

Banko Janakari

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Developing Non-timber forest products sub-sector in Nepal

Non-timber forest products have been defined in a number of ways that also includes medicinal and aromatic plants (MAPs). The exact number of NTFPs in Nepal is unavailable, but since, 10 percent of the 7000 estimated plant species of Nepal have been officially cited everywhere as MAPs, the number of NTFPs will obviously be greater than 700. For a small and poor country such as Nepal, any thing such as this is likely to be contributing economic and social benefits to its people. However, despite such a greater number of NTFPs, only less than 60 items are marketed constantly adding less than ten million rupees per year to the national treasury. Windows of opportunities therefore exist in further developing this sub-sector in Nepal.

For time immemorial the Central Himalaya has remained a source of medicinal plants of vital interest. Since then, these plants get away from Nepal - almost all to India, and a little to Tibet without much return, rather, causing much depletion from its natural state. Many of these valuable resources have even been red listed in IUCN categories for Nepal to impose legal protection against its commercial collection.

For the last decade or so, the people involved in forestry sector development have recognised the potential of NTFPs in contributing national economy especially through the MAPs, and felt the need of conserving this valuable resource. For the growing concern shown by these people in developing this sub-sector, increased awareness amongst the local people throughout Nepal has clearly been evident in conserving, cultivating, utilising and marketing NTFPs. This has further been fuelled with the growing number of community forestry user groups who tend to cultivate and/or conserve NTFPs which take less time to mature than trees which providing a better option of income.

Despite all these paraphernalia, the benefit as the Nepal's Forest Ministry, the top-level agency for this sub-sector would expect from this resource

has not yet accrued, and it has drawn the Ministry's attention. It is in this context, the Ministry seems to be committed to leave no stone unturned to achieve the outcome. It is well known that involving the stakeholders for a long-term planning, clear-cut strategy, suitable policy formulation, enactment and facilitation are the only solutions. It is high time for the Ministry to immediately act upon these necessities that could attract the investment of communities as well as the private sector including multinationals investment in NTFPs development. No wonder if the Ministry and the related authorities are still committed to make Nepal famous for goods based on non-timber forest products including MAPs.