

MINUTES

A meeting was held by the Secretary to Government of India, National Commission for Scheduled Tribes, New Delhi with State department officials, Tribal leaders and District officials of Viluppuram District.

Venue: HRD Conference Hall, Secretariat, Chennai – 600 009.

Date & Time: 8th May 2013 at 1100 hours

Persons Present: List at Annexure.

The Secretary National Commission for Scheduled Tribes welcomed the gathering and requested all to advise their views on important issues and in particular, Education: Land & Forest Rights: Agriculture & Allied Occupations: Marketing: Health: Employment: Credit facilities & Indebtedness: Self-Help Groups: Amenities & Connectivity: Housing: PDS & Millets: Community Certificates: and the Role of Tribal Welfare department. Discussions and views were presented as below:

Education: Panchayat President, Vellimalai, Viluppuram District, Thiru Velli, explained that recently the State government and Tribal welfare department has extended many schemes for tribals in Tamil Nadu. Among about 47,000 Malayali tribals, about 5000 were in schools up to 10th Std and the existing school at Vellimalai was functioning well. He stated that about 1000-1500 were degree holders. He requested establishment of one polytechnic institution in Karumanthurai, Kallakuruchi. He emphasized this would be additional to the new ITI proposed. Further, the existing private Polytechnic and schools in the area should have a greater reservation share for local tribals. Secretary, NCST requested Secretary AD&TW Department to consider setting up a Polytechnic at Kallakurichi after getting proposals from the district administration and to consider district level reservation. The tribal women present in the meeting requested that English medium may be introduced in tribal schools and wanted separate English medium schools in tribal areas of Viluppuram.

ACTION 1: Director Tribal Welfare may obtain proposals for establishing a polytechnic from the district administration and study the feasibility of English medium schools to formulate proposals.

ACTION 2: On district level reservations, the issue may be urgently considered by the State Government.

Land and Forest Rights: The Tribal leaders stated that land pattas had not been given to the Tribal people and the pattas were also not issued to many beneficiaries who have been sanctioned pattas. The Secretary, NCST advised the District officials and Secretary, AD & TW and other to look into this matter immediately. The Tribal leaders stated that considerable extent of land which is under the possession of Tribals for past many years is also under Forest Settlement process and they wanted allotment of that land. In response, the District Forest

Officer Kallakuruchi stated that about 30000 Hectares in Viluppuram district is in the process of Forest Settlement and some of the area is under possession of Tribals in the form of encroachment. The Secretary, NCST observed that this was the status for the last fifty years and advised that this problem needs to be addressed immediately by the Revenue and Forest Departments and after the FRA, the earlier impediments could no longer be given as an excuse. The problem of alienation was also discussed and it was pointed out to the tribal leaders that the Act conferred only a heritable, cultivation right and not the usual alienable patta. Secretary, NCST observed that due publicity could be given to this aspect and only a determined process of retrieval of such land from non-tribals after inquiry would ensure protection of tribal and government interests. In connection with the issue of FRA, the case before the High Court needs to be expedited by State and Central Governments, if necessary, by taking the matter of intrusion by the High Court into administrative actions on omnibus and hypothetical complaints to the Supreme Court for remedy. The steps taken by Director, Tribal Welfare to implead himself in the case was commendable. A significant downstream effect mentioned by tribal leaders was that because of the lack of land pattas in document form, they were unable to access institutional finance including cooperatives for loans. During discussions, it was evident that this was crippling their efforts to rise above poverty and was trapping them in their present situation.

ACTION 3: The Forest Department of Viluppuram district should immediately compile the list of lands under occupation of Tribals and keep it ready for grant of rights. The District Collector Viluppuram should review the situation of pending Pattas for tribals and ensure that benefits actually reach the tribals.

ACTION 4: The Secretary, AD&TW should coordinate and persuade the Cooperation department and work with NABARD and Banks to see how effective institutional support reaches the tribals despite the delay in grant of pattas. This issue also needs to be highlighted in the case before the High Court. The aspect of appeal to the Supreme Court may be explored urgently in the interests of livelihoods of the larger tribal community.

