

## Theme of the Workshop

The workshop planning process was initiated by the Hindu Kush-Himalayan Biodiversity Programme in the International Centre for Integrated Mountain Development (ICIMOD), based in Kathmandu. This regional centre is committed to the sustainable development of the Hindu Kush-Himalayan (HKH) region and has working links with government as well as non-governmental institutions of the region including institutes of Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, China, India, Myanmar, Nepal and Pakistan. In order to plan the activities of the Ethnobotany Programme Experts from participating member countries were invited to a meeting in which representatives from the Nagaland Environmental Protection and Economic Development (NEPED) Project and the Applied Environmental Research Foundation (AERF) also participated. These projects are closely associated with UNESCO, WWF, and the Royal Botanic Gardens' (Kew) initiative on People and Plants. Therefore programme co-ordinators from UNESCO and country representatives from WWF were also present. The programme approach that emerged from the discussions seeks to address the following public policy issues and principles:



# Background to the Workshop

The programme will acknowledge people's rights of people with indigenous knowledge concerning natural resources and biodiversity should be respected.

The need was recognized for training workshops to develop the field of ethnobotany applied to the management and conservation of plant resources through capacity building, supporting research and promoting action-oriented field projects in the HKH region. The need stems from the recognition that people in rural communities often have detailed and profound knowledge of the properties and ecology of locally occurring plants and rely on them for many of their foods, medicines, fuel, building materials, and other products. However, much of this knowledge is being lost with the globalization of local communities and local cultures. Over-harvesting of non-cultivated plants is increasingly common, it is often caused by loss of habitat, increase in local use and the growing demands of trade. Long-term conservation of plant resources and of the knowledge associated with them are needed for the benefit of local people and for their potential use by communities in other places. Ethnobotanists can work together with local people to study and record the uses of plant resources, identify causes of over-harvesting of non-cultivated plants, find sustainable harvesting methods, and investigate alternatives such as cultivation. Similarly it was thought necessary to develop methodologies to understand the issues related to resource management and community development.

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- The principle that all development projects addressing issues related to agriculture, livestock and pasture, agroforestry, forestry, land-use planning, watershed management and other natural resource management fields should take into account the traditional wisdom and expertise of local inhabitants.
- The principle that the interface between people and nature must be addressed in conservation projects that propose setting aside productive lands as protected areas for the conservation of biodiversity. The perceptions, uses and traditional methods of management of natural resources by local inhabitants should be taken into account.
- The principle that the intellectual property rights of people with indigenous knowledge, including special ethnobotanical knowledge, should be respected.

The need was recognised for training workshops to develop the field of ethnobotany applied in the management and conservation of plant resources through capacity building, supporting research and promoting action-oriented field projects in the HKH region. This need stems from the recognition that people in rural communities often have detailed and profound knowledge of the properties and ecology of locally occurring plants and rely on them for many of their foods, medicines, fuel, building materials, and other products. However, much of this knowledge is being lost with the transformation of local ecosystems and local cultures. Over-harvesting of non-cultivated plants is increasingly common: it is often caused by loss of habitat, increase in local use and the growing demands of trade. Long-term conservation of plant resources and of the knowledge associated with them are needed for the benefit of local people and for their potential use by communities in other places. Ethnobotanists can work together with local people to study and record the uses of plant resources, identify cases of over-harvesting of non-cultivated plants, find sustainable harvesting methods and investigate alternatives such as cultivation. Similarly it was thought necessary to develop methodologies to understand the issues related to resource management and community development.

The need for region-specific workshops for the orientation and exchange of information among researchers and development workers led to the development of various specific themes. Such a workshop was considered important for north-eastern India, mainly because resource depletion and population growth are fast in this region, and there is an urgent need to work for equitable resource management with people's participation. So far, the ethnobotanical work in the region has been restricted to ethnobotanical and medico-botanical inventories. The ethnic communities in this region are heterogeneous and their problems are area/ecosystem specific. These tribal communities are different from other tribal communities in the rest of the HKH region in many ways. Through this workshop the understanding of the people's concept of ethnoecology will be developed when coupled with studies of resource-use patterns.

Commitment from the Naga representatives and AERF helped through NEPED being the host organization for the workshop. The Director General and Head of the Mountain Natural Resources' Division of ICIMOD made a visit to Nagaland and other states of north-eastern India in March 1997. They felt that exposure to the activities and orientation to the approach of the **NEPED Project** would be in itself a substantial learning experience for all the participants attending the workshop. Nagaland is very rich in plant and animal resources, and there is tremendous diversity in the uses of plants and animals. So far only ethnobotanical inventories have been done, and efforts to document the use of indigenous knowledge in natural resource management have been limited. Nagaland has rich cultural diversity. Fourteen principal tribal communities use a range of approaches and methods for natural resource management of a variety of agroecosystems.

The aim of this regional workshop was to discuss the issues of natural resource management in general and Home Garden systems in particular and to develop appropriate methods to understand and analyse traditional practices for incorporation into community development and conservation programmes. The workshop process was designed in such a way that it provided an environment for sharing knowledge and resources for the development of a network of multidisciplinary ethnobotanical expertise in the region.

### **Theme of the workshop**

The theme of this training workshop was the maintenance of useful biodiversity through the Home Garden tradition by indigenous communities of north-eastern India. This theme was representative and helped to initiate discussions on other related topics such as *jhum* cultivation (shifting cultivation), agroforestry, interlinkages of traditional agroecosystems, community forests, etc. Ultimately it provided a methodological framework for finding solutions for conservation and community development based on ethnobotanical knowledge and indigenous understanding of resource management.

This theme also helped to generate discussion on the cultural context of natural resource management, cultural beliefs which underlie conservation of biological diversity, the symbolic significance of plant uses, etc. Each of the north-eastern states of India is unique and different as far as resource management

systems and cultural diversity are concerned. Discussions on the workshop theme helped to identify issues related to conservation, community development and resource management. The theme also helped participants to select appropriate methodologies to resolve the issues using ethnobotanical skills. Workshop discussions based on the Home Garden systems of traditional communities emphasised the need for enhancing the understanding of indigenous knowledge among scientists and aiding the search for alternatives for conservation and community development using indigenous knowledge.