

Challenges of Livelihoods in Difficult Tribal Regions: Understanding Markets

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Underlining the fragile plight and future of the tribal people of the country, the article advises that the tribal community, its welfare and growth be included in the planning and implementation of development activities, schemes and projects

The promotion of livelihoods in rural areas is centred, dependent and driven to serve mainstream markets or to grab a share of them. Rapid market integration and the opening of trade and investment frontiers to globalization are leading to a drastic transformation, often with brutal consequences. Markets today are complex, with advantages skewed towards big corporations with deep pockets, product/technology domain expertise and are based on their attendant perceived standards. New forms of pricing, large volumes with short margins, technology innovation and market domination, including cartels, determine market entry, market share and profits. The market is increasingly controlled by big players; producers have little or no option but to serve the needs of these players and use their channels and are thus rendered powerless to negotiate.

Whereas economies are growing, the imbalanced income and earning distribution is leading to a stagnant demand. The worst-hit area is agricultural commodities, the demand for which is inelastic. Income opportunities for a large mass of people are declining due to technology because the focus is on higher productivity with lower manpower. With most people looking for livelihoods and employment incomes, purchasing power remains with a few, affecting those producing and offering demand-inelastic commodities. This inequality is being addressed by creating social safety nets using the Keynesian logic of putting money in the hands of the people. However, this does not solve the problem because the aim of Keynes was to manage the economic vicissitudes of capitalism and not to address its crisis origins or to widen livelihood opportunities.

The focus in livelihoods promotion is, therefore, to supply or to add value to a product by going up the chain with a higher value offer for better price realization. For example, a farmer producing groundnuts may be asked to first take out the shell before selling it or to join a producer company to convert it into oil. Poor farmers offer generic goods at cost plus price, whereas companies earn higher margins through branding. Brands dominate the market and the buyer behaviour, leading to multiple approaches to price-based surplus extraction.

DISTORTIONS

This scenario explains market entry, access and staying power aspects. However, the production of real goods and services is increasingly dependent on complex multiple variables such as credit and risk, financial investment modelling, taxation, technology platforms, intellectual property rights, cartels, labour laws, etc. These have a profound and an invisible influence on product prices or the surplus generated by economic activities. The product market value, pricing and purchase, thereby, are influenced by factors that rest elsewhere and are not necessarily intrinsic to the product. This impacts the exchange equations among economic sectors and the 'terms of trade'.

We also witness shifting of the cost burden to the environment, labour and women. Finance drives market integration and globalization and dominates the overall factors of production and exchange. Livelihoods, today, call for negotiating the political economy and the challenge is to calibrate how people can engage the market, rather than how the market engages them.

Let us take a look at some of the outcomes of globalization, for example, the exchange rate of the dollar vis-à-vis the rupee. In the past 60 years, the dollar has gone up 20 times. The reason given for the increased global oil prices by the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) was that water, a supposedly free commodity and occupying three-fourth of this planet, was being sold at prices higher than that of a litre of petrol, a finite resource; facing a 'choice', Malaysia, a country well-endowed with forests, posed a question to the world as to why it must not cut

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its entire forests, sell the wood and put the money in a bank because the earnings from the bank deposit interest were much higher than the retail selling of forest products.

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capital and technology rather than the real goods and services coming from the natural resource endowments and human effort. The financial sector plays such a major role in the markets today that even the central banks are helpless. Yet, mainstream believes that the market mechanism has self-correcting capacities. Nicholas Stern called global warming as the biggest market failure. It is for such reasons that Gandhi rejected the European growth model with one simple explanation: if the whole of India and large parts of the world is in fetters, to keep affluent a few million English people, where would India go with its large population but to ruthlessly subjugate mankind all over the world.

The fundamental driver of the emerging market economy is 'spend', leading to conspicuous consumption and wastage. Let us look at how national accounting handles data regarding this aspect. Statistics tell us that 30 per cent of the food grain produced is rotting because of ineffective market chains. Preventing this wastage is given as the compelling reason to invite foreign investments in retail. How is the data calculated, however? It begins with the producer and ends when the commodity is sold to the final buyer or the consumer. What is not accounted for is the wastage by the consumer after its purchase. A recent study in Europe showed that 44 per cent of tinned food items purchased in the supermarket transit to the buyer's refrigerator only to be dumped a few days later into the nearest garbage dump.