ACTION 5: Steps should be taken by the District Collector and Director, TW to give publicity to the content and rights of patta under FRA and to initiate steps for recovery of alienated land and reassignment to deserving persons so that the message will be communicated without any doubts on Government's intentions and determination.

Agriculture, Marketing & Animal Husbandry: The Tribal leaders discussed the state of agriculture in their areas and spoke of their activity and interest in horticulture apart from the cultivation of tapioca. The Tribal leaders represented that one Tapioca processing unit may be established in Kollimalai since the tapioca produced presently is marketed in Salem district. Reacting to this the District Forest Officer, Kallakuruchi stated that the Tapioca cultivation is seasonal and the factories at Athur and Namakkal are facing losses. The Secretary, NCST suggested the approach of forming clusters of farms and councils with a Tribal federation for better marketing of agricultural products. In respect of Curry leaf, competition from plains'

farmers had affected their markets. It was suggested that they could market their curry leaf as organic and seek a niche market for this product with better prices.

The Tribal leaders said that milch cattle are being given to the tribals but the Tribal Welfare Department had reduced the number from 215 to 120 for Viluppuram District which was very inadequate. More milch cattle allotment may be done by Tribal Welfare Department to Viluppuram District. The Director Tribal Welfare replied that the milch cows are been given under Govt of India Schemes by the TW Department and the number was reduced to use the grant for need based works. The Director stated that more allotment will be made this year. However, Secretary, NCST pointed out that TSP was intended to be an additionality to State Government programmes and the Animal Husbandry department should not neglect the tribals both under their free cattle scheme and under the new State Balanced Growth Fund (SBGF) scheme and the Secretary, Collector and Director (TW) should press for more benefits, given the available dairy infrastructure.

The Tribal leaders also pointed out that Kadukkai (T. chebula) is the major forest product of excellent quality available in that area and the forest department is only conducting auction to the contractors and the benefit is not reaching tribals. The District Forest Officer Kallakurichi and Viluppuram stated that the minor forest produce including Kadukkai is allotted to Tribal Village Forest Committees and the sale money is deposited in Tribal VFC account. The Director Tribal Welfare explained that all the MFP in the state in Tribal areas is given to Tribal Village Forest Committees formed by the forest department in schemes like TAP, etc. The Tribal Welfare department had addressed the Forest Department to bring the allotment of MFP under the provisions of the FR Act, 2006. It was clear that tribals still had a grievance and this was because the VFC was under the control of the Forest department with all overheads being charged to the account because the VFC was not a participatory body as was borne out by experience and the views of tribal representatives. Secretary, NCST therefore, advised that the forest department should recognize, in both theory and practice, the rights of tribals by conveying the activity of collection, processing, and marketing of NTFP to the gram sabhas under FRA in all the 217 habitations in 22 blocks involved and the forest officers should propose accordingly at the earliest. There was also no impediment arising from the case before the High Court in regard to community rights and no further excuses are tenable. He also requested the Secretary, AD&TW Department, Government of Tamil Nadu to ensure with the Forest Department the recognition of all community rights in forest areas immediately.

ACTION 6: Steps may be taken by the District Collector and the Director, Tribal Welfare to encourage the tribal farmers to form clusters and work closely with the Gram Sabhas to ensure effective marketing and support through credit. This approach should work for both tapioca and for horticulture and also for handicrafts. The existing self help groups should also be activated and harnessed towards this objective.

ACTION 7: The District Collector and Director, Tribal Welfare may coordinate to ensure satisfactory results using the existing State Government Scheme, the State Balanced Growth

Fund (SBGF), BRGF, and the support of the Tribal Affairs department, GOI. Secretary, AD&TW should personally intervene with the Collector and Director, Animal Husbandry to ensure that the role of TSP as a gap filling and benefit enhancing measure is not reduced.

