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Environment and Pollution

Trade potential and ecological analysis of non-timber products in the Himalayan Kingdom of Nepal

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Non-timber forest products (NTFPs) have been welfare, subsistence or livelihood commodity since long; these are traditional source of food, fiber, medicine, etc. In some rural hilly areas, they contribute up to 50 percent of total annual family income. The contribution of the whole forestry sector to gross domestic product of Nepal is estimated at 15 percent, of which NTFPs contribute almost one-third. More than 100 types of plant species are harvested from the wild and are exported to international markets, mostly to India. About 95 percent of NTFPs are collected from the wild and 90 percent are exported to India in raw form. Amala, Atis, Chiraito, Tejpat, Guchhi chyau, Jatamansi, Jhyau, Kutki, Pipla, Ritha, Sugandhawal, Sugandha Kokila and Timur are the major NTFPs exported to India.

The importance of medicinal and aromatic plants (MAPs) has increased progressively over the last two decades. Herbal remedies are increasingly becoming mainstream consumer products manufactured by multinational companies and sold globally through super market chains and other outlets. Food supplements, cosmetics, fragrances, traditional cuisine, dyeing and coloring agents are just a few of the applications where medicinal, aromatic and dye plants are finding increasing use by the day. As a result there is a growing demand of Nepalese MAPs and NTFPs.

The diverse geography and climate of Nepal has rendered it a unique land of NTFPs. However, the commercial exploitation without any conservation measures has threatened many species. The high mountains are highly praised for high value (potency) low volume NTFPs, hence they fetch higher prices. In spite of all advantages, the country is not able to harness the full potential for the welfare of the Nepalese. The major constraints are (i) low capital investments by the government and private sectors for the overall promotion of NTFPs, enterprise development, and perpetual marketing of quality products, (ii) government's unclear investment policy, (iii) lack of proper documentation on species availability (including bio-prospecting) and uses, and (iv) poor public awareness on the values of NTFPs.

The study was initially conceived to identify ten important MAPs and NTFPs to present information to national and international private investors on socio-economic and environmental opportunities available for investment on those species. But, in the course of the study during the various interaction programs organized for feedbacks, participating stakeholders suggested the study team to consider more than 10 species from investment point of view. So, the study considered a list of 30 species already selected by the national level Herbs and NTFP Coordination Committee (HNCC) of the government of Nepal. The study has identified four top priority species for low risk private sector investment in each of the three climatic zones of Nepal, by considering market value, export data, ease of cultivation, parts used in trade, range of distribution of species, threat category, status of legal protection, local processing opportunity, ethno-botanical importance, etc. A total of 17 new criteria are developed by the study team for prioritization of species, by further illuminating and simplifying the criteria set by HNCC of Nepal, the criteria set by National Medicinal Plant Board (NMPB) of India, and the criteria developed by other related development organizations. More detailed information will be compiled for the short listed species on their conservation status, domestication potential, market demand and legal protection so that appropriate policy and promotional measures can be developed and advocated for required changes.