



Harvesting Season & Covid-19 Lockdown

Why in News

[Covid-19 lockdown](#) has suspended the supply chain of **India's rice exports** as well as badly impacted lakhs of Odisha's tribals by **hampering the sale of Non-Timber Forest Products (NTFP)** being collected during March-June.

Key Points

- **Sale of Non-Timber Forest Products (NTFP) Hampered**
 - [Covid-19](#) lockdown has coincided with the harvesting season of **Non-Timber Forest Products (NTFP)**. This has made the sale of NTFP impossible.
 - Forest products are seasonal in nature and the tribals earn their major incomes (60%-80%) in the months of March to June.
 - The **hard cash** earned during these months are critical for their sustenance during the monsoon season when employments dry up.
 - Major NTFPs collected during the summer season include **Wild honey, tamarind, mango, tendu leaves, sal leaves, sal seeds, mahua seeds, neem seeds, karanj (pongamia) seeds, mahua flowers and tejpatta (bay leaf)**.
 - As per conservative estimate, Odisha's NTFP market pegs at ₹5000 crore.
- **Suggestions**
 - The Odisha government should immediately establish and ensure collection centres function under the [Van Dhan Vikash Kendra scheme](#).
 - The Van Dhan Vikas Kendras aim to boost the economic development of tribals involved in the collection of **Minor Forest Produce (MFP)** and provide a sustainable MFP-based livelihood in MFP-rich districts.
 - **Tribal Development Co-operative Corporation** of Odisha, which facilitates the marketing of tribal products, must also intervene.
- **Rice exports suspended on supply chain disruption:** Indian traders have stopped offering quotes to overseas buyers as they are not sure when they would be able to ship their cargoes.
 - Shipments have stalled as transport has become very difficult because of the lockdown.
 - About 400,000 tonnes of non-basmati rice and 100,000 tonnes of basmati rice, meant for March-April delivery, are either stuck at ports or in the pipeline due to the lockdown.
 - India's export volumes have fallen by four to five times.
 - The halt in Indian rice exports has allowed rival countries such as Thailand to raise shipments in the short term.
 - India mainly **exports non-basmati rice to Bangladesh, Nepal, Benin and Senegal, and premium basmati rice to Iran, Saudi Arabia and Iraq**.
- **Labour issue**
 - A severe shortage of labour, triggered by 21-day lockdown to deal with coronavirus pandemic, will impact harvesting of winter crops of India.

- The northern states of Punjab, Haryana and Uttar Pradesh rely on farm labourers from eastern India for harvesting.
- Most of the laborers returned home to their villages after the 21 day lockdown that began on March 25, fearing the virus and facing wage disruptions.
- Farmers worry that the unprecedented **labour shortage will make it tougher to get mechanical harvesters** to fields or even pluck by hand crops.
- **Late harvests mean lower yields, reduced returns**, and a smaller window to plant next season's crops.
- Farmers' next problem is the **struggle of taking produce to market**, with few trucks available to carry large volumes.
 - Most farmers sell produce only at wholesale markets which, in turn, depend on armies of labourers to unload, weigh and pack vast amounts of grain.
- This could also **delay farmers' payments for produce**.

[Source: TH](#)

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