

A Village in the Limelight



Sometimes, one could end up being in the limelight even without trying. It was no different for Atram Bheem Rao and the twenty families in Rawanpally village, in Kagaznagar, Andhra Pradesh. The Rawanpally Van Samrakshana Samithi (VSS), constituted with the formal consent of more than half the families, was selected to be developed as a model village under the Community Forest Management (APCFM) project. A laid-back village in the middle of nowhere and its one score of households found themselves in the thick

of things. Rawanpally VSS, led by its Chairperson Bheem Rao, soon became one of the standard bearers of the Forest Department's initiative to actively involve forest-dependent communities in the management of the forests.

Of the total 88 VSSs in Kagaznagar Division, Rawanpally is one of the 24 that use bamboo for income generation. Apiculture, vermi-compost, biofuel (from *Pongamia pinnata* seeds) and bio-fertilizer (Pongamia seed cake) are the other activities of the VSS. Bheem Rao supervises all these operations and is proud to talk about the difference the CFM brought to the village through the VSS. Pongamia biofuel has brought power (through a diesel generator set) to light up some street lamps and community areas. The pressed-out cakes of Pongamia and vermi-compost have helped revitalize the land to produce vegetables. Bamboo has provided the women a productive and remunerative leisure time activity of agarbatti stick making. Honey from apiculture, vegetables, vermi-compost and agarbatti sticks have started providing the villagers much-needed cash income. "We have good profits now," declares Bheem Rao.



Women of Rawanpalli engaged in producing agarbatti sticks



Bheem Rao cranking the diesel generator

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Rawanpally VSS is fully into forest maintenance and conservation. "Wherever parts of the forest have been handed over to the villagers for conservation, they have developed a sense of ownership," says B. Naganath, Divisional Forest Officer, Kagaznagar. "Now they look at forest as their own resource," supports Ramesh Kalaghatgi, Chief Conservator of Forest and Project

Coordinator of APCFM. All able-bodied VSS members lend their muscles and traditional knowledge for the upkeep of the forest. Trenching, earth moulding, pit digging, planting, pruning...they have work round the year. Another opportunity to work and earn in the vicinity of their homes.

The VSS has to purchase bamboo at Rs 8 (US\$0.18) per pole, as its forest does not have enough bamboo. Bheem Rao views this as a drawback and has initiated bamboo planting with the help of the Forest Department. "In another two years, we will have our own bamboo," he declares.

The Common Facility Centre (CFC) at Peddabanda buys the agarbathi sticks that the Rawanpally women produce. They are paid Rs 5 (US\$0.12) per a bundle of 1 kg. On an average, each woman makes Rs 50 (US\$1.12) per day from sale of sticks, which provides more than Rs 1,000 (US\$22.5) per month. If one adds to this the income generated from other forest-related activities, such as apiculture, one could easily see how livelihoods can be generated around non-timber forest products (NTFPs).



The agarbathi stick manufacturers of Rawanpally VSS with a Forest Department Official

The Andhra Pradesh Community Forest Management (APCFM) project is being implemented by the Andhra Pradesh Forest Department (APFD), with funding support from the World Bank. In 2005, APFD had organized a workshop to explore the possibilities of forest-based livelihood promotion activities, and the International Network for Bamboo and Rattan (INBAR) was invited to the workshop to present the possible livelihood strategies using bamboo as a resource. In view of its expertise, INBAR was also requested to be part of the Supervisory Mission of the project.

Officials from APFD later visited the Tripura Bamboo and Cane Development Centre (TRIBAC), an Action Research Project of INBAR that was implemented by the Centre for Indian Bamboo Resource and Technology (CIBART). TRIBAC also supplied bamboo seeds for planting in project areas in Andhra Pradesh. CIBART/INBAR has recently completed a technical evaluation of the production system used by the VSSs/CFCs under APCFM, examining the quality system in place and the hand tools and machines used.