



## SOCIO-ECONOMIC IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON TRIBAL REMITTANCE AND NTFP GATHERERS FAMILY OF SCHEDULED AREA DISTRICTS OF ODISHA

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**ABSTRACT** The deadly virus COVID-19 pandemic created emergency situation throughout the world by bringing worst misery to the health, economy, livelihood, occupation and social life of the people. The virus infected more than 24.9 crores of population and 50.0 lakhs precious human life were lost with a huge damage of economy and livelihood. Millions of people become unemployed and thousands of migrants returned their home for joblessness. To reduce the rate of infection the worldwide lock-down and shut-down situation arrested the production, economic activity and market, which affected highly to the small and middle income households. Like other remittance and wage labour households the tribal migrant families were also the worst sufferer by the pandemic situation and most of them returned to home for joblessness. After returning home, majority of the tribes once again adopted their traditional source of livelihood i.e., agriculture, forest, livestock, etc. to repair the economy. To assess the socio-economic impact of Covid-19 and role of NTFP on tribal livelihood a study was conducted in seven forest dependent villages of Kandhamal district and found that NTFP has largely supported the livelihood of both low income and migrant tribal families. The changing Government policy on listing of more NTFP commodities and price revisions under MSP scheme worked like an economic panacea for the forest dependent poor tribal families. However, the influence of middlemen and absence of TDCC reduce profit margin of NTFP gatherer families, which needs to be addressed through proper monitoring, intervention and policy resolution.

**KEYWORDS** : Tribe, NTFP, Migration, Livelihood, Economy

### INTRODUCTION

The outbreak of deadly corona virus (Covid-19) pandemic has given a deep and unforgettable shock to human society. It created emergency situation throughout the world by bringing worst misery to the health, economy, livelihood, occupation and social life of the people. The health emergency created by Covid-19 infected 24.9 crores of population and caused death to 50.0 lakhs precious human life throughout the globe (WHO, 2021). In India the virus infected 3.4 crores people and killed 4.6 lakhs human life by Dt.09.11.2021 (WHO, 2021). Apart from health issues the economy is also harshly affected by the impact of virus. Millions of people lost their job due to complete shut-down of trade, business, industry, commerce and market. The effect of virus seriously troubled the economy of small and middle income households basically depended on wage, small business, street vending, etc.

Like other Indian states, Odisha was also affected by Covid-19 to a large extent. In Odisha 10.4 lakhs population were infected and 8361 people died by the virus (GoI, 2021). The economic bombshell of the virus contracted Odisha economic growth by 4.92% (2020-21 FY) and dropped the per capita income of the state by over 5.4% (GoO, 2021). The restrictions on public mobility, social distancing, border seal, weekend/complete lockdown/shutdown, personal isolation and self-quarantine adopted by the government to minimize the rate of infection and community transmission of the virus entirely halted the business activity and stopped industrial work, which forced migrant workers to return to their place of origin. Around 7 lakhs workers lost their job in the pandemic situation (GoO, 2021). The study by PLFS (2017-18) shows that around 13 lakhs workers from Odisha (GoI, 2011) migrate to different parts of India for work, which constitutes 48.3% state labour force participation (GoI, 2019). During shut-down 5.82 lakhs Odia people returned to Odisha as of till June 2020 (Behera et al, 2021).

The Covid-19 pandemic has also impacted the tribal communities' terribly. Tribal are the forest dweller and most primitive people of the society. Presently there are more than 62 different tribal categories resides in Odisha and constitutes 22.8% of the total population of the state (GoI, 2011). Traditionally tribal communities were entirely dependent on forest and nature for their livelihood and economy. With the change in time the traditional sources of livelihood of tribes have been impacted to a large extent for various reasons and resulted tribal migration to urban areas for better income and living standard. However, still many tribes from the typical tribal dominated districts of Odisha are dependent on their traditional economy i.e., collection and

selling of Non-Timber Forest Products (NTFP) for livelihood and income. Due to Covid-19 the systemic migration of tribes to urban areas has been disturbed to a large extent. The trending culture of tribal migration to urban area for income and livelihood was not only stopped by the virus but many tribal have returned to their place of origin due to non-availability of work at destination. In Odisha around one lakh working population returned to 13 scheduled area districts during Covid-19 shut-down and ultimately chosen agriculture and NTFP as sole source of livelihood (GoO, 2020). As a result, the dependency of tribal households on NTFP has increased significantly. By looking into the excess dependency on NTFP the Government of India has made several amendments in the law to ensure favourable NTFP price and adequate forest based income to the tribal people.

