

**Concept note on  
National Workshop on Conservation and Management of Yarsagumba in Kailash Sacred Landscape  
Nepal**

Kailash Sacred Landscape Conservation and Development Initiative  
Department of Plant Resources

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Yarsagumba, a highly regarded Himalayan herb, is a complex of the parasitic fungus (*Ophiocordyceps sinensis*) and ghost moth caterpillar (Thitarodes spp.). The parasitic fungus is commonly known as caterpillar fungus or Chinese caterpillar fungus in English. Yarsagumba is also popularly known as Jivan Buti, Buti, Saram Buti, Kira chhyau, Kira Jhar etc in different parts of Nepal. The mycelium of the fungus grows in the soil and colonizes the caterpillar of this moth. The caterpillar becomes mummified by the growth of the mycelium. Eventually, the mycelium of the fungus forms a fruiting body which emerges from the head of the larva (Sharma 2004). Yarsagumba is found naturally in the northern alpine grasslands of Nepal, India, Bhutan, and Tibetan plateau of China within the altitude of 3,000 to 5,000 m (Buenz *et al.* 2005) but the most common occurrence is between 3500m to 4500m in cold and arid environment (Sharma 2004).

Yarsagumba is highly praised for its medicinal and trade value. The species had no official contribution in the Nepalese national economy till 2001 since its collection, use, sale, distribution, transportation and export was banned by the government of Nepal (Forest Act 1993, Forest Regulation 1995). With the lift of ban from this species in 2005, Yarsagumba has become one of the significant market commodities in the herbal sector of Nepal. Presently, Yarsagumba is traded at Rs 1.4-Rs 1.6 million per kg. The trade, mostly in unprocessed form, is increasing exponentially and the government is earning substantial revenue (Rs 5.1 million in 2068/069). As per the forest rule, an individual has to pay Rs 10,000 per kg as a royalty to the Government of Nepal. Thus, Yarsagumba is providing an economic benefit to the local people as well as to the Government of Nepal.

Yarsagumba is an open access common pool natural resource under government's current forest management regime. The species is notably contributing to mountain livelihood where people rely on subsistence agriculture, collection of medicinal plants from the wild and seasonal migration. People have considered Yarsagumba as a prime source of family income that has significant impact on the working culture of the traditional mountain population. It is noticed that the rural people have, on many occasions, started intemperately depending on such income and failed to materialize such income into assets. The tendency of Yarsagumba collection has been increasing for lucrative income in short duration of time and the people have started hibernating the rest of the time. Moreover, collection of Yarsagumba per unit per person has declined due to the increasing number of people involved in collection. In addition, the loss of social integrity among the local people and instances of robbery and even murders has been recorded in recent days. Furthermore, it is felt that unsustainable collection of the species has become a major cause of biodiversity loss and ecosystem degradation in the high mountains. Along with the unsustainable collection, inadequate knowledge on life cycle, trade pattern, and end use is increasing the risk and vulnerability of Yarsagumba. The price difference between local

and international market is huge leading to inequitable share of income among the primary collectors. The differences between statutory and customary laws and outdated revenue policies have stalemated the development and proper marketing of the species.

The government of Nepal through its plans and strategies like Nepal Biodiversity Strategy 2002, Interim plan (2008-2010) etc are promoting the trans-boundary landscape conservation and management initiatives. In line with its vision, the government of Nepal has launched the Kailash Sacred Landscape Conservation and Development Initiative (KSLCDI) in its four districts i.e. Darchula, Bajhang, Humla, and Baitadi of the Kailash region in 2009. The initiative is a collaborative effort of International Centre for Integrated Mountain Development (ICIMOD), the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) and partners in Nepal, China and India.

Conservation and promotion of Yarsagumba in Nepal is one of the major activities of KSLCDI. The natural availability of Yarsagumba in high mountains and its increasing trend of trade as one of high value commodities have made the people of Kailash region rely on it more for their annual income. In order to manage the species at landscape level and to build it as an element of asset accumulation, it is important to address its sustainable harvesting practices and equitable benefit sharing mechanism with the local people through participatory natural resource management plan (PNRM). In line with the above background information, Department of Plant Resources (DPR) intends to organize a workshop on following four thematic areas long term sustainability of the resource. It is expected that this workshop will open avenue for the sustainability and management of Yarsagumba and will be a great learning experience from the region.

1. Status of conservation, management and sustainable utilization of Yarsagumba in the region
2. Current marketing and trade practices of Yarsagumba
3. Complexities between statutory and customary laws and their solutions (in Nepalese context).
4. Experience sharing on conservation and management practices in India, Bhutan, and China

#### **References:**

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