ACTION 8: *DFO Viluppuram and Kallakuruchi to recognize the NTFP and other community rights immediately as per FR Act for all Tribal Gram Sabhas. The control of Forest department over the VFCs under JFM is completely against the principle of community control and responsibility embodied in the FRA and genuine community institutions should alone be promoted and this should be ensured by the PCCF, Chennai and the DG Forests, Govt of India.*

Health: The tribal leaders expressed satisfaction on the situation. They said that one hospital at Mavadipattu is functioning well and sufficient ambulance facilities are also available. However, the overall State targets for IMR, MMR and other aspects may be monitored for this tribal area and health services, regular, ambulatory and emergency, ensured to levels comparable to other areas.

ACTION 9: *District Collector and Director, Tribal Welfare may make an analysis of health statistics for tribals and compare with State and District figures to pursue interventions that may have escaped the attention of tribals with the help of the Director of Public Health.*

Employment: The Tribal leaders stated that if the MFP is allotted to them and if the facilities for processing and marketing are extended, their employment opportunities will improve considerably. The Tribal representatives said that the decision of the Government to post local people in GTR Schools will help the educated unemployed youth who are not getting employment in Govt sectors. While discussing employment opportunities the Secretary, NCST suggested that in addition to the cluster approach which may create jobs directly and by promoting agro-processing, the TW department and Gram Sabhas may expedite construction activities by ST contractors by way of procuring and supplying required materials like centering material etc that will support the lower capital depth of ST contractors. Additional income sources could be homestead vermicomposting. The Tribal SHG women represented that stitching work for schools could be given to them since many trained Tribal women are available. Some activities may be sponsored by the Dept to extend loans for Bamboo basket making, Soap making, Betel nut processing for SHGs. They also requested the loans for Tractors and Autos from THADCO. The Secretary, NCST advised the District Administration to consider all possible steps to provide more employment in the Tribal areas and even a tribal administered KVK if a large and well organized tribal group gets formed in the area so that agriculture extension is effective. The tribals suggested that training could be given for various skills such as tailoring, agarbathis, soap, pickles, etc for which Labour dept could be addressed.

ACTION 17: *The Tribal Welfare Department and the Rural Development Department should address this issue to improve road connectivity.*

ACTION 18: *The Collector may be requested to coordinate with the Transport Department to provide adequate bus services.*

Credit and Indebtedness: The main problems in this area related to the lack of pattas for land and the non-availability of credit. The tribals confirmed that apart from traders, Microfinance institutions were not operating in the region. While discussing the various facilities required by the Tribals, the Tribal representatives stated that sufficient loans are available for Agriculture purposes in Lamp societies and requested that interest-free loans scheme may be extended to gold loans also. The District Forest Officer, Kallakurichi reported that sufficient money was available for loans in Village Forest Committees also. The Tribal people expressed that the loans given by World Vision NGO was also helpful to them as no interest was charged. They added that they wanted tractor loans to be sanctioned to them.

ACTION 19: *The Collector may be requested to intercede in the matter and arrange required loans.*

Issue of Caste Certificates and Bogus certificates: No major issues were raised in this regard.

Other complaints: The tribal representatives reported that tribal lands in Kilakadu Panchayat had been alienated and were being used by non-tribals for quarrying purposes. The Forest and Revenue departments may intervene in this matter and stop illegal activities.

ACTION 20: *Collector and DFO may take immediate action in this matter to stop illegal activity.*

The Secretary NCST concluded the meeting thanking the officials and the Tribal representatives for their frank exchange of views.



Secretary

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New Delhi-110003.

