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INSTITUTIONAL SUPPORT AND MARKETING OF MINOR FOREST PRODUCTS: A STUDY OF GOVERNMENT AGENCIES IN SOUTHERN KERALA

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RESEARCH ARTICLE

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Abstract

Minor Forest Products (MFPs) play a significant role in sustaining the livelihood and socio-economic well-being of tribal communities in Southern Kerala. Forest-dependent tribes rely heavily on products such as honey, medicinal plants, bamboo, wild fruits, and other non-timber forest resources for income and subsistence. This study examines the effectiveness of services rendered by government agencies in promoting the marketing of Minor Forest Products in Southern Kerala.

The study employs statistical tools such as the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) test, Bartlett's Test of Sphericity, Principal Component Analysis (PCA), and One-Sample t-test to analyze the perception of respondents. The results reveal that while certain services—such as transportation facilities, processing support, machinery provision, and price stability—are positively perceived, significant gaps exist in ensuring market demand, restricting middlemen interference, conducting effective training, and strengthening online marketing systems. The findings indicate the need for improved institutional coordination and market-oriented strategies to enhance the overall efficiency of MFP marketing and to strengthen the socio-economic conditions of tribal communities in the region.

Keywords: *Minor forest products, tribes, marketing, government agencies, Forest Rights Act*

Introduction

Forests have long been regarded as the foundation of ecological balance and human survival. They regulate climate, conserve biodiversity, and support the livelihoods of millions of people worldwide. According to reports of the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) and the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), forests cover nearly 31 percent of the Earth's surface, though their distribution remains uneven. With the global population projected to increase significantly by 2050, pressure on forest resources is expected to intensify. In India, forests account for about 24.56 percent of the total geographical area, reflecting sustained conservation and afforestation efforts. Among Indian states, Kerala stands out for its rich forest cover and biodiversity, forming part of the ecologically significant Western Ghats region.

Kerala is home to 36 recognized Scheduled Tribe (ST) communities, constituting around 1.5 percent of the state's population. These communities are largely concentrated in forested districts such as Wayanad, Idukki, and Palakkad. Major tribal groups including the Paniyas, Kurichiyas, Kattunaikkans, Muthuvans, and Adiyas maintain a close relationship with forests through traditional occupations like hunting, gathering, and small-scale agriculture. Despite Kerala's high literacy and social development indicators, tribal communities continue to face socio-economic challenges such as poverty, land alienation, and limited access to healthcare and education. Their cultural identity, reflected in traditional crafts, herbal medicine, rituals, and ecological knowledge, remains deeply connected to forest ecosystems.

Minor Forest Products (MFPs), also known as Non-Timber Forest Products (NTFPs), form a crucial link between forests and tribal livelihoods. These include honey, medicinal plants, bamboo, wild fruits, tubers, gums, and resins. The biodiversity-rich Western Ghats provides abundant MFP resources that sustain rural and tribal communities. For many tribes, the collection and sale of MFPs constitute a primary source of income. Products such as honey, wild turmeric, gooseberries, and medicinal herbs are marketed locally and through government-supported initiatives like Vanasree Ecoshop, which aims to provide fair prices and market access. Medicinal plants such as neem, ashwagandha, and shatavari also contribute to the Ayurvedic and herbal medicine industries.

Beyond their economic value, MFPs are integral to the cultural and subsistence practices of Kerala's tribal communities. Wild foods ensure nutritional security, while forest-based materials support housing, crafts, and traditional tools. The sustainable harvesting practices followed by tribal groups help conserve biodiversity and maintain ecological balance. Legislative measures such as the Forest Rights Act have further recognized community rights over forest resources, promoting responsible

management. However, challenges such as market inefficiencies and middlemen exploitation continue to affect tribal incomes, highlighting the need for effective institutional support in the marketing of Minor Forest Products.

