

MINOR FOREST PRODUCE (MFP): A CATALYST FOR TRIBAL ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT IN INDIA

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Abstract

Minor Forest Produce (MFP) serves as a vital resource for the livelihoods of indigenous communities in India, providing subsistence and cash income. Despite the legal empowerment of forest dwellers through acts like PESA (1996) and FRA (2006), indigenous communities face challenges in the collection, cultivation, and marketing of Minor Forest Products, including exploitation by intermediaries, lack of market access, and inadequate infrastructure. Government initiatives such as the Minimum Support Price (MSP) for MFP, Van Dhan Yojana, and TRIFED aim to address these issues through sustainable management and value chain development. This paper highlights the economic, social, and ecological significance of Minor Forest Products and underscores the need for improved institutional frameworks, training, market development, and policy support to ensure sustainable indigenous development and the long-term viability of forest resources.

Keywords: *tribal livelihoods, sustainable forest management, economic empowerment, mfp challenges, government initiatives.*

Introduction

Forests hold immense significance in the social and cultural fabric of indigenous communities in India. Approximately 300 million indigenous and local people depend on forests for their sustenance and livelihoods. India is estimated to host around 3,000 plant species, which contribute to Non-Timber Forest Products (NTFPs), also referred to as Minor Forest Products (MFPs). Traditionally, NTFPs or MFPs include all biological materials, apart from timber, that are derived from natural forests and utilised for human and animal purposes, with both consumptive and trade value. Globally, NTFPs are defined as "forest products comprising goods of biological origin other than wood, sourced from forests, woodlands, and trees beyond forested areas." Most indigenous populations inhabit forested regions, relying heavily on MFPs for their livelihoods and income generation. These products serve as a vital source of subsistence and cash earnings for indigenous communities. The Panchayat Extension to Scheduled Areas (PESA) Act of 1996 and the Forest Rights Act of 2006 have legally empowered forest dwellers with the rights to own and manage Minor Forest Products. However, these communities continue to

encounter significant challenges in the production and marketing of MFPs, including legal barriers, complicated permissions, insufficient support prices, inadequate financial assistance, and issues related to branding and sales. This study aims to evaluate the various measures adopted by the Government of India to promote the economic advancement of indigenous communities through the sustainable management of MFPs.

Review of Literature

Raj Kumar Khosla (2024) highlights the importance of Minor Forest Products as a crucial resource for the survival of indigenous populations in rural Odisha. Besides domestic utility, MFPs provide essential nutrients to forest-dependent communities and act as a vital source of financial revenue, particularly during off-peak agricultural seasons. Despite their indispensable role in supporting indigenous livelihoods, the economic potential of MFPs remains underutilised, with limited impact on poverty alleviation in rural regions. This study critically assesses the significance of MFPs in sustaining the livelihoods of indigenous communities in Odisha.

Geeta M. Pargi (2023) investigated the economic contributions of MFPs to the development of indigenous communities across various Indian states. Her findings revealed that forest-dependent populations derive considerable economic support from MFPs. Both the Central and State Governments have implemented several initiatives aimed at the collection, marketing, and sale of these products, significantly improving the standard of living of forest-dwelling communities. Schemes such as the Minimum Support Price (MSP) for MFPs and the Van Dhan Yojana have been particularly effective in streamlining the collection, trade, and sale of MFPs, enabling financial assistance for many indigenous communities nationwide.

Minor Forest Produce - Concept

Traditionally, Minor Forest Produce (MFP) or Non-Timber Forest Products (NTFPs) encompass all biological resources, excluding timber, that are harvested from natural forests for both human and animal use. These resources possess both consumptive and trade value. Globally, NTFPs are defined as "forest products consisting of goods of biological origin other than wood, derived from forests, woodlands, and trees outside forests." It is estimated that approximately 100 million individuals directly rely on the collection and sale of Minor Forest Products for their livelihood (Report of the National Committee on Forest Rights Act, 2011). According to the World Bank, while the MFP economy is considered fragile, it supports nearly 275 million people in rural India (as cited in the Down to Earth report, November 1–15, 2010). A significant proportion of these individuals belong to indigenous communities, which represent one of the most disadvantaged sections of society and predominantly reside in forest-adjacent areas. The MFP sector alone is estimated to generate approximately 10 million workdays annually across the country. Over three-fourths of the population in these regions depend on NTFPs for their nutrition, primary healthcare, and essential needs such as food, shelter, and medicine. The contributions of NTFPs are invaluable, providing a critical safety net for households throughout the year, particularly during agricultural lean periods. NTFPs serve as a significant source of income for local communities, substantially

