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## MINOR FOREST PRODUCTS AS A SOURCE OF LIVELIHOOD OPTION FOR FOREST DWELLERS

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### ABSTRACT

*Minor forest products (MFPs) have attracted considerable global attention due to the significant role played in benefiting people and industries. It is a well-established fact that most tribals and villagers who live in forest regions depend on MFPs as the source of their livelihood. In this context, we present here the role of stakeholders, viz. industry, and society and government agencies in ensuring the livelihood options of MFPs gatherers.*

**Keywords:** Forest dwellers, livelihood, Minor forest produce, rural economy.

### Introduction

DURING the past decades, public interest in natural therapy, namely herbal medicines has increased dramatically not only in developing countries but also in developed nations. In India, approximately 9,500 licensed herbal industries and a multitude of unregistered herbal units depend upon the continuous supply of medicinal plants for manufacturing of herbal formulations. In addition to industrial consumption, significant quantities of medicinal plant resources are consumed by traditional healers and practitioners of the Indian system of medicine. It is estimated that more than 2,400 traditional higher plant species are used in the codified Indian system of medicine and Western medicine system. The World Health Organization report indicates that more than 80 percent of the population of South Asia uses plant based medicines for maintaining and improving its health. People have assistance from

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these plants for many generations. Minor Forest Products (MFPs) have played a significant role in progressive growth in benefiting people and Indian industries. MFPs as defined by FAO refer to market or subsistence goods for human and industrial consumption derived from renewable forest resources and biomass. They include fruits, seeds, resins, medicinal plants, lac, honey and other by products which are renewable unlike several other finite resources like petroleum. In addition to healthcare sector, MFPs have wider industrial application value. Uses of *Terminalia* species in tanneries, non-edible vegetable oils derived from *Pongamia* species and *Celastrus paniculatus* are a few examples. Collection of leaves from *Diospyros* species used as tobacco alternative by means of beedi rolling has been one of the largest operations of MFP collection in many states of India.

### **Review of Literature**

(Calixto, 2000) This review highlights the current advances in knowledge about the safety, efficacy, quality control, marketing and regulatory aspects of botanical medicines. Phototherapeutic agents are standardized herbal preparations consisting of complex mixtures of one or more plants which contain as active ingredients plant parts or plant material in the crude or processed state.

(Debbie, 1998) Found these remedies safe when compared with orthodox medicine, but there are areas of concern. The constituents of Chinese herbal medicines are often crude, and we have assisted doctors by identifying the herbal material and providing toxicity information and general background information on Chinese medicine. We have tried to bring together data that will enable patients and practitioners to make a good risk/benefit assessment before using any herbal or traditional medicine, and have provided support in the evaluation of adverse reactions. Regulation of products may be best achieved by introduction of a separate regulatory category taking into account that herbal remedies are not truly foods but are also distinct from pharmaceuticals. Such a category, requiring all herbal products to comply with a single set of quality standards before being marketed, would substantially reduce the sale of poor-quality products and those with potentially toxic constituents.

(FAO, 1991) Non-wood forest products (NWFP), as used in this report, refers to market or subsistence goods and services for human or industrial consumption derived from renewable forest resources and biomass, bearing promise for augmenting real rural household incomes and employment. The products include the use of plants for food, forage, fuel, medicine, fiber, biochemical, as well as animals, birds, reptiles and fishes for food, fur and feathers.

Wood used for handicrafts is included, as are services derived from the standing forest that generate such benefits as tourism revenues and preservation of biodiversity.

(National Medicinal Plants Board Department of AYUSH, Ministry of Health and Family Welfare Govt. of India, 2009) in his report regarding Guidelines on good field collection practices for Indian medicinal plants:

**International regulation and guidelines:** Provisions lay down in the CITES regulations must be adhered to while collecting any medicinal plant produce from the wild. In case the medicinal plant produce is meant for export, existing laws of the importing country must be honored. Besides the regulatory authorities in the country of import, local secretariats of CITES, IUCN and TRAFFIC International may be consulted for such laws and regulations.

