

**NON-TIMBER FOREST PRODUCTS: A POLICY
ANALYSIS**

**Committee for Protection of Natural Resources
Orissa**

background paper
prepared for the national workshop

NON TIMBER FOREST PRODUCE AND THE RURAL POOR

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Introduction

This paper is an outcome of a five day workshop on NTFP Policy Analysis held from 7-11th April 1996 at Bhubaneswar where a small group worked at analyzing the existing laws and policies that govern NTFP trade in Orissa and discussed and debated on options and strategies that would lead to a more people oriented NTFP Policy. During the course of five days the group also looked at a few products and analyzed the major obstacles that prevent the primary producers to benefit from the trade in these NTFPs these included Hill brooms, Tamarind, Sal Seed, Mahua seed and flowers and Kendu Leaves. These products analysis helped in understanding some generic problems with NTFP collection, processing and marketing.

This paper at this stage is in a draft form and it only provides a basis for further discussions and wider debate on the subject. It is hoped that this would get enriched by comments and analysis by other concerned individuals, organizations and most important, by the comments and insights of the primary producers who have the greatest stake and yet the minimum returns in the NTFP trade.

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Background

Non-Timber Forest Products have an important role in both state economy and local rural economy. A large part of the rural population, especially tribals and women depend on NTFPs for both subsistence and income generation. This implies that access to collection, processing and marketing of NTFPs are issues of basic livelihood to them.

The potential of income generation to the forest dependent population through NTFP collection, processing and marketing has been grossly underutilized. In fact the revenue orientation of the Government for managing forests and also NTFP has given secondary importance to livelihood dependence of tribals and other forest dependent communities on NTFPs. In fact in many contexts State laws and policies seem to be militating directly against the interests of the tribal and other primary collectors of NTFPs. The issue of Hill Brooms in Rayagada and Kalahandi Districts has brought to the fore various contradictions in the policies and the laws of the State which act against the interest of those forest dependent communities who depend on the NTFPs for their livelihood.

The forest dependent populations who collect the various NTFP have a major contribution in the NTFP production process. The primary collectors add value to the NTFP through their knowledge with regards to availability, collection methods and primary processing methods evolved by them over time, and hence need to be treated as primary producers. Yet the primary producers remain exploited. Despite efforts to check exploitation of primary collectors in NTFP trade by the Government through interventions of TDCC, OFDC etc., exploitation of primary producers continues unabated. In the past decade there has been a growing realization that local people's involvement in management of forests (and forest products) is very important. Thus, there is a need to take a second look at the policy and laws relating to the NTFP with the perspective that local people can possibly play a greater role in management and trade of NTFP.

It is in this context that we are attempting to analyze the laws and Government' s policies impacting on NTFPs and their implications and suggest possible points of interventions by the government /policy makers in order to protect the interest of the tribals and other primary collectors. We have made an analysis of the existing policy framework from the perspective of primary producers and provide an alternate viewpoint for looking at NTFP production process in Orissa.

Existing Legal and Policy Framework for NTFP Trade in Orissa

Following the legacy of the British Rule, forests in India have been treated as State Property to be managed for the larger National benefits. Revenue maximization continues to guide the management of forests till recently.¹

Emanating from the status of forest being under State Control, products growing on the forests are treated as State Property. The relevant laws don't recognize any rights of forest dependent communities on collection, processing and sale of NTFPs, except as some customary rights, if any,

¹The Orissa Forest Code, 1977 still includes among the Duties of the Range Officers, among the Duties of the Range Officers among other things ... "producing the highest revenue from his Range consistent with the highest principles of forestry".

of local tribals to gather and collect forest produce, for bonafide consumption. The Orissa Forest Produce (Control of Trade) Act, 1981 provides the scope for State Monopoly over certain forest products, which the State may notify as Specified Forest Produce from time to time. These products even when found on private land holdings and on non-forest commons are treated as forest products [sec2 g{i (a, b, c)}, Orissa Forest Act,1972).

Even apart from the State monopoly over the Specified Forest Products / Nationalised forest products thus declared under the said Act, the rights of the State Government to declare any other product as Specified, in effect enables the State to exercises monopoly over the trade of almost all NTFP. This is done through the practice of granting exclusive rights for the collection of these NTFPs to TDCC, OFDC, Joint Sector Company (management control in hands of private party) and even private parties. Thus in effect the State controls all the threads of NTFP production process. The control of the State even extends to the designated forest products found on private lands and non-forest Government lands. The main objective of these controls seems to be the safeguarding of Revenue to the State. The interests of the primary collectors dependent on the production of NTFPs seem to have been ignored.

