

Reviving Himalayan Springs and Seeds - Focus on *Than* and *Bidon* villages

Looking back – lessons learned

Himalayan springs and traditional seeds are facing tough times due to the environmental stress this region is witnessing. Uttarakhand Jan Jagriti Sansthan (UJJS) together with its local partner organizations, Himalaya Seva Sangh and the friends of Himalaya Resources based in the Netherlands had initiated a springs and seeds campaign in 2015, involving a three days intensive dialogue meet between 27th and 29th October 2015 at UJJS, Khadi in Tehri Garhwal. The meet was attended by more than 150 participants coming from Jammu & Kashmir, Himachal Pradesh, Uttarakhand, Assam, Nagaland, Nepal, Madhya Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh, Delhi and other parts of India giving serious inputs for the conservation of Himalayan springs and seeds.

One of the ideas that was born during this time was the setting-up of a venture called “Samoon” (meaning a Gift) to procure, revive and protect the traditional Himalayan seeds and culture. An outlet called “Samoon” was inaugurated at Khadi where traditional seeds and goods from the mountain communities are being kept for sharing and sale. This has since been developed as a restaurant called "Mountain Food Connect" (MFC) where traditional Himalayan recipes are being served and promoted. The transition and strengthening of SAMOON and MFC were supported by Himalaya Resources and Wild Geese Foundation.

When we started SAMOON, the price of the local traditional crops was very low. We purchased crops at a good price from the farmers and after that price were increased in the market. A local pulse called *Naurangi* (type of lentil) was sold by farmers at around INR 25/- per Kg. We purchased *Naurangi* INR 50/- per Kg from the farmers. Other market players had to buy *Naurangi* at the same price of INR 50/- . Now in 2024 *Naurangi* is being sold at the price of INR 110/- to INR 120/- in the local market.

During the last decade, UJJS also continuously worked in the Herval river catchment villages and spring sheds. Hundreds of small ponds / percolation tanks have been constructed for ground water recharge. Water conserving tree species, bushes and shrubs have been planted for spring shed revival in the region. Good moisture and irrigation are essential for agriculture. Community involvement and participation has been the key to success of these programs. We are thankful to Himalaya Resources and the Wild Geese Foundation for supporting us over the years to implement these fundamental programmes.

Looking forward

UJJS activists and local communities strongly feel the need to further strengthen these initiatives in the region. The mountain communities are increasingly facing problems emerging out of erratic rainfalls and challenges due to unstable climatic conditions. Spring shed discharge is being badly affected by deforestation and unwanted tempering with mountain ecology as a result of unscientific faulty development paradigm.

Potential of traditional seeds (climate change and health)

Traditional seeds have the strength to withstand the harshness of the weather and they are also rich in nutrients. Most of the traditional seeds naturally are organic. Now people are realizing the strength of traditional seeds and they want to make these seeds a part of their food. This is a good opportunity for farmers to sell their crops at the right price. The challenge is that many of the traditional seeds are extinct from the villages.

Mountain livelihood is primarily based on agriculture and animal husbandry. People who live in villages are doing agriculture as their livelihood. Traditional seeds are the most important component, which are becoming extinct from the villages due to declining agriculture practices. It is a big challenge for those farmers who have a willingness to adopt agriculture as their livelihood source. Some times before, around 20-30 years back, most of the families in the village had their seed bank inherited from their ancestors. Now in the present many seeds are missing from the seed banks. Seed banks are much needed intervention to make agriculture more sustainable for firm mountain livelihood.

Interrelationship between good agricultural practices and water springs

Water and irrigation are the basic needs for better agriculture. Most of the mountain agriculture depends on rain. Especially traditional crops are put in the unirrigated land. Moisture in agricultural land is much needed for better crops. Spring sheds are the basic sources to increase moisture regime. It is two ways connection between agriculture and spring sheds. Good moisture and irrigation give good crops and good continuous cultivation helps in increasing the moisture regime and water spring shed.

Most of the mountain agricultural land depends on rain. Nearby water springs of the farmland are the basic source of irrigation and they stay moist, the land for agriculture. Where agriculture is alive their water springs are also in good condition. After plowing the farm, rain water easily goes under the land to make moisture and feed the downstream water sources.

Proposal: a model project in two villages to revive springs and seeds

UJJS is keen to take up a model project based on the above mentioned challenges and opportunities, integrated in a positive and proactive action program.

It is being planned along with the village communities of *Than* and *Bidon* villages of the Hernal river valley of Tehri Garhwal District to take up a constructive program to revive the springs and seeds of this region. These both villages are situated in the upstream of the valley. Spring shed rejuvenation initiatives will affect the downstream spring shed in *Tipali*, *Kaud*, *Upali Khadi*, *Selupani* and other villages.

