

Arunachal Front

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Policy can make bamboo money spinner

Guwahati-based Cane & Bamboo Technology Centre (CBTC) director Kamesh Salam has advocated a national policy on bamboo, particularly for the North Eastern region (NER) to turn its vast bamboo resources into a money spinner.

There are more than 125 species belonging to 23 genera of bamboos found in India. Though only 30 species are commercially important, 66% of India's bamboo resources exist in the NER and offers great potentials.

Salam told this daily in an exclusive interview that the policy will boost the value-added bamboo products under the umbrella of North East Council (NEC). He also suggested setting up a 'National Bamboo Development Board' with its HQ in NER like any other commodity boards such as the Tea Board of India and the Spices Board of India.

A policy to incorporate bamboo into national programmes such as NREGA, Indira Awas Yojana and other rural income generating programmes will boost the uses and application of bamboo, thereby improving the rural economy,

he felt.

Salam is for institutional reform and restructuring to commoditize bamboo for its commercial applications. The local people make functional bamboo items without value addition while most of the bamboo goes out of the NER in raw form for want of processing centres in rural areas.

The policy once evolved will help set up processing centres near the extraction areas, thereby increasing the profit margin for the people, whose skills will be upgraded through training, he reasoned.

Salam drew the attention of Arunachal Pradesh Governor JJ Singh to-

wards his proposal and the latter, already propagating bamboo-based cottage industries, assured to take it up with Prime Minister Manmohan Singh.

Bamboo is an indivisible part of the NER, particularly Arunachal, with its usage right from birth to death, shelter to food and culture to culinary.

Though 100% centrally sponsored schemes are now being implemented all over the country and the National Bamboo Mission was launched in 2006-07,



the NER is yet to fully exploit the bamboo sector for lack of policy and legal constraints, he observed.

There are more than 1,500 documented uses of bamboo, including use in paper and pulp industry besides being used in housing and construction in rural areas, fencing, furniture and modern day engineering goods. Bamboo is also used for incense sticks, charcoal making, packaging, bamboo shoots as food besides its use for bamboo jute composite and gasification for power generation.

As a substitute of timber, bamboo could be used to develop bamboo mats, boards, veneer composite, moulded products and corrugated sheets, engineered bamboo products to replace hardwood, laminated bamboo furniture/lumber, bamboo mat ridge cap, high density strand woven boards, shuttering boards, etc.

The cane and bamboo training centre at Ziro set up by Nani Sala Foundation with the assistance of the handicraft development commissioner of the union textiles ministry is assisting the local artisans through cluster approach to use bamboo as a means of livelihood. Set up in 2003-04, the centre is benefiting a few thousand local

artisans and promoting the SHG concept, says its chairman Nani Kojin.

In fact, the National Mission on Bamboo Application (NMBA) had helped convert the defunct Namsai-based Arunachal Plywood Industry Limited (APIL) into a manufacturer of bamboo composite.

Much before the Supreme Court's blanket ban on all timber operations came in 1995 with a cascading effect on Arunachal economy, APIL through research since 1972 had found bamboo as a total replacement for timber in all its usages, says APIL CEO Madan Jallan.

APIL is the first Indian enterprise to invent the split bamboo board and 100% engineered prefabricated bamboo house/structure (PFH) to meet the nation's requirements by developing indigenous technology with NMBA's technical support. It

has successfully erected PFHs in snow-bound Uri and Khadar, hilltop of Kargil, Rajasthan desert, Andaman & Nicobar Islands and Arunachal.

The result of China's bamboo policy in the 1980's is amazing. Zhejiang province, cultivating about



Salam engrossed in discussion policy with the governor

30 genera and 400 varieties of bamboos, produces thousands of bamboo products for sale globally, with an annual output of 25 billion Yuan (US\$ 3.7 billion) (in 2008), a quarter of China bamboo industry's total income. That means China earns about US\$ 14.8 billion from bamboo alone.

The Chinese Academy of Forestry (CAF), the International Network for Bamboo and Rattan (INBAR) and Center for International Forestry Research (CIFOR), in a joint study on the impacts of national policy changes on the bamboo sector, have found that Linan county, Zhejiang province, which specialises in bam-

boo shoot production, has average yearly household income of US\$ 2,500, with some above US\$ 10,000.

In this column on 22 August last year (under the headline *Chhak chhak reverberates sound of paapi get ka sawaal*), I had highlighted how bamboo had become the rice bowl for about 100 traders, supported by an equal number of collectors in the Capital Complex. The write-up was a reminder to the state government to fulfill its commitment to set up a dedicated bamboo development agency for the growth of bamboo-based industries. It is better late than never.

Beyond the Horizon
By Pradeep Kumar