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Ethnopharmacological survey on raw materials used in traditional systems of medicine in Sri Lanka: A case study

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The demand for herbal products worldwide has increased at an annual rate of 8%. The estimated value of the global herbal market in the year 2050 is US\$ 5 trillion. In the present survey, by using a pre-tested questionnaire information on raw materials, source of materials, plant parts used, heavily used and rare materials, quality of materials, locally cultivable plant species, government involvement, problems faced and potential helpful organizations were investigated. A diverse range of materials including 297 species (65%) for dried plant materials, 59 (13%) fresh plant materials, 69 (15%) types of minerals, 18 (4%) animal materials and 12 (3%) other materials have been listed. All together 309 plant species belonging to 106 families dominated by family Leguminosae were found, and of them 46 heavily used (more than 10,000 kg/year) belonging to 35 families were recorded. The main source of herbal material was of local origin (71%), followed by imported (26%) while 3% was obtained by either direct importation or from local collection. Leaves were the most frequently used plant part (47%). High price, poor quality, absence of continuous supply and insufficient supply, adulteration, poor processing techniques, high amount of impurities, wetness and microbial content have been identified as main constraints for the herbal market. Decreasing of available medicinal plants, lack of proper cultivation and processing protocols, incorrect identification and lack of proper quality control methodologies were identified as major challenges for the industry. Formulation of proper programmes for identification, cultivation and postharvest techniques including quality control and standardization of herbs are very important while focusing much attention on research and development programmes. Information generated through the present study could be incorporate for the future development programmes related to the medicinal plant industry.

Keywords: Ethnopharmacological survey, medicinal materials, Sri Lanka, traditional medicine