

National Seminar on

# Rediscovering Co-operation

November 19-21, 1996

Re-lighting LAMPS: A Draft Action Plan for Revitalizing the Tribal  
Co-operatives in Karnataka

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## Re-lighting LAMPS: A Draft Action Plan for Revitalizing the Tribal Co-operatives in Karnataka

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### **Abstract**

*The current functioning of the Large-scale Adivasi Multi-Purpose Societies (LAMPS) in Karnataka are neither economically viable, socially empowering, nor ecologically sustainable. A state-level dialogue has recently been initiated to understand the problems faced by these co-operatives, and to draw up a holistic time-bound plan of policy-level and grassroots-level actions to address these problems. The result of this dialogue to date is presented in the form of a draft action plan, with specific elements addressing specific concerns within an integrated framework. We outline a step-by-step strategy for building support for this plan, and discuss how this plan, and the strategy embedded in it, address the legitimate concerns of all the stakeholders. The financial requirements for its implementation and potential sources of support are indicated briefly.*

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## **1. Introduction**

The Large-scale Adivasi Multi-Purpose Societies (LAMPS) are co-operative societies set up by the government for integrated tribal development in regions with significant tribal populations. They are generally one per taluka, and their membership is restricted to adult members of any Scheduled Tribe community. In a detailed analysis of the LAMPS in Karnataka (Lélé and Rao 1996), we had analyzed the factors leading to the dismal performance of these co-operative societies.

Our stance in carrying out this analysis was openly partisan: we were looking for ways of *meshing grass-roots development of tribal communities with sustainable forest management*. At the same time, we know our limits: we do not represent the tribal people, the activists, or the policy-makers. Hence, we embarked upon a process of dialogue and discussion at all levels. We were fortunate enough to meet committed people in the community, in the NGOs and even in the bureaucracy, who share our basic goal. This process has resulted in the Draft Action Plan for restructuring of LAMPS that is presented below. [1]

## **2. Prototype design: The "ideal" LAMPS**

The current structure of and influences on the LAMPS are depicted schematically in Figure 1. The LAMPS suffer from multiplicity of activities, too much interference and control of the Department of Co-operative Societies and other governmental agencies, limited access to the basic productive resource, and flawed internal structures such as the presence of agents and the "cheating" (sale outside LAMPS) by members.

The "ideal" situation as visualized by us today is depicted in Figure 2. The key features of this prototype are

- a) the exclusive *focus on MFP collection and marketing*, with internal credit being used only to meet cash flow needs of the collectors,
- b) the *insulation* from governmental control,
- c) clear *access and management* rights over the forest, and
- d) a *two-level structure* corresponding to the two different co-operative

activities involved, viz., forest management and MFP marketing, that need to be organised at different scales.

### **3. Policy-and Grassroots-level Actions**

Making progress towards the "ideal" LAMPS will require a number of actions at both the policy level and the grassroots/community level. We have outlined the key objectives, specific elements of these objectives and actions required to achieve them in Table 1, along with the parties primarily responsible for them and the tentative time-table for completing them.

### **4. Strategy**

The prototype and action plan outline above should not be treated as final or complete. They are the outcome of a continuous process of dialogue and discussion that seeks to involve all the stake-holders. The key steps followed in this process so far and those to be followed in the future are:

1. Detailed analysis of the "problem" by academicians, using field visits, secondary data, interviews and meetings with tribal leaders and individuals, NGOs, and government officials [July 1995-August 1996].
2. Meeting of tribal representatives, LAMPS directors, NGO representatives, and ISEC academics to discuss the problems and outline broad issues [Mysore: 22 April 1996].
3. Personal meetings by a delegation consisting of convener of state-level tribal sangha, NGO representative, and academics with key officials in Bangalore (Registrar of Co-operative Societies, Karnataka Forest Department, and Secretary (Forests)) to discuss and lobby at an individual level [Bangalore: May-July 1996].
4. Brain-storming meeting of tribal, NGO and governmental representatives to draft Action Plan [Bangalore: August 26 1996]

## *Strategies for the Models of Tomorrow*

### *Future steps planned:*

5. Circulation and discussion at the community level to generate awareness about, modify, and generate consensus on the Action Plan [September 1996].
6. Circulation and discussion of the draft Action Plan amongst KFD, RCS, DSW officials [September 1996].
7. State-level meeting of tribal representatives and NGOs with senior Governmental officials (and possibly Ministers) to approve a consensus version of the Action Plan, including sources of funding [end-September 1996].
8. Constitution of a state-level *Co-ordination Committee* with representation from all stakeholders and powers to implement the Action Plan [October 1996].
9. Recruitment/selection of facilitators/community workers necessary for on-the-ground implementation of Action Plan in selected LAMPS [November 1996].

