Ministry of Tribal Affairs

Van Dhan Vikas Kendras in Maharashtra lead in innovative initiatives to help tribal gatherers during ongoing Covid crisis

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Van Dhan Kendras, established under the scheme initiated by TRIFED, Ministry of Tribal Affairs are leading the way in helping tribals generate their livelihood in these distressed times. One segment that has been impacted during the ongoing crisis has been the tribal population as most of their income comes from Minor Forest Produce activities such as gathering, which usually is at the peak between the months of April – June.

The success story of Van Dhan scheme in Maharashtra inspite of the state facing the brunt of Covid 19 is worth enumerating. Maharashtra is home to more than 50 tribal communities and the Van Dhan team has taken charge to stay ahead of the curve. Through their sustained efforts and initiatives, the Van Dhan team is helping 19350 tribal entrepreneurs to find a platform to market the products in order to generate sustained livelihood.

Several initiatives have been put in place to combat the impact of Covid-19. These range from providing interest free loans to Self Help groups to facilitate the collection of bees to the procurement of the seasonal Mahua flowers and Giloe (which form major MFPs of this region) from village to village. Procurement of giloe and mahua, amidst the lockdown, has been made possible after following the adequate safety measures, using masks and maintaining social distancing.
Shabari Adivasi Vikas Mahamandal, one of VDKVs in the region, plans to train self-help groups in establishing forward and backward linkages by making different by-products from these produce. By adding value to these produce, a better price shall be fetched for these products. Swayam Kala Sansthan, a Van Dhan Vikas Kendra at Uikey Shilpgram, has procured approximately 125 quintals of Mahua flower (worth Rs 6.5 lakhs) for adding value and converting it into mahua jam, laddoos and mahua juice.

Another group, the Katkari Tribal Youth Group, which comes under Shahpur Van Dhan Vikas Kendra has set a benchmark for other groups. The youth group has established an online platform and is collaborating with retail chains such as D’Mart to take giloe to markets across the country.

Results from these initiatives can already be witnessed. In this current financial year 2020-21, a procurement of Rs 0.05 crore has been generated, with Mahua and Giloe being the major MFPs.

At a time, when news stories mainly are concerned with disaster, such success stories about the Van Dhan Scheme bring new hope and inspiration.

The Van Dhan Scheme is an initiative of the Ministry of Tribal Affairs and TRIFED and it targets livelihood generation for tribal gatherers and transforms them into entrepreneurs. The idea behind the scheme is to set-up tribal community-owned Van Dhan Vikas Kendras (VDVKs) in predominantly forested tribal districts. A Kendra constitutes of 15 tribal SHGs, each comprising of up to 20 tribal NTFP gatherers or artisans i.e. about 300 beneficiaries per Van Dhan Kendra.
TRIFED, as the apex national organisation involved in the improvement of the livelihood and empowerment of these tribal people, is the nodal agency for the implementation of the scheme. The Scheme has been a resounding success in offering some basic support to the tribal gatherers and has helped in improving their lives. 1,126 Vandhan Kendras have been set up as Tribal start-ups across the country onboarding over 3.6 Lakhs beneficiaries.

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