The International Day of the World’s Indigenous Peoples, known locally as Adivasi Day, has emerged as an important platform for the aboriginal people in Telangana, especially in old undivided Adilabad district, to voice their concerns and this year is no different.

There, however, is the need for focus on loss of livelihoods of the ethnic people owing to loss of collection of minor forest produce (MFP) due to dwindling of key tree species and changing market trends in the country.

The indigenous people, there are nine such tribes in these parts all of which are basically agriculturists, have depended upon MFP since the last few decades to earn precious supplemental incomes.

The list of MFPs that the Telangana State Girijan Cooperative Corporation (GCC) purchases and the trends of it since the last three years is revelatory of loss of tree species and changing market trends impacting the incomes.

One of the most striking aspects is the discontinuation of collection of gum karaya which the GCC is purchasing at a low ₹108 per kg against the ₹270 a few years back.

“We have unsold gum stocks worth about ₹5 crore as its demand has gone down given the cheaper price of ₹100 per kg of gum from African countries,” GCC Uttnoor Divisional Manager G. Prathap Reddy.

Further, only 95 kg of honey was purchased by the Corporation so far this year against the over 500 kg in 2017-18. “We have stopped collecting gum as there are no gum karaya (Gum sterculia) or even honey as the price is not remunerative,” observed Athram Moksha, a Kolam Adivasi from Burk in Adilabad rural mandal. “We have also restricted collection of mahua flowers,” he added.

“Mahua flower collection has taken a back seat given the tribals’ preference for employment generating programmes like the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act. We in GCC, nevertheless, expect honey arrivals to be good given the good rainfall this season,” the GCC official said.