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## Series 3: Programme 6 (of 8) - 'Out of the Woods'

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### Report 4 (of 6): Forest Pharmacy - India

#### Introduction

Medicinal plants originate from almost every part of the globe. Such plants serve the primary healthcare needs of up to 80 per cent of people in developing countries, where there is an increasing awareness of and demand for medicinal plants for healthcare and dietary supplements that often help to save lives. A significant number of modern pharmaceutical drugs are based on or derived from medicinal plants.

The majority of medicinal plants found in the world grow wild. As natural habitats worldwide are degraded, overexploited and destroyed, many plant species including medicinal plants face threats to their survival. It is becoming increasingly important to take care of the areas in which they grow and to share knowledge about their usefulness. Involving local people from areas where the plants grow is crucial.

In the Indian State of Maharashtra, many people rely on plants and plant-products for food, medicine and shelter. Communities who live in these areas generally receive little benefit from increasing commercialisation of medicinal plant use, because only a small fraction of the economic return reaches them. The Medicinal Plants Conservation Centre (MPCC) in Pune - the cultural capital of Maharashtra, western India - aims to address conservation and development while revitalising traditional health practices. In co-operation with local communities, the State Government Forest Department and local non-governmental organisations (NGOs), the Centre uses nurseries and commercial herbal production centres to sell sustainably cultivated medicinal plants.

#### Medicinal Plants Conservation Centre

Supported by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the MPCC combines scientific research, community development and education with sustainable income generation and the revitalization of traditional medical practices. The initiative is promoted by the Foundation for Revitalisation of Local Health Traditions (FRLHT) in Bangalore and is part of a wider plant conservation network covering five Indian states and over 54 conservation sites. As a result of their efforts around 1500 species of medicinal plants are being conserved across the sites in the network, including 76 species highlighted by the UNDP as threatened.

The Medicinal Plant Conservation Centre uses a collaborative approach. From the outset, local communities have joined with scientists and local government to gain a better understanding of the status of medicinal plant species in rural

Maharashtra. Collaborative mapping and botanical inventory exercises have laid the foundations for further conservation work in the state. All together 26 species threatened with extinction have been identified.

The work of the Centre has allowed tribal communities, previously excluded from conservation work, the opportunity to participate in efforts to conserve their botanical heritage while reaping the benefits of income generation and improved access to plants needed for healthcare.

### **Medicinal Plant Conservation**

The MPCC is operating through Rural Communes, a local NGO working with the Forest Department, in promoting local entrepreneurial initiatives based on conservation of medicinal plants. The MPCC is involved in all aspects of identification, protection, training and promotion concerning medicinal plants in Maharashtra State. Medicinal Plant Conservation Areas (MPCAs) are used to designate sites with important medicinal plant diversity. This involves a number of measures, including:

#### *Identification*

Around 1,600 flowering plants used in various Indian medicinal systems have been identified and logged. Between 200 and 300 species have been identified in each MPCA by informally trained botanists.

#### *Protection*

Thirteen forest areas, each about 200 hectares (2 square kilometres) in size, have been designated MPCAs containing threatened species of value for medicine. Within these, nurseries are used to grow new plants. To date over 50,000 plants of 50 different species have been grown, including six threatened species. Local Management and Protection Committees (LMCs) were formed within each conservation area to stop fire and grazing and to manage the nurseries.

#### *Training*

Self-help uses of medicinal plants and processing techniques for production of herbal medicines are taught by the MPCC to local management committees, particularly a number of the women from villages in the conservation areas.

#### *Promotion*

State-wide workshops featuring scientists, teachers, folk healers and suppliers identified 26 species at high risk of extinction. Packages of 10-15 important medicinal plants have been distributed to thousands of households for domestic healthcare use.

Detailed information now exists on threatened medicinal plants in Maharashtra including conservation requirements and literature on each species. The information is being used by communities to better understand medicinal plants and how to protect them.