enhancing household earnings, food security, and healthcare. Beyond their economic significance, NTFPs hold immense social and cultural value. Studies reveal that they can contribute up to one-third of household incomes for communities residing near forests. In traditional forest societies, NTFPs are integral to subsistence, income generation, and cultural traditions. They also have notable medicinal properties, enhancing community health and overall well-being. Moreover, NTFPs play an essential role in sustaining ecosystem stability by conserving soil, landscapes, and providing habitats for diverse wildlife species. In conclusion, NTFPs are a cornerstone of forest ecosystems, with their importance extending far beyond economic contributions to include substantial social, cultural, and ecological benefits.

Types of Minor Forest Produce

Table 1 Types of Minor Forest Produce under Different Categories

Edible products	Fruits, flowers, seeds, roots, rhizomes, tubers, etc. of several forest species are edible. Fruits and seeds of <i>Anacardium occidentale</i> , <i>Tamarindus indica</i> , <i>Syzygium cumini</i> , <i>Embolica officinalis</i> , <i>Buchanania lanzan</i> , etc., flowers of <i>Madhuca indica</i> , green pods of <i>Moringa oleifera</i> , new shoots of bamboo, etc. are in great demand.
Grasses and grazing	Forests provide grazing facility to about 30 per cent of the total livestock population of the country. Grasses such as <i>Cenchrus</i> , <i>Lasiurus</i> , <i>Heteropogon</i> , <i>Bothriochloa</i> , <i>Andropogon</i> , <i>Eragrostis</i> , <i>Iseilema</i> , etc. are abundantly found in the forest as a ground cover. Some grasses like <i>Eulaliopsis binata</i> are also used for rope and papermaking.
Fodder trees and shrubs	Forests provide fodder from trees, shrubs and climbers. Leaf fodder of several tree species is almost as nutritious as that of agricultural fodder crops. Good fodder yielding tree species includes: <i>Ailanthus excels</i> <i>Moringa oleifera</i> , <i>Sesbaniaspp</i> , <i>Morus alba</i> , <i>Albizia lebbek</i> , <i>Leucaena leucocephala</i> , <i>Pongamia Pinnata</i> , <i>Hardwickia binata</i> , <i>Quercus</i> , <i>Grewia Bauhinia</i> , <i>celtis</i> , etc., Several shrubs, herbs and climbers also yield good quality fodder leaves.

Bamboo and canes	India is very rich in bamboo resources. The bamboo is used for housing, for rural agricultural works, for paper pulp, for packaging and other uses.
Oil seeds	Many tree species produce oil-bearing seeds, which are commercially important. Some of these oils are fit for human consumption. Generally, these seeds are used in soap industry. Tribals use these oils for various purposes.
Essential oils	Essential oils are a good source of forest revenue. Many species in the Indian forest yield essential oils, which are used in making perfumes, soaps, cosmetics, etc.
Tans and dyes	A variety of vegetable tanning materials are produced in the forest. Important ones include the myrobalan nuts and bark of wattle (<i>Acacia mearnsii</i> , <i>A. decurrens</i> , <i>A. nilotica</i> and <i>Cassia auriculata</i> , etc.) Other tanning materials include, leaves of <i>Emblica officinalis</i> and <i>Anogeissus latifolia</i> , bark of <i>Cleistanthus collinus</i> , fruits of <i>Ziziphus xylopyra</i> , bark of <i>Cassia fistula</i> , <i>Terminalia alata</i> , <i>T. arjuna</i> , etc.
Gums and resins	Gums and resins are exuded by trees as a result of incision or injury to the bark of wood. Gums are collected from several tree species. Resins find wide use in industries and in Indian pharmacy.
Fibres and flosses	A wide range of plants yielding fibre occur in the forests of India. Fibres are obtained from tissues of different parts of certain woody plants, which are used for making cloth, rope and cordage.
Flavouring plants	A variety of plants including cumin (seeds of <i>Carum carvi</i>), cinnamon (bark of <i>Cinnamomum zeylanicum</i>), cardamom (dried capsule of <i>Elettaria cardamomum</i>), bay leaf (leaves of <i>Cinamomum tamala</i>), are obtained from forests used locally and throughout the world.
Animal products	Animal products include Lac, honey, silk, horns, fur, skins, tusks, musk, bones, fur and feathers, meat etc. Lac is a resinous secretion of the Lac insects, which feed on forest trees, particularly on <i>Butea monosperma</i> . Similarly, silk worm is reared on <i>Terminalia alata</i> and <i>Morus alba</i> plantations. Honey is another important product obtained from forests.
Leaves	Leaves of various forest tree species have been used for various purposes since ancient times and help earn forest revenue. Leaves of several trees and shrubs are widely used as food, fodder, medicine, etc. Other than these, leaves of some

