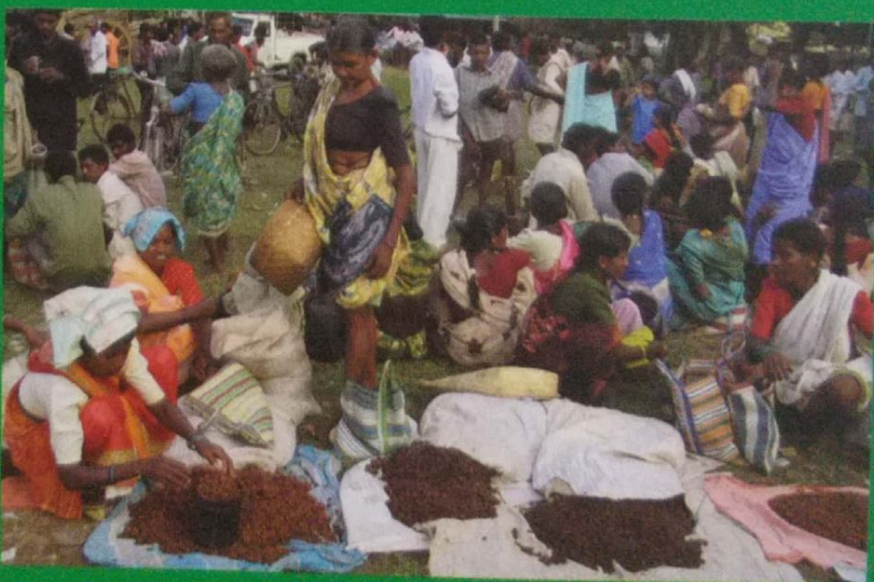
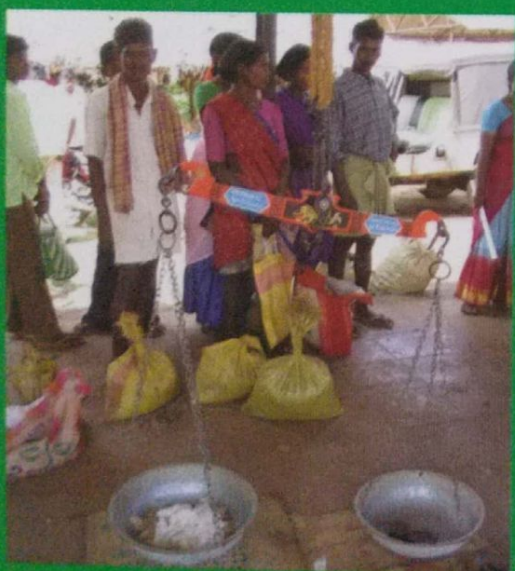


Monitoring by Stakeholders

in Bhadrachalam Division of Andhra Pradesh

April 2004 - March 2005



Non-Timber Forest Produce (NTFP) Collection and Sale

**Monitoring by Stakeholders in
Bhadrachalam Division of Andhra Pradesh**

(April 2004 – March 2005)

To the NTFP Collectors

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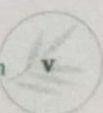
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Foreword

Girijans in the forest regions of Bhadrachalam, Andhra Pradesh, mostly eke out their living by collecting minor forest produce. Though the forest produce is of high value, the returns they get, quite often, are not commensurate with the efforts of the *Girijans* who collect it. The major reason for this predicament is the lack of standardization of the products, which would have enabled them to receive remunerative prices. This situation has given way to exploitation by the private traders, who purchase the forest produce at low prices from the tribals. Many a time, the minor forest produce is purchased on barter system. There have been instances where a Girijan has exchanged a kilogram (kg) of gum for a kg of rice! In the present market, the first quality tapsi gum is sold at Rs. 140 per kg. Compare this price to the price of one kg of ordinary rice! The exploitation doesn't stop here. *Girijans* are also cheated because of wrong measures and low payments.

To abolish this kind of exploitation, the Andhra Pradesh Government began the Girijan Cooperative Corporation (GCC) in 1956. The Corporation was started for reasons like, the protection of *Girijans* from private traders, procurement of the minor forest produce they collect, the supply of essential commodities to their villages and to provide them with agricultural loans, among many others. The GCC operates from its headquarters at Visakhapatnam.