THE TRIBAL EXPERIENCE

The focus of this article is on the opportunities of livelihoods for the tribal people—the most deprived in India. The remote tribal areas have become the focus of attention because corporations and market players are enviously eyeing the immense natural resources found here. There is resistance to the exploitation of these natural resources from the tribal people, with some communities taking to arms and the Prime Minister calling it India's number one internal security challenge. The region of review here is Dandakaranya that spans many states and is inhabited predominantly by tribal people.

Indian policy makers have acknowledged that the tribal communities have suffered a historical injustice. For instance, large tracts of forests were cut down to build the Indian railways so that the British troops and commerce could move swiftly. 'Development' of tribal areas is solely extraction-centred, leaving the people in squalor. Irrigation water, hydel power and mineral wealth are all extracted from the area for voracious consumption elsewhere. There is an absence of a local elite or enterprise, which has a stake or a say in the development. Trade and investment is driven and controlled by 'outsiders', who do not build, invest or lobby for social infrastructure such as schools, healthcare, etc., giving the local population no opportunity to participate in the rising economic activity in their region. Once the resources are extracted, firms leave the areas, closing down the schools and hospitals they built when the mining was on.

Non-timber forest produce (NTFP) is a unique resource of the tribals that could have had a

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competitive advantage; yet, it saw no product or market development. Its management was vested with the forest or tribal department, the primary interest of which was to earn revenue for the state. Thus *beedi* leaf, a unique product and a major source of income of the poor, gave way to competitors making cigarettes. Leaf procurement was vested exclusively with the forest department, which did not

expand the area or productivity, and *beedi* rolling remained reserved for the small-scale sector with no capacity to develop brands or fight the onslaught of competition from large cigarette makers. Consumers shifted to cigarettes and *beedi* saw a shrinking market share and lost its competitive advantage. Restrictions on cutting trees led the paper industry to shift to substitutes, import pulp or have captive plantations. Bamboo cutting is not allowed. Poor marketing and unsustainable tapping practices have led to dead gum karaya trees.

The tribal people are, therefore, wary of the mainstream development approach. They pick forest produce from the forests and practise subsistence farming. They allow water to flow through their lands. Forests serve to construct a house, cook food or make simple furniture. Marketable surplus is kept low and seasonal. The area has no basic amenities such as electricity, piped water, higher education and quality manpower. Officials of the administration and other professionals do not want to work in such places, leading to an absence or poor availability of government services and little administration outreach. The tribal communities prefer 'autonomy' rather than dealing with distant markets, being apprehensive of its players.

EMERGING REALITIES

The corporate business leader of today is under stress, they are expected every three months by the stock market to deliver. If companies were to take a long-term approach to investment, they want high assured returns. To mine minerals or generate hydel power, companies want resource monopoly and want to be assured of protection from market risks and volatility or sovereign guarantees. In most instances, they are governed by international contracts where all arbitration is out of the country and where Indian laws are not applicable. The government is desperate for royalty and the politicians are happy to 'negotiate'.

If high income potential is in the medium term, the dice is thrown differently by corporations. They want subsidies and tax concessions. If the market for a product is to be tested or is likely to mature over time, they use intermediaries to reduce the transaction costs. Virginia Tobacco was among the first to come to these high altitudes, and once product quality value was demonstrated, India Tobacco Ltd. stepped in to monopolize this unique flavour premier tobacco. Once the product becomes market viable with scale potential, companies bring all their might to capture and redirect resources to serve their business. It is somewhat like we see in the cities: A poor vendor puts up kiosks or a push cart to sell eatables. As his business grows, other shops follow and the push cart becomes a traffic nuisance. Zoning follows and this gives way to supermarkets that is followed soon by malls. The poor risk and explore new avenues for a living while the rich players harvest the opportunity.

