

# Issues Related to the Management of Minor Forest Produce and Possible Solutions

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## Abstract

Minor forest produce has great significance for forest dwellers in terms of livelihood dependency. These are a major source of income for people residing in scheduled and tribal areas and the areas near to it. The marketing system of MFP has resulted in the exploitation of the people who are dependent on forests for their income. There are several issues related to the management of minor forest produce like issues related to collection, procurement, processing and marketing etc. Government has taken many initiatives to deal with these issues at various levels. Some of the states like MP have prepared the roadmap to utilize and protect the minor forest produce in the larger interest of community and environment.

**Keywords:** Scheduled areas, aboriginals, joint forest management committee, PESA

To understand what is minor forest produce it is imperative to know about the scheduled areas and tribal areas. As per the article 244 (1) of the constitution of India Scheduled areas are discussed and defined in the 5<sup>th</sup> Schedule of the constitution. The 6<sup>th</sup> schedule of the constitution deals with the tribal areas of northeastern states namely Assam, Tripura, Meghalaya, and Mizoram under article 244 (2). The administration and control of the scheduled and tribal area is mentioned in the 5<sup>th</sup> schedule of constitution of India expect Four above-mentioned north-eastern states.

In these scheduled areas 'Aboriginals' or Indigenous people reside. They are socially and educationally backward. Regarding this area president of India holds the power. President can declare an area as scheduled area. After consulting the governor of the state president can change or reduce the border of a scheduled area. This area falls under

the responsibility of both center and the state. To manage the administration of the area the governor of the state sends a report to the president about the development and functioning machineries and center provides directions to states regarding the administration of scheduled area. For all those states that are having a scheduled area, it is mandatory to setup an advisory council. This council is formed with twenty members in it.

Whereas as discussed earlier the 6<sup>th</sup> schedule deals with the provisions related to the tribal areas in four north eastern states. Tribal areas in these four states are known as 'Autonomous Districts'. However, the executive control of the area stays with the state. The autonomous and regional council of the area has power to make laws concerned with land,

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water of canals, forest areas, shifting cultivation, administration of villages, inheritance rights, various customs of society etc. However, these laws could be made only with assent of governor of the state. With the aim of development of tribal communities in India central government formed a high-level committee to look into the matter under the chairmanship of Prof Virginius Xaxa which was known as Xaxa committee.

One major concern of committee was to focus on the livelihood of people living in these areas. To analyze what are the ways available to them for a sustainable life. What are the means of employment available to them, what their traditional economic practices, how much the community participate in these in available economic activities. Minor forest produce is one way of economic activity in these areas. It includes various non-timber products like bamboo and various other types of grasses, different roots of plants both edible and to be used for medicinal purpose, plants of different categories, flowers, waxes, numerous leaves, many dyes, fodder etc.

Significance of minor forest produce has been there since very earlier times. For example, at the time of Mauryan rule or empire a Kupyadhyaksha was to be appointed. Which happens to be a superintendent for forest produce. His major work was to categorize the minor forest products herbs to be used for medicinal purpose, bamboo, various fiber rich plants, to collect poisonous snakes etc. The categorization of forest produce into 'major' and 'minor' is determined by their value in monetary terms. Initially the main objective of managing the forest was to get timber and woods for fuel. Because of this reason these two are categorized as the major forest produce. All other forest produce other than major products are categorized as minor produce. The revenue of government from major produce were high as compared to minor produce. However, over the period with changing scenarios the significance of minor produced increased.

These minor forest products are a major source of income of people residing in scheduled and tribal areas and the areas near to it. It provides people a way to lead a sustainable life. Minor produces help in generate fair income to people as these are used in various industries such food processing, medical and various consumable and commerce industries. In a recent initiative by government to encourage

the development of scheduled and tribal areas it has amended the MSP (Minimum Support Price) of the minor forest produce. The objective of this initiative is to provide a security to these products from the volatile counter prices which occur because of numerous market factors like not having enough production, inconsistency into the supply side, poor market integration etc. Some of the major points to the minor forest produce and the initiative are:

1. Ministry of Tribal Affairs has the power to revise the minimum support price of the products. They do it in every three years. There is a range between which the MSP increases. This range is 16 percent to 66 percent.
2. This initiative during Covid-19 pandemic was much appreciated by the communities of scheduled and tribal areas. This revised MSP enhances the trust of people residing in these areas into the union government and also provides an opportunity to the region to participate in mainstream development process.
3. Center has directed the state governments to fasten the process of procurement of products. For speedy implementation the state governments have appointed agents to procure the products. These agents are known as VAN DHAN. They procure the minor forest produce from the local *haat bazaars*.

