

## THE ROLE OF ENVIRONMENTALISTS ON THE SUSTAINABLE USE OF MEDICINAL PLANTS, FROM AN AYURVEDIC PRACTITIONER'S POINT OF VIEW

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The unique biological diversity of Sri Lanka is vital for the long term welfare of her own people. But her natural forest cover which harbours a rich species diversity is dwindling rapidly due to various reasons. It is customary for the traditional Ayurvedic physicians of Sri Lanka to use plants as the major original source of drugs used in the treatment of diseases. However, there has been drastic decline in the availability of medicinal plants in Sri Lanka since recent past. Therefore, this issue should be dealt with a multidisciplinary approach.

A model survey was conducted in the Moneragala district in order to assess the hardships faced by the traditional physicians due to the scarcity of required varieties of plant ingredients. Another survey was conducted among traditional physicians among five randomly selected districts and also in ayurvedic pharmacies with the objective of evaluating the status of demand of medicinal plants used for specific diseases using diabetes as a model. All these surveys were carried out using structured questionnaires.

The outcome of these surveys strongly recommend that there is a great necessity to integrate reforestation programmes with medicinal plant cultivation in order to cater to the demand. Therefore, Sri Lanka needs a comprehensive strategy for the development of its medicinal plants. In our opinion, it is the responsibility of the environmentalists to advise and guide the authorities concerned in preserving the medicinal plants which is our National heritage as well.