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Community Seed Bank: Conserving Wild Edible Diversity of Himalayas

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Hundreds of millions of poor people around the world depend directly or indirectly on forests for their livelihoods and subsistence. There is huge demand of natural food products to fulfil nutritional requirements of many living amid forests in remote and inaccessible tracts. Most of the times nutritional and food security questions of communities especially dwelling in mountains are ignored or appropriately answered. Indian Himalayan Region (IHR) is tough, fragile with undulating terrain that faces crucial but the

pertinent issue related to food security and poverty.

Garhwal part of IHR is home to a variety of tribal population and a hub of a variety of wild fruits, berries, ferns, yams, roots, green leafy edibles, seeds etc. Most of the villages of Garhwal Himalaya don't have organized market supplies hence; locals use wild fruits and vegetables as a major source of their food source, nutrition and medicinal support. Most of them are not available in the markets and if collected in large quantity from forests are

are bartered. Lesser possibilities for development, economy generation, migration of locals in Garhwal for education and employment, is leading to erosion of traditional and indigenous use practices linked with utilization of wild edibles. Most of the seasons many of these wild edibles go waste without any proper utilization by locals due to lack of proper know how.

I am leading a project on Conserving Lesser Known Wild Edible Biodiversity and Indigenous Traditional Knowledge of Locals in North Eastern Himalayas, India, funded by Rufford Small Grant, UK in Tolma village of Nanda Devi Biosphere Reserve after a long stint of research and

conservation of Seabuckthorn in Himalayas.

Under the umbrella of this project I am developing seed bank of lesser known wild edibles through participation of local Bhotiya indo mongoloid tribal community in Tolma. Tolma village mainly inhabited by tribal community, is important to be quoted because people have immense knowledge about natural resources but in last few years people are leaving their village for livelihood needs.

Developing a seed bank of lesser known wild edibles of Himalayan region is an interesting and innovative part of the project that is planned to be linked to



Group meeting to discuss importance of seed bank



Field survey for wild edibles



Syzygium cumini still raw on trees



Rosa webbiana in flowering stage



Prunus armenica on tree



Fruits of Viburnum cotinifolium



Micro seeds of Rubus ellipticus



Fruits of Berberis aristata



Hard coat seeds of Prunus persica



national seed repository of lesser known plants on the lines of Kew Botanical Garden Seed Bank Project. This Innovative approach also includes involving locals, developing literary material in local language for school going children.

My work includes regular inventori-zation, monitoring of forests for wild edibles by visiting the forests, pastures and alpin es at a regular interval, collection of seeds, documentation of knowledge *etc.* General meetings and valuable discussion along with field visits to forests with locals especially elders, women and children are important involvements with this project.

Community is helping with collection of seeds and developing a seed bank of lesser known wild edibles in Surraithota village in Nanda Devi Biosphere. Capacity building programmes are being organised and on ground training is imparted to locals for bio-prospecting of semi-domestic fruits and some lesser known underutilised wild edibles to enhance the understanding about value added products and how they can be developed by sustainable utilization for initiating conservation.

Local mapping of lesser known wild edibles present in the region, their consumption pattern Local mapping of

lesser known wild edibles present in the region, their consumption pattern and extent of usage is also recorded to develop detailed statistics and pressure agents on particular wild edibles in forests. Children of the village are motivated to explore their own forests, planning by having eco-clubs with diverse interesting efforts for having a clear understanding of wild edible diversity and how they can ensure in-situ as well as ex-situ conservation of these species by their own small efforts. Technical knowhow of propagating these

wild edible plants in local nursery is also promoted under ex-situ conservation efforts.

This project at large will communicate the value of food security by utilizing cost effective local resources and linking conservation with livelihood enhancement approach. I trying to endorse low cost, local food products by using wild edibles so, that food mile are reduced, low cost food practices are initiated and food security and poverty issues are answered.