This would be followed by the implementation of the Action Plan, with 6-monthly reviews.

### **4.1 Stakeholder Analysis**

The success of any such action plan depends critically on its ability to identify the different stakeholders, to make them feel included in the process of change, and to address their legitimate concerns, while generating sufficient political support to obviate the illegitimate ones.

Admittedly the key stakeholders are the *tribal people* themselves. Conventionally, they have been considered as a homogenous entity. However, our research has shown that various "developmental" processes, including the setting up of the LAMPS themselves, have initiated the twin (but distinct) processes of specialization and differentiation within

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the tribal community. Consequently, two different sources of opposition to the Action Plan (as currently visualized) are likely:

- a) Since the Action Plan tries to initially focus only on MFP-related activities, those tribals who have given up MFP-collection permanently but are benefiting from some other LAMPS activities (especially the disbursement of loans) are likely to oppose such restructuring
- b) In most cases of mismanagement of LAMPS, some local tribal "leaders" (Presidents, Directors, or agents) are party to the fraud or siphoning off of funds/profits. They are likely to strongly oppose any attempts to break the nexus. They will receive support from the government-appointed secretaries who stand to lose their traditional "pastures".

With respect to the former, we have indicated the need to identify alternative structures through which the flows of welfare/developmental funds (loans and grants) can continue. In the latter case, we have assumed that the tribal *sanghas* that we have contacted have sufficient political control over the tribal community to be able to marginalize the exploiters. This assumption needs to be verified, and the strategies fine-tuned.

The other stakeholders are the Department of Co-operative Societies, whose legitimate stake is the *smooth and economically viable operation* of the co-operatives, and the Karnataka Forest Department, which is concerned with *sustainable forest use and wildlife conservation*. The Action Plan seeks to address both these legitimate concerns by making the argument that smooth and economical functioning requires the simultaneous removal of governmental subsidies and controls, and that sustainable forest utilization is both *possible* and *necessary* for the long-term conservation of even designated wildlife areas.[2]

The Forest Department has also traditionally considered maximizing revenues from the forest as a legitimate objective, and many individual forest officials still subscribe to this. The National Forest Policy of 1988, however, clearly made conservation the prime goal, and also specifically mentioned the needs

of the local communities as of greater importance than revenue objectives; this will have to be used as the tool to counter revenue-oriented forest policies. In many cases, of course, ostensible revenue objectives are simply an excuse of the local forest officers to retain control over and thus extract personal "rent" in the disposal of MFP contracts and other activities. This hidden and illegitimate stake can only be fought through sustained political pressure from the bottom and the top.

## **5. Funding**

### **5.1 Budget**

We believe that even if the required policy-level changes are agreed to by the powers that be, achieving even part of the goals of the Action Plan will require sustained action at the grassroots and follow up at the policy-level. For this purpose, we are proposing that this Action Plan be thought of as a time-bound project, for which specific funds and personnel will be allocated. The funds will be used *strictly for community mobilization, organization and human resource development*, not for infrastructure, working capital, share capital, or operating expenses of the LAMPS. Professional community workers will be hired to work with 2 LAMPS each, along with an overall co-ordinator, for a period of 1 or 2 years. They will be under the operational control of the local Taluka Adivasi Sanghas, while getting general training inputs and guidance from the Coordinating Committee. Additional funds will be required for obtaining the services of specific resource persons, and for organizing training workshops, materials, and visits. The total requirement for two years is currently visualized to be about Rs.10 lakhs.

### **5.2 Sources of Funding**

We propose approaching the Departments of Social Welfare at both the State and Central levels, the Registrar of Co-operative Societies, and the Biodiversity Conservation Network (an innovative funding program under the US-Asia Environmental Partnership for enterprise-based conservation activities).

**Notes**

- [1] For a fuller understanding of the basis of this action plan, we recommend that it be read in conjunction with our analytical paper (Lélé and Rao, 1996).
- [2] It builds upon the ongoing nation-wide movement towards Joint Protected Area Management (Kothari and Rangarajan 1996).

**References**

Kothari, A. and M. Rangarajan (1996) "New directions for wildlife legislation," *Sanctuary*, 26(2), 60-63.

