

Power transfer  
E Vijayalakshmi

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## **Power transfer**

**MFP management in TN  
tribals' hands**

E VIJAYALAKSHMI

IN A landmark decision, the Tamil Nadu (TN) government has handed over complete charge of minor forest produce (MFP) to tribal people living in and around the forests of the state. Consequently, from July 1 onwards, not only have the tribals been given the right to collect MFP, they are also vested with the authority to take all decisions pertaining to it.

The government order requires tribals in each village to form village forest councils (VFCS). These bodies will elect a 9-to-12-member executive committee and a president with a fixed tenure of five years. The panel will include the local forest ranger who will facilitate and supervise the setting up of the VFCS. "The councils will be free to collect MFP, add value to it and sell it in the open market," says a senior state forest department (FD) official.

The rationale for the initiative, according to the FD, is "the welfare of the tribals". Pratim Roy of Keystone

Foundation, a non-governmental organisation (NGO) working with the tribals of the Nilgiris, welcomes the development: "The government order is a bold step."

Earlier, marketing and procurement of MFP was in the hands of the government-run Large-Sized Multi-Purpose Cooperative Societies (LAMPS). However, discrepancies crept into their functioning. "Some LAMPS were being sub-leased to non-tribals," alleges an FD official. Illegal collection and harvesting of MFP were also rampant.

With the order, at least Rs 1 crore

out of the total revenue of Rs 2 crore from MFPS is expected to reach tribals directly. But Roy sounds a note of caution. He points out that the order will not benefit tribals unless it is accompanied by sound systems which would enable resource monitoring, local value addition and secured returns.

The project may face teething troubles with regard to organising tribals as they might still have to operate through traders. Yet these difficulties are not likely to prove insurmountable if self-help groups and NGOs are asked to lend a hand.

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Tribals and minor forest produce in Tamil Nadu

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