In this context question arises how Covid-19 has impacted the tribal migration and livelihood? Whether NTFP collection and selling is adequate to nourish the socio-economic needs of the tribal communities? What policy level changes has made by the government on listing of NTFP and price appreciation of products? Do the policy changes help tribal NTFP gatherer adequately? With the above questions in mind, the proposed study aims to investigate the following objectives.

### Objective Of The Study

1. The study tries to explore the changes in NTFP collection, gathering and selling during pandemic situation.
2. The study also tries to explore the changing laws on NTFP procurement and its socio-economic impact on tribal gatherer families.

### Methodology

The study is basically an analytical one and used both primary and secondary data. Secondary data were collected from Government Covid portal, Census, TRIFED, TDCC, SC-ST Department, etc. and used basically to understand the Covid-19 situation, reverse migration of workers and impact of Covid-19 on economy. The information on change in policy by the Government on listing of more number of NTFP commodities and price revision under MSP (Minimum Support Price) were collected from secondary sources. Similarly, primary data were collected from the forest dependent tribal households of fifth scheduled districts of Odisha to understand the socio-economic impact of Covid-19 on their life and role of NTFP in filling the economic gap to live a decent life. For primary data collection four blocks were selected randomly from the Baliguda and Phulbani forest division of Kandhamal district. Out of four blocks five Gram Panchayats and

seven villages were selected randomly for household selection. In the seven villages total 405 ST households were covered in the data collection process. Data were collected with the help of an interview schedule covering the socio-economic aspects of the tribes.

**Analysis Of Results**

Scheduled Tribe population (ST) constitutes a significant portion of the total population of Odisha. Out of total 4.2 crores of population the share of ST is 22.85% (95.9 Lakhs). There are 62 different categories of tribes resides in the state out of which 13 are particularly vulnerable tribal groups (PVTGs). Out of 30 districts of Odisha 13 districts are falling under fifth scheduled area districts, which includes 6 fully covered scheduled areas and other 7 are partially covered scheduled area districts.

Tribes are the most economically backward community in India. Even after 70 years of independence there is no much visible development taken place among tribal communities, which is reflected from their economy, literacy and occupation.

The poverty measurement by Tendulkar committee shows that 47.3% tribes live below the poverty line (Shinde, 2018). However, in Odisha the case is more vulnerable as more than 60% of tribal households are considered as BPL. Similarly, as per 2011 census the tribal literacy of state is 52.24% against the overall state literacy of 72.87%. Even today majority of tribal population depends on primary sector as the primary source of livelihood.

Since ages tribes have been collecting their livelihood from nature. Even today primary sector is the main source of livelihood among the tribal communities of dominated tribal districts of Odisha. As per the 2011 census out of total tribal population of Odisha 47, 69, 659 were workers, which constitute 49% main workers and the rest marginal workers.

Currently more than 40% of the tribal people collect their livelihood from primary sector that includes agriculture and forest. Some of the tribes are also engaged in the handicraft work and looms activities, which is basically processed from the NTFP (Rath, 2018).

But the tribal agriculture in current form is neither sustainable nor enough for sustenance. The forest is slowly occupied by the public at large, thus decreasing the availability of land and forest for tribal population to conduct economic activities.

As a result, the largely dependent tribal livelihoods on agricultural and forest products have highly impacted. The forest based tribal economy further affected with the influence of middlemen, who purchase the products at a very cheaper price, thus snatching a major chunk of the profits from the gatherer. Further, the local youth were disenchanted with farm and forest based livelihood due to low productivity, old farm techniques, low profit margin, small land holdings, etc. and choose remittance as alternative option (Dash, 2018).