Lélé, S. and J. Rao (1996) "Whose co-operatives and whose produce? The case of LAMPS in Karnataka." (this volume).

**Abbreviations**

- DSW : Department of Social Welfare
- GBM : General body meeting
- ISEC : Institute for Social & Economic Change
- KFD : Karnataka Forest Department
- MFP : Minor forest produce
- NGO : Non-governmental organizations involved in tribal development
- PCCF : Principal Chief Conservator of Forests
- RCS : Registrar of Co-operative Societies
- TAS : Taluka Abhivridhi Sanghas (tribal bodies at taluka-level representing the genuine aspirations of the community)

Table 1. Plan of Action

Broad Objectives	Specific Elements	Strategy/Process	Responsibility	Schedule
A. Eliminate state control of and meddling in the cooperative	1. Phase out Departmental Secretaries	a. RCS to issue policy directives indicating withdrawal of secretary in six months and placing currently full-time secretaries in "additional charge" only	RCS	mid-Sep'96
		b. Tribals to select potential candidates (SSLC passed and aged 18-38 years) to replace secretaries	TAS + LAMPS; help from NGOs	mid-Sep'96
		c. Training of potential candidates		Sep-Dec '96
		d. Apprenticeship of potential candidates		Dec'96- Mar'97
	2. Removal of non-tribal presidents	a. Write to RCS seeking clarification	LAMPS + TAS + ISEC	Sep 1, 1996
		b. RCS to issue clarification that DFO does not have to be made president	RCS	Sep 15, '96
		c. GBMs should pass resolution opposing appointing non-tribal president	LAMPS + TAS	end-Oct '96
		d. KFD to be persuaded to withdraw DCFs/ACFs as presidents	RCS + DSW + TAS	end-Oct 96

3. Prevent nomination of outsiders (non-officials) as Directors	a.	LAMPS write to RCS requesting exemption from sec. 53(A)	LAMPS	Oct. 1996
	b.	RCS to issue exemption under sec. 121	RCS	Oct. 1996
4. Remove non-functioning ex-officio Directors	a.	GBM to amend bye-laws	LAMPS	Oct. 1996
5. Return government's contribution to share capital	a.	Build up financial reserves	LAMPS	1996-98
	b.	Create awareness of need for complete independence from govt.	TAS + NGO + ISEC	1996-98
	c.	GBM resolution proposing return of share capital	LAMPS	1998
6. Refuse/reduce channeling of government welfare activities through LAMPS	a.	Awareness building	TAS + NGOs + ISEC	Nov 30, 1996
	b.	All welfare/developmental measures to be cleared by Coordination Committee; Committee to ensure thorough consultation with tribals	RCS + DSW	Oct 15, 1996
	c.	Identify alternative structures (Panchayats, etc.) to handle welfare funds	TAS + DSW	Dec. 1996

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B. Secure rights for resource harvest	1. Obtain access to national parks	Policy-level changes will require sustained and simultaneous efforts in the form of:	LAMPS + TAS + NGOs + Academics + DSW + RCS + KFD	March '96 (?)
	2. Ensure lease in all forest areas	a. <i>Legal action</i> (for violation of existing Government Orders on leases to LAMPS)		
	3. Ensure access to all MFPS	b. <i>Dialogues</i> with Chief Wildlife Warden, PCCF and Departmental Secretaries		
	4. Lease duration min. 5 yrs	c. <i>Confrontation</i> with KFD at the grassroots		
	5. Lease amount = Re. 1/-	d. <i>Legislative action</i> at the state and national levels		
	6. Lease renewal based on joint review	e. <i>Publicity</i> through local and state-level media		
	7. Stop Permits and pass system			

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C. Ensure sustainable harvest and bottom-up forest conservation	8. Enforce exclusion prevent poaching	The process of Sustainable Management will involve: a. Setting up of Village/podu-level Forest Committees or Sanghas, demarcating areas of control b. Developing management plans c. Implementing management and monitoring results	TAS + KFD + NGOs + resource persons	
	9. Rights and responsibilities to control ecosystem processes			
	10. Rights and responsibilities to replant			
D. Increase economic incentives and performance	1. Profit is not the goal	This process will involve: a. House-to-house meetings b. podu/village-level meetings c. quarterly GBMs d. campaigning through street plays and other means e. distribution of bye-laws and other materials to all members f. training workshops g. Visits to successful co-operatives h. lots of trial & error!	LAMPS + TAS + NGOs + resource persons	1996-1998
	2. Diversion into other activities to be avoided			
	3. Increase market outreach competition			
	4. Decrease overheads			
	5. Quality sensitive pricing			
	6. Processing			
	7. Eliminate agents			

