

**Shri Amrendra Kumar Rakesh**

**I.A.S.**

**Additional Chief Secretary,**

**(Panchayat Dept.)**

**Subject:** Recommendations Based on Grassroots Realities in Schedule V Regions

Dear Sir,

Greetings from Centre for Social Justice (CSJ) <https://www.centreforsocialjustice.net/>

During these trying times, the efforts taken by the State of Gujarat are truly commendable. From the implementation of the food basket and the Ann Brahma Yojana to implementing the lockdown measures to prevent the further spread of the pandemic. Despite these great steps, the huge diversity in population and demographics of the state, give rise to certain problems which remain unaddressed and certain issues which crop up which the policy-maker at the state level would not be privy to.

As local problems require local solutions and during times of pandemic it is difficult for the State to engage with all the stakeholders involved, we have concurrently made certain recommendations to tackle the problems identified on the ground. Based on extensive observations from the ground through our field volunteers and leaders, we have identified the following problems.

The Schedule V areas in Gujarat are peculiar in nature and being remote and populated by a population striving through property, face special challenges. This lockdown has had an excruciating impact on them. We have divided the recommendations into general and specific recommendations.

### **GENERAL SITUATION ON THE GROUND**

The lockdown forced most of the labour into unemployment, some even walking back to their villages. Considerable amount of labour in factories and at construction sites constitute of Adivasis who upon returning to their villages have no access to income apart from selling the Minor Forest Produce. Due to the lockdown, even this source of income faces huge risk as people are scared to collect MFPs from forest due to the lockdown as well as the fact that

the agents/ traders are not visiting the villages to collect the Minor Forest Produce and the state has also not made any such arrangements for the same despite the notification of the sixth addendum and the letters by both Mr Arjun Munda, Tribal Affairs Minister and TRIFED.

It is important to note that a considerable number of tribal people directly depend on Minor Forest Produce during from the months of April to June for their income and especially with the lockdown in place, it makes it vitally important that the poorest of the poor, the landless labourers and other marginalized amongst the Adivasis get access to this income and that the state facilitates this.

### **RECOMMENDATIONS**

<b><u>PROBLEMS FACED</u></b>	<b><u>RECOMMENDATIONS</u></b>
<p>a) The collection of minor forest produce has totally stopped in most Adivasi areas. In Dhanpur block, tribals are not even collecting timbru patta despite the season having started. Similar situation is found in all remote villages as the lockdown has severely restricted movement.</p> <p>Wherever it being is collected, it is not being sold as the agents/ contractors are not going to the villages to collect the timbru patta and mahua flowers as well.</p>	<p>The Sixth Addendum to the MHA Lockdown order and the letter written by Tribal Affairs Minister, Mr. Arjun Munda, read together, exempts collection and selling of minor forest produce.</p> <p>It is recommended that the State issues a circular to Collectors and DDOs of all tribal districts to facilitate procurement and transportation of minor forest produce from the villages as livelihood of tribals depends on this. Transportation be organized village wise and contractors and agents be issued passes to procure MFPs at standard rates or at MSPs.</p> <p><b><u>As fear is holding people back from collection of MFP, that fear may be tackled by issuing circulars to all the Panchayats in Schedule V Areas, letting them know that collection of MFP is exempted from lockdown.</u></b></p>
<p>b) Procurement of Minor Forest Produce is not taking place</p>	<p>According to the letter written by Hon'ble Minister Mr. Arjun Munda to the respective State Chief Ministers, he envisaged collection of MFPs at Minimum support price by the Gujarat State Forest Development Corporation. It is recommended that wherever possible,</p>

	procurement of MFPs is done by the State itself according to the MSP rate list.
c) Because tribal villages are located in remote areas, it is difficult for tribals to access their benefits, especially elderly and disabled to access their pensions.	DLSA in co-ordination the Taluka Legal Services Authorities, Bank Mitras and Banks to organize Service camps at the Panchayat level and direct disbursement of funds to happen at the Panchayat level.
d) There is a lack of supply of essential items in the villages. To expect them to survive only on ration provided is inhuman and in violation of Right to Life under Article 21	It is recommended that two or three individuals be assigned in each village to buy supplies from the talukas for their respective villages. Passes may be granted for the same to them by the relevant authorities so that the supply of other essentials is streamlined and the villagers get access to these essential items.

### **Policy Recommendations**

- 1) **A directive may be issued to the District Development Officers and Collectors of all tribal districts to issue a circular to the Panchayats** stating that collection, harvesting and selling of minor forest produce is exempted through the 6<sup>th</sup> Addendum to the MHA Lockdown Order and people shall be allowed to collect and harvest MFPs.
- 2) Issue an order to the collectors to activate the District Implementation Unit under Van Dhan Yojana and in consonance with the “*Guidelines for Mechanism for Marketing of Minor Forest Produce (MFP) Through Minimum Support Price (MSP) & Development of Value Chain for MFP*” vide Notification F.No. 19/17/2018 – Livelihood dated 26.02.2019 for procurement of Minor Forest Produce at Minimum Support price and making arrangements for transport of the same without hassle at the Panchayat level.
- 3) The collected Minor Forest Produce be stored in the Panchayat itself, and the collection and harvest be recorded per person and a date be set for collection of MFPs by the District Authorities and the Gujarat State Forest Development Corporation

together in consultation with the Panchayat for collection of this MFP at the minimum support price. Strict monitoring will be required to ensure that the money accrued actually reaches the collector of MFP.

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