The major highlights of State control of NTFP trade are:

i) **State's discretion to give monopoly leases of particular minor forest products to State Owned Corporations, Cooperatives, Joint Sector Companies and Private parties:** Orissa Forest Act, 1972 and other related Acts, empower the Government i.e. the Forest Department to issue licenses to agencies of the Government, cooperatives and to private parties for collection of Non Timber Forest Products. This has led to a regime of monopoly leases being given to State owned Corporations, Cooperatives, Joint Sector Companies and private parties.

Orissa Forest Code, Section 241, states that it is the policy of the State to encourage tribal and labor cooperative societies to take lease of the minor forest products particularly in the tribal areas to prevent tribals from exploitation. Section 3(6)(i) of OFP(CT) Act, 1983 states that in making selection of agents (for specified forest products), preference shall be given to Gram Panchayats, Co-operative Societies, Orissa Tribal Development Cooperative Corporation and Government undertakings. *But by giving State wide/division wise monopoly leases, especially long term leases, to Government undertakings, joint Sector companies the scope of involvement of grassroots level cooperatives and Gram Panchayat is completely ruled out.*

In Orissa Forest Code, Section 244(1) states that long-term leases may be granted to industrial establishment located within the State where a particular forest produce other than timber is the raw material for the industry. These leases are to be granted through negotiations. The statewide lease of 29 items to UFPL (Utkal Forest Products Ltd.) apparently was given to increase the royalty to the State Government with an additional benefit of a pledge to set up processing capacity for these NTFPs.

This practice seems to have been followed primarily with an aim to make royalty collection convenient. The practice of giving monopoly rights of procurement to TDCC Ltd. was also aimed to prevent exploitation of tribals and other primary collectors from private traders. But today the situation has come to such a pass that it is alleged that TDCC appoints the same traders and moneylenders as its sub-agents for collection of NTFPs, which it was supposed to eliminate.

All the other monopoly leaseholders depend in varying degrees on the local sub-agents/traders for procurement of NTFPs. In reality nowhere does the primary collector gets even the administered prices, rather he/she ends up getting a fraction of these prices.

ii) **Nationalization of important NTFPs** : Two very important NTFPs, i.e. Kendu leaves and Sal seeds have been nationalised and are being procured by State through Kendu leaf Department and OFDC/TDCC for Sal seeds. The Kendu Leaf collection is defined by the Kendu leaf (Control of Trade) Act,1962. The primary aim of the law and policy for Kendu leaf is to eliminate private trading of Kendu leaf by concentrating the production process in the hands of the State Government with resultant increase in the revenue to the State. The Primary collectors/growers are compensated only for their labor. Thus today a situation has arisen in the KL production process that for every one rupee paid to the primary collector/grower, the State appropriates a profit ranging from Rs.2.50 (1993-94) to Rs. 9.00(1989-90). There have been no attempts to share this profit with the primary collectors/growers or even to provide them with some basic facility. Nationalization has in no way helped the Kendu leaves collectors or growers.

iii) **State administered prices of NTFPs** : The relevant Acts relating to NTFPs have laid the responsibility of fixing administered prices of Forest Products to the State Government. For this an Advisory Committee is to be formed at State level for nationalised products and for other forest products at Revenue Development Commissioner level, to advise the State Government in matters of fixation of procurement prices of the Specified forest produces, with representation of Government, procuring agencies, Traders, Manufacturers using NTFPs as raw materials, elected people' s representatives and Growers(thosewho produce NTFPs from their land holdings). There is no representation of Primary collectors who collect these products from forests or from non-forest commons. The committee only recommends the price and it is the State Government' s discretion to accept it.

The price fixation of other NTFPs have been decentralized from the RDCs' level to the District level. As per the relevant Acts {OFP(CT) Act, 1981 and OKL(CT) Act, 1962}, the prices fixed for the NTFP are mainly based on the considerations of minimum wages, which make sense from the conceptual stand point of the State using the villagers as wage laborers for collecting the produce growing on its property, thus not admitting any natural rights of the forest dependent people on these forests and its products.