Review of Literature

- Jayshri R. Kankate, R.G. Deshmukh and Rushikesh K. Patil (2020) examined the marketing systems of Minor Forest Products (MFPs) and identified constraints faced by tribal farmers in Dhanora tahsil. Using primary data from 60 tribal farmers, the study identified three major marketing channels involving collectors, SHGs, wholesalers, retailers, and consumers. The findings highlighted structural inefficiencies and marketing challenges affecting tribal income.
- Yogi, R., Singh, A., Kumar, N., & Sharma, K. (2018) conducted a comparative study on procurement and marketing practices of Minor Forest Produce in Andhra Pradesh and Orissa. The study revealed lower procurement costs in Andhra Pradesh and exposed exploitation by intermediaries in both states. It emphasized the important role of NGOs in providing marketing information, technical know-how, and institutional support to tribal collectors.
- Ashish Alex and K. Vidyasagaran (2016) analyzed the marketing of Non-Timber Forest Products (NTFPs) in Attappady, Kerala. The study identified three primary marketing channels—Kurumba Cooperative Society, Environmental Development Committees (EDCs), and Eco Shops. Cooperative societies were found to be more beneficial to collectors due to profit-sharing mechanisms.
- N. Vijaykumar and K.N. Ushadevi (2022) investigated the problems faced by tribals in the collection and marketing of NTFPs in Kerala. The study highlighted issues such as middlemen exploitation, lack of market access, and inadequate institutional support. The authors recommended sustainable harvesting practices and stronger producer-market linkages.
- Ashish Kumar Gupta, M.L. Sharma, M.A. Khan, S. Narbaria, and A. Pandey (2018) studied the problems faced by tribes in Chhattisgarh in the collection and marketing of NTFPs. The research identified major constraints including poor infrastructure, lack of knowledge, and exploitation by intermediaries, and suggested policy-level interventions and capacity-building programs.
- V A, J., Lazarus, T., Gopakumar, S., Ar, D., NISHAN, M. A., & Gopinath, P. (2022). examined the sustainability of tribal livelihood assets through Minor Forest Produce gathering in Kerala. The study discussed issues related to forest policies, land ownership, and limited technical knowledge, emphasizing the need for institutional reforms and sustainable management practices.
- Singh, A. K. (2023) reviewed the commercialization of Non-Timber Forest Products globally. Their work provided a critical analysis of factors influencing NTFP commercialization, including market access, governance, and socio-economic impacts, offering a global perspective relevant to developing countries.
- Radha, S. (2022)., studied the enhancement of livelihood activities through NTFPs in Jharkhand's Ranchi and Simdega districts. The research highlighted the role of NTFPs as an alternative income source amid declining agricultural productivity and stressed the importance of value addition and institutional support.
- Pokhrel, D., & Thapa, G. (2007). reviewed the role of NTFPs in income generation among tribal populations. The study emphasized that NTFPs significantly contribute to tribal household income but are constrained by limited ownership rights, inadequate marketing infrastructure, and restricted forest access.
- Kala, J. (2015) examined the agricultural information needs and accessibility of tribal farmers in Attappady, Palakkad. The study revealed low awareness among tribal farmers regarding information sources and recommended ICT-based agricultural training and institutional support to improve productivity and livelihood outcomes.
- Government of India (2006) through the enactment of the Forest Rights Act examined the recognition of forest rights of Scheduled Tribes and other traditional forest dwellers. The Act emphasized community rights over Minor Forest Produce (MFP) and aimed to empower tribal communities by granting ownership, access, and management rights, thereby strengthening their role in sustainable forest governance and marketing.
- Forest Survey of India (2021) examined forest cover trends and sustainable resource management in India. The report indirectly highlighted the growing importance of non-timber forest produce in forest-based livelihoods, emphasizing the need for conservation-oriented harvesting practices supported by government policy frameworks.

Statement of the Problem

Forests play a vital role in sustaining ecological balance and supporting the socio-economic livelihood of tribal communities in Kerala. Minor Forest Products (MFPs), also known as Non-Timber Forest Products (NTFPs), such as honey, medicinal plants, bamboo, wild fruits, gums, and resins, constitute a major source of income and subsistence for tribal groups residing in the forest regions of Southern Kerala. Tribal collectors often face issues such as price fluctuations, exploitation by middlemen, lack of assured market demand, inadequate supply chain management, insufficient processing facilities, limited access to training, poor marketing diversification, and weak online marketing mechanisms. Although various government agencies in Kerala have introduced initiatives – such as fair price mechanisms, transportation facilities, processing support, technical assistance, training programs, welfare measures, and institutional marketing platforms like Vanasree Ecoshops – to strengthen the MFP marketing system, the effectiveness of these services remains uncertain.

