



Biodiversity Conservation



CONSERVATION OF MEDICINAL PLANTS & Promotion of Indigenous Knowledge through Local Health Traditions among Rural Communities in Wayanad

Project Background

Given the remote tribal hilly terrain by the side of the wild life sanctuary and protected areas, the outreach to these communities on modern technologies and methods is limited. **Wayanad Social Service (WSS)**, the local NGO contacted the **Centre for Environment Education (CEE)** to explore possibilities to promote a holistic approach for preparation of herbal medicines. **The Global Environment Facility (GEF), Small Grants Programme (SGP)** provided the support to develop a people's led approach for conservation of medicinal plants. The local tribals rich in knowledge and traditional use of the medicinal plants through a more institutionalized approach by WSS were formed into small kinship based common trade Self Help Groups (SHGs).

Project Objectives:

- Conserve local bio-diversity in Wayanad with special focus to medicinal plants.
- Create awareness among the resource poor rural communities and preparation of a Herberiam.
- Document indigenous knowledge and local health traditions in preparation of medicines.
- Promote sustainable use of medicinal plants integrating traditional practices as an alternate health care system through local institution building.
- Formation of one acre of medicinal plant conservation demonstration park.
- Create a replicable model in the areas and with other partners.

Project Rationale:

The rich bio-diversity of the region which forms part of the Western Ghat is endangered and the Conservation of the same is of prime importance for the very survival of nature as well as of the poor and marginalized masses of the region. The target area forms part of Nilgiri bio-sphere, one of the 25 hot spots in the world and had a rich flora and fauna. Vast majority of the population, especially the tribes and small farmers remain under poverty and ill health. The natural resources including the abundant herbal plants were not conserved or used in a nature friendly sustainable manner which has led to the extinction of several. Similarly, Wayanad had a precious medical heritage especially with the indigenous tribal communities which are not documented or promoted by effectively.



Geographical area	:	The whole district of Wayanad comprising an area of 2126 Sq.Kms.
No of Beneficiaries	:	Around 4300 members in the 300 Self Help Groups in 30 Villages
SGP Grant	:	Rs. 10,11,000
Co Financing	:	Rs. 5,15,000
Project Time Period	:	August 2003 to July 2005



Project Activities :

Conservation education among the target group forms basis of the project. Awareness generation, sensitization and dissemination of knowledge and skills relevant to herbs and herbal medicines are undertaken. Documentation of indigenous knowledge and traditional health care practices and its promotion was proposed. Conservation both by the community and by **WSSS – at its Resource Centre was developed.** The conservation park of WSSS represents the entire herbal plants in the check list of herbal flora of Wayanad through botanical surveys. **A Herbal Resource Centre is a model centre** with documentation, reference materials, herbariums, seeds, raw drugs etc. was also proposed to set up which can be used by students, researchers and the general public.

Through more than 2/3 village meetings per month led to develop village level '**community facilitators**' focused trainings and exposure visits in the use of herbal medicines to manage Primary Health were organised periodically. Home Herbal Gardens, Centralized Mother Nursery and regional community nurseries were also proposed as part of conservation and promotion. Collaboration and linkage with potential NGOs and Institutions were also made to sustain the project activities.

Project Results:

Ex-situ Conservation Park with **4400 herbal plants** including **Rare Endangered-Threatened (RET)** species established in 7 acre plot. 10 Community Conservation units with a coverage of **1414 families** with a minimum of 40 herbs set up. A mother Nursery with **10,000 seedlings and ten community nurseries** with an average of **2500 seedlings set-up** for planting by community in Home Herbal Gardens and Commercial Cultivation **1126 Household Herbal Gardens (HHGs) with minimum of 15 plants have been started 145 new species have been collected through botanical surveys.** A resource centre set up with reference books, CDs, herbariums, documentations etc. which has been visited by several students, researchers, herbalists, traditional physicians etc. 80 local health traditions (LHTs) have been documented. 269 women trained in 10 herbal preparations essential for practical community level for common diseases. 39 group enterprises of herbal preparations developed and 174 women have been given exposure to other projects and institutions. Networking of practitioners also initiated. Participation in fairs and exhibitions, analysis of the product are yet other results.

Project Impacts

- Wider collaboration and linkage has been possible with several outstanding centers of excellence and expertise. It includes Department of Science & Technology, Govt of India, Indian Institute of Horticulture Research, Kottackal Arya Vaidyasala, various NGO networks at National and Regional levels.
- Opportunities to participate in various programmes, events, trainings, workshops, consultations etc. have been obtained. International workshop held at CEE Ahamadabad. WSS has put stall for its product at all workshops etc.
- Two Self Help Group leaders were honoured by awarding certificate of appreciation for the valuable contribution to the Project in promoting traditional practices and medicine preparation at CEE Ahamadabad.
- It has been a challenging task for collection of medicinal plants from wild links to the forest department proved very beneficial, although trust worthy partnership took some time.
- Another challenge in conserving local practices has been the influence of allopathic systems and health delivery systems on the locals in the area.

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