

## **Forest Certification: Development of National Standards for Sustainable Collection of Medicinal Plants**

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In view of the international consciousness on sustainable forest management and certification, the project has applied mix of methods and approaches as well as field based research involving collectors, NGOs, traders, medicinal *mandis* (places for auction/sale of medicinal plants) and manufacturers and research institutions. Intensive studies on the practice of collection, storage, sale with or without government intervention in the prominent NTFP rich states of Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Odisha and Uttarakhand have been carried out under this project. Further, regional consultations were also made in North East, South and Central India to validate the relevant knowledge and information gathered in the project states. The field study was conducted with a draft set of certification standards / benchmarks along with structured questionnaires for different groups of stakeholders, to check out how many of the proposed/suggested parameters are already available at the field conditions and how many are yet to be achieved. Studies revealed the existence of basic framework in most of the areas however, proper implementation / utilization/ awareness is yet to be realized. Parameters like access/tenure rights, registration of the harvesters/traders, management plan development, participatory assessment of socio-economic importance, resource inventory and utilization pattern, training/awareness generation on responsible collection practices, storage and value addition, small enterprise development have been developed for these states under study and are being implemented. Final draft standard for Certification thus developed contains four tier standards, namely (i) Principles, (ii) Criteria (iii) Indicators and (iv) Verifiers. The draft certification standards thus evolved can be implemented through creating awareness among gatherers, foresters and other stakeholders. The efforts are also needed towards developing understanding about guiding principles of NTFP certification and its implication on sustainable management of wild MAPs resources, status of NTFPs /MAPs collected, traded and the issues related to sustainable harvesting. This project has helped to develop an accepted certification framework of which in due course of time, may be useful for initiating certification of wild collected medicinal and aromatic plants and NTFPs as a whole.