

The Covid-19 pandemic disrupted lives and livelihoods of tribal people

By : Editor Published On : 15 Sep, 2020 10:32 PM IST



INVC NEWS

New Delhi,

One bright spot in this turbulent and challenging year has been therecord procurement of MFPs under the MSP for MFP Scheme in 16 states which has now touchedRs. 148.12 crores.This is the highest-ever in terms of the number of MFPs, the total value of procurement and the number of states involved, since the implementation of the scheme. With this, the total procurement for the year (both Government and private trade) crossed more than Rs3000 crores, proving to be a much needed panacea in these distressing times of the Covid-19 pandemic which has disrupted lives and livelihoods of tribal people.

Over the last few months since April 2020, with the Government push and the Van Dhan scheme proving to be a catalyst and active participation from the States, the Guidelines for the Scheme for 'Mechanism for Marketing of Minor Forest Produce (MFP) through Minimum Support Price (MSP) & Development of Value Chain for MFP' initiated to provide MSP to gatherers of forest produce and introducing value addition and marketing through tribal groups and clustershas taken firm roots across the country and found widespread acceptance.

Among the States, Chhattisgarh has taken the lead by procuring 46,857 Metric tonnes of Minor Forest Produces worth a whopping Rs 106.53 crores. Odisha and Gujarat follow with a procurement of 14391.23 MTs of MFPs worth Rs 30.41 crores and 772.97 MTs of MFPs worth Rs 3.41 crores respectively. Chhattisgarh has 866 procurement centres and the State has leveraged its vast network of Van Dhan SHGs from the 139 Van DhanKendras effectively as well. Innovations adopted such as door-to-door collection of minor forest produces by mobile units comprising of forest, revenue and VDVK officials have contributed to these high procurement values.

The unprecedented circumstances caused by the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic threw up challenges and resulted in a severe crisis among the tribal population. Unemployment among youth, reverse migration of tribals threatened to throw the entire tribal economy off track. It is in such a scenario that the MSP for MFP presented an opportunity to all the States.

The successful implementation of the Van DhanYojana across the 22 States involving 3.6 lakh tribal beneficiaries and continuous engagement & on-boarding of the States by TRIFED has invariably acted as a catalyst for putting theMSP for MFP Scheme on the right track. In addition, government intervention and procurement provided the required boost. With an intention to revivethe sagging tribal economy, a revised set of MSP for MFP guidelines were issued on May 1 2020, which increased the MSP prices of the MFPs by up to 90% and thus helped in ensuring higher incomes for the tribal gatherers. On May 26, 2020, the Ministry also recommended the addition of 23 new items under the MSP for MFP list. These items include agricultural and horticultural produce collected by tribal gatherers.

TRIFED, as the nodal agency working to empower the tribal population, has been supporting and assisting the State in all their efforts during this crisis. With Government of India and State agencies accounting for over Rs 1000 crores at MSP, the private trade has procured over Rs2000 crores above MSP. With the injection of over Rs3000 crores in the tribal economy, the MSP for MFP Scheme has been instrumental in accelerating the transformation of the tribal ecosystem and empowering the people. With systems and processes getting firmly established across the country, the quantum of procurement will definitely increase.

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