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SCIENCE & TECHNOLOGY RESOURCE CENTRE GONDWANA UNIVERSITY, GADCHIROLI

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From the CPO's Desk

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Emerging Trends in Marketing of Non-Timber Forest Produce: Central Indian Context

Non-Timber Forest Produce (NTFP) plays a vital role in sustaining the livelihoods of over 275 million people in India, contributing an estimated annual market value of INR 30,000 Crore. Central India, comprising states like Maharashtra, Madhya Pradesh, Chattisgarh, Jharkhand and Odisha contributes over 40% of the country's NTFP supply. A significant shift is evident in the market, transitioning from the trade of raw materials such as *tendu leaves*, *mahua flowers*, *chironji*, and *various seeds* to value-added products like *herbal medicines*, *essential oils*, and *natural cosmetics* (Sources: Ministry of Tribal Affairs, TRIFED Reports, and Independent Market Analysis).

This transformation has been catalyzed by branding initiatives emphasizing the cultural and ecological significance of NTFPs. Tribal-focused brands like Tribes India and state-supported ventures like, TRIFED-Odisha, Chattisgarh Herbals are successfully positioning products such as *mahua*, *chironji*, and *tamarind* in premium markets. These strategies are creating opportunities for national and international outreach, ensuring better returns for tribal producers.

Emerging Trends in NTFP Marketing

The marketing of NTFPs has undergone significant changes, driven by advancements in technology, policy support, and evolving consumer preferences. There is a growing emphasis on value addition at the source to enhance profitability. Products like *herbal teas*, *honey*, *essential oils*, and *cosmetics* are being processed locally, which not only improves shelf life but also helps fetch higher prices. Branding has further elevated the market appeal of these products, with initiatives like Tribes India and Chattisgarh Herbals setting benchmarks for promoting regional and tribal identity.

The rise of digital platforms has also played a pivotal role in expanding the reach of NTFPs. Online marketplaces such as Amazon, Flipkart, and niche platforms dedicated to organic and sustainable products have made these goods more accessible. Social media is increasingly used to highlight the cultural narratives behind these products, allowing tribal communities to connect with niche markets.

Government Policies and Institutional Support

Government policies and institutional support have further bolstered this sector. The Forest Rights Act (2006) has empowered communities to directly market their produce, while the Minimum Support Price (MSP) scheme introduced by TRIFED ensures fair pricing for selected NTFPs. Van Dhan Vikas Kendras (VDVKs), established to promote the collection, value addition, and marketing of NTFPs, are helping bridge the gap between producers and markets.



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Certification and eco-labeling are emerging as critical drivers for market growth. Organic and fair-trade certifications are particularly popular in urban and international markets, while Geographical Indications (GIs) are being sought for unique products such as Bastar's tamarind and Gondia's lac, further enhancing their market value.

Challenges in the NTFP Sector

Despite the promising trends, the sector faces challenges that hinder its full potential. Tribal communities often struggle with inadequate infrastructure and limited access to markets. The presence of middlemen continues to reduce the profitability for primary producers, while maintaining consistent quality and meeting export standards remains a persistent issue.

STRC's On-going Efforts and the Way Forward

At STRC, we are addressing these challenges through a combination of targeted interventions and innovative strategies. Our cluster-based approach emphasizes sustainable harvesting and storage practices, with one cluster already operational and plans to expand to two or three more. Women beneficiaries will be trained to produce value-added products, which would not only increase their income but also empower them within their communities.

Strengthening cooperatives and producer groups is another key focus area, ensuring better engagement with markets. To address digital gaps, we are working on improving e-commerce literacy and connectivity among tribal communities. At the same time, we are fostering innovation by promoting sustainable practices and developing new products to cater to emerging market demands.

The marketing of NTFPs present immense opportunities to support tribal livelihoods, enhance rural economy, and promote biodiversity conservation. By addressing existing challenges and leveraging current trends, the sector can pave the way for a sustainable and prosperous future.