Minor Forest produce are an important source of livelihood for people, who live in or near forest. Several communities draw their subsistence and cash income from MFP, as it constitutes a major part of their food, medicine, fodder and other diverse uses. Minor forest produce is all non-timber forest produce of plant origin which includes bamboo, Tendu leaves, Lac, Honey, medicinal plants etc. Around 50 percent of the forest revenues and 70 percent of forest-based export income of the country comes from MFP. In terms of income, input, 35 percent of the income of tribal households in India generates from the action of unprocessed MFP. Tribals derive maximum of their annual income from MFP (Rao, 1987).

Minor forest produce, in general, plays a very significant role into day-to-day life of people

because these products are used by everyone in daily life. Apart from this few produce are used by government to get fair amount of revenue by exporting them. The minor forest produce is very crucial for the forest dwellers as it is the only way through which forest dwellers sustain their livelihood by making income. Various amendments have been done by the governments in the laws concerning the minor forest produce. Government is talking initiatives to bring the forest dwellers into mainstream process of development by providing them adequate opportunities for income.

Minor forest produce sector has the potential to create about 10 million working days annually in the country. It is usually found that the weaker and poor sections of the society are more depended upon the NTFPS as a source of livelihood. Developing countries are the major producers and exporters of the MFPs. A major share of the minor forest produce originates from the south east Asian countries. For unprocessed MFP the trade flow is generally from developing countries to developed countries, In India about 400 million people are dependent on MFP for sustainable and supplemental income (Trifed).

Forest rights Act, which was enacted in 2007, recognizes and vests individual forest dwellers with forest rights to live in and cultivate forest land that was occupied before 13 Dec 2005. It grants community forest rights to manage, protect and regenerate the forests under section 3(1) they have a right to Own and dispose minor forest products from forest where they had traditional access.

Section 3 (1) of the forest rights Act 2006 defines forest rights as inclusive of 'Right of ownership, access to collect, use and dispose of minor forest produce which have been traditionally been collected within or outside village boundaries. This implies that individual and communities with gram Sab has will not only have the rights to use but also rights of ownership over MFPs under this section of the Act, (Forest Rights Act 2007).

After the passing of Panchayats Extension to scheduled areas Act, PESA in 1996 and the forest rights Act FRA 2006, the state governments are working towards the transfer of ownership of MFPs to forest dwellers.

Forest dwellers face a lot of problems in collecting, processing and sale of minor forest produce. The marketing system of the MFP had a lot of imperfections, which resulted in the exploitation of the forest dwellers. So, in some of the states, cooperative federations have taken over the collection and trade of minor forest produce with an objective to eliminate the defections of the system and to protect the rights of forest dwellers. Here we will take up the case study of Madhya Pradesh.

In terms of forest Madhya Pradesh is a rich state and it ranks 1st among the states in India as far as recorded forest area is concerned. A major part of state's population, which includes tribal and people from rural area, sustain their livelihood from forest produce. It also fulfills their basic needs of day-to-day life. There are 5 different types of forests in Madhya Pradesh and these five types are further categorized into 21 sub type forests (Champion & Seth, 1968). Madhya Pradesh is one of the leading states to implement the 'Joint Forest Management' (JFM) movement in India. Not only implementation but the state has developed a very robust JFM network through 15,228 Joint Forest Management Committee/Van Samrakshana Samiti/Eco-Development Committees.