In the past 20 years it has been seen that the scarcity of agriculture land and degraded forest resources has been pushing huge number of illiterate tribes to migrate to urban areas for better livelihood and decent life.

However, Covid-19 pandemic situation largely affected the remittance livelihood by which the migration of tribes not only halted but majority of them were found returning (92188) to their place of origin (Table 1).

Pushing back to the home is caused by adjourned industrial activity and construction work for complete shut-down in which tribal are no exception. After returning to home many tribes were found engaging themselves in the traditional source of livelihood of collecting NTFP to

sale in the market for subsistence.

**Table 1: Tribal Socio-demographic Profile In The Scheduled Districts Of Odisha**

S. No.	District	State popul ation	% of ST popula tion	State literacy	% of ST Literacy	Forest area %	No. of Migrant Returnees
1	Mayurbha nj	2519738	58.72	63.17	53.11	39.30	11515
2	Sundargar h	2093437	50.75	73.34	65.08	44.00	7028
3	Koraput	1379647	50.56	49.21	35.36	23.83	2285
4	Malkangiri	613192	57.83	48.54	35.23	40.34	1323
5	Nabarangpur	1220946	55.79	46.43	38.54	29.48	1721
6	Rayagada	967911	55.99	49.76	36.69	44.49	4797
7	Kandhamal	733110	53.58	64.13	58.34	65.01	2163
8	Gajapati	577817	54.29	53.49	43.66	58.30	1374
9	Keonjhar	1801733	45.45	68.24	53.24	38.80	6610
10	Sambalpur	1041099	34.12	76.22	65.76	49.70	2637
11	Kalahandi	1576869	28.50	59.22	49.29	30.55	5446
12	Balasore	2320529	11.88	79.79	50.06	5.82	20454
13	Ganjam	3529031	3.37	71.09	49.71	25.66	24835
Total		20375059	43.14	61.74	48.77	38.09	92188

**Source:** Data compiled from COVID dashboard, & SC-ST development dept., GoO, & Forest survey of India.

Looking into the shrinking condition of most dependable occupations and livelihoods sources from secondary and tertiary sectors the Government of India took an immediate action of listing of additional NTFPs and revision of MSP of NTFP that can favour the income of collector and assure a decent living standard. In the year 2020 additional 37 commodities were listed with existing 49 NTFPs and MSP appreciated to increase the gatherer's income. As a result, the annual procurement of NTFP increased significantly from 2107.54 MT in the year 2019-20 to 14361.51 MT in the year 2020-21. For the year 2021-22 till 3<sup>rd</sup> quarter a total of 16760.23 MT have been collected with another quarter remaining to be added.

In a study conducted in the forest regions of Kandhamal districts found that the forest dependent people are generally ST and mostly collect leaf, spinaches, fire wood, roots, fruits, mushroom, honey, oil seed, medicinal plants, etc. During Covid-19 situation the collection of NTFP has not only rescued the economy of lower income, illiterate, ST households but many families could live a decent life due to NTFP collection and selling. For some families and villages the collection and selling of NTFP helped the person to fulfil the economic needs up to 80%, which has become possible for the availability of nearby forest and adequate NTFP commodities in the forest (Table 2). In this regards the government policy on NTFP MSP for two consecutive years (2019 and 2020) and listing of additional 37 commodities in a row of two phases in the same year (2020) are of good support. However, still many NTFP gatherer households could not gate adequate benefits from the revised policy of government. Further the excess influence of middleman and absence of Tribal Development Cooperative Corporation (TDCC) near to village act as an economic barrier for NTFP gather households. Additionally, connectivity issues are another major challenge for many villagers, which are disconnected during rainy season.

