

IIT-Indore pushes for three policy steps to deal with forest fires

Our Staff Reporter

INDORE

A study conducted by the Indian Institute of Technology Indore in association with the Indian Institute of Forest Management (IIFM) highlighted the profound impact of forest fires on Non-Timber Forest Products (NTFPs) in Hoshangabad Forest Division of Madhya Pradesh and proposed three key policy measures to deal with the challenges.

Funded by the South Asian Network for Development and Environmental Economics (SANDEE ICIMOD), Kathmandu, Nepal, the study analysed how wildfires affect forest-dependent communities and proposed essential policy measures for mitigation.

Dr Mohanasundari, the study's principal investigator from IIT Indore, said, "The research unveiled three critical findings regarding the effects of forest fires on NTFPs and local livelihoods. First, high-risk areas experience more



The research team at a dam in Hoshangabad forest division for conducting the study

frequent and severe fires, causing significant ecological damage and economic losses, with benefits reaching only a limited few. Second, controlled, small-scale fires can have a positive impact by promoting NTFP regeneration, ensuring a more sustainable collection process. Third, while agriculture remains an important income source, NTFPs play a crucial role in sustaining rural households with smaller landholdings, making them vital for economic resilience."

To address these challenges, the study proposed three key policy measures – the first

being expansion of fire watcher programmes in high-risk zones which would not only help with fire prevention but also generate seasonal employment opportunities.

"Encouraging value addition to NTFPs through products like Mahua laddus, cookies and natural soaps could significantly improve community income while promoting sustainable harvesting. Besides, reinforcing the Minimum Support Price (MSP) system with better enforcement, procurement centres and digital platforms would ensure fair pricing for har-

vesters and protect them from exploitation by intermediaries," the study states.

IIT Indore director Prof Suhas Joshi remarked, "These policy measures are crucial for improving forest management, fostering economic stability, and mitigating the adverse effects of forest fires on dependent communities. Forest fires not only impact biodiversity but also disrupt the livelihoods of countless forest-dependent communities. Our research underscores the importance of sustainable management practices and policy interventions to minimize these effects."