In these two villages, champion farmers will be selected, who have the willingness to protect, conserve, exchange and spread the traditional seeds. Village level seed banks will be established at the farmer level. Seed conservation activities have been planned for more than 15 villages of Hernal valley with the 15-20 identified champion farmers. Initiatives will be taken to connect champion farmers to projection activities from villages including Than, Bidon, Khankar, Sunarkot, Tipali, Rampur, Koti, Bhandargaon, Ampata, Chidiyali, Pipleth, Chaumpa, Byasi, Bhagodi, Kordi, Gaindi and Gaind. The champion farmers will spread the message of the importance of traditional seeds conservation and water spring rejuvenation.

SAMOON will play an important role by supporting, guiding and sustaining the seeds conservation and exchange activities through these champion farmers. And also by introducing higher market prices for traditional seeds and crops, as being done with the local pulse *Naurangi*. Many more traditional seeds and crops that have good market potential are currently missing from the villages and need to be reintroduced. Hybrid soybeans have replaced fast the traditional black bean seed called *kala bhatt*. Traditional *kala bhatt* seed is totally extinct from the valley, while it has the potential to survive in difficult condition and is much more nutritious. It also has also good demand in the market.

Hill pigeon peas called *toor dal*, which is rich in protein and fibers, is missing from the Hernal valley. *Toor dal* has a good market potential. In the winter people like to take *toor dal* and during that time there is a big demand for it in the market. It is profitable for the mountain farmer as they can sell it at villages level to neighbors and nearby people, but also for a good price at nearby markets.

Seed bank and seed exchange are the intelligible possibility for sustainable mountain agriculture and livelihood.

The farmers will connect with SAMOON to sell their crops and to take extinct seeds. And we will help them to connected with other market linkages that are willing to support the local farmers. For example, there is a Central Government scheme Rural Business incubator (RBI) that

supports farmers to sell their produce. The scheme has provided assistance to product packaging, marketing and selling to local entrepreneurs. They are also organizing training program on the various issues to build capacity of local farmers and entrepreneurs. The State Government has opened many stores on the highway that are dedicated to purchase local organic crops from the farmers and sell it to the tourists and visitors.

SAMOON - Mountain Food Connect is connected to this program. Recently, we could open up a new outlet called 3K Organic outlet and Millet Kitchen in New Tehri. It has been opened under the same scheme. 3K means *Krishi evm Krishk Kalyan* (Welfare of Agriculture and Farmers)

Following activities are being planned and proposed for support in the region

1. Seeds and Water conservation Meetings will be organized to sensitize the mountain community.
2. Identification of progressive farmers to participate in this process of Seeds conservation thereby promoting an exchange of seeds that are getting extinct from the region.
3. Documentation of traditional and sustainable methods of seed conservation
4. Identification of Seeds that are getting extinct from the region and collecting them with community participation creating small seed banks with community
5. Small ponds / percolation pits will be constructed in the watershed area to increase the moisture regime in the catchment area of the identified spring shed
6. Water conserving plant species will be planted in the catchment area
7. Plant Nursery establishment of broad leaf species

Uttarakhand Jan Jagriti Sansthan (UJJS), together with Himalaya Seva Sangh, the local community based organizations and Himalaya Resources, intends to take up this program in a campaign mode for ushering in a change in the Himalayan region.

Aranya Ranjan

President

Uttarakhand Jan Jagriti Sansthan

Jagriti Bhawan Khadi, P.O. Jajal

Tehri Garhwal, Uttarakhand

Pin - 249175

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Draft Budget

Sl. No.	Particulars	Unit (s)	Unit Cost	Total Amount	HR - Wild Geese contribution	Community - UJJS Contribution
1	Seeds and Water conservation Meetings will be organized to sensitize the mountain community	15	1000	15000	-	15000
2	Small ponds / percolation pits will be constructed in the watershed area to increase the moisture regime in the catchment area of the identified springshed	10	8000	80000	60000	20000
3	Water conserving plant species will be planted in the catchment area	20 Heqt.	8000	160000	140000	20000
4	Documentation of traditional and sustainable methods of seed conservation	1	100000	100000	100000	-
5	Identification of Seeds that are getting extinct from the region and collecting them with community participation creating small seed banks with community	1	100000	100000	100000	-
6	Identification of progressive farmers to participate in this process of Seeds conservation thereby promoting an exchange of seeds that are getting extinct from the region.	1	50000	50000	50000	-
7	Plant Nursery establishment of broad leaf species	1	35000	350000	300000	50000
8	2 Volunteers	12 Mont	16000	192000	192000	-
9	Local Travel and Transport	12	5000	60000	60000	-
10	Accounts , Audit and Miscellaneous	1	25000	25000	25000	-
Total				1132000	1027000	105000

RS Eleven Lakh Thirt Two Thousand

