



Tropentag, October 9-11, 2007, Witzenhausen

“Utilisation of diversity in land use systems:
Sustainable and organic approaches to meet human needs”

Status of the Medicinal Flora and Indigenous Knowledge in the Garhwal Himalaya, Uttarakhand, India

PAVLOS GEORGIADIS¹, VOLKER HOFFMANN², GOPAL S. RAWAT³, VANDANA SHIVA⁴

¹*University of Hohenheim, Centre for Agriculture in the Tropics & Subtropics, Germany*

²*University of Hohenheim, Institute for Social Sciences in Agriculture, Germany*

³*Wildlife Institute of India, India*

⁴*Navdanya, Research Foundation for Science, Technology & Ecology, India*

Abstract

India is one of the leading countries in the world in terms of the wealth of traditional knowledge systems related to the use of plants. The country possesses a huge indigenous knowledge on harvesting, storage and usage of medicinal and aromatic plants, which has been gathered over centuries. Because they are both a local health commodity and also expected to meet the growing world demand, medicinal plant species experience high pressures due to over-collection from the wild. At the same time, traditional knowledge on the uses of wild plants is declining rapidly due to a lack of awareness and the spread of allopathic medicine.

The majority of Indian medicinal plants recorded come from Uttarakhand, a state located in the central Himalaya. The region shows a high diversity of landscapes and microclimates, which counts for its rich biodiversity. Its largely rural population shows a wide cultural diversity, with communities of high ethnological interest. As a result, local authorities have appreciated the importance of developing a dynamic market of medicinal and aromatic plants. In the last five years, ambitious initiatives are in place aiming to support the sector by means of inventories, conservation, capacity building, training of small-scale farmers and certification.

The project uses a variety of qualitative research tools and herbarium collections in order to inventorize the wild plant resources used in traditional medicine and food in the districts of Garhwal, Uttarakhand. Investigations take place on the role, value, diversity and potential of wild plant resources. Based on direct observations and interviews, the project aims to assess challenges and market opportunities for the utilisation of indigenous knowledge and biodiversity as a way of improving the livelihoods of underprivileged communities in the hilly regions of the state. The results will be a contribution towards the completion of the full inventory of medicinal plants of the state and will be an input for the promotion of the wild plant sector by governmental and non-governmental agencies that work directly with farmers in the region.

Keywords: Ethnobotany, biodiversity conservation, indigenous knowledge, medicinal & aromatic plants, under-privileged communities