



SAMARTHAN-
CENTRE FOR
DEVELOPMENT
SUPPORT

FROM GETTING ENTITLEMENTS TO
GENERATING LIVELIHOOD- LEARNING FROM 3
TRIBAL VILLAGES

| Samarthan- Centre for Development Support |
Dr. Yogesh Kumar, Devidas Nimje, Rajesh Sahu and Ankita Akodiya

Table of acronyms

FRA	The Schedule Tribe and other Forest Dwellers (Recognition of Forest Rights) Act, 2006
PESA	Panchayati Raj Act Extension for Scheduled Areas, 1996
CFR	Community Forest Rights
NTFP	Non-Timber Forest Produce
GS	Gram sabha
HH	House hold
SECC	Socio-Economic Caste Census
NREGA	National Rural Employment Guarantee Act
CBO	Community Based Organization
VO	Village Organization (focus on women)

Concept

FRA: The act enables the forest dependent communities to exercise their rights through Individual Forest Rights and Community Forest Rights. Ownership and management rights are given to the community as their understanding of forest is vast.

PESA: Enables every Gram Sabha to safeguard and preserve the traditions and customs of the people, their cultural identity, community resources and the customary mode of dispute resolution. The act focuses upon tribal dominant areas.

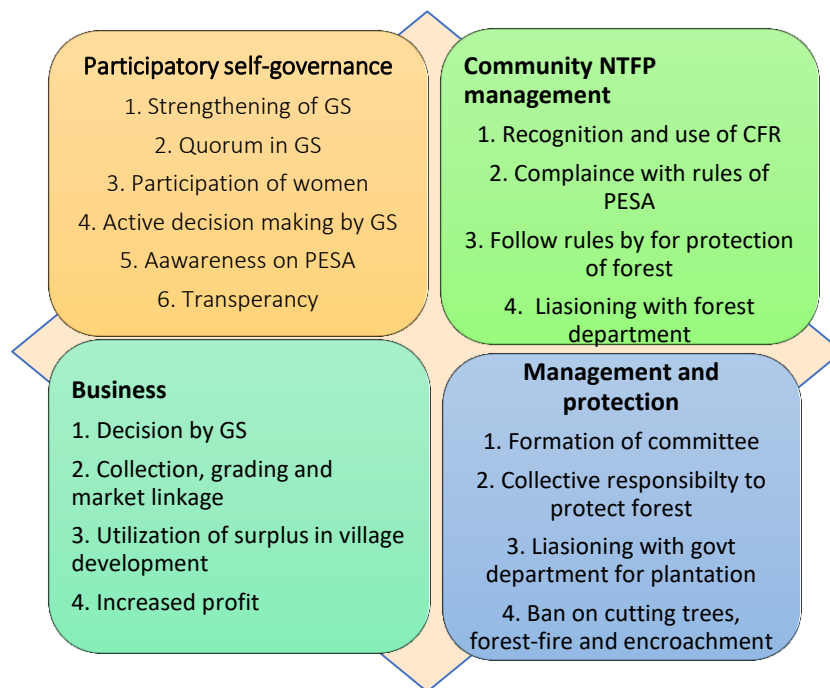
Gram Sabha: A grass root level democratic institution in each Village Panchayat. A vibrant Grama Sabha is essential for the effective functioning of Village Panchayats by promoting transparency and accountability in administration, enhancing public participation in the planning and implementation of schemes and in the choice of beneficiaries, and paving the way for social audit.

Overview/Background

The geographical area of Chhattisgarh is 135,192 Km² out of which the forest area is 59,772 Km² that is 44.20% of the total area. The state is rich in its flora biodiversity with major Non-Timber Forest Produce (NTFP) such as Custard apple, Sal seeds, Tamarind, Mahua flowers and seeds, Honey, Aonla, etc which are collected by the local community for self-consumption, as well a major source of livelihood. These forest resources play a crucial role in the lives of forest dwelling communities. The FRA under its Section 3 (1) and PESA under its Section 4 (m) (ii) gives the right to Gram Sabha to manage the forest and its resources for the purpose of livelihood generation.

