



# NTFP Management: A 12<sup>th</sup> Plan Perspective

## Defining NTFPs:

Management plan & perspective of NTFPs would essentially depend on the purview of NTFPs, i.e. what they include and/or exclude.

In India there was no legal definition of terms like Non-timber Forest Produce(NTFP), Non-wood Forest Produce(NWFP), or Minor Forest Produce(MFP) till the Schedule Tribe & Other Forest Dwellers(Recognition of Forest Rights) Act, 2006 otherwise known as FRA (Forest Rights Act) defined MFP as under:

“Minor forest produce includes all non-timber forest produce of plant origin including bamboo, brushwood, stumps, cane, tassar, cocoons, honey, wax, lac, tendu or kendu leaves, medicinal plants and herbs, roots, tubers and the alike.”(Section 2-1)

Thus, while the FRA recognized a wide range of forest produce starting from bamboo to lichens, thereby giving no scope to the earlier prevailing management concepts that, despite their differences across the states, tried to put certain items under restriction and/or monopoly and hence gave the right & responsibility to the state agency(usually the Forest Department) to manage the same; it critically depended on the term NTFP which itself is a dubious term. For instance, bamboo is said to be an NTFP because it belongs to the grass family and is a monocotyledon but at the same time it has the potential to create a wide canopy cover of its own like trees and contains cellulose that is present in wood/timber. Further, the term ‘non-timber’ can also refer to forest produces of faunal origin ranging from feathers to horns & hides; so the definition of MFP in FRA is on a safe side by mentioning ‘non-timber forest produce of plant origin’, thereby excluding produces of animal/faunal origin though it actually includes lac, honey and tassar cocoon that are of faunal origin.

Based on the recommendations of an internal interdepartmental FAO meeting on definitions of NWFPs held in June 1999, the following new FAO working definition of NWFPs has been adopted: "Non-wood forest products consist of goods of biological origin other than wood, derived from forests, other wooded land and trees outside forests."

According to working definition adopted by FAO, the three components of the term "non-wood forest products" are interpreted as follows:

*Non-wood:* The term NWFP excludes all woody raw materials. Consequently, timber, chips, charcoal and fuelwood, as well as small woods such as tools, household equipment and carvings, are excluded. Non-timber forest products (NTFPs), in contrast, generally include fuelwood and small woods; this is the main difference between NWFPs and NTFPs.

*Forest:* NWFPs should be derived from forests and similar land uses. FAO has elaborated definitions of "forest" and "other wooded land" in a working paper on terms and

definitions for the Forest Resources Assessment 2000. Since plantations are included in the FAO definition of forest, NWFPs that are obtained from plantations, such as gum arabic (*Acacia Senegal*) or rubber (*Hevea brasiliensis*), are thus included in the definition of NWFPs. Many NWFPs are derived from both natural forests and plantations. The final definition of "trees outside forests" (including trees originating from forests which are located out of the forest and other wooded land, such as *Acacia albida* and the Karité tree, *Butyrospermum parkii*) is still in the process of elaboration.

*Products:* In the proposed definition, the term "product" corresponds to goods that are tangible and physical objects of biological origin such as plants, animals and their products. Forest services (e.g. ecotourism, grazing, bioprospecting) and forest benefits (e.g. soil conservation, soil fertility, watershed protection) are excluded. Services and benefits are even more difficult to assess and quantify than NWFPs and have therefore already been excluded from most publications dealing with NWFPs. A clear definition of forest services and benefits is still lacking.

(FAO 1999. FAO Forestry: Towards a harmonized definition of non-wood forest products.

<http://www.fao.org/docrep/x2450e/x2450e0d.htm>)

However, India normally NTFP is not supposed to include fuelwood as per the prevalent practice. Further, to include certain items like tamarind in the NTFP/MFP list has also been questioned as a significant part of their production comes from non-forest growths. The Orissa government therefore had a legal provision to register growers of specified forest produces so as to allow them certain relaxations. However, when the PESA Act gives ownership right to the Gram sabha over MFP, it doesn't clarify if this would not be applicable to produces from private lands(like, cultivated lac).

### **Objectives of NTFP Management:**

In the 12<sup>th</sup> 5-year Plan our objectives of NTFP management should include (but not necessarily confined to) the following:

1. To conserve and develop the vast & diverse potential that the NTFP resources have to critically contribute to the food security & livelihood of the forest dwellers and other dependent disadvantaged communities.
2. To conserve the biodiversity in general and natural produce diversity of forest origin in particular.
3. To preserve & develop the resource base for food security of wildlife.
4. To decide and adopt strategies for the above purposes in the changing contexts like climate change.
5. To help & ensure a smooth & successful compliance with the mandates of PESA and FRA that give ownership rights over MFP to the Gram sabha on condition of preserving & managing them sustainably.

