

## Plant resources in sustaining rural livelihood and food security in Nepal

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Nepal is a landlocked country located between 26°22' to 30°27' north latitude and 80°4' to 88°12' east longitude in South Asia extending over a length of 885 km from east to west and has a non-uniform width of 193 km from north to south. The country has an agrarian economy with about 65% of the population engaged in agriculture and with 21% of land cultivated. It has a total land area of 147,181 km<sup>2</sup> with predominantly mountainous topography and diverse landscape ranging from 64 m above sea level to 8848 m, world's peak, Sagarmatha. The variation in temporal, altitudinal, topographical and aspects has made the country richly endowed with diversity of crops and plants. Hence, Nepal is a safe heaven on earth for many plant and crop species even in the events of disasters of global warming in this planet. The country, being proximal to the original and secondary sources of origin of different cultivated plants, has harbored numerous wild relatives of cultivated agricultural crops like rice, wheat, barley, buckwheat, citrus and other fruits, several vegetable crops, etc. It is estimated that there are 500 edible plant species in Nepal. Among them, 200 species are cultivated and 20 species used as food. People found to have invented and adopted growing, as well collecting from the wild, and consuming several kinds of food items to cope with the problem of food insecurity and other necessities. Crops such as rice, rice bean, egg plant, buckwheat, soybean, foxtail millet, citrus, and mango have high genetic diversity relative to other food crops. Crop species in Nepal owe their variability to the presence of about 120 wild relatives of the commonly cultivated food plants and their proximity to cultivated areas that have been listed 60 food species (fruit, vegetables, legumes) and 54 wild relatives of food plants. People extensively use most of these plant resources both from and wild and from farm fields to fulfill their food and other requirements. Traditional food crops provide many benefits to the farmers practicing different farming systems. These crops are providing food for home consumption, making productive use of marginal land and also provide income to small farmers, entrepreneurs and local market exporter. Not only this, but most of the rural communities especially in hills still rely on these resources for healing the health ailments and a large part of seasonal nutrition come from these plants. At present, use of underutilized plant species has expanded beyond local populations in traditional ways. However, existing diversity is endangered and is getting eroded mainly by the comparative advantage of modern crop varieties to farmers' land races in agriculture and destruction of habitat in wild. This paper throws light on the role of plant resources on food and livelihood security in rural Nepal, and also on some policies adopted by the government aiming at conserving this precious natural wealth.

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