

West Bengal:

Collection, processing and marketing of MFP including medicinal plants in Midnapur district

In West Midnapore district of West Bengal, Jhargram forest division was studied by RCDC in 2002-03 to examine the availability, and trade scenario of NTFP including medicinal species. Some villages were selected for the study using purposive random sampling method. Discussion had been made with the primary collectors, traders, commission agents, forest officials, NGOs etc. The details of sal leaf and some medicinal species have been discussed below.

Sal leaf

Ten years before the primary collectors were not getting proper prices for Sal leaf as most of the Sal plates in West Bengal were coming from Orissa. With increasing demand, local traders start collecting Sal leaf and vis-à-vis the primary collectors get more money.

Mr Ashok Nandi, a trader in Jhargram Block of West Midnapore district started a processing unit on Sal leaf in 1993. At present he has more than 100 employees engaged in processing of Sal leaves and tasar cocoon. For Sal plate making 30 employees are engaged and most of them are from Orissa. The trader has engaged 12 agents in West Midnapore district to collect leaves from different villages. The agents have established good rapport among the FPCs, villages and local hats. They generally take advance from Mr. Nandi to collect leaves. The agents prefer to buy leaves from weekly hats. They keep Rs 2/- as commission per 800 plates while selling to Mr. Nandi. Here the tradition is to collect 800 leafs as an unit while buying, but the selling unit is 1000 leafs. On an average an agent earns Rs. 20- 30/- on each haat.

Though Mr. Nandi mostly procures from Midnapore district, at times of demand, he also procures from Purulia and Bankura districts and at times also from border area of Orissa. This according to him is done in order to keep his clients happy, though it does not make him more profitable.

Price of Sal leaf at haat

Items of Sal leaf	Price at hat (100 Piece)
-------------------	--------------------------

Dry leaf plate	Rs 8-10
Green leaf	Rs 1.50
Green leaf plates	Rs 8.00
Leaf bowls	Rs 5.00
Machine stitched plates	Rs. 15

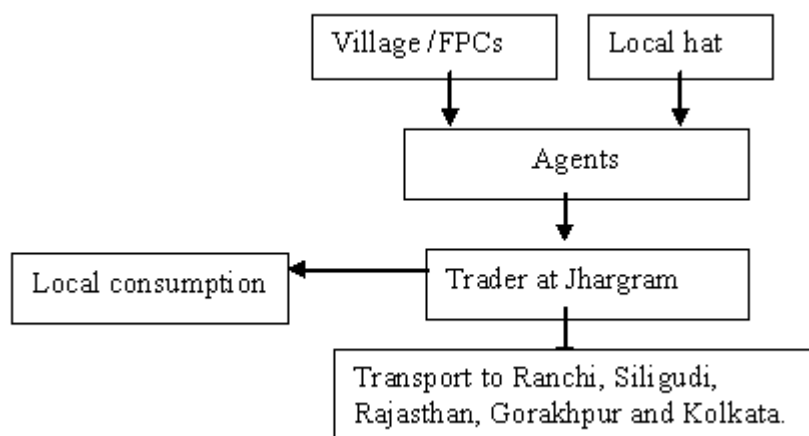
Mr. Nandi generally buys dry leaf plates and bowls. After processing he sells the plates to the traders at Kolkata, Ranchi, Gorakhpur, Rajasthan and Siligudi. Getting a TP is not difficult for him. The Range Officer is authorized by the DFO to issue TP to any trader. He gives royalty to the forest department @ Rs 350/- for small trucks and Rs 713 for big trucks.

Operational cost benefit of setting up a Sal leaf making Machine unit
 1000 raw plates are required for making 500 plates in the machine. One semiskilled person requires 1.5 to 2 hours for making of 500 plates. The other requirements are –
 70 gm pasting polythene is required @ Rs 45 /- kg for 500 plates,
 50 gm polythene for packing of 500 plates @ Rs 42/- per kg.

Cost of 1000 raw plates	=	Rs 60.00
Labour cost for processing 500 plates	=	Rs 9.00
Average electricity consumption for 500 plates	=	Rs 8.00
Stitching and marking cost for 500 plates	=	Rs 0.50
Polythene for pasting of 500 plates	=	Rs 3.15
Polythene for packing of 500 plates	=	Rs 2.10
Packaging bag of 500 plates	=	Rs 0.50
Heating coil (average)	=	Rs 2.00
Misc. expenses	=	Rs 1.00
Total expenses	=	Rs 86.25

Total expenses for 1000 plates	=	Rs 172.50
Sale Price of 1000 plates	=	Rs 200.00
Gross Profit per 1000 plates	=	Rs. 17.50

Trade mechanism of Sal leaf in south WB



Medicinal plants in Midnapore

The forest of the district also has some medicinal plants and good number of NTFPs. The primary collectors had traditional rights on these that have been legalized after implementation of the JFM. (Dr. Tapan K. Mishra, 2002). Most of the plants having medicinal properties like kalmegh, hartaki, anathmul, vella etc. are harvested during early winter.

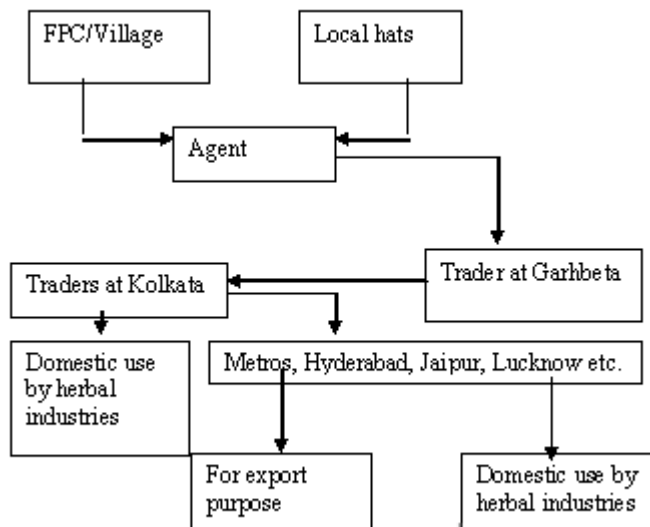
There is always a middleman connected with the trade of NTFPs whether it is consumable items or medicinal plants, who generally keeps contact with FPCs or villagers directly or purchase produces from local hats. These middlemen have good relationship with the collectors as well as the buyers/ wholesalers so that their bargaining power is kept intact and they always try to buy produces with prices as less as possible while selling at as high a rate as possible.

Some traders who deal with medicinal plants are based at Garhbeta block of Medinipur district. Pawan Mallick is one of the traders located at Pingboni of Garhbeta

block. According to Mr Mallick there are lots of medicinal plants in south WB that are not harvested in an organized way. Trading is very poor and the poor collectors are not getting proper price from the plants. There is no medicinal plant cultivation in the state for which the level of awareness among the primary collectors on sustainable harvesting practices is very less. As the production potential of medicinal plants in the state is very less big traders buy from other states. Most of the items he collected from different parts of the district, are being sold in Kolkata for export and domestic use by the herbal drug industries.

The process of collective power regarding collection, value addition and marketing is gradually getting diminished and the primary collectors are not in a position to afford the labour cost involved with it.

Trade Channel of Medicinal Plants



■