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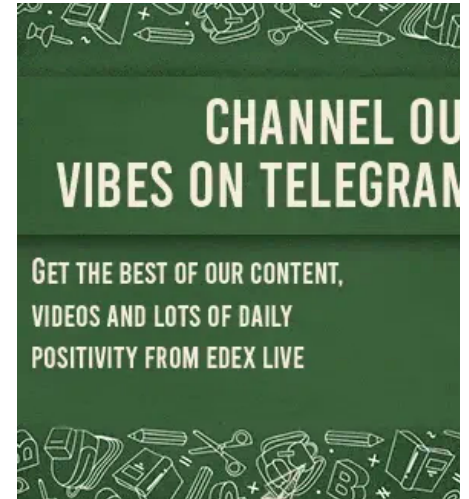
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Our Forest Dream might be a children's book, but it does a swell job in educating even adults about the Forest Rights Act

Ideated and written by the good folk at Nilgiris Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups' Federation, the book *Our Forest Dream* is now finally available in English as well. We find out what it's about



Seema Rajpal
Edex Live



With the book (Pic: N. P. V. G. F. D.)

To truly understand the power of a book, all one needs to do is look at the English book, *Our Forest Dream*, launched on December 1, 2020. At the onset, it might seem like a simple book about a conversation between a grandmother and a granddaughter, but it's actually about The Scheduled Tribes and Other Traditional Forest Dwellers (Recognition of Forest

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TRIBES and Other Traditional Forest Dwellers (Recognition of Forest Rights) Act, 2006 — simply known as the Forest Rights Act, 2006 (FRA). It is an important piece of legislation which balanced the right to environment and right to livelihood of the marginalised adivasis dependent on the forests. More so, this is a children's book targetted at both children and adults, as the Nilgiris Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups' Federation (N-PVTGFED) intended it to be.

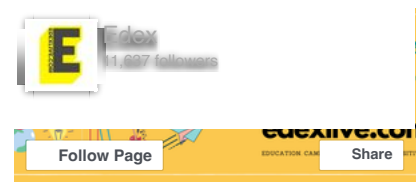
Functioning in Gudalur, a taluk in the Nilgiris district of Tamil Nadu, N-PVTGFED, since its inception in 2014, has been working on implementing welfare schemes for adivasis and have shifted focus to making them aware about FRA. Sobha Madhan, District Coordinator, N-PVTGFED joined the organisation in 2016 after working for La Via Campesina, a global movement of small-scale food producers. "Some of the first things I noticed was that there was hardly any forest area left, it was all just tea estates or cash crops. Then there was the fact that the adivasis were not aware of FRA and what they were entitled to under it," she said. Sobha visited various groups to get her assessment right, from the women who used to run a café in Theppakadu Elephant Camp to forest dwellers in Kanyakumari. "All they were aware of was that they can collect firewood and some other forest products. Hence, I was further motivated to spread awareness about FRA. Thus, *Our Forest Dream* was conceptualised," she shares.



Children with the book | (Pic: N-PVTGFED)

In September 2019, *Our Forest Dream* was released in Tamil. But we couldn't help but wonder, why a children's book? "Whatever we learn, we learn from our elders. The culture, tradition, language... everything. So we envisioned this book as a conversation between two generations that has the power to keep everyone from children to the elderly engaged. Even if they can't read, the illustrations are arresting and self-explanatory," explains Sobha, who also heads the Adivasi Youth Forum (AYF). Also, in the 24-25 villages where they conduct evening schools, it is easier for the team to distribute the book and children can carry forward the conversation with their parents at home. The book itself is an amalgamation of the past, present and future of how adivasis lost their lands, how their activities don't harm the environment and so on. That the adivasis are currently isolated from their nature of living in the forest, how they are not landholders anymore and are in turn dependent on what government gives them and how they can reclaim their rights via the FRA are also strongly spoken about via the book.

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This book was translated into English, Malayalam, Odia, Kannada, Bengali and the English version was released recently. "It was so much easier to just distribute the book and then start conversations around FRA. When we distributed it in Velamur, they called us to their Gram Sabhas and discussed the book further with them" points out Sobha.

Along with the book, four songs were also released, which was co-launched by Adivaasi Drishyam. Expect six more songs to release. And the book itself, which was compiled by the team N-PVTGFED, is doing its bit to further their cause.

For more on them, check out n-pvtgfed.org

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