

Melghat's Payvihir brands its forest produce to success

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NAGPUR: Payvihir, a nondescript village on the foothills of Melghat 220km from here, has come up with an out-of-the-box idea of branding to [sell organic sitafals](#) (custard apples) to Mumbai under the name 'Naturals Melghat'. It now plans to sell farm produce in the same brand.

Melghat has always been in the news for wrong reasons but Payvihir, which was awarded 182 hectare forest land under community forest rights (CFR) in 2012 under the Forest Rights Act (FRA) 2006, has worked wonders in the last four years and showed the way for tribals.

This season, Payvihir and three adjacent CFR villages — Khatijapur, Upatkhedha and Kumbiwagholi — joined hands and sold 10 tonne sitafals and recorded a turnover of Rs 5 lakh.

"Though the yield was less as compared to last year, branding helped us fetch good money. We sold a box of 12-18 sitafals for Rs 200-300. Earlier, we used to sell a crate of 80-90 fruits between Rs350-500," says Ramlal Kale, gram sabha member.

Of the total produce, 3,500 boxes were sold in Mumbai, 450 in Nagpur and 100 in Yavatmal. The remaining sitafals of small sizes were sold in crates in Akola, Wardha and other small towns. Buoyed by the branding success, Payvihir now plans to sell organic farm produce like wheat and jowar in the name of 'Naturals Melghat'.

"After sitafals, in the coming season we will brand mahua and charoli (almond flavoured seeds) collected from forest areas. The idea of branding produce was suggested by chief minister's principal secretary Praveen Pardeshi and Pournima Upadhyay's Khoj, an NGO that has been supporting us since beginning," says Kale.

Recalling Payvihir's sitafal maiden journey to Mumbai, another gram sabha member Amit Sonare says it was possible with tribal department's help which arranged to transport the produce. Besides, forest department arranged for our accommodation, while NGO Khoj sponsored cardboard boxes. Sonare informed bulk boxes were sold to many mantralaya employees where a stall was set up. Earlier, despite quality product, due to lack of marketing knowledge, the villages generated meagre revenue.

Payvihir and three villages are also working together in regenerating over 1,000 hectare of degraded forest land. The village has already bagged one international and national award for outstanding work in 2014 & 2015.

The gram sabha has consistently shown how NGOs and communities can work wonders to save forest and wildlife. For turning barren land under CFR into a forest, Payvihir had also bagged Rs.1 lakh award from United Nation's [Development Programme](#) (UNDP) in May 2014.



UNDP BIODIVERSITY AWARD TO PAYVIHIR VILLAGE

Please join us to congratulate AID Project Payvihar Eco Village who won United Nations Development Program Biodiversity Award 2014. The project was undertaken by AID partner KHOJ.



In May 2014, the village of Payvihar won the UNDP biodiversity award for its forest conservation efforts. Payvihar is a village of 110 families (mainly from the Korku and Balai tribes) at the foothills of Melghat region of Amravati district, Maharashtra. The once rich forests have been depleted taking with it the biodiversity of the region and the lack of livelihood led to migration into the cities. Khoj has been working with the communities in the area since 1996 and the catalyst for social change started with a dialogue with the unemployed youth and elders in the community to try to tackle these issues.

In December 2015, it won special Maharashtra Wildlife Service Award of Sanctuary Asia in recognition of invaluable contribution to [environmental conservation](#) in the state. First published by [The Times of India](#)