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Arunachal seeks Centre's help to set up local processing units for medicinal plants

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Gireesh Babu, Mumbai

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In an effort to support the medicinal plant cultivators in Arunachal Pradesh, which is under-explored for herbal resources considering its geographical and climatic diversity, the Forest Department under the state government has requested support from the centre to set up local level primary medicinal plant processing centres in various parts of the state.

The state forest department has submitted proposal to set up processing centres through 150 Joint Forest Management (JFM) committees out of the total 6000 committees in the state, as a pilot project, to set up processing centres for the benefit of the medicinal plant cultivators and collectors to complete initial processing functions before transporting the material to a major processing centre, said B S Sajwan, principle chief conservator of Forests, Government of Arunachal Pradesh and former chief executive officer, National Medicinal Plants Board (NMPB).

The Central government has schemes to support Joint Forest Management (JFM) committees to support the tribal communities for value addition in medicinal plant conservation, collection and processing, under which up to Rs 12 lakh will be issued for each JFM committee.

JFM is a joint body of fringe forest user groups or the local communities with the state forest departments for forest protection. The project is designed to manage the resource and share the cost equally between the government and the local communities.

“This part of the country is known for its richness in flora, especially the medicinal plants like Chirata, Manjishtha, Dasamulam and Oroxyllum Indicum, which are regularly used in herbal medicines. Our effort is to develop local primary collection and processing centres through the JFMs, so that the collectors or the cultivators could give a value addition to their products by timely processing,” said Sajwan.

The department is focusing on conservation, collection and processing of medicinal plants from the state, through encouraging cultivators and collectors of medicinal herbs, he added.

The North-Eastern region comprising of Assam, Arunachal Pradesh, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland, Sikkim and Tripura has a large number of medicinal plants and tribals of various ethnic groups with traditional knowledge on specific curative use of many of the plants.

A study conducted by a team of scientists in Department of Biotechnology and the Indian Institute of

Technology, Guwahati, in 2007, showed that the people of the region use at least 65 plants belonging to 38 families to treat malaria. Different plant parts such as the leaf, root, bark and fruit and in some cases the whole plant were used for making the herbal preparations. Of the 65 plants, 21 were found to be used in the form of a decoction. The study also indicated that most of the preparations made for curing malaria were derived from single plant sources.