### **Current challenges in NTFP sector:**

- Low priority at the policy & planning level, and hence low investments for developing this sector.
- Being unorganized in most part(except for few like Bidi leaves and bamboo) there is a lack of clarity on the actual collection, trade, pricing and other related aspects like the number of primary collectors.
- Owing to lack of scientific inventorization there is also a lack of clarity on the actual production potential of NTFPs and how it has changed over time due to anthropogenic and non-anthropogenic pressures like climate change.
- Timber-centric management approach
- Inconsistent policy environment across the states and also at national level
- Low range of R&D focus(we can question to what extent the huge investments made in R&D institutions have actually been productive)
- Insecure market
- Poor market linkages
- Producer's organizations can't normally compete with private traders partly because they are not supposed to adopt illegal practices(like evading taxes) and partly because of unfavourable policy.
- Inadequate value addition & storage
- Dwindling resource base
- Poor interest of entrepreneurs in commercial farming of NTFPs(this is chiefly due to the insecure market)
- Unsustainable harvesting practices
- Cost of transportation (as in case of *Andrographis paniculata*)
- Impact of welfare schemes like MGNREGS that have increased options for NTFP collectors thereby facilitating a decision for ignoring the NTFP collection, unless otherwise required.

The immediate challenges are as under:

- *Ownership & management by Gram sabha:* Whereas examples from Kerala and other areas confirm that under favourable enabling mechanisms sincere & enthusiastic PRI functionaries can really manage the local development affairs successfully, and whereas there are a number of examples from Odisha and other states showing how individuals and/or communities have successfully managed to handle the bidi leaf and/bamboo produced under their ownership, the overall situation particularly in the tribal areas/forest areas is that neither the Gram sabha is in a position to handle NTFP resource & trade management on its own in a sustainable & successful way, nor are the PRIs capable enough to ensure the same; and this is because of lack of proper enabling mechanism, differential requirements of NTFP species, and often not so promising commerce of locally available NTFPs.

Neither FRA nor PESA defined ownership. On the other hand, the MoPR Committee headed by Dr.Haque clarified that while ownership over MFP should mean that the owner communities are free to collect and sell the produce(MFP) as they please ‘subject to existing laws’, given the fact that these people are often unable to bargain with market forces successfully hence state trading on their behalf still seems to be relevant with rights of the owner communities over the profit generated(MoPR 2011.Report of the Committee on Ownership, Price Fixation, Value Addition and Marketing of Minor Forest Produce. Section 2.4).

Centralized management has its own advantages and can be relevant in particular cases like tendu leaves and bamboo. Whereas private traders have been eagerly awaiting abolition of state monopolies over tendu leaves with a promise of better returns to the gatherers, one should not forget that it was their exploitation that was a major factor behind imposing the state monopoly. Presently, pluckers in Odisha are getting equal price for their tendu patta collection irrespective of the quality(gradations) whereas private traders are not likely to do that and in that case pluckers in most areas may get a poor price since the quality of leaves is better only in few pockets. Similarly, centralised management of bamboo can better tackle situations like gregarious flowering.

What the Secretary, Ministry of Panchayati Raj has suggested is that Gram sabhas should prepare a MFP management plan in consultation with the Forest Department. We can go a little beyond and say that localised management should also have some centralized & complimentary mechanisms in deserving cases. In other words there can be a sharing of responsibilities at both levels. What these cases can/should be and how it can be done is to be discussed.

- Whereas the Working Plan Code prescribes for NTFP management though it is questionable as to what extent this has actually been complied with, it is to be made clear what should be the responsibility for Reserve Forest areas under Gram sabha control.
- Whereas due to lack of options poor forest dwellers used to heavily depend on NTFP collections earlier now with welfare schemes like MGNREGS and also due to other factors like educational developments they are being found to have ignored this occupation to some extent if not totally. The Government of India’s decision to offer Minimum Support Price is definitely expected to alter this situation, but while the government would guarantee the MSP it would not be able to guarantee that the resource base will not be adversely affected by this.
- Silvicultural operations should be participatory and based on local microplans given the fact that there are reports that in some areas silvicultural operations by the Forest Department destroyed valuable NTFP species and even paved the way for invasive weeds. NTFP-specific silviculture should be emphasised.

