

EDITORIAL

This issue focuses on both non-timber forest products (NTFPs) and livelihood promotion. NTFPs provide an important contribution to the household income of people dwelling in forest fringe areas. They provide sustenance and farm inputs, including fuel, food, medicines, fruits, manure, and fodder (Saxena, 2003). Although the term “non-timber forest products” has been seen as a “negative one” because it literally includes all products other than timber that come from the forest (Belcher, 2003), over the last decades a considerable amount of knowledge on the socio-economic importance and potential of NTFPs utilization, and their impacts on poverty reduction, livelihood improvement and environmental sustainability has been gained. Yet a number of basic and conceptual issues remain unresolved, including a universally accepted definition of the products (Ahenkan & Boon, 2011). A plethora of terminologies are used interchangeably by various authors and organizations, such as “non-wood forest products”, “minor forest products”, “forest biological resources”, “special forest products”, “non-wood forest benefits”, “non-wood goods and services”, “forest garden products”, “wild products”, “natural products”, to name but a few (Chandrasekharan, 1995; FAO, 1999; Wunder & Angelsen, 2003; FAO, 2006; as cited in Ahenkan & Boon, 2011, p. 2). This hasn't aided progress in policy formulation.

Semantics aside, the theme of this issue is serious because it deals with the lives and livelihoods of some of the most marginalised and economically poor people in today's globalised world. While four of its contributions focus on tribal-dominated areas within Jharkhand state, their findings are most certainly applicable and relevant to neighbouring states. We are pleased to publish the contribution of a Nepalese colleague based in Canada, who focuses on medicinal and aromatic plants in the mountains of Nepal. The sharing of research findings across borders and cultural boundaries enriches our understanding of the problems facing our rural brethren. A fourth most important article focuses on a product unbeknown across much of the world, lac, that is grown across the country and earns India significant export earning. With the increasing frequency of unseasonal and extreme weather events, farmers are increasingly facing difficulties in managing high-risk agricultural practices. As it is the weaker sections of society that collect, consume and sell various NTFPs in order to survive (Sharma & Butola, 2008), we feel it especially timely to publish this special issue on “NTFPs and livelihood promotion”.

The issue of NTFPs and livelihood promotion inevitably deals with government policies and NTFPs promotion strategies by government, non-government, as well as private sector. The problems facing the NTFP sector include the perishable nature of produce, lack

of storage capacity, lack of marketing, weak infrastructure, exploitation by middlemen, lack of government intervention at the required time and scale, and the volatile nature of markets leading to an inability of collectors to bargain for fair prices. The Government of India (2016) has decided to introduce a scheme for marketing of Minor Forest Produce (MFP) through Minimum Support Price (MSP) and development of value chains. The scheme is designed as a social safety net for improvement of the livelihood of gatherers of non-wood forest products (NWFPs) by providing them with a fair price for the produce they collect. The government has also introduced several policies related to price fixation, price announcement, procurement, revolving fund and subsidy requirement, capacity building, market information system, creation of storage facilities at aggregation points, and multi-purpose centres for overcoming the problems faced by NWFP gatherers. However, there still remains a need for a more systematic approach combining biological and economic approaches with NTFPs users' own perception and knowledge regarding sustainable livelihood promotion and forest conservation. There is a need to provide industrial processing by setting up small-scale units with modern technology for processing of the NTFPs at the local level. Furthermore, honest political will to implement new policies on NTFPs regulation and livelihood promotion is the need of the hour. Finally, awareness-cum-training camps and capacity building programmes need to be organized, involving the state agricultural universities, government agencies, NGOs, community based organisations (CBOs) and other competent sectors.

To sum up, it may be said that climate change has greatly affected agricultural production and livelihood opportunities across the world. Due to highly unpredictable rainfall, including increasing frequency of either scanty or torrential rainfall during cropping seasons, there is an increasing recognition of the importance of NTFPs to local livelihoods and biodiversity conservation. Underlining the significance of the theme, in this issue six articles and one book review are published. The authors have suggested some points for action, both immediate needs as well as to address long-term challenges. In this regard I thank the authors for raising many burning issues that require further debate, exposition, policy formulation and implementation. In the following paragraphs I provide a summary of the featured articles.

The first article "Non-timber forest products (NTFPs) supporting food security in tribal Jharkhand", by M. A. Islam and S. M. S. Quli, documents the diversity, distribution, and pattern of utilization of edible NTFPs in Bundu block, Ranchi district, Jharkhand. A total of 59 edible NTFPs are documented and classified. The authors show that while edible NTFPs constitute the main source of diet, nutrition, economy and health of the people, the availability of NTFPs is on the decline. They conclude that if NTFPs are to continue to play their role as a safety net, forest management must be linked with rural development and food security strategies.

