

KORAPUT – Livelihoods & NTFPs

CASE STUDY - Assessing the potential of tree-borne oilseeds in Koraput District

Tree-borne oilseeds are a type of NTFP which are abundant throughout Odisha but whose potential arguably remains untapped. The seeds of trees such as Sal, Kusum, Karanj, Neem, Mahua and Castor yield natural oils which have a variety of applications. Some are used for medicinal purposes and to treat skin conditions, others for cooking or as a fuel, while others are ingredients in food products.

However, the price fetched by primary collectors for these seeds has prohibited large-scale collection from the forest and many of the oil mills in this part of Odisha operate below capacity.

With this in mind, NABARD commissioned RCDC to undertake a study of the potential of tree-borne oilseeds in Koraput district in November 2011. Staff of the Koraput Regional Office carried out extensive fieldwork across all 14 blocks of Koraput District during December 2011 and January 2012. They interviewed primary collectors, Self-Help Cooperatives, traders and officials and gathered data on current production levels, prices, seasonality, trading, market channels and untapped potential.

The study found that tree-borne oilseeds are important in Koraput District in terms of both subsistence and cash income. However, there is undoubted potential for further growth in this sector, especially for Sal, Kusum, Karanj and Mahua. Better prices for collectors and support from government and NGOs would be required to fulfil this potential.

At present, prices are too low to make collection of seeds economically feasible, even for those on low incomes. A more healthy industry would also encourage people to protect and sustainably manage forests. If the potential of tree-borne oilseed was tapped, it would help to improve the income of tribal collectors, most of whom are women.