	trees and shrubs are put to the following uses: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Making plates and cups; ● Thatching; ● Basket making; ● Umbrella making; ● Bidi™ leaves for smoking.
Tendu and other leaves	Tendu leaves (<i>Diospyros melanoxylon</i>) are used to prepare „Bidis“ and therefore, these are also called „bidi“ leaves. Leaves of trees such as <i>Bauhinia</i> spp., <i>Shorea robusta</i> , <i>Pterospermum acerifolium</i> , etc. are used for making plates, „dona“, etc.

Source: Forest Research Institute, Dehradun

Table 2 presents the economically significant Minor Forest Products, emphasising their pivotal role in the indigenous economy throughout different seasons. The data underscores the critical importance of these products in creating livelihood opportunities for millions, particularly in rural and indigenous regions. Furthermore, it highlights the seasonal fluctuations in the collection of Minor Forest Products, thereby illustrating the necessity of eco-friendly management and robust marketing strategies to ensure the long-term sustainability and viability of these resources.

Table 2 Economically Important Minor Forest Products

Seasons	Minor Forest Products	Economy Value
January to March	Mahua flower, Lac (Resin), and Tamarind	Almost 75 % of tribal households earn Rs.5, 000 a year from gathering Mahua flowers in the states of Odisha, Madhya Pradesh and Andhra Pradesh. Three million people work in the lac manufacturing industry.
April to June	Chironji, Sal seeds and Tendu leaves	Around 30 million forest dwellers depend on the seeds, leaves, and resins of Sal trees; more than 3 million people engage in bidi processing, while 7.5 million labour for about 90 days to gather tendu leaves.
July to September	Bamboo, Chironji, Mango, Mahua fruits, and Silk Cocoons	10 million people make their living from bamboo; whereas only 1, 26,000 households cultivate tussar silk.
October to November	Lac, Kullu gum, Resins used in incense sticks	Gum collection provides three lakh person days of employment.

Source: TRIFED,

Table 3 illustrates the output of Non-Timber Forest Products (NTFPs) at a constant price. The value of Minor Forest Produce (MFP) in India has exhibited a generally upward trajectory over the seven-year period from 2011-12 to 2017-18. Beginning at ₹26.4 thousand crore in 2011-12, the value of MFP increased to ₹29.6 thousand crore by 2017-18, reflecting a moderate growth rate of 12.1% during this timeframe. Although there was a minor decline in 2014-15, the overall trend points to a consistent rise in the value of MFP, with the peak growth rate of 6.5% recorded between 2016-17 and 2017-18. This upward trend highlights the significance of MFP in the Indian economy and underscores the necessity for ongoing support and sustainable management practices to ensure the long-term sustainability of this sector.

