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Minor Forest Produce (MFP) is a major source of livelihood for tribals living in forest areas. The importance of MFPs for this section of the society can be gauged from the fact that around 100 million forest dwellers depend on MFPs for food, shelter, medicines and cash income. It provides them critical subsistence during the lean seasons, particularly for primitive tribal groups such as hunter gatherers, and the landless. Tribals derive 20-40% of their annual income from MFP on which they spend major portion of their time. This activity has strong linkage to women’s financial empowerment as most of the MFPs are collected and used/sold by women. MFP sector has the potential to create about 10 million workdays annually in the country.

Ministry of Tribal Affairs has taken a number of initiatives for socio economic development of tribals like introduction Forest rights Act, PESA Act and has been implementing schemes for development of MFP by providing financial support to State TDCCs and TRIFED for market development of MFPs. Recognizing the critical importance which MFP hold for tribals and its potential to create large scale employment opportunity thereby, helping in reducing poverty and increasing empowerment of tribals particularly women and poor people of the poorest and backward districts of the country, Govt. of India has introduced an ambitious scheme of “Mechanism for marketing of Minor Forest Produce (MFP) through Minimum Support price (MSP) and development of Value chain for MFP”.

The scheme was started with the objective of providing fair price to MFP gatherers, enhance their income level and ensure sustainable harvesting of MFPs. The MSP scheme seeks to establish a framework to ensure fair prices for the produce collected by them, assurance of buying at a particular price, primary processing, storage, transportation etc while ensuring sustainability of the resource base. It is a holistic scheme for development of MFP trade and covers 24 MFPs.

Value addition assumes critical importance in ensuring remunerative prices to the tribals in this approach. Three stage value addition would be the corner stone for enhancing incomes of the tribals under the scheme. The grass root level procurement is proposed to be undertaken through SHGs associated with Implementing Agencies. Convergence and Networking with other Govt. departments/scheme shall be undertaken to utilise the services of existing SHGs like Ajeevika, etc. These SHGs shall be appropriately trained on sustainable harvesting/collection, primary processing & value addition and be formed into clusters so as to aggregate their stock in tradable quantity and linking them with facility of primary processing in a Van Dhan Vikas Kendra. The stock after primary processing shall be supplied by these SHGs to the State Implementing Agencies or direct tie up for supply to corporate secondary processor. For creation of secondary level value addition facility at district level and tertiary level value addition facility at State level, Big Corporates shall be involved under PPP model. This PPP model will be based on utilising Private entrepreneur skills in undertaking processing as well as marketing of the produce and Central/ State Govt. support in terms of creating infrastructure and providing enabling environment for undertaking value addition of systematic scientific lines. These will be sophisticated large value

addition hubs managed by Private entrepreneurs.

The Ministry of Tribal affairs has approved establishment of the first multipurpose “Van Dhan Vikas Kendra” on pilot basis for establishment in Bijapur District of Chhattisgarh State for providing skill upgradation and capacity building training and setting up of primary processing and value addition facility. This first model Van Dhan Vikas Kendra is being implemented for training of 300 beneficiaries with a total outlay of Rs 43.38 lakhs for training, providing equipments & tools for primary level processing and infrastructure & building for housing the Kendra. This Kendra to start with will have processing facility for Tamarind brick making, Mahua flower storage facility and chironjee cleaning and packaging.

TRIFED has assigned the work for establishment of this pilot Vikas Kendra in Bijapur District of Chattisgarh to CGMFP Federation and Collector, Bijapur would be the coordinating force. The selection of the tribal beneficiaries and formation of the SHGs has been undertaken by TRIFED and the training is scheduled to start from 10th April, 2018. To start with Van Dhan Vikas Kendra is being established in a Panchayat Building so that the primary processing can be commenced by the SHGs. The Kendra will be shifted to its own building once the same is ready.

The Van Dhan Vikas Kendras will be an important milestone in economic development of tribals involved in collection of MFPs by helping them in optimum utilization of natural resources and provide sustainable MFP-based livelihood in MFP-rich districts.

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