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Nepalese Climbing Jasmine

Introduction

Jasminum sambac A. commonly referred to as climbing jasmine, is a plant species native to South Asia (Rahman et. al, 2011). The common name is no coincidence, as climbing jasmine is known to be a climbing vine (evergreen) that can extend up to one to three meters tall. The shrub has short, three to ten centimeter leaves, and white flowers known for their intense fragrance (Bhowmik et. al, date N/A). Climbing jasmine has over time been used for various purposes in various products. Such uses have spanned from food products, to beauty care products, as well as to health and wellness products. All of the parts of the shrub are used and cultivated in order to produce these variety of products. The most traditional suggested use of the plant is for medicinal purposes (Bhowmik et. al, date N/A).

Geography and Environmental Conditions

Climbing jasmine, as a medicinal, aromatic plant, grows abundantly alongside other herbs and trees in the Himalayas of South Asia (Karki et. Al, 2003). Karki et. al. (2003) describe these surroundings as “fragile ecosystems that are predominantly inhabited by rural poor and indigenous communities”. The plant is extremely flexible in regards to what Karki et. al. (2003) refer to as “crop-geometry”. = It is commonly found in poor soil areas, and is able to survive on low rain, perfect for hillside communities(Karki et. al, 2003).

Sustainability

Climbing jasmine can be considered extremely sustainable to the communities of Nepal for a variety of reasons. Due to the crop's low reliance on appropriate weather and/or care by local farmers, it makes for an excellent complement in the growing of other crops. As well as being a self-sustaining crop, these shrubs are extremely versatile and can be used as both under-story crops, as well as inter-crops (Karki et. al, 2003). Because these hillside areas are rough on soil, and provide difficult growing conditions, it is important to have a crop that not only thrives in such an area, but also contributes positively to the organisms around them. The roots of the crop contribute to soil sustainability and prevent erosion (Karki et. al, 2003). These crops also contribute a great deal to the growth of trees in the Himalayan regions, and therefore further advance the conservation of forests and biodiversity that has otherwise been threatened from large-scale harvesting of non-eco-friendly goods. The harvesting of these crops also provides an alternative to unsustainable harvesting.

Livelihoods

Climbing Jasmine is a great contributor to the livelihoods of Nepalese families. This is especially true for the women of the poor rural regions in which it is most commonly grown. The process of cultivating the crop involves collecting, drying, and transport to the market (Karki et. al, 2003). This work is what is described by Karki et. al. (2003) as "socially acceptable" work for women as it fits well into their still existing schedules of household work, and caregiving. Along with a growing demand for these eco-friendly alternatives to medicinal methods, there comes a growing demand for the crops involved. This growing demand is creating an abundance of opportunities for the rural poor in the surrounding areas. These opportunities are not simply limited to the cultivation of these crops, but also through the markets, as well as practicing the traditional healing in surrounding clinics (Karki et. al, 2003).

Preservation of Local Culture

Preserving local culture is bound to be an issue in any case of exporting from rural poor areas of underdeveloped countries. This is true because the enterprising and adaption of these goods is often controlled by much larger, developed, and more wealthy countries. The use of jasmine as a medicinal plant employs the pre-existing cultural beliefs surrounding the local traditions of alternative healing. However, this is not to say that the local culture and history of traditions is not constantly threatened by ideas of development and globalization. Karki et. al. (2003) describe exactly how important it is to invest in this pre-existing traditional knowledge:

“As the Himalayas are recognized to be the treasure trove of biological and cultural diversity - the product of millions of years of evolution – there is a need to protect indigenous knowledge and cultural diversity on an urgent basis. In the uplands of Northeast Himalayas, especially in the areas predominated by shifting cultivation and marginal agriculture, the means of achieving this may be by providing economic value to traditional and indigenous knowledge.”

Health and Nutrition Associations

Climbing jasmine is used for a variety of medicinal purposes contributing to the health and wellness of individuals. Not only the plant itself, but the leaves, roots, and essential oils made from the plant have all been shown to provide medicinal benefits. According to Rahman et al. (2011) the crop can be used as anti-depressant, anti-inflammatory, antiseptic, aphrodisiac, sedative, expectorant, anti-spasmodic, galactagogue, and tonic effects. In addition, the leaves are used for decongestants, the roots for analgesics, and essential oils for anti-microbial and antioxidants in fighting infectious diseases (Rahman et. al, 2011).

Economic Benefits

Because the crop provides a green alternative to medicinal practices, and has contributed strongly to the conservation of biodiversity in these areas, demand for the crops has increased significantly (Karki et. al, 2003). Perhaps the most exponential benefit to come of the increasing demand for these crops is the increase in jobs it is sure to create to the local areas.

Business opportunities

The development of this crop into an equitable export needs to be evaluated from all angles of the spectrum (Karki et. al, 2003). Because it is raised in such an economically poor region it is important to prevent any chance of exploitation from large-scale operations. The best way to ensure this is to involve the communities in both the initial and on-going planning. The involvement of NGOs as mediators between companies and communities can be a useful tool in both linking the developed world to the local communities, and supervising the relations. Lastly, it is important to have strong community ties, the development of groups and organizations are good ways to ensure community concerns are met (Karki et. al, 2003).

Export Potential

The market potential for climbing jasmine is wide and continues to expand. The crop has not only proven its worth in niche markets such as organic teas, and a variety of beauty care products, but more interestingly has shed interest as a medicinal asset. Though the world is not in dire need of this crop, it is certainly one that is benefitting a great deal to a great number of communities. The crop is very low maintenance and has few requirements post-harvest. The crop is simply harvested, dried, and shipped. Further research is necessary to assess the relationship

between embracing the traditional knowledge of the crop and the ways in which the crop can be exported.

References

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