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The corporate sector also harvests the purchasing power of the tribal people. For example, the people are introduced to and encouraged to use a paper tea sachet; this big early success is followed by promoting the use of plastic because it is easier to transport, has a longer product shelf life and can be made to affordable sizes. Corporate players are in 'sync' with market opportunities emerging from technology. Thus, the *adda* leaf has given way to plastic and paper plates. The worst affected by these marketing strategies are products that use nature as the production base whereas, in other instances, the costs are passed off to the environment. It is here that the tribal people face big challenges.

The issue for livelihoods promotion is: how should the tribal people play the market and occupy space that can enable them to develop an agenda of enhanced and sustainable livelihoods, based on their capabilities, culture and the natural and human resource potential of the area? The task of a livelihood intellectual is to find ways to use the market play and government policies, and make them beneficial for tribal communities. This will help develop human capacities and the competitive advantages of their natural resource endowments, which will, in turn, serve and develop livelihood opportunities for the local people.

There is another aspect to be borne in mind and that is with reference to the growing Indian population. Whereas some people in India move to urban areas seeking opportunities to work, many head to tribal areas which have productive land and water resources, with sparse and thinly spread population. However,

in these areas, the Tribal Land Protection Law is in place to protect tribal communities. With more people moving to these areas, the law will have to be changed. One must not forget that this is the place where most of the refugees from Pakistan, Tibet, Bangladesh or Sri Lanka have come and settled. In a recent TV interview, a Chief Minister of a tribal-dominated state was asked, "Why not allow the tribals to sell their land because that would mean a good income?" The Chief Minister replied that amending and relaxing the land law would mean that the tribals would soon vanish from India.

CENTRE STAGE: THE CITIZEN

The rising demand for natural resources and minerals means that the tribal population will not be able to withstand its fury. The many questions dominating the contentious discussion are: Should the tribal communities alone have the right over precious metals and minerals of global demand that are vital for the Indian economic miracle? Is it not national wealth? Does it only belong to the sons of the soil? Is it necessary to have safe government custody for selective sustainable mining by public sector companies? What is a fair compensation for the locals—alternative land sites, jobs, shareholding, compulsory corporate social responsibility investments or the adoption of least damage-causing technologies?

What should be our response? What follows are the contours of a perspective closer to the tribal approach to life and management of scarce resources—the resource is water, which is the topic of heated discussion on contemporary TV.

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Democratic values and ethics emerged from the struggles of the people for freedom, equality and justice. Democracy, in practice, is voting and the voicing of an opinion and then leaving the rest to elected representatives. Not the ideal situation. Yet 'project democracy' is the only available civilized option for governance. Efforts are on to improve citizen partnership. How should we, then, see water resources in the framework of an evolving democracy project?

The motivation and dynamics of the three key players in the economy—the government, the corporates and the citizens—need to be understood. The government has an insatiable thirst to increase its revenue whereas the corporates are hungry for profit. The citizens want to reach their capability index. Only unhindered and rapid economic growth can bring in and increase revenue and profits. Thus, the government and the corporate sector must necessarily work in tandem, despite respective public posturing. Add to this, the greed that acts as lubricant for the decision-maker, the politician! The current situation to vest ownership and natural resources in the government is a perfect recipe, suiting, serving and safeguarding the shared interests of the government, the politician and the corporate sector. The only option available for the citizen to be heard and his interests to be considered is to vote, and failing that, to protest against the decision-makers.

Water, although scarce, is wasted, and exhortations to conserve it meet with little response. Some technologies are being introduced such as drip agriculture or water recycling in industrial plants. The technology is profitable and saves water but does not

necessarily maximize the use of water. Supplying tanker water in cities and in drought-hit areas is good business and helps the political class and the government to show their gratitude to the community. Some experts have suggested water pricing. However, water cannot be sold at a high price because it would lead to riots, and will not necessarily be conserved or used judiciously by the rich.

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To entice industrial investments, contracts for water supply are offered by the government. The volume and the price of water are negotiated by those in authority even though ground water is private property. The water crisis is overwhelming, and the alternatives offered by the government and industry do not address fundamental issues; so citizens give up ownership to the government and then absolve themselves.

