

Forest Fruits in Livelihoods

Policy Briefing Note to Central and State public sector organisations

The research issue

Forest fruits contribute to the livelihoods of poor peoples in many parts of the tropics, but restricted access to natural resources, weak markets and poor information limit the realisation of benefits to forest-dependent poor peoples. Identifying these constraints can enhance livelihood strategies through promoting policy options which enable effective utilisation of forest resources.

This research concerns forest fruits in the livelihoods of forest-margin communities in India.



The research area

In BR Hills and MM Hills of southern Karnataka, India, forest Tribal communities derive up to 60% of their cash income from forest products, with 15% derived solely from four forest fruit species: amla (*Phyllanthus emblica* and *P. indofischeri*), arle (*Terminalia chebula*) and seege (*Acacia concinna*).

Products are significant ingredients for the manufacture of food products and pharmaceuticals, but commercialisation is regulated.

Policy environment

Forest policy in India needs to incorporate considerations of the livelihoods of forest margin communities.

The rationale for this is that the thrust of forest policies focuses on conservation with less regard for forest dwellers' livelihoods.

This shortcoming is being recognised by the State Government which needs assistance in understanding the issue through research, and also requires case studies to serve as a means to gain experience in delivering livelihood-focused policy.

Non-forest initiatives

Results suggest that alternative sources of income must complement that from forest fruits. In particular, improved access to labour markets and training will help diversify income sources.

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Recommendations

Constraints to the enhancement of livelihoods through improved use of forest fruit products, and approaches to overcome these constraints are presented below:



Constraint	Findings	Action
Access to natural resources	Reduced tree population sizes and poor regeneration result from extensive and indiscriminate forest fruit harvesting, which imperil the sustainability of livelihood strategies based on forest resources	<p>Forest authorities should prioritise semi-domestication of fruit (and other NTFP) species through <i>in-situ</i> conservation and agroforestry on degraded forest lands in communities such as Ponnachi, Kombudikki and Chengadi</p> <p>Forest authorities at State and Federal level should consider land re-titling of currently un/under-productive lands</p> <p>Forest fruit species and Social Forestry projects should be included in the State Tribal Sub Plan</p> <p>Better road infrastructure leading to the more remote communities to ease extraction costs</p>
Access to markets	Legislation creates a marketing monopoly through state-authorized contractors and contributes to low returns to harvesters	<p>In order to enhance margins and returns to principal beneficiaries, contractual exchange mechanisms need to be revised:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • more favourable contractual terms between contractors and beneficiaries, and/or: • revision of the auction process, and/or: • development of alternative local tribal markets for forest products within the regulated market system: <i>hatts</i> or primary rural markets

Full Project Title: Enhancing the Role of Forest Fruits in Sustaining Livelihoods of Forest Margin Communities.

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