(With inputs from Shri Gandharv Pilare, Scientific Officer, NTFP / Med. Plants and Other Livelihoods, STRC)





Vision Plan to Empower Rural Communities in Lakhandur through Bamboo based Social Entrepreneurship

Empowering rural communities through bamboo-based social entrepreneurship is set to redefine economic and social development in Lakhandur tehsil, Bhandara district. Science and Technology Resource Centre (STRC) has devised an ambitious vision plan to establish a Raw Material Development Unit (RMDU). This initiative aims to provide sustainable livelihoods for local bamboo artisans while promoting ecological balance and economic resilience.

Current Scenario and STRC's Initiative

Lakhandur boasts approximately 70 families of skilled bamboo artisans, passionate about creating traditional and modern bamboo products. These artisans face significant hurdles despite their expertise, including inconsistent access to quality raw materials and limited market exposure. STRC's planned Raw Material Development Unit (RMDU) seeks to address these challenges by ensuring a reliable supply of high-quality bamboo at reduced costs. This initiative will work alongside STRC's existing Model Production Unit, empowering artisans to scale up their production efficiently.

Economic Impact

The program is projected to bring tangible economic benefits to artisan families. On average, each family participating in the initiative are expected to gain an additional monthly income of ₹3,000. With 70 families involved, this translates to an annual projected collective income of ₹25 lakh for the community. Such financial stability will enhance rural livelihoods and reduce curb migration to urban areas in search of better opportunities.

Advancing Sustainable Development

Bamboo is often called "green gold" for its economic and environmental value. By promoting its cultivation in and around Lakhandur, the initiative will encourage ecological sustainability. Bamboo's rapid growth, low resource requirements, and carbon sequestration properties make it an eco-friendly alternative to timber. Establishing the Raw Material Development Unit (RMDU) also supports soil conservation, combats desertification, and aligns with the objectives of India's National Bamboo Mission, which seeks to promote sustainable bamboo development across the country.

Additionally, bamboo's versatility enables the creation of eco-friendly products such as furniture, handicrafts, and bioenergy materials, contributing to the circular economy. STRC's efforts to process and use bamboo efficiently will reduce reliance on non-renewable resources, furthering environmental conservation efforts.

Social Empowerment

Beyond economic and environmental benefits, the program prioritizes social inclusion and empowerment. Women and marginalized groups, who often lack formal employment opportunities, will play a significant role in value-added bamboo activities such as weaving,



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crafting, and processing. This will foster their financial independence and build social capital.

STRC also plans to organize community-driven models, such as self-help groups (SHGs) and cooperatives, ensuring equitable profit-sharing and collective ownership. By emphasizing skill development, these models will not only enhance artisans' capabilities but also create a strong sense of community.

The Way Forward

To realize this vision, STRC has outlined a multi-pronged strategy



Periodic skill development



Artisan group as raw material 'Vendor'



Market linkages to ensure wider reach



Institutional collaboration

Conclusion

The establishment of the Raw Material Development Unit (RMDU) in Lakhandur is a transformative step towards rural empowerment. By tapping into bamboo's untapped potential, STRC's initiative combines economic upliftment with environmental stewardship and social inclusiveness. This visionary plan not only promises to transform the lives of bamboo artisans in Lakhandur but also serves as a scalable model for sustainable rural development across India.





On December 23, 2024, Shri Ashis Gharai, Chief Program Officer & Head, STRC represented STRC at the State Level Consultation Meeting held in Pune, on 'Status of Adivasi Livelihoods (SAL) in Maharashtra', jointly organized by the BAIF Development Research Foundation and PRADAN.