It is time that decisions on the bounties of nature such as water are seen in the context of democracy, with centrality to the citizen. So, rather than water distribution, the role of the government must be focused on harvesting and storing precipitation. Ground water must not be personal property, except what is individually or collectively harvested from precipitation. Of the total water harvested and stored, 30 per cent should be set apart for explicitly designed environmental and fresh-water fishery commitments, 10 per cent as transfers to water-scarce areas and another 10 per cent as buffer to meet emergencies.

The remaining 50 per cent of the water should be given as entitlement to citizens, with the rights to use, transfer and sell. The entitlements could be built around categories such as

farmers, artisans and small-scale industries. The quantity of entitlement could be region-based or agro-climate based, and some regions supplemented, to ensure a minimum water requirement. Water transfers could be provided for natural calamities such as droughts. Each entitlement would get, say, a million litres of fresh water annually. In this regime, if someone or an entity wants more than its entitlement, he/she

would have to approach a water entitlement holder and purchase it. The sale and transfer of water could be facilitated by a regional or national exchange board. If someone is in another town, he/she could exchange their entitlement for money. The price could vary, based on the season and the buyer's capacity to pay.

The system can be manipulated through taxation or incentivizing instruments. This would lead to water conservation being a profitable business and would unleash the creativity of a new genre of citizen-driven innovations for conservation, to attain the highest level of water efficiency, rather than profit being the driver. This would change the focus of the water management regime and bring the citizens and conservation to centre stage. Starting with water, it is crucial to take away all natural resources from the government and corporate sector control and hand it back to the citizens. Acts of God or Nature (based on individual beliefs) must not have proxy custody. Natural resources must belong to the citizens. Government tax income and corporate profits must be limited to what can be accrued from the 'acts' of the people. The above is not utopian, but is easily achievable. It can be managed with technology such as

sensors, electronic exchanges, water-grids and unique identification cards. The concept needs detailing and fine-tuning. That is how the tribal people see their natural resources.

THE MARKET HAS ARRIVED

The supply opportunity to the market, especially of generic products and agricultural commodities, will grow rapidly and witness diversifying customer demands. Competition will drive the search for new places with lower prices and product qualities suiting the consumer perception or for its substitutes. With such opportunities and the entry of big players, India will be able to address the difficulties and disadvantages hitherto faced of procuring supplies from the tribal areas. Issues of sluggish market activity, small market players with little money and low ambition, inadequate and poor physical infrastructure, difficulties of procuring sufficient quantities, grading, lack of viable transport volumes with frequency, high transaction costs, etc., will soon be history. These areas will integrate with the mainstream markets due to a demand 'pull' accompanied by the 'push' from the tribal youth, to harvest higher incomes to meet the rising costs of health, education, old age, etc. In short, procuring from the tribal regions has 'arrived'. The challenge for the development activist is to understand, shape and moderate this opportunity as an advantage, with the power to transform livelihoods that meet the expectations of the people, develop their capabilities, retain autonomy, enhance the productive factor endowments and thus shape a development dynamic that secures their destiny.

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THE CHALLENGE

The biggest player in livelihoods today is the National Rural Livelihoods Mission (NRLM). It has a direct and indirect impact, in shaping tribal economy. Whereas NRLM has laudable plans and goals, its construct and focus are primarily on women communities: to help them participate, borrow, serve and benefit from emerging market opportunities. However, if implemented, without understanding 'power' and 'equations', it will lead to an

impact opposite to what is intended for the tribal community. At present, markets play a limited role in the livelihoods of tribal people. The activist must seek a larger framework and approach, to deal with NRLM livelihoods platforms.

Two questions are crucial. "How should livelihoods for the tribal people be conceived and constructed?" And if serving and succeeding in the emerging markets is the central opportunity to livelihoods, "how must the markets be negotiated and the productive forces that safeguard their interests, foster their well-being and retain their 'autonomy' be developed?"

This perspective involves tough choices and a deeper understanding of market dynamics. The activist must see her/his task as reshaping NRLM, to serve the tribal people to pursue strong autonomy-based strategies that suit their capacity and culture, and safeguard the natural resource endowment and human capabilities while negating their historical experience. Any strategy must be in sync with tribal human values for modest but assured income expectations and be in harmony with nature.

