

## **EXTENSION NEEDS FOR THE SUSTAINABLE MANAGEMENT OF THE MEDICINAL PLANT INDUSTRY IN SRI LANKA**

U.I. DISSANAYAKE, W.A.D.P. WANIGASUNDARA AND P.A. MARASINGHE<sup>1</sup>

*Department of Agricultural Extension, Faculty of Agriculture, University of Peradeniya*  
<sup>1</sup>*Department of Ayurveda, Navinna*

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 medicinal plants. In Sri Lanka, over two - thirds of the supply is gathered from wild sources where the cultivation of medicinal plants was 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 randomly selected for the field survey.

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. Many of these categories are not mutually exclusive since many of them have diversified their activities into more than one field.

Major extension problems identified 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.

Based on the problems, an extension model is proposed which could incorporate a participatory system by the intended parties. This could be implemented through several steps; determination of the target group, situation analysis, needs assessment, formulating objectives, developing the work plan, implementation, monitoring and evaluation. Participatory approach is encouraged in all the steps since the knowledge system is highly shared by the different stakeholders.

Since this is a relatively un-researched area further research is needed in this area. Recommendations for the future are to develop an information network to provide timely and accurate information, which facilitates coordination among the stakeholders and to establish local collection centres to facilitate the commercial collection of medicinal plants.