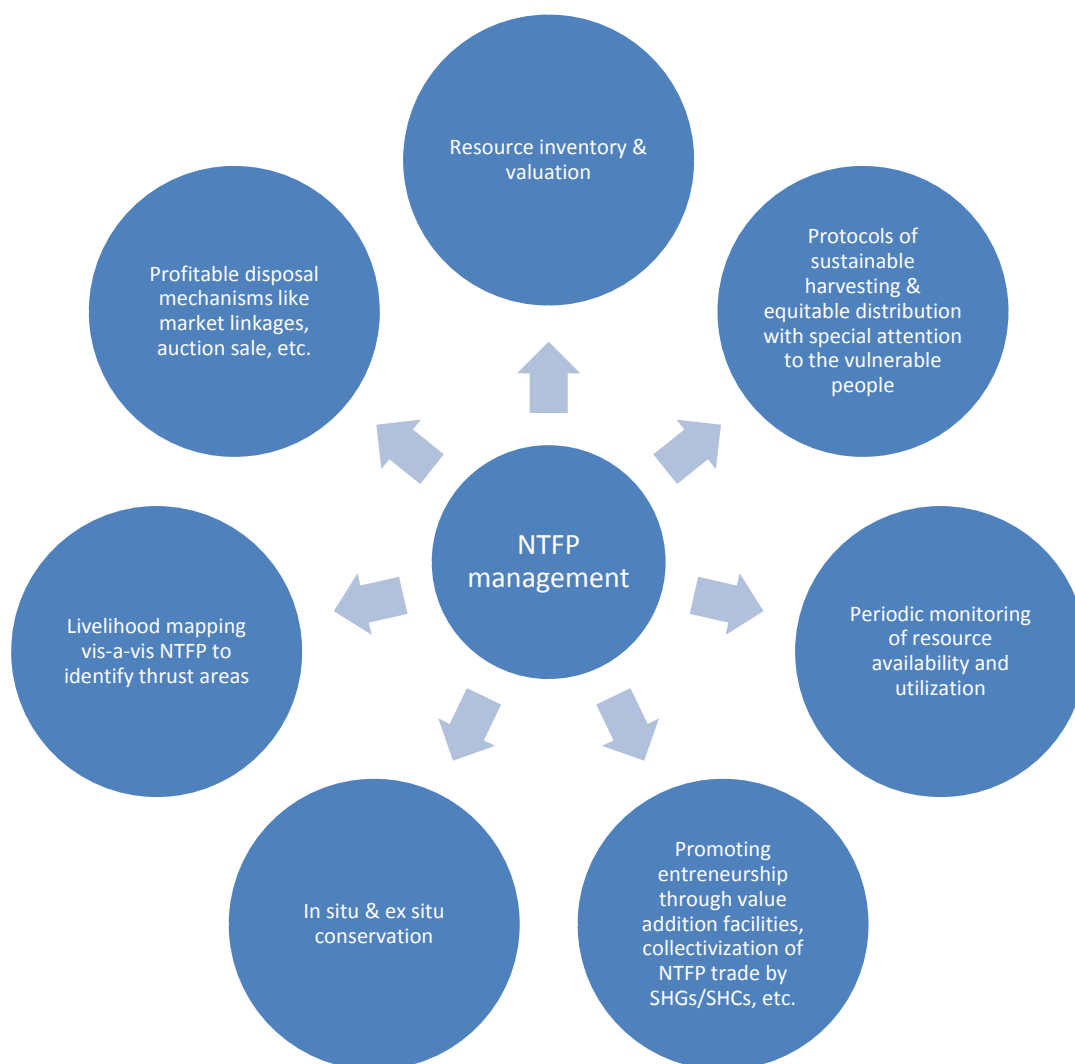
- In most cases including the MoPR Committee's report on MFP scientific identity and factors are either ignored or given secondary importance. For instance, the said report did not mention any scientific name and simply recommended for MSP on 'myrobalans' without clarifying if it meant all the three myrobalans. Further, it mentioned 'puwad' which people in Odisha and some other parts of India can hardly understand/recognize. Mahual patta means *Bauhinia vahlii* in MP whereas in Odisha it should mean *Madhuca indica*. This causes confusion having sometimes adverse impacts like in Orissa where the government deregulated the trade of 'rasna' without mentioning which species it referred to, and hence among the three/four different species traded in the name of rasna the valuable one (*Blepharispermum subsessile*) is in danger<sup>1</sup>.

