

# Tribals of E. Godavari getting a raw deal

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KAKINADA, Aug. 28 - All the key posts of officials in tribal areas of East Godavari district are vacant since April '91. The Revenue Divisional Officer (RDO) who had replaced the sub-collector in March also was transferred in July. The mobile magistrate has taken over as additional incharge. He has a heavy work load as he is presently additional incharge of revenue divisional officer. Besides he has to look after flood duties, warning preparations etc. Rendering justice to tribals has been affected due to these additional burdens.

Though the posts of project officer, ITDA, tribal welfare officer, assistant project officer (special monitoring cell) and special deputy collectors are vacant the grounding of new programmes such as IFAD (International Fund for Agricultural Development) here not been hampered.

Rehabilitation programmes: Re-

habilitation programmes launched in Pandirimamidikota and Vetukuru of Maredumilli mandal have not been successful. These two villages were nurtured for a decade with sericulture with no success. Later the government switched over to Tassar silk and rubber plantation in these villages. The Citron grass introduced in nearly hundred acres belonging to 34 families has not been reaped since last year. The citronella oil extraction plant is under repair. Once the grass flowers it is not suitable for oil extraction. Plucking out the grass and taking up some other crop for farming shall be more expensive and labourious. Not a single sapling was lifted from the bamboo nursery near Addatheegala raised by forest department through ITDA funds.

The white burley tobacco is produced in light red soils of tribal areas. It is nicotine free and earns a good deal of foreign exchange. So far selecting the farmers, providing loan and marketing had been the

monopoly of ITC and some other small companies.

Some voluntary agencies have repeatedly brought the irregularities committed by tobacco companies to the government.

So far the trend is that the 'profits to tobacco companies and losses to the tribal farmers.' Last year Naxalites forced the companies to increase the purchasing price.

The G.C.C. (Girijan Co-operative Corporation) has taken up the provision of loan for tobacco cultivation. Raising nurseries, plant care and marketing are still in the hands of the companies. This year also it is reported that Naxals are likely to demand increase in purchase price. One wonders whether the G.C.C. has any role in deciding the purchase price and redressing the grievances of tribals.

Lack of coordination: Since last year G.C.C. is purchasing palm fibre. The GCC has to depend on

ITDA for the training programmes in the processing of minor forest produce, other products ITDA has to depend upon the GCC for marketing the produce of tribals. But ITDA did not take up training programme for tribals in the processing of palm fibre. There is no coordination between these agencies working for tribals. Still GCC did not distribute bonus to the tribals nor the consumption loans. The higher officials in GCC are quite enterprising. Though there is a great deal of expansion of the business, the efficiency of head office the division and the branches has to be improved a lot. Unless these planning and execution go together the whole exercise shall crumble down.

The forest officials, paper mills and RCS (Rythu Coolie Sangham) has entered into agreement on wages. Every year the forest department revises wages in April but enters into agreement with RCS or

other pressure groups later. The officials allegedly pocket the difference of wage amount for the period between the department revision date and agreement date.

The director of "Sakti" a voluntary organisation, met the Principal Secretary of Forests, Mr. D. Arora and the latter agreed to instruct his official to display the FSR (Forest Scheduled Rates) prominently. It is not known what happened further. The Department of Labour did not revise minimum wages for forest and timber operations since 1984. The poor tribals are thus denied minimum wages, prescribed by the State Government.