ACTION 10: *Secretary, AD&TW may pursue action to post local persons to teach in GTR schools to avoid absenteeism and improve results.*

ACTION 11: *Director, Tribal Welfare is requested to consider supporting acquisition of building support infrastructure which will enable Gram Sabhas to earn by lease and support capital deficient ST contractors.*

ACTION 12: *MD, THADCO may explore the possibility of grants and loans for livelihood promotion under Tribal schemes. Collector may develop proposals for this purpose and Director, Tribal Welfare is requested to coordinate these efforts.*

ACTION 13: *Labour department may be addressed to take up Skill development schemes in the area for tribals.*

Housing: During the discussion the Tribal representatives have stated that sufficient house site pattas have not been given to them by the ADW and Tribal Welfare Department. They said that about 60% of Tribal families need house site pattas even in Natham poramboke and they are, therefore, not able to avail house building loans. The Secretary, NCST requested that this issue could be investigated and action taken to issue fresh house site pattas to the poor Tribals. The Tribal leaders requested that the scheme for Replacement of Thatched Roof should also be extended to Viluppuram District and Director, TW agreed to examine this request.

ACTION 14: *The District AD and TW Officer should investigate the reasons for non-issue of house site pattas and take immediate action to propose house site pattas to the deserving Tribal people.*

ACTION 15: *The District Forest Officer should propose village wise requirement of replacement of Thatched Roof and send the proposals through PCCF to Tribal Welfare Department for sanction under Comprehensive Tribal Development Programme of State Government.*

PDS scheme: The Tribals reported that new Ration cards for existing family members who got married and are living separately have not yet been issued by the concerned authorities. The District Officials replied that there was a ban till recently to issue new Ration cards and all the pending cases will be cleared immediately.

ACTION 16: *The District Collector may address the issue and take urgent action.*

Communication and Amenities: The Tribal leaders represented that many Tribal habitations are not linked to the main roads and hence, they are unable to reach the bus stop in time. About 82 such habitations require link road facilities. The tribals representatives however, wanted adequate bus transport facilities or the arrangement of minibuses to villages. They were generally happy on the provision of amenities from existing Government programmes.

Annexure

List of Participants

1. Smt. Kannegi Packianathan I.A.S., Secretary to Government, Adidraavidar and Tribal Welfare Dept., Chennai;
2. Thiru. K.V. Giridhar I.F.S., Director of Tribal Welfare, Chennai;
3. Thiru. Gunasekaran I.F.S., DFO, Kallakurchi (i/c);
4. Tmt. D. Sujatha J.F.S., District Forest Officer, Viluppuram District;
5. Thiru. C. Thunaivendan, District Adidraavidar and Tribal Welfare Officer, Viluppuram District;
6. Thiru. S. Punniakodi, Special Thasildar (ADW), Kallakurchi, Viluppuram District;
7. Tmt. V. Jothi, Personal Assistant to Revenue Divisional Officer, Tindivanam;
8. Thiru. R. Sethuraman, Personal Assistant to Revenue Divisional Officer, Viluppuram District;
9. Thiru. B. Gogulapadmanaban, Personal Assistant to Revenue Divisional Officer, Kallakurchi;
10. Thiru. Velli, Chairman, Vellimalai Panchayat, Union, Kalrayan hills, Viluppuram District;
11. Tmt. R. Nagamma, Councillor, Kilakadu Panchayat, Sankarapuram Taluk, Viluppuram District;
12. Tmt. S. Ambika, Councillor, Serapattu Panchayat, Sankarapuram Taluk, Viluppuram District;
13. Thiru. A. Kanagaraj, President, Karialur Panchayat, Viluppuram District;
14. Thiru. A. Annamalai, President, Vellimalai Panchayat, Kalrayan Hills, Viluppuram District;
15. Thiru. A. Arumugam, President, Kandiyatham Panchayat Union, Kalrayan Hills, Viluppuram District;
16. Thiru. C. Valliam, President, Maniyarpalayam Panchayat Union, Kalrayan Hills, Viluppuram District;
17. Tmt. P. Sarasi, President, Kilakadu Panchayat, Kalrayan hills, Viluppuram District;
18. Tmt. K. Lakshmi, President, Serapattu, Sankarapuram Taluk, Kalrayan Hills, Viluppuram District;
19. Tmt. C. Alamelu, President, Vanchikuli, Sangarapuram Taluk, Viluppuram District; and
20. Tmt. S. Rani, President, Thumbabacheri, Sankarapuram Taluk, Viluppuram District.