The operations of GCC at the grassroots have gradually raised a feeling among the voluntary organizations operating in the tribal areas that the GCC has not been providing minimum support price to the *Girijans* for Non Timber Forest Produce (NTFP). Actually, serious market fluctuations have not provided GCC an opportunity to announce minimum support price for the forest produce. However, the Government has been making efforts to resolve the situation. As a part of this mission, the Government has provided an opening for the *Girijans* through Vana Samrakshana Samithis (VSS) promoted by the Forest Department, to collect the forest produce and sell it; but this effort has also not yielded satisfactory results. Similarly, the Government has also permitted *Girijans* to collect minor forest produce through village federations, promoted under the 'Velugu' programme. This has resulted in enabling *Girijans* to sell their forest produce through three agencies (federations formed under 'Velugu', VSS



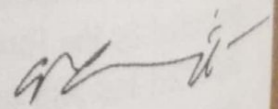
formed by the Forest Department and GCC). Unfortunately, the presence of these three agencies also has given rise to problems in this tribal belt.

GCC has the monopoly to purchase 25 varieties of forest produce. This has created an apprehension among Vana Samrakshana Samithis, village federations and NGOs that the *Girijans* are not able to sell the produce freely. Further, the presence of more than one official market outlet has resulted in confusion among the Girijan members. Having observed the functioning of the three agencies and the prevailing confusion, Centre for Peoples' Forestry (CPF), Hyderabad, felt the need to streamline the transaction process with a view that a coordinated effort between all the three organizations would help deliver better services to the *Girijans*. A State-level workshop to that effect was planned for all partners, wherein GCC was also invited. Subsequently, GCC requested CPF to organize regional meetings in the tribal areas and invite the three organizations, NGOs working in the area and the collectors of non-timber forest produce. The meetings, to a certain extent, have improved understanding between the three organizations. GCC intended to know the extent to which this exercise has helped the *Girijans*. The responsibility of understanding the tribal perception of the effort and its benefit has been taken up by an NGO – ASDS (Agricultural and Social Development Society) operating in Bhadrachalam Division.

ASDS has studied the status of the collection of the forest produce, purchase prices, improvement in tribal incomes and partnership among the three organizations in Bhadrachalam Division from January to June 2004 and published the experience in Telugu for wider dissemination within AP. The work has later been extended up to March 2005. The effort is still going on. A report in English, supported by quantitative data, has been prepared on this initiative for a one-year period (April 2004 to March 2005) now. I am happy to present this report to one and all and would recommend that all the organizations concerned with the livelihood issues of tribals should read this report.

The efforts of Centre for People's Forestry (CPF) in improving the livelihood and income of tribals, in collaboration with ASDS, and their keen observations in Bhadrachalam Division, are well appreciated. We all need to extend our thanks to Dr. D. Suryakumari and Mr. V. Gandhi Babu, and sincerely hope that they would continue such efforts to provide better services to the *Girijans* in future too.

With best wishes.

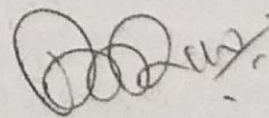


(A. Vidyasagar)
Managing Director
Girijan Cooperative Corporation
30th August 2005

About this document

Everyone now recognizes that NTFP plays a vital role in the livelihood of the *Girijans* and poor people. It has been identified that some of the main problems are not collecting the products in the traditional method, but are related to cheating by middlemen in the market, the community not having skills for processing of products and thereby not being able to demand a better price. In Andhra Pradesh, along with the Forest Department, GCC and Velugu too have been conducting programmes to enhance livelihood related to NTFP, including research, developing NTFP production and its marketing. For development of NTFP and for enhancing livelihood of the community dependent on NTFP, all the organizations have to work collectively. CPF's role in taking initiative in this regard is highly appreciated. Along with their partner NGOs, they have organized regional consultations with stakeholders through networks and have initiated monitoring programme by stakeholders in Bhadrachalam Division. The result of this monitoring exercise has been very encouraging. This document captures the process undertaken for monitoring by stakeholders for the NTFP in the field. Hope, this document encourages and inspires the networks working with the forest dwelling communities to enhance their livelihood security, by efficiently developing the mechanism for developing and selling NTFP.

Best wishes.