Research Methodology

This study employs a quantitative research approach to investigate the effect of services provided by Government agencies for marketing of Minor Forest Products in Southern Kerala. The research design is cross-sectional, utilizing primary and secondary data.

Data collection involves administering structured questionnaires to 100 tribal respondents involved in MFP activities, selected through purposive sampling.

Additional data is gathered from government records and existing literature. The survey questionnaire covers demographic characteristics, government agencies' services.

Data analysis is performed using descriptive statistics and inferential statistics to identify relationships between variables. The Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) software is used for data analysis.

Analysis and Interpretation

Table 1: Profile of Respondents

Variable	Attributes	Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Male	64	64
	Female	36	36
Age	Below 30	5	5
	31-40	28	28
	41-50	52	52
	51-60	15	15
	Above 60	0	0
Educational qualification	Illiterate	67	67
	1st std.	21	21
	2nd Std.	6	6
	3rd Std.	3	3
	4th Std.	2	2
	5th Std.	1	1
	Above 5th Std.	0	0
Annual income	Below 5000	29	29
	5000-10000	58	58
	10001-15000	13	13
	Above 15000	0	0

Source: Primary Data

Table 2: Opinion regarding services provided by government agencies for marketing of MFPs

Statements	Highly disagree	%	Agree	%	Highly Agree	%	Neutral	%	Total
Offering a better price for minor forest products	25	25	25	25	45	45	5	5	100
Ensuring the price stability and value of products	5	5	15	15	75	75	5	5	100
Training regarding the collection of products	70	70	25	25	3	3	2	2	100
Providing welfare activities to tribes	18	18	27	27	45	45	10	10	100
Effective working of online product marketing	22	22	38	38	28	28	12	12	100

Source: Primary data

Effect of Service Rendered by Government Agencies

Table 3: KMO and Bartlett's Test[a]

Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy.		.880
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity	Approx. Chi-Square	41496.425
	df	210
	Sig.	.000
a. Based on correlations		

The sampling adequacy test (KMO) result is .880 which is close to 1. This means that KMO index is high, thus PCA can act efficiently. Bartlett's Test output significant value (p-value) is less than the level of 5 per cent significant level (.000<0.05). This depicts that there is a sufficient correlation between the variables used in the study

Table 4: Communalities

Communalities	Initial	Extraction
Offering a better price for minor forest products	1.000	.923
Ensuring the demand of products (Among people)	1.000	.961
Running an effective supply chain management	1.000	.933
Ensuring the price stability and value of products	1.000	.949
Ensuring the restriction of middle man	1.000	.934
Helping in processing the minor forest products	1.000	.934
Providing technical support	1.000	.937
Transportation facilities to move the products	1.000	.868
Machinery system for processing the products	1.000	.815
Training regarding the collection of products	1.000	.716
Training regarding the processing of products	1.000	.726
Training regarding the diversifying the products	1.000	.867
Training regarding the marketing of products	1.000	.702
Ensuring the market demand for products (wide market)	1.000	.748
Ensuring the collaboration with other retailers regarding MFP	1.000	.764
Providing welfare activities to tribes	1.000	.716
Ensuring the market diversity (location, techniques etc.)	1.000	.717
Helping in diversity of products	1.000	.999
Effective working of online product marketing	1.000	.785
Effective in product advertisement	1.000	.742
Ensuring regular payment to tribes (collectors/processing workers/workers engaged in distribution)	1.000	.772
Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.		

Communality coefficient table shows the high coefficient and lower coefficient of variables used in the study. Here the all variables have high coefficient value (Above .70), this depicts that all the variables used in the study is very strong to predict the effect of marketing of minor forest products on the socio-economic status of tribes.

Table 5: Rotated Component Matrix[a]

	Component		
	1	2	3
Offering a better price for minor forest products	.962		
Ensuring the demand of products (Among people)	.975		
Running an effective supply chain management	.954		
Ensuring the price stability and value of products	.974		
Ensuring the restriction of middle man	.970		
Helping in processing the minor forest products	.965		
Providing technical support	.967		
Transportation facilities to move the products	.573		
Machinery system for processing the products	.604		
Training regarding the collection of products		.720	
Training regarding the processing of products		.642	
Training regarding the diversifying the products		.669	
Training regarding the marketing of products		.826	
Ensuring the market demand for products (wide market)		.854	
Ensuring the collaboration with other retailers regarding MFP			.852
Providing welfare activities to tribes			.564
Ensuring the market diversity (location, techniques etc.)			.818

Helping in diversity of products			.999
Effective working of online product marketing			.954
Effective in product advertisement			.871
Ensuring regular payment to tribes (collectors/processing workers/workers)			.876
Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis. Rotation Method: Varimax with Kaiser Normalization.			
a. Rotation converged in 4 iterations.			

