



## New Opportunities for a third of Chhattisgarh's Population

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Forest management is a major component of Chhattisgarh's economy, like agriculture. Not only do the forests represent a large part of economy, but they also exhibit the essence of the culture of the state. While strengthening the rights of local people on forests and forest produce, new and historic tales of development are being formed.

The aim with which the new government is heading forward with its new policy can be chalked out by this statement by the Chief Minister Bhupesh Baghel: "If the income earned via forests increases, the love for forests will increase among the tribals." In this direction, this new policy gives equal importance and emphasis to economic and cultural development in forest-based economic activities.

31% of the tribal population resides in 44% of the state's forest cover. The new economic strategy of the Chhattisgarh government is bringing an incredible change in the lives of this large population through its approach to forests. Not only is the income of forest-dwellers increasing, but additional employment opportunities are also witnessing a spurt.

Every year 15 lakh standard bags of *tendu patta* are collected in the state which employs 12,53,000 families. The value of *tendu patta* has been increased from Rs 2,500 to Rs 4,000 per standard bag by the state government, gifting them with a direct benefit of Rs 649 crore. The government has set a target of benefiting 13 lakh forest dwellers who collect *tendu patta* with Rs 870.61 crore in the year 2020.

Many rare kind of herbs and other forest produce are collected by forest-dwellers of the state. The process of collection and processing of all kinds of forest produce, including *tendu patta*, provides forest-dwellers with an income of Rs 2,500 crore. The government has further increased the items of forest produce to be purchased at the minimum support price from 7 to 25 with an aim to liberate the forest-dwellers from the exploitation of middlemen and to provide them with a fair price for forest produce. A total of Rs 930 crore of forest produce brought under the purview of the scheme is traded within the state. The forest produce is procured via 866 *haat* markets and by April this year, about 86,000 quintal of micro forest produce had been collected at the increased rate by the Chhattisgarh government.

The processing of micro forest produce is providing employment to 1,390 self-help groups of women. They are processed in 130 Van Dhan Kendras. Approximately 8,000 women have increased their income by manufacturing masks. A plan of Rs 155 crore has been approved by the state for the processing of minor forest produce. With the help of CFTRI Mysore, production of Mahua-based energy bar, chocolate, pickle, sanitizer, *amla*-based dehydrated products, tamarind candy, *jamun* juice, *bell sharbat*, *bell murabba*, *chironji* and cashew

packets, etc. being planned and developed. This will provide employment to more than 5,000 families.

Apart from this, other forest-based activities have also created large employment opportunities. 30 lakh man-days of employment is being generated through activities like ground water conservation, revival of degraded forests, wells, etc. 20 lakh man-days of employment is being created through forest planting, river bank planting ,etc. Nearly 50 lakh man-days of employment are being provided by the Narva Development Program under the Campa. More than 7,000 tribal youths have got employment via the recurring Charai scheme which includes organic manure production. Various tasks related to forest management committees, such as the prevention of fire accidents, plant preparation, wildlife management, ground water conservation, mushroom production, fisheries, tourism development, wood art development, lac bangle manufacturing, dona *pattal* production, handicrafts work of terracotta art: 10 lakh man-days of employment is being generated by this. About 14,000 youths are getting employment through the construction of bamboo tree guards, bamboo furniture manufacturing, the planting of medicinal plants through Vanaushadhi Board, etc, through the Forest Development Corporation.

The new policy of the Chhattisgarh government has instilled a wave of new energy and enthusiasm among the residents of forest areas. The result was so significant that amid the lockdown period of Covid-19, where forest-based economic activities were stagnant throughout the nation, the state of Chhattisgarh registered an incredible achievement: it accounted for 98 percent of the forest produce collected during the lockdown.

*Taran Prakash Sinha (IAS) is Commissioner Public Relations, Government of Chhattisgarh.*

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