This movement covers 66,874 sq kilo meter of area. In Madhya Pradesh, MP Minor Forest Produce Cooperative Federation limited (MFPCFL) was set up in 1984 with the vision of providing profits to forest dwellers in collection and trade of MFP. With the assistance of Primary Forest Produce Co-operative Societies the federation harmonizes the task of collection processing and marketing of minor forest produce such as sal seed, kullu gum, tendu leaves etc. The scientific harvesting in the forest and its regeneration is being done by the Madhya Pradesh Rajya Van Vikas Nigam Ltd. Tendu leaves collection provides employment to at least 75 lakh leaf pluckers. MP produces the largest volume of tendu leaves in the country. Also, rich forest of the state provides it an edge to fully utilize the benefits of forest produce both in favor of the community and the society.

"Based on the interpretation of IRS Resourcesat-2 LISS III satellite data of the period October 2017 to January 2018, the Forest Cover in the State is 77,482.49 sq km which is 25.14 % of the State's

geographical area. In terms of forest canopy density classes, the State has 6,676.02 sq km under Very Dense Forest (VDF), 34,341.40 sq km under Moderately Dense Forest (MDF) and 36,465.07 sq km under Open Forest (OF). Forest Cover in the State has increased by 68.49 sq km as compared to the previous assessment reported in ISFR 2017” (Forest Survey of India report, 2019).

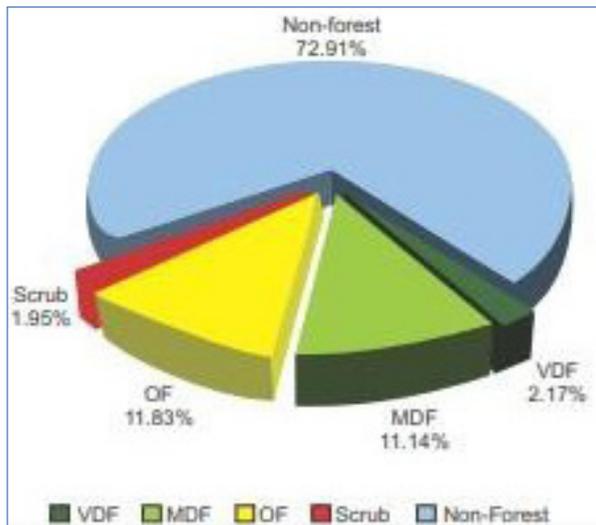


Fig. 1: Forest cover of Madhya Pradesh

Table 1: Forest cover of Madhya Pradesh (in sq. km)

Class	Area	% of GA
VDF	6,676.02	2.17
MDF	34,341.40	11.14
OF	36,465.07	11.83
<b>Total</b>	<b>77,482.49</b>	<b>25.14</b>
Scrub	6,001.91	1.95

Source: Forest survey of India (India state of forest report 2019).

All central Indian states have nationalized tendu leaves to enhance the income of tendu leaf pluckers and to control its trade. The MP government had introduced a model, in which a three-tiered federation of cooperative was set up to procure and process the marketing of minor forest produce. After the passing of panchayats (Extension to scheduled areas) Act PESA in 1996 and the Forest Rights Act FRA 2006, the state governments are working to transfer the ownership of MFPs to forest dwellers.

NTFP have been a major fascinating subject in the national and international literature for being a source of livelihood of a very large forest dependent population. However, when one looks into the

dynamics of NTFP collection and trade it is common practice except in case of certain nationalized products where there are state interventions in organizing the collection and in facilitation of marketing, in most other cases it is free for all with scant regard for carrying capacity and degree of collection. Rural development schemes have been placing emphasis on Income Generation Activities (IGA) based on the local resources such as fishery, poultry, and many others. Formation of SHGs is a pre-requisite for the success of IGA based on these resources (International Herbal Fair Magazine, 2012).