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E. Increase member participation in management	1. Enforce exclusion of non-members	a. Building awareness b. GBM resolution c. monitoring	NGOs + ISEC + TAS	1997
	2. Force members to contribute from own pocket			
F. Enhance community's management capability	1. Reduce LAMPS size	Restructure LAMPS as a two-level organization: a taluka-level federation and village-level cooperative sanghas	RCS	1997-98
	2. Training in Accounts, Marketing, Extraction, Processing	Training workshops at local level, hands-on experimentation, emphasis on learning-by-doing with facilitator to review lessons so learnt	TAS + NGOs + RCS	
	3. Awareness of laws, concepts, and practical possibilities			
	4. Transparency	a. Simplifying accounting procedure (single entry system) b. Open display of monthly transactions, stocks and bye-laws c. Frequent GBMs		

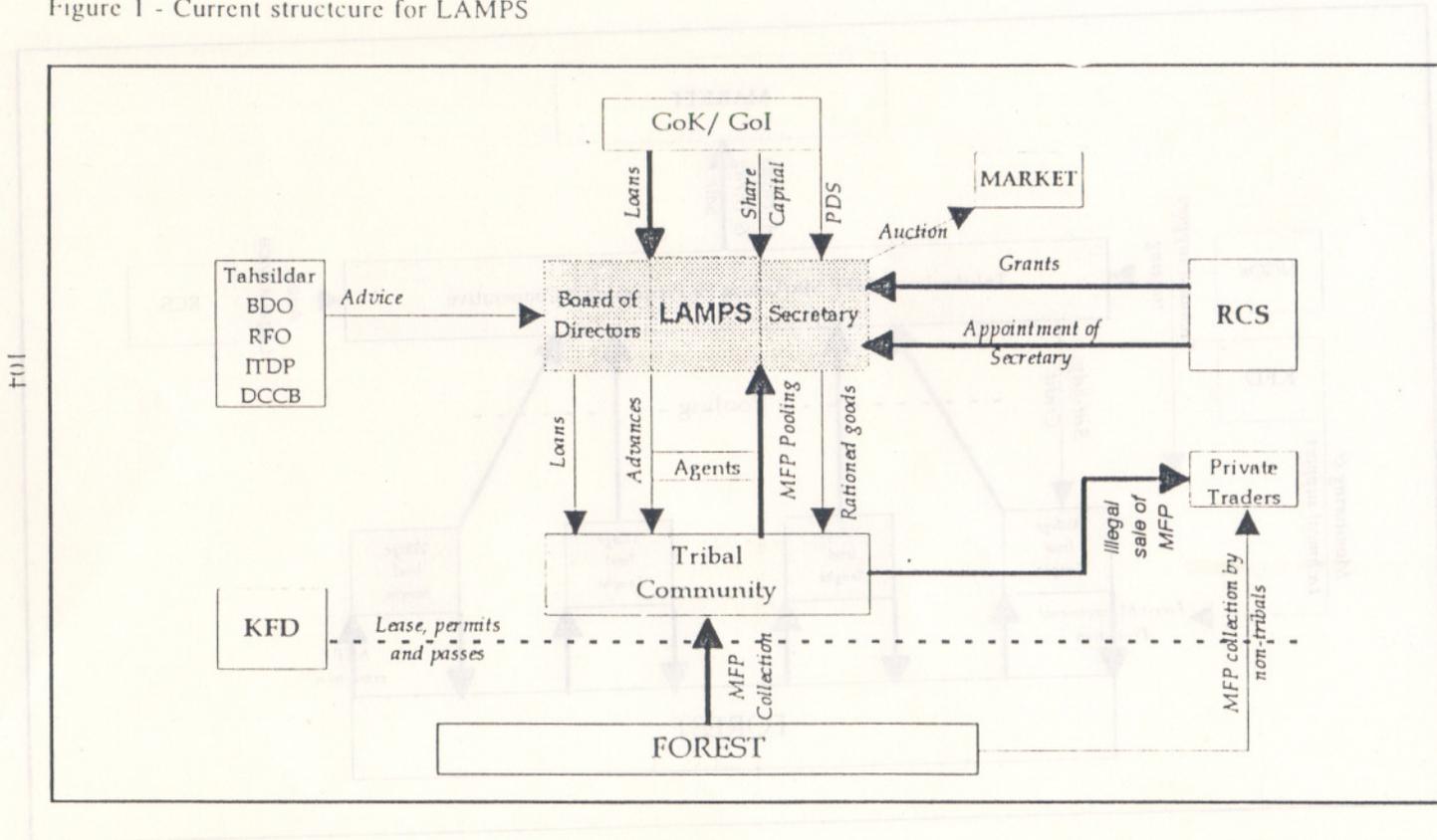
Note: 'ISEC' is used to represent interested academics of ISEC, not to indicate any official involvement of the academic organisation as a whole.

