

MINOR FOREST PRODUCE

(Item No.7)

The estimated Revenue of about Rs.50.00 Crores from Forest Resources in the State is contributed by six major sources viz. Pulpwood (30%), SandalWood (50%), Social Forestry - Fuel (7%), Timber (3%), Minor Forest Produce (3%) and Others (7%). The main focus for the extraction of minor forest products is not solely commercial purpose. The basic principle in the management and marketing of minor forest usufructs is to provide a socio economic support to rural and tribal population of forest areas.

02. Minor forest produce consists of many items like tamarind, curry leaf, gallnut, cane, soapnut and stone and tree moss etc. The collection of these usufructs and minor forest produce is leased out to scheduled caste and scheduled tribes co-operative societies (LAMPS) at concessional rate of 10 percent less than the fair price fixed under section 130 (4) of the Tamil Nadu Forest Department Code. Whenever Co-operative Societies are found to misuse the concession or unwilling to accept the units, the products are offered to sale in public auction or departmental collection is undertaken. In recent years, the Forest Department has adopted intensive silviculture practices on farm management basis in tamarind plantations in some selected districts and as a result the revenue from the tamarind plantations is expected to go up considerably.

03. There are about 5.20 lakhs tribals living in the forest areas in the State. Though the tribal population is well spread in the State, the Government of India have identified five of the districts in the State which get priority fund allocation under the Integrated Tribal Development works. In order to improve the economic conditions of the tribals residing in the five ITDP districts (There are 9 Panchayat Unions with Predominantly tribal population) viz. Trichirappalli, South Arcot, North Arcot, Dharmapuri and Salem, schemes such as afforestation, maintenance and upkeep of existing roads, construction of school buildings and tribals village forests are being implemented. Nineteen Co-operative Societies have been formed and minor forest produce units are leased out to Tribal Co-operative Societies. Tribals are also allowed to take raw materials like bamboos, canes and small timber for their bonafide requirements at concessional rates. They are also permitted to remove small timber, fuel and other minor forest produce for domestic and agricultural purposes free of cost.

04. As per the provisions of the Panchayats (Extension to the Scheduled Areas) Act 1996, Constitutional provisions have been made to authorise the state legislature to ensure that Panchayats in the scheduled areas at the appropriate level and Grama Sabhas are endowed with "the ownership of Minor Forest Produce". The provisions of this enactment needs to be incorporated in Tamil Nadu Panchayat Act 1996 to extend benefits to the scheduled areas (specifically for tribal Panchayat Unions). In order to have uniformity, similar facilities to collect forest produce in all other areas may also be extended.

The proposed entrustment of powers to Panchayat Raj Institutions under Minor Forest Produce are given below:

I. VILLAGE PANCHAYAT

<i>ACTIVITY</i> (1)	<i>ENTRUSTMENT OF POWERS</i> (2)
1. Regeneration of Minor Forest produce	i) Assist in (i) identification of families willing to plant minor forest produce species and (ii) distribution of plantation in degraded Community Waste lands. ii) Encourage plantation of tree species to produce minor forest produce such as gum, resin, medicinal plants, aromatic plants, leaves, oilseeds, tans and dyes, grasses, seeds, canes, bamboos, etc., particularly in tribal areas.

<i>(1)</i>	<i>(2)</i>
	iii) Promote plantation of minor forest produce species under Drought Prone Area Programmes under Social Forestry activity under Jawahar Rozgar Yojana, Western Ghat Development Programme and Tribal Development Projects.
2. Collection of Minor Forest Produce by Village artisans and others	i) Facilitate the village artisans to get permits from Forest Department to Collect Minor Forest Produce in Reserve Forest Areas.
3. Training	i) Assist in selection of the trainees for undergoing training to plant species for Production of Minor Forest Produce.