The primary purpose of the consultation was to refine the SAL-Maharashtra Report and to make it more scientific, comprehensive and inclusive by inviting ideas and suggestions from delegates across the state. During the event, discussions were focussed on key aspects affecting Adivasi livelihoods, such as culture and traditions, education and healthcare, road and transport infrastructure, forest dependency, and other socio-economic factors. The unique context of the Gadchiroli region received special attention during the deliberations. The meeting brought together diverse stakeholders, including development organizations, research agencies, and universities, such as; MSRLM, Gokhale Institute, TRTI, Nature Conservancy, and of course BAIF and PRADAN, amongst others.

For STRC, the event served as a valuable platform for networking, exchanging ideas, and exploring collaboration opportunities. Insights from this consultation are expected to influence policy and development initiatives, contributing to the larger cause of welfare of Adivasi communities across Maharashtra.

STRC remains committed to empowering local tribal communities and looks forward to engaging in future initiatives that promote sustainable development and inclusive growth.



STRC Explores NTFPs Value Addition and Marketing Opportunities in Chhattisgarh

With a vision to explore opportunities in value addition and marketing of Non-Timber Forest Produces (NTFPs), Shri Ashis Gharai, Chief Program Officer & Head, STRC, approached Rajya Van Vikas Nigam Limited and Chhattisgarh State Minor Forest Produce (Trading & Development) Co-operative Federation Limited (Van Dhan Bhawan), Raipur, on December 21, 2024.

During the visit, CPO & Head, STRC interacted with

Shri Harsh Chaturvedi, who heads the PMU at IIM Raipur for Chattisgarh Herbals under Chattisgarh State Minor Forest Produce (T&D) Co-operative Federation Limited. Shri Chaturvedi provided valuable insights into the current trends and status of NTFP product marketing, emphasizing the importance of creating opportunities through product development and marketing, rather than raw material trade. Shri Chaturvedi further recommended hiring a dedicated marketing team at STRC, mentored by professional agencies or individuals, and expressed his willingness to offer required support in this endeavour. He advised STRC to approach through the proper channel. An exposure visit will soon be planned to understand the processes involved in value addition and marketing of Chattisgarh Herbals, aiming to strengthen our efforts in this domain.

This initiative aligns with STRC's commitment to promoting sustainable livelihoods by leveraging the potential of NTFP value addition and marketing through strategic partnerships and innovative practices.

'Empowering Artisans' - Workshop on Exports of Handicraft Products

Joint Director General of Foreign Trade Nagpur, under the Directorate General of Foreign Trade (DGFT), Ministry of Commerce and Industry, Govt. of India, invited STRC to participate in the 'Empowering Artisans' - Workshop on Exports of Handicraft Products, held at the Chandrapur Forest Academy of Administration, Development, and Management, Chandrapur on December 11, 2024. The event was organized in partnership with Bamboo Research and Training Centre (BRTC), Chichpalli and Department of Post, Govt. of India.

This one-day workshop was aimed to equip local artisans with the required knowledge and tools and empower them with a vision to explore possibilities in international markets to fetch fair prices. The event served as a platform to discuss strategies, policies, and resources for enhancing the global reach of India's traditional crafts. STRC would look forward to promote sustainable livelihoods and continue its efforts in supporting artisans to upscale their craft-based businesses to international markets.



Bamboo Hastakala Udyojak Workshop, Pune



Subsequent to the earlier event held in June 2022, Maharashtra Bamboo Promotion Foundation (MBPF) organised a two day workshop 'Bamboo Hastakala Udyojak' on product design, marketing, working capital, skill development with 40 participants including bamboo based artisan, enterprises and sector experts during 2nd-3rd December 2024 at S M Joshi Foundation, Pune. STRC participated at the event upon receiving invitation from Shri V. Giriraj CEO, MBPF.

As major takeaways, STRC artisans were exposed current trends in product design and nuances of developing a business around bamboo.



10th World Ayurveda Congress & Arogya Expo, Dehradun

STRC got the opportunity to participate at the prestigious 10th World Ayurveda Congress & Arogya Expo, held in Dehradun during 12th to 15th December, 2024. Shri Ashish Bhojar, Junior Scientific Officer (Herbal Plant Initiative), led a team of Traditional Healers (THs) affiliated to STRC Vaidya Chikitsalaya to represent at the event.

