

Jharkhand govt, ISB ink pact for developing forest economy

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Hyderabad: The Jharkhand State government collaborated with the Indian School of Business (ISB) for a unique initiative to empower the State's forest economy.

At an event to mark the second anniversary of Hemant Soren-led government on Wednesday, the Department of Scheduled Tribes, Scheduled Castes, Minorities and Backward Classes Welfare along with the Department of Forests, Jharkhand, signed an MoU with the Bharti Institute of Public Policy at Indian School of Business to develop scalable and sustainable solutions focusing on forest-based industrial value chains.

The MoU was signed by Naman Priyesh Lakra, Welfare Commissioner, Government of Jharkhand and Professor Ashwini Chhatre, Executive Director, Bharti Institute of Public Policy, ISB, in the presence of Governor Ramesh Bais and Chief Minister Hemant Soren.

Elaborating on the collaboration, Professor Ashwini Chhatre said, "Our approach is to build and formalise linkages between major stakeholders in existing value chains for forest-based industrial raw material while creating incentives for sustainable forest management. We will facilitate institutional and technological capacity building of communities. This vision will contribute towards meeting India's global commitments for sustainable development."

In January 2020, the Chief Minister, less than a month old in office, approached ISB to propose a cluster-based strategy for the development of the State's forest economy. Based on research on the current scale and future potential of existing value chains, the team of researchers from ISB, led by Prof Chhatre, proposed an institutional design to facilitate sustainable forest management, value addition, and industrial procurement of seasonal forest products.

The ISB team plans to pilot this approach in the Gumla district, before expanding to other districts with promising forest products. For this, the researchers have prepared an action plan, starting with creating incentives for local communities by establishing Community Forest Resource rights under the Forest Rights Act. The team is also working closely with Jharkhand State Livelihood Promotion Society (the nodal agency for the National Rural Livelihoods Mission in Jharkhand) for supporting this vision through women's self-help groups (SHGs).

The lynchpin of the initiative is the partnership between local communities as the custodians of forest resources; industry leaders using the products of that forest, and government agencies facilitating and regulating the creation of jobs and wealth. This unique project also represents a triple-win opportunity by reducing environmental threats, creating jobs at the bottom of the pyramid, and establishing sustainable forest management systems.

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