Rotated Component Metric was processed based on the factors loading, each statements have sufficient internal consistency. Hence, based on the rotated component Metrix, the statements were categorized as following factors i.e., Factor1(F1), Factor 2(F2), Factor 3(F3).

Services rendered by Government agencies

Table 6: One-Sample Statistics

	Factors	Mean	SD	T	p
F1	Offering a better price for minor forest products	3.22	1.967	-9.047	.000
	Ensuring the demand of products (Among people)	2.07	2.217	-9.575	.000
	Running an effective supply chain management	2.94	1.944	-11.602	.000
	Ensuring the price stability and value of products	4.06	2.079	-9.806	.000
	Ensuring the restriction of middle man	2.31	2.422	-6.641	.000
	Helping in processing the minor forest products	3.63	2.478	-4.104	.000
	Providing technical support	3.36	2.279	-6.568	.000
	Transportation facilities to move the products	4.63	1.892	4.026	.000
	Machinery system for processing the products	4.31	1.690	1.136	.265
F2	Training regarding the collection of products	1.24	.426	-124.697	.000
	Training regarding the processing of products	2.03	1.300	-29.935	.000
	Training regarding the diversifying the products	1.72	1.293	-34.377	.000
	Training regarding the marketing of products	1.95	1.245	-32.419	.000
	Ensuring the market demand for products (wide market)	2.47	1.052	-29.520	.000
F3	Ensuring the collaboration with other retailers regarding MFP	2.93	1.418	-15.576	.000
	Providing welfare activities to tribes	2.08	.705	-53.929	.000
	Ensuring the market diversity (location, techniques etc.)	1.64	.481	-95.378	.000
	Helping in diversity of products	2.92	1.788	-12.805	.000
	Effective working of online product marketing	2.31	.775	-43.027	.000
	Effective in product advertisement	1.64	.451	-95.378	.000
	Ensuring regular payment to tribes (collectors/processing workers/workers)	2.88	1.763	-13.432	.000

Table illustrates the descriptive and one sample t-test result regarding the opinion of sample respondents about the effect of services rendered by government agencies on marketing of minor forest product. Result shows that majority of the sample respondents agreed that government agencies are offering a better price for MFP, ensuring the price stability and value of products, helping in processing the MFP, providing technical support, providing transportation facility to move the products, and providing, machinery system for processing the products. While on the other hand, majority of the them were disagreed with the rest of statements under factor one i.e., government agencies are failed to ensure the demand of the products, failed to run effective supply chain management, failed to restrict the interference of middle man. While looking into the other two factors, majority of the respondents disagreed with the effect of services rendered by government agencies in marketing of MFP.

Major Findings of the Study

1. Most respondents agreed that government agencies provide better prices for Minor Forest Products (MFPs).
2. The majority felt that price stability and value of products are properly ensured by government agencies.
3. Transportation facilities for moving MFPs are considered highly satisfactory by the respondents.
4. Processing support and machinery facilities provided by the government are positively perceived.
5. Respondents expressed dissatisfaction regarding training programs related to collection, processing, diversification, and marketing of MFPs.
6. Many respondents stated that government agencies have failed to ensure adequate market demand for their products.
7. The study found that middlemen interference is still not effectively controlled.
8. Online marketing, product advertisement, and market diversification efforts are perceived as weak and ineffective.

Conclusion

The study states that government agencies in Southern Kerala have made notable efforts in supporting the marketing of Minor Forest Products, particularly in areas such as price stability, transportation, processing facilities, and technical assistance. Although institutional support exists, its effectiveness is uneven across different service dimensions. Therefore, stronger coordination, better training initiatives, improved supply chain management, and enhanced market linkages are essential to ensure sustainable income generation and socio-economic upliftment of tribal communities dependent on Minor Forest Products.

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