The Orissa Forest Products (Control of Trade) Act,1981, Section (7), states that while fixing the price of specified forest products, regard may be paid to, among other things, "general level of wages for unskilled labor prevalent in the unit and the provisions of the Minimum Wages Act,11 of 1948". Prices are not worked backwards from the market prices of these products to provide value of these products to the primary producers. Unfortunately in this process the revenue objectives of the Government miss out on utilizing the full potential of income generation to forest dependent communities through ensuring better prices and value addition at local levels.

iv) **Various restrictions related to storage, transportation, processing and marketing**: The laws related to NTFPs place restriction on the amount of NTFP which can be stored by a person, whether collectors or growers. This varies from item to item. The law also provides for registration of growers of specified forest products whose production is in excess of the specified quantity. Similarly for transporting NTFPs, transit permits issued by the forest department are required. There are a number of other restrictions governing the transportation of NTFPs. Restrictions for primary level value addition may also exist if interpretation of laws is so made by the enforcers.

Higher level processing requires permission through registration from the forest department. The processor/manufacturer is also supposed to submit prescribed declaration, accounts and returns. The Forest Department is the enforcing authority for these laws.

These restrictions and permits help in enforcing the trading regime determined by the laws and the policies of the Government.

As stated earlier, the policy of royalty maximization seems to be at the center of these laws and policies. Another aim seems to be to retain the total control of the production process of NTFPs so as to safeguard against ecological damage to forests through unrestrained collection of forest products. The objective of sustaining and upgrading the livelihood dependence of the primary collectors has nowhere been mentioned in the relevant laws -- neither in letter or intent. In some cases the revenue-oriented policy has led to extreme distortions -- witness the Hillbrooms, where TDCC paid Rs. 3.00/-per kg. to the primary collectors, mainly tribal women and paid Rs.7.00- Rs. 9.00/- per KG as royalty to the Forest Department. When the same tribal women' s organisations tried to store hill broom Grass to process it, the stock was seized and people arrested. Incidentally a market study shows that if tribal women are allowed to process hill broom grass into broom sticks, for every Kg. of hill broom sold to TDCC at Rs 3.00 to Rs 4.00 at present, they can easily get an additional income of Rs 12.80 per work day , on a conservative estimate.[At a collection price, i.e. the opportunity cost of processing, of Rs 4.00; sale price of Rs 8.00 per broomstick and royalty of Rs 9.00 per kg]. Upon removing the royalty the additional daily income rises to Rs 34.40. Ironically, TDCC seems to be making a loss in its hill broom business.

These calculations are made using the Official prices as determined by the District level price fixation committee- the actual prices paid to the primary collectors is much lower considering that TDCC rarely collects hill broom directly, rather it appoints, unofficially, sub-agents on a commission basis. These sub-agents are often the same traders-moneylenders, from whose clutches the TDCC was supposed to save the tribals. The price received by the tribals is a fraction of the administered price. (1996, Agramee Report)

The above system apparently applies to almost all items, especially in the procurement pricing received by the primary collectors. Thus the excuse that monopoly procurement of NTFPs helps primary collectors through establishing state control and eliminating middlemen does not hold. It is also clear that the even totally free market conditions would be better than the current situation where lack of competition under monopoly procurement depresses prices and provides sufficient space to the exploitative agents to deprive the primary collectors of their livelihood.

The overall impact of the current policies and laws are as follows:

- i) *Depression of prices received by the primary collectors* for NTFPs, especially due to monopoly leases and high royalty fixed by the Forest Department, with a resultant deprivation of their livelihood.
- ii) *Inability of primary collectors to process NTFPs* , add value their labor and sell it in the open market, thereby increasing their disposable incomes. This deprives them of both income and meaningful employment, especially in the lean months of summer.

iii) *Non-utilization of the potential of NTFPs* due to low returns to the primary collectors as they find it uneconomic to collect NTFPs if the prices offered to them are too low. Apart from the implications on the livelihood of the primary collectors, it also leads to loss of income to State.

iv) *Continued exploitation of the tribals and other forest dependent communities by the traders/moneylenders.* As discussed earlier the monopoly system has not been able to eliminate the exploitative traders, who now operate either as unofficial sub-agents of the monopoly procurers or collect forest products without a license.

v) *Loss of revenue to the State Government* : Organisations like TDCC, in spite of having monopoly procurements rights over many products, have neither been able to serve their objective of welfare of tribal people and nor have they been able to provide revenue to the State Exchequer. Despite efforts to check illegal trade and smuggling of forest products by control in trade, it still continues with consequent loss to the state exchequer.

vi) *Low stake of forest dependent communities in sustenance of forests* : The chords of symbiotic relationship of forest dwellers with forests has been severed through changes which have led to State appropriation of local resources disregarding local natural rights. Due to the treatment of the primary collectors only as wage labor rather than producers, and due to the low returns to them from the collection of forest product, their stake in protection of forests have been reduced.