II. PANCHAYAT UNION

<i>ACTIVITY</i> <i>(1)</i>	<i>ENTRUSTMENT OF POWERS</i> <i>(2)</i>
1. Minor Forest Produce Collection, Processing and marketing.	i) Assist in promoting Collection of minor forest produce, primary processing and value addition to minor forest produce before selling. ii) Assist in ensuring timely payment and adequate collection charges to the minor forest produce collectors. iii) Review the schemes operated by Forest and other Departments in Promotion/Collection/Processing and Marketing of Minor Forest Produce in Panchayat Union Areas.
2. Implementation of Schemes on minor Forest Produce	i) Plan and Non-Plan Schemes should be entrusted to Panchayat Unions.

III DISTRICT PANCHYAT

<i>ACTIVITY</i> <i>(1)</i>	<i>ENTRUSTMENT OF POWERS</i> <i>(2)</i>
1. Planning for Promoting Minor Forest Produce Collection, Processing and Marketing	i) Conduct annual conference of officers, users and organisers involved in the Minor Forest Produce Production/Collection/Processing ii) Organise Credit linkages needed for the promotion of Minor Forest Produce Procurement, Processing and marketing. iii) Advise the State Government on the measures to be adopted in respect of the powers 1 and 2 above.

Administrative Implication

5. Certain guidelines were issued in G.O.Ms.No.800, Forests and Fisheries Department, dated 14.6.1982 in the matter of leasing out minor forest produce to the Large Sized Multi Purpose Co-operative Societies (LAMPS) and also to other Co-operative Societies. Government authorised all Conservators of Forests to convene meetings with Co-operative departmental officials presidents of Larage Sized Multi Purpose Co-operative Societies and other Labour Co-operative Societies for finalising the supply of minor forest produce item well in advance of the season or to sell the minor forest produce in auction if the co-operative societies did not require them.

6. Government constituted a minor forest produce study team for an indepth study with all aspects of minor forest produce trade. On the basis of the Team's suggestions, the leases of minor forest produce units were continued to be allotted to large Sized Multi purpose Co-operative Societies and other co-operative societies run by hill tribes, Adi-Dravidars and backward Classes under the provision of Section 130(a) of Tamil Nadu Forest Department Code with the object of providing employment and promoting their welfare and economic status. The base unit for collection of minor forest produce is allotted to the tribal co-operative societies at a concessional price that is 10% less than the price fixed for lease units. Government have also instructed that the fair price should not be higher than the previous year's auction price. In view of 1996 enactment by Government of India the ownership of minor forest produce will vest in the Village Panchayat in the scheduled areas. This permit presently being issued by the Forest Department will not be applicable when Tamil Nadu Panchayat Act incorporates such a provision and the same will be administered by Village Panchayat.

Financial Implication

7. The financial assistance provided by the State Government for Minor Forest Produce promotion through the Forest Department, was Rs.1.11 crores in 1994-95. Outlay under State, and Centrally Sponsored Plan schemes for the development of Minor Forest Produce in the reserved forest areas annually comes to Rs.1 Crore. Non-plan scheme grants for this may be transferred to the selected Panchayat Unions and schemes may be entrusted to them for implementation. The SPC Group opines that these schemes can be best entrusted by the Panchayat Unions. They may be implemented in Co-ordination with Forest Department.

Legal Implication

8. For the protection and management of forests in Tamil Nadu the following Acts and Rules are in force.

- i) Tamil Nadu Forest Act, 1882.
- ii) Tamil Nadu Preservation of Private Forests Act, 1949.
- iii) Tamil Nadu Hill Area (Preservation of Trees) Act 1955.
- iv) Wild Life Protection Act 1972.
- v) Environment Protection Act, 1986.
- vi) Forest Conservation Act 1980.

While the first four Acts were enacted by Tamil Nadu Government, the last two Acts were enacted by the Government of India. The Tamil Nadu Panchayats Act, 1994 (Tamil Nadu Act of 21 of 1994) provides certain powers to Village Panchayat and Panchayat Union related to unreserved forests (Section 120, 121, 131 and 245). In the light of the above, necessary amendment to the appropriate Acts, Rules and Codes may be carried out incorporating the suggested Powers to be entrusted to rural local bodies.