Table 3 Output of NTFPs at Constant (2011-12) Prices

Year	Value (₹000 crore)
2011-12	26.4
2012-13	26.7
2013-14	27.1
2014-15	26.5
2015-16	26.9
2016-17	27.8
2017-18	29.6

Source: Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation Government of India

Table 4 presents an overview of the estimated production and collection potential of various Minor Forest Produce (MFP) commodities in India. The table includes 14 MFP commodities, such as tamarind, mahua flowers, sal seeds, and wild honey, among others. The estimated production potential for these commodities varies significantly, ranging from 0.05 lakh metric tonnes (MT) for gum Karaya to 80 lakh standard bags for tendu, culminating in a total estimated production potential of 3,777 lakh MT. In contrast, the estimated collection potential is lower at 1,908 lakh MT, revealing a gap between production and collection. The estimated value of these commodities spans from ₹20 crores for Puwad seed to ₹1,040 crores for tendu, with a cumulative estimated value of ₹1,908 crores. Overall, the table underscores the

considerable potential of Minor Forest Products in India and highlights the need to enhance collection and marketing efforts to fully realise this potential.

Table 4 A List of the Important Minor Forest Products, in Terms of their Collection Potential besides Importance for Livelihood

S. No.	Commodity	Estimated Production Potential		Estimated Collection Potential	
		Qty in Lakh MTs	Value in Rs Crores	Qty in Lakh MTs	Value in Rs Crores
1.	Tamarind	2.00	240.00	2.00	240.00
2.	Mahuwa Flower	1.50	122.00	1.00	81.00
3.	Mahuwa Seed	1.00	110.00	0.50	55.00
4.	Sal Seed	1.60	160.00	1.00	100.00
5.	Tendu	80 (In standard bags)	1040.00	40 (In standard bags)	520.00
6.	Bamboo	48.00	12.00	12.00	300.00
7.	Karanjaaa Seed	0.40	40.00	0.25	25.00
8.	Myrobalan	1.30	78.00	0.75	45.00
9.	Chironjee	0.10	230.00	0.05	110.00
10.	Lac (Stick Lac)	0.25	150.00	0.20	120.00
11.	Gum Karaya	0.05	62.00	0.03	37.00
12.	Wild Honey	0.30	270.00	0.25	230.00
13.	Puwad Seed	0.50	50.00	0.20	20.00
14.	Neem Seed	0.25	25.00	0.25	25.00
			3777.00		1908.00

Source: Trifed

Challenges and Issues during Collection, Cultivation and Marketing of Minor Forest Products

Challenges in MFP Collection

Tribal communities encounter various challenges when collecting Minor Forest Produce (MFP). A major issue is

restricted access to forests, often resulting from conservation initiatives or private ownership. Ambiguous forest policies and regulations can create confusion and conflict regarding MFP collection. Furthermore, competition from non-indigenous collectors can adversely affect the income of indigenous communities. Additionally, physical hazards present significant risks for indigenous collectors, especially in remote and hard-to-reach areas.

Challenges in MFP Cultivation

Tribal communities also face challenges in cultivating Minor Forest Products (MFP). A lack of technical knowledge and insufficient infrastructure, including irrigation systems and storage facilities, can impede MFP cultivation. Additionally, climate change and pest infestations may adversely affect both the yields and quality of MFP. Limited access to markets can further diminish the income of indigenous communities. To address these challenges, indigenous communities need support in the form of training, credit, and marketing assistance.

Challenges in MFP Marketing

The marketing of Minor Forest Products (MFP) presents considerable challenges for indigenous communities. Exploitation by middlemen is a prevalent issue, with indigenous collectors often receiving low prices for their produce. Limited access to market information further complicates negotiations for fair pricing. Additionally, inadequate marketing infrastructure, including insufficient storage facilities and transportation networks, can obstruct MFP marketing efforts. Competition from cheaper, non-indigenous alternatives can also diminish the demand for indigenous Minor Forest Products.

Other Challenges

Tribal communities encounter further challenges in asserting their land rights, which can result in conflicts regarding the collection and cultivation of Minor Forest Products (MFP). Financial limitations and inadequate institutional support can hinder the development of MFP cultivation and marketing efforts. Moreover, cultural and social challenges may emerge as indigenous communities adapt to new market demands and production systems.

Addressing these issues necessitates a comprehensive approach that involves collaboration among government agencies, NGOs, and indigenous communities.

Government Action to Overcome the Challenges

The Indian government plays a vital role in promoting the livelihoods of indigenous communities through the sustainable harvesting and marketing of Minor Forest Products (Minor Forest Products).