It is a sad state of affairs that on one hand for a few crores of royalty to the State exchequer, the income generation potential of NTFPs to primary collectors remains grossly under-tapped. The government allots crores of rupees for tribal development and rural development programs and gives temporary relief such as loan waivers etc. Instead of such subsidies, relief etc., it would definitely make much more sense to give rights to local communities over the NTFPs and provide support through judicious market interventions for NTFP production , processing and marketing. Such a step would not only lead to increased employment and income generation at local levels to the poor but also provide incentives for forest resource conservation.

ALTERNATE FRAMEWORK FOR POLICY ON NTFPs

Need for change

As is reflected clearly in National Forest Policy of 1988, there is a shift in focus from revenue maximization to ecological functions of the forest and the subsistence support provided by forests to the forest dependent communities. This shift in focus creates a definite need to rethink on the policy framework guiding NTFPs.

New developments like Joint Forest Management also point to the recognition of rights of local communities to the forests and its produces, as well as the need for their active involvement in the management of forests as well as disposal / utilization of the forest products. ***Under Joint Forest Management village communities are committed 100% of the intermediate produces (NTFP) and 50% share in any major harvest. However at present all primary collectors including those who are members of the VSS, are entitled to collection charges only and not the real value of the NTFPs produced by them.*** This goes against the spirit of Joint Forest Management whereby villagers are to be partners in management and share both costs and benefits.

Our argument is that with forests being looked upon as local resource and the professed priority accorded to the local population, there needs to be a shift in the way NTFP are looked upon and treated. The local communities should have a right over these produces. Providing this right to the local communities would provide greater stake of these communities in the continued existence of the forests.

Focus of NTFP Policy :

The State policy on NTFPs should be built around the key objective of sustaining and upgrading, both quantitatively and qualitatively, the livelihood dependency of tribals and other forest dependent communities. Its long term mission should be to empower and to enable the primary producers/collectors to produce, process and market NTFPs in the open market, through their own organisations and federates of such organisations. The role of the state should be that of a pro-active supporter and facilitator to the primary collectors/producers' organizations. This vision should inform each & every law, policy and action of the State. The intention to maximize revenue, through royalty, which indirectly comes at the expense of the primary collectors/producers must be completely eliminated.

With the above focus contours in mind, a framework of a people oriented policy on NTFP has been detailed for discussions. This framework is at a preliminary stage and it is hoped that this would get enriched after a series of discussions and debate at grassroots level with the primary producers especially tribals, women and other forest dependent groups; and inputs from the Forest Department.

Framework for People oriented NTFP Policy

Preamble :

The preamble of the alternate policy on NTFP should clearly state the Government's perspective on NTFP and lay down the basic tenets of the Policy. The group felt that the following should be clearly stated in the Preamble of Proposed Policy on NTFP :

- 1) That forests are a local resource and the government recognizes the rights of local people over local natural resources, and accords priority to meeting local needs (as per the NFP, 1988).
- 2) That a majority of the rural population depends on forests, especially on NTFP, for their livelihood in subsistence as well as income generating roles². This role of the forests, as a life support system for a vast forest dependent population is far greater in importance than revenue interests.
- 3) That there is a definite need to **involve people in protection, conservation and management of the forests** and to encourage constructive local dependence on forests for sustainable management of forests.

²As stated in the National Forest Policy, *minor forest produces provide sustenance to tribal population and other communities residing in and around the forests and should be protected, improved and their production enhanced with due regard to generation of employment and income.*

4) NTFPs form the major **basis of the livelihoods of forest dependent communities**. Better incomes from NTFPs collection, processing and marketing hold the key to the economic development of these people.

Goal

The NTFP policy should have goal compatibility with the general development initiative. Thus the goal of the NTFP policy should be ***Sustainable Livelihood for Forest dependent people in general and tribals in particular***. To achieve this goal the following objectives have to be fulfilled.

Objectives

Objectives, as outlined in the following, are the more specific achievement criteria which when fulfilled will result in achievement of the goal of ***Sustainable Livelihood***:

- Sustainable Production of NTFPs for livelihood needs of Forest Dependent Communities.
- Ensured access of the primary collectors/ producers to the NTFPs
- Maximum possible ***value addition*** at the level of the primary collectors to increase their income from NTFPs.
- Ensure fair & just returns for the primary collectors' contribution to the production of both processed and unprocessed NTFPs.