Old development theories and livelihoods approach will not work because the tribals are angry and helpless at what is unfolding for them. Development investments whatever, their origin—government, donor or corporate social responsibility—are driven by the consumer self-interest of the rest of India. The interests of the tribal people, are incidental, whereas, for activists, the interests of the tribal communities must be intrinsic. The activist must understand how to build the competitive advantage of tribals, shape the people's understanding of enterprise and deliver a roadmap where their produce emerges as the key economic player rather than being driven by the market. The task is to help navigate and influence the evolving economic development model and the market dynamics trajectory for the tribal people, to take advantage of the opportunity while keeping away from the attendant threats and risks. One must maximize the potential of their productive resources—human, physical and natural.

Once the cultural and philosophical perspective is grasped, the activist must engage and empower community leaders to plan, participate, negotiate, sharpen and shape their ideas, leading to their development and well-being. When engaging with the markets, the aim must be to have negotiating power, a seat on the marketplace high table and the interests of autonomy of the markets served. So the focus must be to identify and recognize products and processes wherein the local people have a natural, competitive, and unique advantage and capability. The opportunity must be in tune with the specific

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realities of the endowments of different areas. It must capture and trigger tribal imagination. The key areas to focus on when promoting the livelihoods of the tribal people are autonomy in trading, strengthening the local economy of exchanges through multiple instruments, assuring the deliverance of government social protection and welfare schemes.

It is crucial that work on livelihoods development for the tribal people must start with giving tribals access to all social protection and welfare schemes. This will provide them with their basic necessities; currently, the people's despicable situation should be a matter of shame for us. The key and challenging task for activists vis-à-vis welfare schemes and NRLM investments is to ensure the delivery of funds with regularity and predictability. This will instil confidence in the people. Otherwise, they will have to go to government offices repeatedly for their payments, which may be a task so overwhelming that they may not follow up at all. The next step would be to help tailor the schemes to suit the requirements of the tribal areas. Key central ministries must have an advisory group to ensure that implementation guidelines take into consideration the specificities and needs of the tribal community and of the personnel serving them. This committee must not comprise academics and bureaucrats alone, but must include activists, field implementation officials, elected representatives, tribal leaders, etc. This includes MGNREGS, the Right to Education, and the food and nutrition provisioning entitlements of ICDS, PDS, Mid-day Meal, pensions for the old and widows, etc.

Nothing succeeds like the timely provisioning of food to gain tribal interest. Innovations must be offered by linking MGNREGS wages to PDS and old-age pension such as the advance wage payment in MGNREGS in Andhra Pradesh.

It is crucial to take away all natural resources from the government and corporate sector control and hand it back to the citizens

Implementation effectiveness is generally sought by adding more manpower but unless complemented with removing the obstacles to decision-making, it will not be effectual. It is crucial to adopt innovative and decentralized approaches to programme management, with transparency and accountability as the hallmark. The risks involved in effective outreach must be taken into account. It is important to be broadly and basically right rather than to seek perfection. The Ministry of Rural Development (MoRD) must not pass on the responsibility to the tribal welfare department or the *gram panchayat*. Those institutions lack resources—both human and financial.

Convergence is crucial but is not practised. Everyone talks of convergence, yet no one provides its 'know-how'. The focus of convergence must include arranging financial resources, harnessing technical capabilities, organizing institutional infrastructure and, above all, viewing and delivering the outcome from the lens of the user or the beneficiary community. One instance of convergence at work, coming by default and albeit with many inadequacies, is the instituting of watershed projects in some states. These have evolved over two decades, aided by a clear definition of the roles and actions of the participating implementation departments, specific budget provisions and oversight aegis by a community-led management body. The task of convergence must begin with schemes administered by MoRD. It has an investment

exceeding Rs 100,000 crores annually and NRLM must be the crucial springboard to start this process and bring in public sector institutions such as banks.

