



Atmanirbhar Bharat (self-reliance) and Tribal MSMEs: Role of Minor Forest Produce in Sustainable Livelihoods among the people of Chandel in Manipur.

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Abstract: The concept of Atmanirbhar Bharat emphasizes self-reliance through local resource utilization, entrepreneurship, and sustainable development (Government of India, 2020). In tribal regions such as Chandel district of Manipur, Minor Forest Produce (MFP) plays a crucial role in supporting livelihoods, promoting micro, small, and medium enterprises (MSMEs), and strengthening socio-economic resilience (TRIFED, 2020). This paper examines the relationship between MFP-based activities and tribal entrepreneurship, highlighting policy interventions such as the Van Dhan Vikas Yojana and their implications for sustainable livelihoods (Government of Manipur, 2021). The study argues that integrating indigenous knowledge systems with value addition and market linkages can significantly contribute to self-reliance and inclusive development (Berkes, 2012).

Keywords: Atmanirbhar Bharat, Minor Forest Produce (MFP), Sustainable Livelihoods, Indigenous Knowledge Systems.

I. INTRODUCTION

India's tribal economy is deeply intertwined with forest ecosystems, where Minor Forest Produce (MFP), also known as Non-Timber Forest Products (NTFPs), serves as a vital source of livelihood (World Bank, 2011). The Atmanirbhar Bharat Abhiyan has brought renewed focus to strengthening local economies through indigenous resource utilization and entrepreneurship (Government of India, 2020). In regions like Chandel district of Manipur, where tribal communities depend heavily on forest resources, MFP-based activities form the backbone of

subsistence and income generation (Thoudam et al., 2022).

Forests provide food, fuel, medicine, and raw materials, significantly contributing to both subsistence and market economies (Planning Commission, 2014). Studies indicate that MFP contributes 20–40% of annual income for many tribal households, especially during agricultural lean seasons (Khosla, 2024). Therefore, promoting MFP-based MSMEs aligns closely with the goals of self-reliance and sustainable development (TRIFED, 2020).



Chandel district of Manipur is a predominantly tribal and rural region with a population of about 144,182 as per the Census of India (2011), showing steady growth over time. The district has a sex ratio of 933 females per 1000 males and a literacy rate of around 71%, with noticeable gender disparities in education (Census of India, 2011). Nearly 88% of the population resides in rural areas, reflecting a strong dependence on agriculture and forest-based livelihoods, particularly Minor Forest Produce (MFP) (Planning Commission of India, 2014). The population density is low, at about 44 persons per square kilometre, indicating a sparsely populated and forest-dominated landscape. A significant proportion, approximately 89%, belongs to Scheduled Tribes, highlighting the dominance of indigenous communities such as Monsang, moyon, Anal, and Lamkang (Thoudam et al., 2022). The majority of the population practices Christianity, and the local economy is largely subsistence-oriented, relying on natural resources and traditional knowledge systems (World Bank, 2023).

Table 1: Overall Economic Structure

Sector	Nature of Economy	Contribution/Characteristics
Primary Sector	Dominant	Agriculture, forestry, MFP
Secondary Sector	Limited	Cottage and small-scale industries
Tertiary Sector	Emerging	Trade, transport, border commerce

Source: Government of Manipur (2018); Planning Commission of India (2014).

II. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Atmanirbhar Bharat and Local Economies

The Atmanirbhar Bharat initiative emphasizes local production, strengthening MSMEs, sustainable resource utilization, and employment generation (Government of India, 2020). In tribal areas, this vision translates into leveraging traditional knowledge and natural resources such as MFP for economic empowerment (Berkes, 2012).

Minor Forest Produce (MFP)

Minor Forest Product (MFP) includes products like bamboo, medicinal plants, wild fruits, resins, honey, and leaves, which are collected, processed, and marketed by tribal communities (World Bank, 2011).

MFP plays multiple roles such as a source of nutrition, income generation, cultural identity, and ecological sustainability (Planning Commission, 2014). It supports approximately 100 million forest-dependent people in India and contributes significantly to rural livelihoods (Khosla, 2024).

Table 2: Forest and Natural Resource Economy

Indicator	Value
Forest Cover	~87.75% of total area
Forest Area	~2,907 sq. km
Major Resources	Bamboo, timber, medicinal plants, wild edibles
Role	Livelihood, ecological balance, income source

Source: District Administration Chandel (2022); World Bank (2011).

Tribal MSMEs

MSMEs based on MFP involve collection, primary processing, value addition, and marketing (TRIFED, 2020). These enterprises are often community-based and rely on indigenous skills and traditional knowledge systems (Berkes, 2012).