#### **Aspects of NTFP management:**

NTFP management should mean an overall responsibility of conserving & developing the resource with sustainable utilization and equitable distribution. The following chart would indicate different dimensions of NTFP management:

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<sup>1</sup> This information on rasna is courtesy Sri Biswanath Hota, member, State Medicinal Plant Board, Odisha



### **Important NTFPs in Eco-zones:**

Odisha, Andhra Pradesh, Jharkhand, Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Maharashtra are the major producers of NTFPs in India though specific NTFPs may dominate in other areas like tamarind in southern states, bamboo in north-east, and medicinal plants in the Himalayan states. These states belong to the Indomalayan eco-zone(vide Wikipedia, List of Eco-regions in India). The following table provides information about some of the important NTFP species of this region with specific reference to Odisha:

Important non-nationalized NTFPs of commercial importance in Odisha

Sl. No.	Local name	Botanical name	Part used	Collection area	Regional importance
1	Sala	<i>Shorea robusta</i>	seed/kernel, leaves, resin	Whole state	Widely collected
2	Amla	<i>Embllica officinalis</i>	fruit	Whole state	Widely collected
3	Char	<i>Buchanania lanzan</i>	kernel	Whole state	Widely collected
4	Siali	<i>Bauhinia vahli</i>	leaves/fibre	Whole state	Widely collected
5	Phul jhadu	<i>Thysanolaena maxima</i>	inflorescence	Localised	Localized due to sporadic distribution
6	Pojo/Jayasandha	<i>Litsea glutinosa</i>	bark	Whole state	Widely collected
7	Genduli atha	<i>Sterculia urens</i>	gum	Whole state	Widely collected
8	Paluo	<i>Curcuma angustifolia</i>	tuber starch	Localised	Localized due to sporadic distribution
9	Patalgarud	<i>Rauvolfia serpentina</i>	roots	Localised	Localized due to sporadic distribution
10	Tentuli	<i>Tamarindus indica</i>	Fruit/seed	Whole state	Widely collected
11	Beta(cane)			Localised	Localized due to sporadic distribution
12	Mahua	<i>Madhuca indica</i>	Flower/seed	Whole state	Widely collected
13	Mahu(honey)			Whole state	Widely collected
14	Lakha(Lac)			Localised	Localized due to not so wide-spread cultivation
15	Tassar khosa (cocoon)			Localized	Localized due to not so wide-spread cultivation

Important nationalized NTFPs of commercial importance in Odisha

Sl. No.	Local name	Botanical name	Part used	Collection area	Regional importance
1	Kendu patra	<i>Dyospyros melanoxylon</i>	Leaves	Whole state	Widely collected
2	Baunsha(bamboo)	<i>Dendocalamus strictus and Bambusa bambos</i>		Whole state	Widely collected

Note: Other items like *Terminalia chebula* (Chebulic myrobalan), Karanj(*Pongamia pinnata*) are also collected, but not always seen as very valuable or important NTFP.



## **Recommendations:**

In view of the past experiences and current challenges the following recommendations are made:

1. Consistency at policy level should be brought in regarding the provisions on NTFPs. Sal seed butter(CBE) should be permitted for chocolate making.
2. High priority at policy and planning level for optimum utilization of the potential of NTFPs, be it employment generation or export promotion.
3. A centralized mechanism should be developed for harmonizing the unorganized dynamics of NTFPs.
4. Like Rubber Board, Coir Board, or Spice Board the government should essentially consider similar agencies for promotion of NTFPs, atleast for top-ranking NTFPs like tendu leaf.
5. Scientific inventorization of NTFP should be taken up on priority basis.
6. Impact of non-anthropogenic factors like climate change should be properly studied at national level so as to design relevant strategies.
7. MSP should be considered for low-value but high volume NTFPs that otherwise remain undisposed of.
8. Silvicultural practices should be NTFP-specific and participatory.
9. A special R&D drive should be launched at national level so as to develop alternate, dignified and commercially viable marketability of single-use(major) items like mahua and tendu patta, and also to develop marketability of otherwise obscure items.
10. The corporate sector should be asked to invest for NTFP development.
11. Export promotion of NTFPs should be strategized because the present system seems inadequate for that. Even the information available with Director General of Commercial Intelligence (DGCIS) doesn't give a proper and detail picture of the export of NTFPs.
12. Where state trading is required to safeguard the interest of the primary collectors the top-most priority should be to generate maximum profit for them.
13. There should be something like a Trust Fund that can finance NTFP-based entrepreneurship, and can even provide financial support to Gram sabhas for this purpose. This can work under the NTFP Board. Convenient linkages with Medicinal Plant Board and National Bamboo Mission etc. can be also built for this purpose.
14. User-friendly, eco-friendly and viable value addition & storage techniques should be developed, particularly keeping in view the fact that most of the NTFP collectors are women.
15. Institution building for collective trading of NTFPs is to be promoted with special support systems for women.
16. IEC materials on protocols on sustainable harvesting and equitable distribution should be developed and distributed in major vernacular languages of the primary collectors.
17. Scientific database on NTFPs should be developed and standardized.
18. Viable mechanisms for NTFP certification alongwith Criteria & Indicators developed by IIFM, Bhopal should be developed and promoted.
19. The JFM regime of NTFP rights & management should be revised in the context of FRA, and PESA.

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