



MoEF announces National Seabuckthorn Initiative on a consortium approach

Leh, 14th July, 2010

The Ministry of Environment & Forests and the Defence Research and Development Organisation have jointly launched a major new national initiative for seabuckthorn cultivation in the high altitude, cold desert ecosystems of the country. Announcing this at a national workshop on seabuckthorn today at Leh, Minister of State (I/C), Environment & Forests, Shri Jairam Ramesh said that the initiative has great relevance for the Himalayan states, particularly Jammu & Kashmir and Himachal Pradesh, where cold deserts of the Himalayas comprise some 40% of the area. The workshop, organised by the Defense Institute of High Altitude Research (DIHAR), in collaboration with Ministry of Environment & Forests (MoEF), was co-chaired by the Minister of State (I/C), Environment & Forests, Mr Jairam Ramesh and Minister of State for Defence, Dr M M Pallam Raju. Over 50 participants attended the meeting from various sectors including government representatives, experts, researchers and CSO members.

Seabuckthorn (local name in Ladakh: Tsemarang; Himachal Pradesh: Chharma; Uttarakhand: Ames/Chuk; NE region: Tare/Taroobo has multi-purpose medicinal and nutritional properties, besides being useful for soil conservation and nitrogen fixation (see below) but has for long been considered a humble shrub of the Himalayas. This workshop brought together for the first time various stakeholders under one platform to discuss strategies for cultivation and commercialisation of seabuckthorn. This will not only benefit the local community secure livelihoods but will ensure conservation of the fragile ecosystem in the high altitudes. It is noteworthy that India currently has only 11,500 ha under seabuckthorn cultivation, compared to 1.1 million ha in China, 30,000 ha in Mongolia and 47,000 ha in Russia.

A Leh Declaration was adopted at the conclusion of the workshop, and the following important decisions were taken:

1. A National Seabuckthorn Initiative will be established. This will be based on a consortium approach, bringing together the existing work being done by various agencies including DIHAR, ICFRE, CSIR, ICAR, DBT, the National Horticulture Board and the National Medicinal Plants Board. Specific, complementary “work programmes” will be identified for each institute, so that there is an integrated programme and no duplication of work.
2. An overarching national objective of the initiative will be to bring one million hectares of land area under seabuckthorn cultivation by the year 2020.
3. An Action Plan will be prepared over the next 2 months, under the leadership of DIHAR and Ministry of Environment & Forests (MoEF). A website to facilitate collaboration will be launched within 30 days.
4. An initial allocation of Rs. 25 crores will be made for the initiative in 2011 for initial preparatory work, awareness and pilot programmes.



5. An initial pilot will be launched in five districts: Leh and Kargil in J&K, Lahaul-Spiti and Kinnaur in Himachal Pradesh and Chamoli in Uttarakhand. Riverbanks and hill slopes will be prioritised for cultivation.
6. Engaging the private sector, especially in the commercialisation of seabuckthorn products, through public-private partnership, will be a key focus of the Initiative.
7. Eco Task Force Battalions will be mobilised for plantation of seabuckthorn in remote areas. A Meeting will be convened with the Territorial Army to discuss modalities in the near future.
8. Women's Self-Help Groups will also be mobilised to scale up the Initiative in the focus areas.
9. Programme for international cooperation on seabuckthorn R&D will be initiated under the Initiative. This could include collaboration on research and cultivation with China, Mongolia, Russia and Pakistan and collaboration on processing and commercialisation with Germany and Finland. The recent regional collaboration project involving India, China and Nepal for the Mt. Kailash Landscape, initiated by ICIMOD, could serve as a model for this partnership.
10. A Sub-Mission on Cold Desert Ecosystems will be established under the Green India Mission, a key Mission under India's National Action Plan on Climate Change, which is currently being finalised. This Sub-Mission will include the National Seabuckthorn Initiative.

Why Seabuckthorn?



Seabuckthorn (*Hippophae rhamnoides L.*) – popularly known as Leh berry, is indigenous to the high altitudes and grows widely in the Himalayan region. The dry temperate and cold desert of the Himalayas is an ideal place for the Seabuckthorn to flourish, and as such Seabuckthorn is found extensively in Jammu & Kashmir, Himachal Pradesh, Uttarakhand, Sikkim and Arunachal Pradesh.

Seabuckthorn not only provides nourishment but has multi purpose value. This is indeed the golden berry, with every part of the plant (twig, leaf, root, and thorn) being traditionally used as medicine, nutritional supplements, fire wood and fence shrub.

Being a nitrogen fixing deciduous plant, it can be used for commercial purposes and well as for environment protection especially through afforestation. Since this is the only plant that can grow in high altitude regions it can be easily used for water and soil conservation. With climate variations on the increase, it will be of importance to conserve this species that can aid in climate change mitigation and provide livelihoods support thereby reducing pressures on the ecosystem. Seabuckthorn is the ideal plant for desertification control.



There are 6 species and 12 subspecies native over a wide area of Europe and Asia, including China, Mongolia, India, Nepal, Pakistan, Russia, Great Britain, France, Denmark, Netherlands, Germany, Poland, Finland, Sweden and Norway. In India, it is distributed in Ladakh region of Jammu & Kashmir; Kukumsari, Lahaul, Kaza and Tabo in Himachal Pradesh; and Nathula in Sikkim.

It has silvery deciduous leaves and colourful red, orange or yellow berries that remain on the shrub most of the winter. The plant is hardy and usually cold tolerant. It can withstand extreme temperatures from -43°C to $+40^{\circ}\text{C}$ and considered to be drought resistant. The shrub develops extensive root system having ability to fix atmospheric nitrogen. It is therefore an ideal plant for environmental conservation, soil erosion control, land reclamation, wildlife habitat enhancement, and farm stand protection. Every part of the plant viz. fruit, leaf, twig, root and thorn has been traditionally used as medicine, nutritional supplement, fuel and fence, and therefore, seabuckthorn is popularly known as 'Wonder Plant', 'Ladakh Gold', 'Golden Bush' or 'Gold Mine'.

For more information, visit:

www.moef.gov.in

<http://www.drdo.com/labs/frl/index.html>