### **Biodiversity and Poverty Reduction**

The MPCC promotes the conservation of biodiversity in forest areas and traditional healthcare through plant remedies. The inability of people to meet their healthcare needs is a major aspect of poverty. Protecting declining healthcare resources by training in the growth and use of medicinal plants is one

solution. Nurseries and herbal processing units also provide local employment.

Forest officials are learning about the value of medicinal plant resources along with the communities. Almost half the total medicinal plants in the State, including threatened species, now stand a much better chance of being conserved due to increased awareness.

The supply of high quality planting material for nurseries from the MPCAs constitutes sustainable use. Eventually cultivation may meet industrial demand so that all forests become a source for planting material rather than a source for harvesting the plants.

Learning how to use medicinal plants has benefited communities and motivated them to protect natural resources and undertake cultivation of medicinal plants. People who were previously excluded from participation in nature conservation programmes are now benefiting from new income generation and employment opportunities.

### **Lessons learned**

The MPCC project has shown that in only three years significant moves towards conservation of medicinal plants can be achieved. Co-ordination between the State Forest Department, local NGOs and rural communities has been crucial to the success of the project. The Forest Department has now integrated medicinal plants conservation and sustainable use activities into all its working plans.

### **For further information, please contact:**

**Medicinal Plants Conservation Centre (MPCC)**

Rural Communes, F-3, 2nd Floor  
Radha-Krishna Society  
T.M.V. Colony, Mukundnagar  
Gultekdi, Pune - 411 037  
India

Tel. +91 20 4266629, 5270216

Email: [rcmpcc@vsnl.com](mailto:rcmpcc@vsnl.com)

### **Websites**

<http://www.frlht-india.org/>

The Foundation for Revitalisation of Local Health Traditions (FRLHT) is an organisation promoting the conservation of medicinal plants in India, of which this project is part. The website contains material on training, research, and education into medicinal plant conservation.

### **Further Reading**

Books with underlined titles can be downloaded for free by clicking on them. Others can be ordered from the relevant address.

### **Medplan Conservatory Society Books**

*Tropical Indian Medicinal Plants*

This book provides information and photographs relating to the natural distribution, uses, agro-climatic practices and propagation methods for about 170 medicinal plants of extremely high conservation concern.

*Medicinal Plants for Primary Health Care: A User's Guide*

The main purpose of this Guide is to promote use of important and easily available medicinal plants in treating common ailments at home.

(also available in Malayalam, Tamil and Marathi priced at 50 Rupees)

*How to Grow Medicinal Plants for Primary Health Care*

This manual describes how seedlings of some medicinal plants can be raised in your nursery.

## **Food and Agricultural Organisation (FAO) Books**

[Medicinal plants for forest conservation and health care](http://www.fao.org/docrep/W7261e/W7261e00.htm)

([www.fao.org/docrep/W7261e/W7261e00.htm](http://www.fao.org/docrep/W7261e/W7261e00.htm))

FAO non-wood forest products series, No. 11

US\$19, 1997, ISBN: 925104063X

This volume brings together a collection of papers by some experts in medicinal plants. It is presented as a contribution to clarifying the many policy and technical issues associated with the conservation, use, production and trade of medicinal plants. This publication draws attention to the huge contribution of medicinal plants to traditional and modern health care systems, but also alerts the reader of the many problems and challenges facing their sustainable development. These include assessment and management of the medicinal plant resource base; best harvesting and processing practices; trade issues and aspects dealing with the intellectual property rights on traditional medicine by indigenous peoples.

**The Medplan Conservatory Society**

8, 1stFloor, 4th Main, MSH Layout,  
Anand Nagar, Bangalore 560024  
India

Tel +91 80 3434464, 3638991

Fax +91 80 3334167

All books are listed, with prices, on the FRLHT website at: [www.frlht-india.org/html/emppubli.htm](http://www.frlht-india.org/html/emppubli.htm)

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