

Voices from the forest



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LESSONS FROM INDIA

tapping into gums & resins

By SNEHLATA NATH

The collection of gums and resins is common in various parts of India. Done mostly for commercial trade, India is now the third largest exporter of gums and resins in the world. However, some methods adopted for extraction are unsustainable, causing significant damage to the tree. There is also little information about quality parameters, markets and trade and harvesting methods.

With the aim of bringing together and sharing information amongst a diverse range of people working with gums and resins, two workshops were organized in different parts of the country, covering varying ecozones. The meetings were organised through the members of the Non-Timber Forest Products – Exchange Programme.

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A SWIFTLET HOTEL IN KETAPANG
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KILLING THE KING OF SPICES

A day's harvest of *Sterculia* gum for an experienced resin tapper in the vicinity of Karjat, Maharashtra



S. NATH

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The Keystone Foundation in Nilambur, Kerala organized the first meeting. Tackled were resins and gums from *Canarium strictum*, *Boswellia serratus*, *Kingiodendron pinnatum* and *Vateria indica*. This primarily focused on the states of Karnataka, Tamil Nadu and Kerala which have evergreen/semi-evergreen forest areas.

The second meeting, held in Karjat, was organized by the Academy of Development Science (ADS). This covered gums and resins from *Sterculia urens*, *Shorea robusta*, *Anogeissus latifolia*, *Pterocarpus marsupium* and other minor gums. This primarily

focused on the states of Maharashtra, Andhra Pradesh, Orissa and Chattisgarh which have dry/moist deciduous forest types.

Adivasi people who collect these gums and resins were the primary participants of these meetings.

Others were researchers, co-operative societies, trading organisations and NGOs working in this field.

Two technical resource persons also attended the meetings. One was Mr. Luu Hong Truong, an ecologist at the SIERES Research Institute in Saigon, Vietnam. He is currently finalizing his PhD thesis on dipterocarps, especially those harvested for resins. Another was Mr. Jenne de Beer, an anthropologist with over 20 years of experience in working on NTFPs in South and Southeast Asia.

He is presently Field Coordinator of the NTFP-Exchange Programme.

The main objectives of the meetings were to:

- ▶ Exchange information amongst primary collectors and other roleplayers;
- ▶ Discuss possibilities to improve harvesting, quality and market links;
- ▶ Initiate discussion and dialogue; and
- ▶ Form an informal forum for continued exchange on this NTFP.

at Nilambur..

As *Canarium strictum* or Black Dammer is collected using destructive methods, discussions focused on sustainable harvesting. Quality and pricing parameters also play an important role in determining harvests.

The representative of the co-operative society explained market trends and the system of sale/auction. Researchers deliberated lengthily on the type of cuts to be made for resin extraction, their spacing, depths and shapes. Live demonstration of sustainable harvesting was done by the adivasis from the different zones of the Western Ghats. Truong played an active role in the discussions and shared his work on dipterocarps from Vietnam and the 14 km long trek to see a Dammer Tree was indeed interesting!

at Karjat...

Close to Pune, Karjat is located almost where the Western Ghats start. The meeting was held in the medicinal garden of ADS and started out by listing out trees yielding gums and resins and their local names in different languages represented.

Truong gave an overview of the status of gums

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Ecologist Mr. Truong shares his own experiences with gums and resins in Vietnam to Indian participants

NATH

in India and its trade in the world market. The most important gum is *Sterculia urens* which is exported in large quantities from India. Commonly known as Gum Karaya, its main use is in the food and pharmaceutical industry and it is consumed mainly in Europe. He emphasized pricing, quality and sustainable harvesting criteria. A variety of issues are associated with gums; some of the ones pointed out related to state laws, uncontrolled collection, tapping techniques and poor access to fair markets.

Discussions likewise revolved around uneven pricing in the different states and lack of regulated marketing avenues in Chattisgarh and Orissa. The example of Andhra, as elaborated by Manoj, was useful in knowing

about the Co-operative Corporation there and its functioning. The field trip to the Thakur Village, Pinglewadi had the team discussing private forests prevalent in the area, the extraction of *Anogeissus* gum and its marketing.

The workshops have initiated a process with regard to gums and resins. Interested members/participants may pursue the issue in terms of community-based research, trials and experiments, observations and studies or market interventions. The EP is conducting a world market study on gums and resins which will soon be circulated.



Tribal leader Mr. Bhau explains the local resin situation during the workshop in Karjat



A demonstration of how *Anogeissus* gum is harvested

COVER PHOTO: Resin tapping demonstration during sharing workshop in Karnataka

Welcome to your new Voices! As you have welcomed new people and partners into the fold that is the NTFP-EP, we also hope that you welcome the exciting changes and challenges that the coming years have in store for us. Soon, the website www.ntfp.org will also sport a new look, as we aim to bring information to you in new ways and in more accessible forms.

Filling the information gap for communities and their support groups – in order for them to make informed decisions in managing various NTFPs – has been a cornerstone of the NTFP-EP's efforts. In our cover story, Snehlata Nath of Keystone recounts their education and advocacy efforts in relation to gums and resins in face of the growing demand for resins in the world market. In the Philippines, meanwhile, government's massive campaign pushing oil palm plantations as the new wonder crop has raised the alarm on its impacts on communities. AFRIM shares their advocacy efforts so that the Philippines does not blithely go down the road of Malaysia.

The successes of other's endeavors provide inspiration on how to better manage our NTFPs. In Ketapang town in Indonesia, Jenne de Beer stumbles upon "swiftlet hotels." Hotels have literally become the new homes of these birds. The culprit is the unsustainable harvesting of birds' nests from caves in the nearby forests. Ironically, the local Dayak now want to lure the birds back from town!

In the Exchange News, it is heartening to look back on the past year and see that much has indeed been done in the field ranging from sustainable management to policy advocacy and even marketing. Everyone deserves a pat on the back!

Cinnamon is known as a money plant in India. Pandurang Hegde wonders why government, supposedly intent on conserving forests is in the forefront of maximising revenues from auctions of cinnamon leaves. Fortunately, Appiko-Chipko's campaigns have made inroads in national policies towards protecting the "King of Spices."

Lastly, the most recent NTFP regional meeting was given a warm reception in Vietnam, where the meeting was held. With the national eye trained on harnessing the potentials of its rattan and bamboo, stakeholders have come on board to better understand how to manage this resource. And that is what it is all about - working together towards a common goal.

- Aloisa Zamora-Santos

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