

Enterprise Development in Natural Fibre-based Products

**A Study of the Status and Potential
in the Central Himalayan
Region of India**

**Lok Man S. Palni
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Subrat Sharma**

**International Centre for Integrated
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Kathmandu, Nepal
1999**

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Development experiences in most of the mountain areas of the Hindu Kush-Himalayas Region, over the past decades, have shown that the prevailing predominant mode of their economies – subsistence agriculture – is becoming increasingly unsustainable both economically and ecologically. Diversification of economic activities into products and services, for which these areas offer a comparative advantage, through enterprise based production for the market is considered necessary for sustaining livelihoods.

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The present paper 'Enterprise Development in Natural Fibre-based Products: A Study of the Status and Potential in the Central Himalayan Region of India', by Lok Man S. Palni, Hem C. Rikhari, and Subrat Sharma, is one in a series of case studies published with the hope that it will be found useful by those engaged in development, policy-making, programme formulation, and implementation of enterprises, as well as by present and potential entrepreneurs in the region.

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The views and interpretations in this paper are those of the authors. They are not attributable to the International Centre for Integrated Mountain Development (ICIMOD) and do not imply the expression of any opinion concerning the legal or boundaries of countries.

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Preface

Development experiences in most of the mountain areas of the Hindu Kush-Himalayan Region, over the past decades, have shown that the prevailing predominant mode of their economies – subsistence agriculture – is becoming increasingly unsustainable both economically and ecologically. Diversification of economic activities into products and services, for which these areas offer a comparative advantage, through enterprise-based production for the market is considered necessary for sustaining livelihoods and alleviating the poverty of the rapidly increasing population. It is in this context that ICIMOD established a programme on 'Development of Micro-enterprises in Mountain Areas' with the objectives of identifying constraints and opportunities and developing policy, programme, and training guidelines for enterprise development in hill and mountain areas of the HKH region. As part of this programme, the Centre has commissioned a number of studies in different countries and areas of the HKH region with a view to documenting experiences of development and functioning of enterprises covering different aspects such as comparative advantage of products, processes, and factors in enterprise development, technology, credit, marketing, and development of entrepreneurial skills as well policies and programmes by government and non-government agencies for promotion of enterprises.

The present paper 'Enterprise Development in Natural Fibre-based Products: A Study of the Status and Potential in the Central Himalayan Region of India', by Lok Man S. Palni, Hem C. Rikhari, and Subrat Sharma, is one in a series of case studies. It is being published with the hope that it will be found useful by those engaged in research and development, policy-making, programme formulation, and implementation for the promotion of enterprises, as well as by present and potential entrepreneurs in their respective activities.

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Abstract

This study explores several aspects relating to a few important fibre-yielding plants (viz., *Agave* sp, *Cannabis sativa*, *Girardiana heterophylla*, *Grewia oppositifolia*, and *Daphne papyracea*) of the Central Himalayas and their fibre products. These traditional products are an integral part of the typical rural system because of their durability, flexibility, and ecofriendly nature. These fibre products not only fulfill rural needs and/or augment the economy, but are also of use in various household activities, including animal care. For example, ropes made from such fibres do not heat up under the sun and remain soft when animals move or shift postures. However, with some inputs, fibres of various species can be used for the preparation of non-traditional products in order to meet the ethnic choice/fashion of urban society.

Market indicators show that there is potential for enterprise development of various non-traditional fibre products, particularly in light of the growing preference for natural products rather than for synthetics. Furthermore, these products can compete in the market because they are unique. With this in mind, certain NGOs have begun to commercialise fibre-based products, although on a very limited scale because of the lack of infrastructure and of a marketing strategy. In order to increase the supply of raw materials, efforts have also been made to carry out large-scale plantation of *Agave* sp and other species. These are regenerated in nurseries through bulbils in order to support plantation work.

It has been observed that this document could serve as a useful basis for future research to develop appropriate strategies for achieving sustainable and feasible development of cottage industries based on fibre plants.

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DNDA - District Rural Development Agency

GBPIHED - Govind Ballabh Pant Institute of Himalayan Environment and Development

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GMVN - Garhwal Mandal Vikas Nigam

HKH - Hindu Kush-Himalayas

HOPE - Himalayan Organization for Protecting Environment

IIFT - Indian Institute of Fashion Technology

INHERE - Institute of Himalayan Environmental Research and Education

KMVN - Kumaon Mandal Vikas Nigam

NGO - Non-governmental Organization

UNICEF - United Nations International Children's Education Fund

UPAA - Uttar Pradesh Academy of Administration

Acronyms Used

- CDS** - Centre for Development Studies
- CSIR** - Council of Scientific and Industrial Research
- DRDA** - District Rural Development Agency
- GBPIHED** - Govind Ballabh Pant Institute of Himalayan Environment and Development
- GMVN** - Garhwal Mandal Vikas Nigam
- HKH** - Hindu Kush-Himalayas
- HOPE** - Himalayan Organization for Protecting Environment
- IIFT** - Indian Institute of Fashion Technology
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