Open Market Debate

There was a general agreement on the need to do away with State Monopoly in NTFP trade and the practice of granting monopoly leases. However, there was considerable debate on how far and at what pace to open up the NTFP trade. While some felt that the market should be opened up and no lease granted, another opinion among the group was to render protection to community institutions and grant them preferential collection and processing rights through leases. The two options that were debated upon included :

Free Market with the primary producers having the option to sell the forest products at different levels of processing to any purchaser which may include Government agencies as well.

Controlled Market with protection to people's institutions / cooperatives/ associations of primary producers with preferential leases to them, with State playing more direct role in rendering protection against private traders entering the trade.

These options and their implications need to be debated and analyzed in detail .

Strategies

NTFP led forest management is an option where the value of trees lies in their continued existence rather than in their felling. Thus the strategies required for better NTFP based livelihoods for Forest Dependent Communities are also in consonance with the ecological objectives of protection.

The basic tenet of a community oriented NTFP policy as mentioned before should be enhancing the stake of the Tribals and Forest dependent people in forest protection through

securing rights (and income) of the Tribals and other Forest dependent communities over NTFPs collection, processing and marketing.

*The **Royalty objectives** of the state should be **subordinate to the livelihood objectives** of the tribals and other forest dependent communities.[refer Article 46 of the Indian constitution and recommendation 88, Para 6.25, NCDDB(National Committee for Development of Backward Areas) 1981]*

Some of the strategies for ensuring the above are outlined below :

1. Collection prices should be market determined so as to give the Primary collectors the status of entrepreneurs and not wage laborers as at present.(*refer recommendation 89, Para 6.25, NCDDB*). The State should, instead of administered prices, provide minimum support price. The MSP should be based on the principle of incremental margin working backwards from the actual market price, as followed by GCC.
2. Elimination of monopoly leases - Statewide/division-wise. State Monopoly (or monopoly leases reduces the number of legal buyers, chokes the free flow of goods, and delays payment to the gatherers, as the government agencies find it difficult to make prompt payments. This results in contractors entering from the back door, but they must now operate with higher margins required to cover risks and uncertainties. This all reduces tribals' collection and incomes (*Saxena N.C, 1995³*)
3. Foregoing of royalty on NTFPs, especially non-nationalized NTFPs by the State.
4. Rights to primary collectors/producers organisations to collect process and market non-timber forest products.
5. Facilitating formation of local level primary collectors' institutions for procurement, processing and marketing. (*refer recommendation 99, Para 6.30, NCDDB*)
6. Allow encourage/support /facilitate value addition at primary collectors/groups of primary collectors' level. There should be special efforts to facilitate local NTFP based enterprises. (*refer recommendation 98, Para 6.29, NCDDB*).
7. Organisations such as TDCC, OFDC etc. should have a support role to grassroots level organisations-they would provide market linkage (in a free market scenario), administer minimum support prices, upgrade skill-building capabilities of the grassroots organisations etc. These agencies should function as or be replaced by Marketing Promotion Boards.
8. Skill Upgradation programs for value addition, packaging, stocking, accounts and other management skills.

Some specific action points are :

³ 1995, Saxena, N.C "Forest Policy and the Rural Poor in Orissa"

Collection & processing

Exclusive rights of collection and processing to forest dependent communities and their organizations and cancellation of monopoly leases.

Provision of storage and transport infrastructure of the government agencies to primary collectors' organizations on rent.

NTFP processing should, as far as possible, be reserved for the cottage and tiny units sector.

Grading of products should be carried out at the primary collectors' level in order to ensure better prices for better quality products.

Financial support to primary collectors for storage and processing in form of Working Capital etc. should be made available on softer terms.

Training for skill enhancement for sustainable extraction methods and processing to the primary producers is an important area of intervention.

TDCC, OFDC, Oil Federations etc. should take up higher level processing (which is not possible at primary producers' level) In order to create market for the processed products of the primary collectors' organizations

Marketing

No Royalty should be charged on NTFPs other than the Nationalized NTFPs i.e. Sal seed and Kendu Leaves. The royalty on these products is estimated to be of the tune of 70-80 lakhs which is negligible compared to the returns that would accrue to the primary produces from such a royalty waiver (refer Hill brooms example given earlier).