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Figure 1 - Current structure for LAMPS



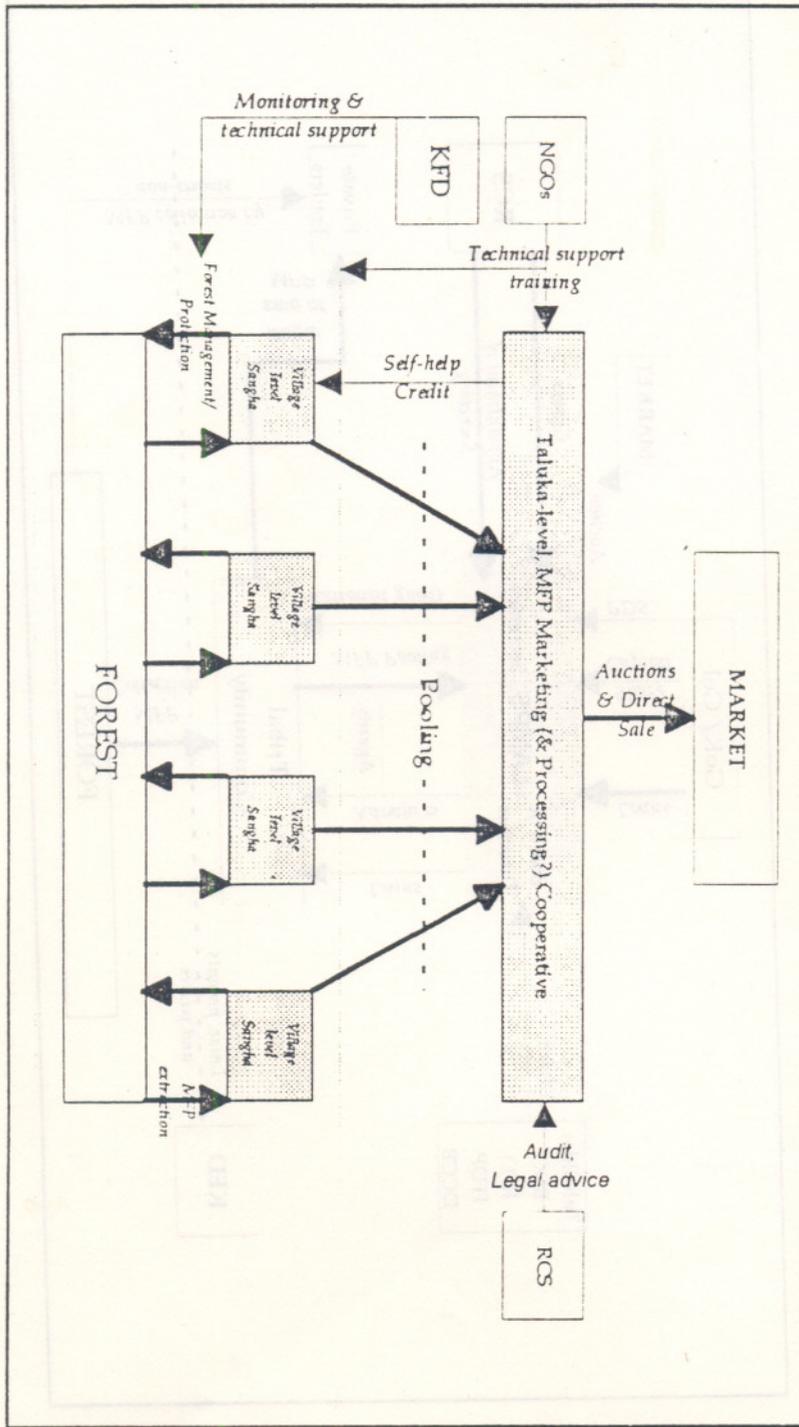


Figure 2 - Proposed structure for LAMPs