### Steps taken by Government to regulate the activities related to Minor forest produce

Following are the characteristics through which income generation activities would be governed by states:

1. Uniqueness of the product or services available in the state: The states in central India are recognized for providing most congenial physical and ecological settings for rich biodiversity. Along with various minor forest produce bamboo grows gregariously and establishes fast to be available for harvesting in less than 10 years. Further, there are many bamboo clumps found growing by farmers in the state. Broom grass various medicinal plants are other sources of rich biodiversity of the region.
2. Abundance of resources in terms of production potential and financial values: Most of the central part still account for more than 2/3<sup>rd</sup> of the total medicinal plants and other useful NTFPs of the country. With proper management of existing wild resources and annual augmentation plan at JFMC level could ensure the sustainability of resources. This subject is gradually receiving attention through working plan prescriptions and schemes like PPAs However, for the success of schemes it is necessary to reduce the gap between field implementation and rhetoric.
3. Marketing potential and ready buyers for the products: Owing to central location and recognition as medicinal plant rich

biodiversity area the states are well placed to attract buyers from different parts of country. However, there is a need to assist the communities to organize themselves in collection of non-nationalized non timber forest produce and their marketing.

4. Little or no competition from the other states: The states of central India are well placed for quality products and therefore, face no or little competition. Looking to the ever-growing demands of industry these states have no problem in selling their products at reasonable price.
5. Comparatively easy processing and value addition techniques are required: The most important 5-6 NTFPs which were been mentioned in this section are such which don't require sophistication in processing. Comparatively, simple training can make the local communities skilled in production of good quality products.
6. Quick return on products; both raw and processed materials fetch good returns: Most of the products collected in these areas required simple processing techniques. The primary processing may include grading, cleaning, washing, drying, depulping, powdering etc. simple machines or manually at household level many of these things could be done which may result into manyfold remunerative price. The facilities of Common Community Facility Centre (CCFCs) can be created between 2-3 JFMCs at an estimated cost of ₹ 10 lakhs. These CCFCs could be provided with the facility of oil extraction, rolling of incense stick, processing of broom grass, solar drying, repulping and other such facilities.
7. There are existing market networks-middlemen, traders and large-scale purchasers: Markets are coming closer to people through state MFP Federations. With the economic potential of products and well-established quality standards the NTFPs of these states are getting good acceptance in the markets outside the states. The network of traders is being accessed by MFP Federations and even by some of the JFMCs.
8. Villagers know the products but were not organized earlier: Joint Forest Management Committees have been oriented for resource regeneration, sustainable harvesting, and processing. Hand holding support for marketing has also been provided by MFP Federation. Many villagers knew of these products (but in many cases they were not aware about the potential) but were not organized to undertake these activities on trade-scale. The project has shown the possibility of business development; The community groups (SHGs) are coming together to take the advantage of new opportunities coming their ways based on what they already have in their surroundings.
9. Threats for resource decline is minimized due to existing schemes to augment resources and people have understanding for resource augmentation: The economics returns to communities is also creating a sense of responsible management and use which has often been a matter of academic interest. Invariably the access to resources and entitlements empowerment has often led to the irresponsible practices and consequently destruction of resources. The orientation of communities through FGDs during demonstration on plantation techniques, sustainable harvesting and processing is having a positive impact on NTFP gatherers and JFMC members.
10. Champions and among forest staff, JFMCs and facilitating institutions: The project activity to promote sustainable livelihood development through management of NTFPs is throwing up local leaderships. Champions are gradually coming to the fore and around them the livelihood clusters are coming up. Individuals and Institutions are assisting all these operations.

*(International Herbal fair Magazine, 2012).*

MP minor Forest Produce cooperative Federation Limited is playing important role in protecting the rights of forest dwellers. MPFED has worked in transacting the business of MFP through its three-tiered structure.

There were problems faced by the forest dwellers before the creation of MPFED in collection and marketing of MFP directly with the traders.

There are some limitations and constraints of MPFED in assuring the rights of forest dwellers. Procurement and marketing of MFP through cooperative Federation Limited is in line and spirit of Panchayats Extension to scheduled areas Act PESA (1996) and Forest Rights Act 2006.

For effective functioning of such organizational structure its important to remove such limitations in order to have an impact on policy formulation of MFP sector in long run. This study assesses the role of MP minor Forest Produce cooperative Federation Limited in the collection and marketing of minor forest produce for the benefit of forest dwellers.