Samarthan- Centre for Development Support is working in areas under PESA in Chhattisgarh; Samarthan developed a model for livelihood generation by the management of forest and business through Custard apple through active engagement of Gram Sabha. This intervention helped in income generation both at household level and at village level. This was the first Gram Sabha in Chhattisgarh which utilized its rights over the forest to generate income.

This document presents the experiences, learning and challenges during the course of implementing the project. This will act as a guiding document for others to utilize their rights for a developmental pathway.



Methodology

The study was conducted with focus on the enterprise developed in the forest villages; undertaken by Samarthan- Dr. Yogesh Kumar, Devidas Nimje, Rajesh Sahu and Ankita Akodiya. The target population is of three tribal dominant villages-*Duwalgudara*, *Tirpementa* and *Edamagondi*. The villages were selected on the basis of years of intervention, presence of community engaged in business from NTFP business, success of business, etc. The study is a result of extensive field work during five years (2016-2020) in tribal dominant areas of Chhattisgarh. Primary data from HH survey of 30% HH in 3 villages and discussion with *Gram Sabha sah Van Niyantaran Samiti*. Secondary data has been used for the study- GP meeting register, books of accounts, previous reports, etc.

Socio-economic profile

A total of 296 HH resides in these villages whose livelihood depends majorly on seasonal agriculture, daily-wage work and NTFP collection. Each HH have an approx. 4 acres of agricultural land but 97.80% area is unirrigated and 18.55% HH are landless. The villages have 44.8% area under forest whereas 44% area is used for NTFP collection. Despite being rich in natural resources, 97.17% HH have income below Rs. 5,000 per month; 38.68% HH comes under D-01 category of SECC 2011. It's evident that area is naturally rich but due to lack of collective efforts, knowledge about rights and failed implementation of government schemes, this area is still underdeveloped.

Intervention strategy

For the sustainable management of natural resources, the grassroot governance system was strengthened. In 2016, Samarthan extensively worked in generating awareness on PESA and FRA in the local community and community based organisations. Villagers started participating in the Gram sabha meetings, preparing their own agendas and organizing Gram sabha as and when required. The participation of women substantially increased.

Gram sabha decided to exercise their community forest rights to protect the forest, plantation of native species and collect NTFP. The production of Custard apple was high in the area and the Gram sabha observed the middle-men earned huge profit from buying at low price and selling at higher price in market. The collectors were not getting adequately paid for their efforts. Hence, the Gram sabha decided to purchase Custard apple at higher price than that of the middle-men and further create market-linkage for better pricing.

This was the first Gram sabha in Chhattisgarh to open its own bank account. The amount from sales was transferred to the account which was distributed amongst the HH engaged in collection. The surplus helped in making crucial changes at village which was not possible with tied government funds. **Gram Sabha sah Van Niyantaran Committee** was formed for protection and management of forest resources, collective marketing of Custard apple. The committee members were trained on grading, marketing and finance management and members organized meeting, kept records and documented the natural resources in the area. With the strengthening of Gram sabha, they started engaging with the Forest department and NREGA to improve the condition of forest, in previous 5 years; they planted over 5,000 saplings and took ownership of

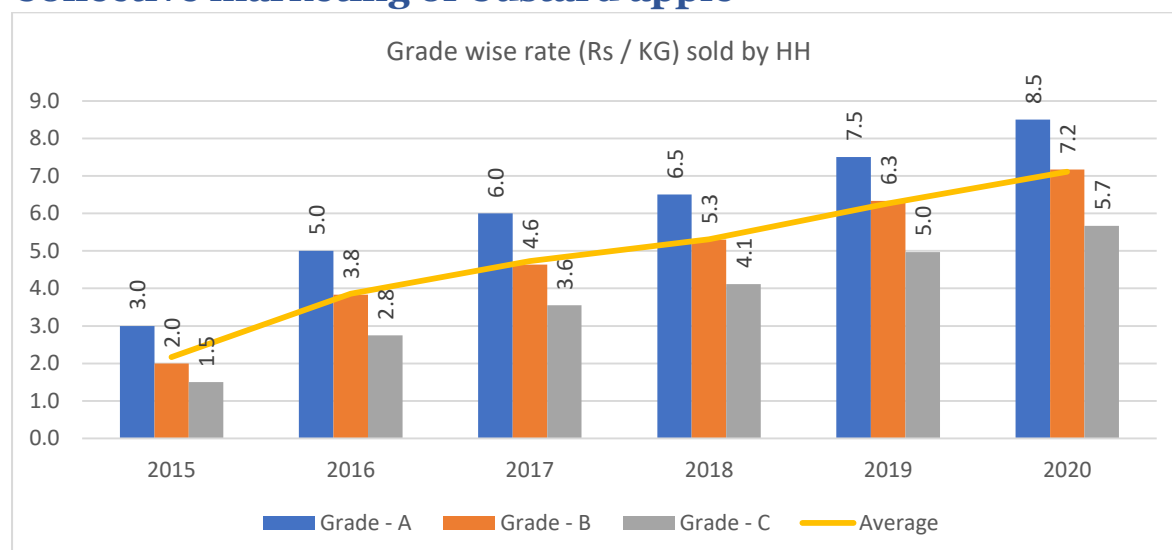
each and every plant. Every day, members from 5 families patrol the boundary of the village. A rooster has been prepared to avoid any conflict; a blue stump is used by the patrolling team for identification.