Royalty on nationalized products should be linked with the price prevalent at the level of the primary collector, and should be a fraction of the price to the primary producers.

Transit formalities should be relaxed and should be made simpler. For NTFPs other than nationalised NTFPs transit formalities should be relaxed to ensure free trade. The implications of this need to be debated and analyzed. In case of Mahua flowers, excise requirements should be relaxed.

Market Information dissemination is very important for the benefit of the primary collectors' organizations, such market information support is one of the crucial marketing support that can be provided by existing agencies such as TDCC, OFDC.

Establish support prices linked with market prices through analysis of value addition at various stages(*refer recommendation 92, Para 6.26, NCDBA*). TDCC and OFDC may administer the support price.

Develop stronger linkages between the primary producer and the final consumer through better retail network and marketing support.

Higher level processing units may be set up by organizations like TDCC and OFDC in tribal areas. Similarly, wherever federations of primary collectors' organisations are willing and capable, they may be supported to set up such processing units.

The fear that in case the lease system for monopoly procurement is abolished, there may not be any purchasers for certain NTFPs does not apply-as monopoly procurers like TDCC and UFPL have already surrendered a number of forest produce which are not viable to collect and market.

According to a decision taken in July,94 in review meeting taken by Finance Minister, it has been decided that TDCC should procure different MFPs through tie-up arrangements only. As it is, TDCC procures only those products, which have an assured market demand-giving monopoly over such products is decided by unfair practice, specially when it depresses the prices paid to the primary collectors.

State owned organisations like TDCC & OFDC may be given special incentives to be able to compete in free market-the cost of these incentives should be borne by the State from its Welfare Programs. The State can offer following benefit to these organisations:-

(I) Managerial subsidy :- The TDCC of Orissa suffers on account of high managerial overheads. In the GCC of Andhra Pradesh and the respective TDCCs of West Bengal and Maharashtra the Government fully subsidizes the managerial expenditure. In Orissa the subsidy on this account amounts to Rs 20 lakhs per annum which is less than 15% of the total managerial expenditure. For greater stability and better operation of TDCC the Orissa Government has to do the same as these other states.

(ii) Royalty :- The GCC and the TDCC of West Bengal are reimbursed by their respective state Governments for the entire royalty amount paid by them. Maharashtra compensates for the loss on trading account. In Orissa there is no reimbursement for the royalty paid. Reimbursement of the full amount of Royalty is going to benefit the TDCC by Rs 80 lakhs per annum and wipe out its annual loss on the trading account(from figures for 1993-94).

(iii) Purchase Tax and Sales Tax :- GCC is fully exempted from sales tax and purchase tax. TDCC is burdened with a sales/purchase tax figure of Rs 15 lakhs that depresses the sale rate. The TDCC should also get the same kind of exemption as the GCC of Andhra Pradesh.

(iv) TDCC has to bear an annual interest burden of Rs 200 lakhs on borrowings for working capital. TDCC has proposed to the Government to sanction a one-time grant of Rs 8.5 crores as procurement advance.

Institutional Support

Reorientation and restructuring of Government. Marketing set-up towards taking up the role of a support system is becoming imperative.

The possibility and implications of a Marketing Promotion Board needs to be analyzed.

Formation of district level coordination committee with representation of the collectors' representatives

Establishment of R & D facilities for :

- Skill Upgradation
- Development and extension of Appropriate Technology for NTFP processing
- Compilation and Dissemination of Market Information
- Finding alternatives for better and more paying uses of NTFPs (*recommendation 97, Para 6.28 NCDBA*)
- There needs to be shift in focus from timber to NTFP, and this shift needs to be supported by research in the direction of NTFP based forest management systems.

Involvement of NGOs, Experts, research institutions for marketing and training support processes to the primary producers and their organisations and also R& D in production and processing organisations is also important.

Gender Issues

Last but not the least it was emphasized at various points during discussions that since women are the major producers of these NTFP there should be emphasis in involving women at all stages of decision making in NTFP management i.e. forest management with focus on NTFP, NTFP collection and processing. There should be adequate attention on incorporating gender sensitive forest management options that focus on enhancing productivity of products that women depend on for the subsistence needs of the family. Facilitating associations of women for processing of NTFP and women entrepreneurship would also help in income generation to women as well as empowerment through confidence building.

This paper as mentioned before is meant to initiate debate on some crucial issues with regards to NTFP trade and rights of local people on NTFP. Comments on this paper can be sent to :

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