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Nettle Value Chain Solutions to Bridge the Rural-Urban Divide in Uttarakhand India

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Abstract

Himalayan nettle (*Girardinia diversifolia*) a natural fiber yielding plant species grows naturally in Uttarakhand, India between 1200–3,000 m asl. The traditional usage by ethnic groups has been restricted to traditional household applications like slippers, bags, ropes etc. This high value plant, having significant potential for value addition, provides alternative livelihood options for the local communities.

In 2010–2012, the GIZ under its Regional Economic Development (RED) Program, in partnership with Uttarakhand Bamboo and Fiber Development Board (UBFDB) assessed the entire value chain. A series of consultations, findings of value chain analysis, focus group discussions, multi-stakeholder meetings showed that a multi-pronged approach is required to widen the bottlenecks in the value chain. Stakeholders associated directly or indirectly with Himalayan nettle addressed different bottlenecks at various levels. Framework conditions like allowing for sustainable collection of plant from protected forests were addressed with Uttarakhand Forest Department. Resulting in the allowance to collect plant fiber from reserve forest for livelihood purposes. The state government positively supported the initiative by declaring a minimum support price (MSP) INR 35 per kg for fiber in 2010. MSP was further increased to INR 55 per kg in 2012.

To ensure sustainable harvesting from the wild, the Forest Research Institute, Dehradun started working on its cultivation practices. After streamlining the supply side, GoUK and UKFD along with GIZ-RED concentrated on the bottleneck within the processing technology.

A series of technological inventions were initiated to develop consistent, standardised yarn. RED efforts were concentrated on developing carding and slivering machines. The innovation and partial mechanisation for converting bast into weavable yarn helped in improving the overall economics of the nettle value chain. Prominent donors like Sir Ratan Tata Trust (SRTT), IFAD and NGOs were mobilised for upscaling and extension.

Yarn developed is being supplied to women groups for making value added products like stoles, shawls, scarfs, etc. These eco-friendly products are slowly finding their place in the fashion industry. Design firms have started contacting the women's group for products. The innovation has also increased sufficient interest in other Indian states like Sikkim and also from countries like Nepal and Bhutan.

Keywords: Capacity building, *Girardinia diversifolia*, Himalayan nettle value chain, improved technology, Uttarakhand