There has not been a single case of forest-fire and cutting of healthy trees in the community forest from the past 5 years, making the forest greener than ever. Similar initiatives have started with conscious efforts from Forest department, Joint forest Management Committee and other relevant departments to create Forest Management Plan which will be approved by the Gram sabha. They have mapped all the natural resources- water bodies, NTFP collection area, etc and the committee is working in a phased manner to rejuvenate these resources. Apart from this, the Gram sabha is taking proactive measures from small and marginal farmers to help them in accessing benefits from departmental schemes. The community was already engaged in collection and selling of custard apple which gave them edge in entering into this business, they are further planning to include other NTFPs and agriculture crop for business growth.

Achievements of Green enterprise/ CBO

- ❖ Market linkage was established by the community members by searching for better prices in various markets,
- ❖ The community took proactive step by planting Custard apple saplings to avoid overextraction of available resources,
- ❖ Value-addition by the means of grading Custard apple into three categories resulted in better price, Community learnt and implemented sustainable ways to collect, process NTFPs for better pricing.
- ❖ GS supported this intervention by forming its own Sub-Committee to manage its natural resource to generate income out of it.
- ❖ Gram Sabha understands their roles and responsibilities for towards forest and take active participation in management of forest, utilization of forest resources for livelihood.
- ❖ Inspired other villages to opt for collective marketing of NTFPs, protecting their forest lands.

Collective marketing of Custard apple



In year 2016, GS started the trading of Custard apple. In last 5 year, GS purchased 1507 quintal of Custard apple (shown in graph). The purchased dropped in year 2020 as they faced difficulty in marketing as a result of pandemic.). The Custard apple is collected from CFR area (39%) and individual lands (61%); the community planted 8,000 saplings to increase production.

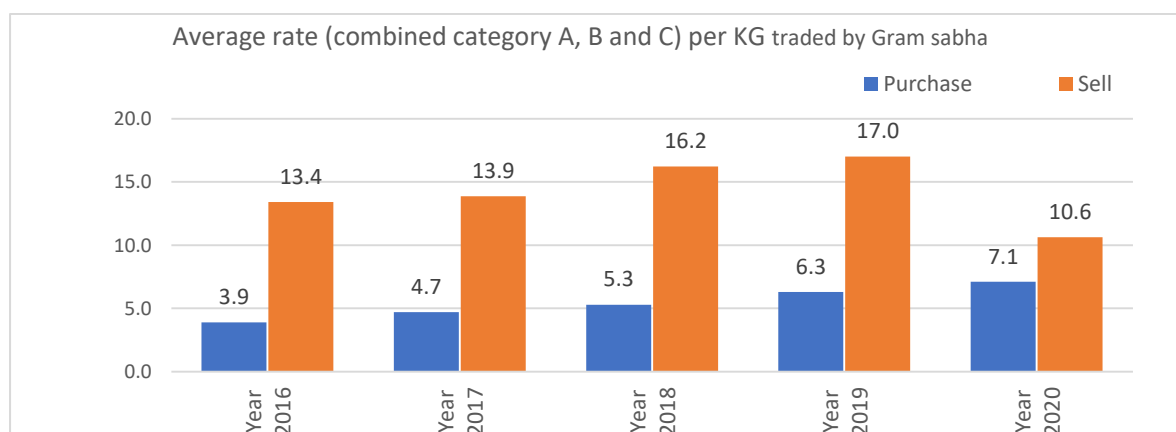
The Custard apple is graded into three categories (A, B and C) at village level which is sold in market which yields better price. This grading results in difference of 35-40% in pricing. Rs.26, Rs. 17 and Rs. 10 per Kg is received as per grade category. The committee emphasis on grading, the market linkage was set-up once they skilled in grading. Trainings were provided on the market understanding, book keeping, grading and trading in market.

