

Concept Note on Minor Forest Produce (MFP) and its Management

India is a mega biodiversity country with 18,000 species of flowering plants. Apart from yielding timber and fuelwood, many plants yield root, bark, leaves, flowers, seeds and fruits which are collectively termed as non-timber forest products (NTFPs).

The issue of ownership of MFP has to be understood in totality. The word MFP, gives a connotation of something minor or less important. Quite a few produce which stand alone in nature, like honey, wax, roots, tubers, medicinal plants, etc. fit into this definition well, but most of the MFP's are composite and intricately linked with major produce i.e. tree. For example resin and gums are MFP while the pine tree /Gum tree from which it is extracted is not. Bark of *Taxusbaccata*, *Litseachinensis* are MFP while the main trees are not. Due to unsustainable debarking tree starts to die. Hence the bark extraction of certain species had to be banned. Most of the fruits like Chironji, Mahua fruit, flowers, Sal seeds, Harrah, Baheda, Aonla are MFP, while the tree's are not.

Discussions had been held at various levels MoEF&CC and also in the States since the year 2007 to discuss the issue of Minimum Support Price for MFP/NTFPs. In these meetings regarding minimum support price it was decided that this will have to be state specific, MFP specific and even season specific. **The basic objective should be to protect the collector from the exploitation of various level intermediates and the fair price should be ensured to them.** Hence unlike agricultural produce, no national level fixation of MSP is advisable for MFP. It has to be decided by the state organizations or Government.

After PESA 1996 &FRA, 2006, Ministry of Panchayati Raj and Planning Commission have taken initiatives and a wider stakeholders committee has been constituted under the chairmanship of Sh. T.Haque to look after the issue of MSP related to NTFP by the Ministry of Panchayati Raj. Representative of the Ministry of Environment & Forests is one of the member of the Haque Committee. Subsequently, MFP Commission, an autonomous body under the MoTA was established as a way forward.

The Ministry is also of the view that since Minimum Support Price is dependent on the nature of the commodities and is product specific, year specific and States specific, the State Government is competent to take suitable steps. Accordingly, the has issued following advisory to all the concerned States such as Andhra Pradesh, Bihar, Jharkhand, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Chhattisgarh, West Bengal, Orissa and Uttar Pradesh regarding management of NTFPs:-

'the NTFP contributes a major share in day to day livelihood activities of tribals of these areas. But there is an apprehension that they may not be getting their due share of profit due to exploitation by the middle men in the NTFP trade and marketing. MSP is an instrument to give the maximum benefit to the primary collectors especially tribals. The State Govt. are requested to consider taking suitable steps to provide MSP for at least the major

NTFPs specific to their states, so that the forest dwellers can be protected from the exploitation of various level intermediaries’.

Regarding the Dr. T.Haque Committee, it has submitted the Interim Report which included the following 13 MFPs viz., tendu, bamboo, mahua flower, mahua seed, sal leaves, sal seeds, lac, chironji, wild honey, myrobalan, tamarind, gums and Karanj. In West Bengal all these MFPs form an important use and are also being used for earning small livelihood in the regions where there is appreciable tribal population and MFP resources in the forest areas. The working plans also include such forest areas under the Overlapping and Mandatory Working Circles for the proper and sustainable management of such areas.

It has been proposed in the Report to provide better prices to the MFP gatherers, who now receive a pittance, exploited as they are by local traders and other vested interests; it will also ensure sustainable harvesting of MFPs. However, MSP schemes would be impractical in case of MFPs, which do not command large markets and which are hardly standardized. It will probably only end in loss to the agencies, apart from accusations of malpractice.