidders would form a syndicate and lower the prices. But with Forest Department officials keeping a watch, the process was successful and the 41,400 harvested bamboo stalks were auctioned to raise Rs 26.10 lakh. Till now, bamboo was handed over to the state forest department which auctioned it.

The villagers' fight started off with "our bamboo, our right" slogan a decade ago when they opposed the Forest Department's control over the sale of bamboo cut by them. They had to overcome stiff opposition from the bamboo transporters lobby as well as the state Forest Department which wanted the harvested bamboo to be deposited at the department depot. However, the Integrated Tribal Development Agency, Bhadrachalam stepped in and asked the department to fall in line and give the villagers their rights.

Prathima Nalabolu, who joined the villagers' efforts after training for three months at the Dr Marri Channa Reddy Human Resource Development Institute at Hyderabad, said: "I have been working as a facilitator for the gram sabha, helping them complete the documentation and GPS survey for filing Community Forest Rights claim and working with Bhadrachalam to ensure the gram sabha receives a title deed. I held gram sabhas in the village on decision-making and gave on-job training in resolution writing... My idea was to ensure that by the end of this process their capacities are built such that they can manage the activities on their own from next year."

The jubilant village has decided to spend half the income earned on forest regeneration activities including bamboo regeneration, irrigation via a farm pond, canals for fields that are currently rain-fed and safe drinking water for all households.

Another 25 per cent would be divided among the 31 families as dividend while the remaining 25 per cent has been kept as a reserve fund towards the expenses for the next year's sale, according to Badisa Gangaih, a village elder.

The gram sabha had elected a 10-member forest management and protection committee which is now overseeing the process, writing resolutions, managing accounts and distributing the labor charges.

Madivi Kanna Rao, president of the village's CFR management committee, says: "To gain rights over the collection and sale of minor forest produce had been a daily struggle for us. We have overcome 10 years of struggle to access the bamboo in our forest. We will continue harvesting bamboo every year and use the income generated to convert our village into a model village."

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