This global platform provided an enriching experience, as participants engaged with diverse stakeholders in Ayurveda and holistic healthcare sector and served as a hub for knowledge exchange. STRC's participation in such international events reflects its growth and aligns with its mandate to empower THs and promote traditional practices to integrate with the modern healthcare system.



21st Kerala Bamboo Fest, Kochi

Maharashtra Bamboo Development Board, Nagpur, recommended STRC to represent the state at the 21st Kerala Bamboo Fest, held during 7th to 12th December, 2024, Kochi, Kerala. Under the banner of 'Gondwana Craft,' STRC showcased its exquisite traditional art forms, highlighting the rich cultural heritage and craftsmanship of the Gondwana region. The event, organized by the Kerala State Bamboo Mission (KSBM), envisage to promote sectoral collaboration in-line with the National Bamboo Mission, Government of India.

Agrotech 2024, Akola

Agrotech 2024, organized every year by PDKV Akola, celebrates advancements in agricultural technology and innovation. This year's event, held during 27th to 29th December, 2024, brought together farmers, researchers, and industry experts to explore sustainable solutions. STRC exhibited eco-friendly bamboo-based products and advanced digital tools for agri-advisory, empowering farmers with real-time solutions. The exhibition included workshops on organic farming, climate-smart practices, and precision technologies, alongside expert talks on future of sustainable agriculture.





Fishery Students of MAFSU, Nagpur, get internship opportunity at STRC

Maharashtra Animal and Fishery Sciences University (MAFSU), Nagpur, approached STRC to host a group of students from its Bachelor of Fisheries Science (BFSc) program for an enriching internship experience. The 45 day internship program starting December 20, 2024 aims to provide students with hands-on exposure to STRC's innovative projects and initiatives in aquaculture based livelihoods.

This collaboration offers the interns, a unique opportunity to engage in practical learning, explore interdisciplinary approaches, and contribute to STRC's mission of sustainable development and community empowerment through aquaculture.



STRC Launches Pilot Initiative in Vegetable Farming

As a precursor to the vegetable farming project, proposed to be supported by NABARD, STRC launched a pilot initiative with a small group of farmers, in Armori and Wadsa. This initiative aims to encourage local farmers to diversify their crops, enhance productivity, and adopt sustainable farming practices. By providing quality seeds and empowering farmers with technical know-how, STRC is committed to fostering livelihood enhancement in the region through agricultural innovation.



Bamboo Common Facility Centre

Construction of the Common Facility Center (CFC) at Maldugi, Kurkheda, under Manav Vikas Mission, Govt. of Maharashtra funded project, is now complete. The CFC will soon be functional and will be reasonably equipped with machines and tools to cater to 63 local artisan house-holds.



STRC Celebrates World Soil Day

To commemorate the occasion of World Soil Day, on December 5, 2024, STRC organized multiple awareness programs with farmers at Pimpalgaon and school children of Indira Gandhi Ashram Shala, Pimpalgaon, Wadsa.





Shri S.H.S. Khandwawala, Former Director General of Police, Gujarat and Head, Anti-Corruption Unit, BCCI



On December 20, 2024, STRC had the honor of hosting Shri S.H.S. Khandwawala, former Director General of Police, Gujarat and Head, Anti-Corruption Unit (ACU) of Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI). He was accompanied by Lt Col Vikram Mehta, Resident Director, Lloyds Metals and Energy Limited.

Shri Khandwawala was seen having a very engaging discussion with CPO & Head, STRC, gaining insights into STRC's unique initiatives, contributions to sustainable development and community empowerment. He even expressed his keenness on availing some of the bamboo products (mementos and bouquets) during BCCI's upcoming tournament, soon to be organised here in Gadchiroli. His presence and encouraging words were a source of inspiration, reflecting STRC's growing recognition as a hub of innovation and traditional knowledge integration.