Market Linkage

Due to its remote location, there is no market facility available at local level. The network of middle-men is very strong in this area, they collect goods from farmers individually and collectively on specified dates they further sell it off at higher rates. Their hold over the area at large makes it difficult to break this chain.

The Gram Sabha undertook collection and marketing of Custard apple but faced problem in market linkage as the markets are located at distance. They searched for market in *Ambagadchauki* and *Rajnandgaon* but the price was low; they contacted *Mandi* in *Bhilai* and *Durg* which was 110 kms far from these villages. The distance was long but looking at the future prospects, the Gram sabha decided to establish link in the wholesale market of *Bhilai*, here they directly supplied goods to bigger market players and reaped good profit from the deal. The committee ensured uality in garding, packaging and took protective measures while transporting the Custard apple which helped them in getting better price then that of middle-men.

There is a visible increase in selling price of the Custard apple. The difference in the sales and purchases denotes the profit which was constantly increasing but due to pandemic, the difference is less in year 2020.

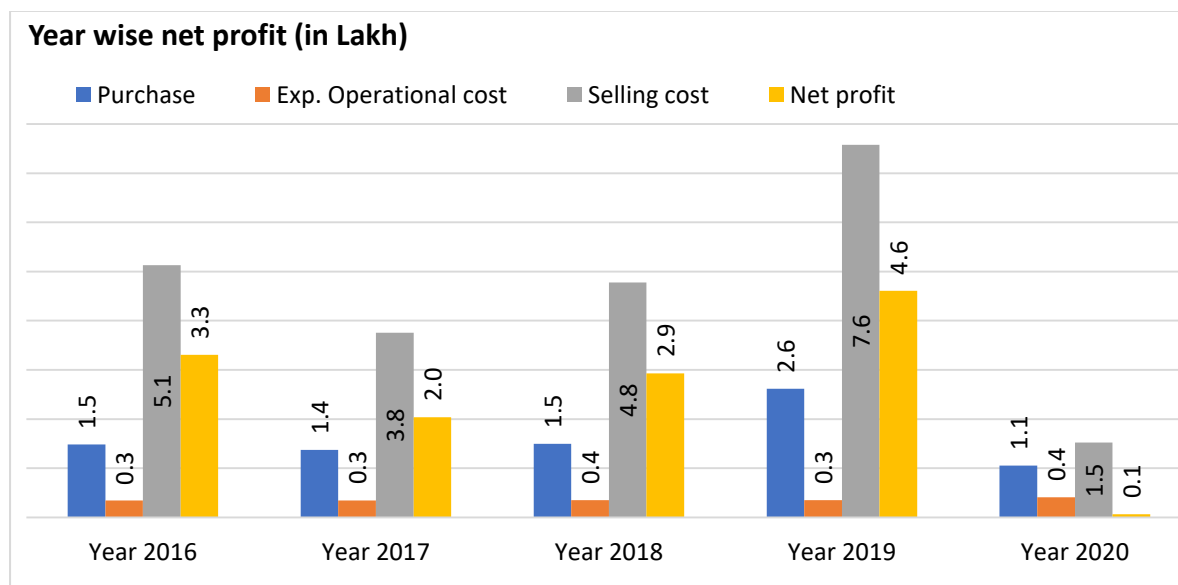


The trading is done in the month of October and November. During this period, rules set by Gram sabha are strictly followed- when to start collection, where to store and facility of collective marketing. The village community centre is used as storage center, vehicles are hired for transportation. The average price ranges from 35-40 Rupees per KG in

season but when sold at Mandi, the price is low. The Gram sabha needs to take set-up stalls to get a better price.