MGNREGS, for instance, is doing poorly in tribal areas

whereas the tribals are desperate to earn incomes. MoRD often shirks its responsibilities, saying the 'guidelines' are flexible. Yet no government official will risk using this proviso. The finance person will strike the proposal down, saying that it is not covered under the guidelines. Let us take the example of crèches in MGNREGS. After discussions with the women and understanding all aspects of managing and keeping the children and the mothers happy, the village was found to be the most suitable place to locate crèches. Despite the government agreeing to suggestions on how to foster and implement the crèche scheme, no one advanced its adoption. The reason, later cited, was that the crèche being an item listed under the heading of 'work-place facility' must be located at the worksite and not the village.

Vizag, a predominantly tribal area where people practise shifting cultivation, won the recent national district award for implementation of MGNREGS. It gets about 1,000 mm of rainfall every year. The officials' claims for the award were their coffee plantations, an alien crop with no consumption value to the tribal. The local communities have no role in its plantation, production, processing or marketing. The capabilities of the tribal people are completely undermined and they are silent, helpless observers, serving, at best, as wage workers at these coffee plantations. It has destroyed their ability to 'negotiate'. The photographs of the greenery around coffee plantations are displayed in Delhi and everyone is happy to see the forest land restored—from the practice

of shifting cultivation to lush coffee plantations. Worse, not a penny has been invested in MGNREGS, to produce adequate and easy access to firewood or housing materials for the local population. The tribal people have lost control over their land.

Once social protection and welfare schemes reach the tribal people, the next step is to identify potential areas of production, which enjoy comparative and competitive advantage (human and natural resources) in the markets, and bring value addition to economic activities. Also necessary is the need to identify the aspects of ease of accessing the markets, in terms of logistics, and tapping market potential at higher levels in the supply chain. We must look at the local markets in nearby towns rather than aspire for large cities. After that, we can plan the steps and invest in aspects needed to create or develop enabling conditions for the economic growth of the area. The production ecology of forest areas must be understood; otherwise the rush to harvest the produce will see a repeat of the demand for timber by the Indian railways during the British rule, leading to the ravaging of forests, and the widespread outrage and anger among the community. MGNREGS can serve to provide the investment for improving the resource infrastructure.

Cash transfer schemes will become operational soon, and subsidies will be distributed directly in cash to beneficiaries, vide their bank accounts. Here too, the big ticket items are cooking gas, fertilizers, etc. Electricity, a state subject, will soon join in. Most cash transfers are market linked to subsidy schemes that are private, efficient and customer-driven such as

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with gas. They serve the middle classes and the urban people. The tribal population cannot access or use them. In addition, welfare schemes implemented by the government have high numbers of exclusion and are characterized by poor servicing. Cash transfer schemes that will, to some extent, benefit the tribal population are government welfare schemes such as PDS and old-age pensions, which constitute a very small amount and hence will provide paltry gains to the tribal people. Development activists must advocate a new subsidy regime that is not budget deficit-

centred but is just, equitable and need-based to the requirements and welfare of the people in these regions. This is a livelihood issue.

In NRLM, a major thrust is financial inclusion and bank linkage. Any business plan, therefore, must meet banks' requirements for them to lend. This compels people to understand enterprise management. The development worker has a major role to play here because the local people have no understanding of the financial system. Experience shows that the poor, as placed now, accept and go along with any government or NGO investment, however irrelevant it may be to them. The task, therefore, is to trigger enthusiasm among the people of the potential of their own project ideas, rather than be led by the lending schemes of the banks. This will happen only when we address tribal aspirations with scope for substantial improvement to their life. Unless the possibility of such a goal were to be shown to them, the people will not put their entire efforts into the project—a basic for any business to succeed.

How does one identify business opportunities? The first step is to list all the possible opportunities and then eliminate some. For instance, we all know that there is a high demand for fresh vegetables. These can be produced in tribal areas, where land has higher productivity. However, the hamlets are dispersed and the region is hilly. Road connectivity and cold storage facilities are lacking. So for areas far into the interior, businesses that focus on procuring and marketing of perishable vegetables will be excluded because it is difficult and risky. The sale of vegetables is excellent if the markets are nearby or transport is reliable.

The business plan should then focus on scheduling the production in order to be in sync with the market and thus avoid getting lower prices or incurring wastage. For remote interior areas, the business plan must be to produce such fruits and vegetables that have a longer shelf life, for instance, jack fruit, gourds or pumpkins.