TRIFED - Tribal Cooperative Marketing Development Federation of India Limited

TRIFED was established in August 1987 under the Multi-State Cooperative Societies Act, 1984, by the Government of India as a national-level cooperative body operating under the administrative control of the then Ministry of Welfare of India. Its primary mandate is to promote the socio-economic development of indigenous people in the country by institutionalising the trade of Minor Forest Produce (MFP) and Surplus Agricultural Produce (SAP) that they collect or cultivate. As a market developer and service provider, TRIFED aims to enhance the socio-economic well-being of indigenous communities through the development of markets for indigenous products, which are vital for their livelihoods as these communities invest significant time and derive a substantial portion of their income from these resources. The philosophy underlying this approach is to empower indigenous people with knowledge, tools, and access to information, enabling them to conduct their operations in a more systematic and scientific manner.

Minor Forest Produce Development Activities under Pradhan Mantri Jan Jatiya Vikas Mission (PMJVM)

The Ministry of Tribal Affairs is implementing the Pradhan Mantri Jan Jatiya Vikas Mission (PMJVM), which has been developed by merging two existing schemes aimed at promoting indigenous livelihoods: the "Mechanism for Marketing of Minor Forest Produce (MFP) through Minimum Support Price (MSP) and Development of Value Chain for MFP," and "Institutional Support for Development and Marketing of Tribal Products/Produce."

The "Mechanism for Marketing of Minor Forest Produce (MFP) through Minimum Support Price (MSP)

and Development of Value Chain for MFP" scheme consists of the following components:

- Procurement of Minor Forest Products at Minimum Support Prices.
- Infrastructure development, including the modernisation of haat bazaars and storage facilities.
- Development of the Value Chain for Minor Forest Products.

Under this scheme, the Ministry of Tribal Affairs has allocated ₹319.65 crores to 18 states for the procurement of Minor Forest Products at the MSP rates set by the Ministry. In response, 17 states have procured ₹524 crores worth of Minor Forest Products under the scheme. Additionally, the Ministry has also disbursed ₹89.15 crores for infrastructure development to 15 states as part of the initiative.

Van Dhan Yojan

The Van Dhan Yojana is an initiative launched by the Government of India to enhance the livelihoods of indigenous communities by tapping into the potential of Minor Forest Produce (MFP). The scheme aims to establish Van Dhan Vikas Kendras, which will provide training and support to indigenous communities in MFP-based livelihoods, as well as develop the MFP value chain encompassing harvesting, processing, packaging, and marketing. Additionally, the scheme promotes indigenous entrepreneurship and the formation of self-help groups to engage in MFP-based livelihoods while establishing market linkages to ensure fair prices for Minor Forest Products and provide a consistent income for indigenous communities.

The Van Dhan Yojana is expected to boost the incomes of indigenous communities, create employment opportunities for indigenous youth and women, empower these communities through entrepreneurship and self-help groups, and promote the sustainable harvesting and management of forest resources. The scheme is implemented through TRIFED, in collaboration with state governments and NGOs, to offer training and support to indigenous communities.

The implementation of the Van Dhan Yojana began across the country in the financial year 2019-20, with

states carrying out activities through their designated Nodal Departments, Implementing Agencies, Mentoring Organisations, District Implementation Units, and other stakeholders. During this period, TRIFED engaged with Central Ministries, State Governments, Research Institutions, Social Sector Organisations, and various Government and Private Agencies to promote the Van Dhan Yojana nationwide. In the financial year 2021-22, TRIFED sanctioned the establishment of 1,009 Van Dhan Vikas Kendras, amounting to ₹149.77 crores, benefiting 302,000 individuals across 13 states and 1 Union Territory.

Tech for Tribal – Entrepreneurship & Skill Development Programme (ESDP)

Under the 'Tech for Tribals' program, TRIFED, in collaboration with the Ministry of Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSME), provided advanced entrepreneurship training to Van Dhan Vikas Kendras through the Entrepreneurship Skill Development Program (ESDP) of MSME. TRIFED arranged for institutions of national significance, such as IITs/IIMs, and renowned organisations like CAU, Imphal; TISS, Mumbai; KISS, Bhubaneswar; and IIE, Guwahati, to deliver advanced training to Van Dhan beneficiaries. TRIFED received approvals for conducting training for 1,477 batches, each consisting of 25 members, with funding of ₹18.46 crores from MSME. In line with this sanction, TRIFED successfully organised ESDP training through training partners for 394 batches across 15 states, benefiting 9,850 Van Dhan beneficiaries. SFURTI – Scheme for Fund for Regeneration of Traditional Industries