The second paper by Sanjay Kr. Verma and Sujit Kr. Paul, titled “Sustaining non-timber forest products (NTFPs) based rural livelihoods of tribals in Jharkhand: Issues and challenges”, deals with the contributions of non-timber forest products (NTFPs) to the livelihoods of tribals in Bishunpur block, Gumla district. Using both quantitative and qualitative data based on empirical fieldwork conducted by the lead author as part of his doctoral research, the article shows that a large number of Bishunpur block’s economically-poorest people generate income, food and medicine from the collection and sale of NTFPs. The most common activities are the collection and sale of fuel wood, honey, mahua, amla, satawar root, dori, musroom, kusum, sal leaves, leafy vegetables and bamboo. A van suraksha samiti (VSS) has been formed to take decisions and protect the forest, yet villagers must also seek permission from the Gram Sabha to collect forest products. Findings reveal that villagers’ lives are somewhat sustainable, both economically and environmentally.

Dhital Narayan Prasad’s article entitled “Domestication/ cultivation potential of high altitude medicinal and aromatic plants in central Nepal” uses empirical data to explore potential intervention areas for promoting the production and management of high value medicinal and aromatic plants (MAP) by local communities. The author focuses on six selected species, including Padamchal that is used as a tea from its rhizome, pickle from its new shoots, as a vitamin, and as a medicine for snakebite and for healing broken bones. Dhital concludes that the MAP subsector is potentially a strong alternative livelihood strategy for people living in Nepal’s mountainous areas. As an appropriate MAP cultivation mechanism, he recommends cultivation in community forests by community forest user groups (CFUGs).

The fourth article is a study on lac production that draws on data from Jharkhand, Chhattisgarh, Madhya Pradesh, West Bengal, Maharashtra, Odisha, parts of Uttar Pradesh, Andhra Pradesh, Gujarat, and the North Eastern Hilly (NEH) region. R. K. Yogi, R. K. Singh, A. Bhattacharya, A. K. Jaiswal and Alok Kumar in their paper “Current scenario and new policy interventions in the Lac sector” explain how lac is produced and processed in India. Lac, one is surprised to find out, significantly contributes to India’s foreign exchange earning. The paper also presents a review of new policy interventions by the Central Government for the welfare of lac growers, such as price fixation and market information system. The authors conclude that by strengthening infrastructure and other support facilities in the lac sector, gainful employment can be generated for migrating youths while also providing higher quality output to consumers.

In the paper titled “Enhancement of livelihood activities through non-timber forest products: A study in Jharkhand’s Ranchi and Simdega districts”, Sudeep Kumar and Ankita Choudhury examine

the collection, processing and marketing of NTFPs. On the basis of their analysis of empirical data collected by the second author for her post graduate diploma in rural management at XISS, the authors find that mahua, chiranjee, kendu leaves, and lac generate the most income in the sampled villages. There is a vast scope to add value to NTFPs like lac and mahua, large amounts of which are easily generated. Value added products like jam, jelly, and pickle from NTFPs like karanj can add delicious and healthy items to diets that would, the authors point out, especially benefit the health of children and the elderly. More awareness generating interventions are needed in rural areas to help villagers form cooperatives to aggregate their produce, and develop market linkages to bring large buyers in direct contact with the NTFP gatherers, thus bypassing predatory middlemen.

Values shape both our personal and professional lives. Leadership behaviour and leaders' value orientation are important factors to be taken into consideration if the deprived villages of states like Jharkhand are to be transformed into prosperous villages. In a fantastic and eye-opening article, titled "Personal value orientation (PVO) of the Panchayat Mukhias of Ranchi district", Deepak Kumar Bhagat and Shriti Choudhary identify the dominant personal value orientations of 32 village leaders. The gender segregated sample of 32 Panchayat Mukhias from four of Ranchi district's blocks – Itki, Nagri, Kanke and Bero – is drawn from a pilot survey conducted as part of the doctoral research of the first author. Unsurprisingly, and one could say rather depressingly, the findings show that power, hedonistic, and economic values are the three most preferred values of Mukhias. The gender and education of the Mukhias were found to significantly influence certain but not all aspects of their value systems. The authors conclude that further attempts ought to be made to investigate the relationship between personal value orientation of elected leaders and the development of villages. What's more, this article leads one to wonder how value orientations affect leadership at other political levels.

Finally, Sudeep Kumar presents a comprehensive book review of a recently released book titled "Rural development: Concept and recent approaches" by Sujit Kr. Paul, published by Concept Publishing Company, New Delhi. The book covers the concept of development in India, reviews the many livelihood-supporting programmes of the Government of India, and provides details on India's unique Panchayati Raj Institutions. It devotes a chapter to SHGs, which is more than appropriate given the impact these institutions have had on rural women's lives. Likewise a chapter is devoted to India's tribes, who are an integral but neglected and one could say, subordinated part of Indian civilisation. According to the reviewer, this book can help readers to gain a basic understanding of and exposure to rural development concepts and practices in India.

We hope that the articles in this issue will be read by practitioners and decision-makers, and may contribute to the improvement of NTFP-based livelihood promotion strategies in the future. We are thankful to the contributors who have generously submitted their modified papers within the stipulated time frame. Our sincere thanks go to the esteemed reviewers of the journal for their critical eyes, constructive comments, and rich advice that enhance the academic quality of this multi-disciplinary, quarterly and thematic research journal.

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