**National regulations:** Government of India, from time to time, has enacted various Acts to ensure conservation and sustainable use of wild resources including medicinal plants. Indian Forest Act 1927, The Wildlife (Protection) Act 1972, The Forest (Conservation) Act 1980, The Biological Diversity Act 2002, The Scheduled Tribes and Other Traditional Forest-Dwellers (Recognition of Forest Rights) Act 2006 contain provisions related to collection, transit and trade of medicinal plant produce. Collectors and collection managers must keep themselves updated about the provisions in such Acts, Rules and amendments made from time to time and must abide by the conditions laid down in them. In addition to the Acts and Rules, collectors should also be aware about Export-import policy and the negative list of export, brought out from time to time by Govt. of India in order to comply with the provisions laid down in such policy documents

**Local regulations:** Majority of the States in India have additional laws enacted and enforced for regulating removal and use forest resources. Some of the examples are – The Madhya Pradesh Sustainable Harvesting Act 2005, The Andhra Pradesh Red Sanders Wood Possession Rules 1989, The HP Forest Produce Transit (Land Routes) Rules, 1977, The Tamil Nadu Sandalwood Transit Rules, 1967, and The Maharashtra Forest Produce (Regulation of Trade) Act, 1969. Further most of the states in India have modified Indian Forest Act 1927, to recommend the regional intricacies and necessities of conservation and utilization of wild resources. Collectors/collection managers should be aware of such regulation governing the collection, transit and sale of the medicinal plant produce applicable at the time of such activity in the given area and should abide by the rules therein.

**Permission for collections:** Wherever the provision requires, collectors/collection managers should take prior written permission from the authorized agency for collection, possession, transit and sale of the medicinal plant produce. The documentary proof of such permissions

must be kept in safe custody. Such medicinal plant produce, when traded, must be accompanied by appropriate documentation in accordance with the laws.

(Ved and Goraya, 2007) The study, in view of the growing interest in herbal products, emphasizes upon the need for periodic assessment of such demand and supply studies, so that resource management strategies and policy interventions could be suitably modified in view of any changes in the demand pattern. A triennial national level assessment of demand and supply and a template for such periodic studies has also been suggested.

### **Objective of the Study**

1. To study the role of minor forest produce in livelihood of forest dwellers.
2. To study the role of society, Herbal industries and Government Agencies in livelihood of forest dwellers.
3. To study the supply chain of minor forest produce in Anuppur District.
4. To study the contribution of minor forest produce in local economy.

### **Contribution of MFP to Rural and Local Economy**

MFPs have attracted considerable global attention in recent years due to increase in recognition of their contribution to household economies and food security. MFPs can provide important community needs for improved rural livelihood, household food security, local and regional economies. Several million households all around the world depend heavily on MFP for both sustenance and regular income. Although individually MFPs make a minor contribution, collectively they often represent a larger proportion of the rural economy and can add significantly to export revenues. India is an agriculture focused country where 70 percent of its population lives in rural areas; for tribals this is as high as 92 percent. It is a well-known fact that most tribals live in forest regions and their livelihood is either partly or fully derived from gathering from forests. Forest gatherers include, in addition to tribals, forest dwellers, women and other marginalized groups. Most of the botanicals are sourced from the natural growth found in the nearby forests, shrub lands, waste lands and field sides. Forest-based small-scale enterprise represents an opportunity for employment for rural, tribal and marginalized groups which are based mainly upon the collection and processing of MFP.

