

LOOKING AHEAD:



Chiraito seedlings have successfully germinated in MAPs Nurseries. In two years time, the plants will reach full maturity and will sell for as much as 500 rupees per kilo, dry weight.

Future Goals:

- To expand the MAPs project to include other communities in the Bhotkhola region, training more village farmers, distributing more seed, and constructing more MAPs nurseries.
- To continue monitoring and support for existing project sites, providing consultation and refreshment trainings for MAPs growers.
- To establish a Central Collection Depot in order to streamline the processing of MAPs products and increase the bargaining capacity of local farmers.
- To continue to play a positive and constructive role in local communities and encourage the sustainable development and improvement of village education, infrastructure, and public health.
- To spearhead community-based reforestation and waste-management projects.
- To promote and preserve local religious institutions, systems of traditional medicine, and the unique cultural heritage of the Bhotkhola.



How Can You Help?

Please join us in our effort to conserve the areas rich biodiversity and improve the lives of mountain people:

- Visit the Bhotkhola and tell your friends about the area and the MAPs projects.
- Volunteer. There are many opportunities for service in the region and TMI can help facilitate a meaningful volunteer experience.
- Send a tax deductible contribution to:



USA

3000 Connecticut Ave NW,
Suite 138
Washington DC 20036, USA

Tel: (202) 234-4050
Fax: (202) 234-4051

Email: assistant@mountain.org

Web: www.mountain.org

NEPAL

Asian Regional Office
P.O. Box 2785
Baluwatar, Kathmandu, Nepal

Tel: 977-1-4414237 / 4419356
Fax: 977-1-4410073

Email: tmiregional@wlink.com.np

Web: www.mountain.org



Text, Concept and Photos by: Karma Bhutia and Jason Davis

Bhotkhola Futures

Conserving communities. Cultivating Livelihoods



A Community-Based Medicinal and Aromatic Plants (MAPs) Conservation and Cultivation Project

Upper Arun Valley, Nepal 
2010



BACKGROUND:

The Upper Arun Valley lies on the eastern edge of Makalu-Barun National Park and Buffer Zone in NE Nepal (Sankhuwasabha District). Locally known as the Bhotkhola, this region was closed to foreign visitors until 2003 and remains one of the most remote and least visited of Nepals wilderness areas. Travel into the area is exclusively on foot and involves 6-8 days of strenuous trekking from the District Headquarters at Khandbari to the border of the Tibetan Autonomous Region (China). The dramatic landscape of the Upper Arun Valley supports a splendid diversity of mountain and forest ecologies. Forested slopes rise thousands of meters on either side of Nepals largest river, providing habitat for a unique variety of flora and fauna, including rare medicinal plants and several endangered animal species like the clouded leopard and red panda.

The Bhotkhola is also home to some 10-14,000 indigenous people, occupying dozens of permanent village settlements where they practice subsistence farming and animal husbandry as they have for centuries.



The People of the Upper Arun

Valley belong to the Bhote ethnic group. In language, custom, lifestyle, and religion they share much in common with their Tibetan neighbors to the north. Very much tied to the land, Bhote people rely principally on agriculture for their means of livelihood. Millet, rice, maize, barley, and potatoes are the staple crops, but in this environment many families find it difficult to raise enough food for their needs. Each village is surrounded by an ever-expanding network of terraced fields. All work is done by hand or with the aid of the ox-plough, and most farmers also raise goats, pigs, chickens, and other livestock. To supplement farm income, many families have adopted a pattern of seasonal migration to trade livestock, medicinal plants, and other goods across the border in the TAR or south in the Terai (Indian border region).



KEY THREATS AND CHALLENGES:

Deforestation caused by slash & burn agriculture poses a significant threat to the sensitive ecologies of the Bhotkhola. Removal of fuel wood for cooking, and over-harvesting of wild medicinal plants for sale, also disrupt the ecological balance. Poaching is a serious problem in the region, encouraged by the illegal (but lucrative) endangered species trade. Geographic isolation, political instability, lack of funding, and inadequate government presence and oversight have thus far stymied conservation efforts in the region. Meanwhile, the quality of life for village families remains at a low standard due to poverty, illiteracy, poor health/sanitation, and lack of year-round food security.



THE MOUNTAIN INSTITUTE'S



(TMI) vision is one that links conservation efforts with improved quality of living for village families. The aim of the MAPs project is to introduce a new source of income into the region, by tapping into already-existing markets for high-value medicinal and aromatic plants and timber crops. TMI has been conducting MAPs cultivation projects since 2001 in other parts of Nepal, achieving wide success in Ilam and Panchthar Districts. Only recently were funds made available to replicate this work in the villages of Upper Arun Valley. TMI and the communities of Upper Arun would like to extend heartfelt thanks to our anonymous donors for their generous contributions. The Bhotkhola MAPs Project was launched in Nov 2008.

Bhotkhola Region: Proposed Working Area Sankhuwasabha District



GOALS AND OBJECTIVES:



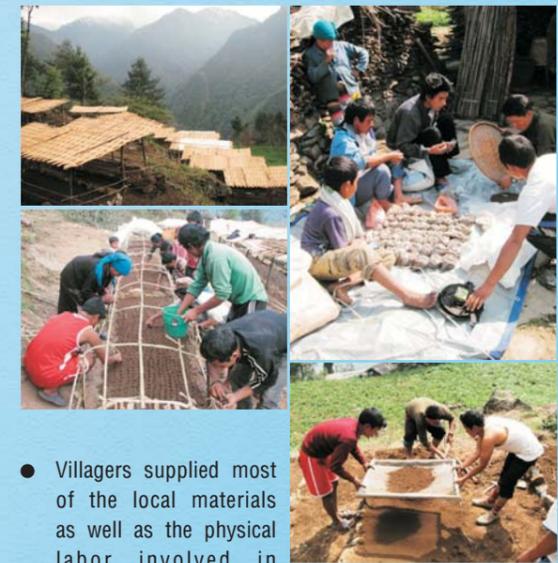
- To train local farmers in the cultivation, production and marketing of high-value medicinal plants and timber crops.
- To improve the standard of living for village families, e.g., access to education and public health facilities, by generating new modes of income.
- To explore and develop potential markets for MAPs products, especially in the TAR border region.
- To educate villagers on the harmful impacts of slash & burn agriculture, overharvesting, poaching, etc., and promote awareness of conservation issues.
- To demonstrate incentives for continued protection and conservation of local forests and the wild medicinal plants found in them.

ACHIEVEMENTS:



- Village farmers from 204 households committed portions of farmland to MAPs cultivation, and participated in field training exercises led by TMI staff.

- 3 MAPs nurseries were constructed in the villages of Chyamtang, Chumsur, and Kimathanka, each including shaded propagation beds and a small greenhouse.
- 40kg of chiraito (Swertia chiraita) and champ (Magnolia sp) seeds were purchased by TMI. Participating households each received a 150g seed packet (enough for 50,000 viable plants). The remaining seeds were planted in the new nurseries or wild-sown in outdoor field trials.



- Villagers supplied most of the local materials as well as the physical labor involved in constructing the nurseries. Community members are very invested in the project.
- Villagers also appointed, by democratic process, 3 Nursery Caretakers and Local Monitoring Boards who now assume responsibility for the project, in consultation with TMI field officers.
- TMI has provided social mobilizer training and basic accounts/record-keeping training for 2 of its field officers, and arranged educational visits to other TMI model sites in Ilam and Panchthar districts.
- TMI staff conducted a follow-up consultation and monitoring visit in fall 2009, including several refreshment trainings and community presentations related to MAPs cultivation and broader conservation issues.