The poor operate on low profit margins. It is important that the markets they serve are steady and provide an assured income. Risk reduction and stability must be at the heart of determining and developing the business plan. Pricing must not only be cost plus. The aim must be to move higher up on the value chain. The focus must, therefore, be on creative - strength based thinking on business development, taking into account local capabilities, removing or addressing risk bottlenecks and building on comparative advantages. Instead of excluding and eliminating the local seller, his expertise must be used because he has a better business sense.

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Another aspect is to fully avail of the Forest Rights Act (FRA) both for individual and community *pattas*. This will give a big boost to their ownership and expanse of the tribal territory. This must be followed by measures to enhance NTFP production. The impetus here comes by developing and using technology and methodology for productivity enhancement and for sustainable harvesting techniques. In its absence, business models on existing surplus will not be viable. Whereas all this is possible, a major challenge along the way would be to get banks to invest and lend. There is talk of setting up a National Dairy

Development Board (NDDDB)-type structure for NTFP development and marketing, which might address certain lending and technology development work. However, the experience of government-controlled and managed NTFP produce is dismal. The issue is not the architecture of the institution, although it helps to mobilize certain resources, but of the lack of vision, sagacity, smartness and clarity of purpose that stalwarts such as the Late V. Kurien demonstrated. Under NRLM, the setting up of some tussar producer companies is being envisaged. How the task is understood and the activities unfold will have immense bearing in the marketing of NTFP.

NRLM must not be in a hurry to create market linkages, to serve high value markets. Instead, it must deliver a limited agenda, based on developing the comparative advantage of the produce of such regions. It must develop regional marketplaces and foster local players, to service the market chain. It must promote

the increased circulation of money within the local economy. NRLM must take a long-term approach, to develop the potential of natural resources and the capacities of the people. Its task must be to invest, based on the interests of the tribal people, and promote enabling conditions so that the poor are able to negotiate and avail of benefits of their integration into mainstream markets. Otherwise, the poor will end up at the bottom of the market pyramid, to serve and satiate the urban market appetite.

Conceived and developed properly, the above steps and approach will enthuse and energize the local staff and the tribal leaders, to encourage active community participation. It will address some of people's fears of extraction, exploitation and extinction. It is only when the tribal representatives sit on the high table and negotiate that we can trigger off the processes for the people to successfully participate in and direct the process of inclusive growth—a key national goal.

The paradigm shift, therefore, that needs to take place is that NRLM must pursue a long-term, sustainable, people-centric approach to poverty reduction, deprivation and economic backwardness. Its strategies must aim to improve and create a fair relationship, and balance the terms of production and trade. Centre-staging development with finance as impetus has little relevance to the aspirations and the needs of the people in such areas. The rising power of finance capital and the increasing casino approach distorts development and destroys societies.

Linking with and going up the value chain must be seen in all its multiple facets. It must

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not merely aim at servicing high value markets through big corporations. It must ensure autonomy and control in the hands of the people over the production process and its products rather than the powerful market forces, especially because they are outside the state check, control or radar. For instance, growth demands that we aim for the lowest product cost but

development calls for influencing how the costs behave and the incomes are distributed, thus helping each to rise to its potential.

With few options left but to pursue the rapid growth of the Indian economy and its urgency, India is poised to aggressively penetrate the resource rich tribal areas. NRLM has multiple in-built strengths. NRLM is a mission and not a department; it has a seven-year timeframe, is led by an autonomous body headed by committed young officials, has flexibility in staffing and employs a large workforce that is young, motivated and keen to show results. It partners with village communities and institutions, and enjoys a liberal, open-ended, technical support funding from World Bank.

Promoting livelihoods is not just a simple issue of putting together resources and capacities such as human, financial, natural resources and technologies. This approach may help a select few in joining the market bandwagon to gain advantage; only a few tribal people will benefit from it. A rich and full harvest will occur only when the political economy compels markets and institutions, to fulfil democratic aspirations of a just and egalitarian society, which reaches and serves the last man, as sought by the Father of our nation.