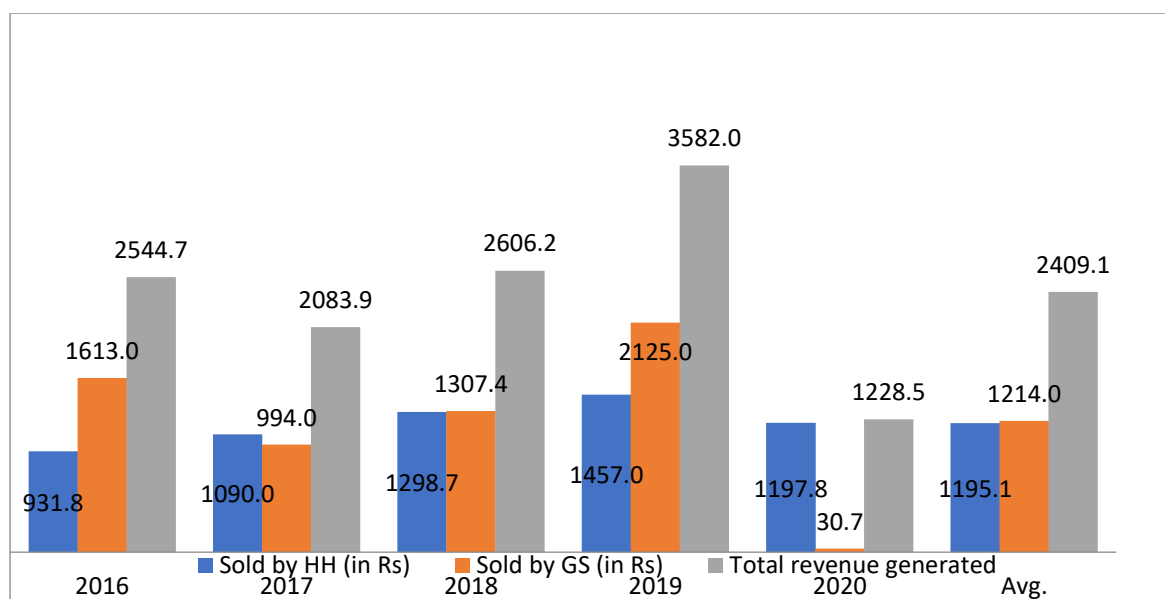
Revenue generated from project intervention

The intervention of collective marketing resulted great benefit to the community as the averag profit for 5 years is Rs. 1.5 lakh approx. As the expenses pertaining to sales such as transportation, labour, packaging, etc was borne collectively, the net profit was much higher. The year-wise purchase-sale-expenses and profit are shown below in the graph:



The Gram sabha had made business of Rs.22.8 lakhs in 5 years, where the net profit after deducting the purchase and expenses are Rs.12.9 Lakhs. This amount is used in the management of natural resources and development of village. In our project village, out of 296 HH 211 HH are engaged in collectionn of Custard apple. They collected around 232 Kg in 2016, 222 Kg in 2017, 238Kg in 2018 and 230 Kg in 2019 to sell it to the Gram sabha.

As per the Gram sabha decision, the HH collects Custsard apple from forests and farm lands which were then purchased by the Gram sabha after grading, the Gram sabha works on aggregation and transportation of Custard apple to the market. GS has fixed the rate for purchasing Custard apple and it is sold at higher price, the HH end up getting more prices for their goods then they were getting by selling it to the middle-men. The surplus is kept with the Gram sabha for developmental activities and purchasing Custard apple in the next year.



On an average a HH gets Rs.1196 every season, if the surplus under Gram sabha is distributed among the HH, they'll get approx Rs.1214 which will give income of Rs.2409 to every HH in every season only from marketing the Custard apple.

Cost-effectiveness of the model

The pilot project was funded by Cartias India for enhancing livelihood opportunities in tribal villages of Chhattisgarh. The funds allocated to Gram Sabha are mostly on infrastructure development; it doesn't focus upon building livelihood through GS intervention. The GS purchased the Custard apple on credit from the community; later it was paid off with the sales in Bhilai market.

