

## **Enhancing the gamechanger quotient of bamboo**

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The advantages of bamboo in commercial and domestic applications are already well documented. Nevertheless, its significance as a tool for achieving environmental and economic sustainability in the wake of growing climate crises needs greater understanding.

This is largely because bamboo is unaffected by flood, hailstorms, drought and fire, is quake resistant and has unique elasticity. As an extremely fast and flexibly growing grass in different conditions, it provides the farmers with the ability to adapt their farming practices to climate induced agricultural conditions. Bamboo provides a year-round source of income, and can be converted into an increasingly wide variety of value-added products for sale including bamboo shoots, charcoal, vinegar etc.

With its wide use and properties, it is rightly hailed as potential game changer especially in developing economies. In India, north-eastern region accounts for substantial bamboo cultivation close to 65 percent with bamboo closely embedded in the traditions and food heritage of the states.

However, habitat destruction and extensive use of bamboos for subsistence and commercial purposes have resulted in severe depletion of natural bamboo resources. In international bamboo trade, India still captures only 4 percent share even though it is the second largest cultivator of Bamboo globally after China. While India needs to catch up in a big way internationally, the domestic bamboo industry has simultaneously struggled to attain fruition.

In recent years, the government of India has taken steps to increase bamboo's utility. One of these relates to amending the Indian Forest Act of 1927 for declassification of bamboo from trees to grass to enhance livelihoods of farmers to grow, harvest and value add bamboo. Moreover, it was moved to the horticulture department in June 2019.

The renewed National Bamboo Mission (NBM) in 2018 envisages improved post-harvest facilities for primary processing, treatment, seasoning and market development. One such area neatly catering to such objectives is the bamboo shoot industry which has immense potential of marketing as health food. In India, the domestic bamboo shoot industry is yet at a nascent stage and more spearheading intervention is required for preserving bamboo shoots for long term use and retaining its nutritional content.

A climate vulnerable state—Mizoram has 57% of the geographical area covered by bamboo forests. The dominant species of *Melocanna baccifera* has immense potential utility as 50% is utilized of the 24 million metric tons stock present.

Notwithstanding the various bottle necks that exist in the form of low productivity, lack of proper management, overload of taxation in transportation of finished products due to transit through Assam, flooding of local markets with duty free imports through the ASEAN trade agreement; with the right inputs and an enabling environment, bamboo still has the potential to be a game changer in the region including Mizoram.

Of late, the government of Mizoram has worked for promotion and marketing of bamboo. It has provided training visits to farmers to Tripura for better production of handicrafts and furniture uses. It is also promoting indigenous varieties of bamboo and implementing the objectives of national bamboo mission.

Aligning with goals of Indian government, under Indo-German bilateral cooperation, GIZ is supporting intervention in bamboo sector on 2 aspects- the supply side and demand side management in the state of Mizoram.

As a first step, GIZ carried out a feasibility study for bamboo sector development, enabled Government of Mizoram to access finance from the National Bamboo Mission as well as facilitated documentation of international standards for some select bamboo value chains for the state of Mizoram.

The supply side intervention on community-based bamboo forest management aims to prevent illegal harvesting of bamboo trees in the protected forest area by introducing permit with Department of Environment, Forests and Climate Change, Government of Mizoram. As an area of intervention, the *Upamual* protected forest site in *Chhingcchip* village of Mizoram, is divided into different blocks for different levels of conservation. While some areas are demarcated with limited harvesting, some others have limited or no harvesting' zones demarcation. Additionally, the work promotes active conservation and re-generation of bamboo by replacing old species of bamboo with new ones and creating inventory for categorizing species and number of bamboo in the protected site village.

With regard to demand-side intervention, developing supply chains is necessary to meet economies of scale while securing business to business linkages enhances cost-competitiveness. Within this context, several extra-sectoral inputs that can enhance and promote the growth of bamboo sector are infrastructure, connectivity, skilled labour as well

as credit facilities. Additionally, knowhow on international markets and standards are a prerequisite to sustainable bamboo value chain augmentation

In the area of bamboo shoot preservation, GIZ supported training of entrepreneurs for primary processing and packaging of bamboo shoots while also setting up of international standards of bamboo shoots for credibility and trade outside the state. It is anticipated that the trained entrepreneurs would set up MSMEs boosting domestic and international markets.

For bamboo species unsuitable for the bamboo shoot value chain, the rapidly growing bamboo value chain of activated charcoal, charcoal briquettes, biochar and bamboo vinegar makes great business opportunities also since it sequesters carbon and arrests land degradation. Considering the co-benefits aspect of this value chain, GIZ facilitated a feasibility study to bring forth the input requirements, costs as well as details of international standards.

The ground has been set in Mizoram for creation of interest, upward pull and bankability for viable business models for bamboo value chains. As climate crises escalates, now is the right time for the government to apply the knowledge thus gained for greater bamboo utility in the state.

Source: <https://www.northeasttoday.in/enhancing-the-gamechanger-quotient-of-bamboo/>