Table 3: Industrial and MSME Profile

Indicator	Status
Industrial Development	Very low
Type of Industries	Cottage, small-scale, household industries
Common Activities	Handloom, handicrafts, bamboo work
MSME Presence	Emerging but limited



Source: Ministry of Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (2021); Government of Manipur (2018).

The district lacks large-scale industries, and economic activities are concentrated in **micro and household enterprises**, reflecting low capital investment and infrastructure constraints.

III. INDIGENOUS CONTEXT OF CHANDEL DISTRICT, MANIPUR

Chandel district is predominantly inhabited by tribal communities such as the Monsang, Moyon, Anal, Lamkang, and other Naga and Kuki-Chin groups. These communities maintain a close relationship with forests, utilizing MFP for subsistence and trade (Thoudam et al., 2022).

Research in Manipur indicates that forest products play a crucial role in tribal economies, with structured surveys highlighting their importance across multiple districts including Chandel (Thoudam et al., 2022). Traditional practices include the collection of wild edibles and medicinal plants, use of bamboo and cane for handicrafts, and seasonal harvesting aligned with ecological cycles (Berkes, 2012). These practices reflect sustainable resource management rooted in indigenous knowledge.

Table 4: Agriculture and Allied Activities

Indicator	Value / Description
Main Occupation	Agriculture
Type of Farming	Jhum (shifting cultivation), wet rice cultivation
Major Crops	Rice, pulses, cereals, vegetables
Irrigation	Mostly rain-fed
Mechanization	Low

Source: Directorate of Economics and Statistics, Government of Manipur (2018); District Administration Chandel (2022).

IV. ROLE OF MINOR FOREST PRODUCE IN LIVELIHOODS

Economic Contribution

MFP contributes significantly to household income by acting as a primary income source for land-poor households, providing seasonal employment, and supporting women's economic participation (Khosla, 2024). In many cases, MFP serves as a safety net during crop failures or economic shocks (World Bank, 2011).

Nutritional Security

Forest products such as wild fruits, roots, mushrooms, and honey contribute to dietary diversity and food security among tribal populations (Planning Commission, 2014). Medicinal plants also play a key role in traditional healthcare systems (Berkes, 2012).

Social and Cultural Significance

MFP is deeply embedded in rituals, festivals, traditional medicine systems, and community sharing practices, thereby reinforcing cultural identity and social cohesion (Berkes, 2012).

Table 5: Livelihood Pattern

Livelihood Source	Percentage (Approx.)	Trend
Agriculture	High (~60–70%)	
Forest-based (MFP)	Moderate to High (~20–30%)	
Trade and services	Low but growing	
Government employment	Limited	

Source: Planning Commission of India (2014); World Bank (2011).

The livelihood structure reflects a **traditional rural economy**, heavily dependent on natural resources with limited diversification.



V. MFP-BASED MSMEs AND ENTREPRENEURSHIP

Emergence of Tribal Enterprises

MFP-based MSMEs include bamboo craft industries, herbal product enterprises, honey processing units, and leaf plate manufacturing (TRIFED, 2020). These enterprises promote local employment, skill development, and value addition (Government of India, 2013).

Women and Entrepreneurship

Women play a dominant role in the collection, processing, and marketing of MFP, thereby enhancing gender empowerment and financial independence (TRIFED, 2020).

VI. GOVERNMENT INITIATIVES AND POLICY SUPPORT

Van Dhan Vikas Yojana

The Van Dhan Vikas Yojana aims to promote MFP-based livelihoods through the establishment of Van Dhan Kendras, skill development, and value addition (Government of India, 2018). In Manipur, these initiatives have benefited thousands of tribal entrepreneurs (Government of Manipur, 2021).

MSP for MFP Scheme

The Minimum Support Price (MSP) scheme ensures fair pricing for MFP, reducing exploitation by middlemen and stabilizing incomes (Government of India, 2013).

Role of TRIFED

TRIFED supports market linkages, branding, and capacity building for tribal products, aligning with the “Go Vocal for Local” initiative (TRIFED, 2020).

VII. SUSTAINABILITY DIMENSIONS

Environmental Sustainability

MFP-based livelihoods promote forest conservation, sustainable harvesting, and biodiversity protection (World Bank, 2011). Indigenous knowledge ensures minimal environmental degradation (Berkes, 2012).

Economic Sustainability

Diversified income sources and reduced dependence on agriculture enhance resilience to economic shocks (Planning Commission, 2014).

Social Sustainability

MFP strengthens community institutions, preserves indigenous knowledge, and promotes inclusive development (Berkes, 2012).

VIII. CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES IN MFP-BASED LIVELIHOODS

Challenges in MFP-Based Livelihoods

Despite the significant contribution of Minor Forest Produce (MFP) to tribal livelihoods, several structural, institutional, and environmental challenges continue to hinder its full potential in achieving sustainable development and self-reliance.