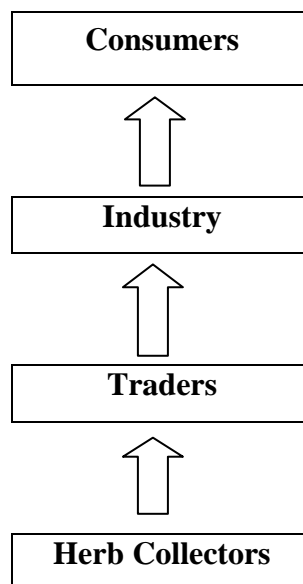


Figure 1.Relationship between MFP collectors, traders, industry and consumers

### **MFP Collectors form an Important Stratum of the Value**

Forest gatherer communities who rely on MFPs for their livelihood are often poorly organized. Sometimes they have great difficulty in selling MFPs even at local markets. It requires marketing sophistication, and an institutional and administrative infrastructure that is far beyond their reach. Most MFPs are by products or end products such as seeds, fruits and leaves which will go waste if not collected at the appropriate time. By promoting collection by gatherers we not only assure their income, but also allow proper utilization of MFPs. There are systematic efforts towards implementation of quality, safety of herbal products and conservation, cultivation and resource management. However, little has been done at the level of MFP gatherers who form the mainstay of environment management and herbal industry. Focusing on and promoting their livelihood options not only improves the economic status but also prevents further degradation of land and helps maintain forest cover. Income generated by MFP gatherers is bare enough to meet their needs. The price paid to gatherers for MFP collection is often very low. The gatherers often mine the plants extremely to generate more income. For forest collection labour and time are invested. However, for MFP gatherers investment of time and labour is never returned proportionately. They are the people who live ‘on the edge’. Till recent times, there have been ambiguities with reference to their rights or ownership on the resource. However, the enactment of Recognition of Forest Rights Act, 2006 (No. 2 of 2007; The Gazette of India, Extraordinary, Part-II, Section-I Dated 2 January 2007) was the first milestone in clarifying their rights over the forest produce. Yet, there have been issues in its implementation. These issues were resolved by the

amendments to the related rules through a recent notification (The Gazette of India; Extraordinary, Part-II-Section 3(i) dated 6 September 2012). Accordingly, the Gramsabhas have been empowered to assign the forest resources to the dependent communities.

### **Models Implemented for the Welfare of MFP Gatherers**

Recently, the Central Government had announced the constitution of minimum support price (MSP) commission for forest produce to fix assured price to tribals, which is a welcome move. This is similar to MSP for agricultural produce. In order to establish long-term market linkages, aggressive buying of MFPs by state agencies, cooperative agencies, NGOs, Girijan cooperatives or producer companies is recommended. But government agencies should have sufficient mechanisms to dispose the collected MFPs; otherwise it might lead to wastage. In this case, the government can consider collaboration with socially committed private sectors. While price level interventions as a welfare measure seem to be a workable option, enforcement of such interventions may remain an issue. On the other hand, promotion and strengthening of producer companies and collectors cooperatives can augment the opportunities for local value addition by the community.

Further, production of non-edible oils and primary extraction of dye-yielding species by the producer companies, collector's cooperatives, offer sufficient opportunities to increase the economic returns to the collectors' communities. There are several producer companies and cooperative federations that are supporting organized MFP trading. CGMFPPED has a scheme to share 80% of profit from MFP trading as incentive wages to collectors of tendu leaves, 15% for collection, sale and the warehousing and the remaining 5% for temporary reimbursement of costs to Societies. CGMFPPED has nationalized certain MFP for organized trading. Structured trading has led to proper payment of collection prices to the herb collectors and sustainable harvesting from forest areas. However, while deciding the price for MFP, the policy makers need to evolve the basis for arriving at a 'fair price'. This should ideally be based on particular species-wise studies conducted on the cost incurred in sustainable scientific collection. Under the Biological Diversity Act 2002, India, it is required to ensure practical and sustainable utilization of the bio-resources. The need of the hour is to work on the improvement in collection practices in line with the Standards for Good Field Collection Practices (GFCP) as stipulated by the Quality Council of India. This process must be followed by assessment of cost involved in practicing the same. A suitable margin can then be added to the cost incurred for arriving at the fair price.