Apart from the support provided by GS, Samarthan provided capacity building training, book-keeping training to the committee members which costed Rs. 8,000; financial support by providing 320 crate and 3 weighing machines which helped in grading and packaging which costed Rs. 83,500. An exposure visit was conducted to Menda Lekha village for better understanding on the role of GS in attaining ownership of the forest and generating income from forest. Financial support was provided in the first year of the project, from next year onwards the GS itself engaged in purchasing the crate, managing its books, etc.

Replication of model at local level

Mahua flower			Custard apple			Mahua seeds			Tamarind		
No. of HH	Collecti on (in Kg)	Selling price	No. of HH	Collecti on (in crate)	Selling price	No. of HH	Collection (in Kg)	Selling price	No. of HH	Collectio n (in Kg)	Selling price
85	42.5	50	85	320	160	18	360	30	6	750	85
104	41	50	105	380	160	23	460	30	35	4375	85
52	31.2	50	50	325	160	25	500	30	25	3125	85
75	30	50	74	205	160	21	420	30	16	2000	85
316	144.7	200	314	1230	640	87	1740	120	82	10250	340

The success of the intervention inspired the neighbouring villages to take up similar activity by collective marketing of Custard apple, Mahua flower and seeds and Tamarind. Villagers of neighbouring villages approached us to provide them with training and capacity building, some villages formed a committee and few worked on SHG model. Similar work is going in other villages of Sukma and Rajnandgaon where the community collectively engages in collecting NTFPs, grading, packaging and market linkage. Below is a table presenting the business intervention in 4 villages of Rajnandgaon district:

Challenges:

- The land titles for CFR were given on the name of Forest Management Committee which works under the State Forest Department which initially caused problems in exercising the rights endowed to the Gram Sabha. Under the decision by Gram Sabha, the rights to use and manage the forests were transferred by the Forest Management Committee to the Gram Sabha.
- The titles given to the community didn't include managing rights. This issue was brought before the government, the process of rectification has started.
- Issue in opening bank account on the name of Gram Sabha- which was rectified by using proceedings from meeting register, documents of the members.
- People were not confident about this process of income generation from forest as they faced issues in working with Forest Department. They were made aware of their rights under PESA and FRA after which they agreed to undertake this activity.
- Initially they faced problem in dealing in market with buyers but eventually they developed this skill. The committee members got actively engaged in trading of Custard apple.
- There was a trust issue between the community and the Gram Sabha, to deal with this issue, committee ensured transparency through its documents. The committee also used to go under social audit to maintain trust.
- Middle-men played a crucial role in buying goods from these remote forest villages and used to take a huge chunk of profit. With the intervention of Gram Sabha, their business was largely effected which resulted in conflicts within the community, the Gram Sabha and middle-men. Later, Gram Sabha prohibited the entry of middle-men.

Key Learnings and Opportunities

- The local community and the forest share a symbiotic relationship, both are interdependent. The community from its knowledge and practice knows how to manage the forest and sustainably use its resources. The intervention was possible when the community understood its rights and responsibilities which resulted in no forest fire in past 5 years, and ban on cutting healthy trees along with plantation of native species.
- Collective marketing resulted in increased income as the expenses were borne by the community together (packaging, transportation, etc) and the excess was utilized for development of village and rejuvenation of forests.

- Rectification of FRA titles will enable the forest dependent communities to engage in income generating activities. Currently, only a few NTFPs are collected and marketed but the area is rich in biodiversity, more varieties of NTFPs can be included with proper collection training.
- As people are becoming much concerned about the quality and source of items they consume, we have opportunity to take national market. The NTFPs collected are of high quality without any adulteration and has a scope to reach to national market if support and guidance are provided on marketing of the products.
- This model was applauded by the State Institute of Rural Development, Chhattisgarh as a great initiative to begin from village level without disturbing the traditional pattern of conducting business. The government has shown interest in replicating the model of collective NTFP collection and marketing.

Shri Shravan Kumar, President of Van Niyantaran Committee tells us that this village is a dependent village. Most of the government fund is spent at the Gram Panchayat Head office which leaves our village underdeveloped. With the income from marketing Custard apple, we discuss within the Gram sabha on spending the surplus.