Since 1988 the role of so called non timber or MFP has gained a renewed significance in discussion of forest policy in India, Joint Forest Management (JFM) agreements which encourage the participation of forest dependent people in programmes to restore forest cover on degraded lands, form the basis of new strategy. The state has promoted access to NTFPs as a major short-term incentive offered by forest departments to encourage villagers to contribute to this process.

The forest dwellers mainly belong to tribal communities. Despite the globalization of the world's economy and the rise of industry, NWFPs still remains an important source of income for hundreds of millions of rural livelihoods. NWFP have been welfare, subsistence and livelihood commodity since long and are traditional source of food, fiber medicine etc. for the forest dwellers. One other study highlighted that tendu leaves were estimated to provide employment nearly to 4 million people (Sharma 2012).

There have been increasing trends in the trade of forest products of MFP. Increasing trade in forest products has supported economic growth and has helped in reducing poverty in several emerging countries. There is strong evidence that forest products play a significant role in the livelihood of the world's rural poor. Forest products are the main source of income for the forest dwelling population in many countries.

There is a need to understand the production and trade status of forest production and to explore how

these products can be used in an improved way to reduce poverty.

A related issue is value addition: An attempt needs to be made to capture as much value addition as possible at the level of the primary collectors. The NTFP Supply chains are unduly long and primary collectors get only a fraction of the price paid by the consumers.

Over regulation impedes enterprise development: There is over regulation in case of several NTFPs especially those that are commercially important. In MP all farmers growing bamboo in natural bamboo districts have to register themselves with the federation. One of the biggest bottlenecks for the development of NTFP based enterprise is the transit permit requirement for many products. The issuance of the transit permit can take upon 30 days as in the case of tendu leaves in MP (Gauraha 1992).

There is a need for holistic planning, along the supply chain as many primary collectors and local traders are unaware about the end use of NTFP they collect. They do not follow correct collection and storage methods and consequently marketability of their products suffers.

Several NTFPs have been nationalized with the time objectives of preventing over exploitation of resources and safeguarding the interest of primary collectors and local communities.

Sustainable NTFP management is critical for livelihoods.

It is important that NTFPs are sustainably managed: There is a need to assess production potential as well as current extraction levels of various NTFPs, similarly there is a need to assess current collection and management techniques. The NTFP management decisions should be based on scientific studies (Sharma 2012).

Sale or barter simply because of lack of alternative employment opportunities, especially during the lean agriculture season exists. Unless this issue of low remuneration is tackled it will be difficult to address poverty through the NTFP route.

The agency setting the procurement rate should ensure that the collectors can at least earn the official minimum wage. The collectors need to be trained in proper collection, grading and storage techniques. They often lose a significant proportion of potential

income due to poor techniques employed. An attempt should be made to end the exploitative credit linkages, barter and measurement system in NTFP trade through education of primary collectors and provisions of alternative.

The subject of forest has been much discussed by ecologists in the past decade or so, mainly because of the large-scale degradation faced all over the world. It is very recently that the academician and social workers have brought the problem of tribal Rights and their dependence on forests to the fore.

In recent years there has been much talk about the rapid denudation of green cover of the geographical area of our land. Concern is expressed over the environment pollution, ecological imbalance, soil erosion etc. by various experts in various fields. Preservation and expansion of forest cover are advocated both as preventive and curative measures to eradicate all these problems (Bhattacharya, 2004).

Being aware of the situation, the central government, and the state governments have substantially stepped up the spending on forest development.

The inter relationship between the forest dwellers and the forests may be studied through various angles, such as income and employment generation through social forestry, evaluation of forest dwellers welfare schemes, impact of MFP cooperative societies, cost benefit analysis of forest development corporations, marketing of forest produce etc.

Minor forest produce have great significance in subsistence and livelihood of forest dwellers. Traditionally lot of problems have been faced by forest depended communities in processing the marketing of MFP. Government has taken up many steps specifically through state cooperative federation limited which has resulted in great success. There is a need to remove the constraints in the functioning of cooperative federations to yield better results.

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