

BAMBOO- THE GREEN GOLD

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ABSTRACT

Bamboo has been considered as a low commercial value product for so many decades. This case study aims at exploring the export potential of Bamboo. With the Indian Government trying to increase revenues via exports, Bamboo products have become the key elements to enter the list of export products in the country. Owing to its high organic and natural value Bamboo is gaining more importance as the substitute to plastic as well as wooden products. The high sustainability of Bamboo has led researchers and organizations to come together to enhance its commercial value.

Keywords: Bamboo, Gold, Green, Exports

CASE STUDY

THE BAMBOO POTENTIAL

Bamboo is found almost everywhere in India and has been a part of livelihood for millions of Indians for decades. Unique qualities of bamboo such as adaptability to different climatic and soil conditions, make it a rare naturally occurring resource. Despite these facts and India being the second largest bamboo producing country in the world, bamboo still remain under-utilized.

There are a couple of reasons for its low commercial value. Firstly, bamboo has always been perceived as poor man's timber. Bamboo and its products are usually considered for household consumption of the

locals. Secondly, in non-designated forest areas, bamboo is still denoted as a 'tree' preventing its commercial usage so as to pave its way into the consumer market.

The Indian Forest (Amendment) Ordinance re-classified bamboo as a grass in 2017, and challenged the title "poor man's timber" whilst aiming at proving it as "wise man's timber". This initiative ensured widespread cultivation of bamboo, enabling the manufacturing organizations to start mainstream production.

Adhering to the fact that environment is continuously compromised by extensive usage of plastic, wood and other hazardous materials, bamboo comes to rescue as a renewable, affordable, durable and tenacious non-wood material for various types of products including furniture. Offering lesser cost and financial stability, bamboo can easily reduce dependency on wood. Understanding these aspects lot of organizations as well as the government have come forward towards increasing the commercial potential of bamboo.

One such initiative is taken by Bamboo India, a social entrepreneurship initiative established in 2016. They are dedicated towards replacing plastic and have ventured into products ranging from bamboo toothbrushes, pen stands, combs etc. By working in collaboration with over 3000 bamboo

farmers, they have been successful in preventing 13.8 kg of plastic produce.

Another initiative by Sunil Joshi, Chairman of Bamboo Society of India's Maharashtra is toward construction and architectural usage of bamboo. He suggests that chemical and civil engineers should explore bamboo's potential for creation of sustainable, world class structures in the future. Further, the industry, government and farmers need to work as a team to reap the benefits of this 'Green Gold'.

JANS Bamboo is the largest exporter of bamboo from India and has successfully constructed bamboo structures in Maldives and Africa. Krunal Negandhi, co-founder of JANS Bamboo, declared that "through the indigenous process and engineering capability they have developed, it has facilitated sequester more than 25 lakhs of carbon dioxide and provided regular employment to over 250 artisans." This clearly indicates the potential of bamboo for construction purposes.

As Bamboo needs lot of treatment and differs in cultivation practices, KONBAC has come forward towards training in cultivation, production processing, and enterprise development to the farmers along-with their 120 employees in the Sindhudurg district of Maharashtra. Also, Sanjeev Karpe, founder of KONBAC further states "for commercial purposes bamboo doesn't need huge land area. It can be cultivated alongside other trees, he adds."

The coordinated efforts of non-government as well as government agencies have triggered this change in outlook towards bamboo. The Indian Government's initiative Pradhan

Mantri Awas Yojana (PMAY) is another factor that may lead to increased demand for bamboo. A collaborative initiative that brought major stakeholders such as Ministry of Agriculture, Invest India, National Bamboo Mission and other relevant industries came together as a joint initiative in February to discuss about the growth and prospects of Bamboo at the national conference.

Agarbatti or incense sticks made from bamboo have great export potential. The industry already has employee strength of 20 lakh and generated export revenue of INR 1000 crore for the FY 2018-19. It is expected to cross INR 12000 cr mark in the next five years with 15% growth. Further, to boost exports aiming at substituting imports from China and Vietnam, the incense stick manufacturers are considering sourcing of 'Tulda' variety of bamboo from the North-East region. More expansion to exports is aimed via various nutrition packed food products like bamboo vinegar, bamboo rice and bamboo shoots.

CONCLUSION

Bamboo has huge potential to replace wood, timber, plastic based products and contribute towards highly sustainable, environment friendly products. The advanced technology has made it possible to reap maximum benefits out of this 'Green Gold'. Institutional investment support ranging from its cultivation, harvesting, processing covering its entire supply chain becomes imperative towards maximising bamboo's potential. Research on cultivation, processing and soil conditions will enhance its market potential

for consumer markets. Finally, establishment of export routes, technology integration for manufacturing and overseas marketing would give a boost to bamboo exports, thus, making the initiatives more fruitful.

QUESTIONS

1. Discuss the key takeaways from the case.
2. In your opinion, apart from Govt. initiatives what other initiatives can enhance the export potential of Bamboo?
3. Describe the wide usage of Bamboo w.r.t. products and industry that can help increase its market potential as compared to Plastic.

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