

MEDICINAL PLANTS CULTIVATION

The knowledge of medicinal plants, historically, was occupied by a few specialized herbal healers in rural communities; thus, much of their use was observed as being primary of local interest. For past couple of decades, medicinal plants have been increasingly recognized for their role as not only for health care but also for improving the economic status. This ongoing trend towards increasing commercialization has resulted in overharvesting of some economically important medicinal plant species, many of which has become rare, endangered and threatened. Since the medicinal plants form an important health commodity, sustainable utilization and conservation of this valuable bio-resource is an urgent need of hour. India is one of the largest countries in Asia, which has the richest arrays of well-known medicinal plants and alternative medical systems including Ayurveda. A large number of manpower from herb collectors/ farmers to industry is involved in the medicinal plants sector, which is largely unregulated. Realizing the continuous erosion in the traditional knowledge of many valuable plants for medicine in the past and the renewal interest at present, the need existed to review the various issues associated with the medicinal plants, especially the sustainable development of the medicinal plants sector.

MARKET SCENARIO OF MEDICINAL PLANTS

a) Domestic Scenario:

Medicinal plants market in the country is today unorganized due to several problems. Medicinal plants are a living resource, exhaustible if overused and sustainable if used with care and wisdom. At present 95% collection of medicinal plants is from the wild. Current practices of harvesting are unsustainable and many studies have highlighted depletion of resource base. Many studies have confirmed that pharmaceutical companies are also responsible for inefficient, imperfect, informal and opportunistic marketing of medicinal plants. There is a vast, secretive and largely unregulated trade in medicinal plants, mainly from the wild, which continues to grow in the absence of serious policy attention with environmental planning. Confusion also exists in the identification of plant materials where the origin of a particular drug is assigned to more than one plant, due to which, adulteration is common in such cases. All these affect the market both directly and indirectly.

Marketing is a daunting problem, which affect the development of the plant-based industry in developing countries. Marketability of products will be a crucial factor in determining the failure or success of this sector. The market outlets can be for local use and for export. As for local use some products could reach the consumer directly while others have to be either further processed or used as secondary components in other industrial products. A clear understanding of both the supply-side issues and the factors

driving the demand and size of the medicinal plants market is a vital step towards planning for both the conservation and sustainable use of the habitats of these plants as well as for ensuring continued availability of the basic ingredients used to address the health needs of the majority of the world's population.

b) Brief Global Scenario:

According to the report of the World Health Organization (WHO), a large population of the world relies on the traditional systems of medicines, largely plant based to meet their primary health care needs. India at present exports herbal materials and medicines to the tune of Rs.446 crores only while it has been estimated that this can be raised to Rs.3000 crores by 2005. The Chinese export based on plants including raw drugs, therapeutics and other is estimated to be around Rs.18,000- Rs.22,000 crores. In view of the innate Indian strengths which interalia include diverse eco-systems, technical and farming capacity and a strong manufacturing sector, the medicinal plants area can become a huge export opportunity after fulfilling domestic needs.

Export

A part from requirement of medicinal plants for internal consumption, India exports crude drugs mainly to developed countries, viz. USA, Germany, France, Switzerland, UK and Japan, who share between them 75 to 80 percent of the total export of crude drugs from India. The principal herbal drugs that have been finding a good market in foreign countries are *Aconite*, *Aloe*, *Belladonna*, *Acorus*, *Cinchona*, *Cassia tora*, *Dioscorea*, *Digitalis*, *Ephedra*, *Plantago* (Isabgol), *Cassia* (Senna) etc.