(P. Mallikarjuna Rao)
Director
AP Forest Academy
30th August 2005

Executive Summary

Girijans in Andhra Pradesh depend for their sustenance heavily on returns from selling NTFP. To facilitate the process of selling the NTFP by the *Girijans*, the Government of Andhra Pradesh formed the Girijan Cooperative Corporation (GCC) in 1956. The main objective of GCC is the socio-economic upliftment of the tribals. The Corporation was begun for reasons like, the protection of *Girijans* from private traders, procurement of the minor forest produce they collect, the supply of essential commodities to their villages and to provide them with agricultural loans, among many others. The Government of Andhra Pradesh has conferred monopoly status on the GCC to purchase forest produce from the *Girijans* and thereby protect them from being exploited by middlemen who buy the produce for a pittance.

However, over the years, it was felt that since GCC has a monopoly over NTFP collection, it is not providing the minimum support price to the *Girijans*. To help the *Girijans* the Government provided other options to them in the form of VSS promoted by the Forest Department and Velugu which promoted village federations. Yet the presence of these three outlets has only led to confusion and the *Girijans* are unable to sell their produce freely.

With a view to address these issues and help in streamlining the process, Centre for People's Forestry, Hyderabad initiated a dialogue process to coordinate the efforts between the three organizations. The ultimate objective was to ensure that the *Girijans* were benefiting from the collection and sales of NTFP. As a part of this process, a State-level workshop was organized for all the stakeholders. The workshop reinforced that GCC should continue to have monopoly over the purchase of NTFP because most of the *Girijans* who depend on NTFP for sustenance are illiterate and their interests may not be taken care of by any other organization. The second issue that emerged was the need to improve coordination and cooperation amongst all agencies concerned, both Government and NGOs, so that they all work towards helping the *Girijans* secure their livelihood.

The State-level workshop recommended that, to further this cause, regional workshops be held, in which, the stakeholders like GCC, Forest Department, Velugu, local NGOs and more importantly the primary stakeholders, the NTFP collectors, would participate regionally. The outcome of this deliberation was that GCC should play a more proactive role in encouraging the tribals to sell the produce to them. In this respect, the issues raised were that GCC should enhance the procurement price of the NTFP products, ensure that the weights and measures were accurate, see that the attitudes of the field level officials towards the NTFP collectors was more conducive and encouraging, and create awareness among the collectors on the unscrupulous and exploitative practices followed by middlemen in cheating them.

The Regional-level Stakeholders' workshops were very useful in rejuvenating cooperation amongst the different stakeholders. To carry forward the recommendations of the regional workshops, the stakeholders decided to implement these in one division for a period of six months. The collection and sales of the produce in this intervention period were to be closely monitored. The NGO, Agricultural and Social Development Society (ASDS) showed interest to take up the task of intervention, and the same was considered since it had a presence in the region and also had a good working relationship with all the stakeholders. Thus the intervention project focusing on "monitoring by stakeholders" was conceptualized by CPF and ASDS.

The overall objective of monitoring is the enhancement of livelihood status of NTFP collectors by strengthening existing institutional structure and empowering communities with knowledge. Emphasis was laid on clarifying the role of GCC to the collectors and thereby encouraging them to sell NTFP to GCC. To achieve this, information regarding the use of correct weights and measures by GCC, correct procurement price and proximity of procurement centre at shandies to villages was disseminated to the collectors. Messages were sent out through pamphlets, folklore and direct interactions. All the stakeholders played a proactive role in this process. While the Forest Department initiated training programmes regarding the species and cultivation, GCC was in charge of holding training programmes for undertaking grading and quality and also displaying prices at the purchasing centres.

The outcome of the monitoring process was evaluated based on the feedback received from the tribals and the interpretation of the data on the numbers of collectors and the quantity of produce sold. The collectors did express reassurance about the role of GCC on purchase and were excited about the enhancement in procurement price.

Results of the analysis show a drastic increase in the number of collectors that also got reflected in the quantity of produce sold. An increase in the number of women collectors was also observed. The need to extend the intervention process was emphasized. It was also recommended that a similar process be replicated in other places. Change in the attitude of the field staff of GCC and Forest Department had an influencing effect on the *Girijans*.

Continued efforts are required to maintain the numbers of collectors coming to the shandies. And mere awareness about the exploitative nature of middlemen will not keep them away. More proactive measures by the GCC staff will have to be taken up to dissuade the *Girijans* from going to the middlemen.

The intervention period had a definite positive impact on the collectors of NTFP. Reassurance about the role of GCC and other stakeholders encouraged more collectors to participate. The amount of produce collected and the increase in income levels has been encouraging. The findings of the study will play an important role in serving as a guide for addressing similar issues in other regions.

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