A group of Principals and Senior Faculties from various colleges across Maharashtra

Tribal Pride Journey - an initiative of Maharashtra State Faculty Development Academy, Pune

As a part of the Tribal Pride Journey under Faculty Development Program of Maharashtra State Faculty Development Academy, Pune, in collaboration with Gondwana University, a group of Principals and Senior Faculties from various colleges across the state visited Gondwana University Gadchiroli on December 21, 2024. During the day-long event at the University, a visit to STRC was organized.

The visit offered the group with an opportunity to explore STRC's impactful initiatives dedicated to preserving indigenous knowledge, local traditional art-forms and promoting sustainable development. Engaging discussions fostered a meaningful exchange of ideas, emphasizing STRC's pivotal role in empowering tribal communities through knowledge, skill and technology.



Shri Vikas Kulkarni, Under Secretary Education, Raj Bhavan Maharashtra

STRC had the privilege of hosting Shri Vikas Kulkarni, Under Secretary (Education) (Ag) and Dy. Director (D.B.), Raj Bhavan, Maharashtra on December 18, 2024.

During his visit, Shri Kulkarni appreciated STRC's initiatives in education and community development, and lauded the efforts in leveraging technology and traditional knowledge for sustainable growth.

Dr. Surendra Kalbande, Dean, Agricultural Engineering, PDKV



Dr. Surendra R. Kalbande, Dean, Faculty of Agricultural Engineering, Dr. Panjabrao Deshmukh Krishi Vidyapeeth, Akola visited STRC on December 24, 2024. During his visit, Dr. Kalbande explored STRC's innovative approaches to agricultural practices and rural development. Discussions centered around integrating advanced agricultural solutions and sustainable practices to boost productivity and improve rural livelihoods. The visit also provided an opportunity to strengthen collaboration between academic research and practical field-based applications using low-cost technologies.

As advised by Dr. Kalbande, in a follow-up initiative, STRC connected with Dr. Suchita Gupta, Head, Department of Farm Mechanisation, Dr. PDKV, Akola to further the possible collaboration.

Dr. Vijay Ilorkar, Senior Scientist & Head, Agroforestry, PDKV CoA, Nagpur

Subsequent to our interaction on multiple occasions during past few years, Dr. Ilorkar visited STRC on December 4, 2024 to have a first hand understanding of STRC's initiatives, especially in bamboo and discussed on possible collaboration on Standard Operating Procedures for developing bamboosetum and other technology transfer.



STRC Hosts Exposure Visit of Differently-Abled Students

STRC hosted two different groups of students this month, providing them with an enriching experience of the centre. While over 50 students from Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar High School, Gadchiroli, visited and explored STRC on 13th December, it was an overwhelming experience to host a group of differently-abled students from across Gadchiroli on December 27, 2024.

This exposure offered the visitors with a unique opportunity to learn about STRC's diverse initiatives, such as Gondwana Craft, Model Production Unit and Vaidya Chikitsalay and other sustainable practices for rural development. Through engaging interactions, the young learners gained valuable insights into S & T based community development through research and innovation, and a deeper appreciation for local crafts and cultural heritage. Such events reflect STRC's commitment to inspiring the next generation.





Conceived and funded by Rajiv Gandhi Science and Technology Commission (RGSTC), Mumbai, Government of Maharashtra, Science & Technology Resource Centre (STRC) is an autonomous institute established in concurrence with Gondwana University, Gadchiroli in 2014. As a centre of excellence for sustainable value creation, STRC is leveraging local resources, relevant knowledge and appropriate technologies for human capacity development. STRC acts as a catalyst to science and technology based development of the under-served tribal communities of the Gadchiroli region and as a bridge between knowledge activities of the University and enhanced livelihoods in the neighborhood.



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