

**Ministry of Tribal Affairs to expand Van Dhan Vikas Kendras in Tribal Districts across the country**

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After the launch of the Van Dhan Vikas Kendra at Bijapur by the Prime Minister, Shri Narendra Modi on 14<sup>th</sup> April, 2018 and his call to converge Jan Dhan, Van Dhan and Govardhan Schemes, the Ministry of Tribal Affairs (MoTA), Government of India proposes to expand Van Dhan Vikas Kendras in Tribal Districts across the country. A meeting chaired by Secretary, M/o Tribal Affairs, Ms. Leena Nair, Secretary, was held recently to formulate the arrangements to decide the modalities.

As per the plan, TRIFED will facilitate establishment of MFP-led multi-purpose Van Dhan Vikas Kendras, a cluster of 10 SHGs comprising of 30 tribal MFP gatherers each, in the tribal areas. This initiative is aimed at mainstreaming the tribal community by promoting primary level value addition to MFP at grassroots level. Through this initiative, the share of tribals in the value chain of Non-Timber Forest Produce is expected to rise from the present 20% to around 60%. About 3000 such Van Dhan Kendras are proposed to be set up in two years in the forested Tribal Districts of the country. To begin with, this initiative is proposed to be taken up on priority in the 39 Districts with more than 50% tribal population and to then gradually be expanded to other Tribal Districts in India.

The scheme will be implemented through Ministry of Tribal Affairs as Nodal Department at the Central Level and TRIFED as Nodal Agency at the National Level. At State level, the State Nodal Agency for MFPs and the District collectors are envisaged to play a pivot role in scheme implementation at grassroot level. Locally the Kendras are proposed to be managed by a Managing Committee (an SHG) consisting of representatives of Van Dhan SHGs in the cluster.

The initiative aims to promote MFPs-centric livelihood development of tribal gatherers and artisans. MFP or what may be more aptly referred to as Non Timber Forest Produces (NTFPs) are the primary source of income and livelihood for about 5 crore tribal people in the country. Notably, most of the tribal Districts in India are forested Districts. Tribals have enormous traditional skills in the processes involved in collection and value addition of NTFPs. Based on local skills and resources the ideal model of tribal development has, therefore, to be NTFP centric.

In the past, the Government of India has brought in certain reforms in the sector through Provisions of Panchayats (Extension to Scheduled Areas) Act, 1996 and the Scheduled Tribes and Other Traditional Forest Dwellers (Recognition of Forest Rights) Act, 2006 which conferred ownership rights on tribal Gram Sabhas in respect of MFP found in their area. In 2014, the Scheme of MSP for MFP was introduced which provides minimum support price to MFP gatherers for selected MFPs. While the steps are in right direction, however, most of the trade related to the MFPs is unorganized in nature, which has led to low returns to the gatherers and high wastages due to limited value addition. Thus, a more holistic approach with robust institutional mechanisms is required for strengthening the backward and forward linkages of MFP supply chain and particularly for mainstreaming the tribal community.

The Prime Minister while launching the pilot project at Bijapur District, Chattisgarh on 14.04.2018

stated that the “Van Dhan, Jan Dhan and Govardhan would be the basis for transforming the rural and tribal economy in the future”. Matching with his vision, concerted actions are being put in place to achieve these desired outcomes.

### Key Highlights of Van Dhan Initiative

- At unit level, aggregation of produce would be done by SHGs having about 30 members each forming Van Dhan Vikas ‘Samuh’. The SHGs would also undertake primary value addition of the MFPs using equipment such as small cutting and sieving tools, decorticator, dryer, packaging tool etc based on MFPs available in the area.
- A typical Van Dhan Vikas Samuh would have the following facilities:
  - Provision for required *building/ infrastructure support* to be established in one of the beneficiary’s house/ part of house or Government/ gram panchayat building
  - *Equipment/ Tool Kit* comprising of equipment such as small cutting and sieving tools, decorticator, dryer, packaging tool etc. based on MFPs available in the area
  - Fully equipped training facilities for a batch of 30 trainees with provision for raw material for training purpose and supply of trainee kits (comprising of bag, scribbling pad, pen, brochures, training manual, booklet etc)
  - Provisioning of *working capital* for the SHGs through tie up with financial institutions, banks, NSTFDC etc
- A cluster of ten such SHGs within the same village shall form a Van Dhan Vikas Kendra. Subject to successful operations of the samuhs in a Kendra, common infrastructure facilities (pucca Kendra) may be provided to the Kendra in the next phase in terms of building, warehouse, etc. for use of the samuh members
- An illustrative list of major MFPs which may be covered under the initiative are tamarind, mahua flower, mahua seed, hill broom, chironjee, honey, sal seed, sal leaves, bamboo split, myrobalan, mango (amchur), aonla (churan/candy), seed lac, tez patta, cardamom, black pepper, turmeric, dry ginger, cinnamon, coffee, tea, sea buckthorn tea, etc. Apart from these, any other MFP with potential for value addition may be included.

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