

## Extension needs in the medicinal plants industry

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Approximately 80% of the developing world's population and over one third of the Sri Lankans are primarily dependent on traditional systems of healthcare, where most of the drugs and medicinal preparations are derived from plants.

In Sri Lanka, over two third of the supply is gathered from wild sources where the cultivation of medicinal plants has given almost no attention. Poor quality of drugs in the market; use of destructive collection practices; and decreasing availability of medicinal plants are the other major problems, which prevent the growth of the industry.

The study was carried out to identify the key stakeholders in the medicinal plants industry, their major extension problems and to suggest a suitable mechanism to overcome them.

The industry was studied using key informants interviews, key group discussions, direct observations and a field survey. This was supplemented by the secondary data collected through published literature. While having discussions with different institutions, different stakeholder categories were identified. Importers and processors were selected for the field survey using random sampling. Convenient sampling was used to select the key informants.

Ten major groups of stakeholders were identified during the study; they were drug manufacturers, physicians, importers, wholesalers, retailers, researchers, growers, collectors, suppliers and drug users or the patients. These categories are not mutually exclusive because many of them have diversified their activities into other fields.

Major extension problems as identified by the stakeholders were low supply of crude drugs to the market due to inadequate cultivation; lack of knowledge on cultivation techniques and post harvest handling; poor quality of herbal materials in the market (85%), inadequate supply and lack of an information network to obtain timely and accurate information. Almost all the respondents (100%) agreed that the cultivation of medicinal plants should be encouraged. An effective extension service could play a critical role in this regard. Based on the extension problems identified during the study, an extension model was proposed to improve the present state of the medicinal plants industry.

It can be concluded that promoting the cultivation of medicinal plants is vitally important for the sustainable development of the industry. As there is very little studies undertaken so far further research and development is needed in this area. It is recommended that an information network be developed to provide timely and accurate information, which facilitate coordination among the stakeholders and to establish local collection centres to purchase medicinal plants.

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