### **Role of Stakeholders in Supporting Livelihood Options of MFP Gatherers:**

Educating MFP gatherers is a priority issue. Ignorance of gatherers about plant biology and selective harvesting might lead to over exploitation. For example, collection of immature plant parts might lead to reduction in quality of raw material and subsequently its wastage. Similarly, quality of raw material reduces due to collection and accidental mixing of foreign material along with the material of interest. According to the authors' estimate, 20–50% loss can occur due to presence of soil, sand, mud, foreign material and excess moisture and having no storage facility. One of the factors is the lack of knowledge in collection practices and timing of harvesting. These issues can be sorted out through periodic training programmes. Proper training on scientific methods of collection can be impacted by stakeholders. Such awareness programmes not only improve the quality of raw material, but increase the income of herb collectors. Premium is paid for good quality material by the end users.

Certain remedial measures have been proposed that effectively provide MFP gatherers with sustainable source of livelihood. This is the responsibility of the society, industries, government agencies and other stakeholders. Providing insurance facility to the herb collectors is one of the options. Sometimes, the gatherers' families depend on a single source of income. Providing insurance can protect the rest of the dependents. This is similar to the farm insurance for agricultural farmers. Right identity cards may be issued to enable them to carry the collected herbs. This can be implemented in collaboration with local NGOs with financial help from government agencies and other developmental funds.

It is also essential to arrange regular workshops/awareness programmes on good harvesting practices. The National Medicinal Plant Board (NMPB) in collaboration with WHO published a document on good field collection practices for Indian medicinal plants. While preparing awareness programmes one needs to consider the above guidelines for popularizing the best gather practices. Relevant traders or industries can also organize the same. Currently, NMPB has provision for financial assistance to organize awareness programmes under the National Mission on Medicinal Plants. Safety protection gears may also be supplied to them to avoid minor accidents. There are some incidents when herb collectors, especially women are faced with risky job of climbing trees, as well as snake and scorpion bites. Frequent health check-up programmes for their families are necessary to minimize occupational health diseases. Responsible society leaders can volunteer such programmes. One such noteworthy example is that of Dabur's initiative and its impact on the living standards of local people in Nepal. The company evolved a model for sustainable collection coupled with concurrent

plantations of Himalayan Yew leaves from the Nepal Himalaya region. An independent study established that the initiative could help the communities in improving the quality of life due to an enhanced income (Susan Howard, personal common).

Since MFP collectors' living standards are poor, a common, shared drying yard can be provided for drying the herbs. Further, arranging the nearest collection distribution points can reduce the time and money spent on transportation. Having the facility of distribution points is ideal if the material is of perishable nature, for quick transportation.

### **Benefits of value addition can be translated to MFP collectors**

Creating value in the existing value chain by scientific and technical intervention can benefit MFP collectors. Value addition at the grass root level, e.g. primary processing of herbs such as cleaning, drying and sorting at the level of collection is important both in terms of quality and value addition. Value addition to 'spent material' or processed MFP is another important area. Spent material is generally discarded without realizing its potential. In addition to technical contribution product value can be enhanced by understanding and complying with regulatory requirements of major world markets. Such value improvement to value chain will empower all actors of the supply chain such as primary producers, traders, industry and consumers. Benefits thus obtained will get translated to herb collectors who are at the bottom of the chain. However,