**Table 2: Procurement and Value of NTFP (2019-20 to 2021-22)**

S. N.	Procurement Details till FY 2019-20			Procurement Details in FY 2020-21			Procurement Details in FY 2021-22		
	Name of Commodity Procured	Quantity (MT)	MFP Procured (Rs. in Lakhs)	Name of Commodity Procured	Quantity (MT)	MFP Procured (Rs. in Lakhs)	Name of Commodity Procured	Quantity (MT)	MFP Procured (Rs. in Lakhs)
2	Myrobalan	136.91	15.033	Myrobalan (Terminalia chebula)	1.49	0.23	Harida	42.72	0.6408
3	Seeded Tamarind	486.423	117.02	Seeded Tamarind	915.89	329.72	Seeded Tamarind	16617.61	598.2339
4	Chironjee Pods	133.098	132.82	Honey	0.7	1.36	De-Seeded Tamarind	99.9	6.2937

5	Karanj Seeds	16.46	3.46	Hill Broom	1.88	0.93	Sal Seeds		
6	Mahua Seeds	64.8	14.25	De Seeded Tamarind	0.03	0.01			
7	Sal seeds	1269.85	126.98	Sal Seed	13351.85	2670.37			
8				Baheda	0.08	0.01			
9				Chironjee Pods	4.11	5.17			
10				Mahua Seeds	85.48	24.79			
Sum Total		2107.54	409.57		14361.51	3032.61		16760.23	605.17

Source: Author's Compilation from Tribal Development Cooperative Corporation, Odisha

Table: Study Area Profile

Block	Phiringia		K.Nuagaon	Baliguda	Chakapad		
Gram Panchayat	Taladandikia	Taladandikia	Sarangada	Bataguda	Sankarakhola	Bapalamendi	Bapalamendi
Village	Tandalnaju	Karandagada	Gundargaon	Samaragaon	Basiamba	Panabadi	Ragaguda
Total HH	32	153	151	120	34	60	47
Total St HH	30	78	109	94	32	15	47
Migrant HH	12	14	65	49	18	32	24
BPL HH	28	135	142	112	32	60	47
Total Population	154	627	588	482	150	300	200
Total St Population	145	312	444	376	136	70	200
Village Literacy %	61	55	52	58	50	45	60
ST HH Primary Occupation	Farming, NTFP Collection and Sale, Wage Labour and Remittance						
ST HH Primary Occupation during Covid-19	Farming and NTFP Collection and Sale						
Does NTFP helped economically during Covid-19	68	72	65	77	80	75	85
Total Land (Ac)	150	300	250	260	150	100	90
Forest Land	50	60	50	100	65	80	70
Road Connection to Market	Semi Pucca	Semi Pucca	Semi Pucca	Pucca	Kutchha	Semi Pucca	Pucca
Where do you Sale Product	Market &/or Trader &/or Middleman						
Available of Tribal Development Cooperative Corporation	No	No	No	No	No	No	No
Aware of NTFP Price and Govt. Scheme on NTFP	No	No	No	No	No	No	No

Source: Data Compiled From Field Survey

## Conclusion And Suggestion

### Conclusion

In a shocking condition of Covid-19 pandemic the immediate action of the Government on listing of additional 37 NTFP commodities and price appreciation (MSP) of NTFP products twice in a row for two consecutive years largely helped the lower and middle income remittance and forest dependent households in general and tribes in particular. During pandemic situation seize of most of the dependent livelihood sources particularly for the migrant wage labour, NTFP served as an economic remedy.

The tribal wage earner, who basically dependent on remittance were returned to their place of origin for non-availability of work in the destination and solely engaged in NTFP collection and sale to elevate their economic condition. In an unexpected crisis NTFP helped to serve the financial necessity of the NTFP gatherer family and returnees. However, the age old influence of middleman and lack of availability of TDCC are often a challenge to get optimum profit from NTFP for the gatherers, which needs serious course correction measures.

### Suggestion

To ensure optimum profit and income for the forest dependent NTFP gatherer households the sellers need to be directly connected with market without depending on middleman. In this regards the Government has to take action to minimizing the influence of middleman. Necessary steps are to be taken for awareness creation about commodity listing and price revision (MSP) of NTFP. More number of Mandi/TDCC collection centres should be opened in the

nearby areas of the NTFP gatherers.

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