

Gondia villages show the way for tendu collection

12 Gondia, 2 Melghat Villages Use Community Forest Rights To Earn From Forests In Sustainable Manner

TOI

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Nagpur: Even as community forest rights (CFR) have met with limited success, and failed to pan out across all forest communities, 14 gram sabhas have shown the way by exercising their rights on tendu patta and making a turnover of around ₹35 lakh.

This is the third consecutive year where villages collected tendu and sold it, passing on the benefits to the communities. Of these 14 gram sabhas 12 are in Gondia and 2 in Amravati district.

During tendu season in May this year, 12 villages, Mangatola, Dhamditola, Tumadikasa, Paulzola, Mehtakheda, Mohandi, Vasani, Heti, Girola, Lendezari, Pradhantola and Malijunga, from Gondia collected 7,57,735 tendu bundles (775.73 standard bags) from their forest areas under CFR.

Dilip Gode, secretary of Vidarbha Nature Conservation Society (VNCS), said 561 families and more than 2,000 persons were involved in this process, which lasted for some 10 days.

A group of gram sabhas, an apex body of the villages, fixed the rate of ₹175 per 100 bundles for tendu leaf collection and paid the people immediately on getting material at a collection centre. "They sold collected tendu leaves for ₹4,500 per standard bag to a trader from West Bengal," he said.

Gode says there may be few success stories like this, where despite extraction of forest produce ecological aspects are being valued. "The villagers protected forests from fires and bush cutting. There was no illicit felling and poaching. Due to regeneration of forests, wildlife



Tendu leaves being dried and packed in a village

HOW THEY DID IT

- Over 2,000 persons from 14 villages in Gondia and Melghat collected tendu leaves
- They targeted around 8,000 hectare forest area under community forest rights
- People collected 775 standard bags and sold them to Bengal trader @ ₹4,500 a bag
- Villagers get wages
- To meet initial expenses, financial help came from state tribal corporation
- NGOs VNCS from Nagpur and Khoj from Melghat facilitated collection process

has staged a comeback. The area where CFR work is being done is part of Navegaon-Nagzira corridor," he added.

Gode said this is the third year people have exercised their rights despite many obstacles in the trade, like blockade by vested interests, lack of marketing support by related government departments and volatile market and climatic conditions.

The locals themselves managed collection, checking, grading, drying and packing of the material followed by sale and maintained all records.

This process was facilitated by VNCS, whereas fi-

nancial support was provided by Maharashtra State Cooperative Tribal Development Corporation, a state government body functioning under the department of tribal development, to meet the cost of initial payment for collection and management of centre. The amount was sought as temporary capital and will be returned to the corporation after receipt of full and final payment from the purchasers.

Tendu leaves (80 standard bags) were also collected by two villages in Melghat area of Amravati with facilitation by Khoj, working for CFRs. "People from Melghat villages involved are happy to exercise their power not only for income, but for establishing their ownership over the land and regulating its use by preventing forest destruction," said Purnima Upadhyaya of Khoj.

Instead of aiming for more yield by using ecologically unsustainable practices like bush cutting and forest fires, villagers set an example by giving up the controversial practices.

"In Maharashtra, bush cutting is officially allowed by forest department, which helps generate more income to the traders but degrades forest and arrests regeneration," says Gode.