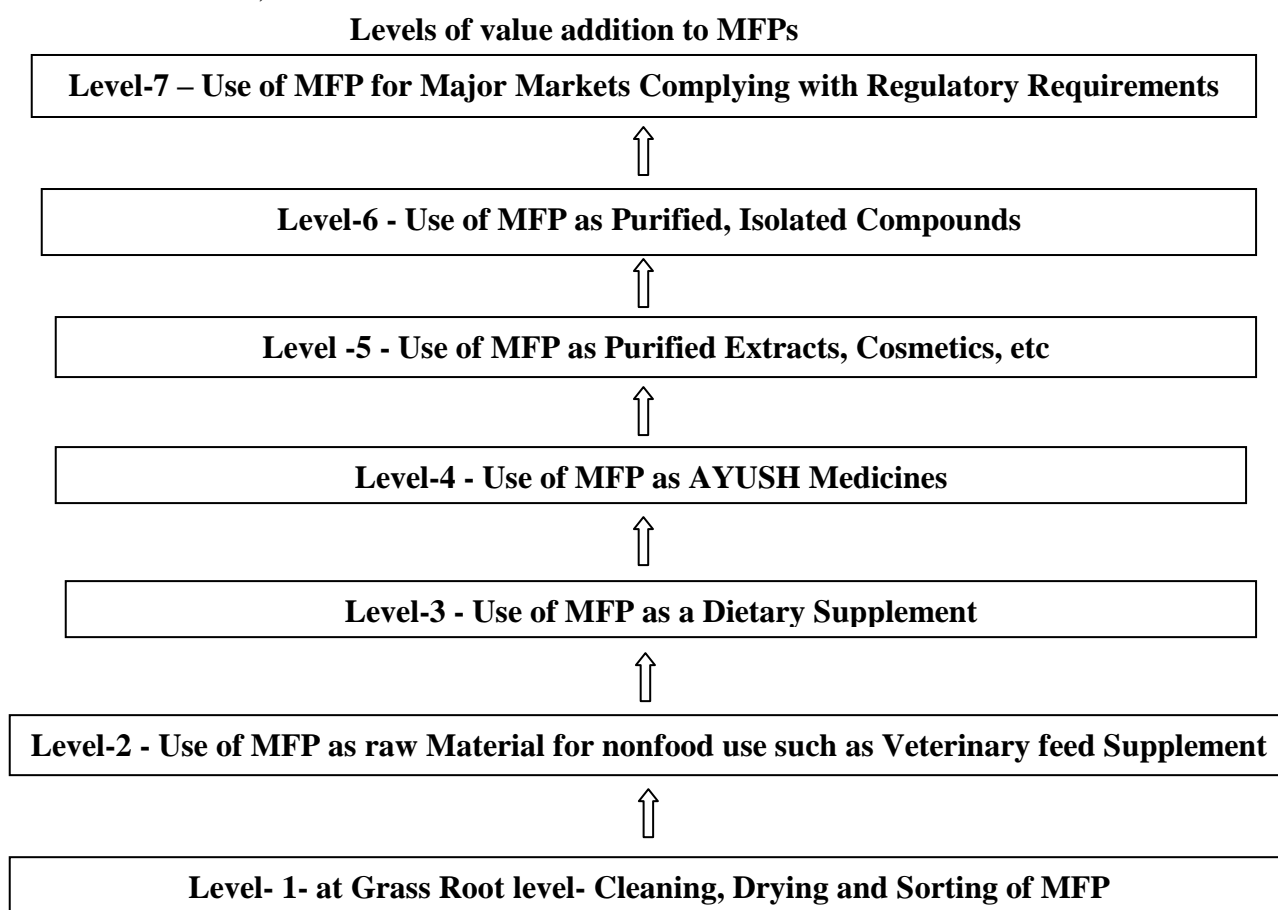


Figure 2: Levels of value addition to MFP

Value addition to value chain will empower all actors of the supply chain such as primary producers, traders, industry and consumers. Benefits will get translated to herb collectors, due to value addition, who are at the bottom of the chain there is little effort in the area of identification of the value chain, and value creation at various levels, by industry stakeholders.

## Conclusion

Therefore, it is a collective responsibility of all stakeholders, including government agencies to support livelihood options of MFP gatherers. As long as the bottom of the chain is supported, enriched and equipped, rest of the strata can sustain for a long time.

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