SFURTI is an innovative cluster Development Programme of the Ministry of MSME, Govt. of India to increase the scale of operations and economical sustainability of artisans and rural enterprises. MSME has designated TRIFED as Nodal Agency for implementation of SFURTI scheme in indigenous areas. TRIFED plans to scale up the indigenous development programs being implemented in States, by scaling up developmental support at cluster level for economic benefit of indigenous artisans as well as indigenous gatherers/beneficiaries under SFURTI scheme across the country. Under SFURTI scheme, a cluster can get Rs.2.5 Cr. to 5 Cr for different interventions.

MSP for MFP Procurement

The Ministry of Tribal Affairs, Government of India, has allocated ₹319.65 crores as a revolving fund to state procuring agencies identified by the respective state governments for the procurement of Minor Forest Produce at the declared Minimum Support Price (MSP). Additionally, for infrastructure development, the Ministry has released ₹89.15 crores for the modernisation of haats and the establishment of storage facilities or small godowns at aggregation points. The guidelines for the MSP for MFP Scheme explicitly outline the following two components concerning haat bazaars and storage facilities:

Modernizations of Haats

The identified Minor Forest Products will be procured from gatherers at village or haat-level centres, where gatherers bring their produce after collection, drying, cleaning, and grading for sale. State agencies are required to establish a sufficient number of these procurement centres. In some states, governments have already initiated measures to provide facilities such as the construction of platforms and shades. However, in many other states, the buying and selling of commodities (including MFP and Surplus Agricultural Produce) in haats occur in open areas, leading to various challenges for both buyers and sellers during the rainy and hot summer seasons. To enhance the conditions of these trading spaces and establish a formal structure for systematic trading, the modernisation of haats will be undertaken. This modernisation will be carried out by state agencies in consultation with the Gram Sabha, Panchayat, and District Administration.

Creation of storage facilities at aggregation points

The stocks procured by state-designated agencies at each haat bazaar may be relatively small, necessitating transportation to aggregation centres, from which larger quantities will be transported to centrally located godowns or cold storage facilities, either existing or newly provided. Therefore, it is essential to establish a godown with a capacity of 50 metric tonnes at the block level to aggregate the stocks procured from each haat. The costs associated with land acquisition and recurring expenses will be borne by the respective state agencies. The aim is to create infrastructure that demonstrates livelihoods through value addition, with successful examples intended to be replicated in other locations.

Conclusion

Minor Forest Products (MFP) play a crucial role in the livelihoods of indigenous communities in India. The Indian government has introduced various initiatives to promote the sustainable harvesting and marketing of these products, such as the Minimum Support Price (MSP) scheme, the Van Dhan Yojana, and the activities of TRIFED. However, despite these efforts, indigenous communities continue to encounter challenges related to the collection, cultivation, and marketing of Minor Forest Products.

To Address these Challenges, the Following Suggestions are Proposed

1. **Strengthening the Institutional Framework:** There is a need to enhance the institutional framework for MFP management, which includes establishing cooperatives and self-help groups that are owned and managed by indigenous communities.
2. **Capacity Building and Training:** Tribal communities require comprehensive training and capacity-building initiatives to enhance their skills in MFP collection, cultivation, and marketing.
3. **Market Development and Access:** It is essential to focus on developing markets for Minor Forest Products and improving access to these markets for indigenous communities.
4. **Value Addition and Processing:** Enhancing the value addition and processing of Minor Forest Products can increase their market value and create better income opportunities for indigenous communities.
5. **Sustainable Harvesting and Cultivation Practices:** Promoting sustainable harvesting and cultivation practices is vital to ensuring the long-term viability of MFP resources.
6. **Policy Support and Governance:** Effective policy support and good governance are critical for the sustainable management of Minor Forest Products and the empowerment of indigenous communities.
7. **By addressing these challenges and implementing these recommendations, it is possible to promote the sustainable development of Minor Forest Products and improve the livelihoods of indigenous communities in India.**

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