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Scarcity Hidden in Similipal- A Case Study of Santali Family

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This is a story about Mr Joharlal Besra, his family and his forest. He lives in Jamuani village of Jashipur Block in Mayurbhanj district. His family consists of his wife, three daughters and two sons. Their Similipal forest is very rich as it has so many valuable trees, herbs and shrubs which serve as a source of livelihood for us. Once upon a time his family was an example of a happy and prosperous family in natural resources especially forest resources. Today, the forest is 'for their eyes' only. His family depends very much on this hill reserve to collect several kinds of roots and tubers, flowers and fruits, leaves and barks and resins, etc. to earn livelihood, which the ecosystem provides from time immemorial. He has also realized that it is the source of their livelihood. Issues related to him and his family is the issue of all poverty ridden people of the Similipal Eco system. They need secure livelihood from their forest products. However, he feels their sufferings are overlooked. These days they are vulnerable to adverse climatic conditions like delay in monsoon or erratic rainfall and long summer. Though he has been observing climate change in Similipal since 1997 but since last 5 years the change in climate is visible. Summers in the area are very hot and humid, with mean temperatures of 45-50ºC from May to August. Winters are short, dry and mild with temperatures dropping to 14ºC in January. The mean rainfall mostly falling during the monsoon (mid-July-August).Winter rains fall from December to March and are of low intensity. Today he don`t feel any distinct seasons. The forests are also threatened by the rise in temperature, which causes decreased tree height and size of fruit, leaf, and flower. Also water scarcity due to long dry spells. There is evidence of many extreme events such as heat waves, prolonged dry spells, low intensity rainfall, forest fires in the region causing very high economic loss, destruction of biodiversity and pollution.

Over the years the change in rainfall patterns and increasing temperature poses a serious threat to minor forest produces (MFP), and therefore to his family's economy and food security. Forest produces like *Mahua flowers, Mahua seeds, Sal seeds, Paluo, Jhuna, Char seeds, Kususm, Amla, Harida, Bahada* are adversely affected not only by an increase or decrease in the overall amounts of rainfall, but also by shifts in the timing of the rainfall and long summer. Over the last 5 years, the region has received less than its share of pre-monsoon showers in May and June. Due to loss of significant forest based income sources both quantitatively and qualitatively, and absence of cultivable lands, his sons turned as agricultural labours for their living options. Women in his family in special way lose control over resources and this increases their burden in terms of finding fuel, fodder and food. His family suffered 40% loss in their annual income from forest products. Other minor forest products often collected for domestic consumption like *Saga, Phuljhadu* and grasses like *Sabai* are scarcely available in parts of Similipal. The distance covered to collect MFP during 1990s was 2 to 7 km and now it's more than 15 to 20 km.

His last five years' MFP collection has been less than the peak collection level because of the adverse impact of climate change.

MFP variation over last 5 years

Item	*Amount collected before 5 years*	*Amount available this year (2008-09)*	*Quality*
Sal seeds	200 kg	110 kg	Decreased size
Mahul flowers	500 to 600 kg	200 kg	Decreased size
Mahul seeds	200 kg	90 kg	-
Kusum	300 kg	130 kg	Decreased size
Char seeds	12 kg	5 kg	-
Amla	100 kg	90 kg	-
Harida	100 kg	60 kg	-
Bahada	60 kg	25 kg	-
Pitaalu	100 kg	30 kg	Small size

Tribal communities in Similipal are typically heavily dependent upon harvests of forest and non-cultivated plant resources for fulfilling their energy and material needs. Today they are affected by the impacts of environmental and climate change and are struggling to adapt to the changes in the environment in the region. The most serious potential threat arising from climate change in Similipal is water scarcities which in some way trigger other impacts, like fall in agriculture productivity. Rice fields are being abandoned, partly to the drying up of streams and rivers which once flowed abundantly. Substantial decreased of pulses and oil seeds *like Biri, Kolatha,Muga, Rasi, Sorisha etc.* are also declined and not available for our local need. Tribal people are losing their traditional sources of livelihood due to such change in climate. They are affected by the decreased quantity or quality of these resources as a consequence of climate change. Those adapting their lives to an agricultural economy are becoming increasingly semi sedentary. The change in livelihood options in many villages witnessed migration to Kolkata, Surat, Mumbai, Delhi,Bhubaneswar and other cities. Increasing temperatures are among the variables that affect malaria and the disease is emerging in places where it did not exist before. The loss of traditional medicinal plants also forced significant amounts that they are forced to spend on modern healthcare often lead them into a heavy debt trap. These plants which were easily available in the past have become rare.

Primitive tribes like Kharias and the Mankidias who mainly live in the forests consider Similipal as their primordial home and they live in the forest and depend entirely on it. Most of the minor forest produces like - honey, wax, resin, wood, herbal plants, roots, fruits, leaves, *Siali* fiber arrowroot etc. are collected by them. However seasonal and yearly fluctuations in income and employment have resulted in starvation, malnutrition and indebtedness among the majority of these tribes. They begin to lose their capacities to contribute to society either economically or socially.

Therefore, climate change poses a serious and additional threat to the poor communities in the region who live in remote, areas with limited natural resources, communication and transportation networks and weak institutions. The sustainability of our future generation is a big challenge. While we do not get into details of what has caused large-scale deforestation in these regions, its impact on impoverishment is fairly clear. Survival of indigenous peoples, who depend on MFPs, hunting and agriculture, also depends on the success of their fragile environment and its resources. They need food security, better health and better life to survive.