

“Seaweeds farming will benefit coastal poor”

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CHENNAI: Disasters may throw open a sea of opportunities, as evident from the benefits gained by 200 tsunami-hit families through seaweed harvesting in some coastal districts of Tamil Nadu.

This is just the beginning, as people in the know of things say the growing popularity and

potential of seaweeds, used in some edible items for its medicinal value and as a source of industrial chemicals and fertilizer, could benefit many more families.

Though in vogue even before the December 2004 tsunami, seaweed harvesting became popular after the disaster that prompted a convergence of initiatives. Nearly

190 of the families in Ramanathapuram and Tuticorin districts took to the harvesting after the tsunami. The State Bank of India is providing financial assistance. Cola major Pepsi has signed a purchase agreement, says Aquaculture Foundation of India president M. Sakthivel.

The going price for the produce (*Kappaphycus alvarezii*)

is Rs.8.50 a kg, and it is likely to increase to Rs.10 in October.

The Union Ministry of Ocean Development, according to its secretary P.S. Goel, looks at seaweeds harvesting as an opportunity to improve the livelihood of the coastal poor. Besides taking just 45 days for farming, it promises a larger role for women in the fishing community.