Market Access and Value Chain Constraints

One of the most critical challenges faced by tribal communities in Chandel district is limited access to organized and formal markets. Most MFP collectors rely on local traders or intermediaries, which often results in distress sales and reduced income realization (TRIFED, 2020). The absence of structured value chains restricts the ability of tribal producers to engage in value addition activities such as processing, grading, and packaging. Consequently, they remain confined to the lower end of the value chain, capturing minimal economic benefits (Planning Commission of India, 2014).

Furthermore, price volatility in MFP markets creates uncertainty in income generation. Seasonal fluctuations in supply, lack of storage facilities, and absence of real-time market information exacerbate the vulnerability of tribal producers (World Bank, 2011). Although the Minimum Support Price (MSP) scheme aims to address this issue, its implementation remains uneven across regions, including parts of Manipur (Government of India, 2013).

Infrastructure and Technological Gaps



Inadequate infrastructure poses a significant barrier to the growth of MFP-based MSMEs. Poor road connectivity, lack of transportation facilities, and absence of storage and processing units limit the ability of tribal communities to efficiently collect, preserve, and market forest produce (Planning Commission of India, 2014). Perishable MFP items such as fruits, mushrooms, and medicinal plants often suffer from post-harvest losses due to the lack of cold storage and preservation technologies.

Additionally, limited access to modern technology and digital platforms restricts the integration of tribal producers into wider markets. The digital divide further exacerbates inequalities, preventing communities from leveraging e-commerce opportunities and accessing market information (TRIFED, 2020).

Institutional and Policy Implementation Gaps

While several government initiatives such as the Van Dhan Vikas Yojana and MSP for MFP scheme have been introduced, their effectiveness is often constrained by weak institutional mechanisms and inadequate awareness among beneficiaries (Government of India, 2018). Many tribal communities lack information about these schemes, resulting in low participation rates.

Moreover, coordination among different stakeholders—government agencies, NGOs, and community organizations—is often fragmented, leading to inefficiencies in program implementation (World Bank, 2011). Bureaucratic delays and lack of localized planning further limit the impact of policy interventions.

Environmental and Ecological Concerns

The sustainability of MFP-based livelihoods is closely linked to the health of forest ecosystems. However, increasing pressure on forest resources due to population growth and commercialization has led to overexploitation in certain areas (Berkes, 2012). Unsustainable harvesting practices, coupled with climate change impacts such as irregular rainfall and temperature variations, affect the availability and productivity of MFP.

The loss of biodiversity and degradation of forest ecosystems not only threaten livelihood security but also undermine the ecological balance essential for long-term sustainability (World Bank, 2011).

Socio-Economic Constraints

Tribal communities often face socio-economic challenges such as low literacy levels, limited access to financial services, and lack of entrepreneurial skills (TRIFED, 2020). These factors hinder their ability to engage effectively in MSME activities and adopt innovative practices.

Gender disparities also persist, despite the significant involvement of women in MFP collection and processing. Women often lack access to resources, decision-making power, and market opportunities, limiting their economic empowerment (Planning Commission of India, 2014).

Table 6: Infrastructure and Economic Constraints

Factor	Status
Road Connectivity	Poor to moderate
Market Access	Limited
Storage Facilities	Inadequate
Irrigation	Minimal
Technology Adoption	Low

Source: District Administration Chandel (2022); Government of Manipur (2018).

Infrastructure deficits significantly restrict economic growth, particularly in agriculture and MSME development.

Opportunities for Strengthening MFP-Based Livelihoods

Despite the challenges, MFP-based livelihoods present significant opportunities for promoting sustainable development, self-reliance, and inclusive growth in tribal regions.

Value Addition and Enterprise Development



One of the most promising opportunities lies in value addition and the development of MFP-based MSMEs. Processing raw forest produces into finished or semi-finished products—such as herbal medicines, bamboo crafts, and packaged food items—can significantly enhance income levels (TRIFED, 2020).

Value addition not only increases profitability but also creates employment opportunities within the community. The establishment of local processing units and training centers under initiatives like the Van Dhan Vikas Yojana can play a crucial role in promoting entrepreneurship (Government of India, 2018).

Digital Marketing and Market Linkages

The expansion of digital technologies offers new avenues for marketing tribal products. E-commerce platforms and digital marketplaces can connect tribal producers directly with consumers, reducing dependence on intermediaries and improving price realization (Government of India, 2020).

Initiatives such as “Tribes India” have already demonstrated the potential of branding and online marketing in promoting tribal products at national and international levels (TRIFED, 2020). Strengthening digital literacy and infrastructure in tribal areas can further enhance these opportunities.

Capacity Building and Skill Development

Enhancing the skills and capacities of tribal communities is essential for the sustainable development of MFP-based enterprises. Training programs in entrepreneurship, financial management, and value addition can empower individuals to manage businesses effectively (Government of India, 2018).

