

## Research findings

### Demand and Supply of Medicinal Plants

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The industrial demand for the medicinal plant resources has been on the rise due to the worldwide buoyancy in the herbal sector. In India, nearly 9,500 registered herbal industries and a multitude of unregistered cottage-level herbal units depend upon the continuous supply of medicinal plants for manufacture of herbal formulations. In addition to the industrial consumption, significant quantities of medicinal plant resources are consumed at the household level, by traditional healers and by practitioners of Indian Systems of Medicine. Whereas, more than 6,000 flowering plant species are recorded in the codified and folk healthcare practices in the country, the quantum of their consumption has remained a matter of guesstimate. The fallout of the lack of reliable species-wise demand estimates has been an inadequate focus on the management of these resources. In fact, wild populations of many a medicinal plant species, forming the major resource base for the herbal industry, are reported to be facing a serious threat of decline and extinction due to indiscriminate harvesting.

It is in this context that the National Medicinal Plants Board (NMPB), Government of India, supported nation-wide study to assess the demand and supply of medicinal plants in India by Foundation for Revitalisation of Local Health Traditions (FRLHT), Bangalore.



Photograph by: Sima T.S.

*Elaeocarpus sphaericus* (Rudrakshi or Rudraksha) These deep blue fruits and seeds are from the tree growing at FRLHT Campus.

**Some of the highlights of this study are as follows:**

- A list of 960 medicinal plant species forming source of 1289 botanical raw drugs in trade in the country has been worked out.
- An annual trade value corresponding to the trade of 3,19,500 MT of botanical raw drugs in the country works out to Rs. 1,06,91,058.90 crores for the year 2005-06 and the corresponding annual turnover of the herbal industry in the country has been industry estimated at more than Rs. 8,800 crores!
- Of the 960 traded medicinal plant species, 178 are consumed in volumes exceeding 100 MT per year each, with their consolidated consumption accounting for about 80% of the total industrial demand of all botanicals in the country. Analysis of these 178 species by their major sources of supply reveals that 21 species (12%) are obtained from temperate forests, 70 species (40%) are obtained from tropical forests, 36 species (20%) are obtained largely or wholly from cultivations / plantations, 46 species (25%) are obtained largely from road sides and other degraded land use elements and the remaining 5 species (3%) are imported from other countries.
- Whereas all such species in high volume trade, sourced from the wild, need appropriate attention, the temperate and alpine herbs and the tropical trees form the most vulnerable group that need immediate management focus.
- As regards the 36 species sourced wholly or largely from cultivation, it needs to be appreciated that cultivation of these species has already stabilised and got firmly incorporated into the local agricultural systems and does not need any urgent promotional incentives. Instead, the focus in relation to these species would need to be on developing better cultivars/varieties and making their germplasm available to the growers in adequate quantities for enhancing their income.

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