

Medicinal & aromatic plants (MAPs) have been a vital substrate for human health ever since the dawn of civilization. The Indian Sub-continent, particularly the state of Uttarakhand, has the distinction of sporting a wide range of faunal and floral diversity including rare and valuable MAPs, as also being the abode of the ancient health system of 'Ayurveda' that has been used to the benefit of mankind for more than 5000 years.

However, many once abundant species of MAPs, have suffered a serious decline due to an ever-expanding market fuelled by the needs of an exploding human and animal population, making them a topic of worldwide concern. The major reasons for the depletion of this important natural resource are uncertain tenurial regimes over land and plant resources, over collection of wild populations and un-sustainable management practices, in addition to other factors such as destruction, reduction and translation of habitat, competition by invasive weeds, pollution and climate change.

At present it is estimated that more than 90% of all the herbal raw material is a produce of collections from the wild. The responsible use of the natural resources to ensure their availability for the future is a major global concern and sustainable utilization of MAP populations is the most tenable strategy for conserving them. We can also not forget that a vigorous bio-diversity is essential to ensure a balanced hydrology and the consequent availability of fresh drinking water.

The total geographical area of this mountain state is approx 52000 km² out of which 65% is classified as forest area, including 14% under protected area network. This Himalayan state offers a wide range of habitats extending from Sub-tropical to Temperate to Alpine and Cold Desert types of climate that sport more than 5000 species of vascular plants out of which 800 species have been used traditionally and are of known medicinal value. The physical and cultural environment here is highly conducive for the growth of MAPs.

The state govt of Uttarakhand has thus decided to adopt a policy that allows the extraction of medicinal plants from the wild only up to a sustainable extent and the promotion of large scale cultivation of MAPs to meet the growing demands of industries. It is visualized that such an eco-friendly policy shall ensure proper development and conservation while at the same time providing suitable opportunities of better economic returns to the local communities.

Major Policy Shift in Uttarakhand

1. Declaration of Uttarakhand as herbal state – Uttarakhand has been declared a herbal

state by the Hon'ble Chief Minister and the State Medicinal Plants Board has been constituted on under the Chairmanship of Hon'ble Chief Minister of Uttarakhand. Recognizing the multifarious aspects of the MAP sector, Herbal Research & Development Institute at Gopeshwar has been named as the apex agency for synchronizing and promoting the sector.

2. Registration of farmers – With a view to encourage cultivation of MAPs on a large scale in an organized manner, the process of registration of farmers has been initiated. It is envisaged that registration of farmers for cultivation of MAPs will facilitate training, scientific production, financial assistance, enhanced value addition through post harvest practices, hassle free transportation, better marketing opportunities, export opportunities, certification and overall planning to the exercise.

3. Subsidy on MAP cultivation- Govt has prioritized 26 species and has declared 50% subsidy on their cultivation cost to a maximum limit of Rs one lac. Free planting material up to 5 nali of land is in addition to fifty percent subsidy.

4. Regulation of harvesting from wild through Govt Agencies – Govt has nominated four Govt Agencies, viz, Forest Corporation, Kumaon Mandal Vikas Nigam, Garhwal Mandal Vikas Nigam and the District Bheshaj Vikas Sangh as the sole agencies for collection of MAPs from the wild. This has introduced scientific collection practices and greater regulation.

5. Establishment of MAP Depots – Three Govt Depots at Rhishikesh, Ramnagar and Tanakpur have been established as Herbal Madies and it has been made mandatory for all MAPs collected from the wild to be disposed by open public auction from them. This has served to control illegal trade of medicinal plants and has also provided a convenient facility to the buyer.

6. Community participation in management of MAPs – Appreciating the need for involving the local community in the management of natural resources, the Govt of Uttarakhand has strengthened Van Panchayats by giving them the authority of forest officials.

7. Incentive to MAP Industry – MAP industries have been adopted as thrust area in the state and several incentives in the form of soft loaning, tax rebate etc have been declared in new Industrial Policy, 2003.

8. Agri Export Zone – The Agri Export Zone established by Govt of Uttarakhand has Medicinal and Aromatic Plants on their agenda of export and this has been done with a view to encourage cultivation of herbs.

9. Research – It is being carried out and coordinated by HRDI and research wing of Forest Deptt, different Universities and research institutes have been involved in developing agro-techniques, field trials, quality improvement and analytical studies.

10 Organic Cultivation and Certification - Uttarakhand, particularly the hill areas, is organic by default and Govt is careful in preserving and promoting this tradition. A separate organic board has been constituted to take care of it. Medicinal plants are being grown organically to

maintain quality of produce with an eye over export market.

11. National Mission on Medicinal Plants - Central government is also aware about this resource and financially supporting every state for medicinal plant sector development. Uttarakhand government has decentralized planting material production in the state and established nurseries in every district to meet the planting material shortage to farmers for cultivation of MAPs.

12. Revolving Fund - Market structure in this sector need to improved. State Government has given to Institute revolving fund of Rs. Fifty lacs for market structure improvement.

I hope this endeavor will continue in future and will generate sufficient energy for cultivation and conservation of medicinal and aromatic plants for the benefit of people, benefit of state and benefit of nation.....