Capacity building initiatives should also focus on strengthening community institutions such as self-help groups (SHGs) and cooperatives, which play a vital role in collective action and resource management (Planning Commission of India, 2014).

Integration of Indigenous Knowledge Systems

Indigenous knowledge systems offer valuable insights into sustainable resource management and biodiversity conservation (Berkes, 2012). Integrating traditional practices with modern scientific approaches can enhance the sustainability and efficiency of MFP-based livelihoods.

Community-led forest management and participatory decision-making can ensure the conservation of natural resources while promoting economic development (World Bank, 2011).

Policy Support and Institutional Strengthening

Strengthening policy frameworks and institutional mechanisms is critical for realizing the full potential of MFP. Expanding the coverage of MSP schemes, improving infrastructure, and ensuring effective implementation of government programs can significantly enhance livelihood outcomes (Government of India, 2013).

Collaboration between government agencies, NGOs, and private sector stakeholders can facilitate knowledge sharing, innovation, and market integration.

IX. DISCUSSION

The findings of this study highlight the dual nature of MFP-based livelihoods in tribal regions such as Chandel district—characterized by both significant potential and persistent challenges. The analysis demonstrates that MFP serves as a critical pillar of livelihood security, contributing to income generation, employment, and socio-economic resilience (Khosla, 2024).

The strong dependence on MFP among tribal households underscores its importance as a safety net, particularly during periods of economic uncertainty and agricultural lean seasons (World Bank, 2011). This aligns with the broader objectives of Atmanirbhar Bharat, which emphasizes self-reliance through local resource utilization and entrepreneurship development (Government of India, 2020).

However, the study also reveals structural constraints that limit the effectiveness of MFP-based livelihoods. Market inefficiencies,



infrastructure deficits, and institutional gaps continue to restrict the ability of tribal communities to fully benefit from forest resources (Planning Commission of India, 2014). These challenges highlight the need for a more integrated and holistic approach to policy implementation.

The role of government initiatives such as the Van Dhan Vikas Yojana is particularly noteworthy. These programs have contributed to capacity building, value addition, and market access, thereby enhancing the economic prospects of tribal communities (Government of India, 2018). Nevertheless, the impact of these initiatives is uneven, indicating the need for improved coordination and grassroots-level implementation.

Another key finding is the importance of indigenous knowledge systems in promoting sustainability. Traditional practices of resource management not only ensure ecological balance but also provide a foundation for community-based entrepreneurship (Berkes, 2012). Integrating these practices with modern technologies can create a more resilient and sustainable development model.

The study also highlights the significant role of women in MFP-based activities. Despite their active participation, gender disparities persist in terms of access to resources and decision-making power (TRIFED, 2020). Addressing these disparities is essential for achieving inclusive development.

From a theoretical perspective, the findings support the sustainable livelihoods framework, which emphasizes the interplay between natural, human, social, financial, and physical capital in shaping livelihood outcomes (World Bank, 2011). MFP-based MSMEs contribute to all these dimensions, making them a powerful tool for rural development.

Overall, the discussion underscores the need for a multi-dimensional approach that combines policy support, capacity building, market integration, and environmental conservation. By addressing existing challenges and leveraging emerging opportunities, MFP-based livelihoods can play a transformative role in achieving self-reliance and sustainable development in tribal regions.

X. Conclusion

The integration of Minor Forest Produce with MSME development provides a viable pathway for achieving the goals of Atmanirbhar Bharat in tribal regions like Chandel district of Manipur. MFP-based livelihoods not only ensure economic security but also promote environmental sustainability and cultural preservation (World Bank, 2011). With appropriate policy support, capacity building, and market integration, tribal communities can transform traditional practices into sustainable enterprises, contributing to inclusive and self-reliant development (TRIFED, 2020), which is the main objective enshrined by the government of India. Through the emphasize of the Atmanirbhar Bharat along with all the stake holder. Then only it can become a rational and practical tangible domain in the near future.

XI. Suggestions and Scope for Future Studies

The study suggests that greater emphasis should be placed on strengthening market linkages, promoting value addition of Minor Forest Produce (MFP), improving infrastructure and digital connectivity, and enhancing access to finance and entrepreneurship training among tribal communities. Government agencies and other stakeholders should focus on capacity building, effective implementation of development schemes, and the promotion of women and youth entrepreneurship to ensure sustainable and inclusive development.

Future studies may undertake empirical research to examine the actual contribution of MFP to household income and livelihood security in Manipur. Further research can also assess the impact of government interventions, digital technologies, and e-commerce on tribal entrepreneurship. Comparative studies across different tribal regions and investigations into the long-term socio-economic and environmental impacts of MFP-based enterprises would provide deeper insights for policy formulation and sustainable development planning.



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