

A case of Kerong's Rubia

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Introduction:

Rubia which is called *Rubai Cordifolia* in scientific name is a non-woody climber. It is a perennial, prickly or scabrous, climbing herbs belonging to Rubiaceae (Devi Priya M, 2014). Rubia is known for its medical properties. In India, it is called madder and is widely used as a blood detoxifier. Rubia is also known for its coloring properties.



Figure 1: Image of a young Rubia

In Bhutan, Rubia is used mostly in coloring the fabrics and also the wooden floors. Traditionally, it was also used in coloring the eggs to be presented in high profile gatherings. Apart from these, Rubia still is believed to have the martial benefits of curing marks and scratches from the evil spirits.

Rubia is a source of income for Kerongpas; the people of Kerong. Kerong is a village with 57 Households (HHs) under Choekhorling geog of Pemagatshel Dzongkhag.

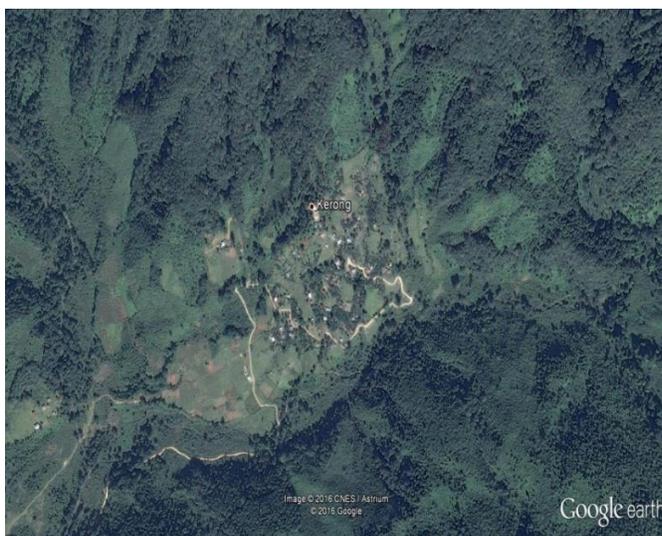


Figure 2: Digital image of Kerong

Kerongpas' have been switching to this source since the decades of years back but in a negligible quantity.

In 2013, 'Kerong Rubia Collection Group' with 38 (---male.... Female) members were formed by the Dungkhag Forestry Unit under the support of MAGIP. Since then, mass collection of Rubia has started.

MAGIP intervention on this group:

MAGIP's intervention to Kerong was particularly on the Rubia. Since the advocacy to form the Rubia Collection Group and group mobilization, MAGIP has provided even the weighing machine each to the members. The membership register, bylaws book and other files were also provided.

In addition, MAGIP has also issued the collectors with sacks and polymer bags so that the collectors can store the collections safely and reduce the wastage during transportation.

Rubia Collection: Time & Formalities

Rubai collection starts from October till the end of November or early December. Each member collects about 200-300 kilogram in one season. In a day, a person can collect about 20 kilos, in average. However, this is influenced by the skills and the physical strengths of an individual.

For the collection area, each community has a certain Acres of boundary allocated upon which one cannot enter beyond. The collection is done only within the allocated area for the community. If a collector from the next community is found crossing the demarcation, cash fine of Nu. 1500/- is imposed as a penalty. But so far, no major misunderstanding has happened among the collectors.

According to the collectors, Rubia Collection is not hazardous in nature. Collectors need not have to be equipped with safety materials gears except the hand gloves as per their preference and comforts. However, the only challenge in the collection is that of the fear from snakes, elephants and other wild inhabitants.

Collection mechanisms:

Rubia falls under NWFP and its collection is done entirely from the wild. Rubia is domestically cultivable but so far no body has done and also nobody has done anything for its regeneration.



Figure 3: Image of Rubia

However, Rubia collectors of Kerong are conscious about the sustainability issues. They are concerned about the future of Rubia and the likely environmental destructions. According to the collectors, this sustainability concerns within the collectors has happened after the sensitization from the Dungkhag's Forestry Sectors

Therefore, the collection is done in such a way that the entire roots is not uprooted or damaged. They cut and take only the matured stems from the inch above the ground surface. In the next collection season, the sprouts developed from the part left un-cut would be matured ready for the harvest.

Since Rubia is a climber plant, collectors folds and make a bunch. In a day, they can collect about 200-300 bunches in average. 300 bunches of wet Rubia when dried weighs about 20 kilogram. It is at home where these bunches are chopped and made into the pieces. These pieces are then sun-dried before selling.

The collectors feel that there is no need of monitoring on sustainable collecting approaches or the intervention from the concerned sectors on sustainable collection measure because each collector is taking the individual responsibility.

Rubia Marketing:



Figure 4: Image of Dried Rubia

Rubia marketing in Kerong is done collectively in the Group. The middle men/traders from the local community gather all the collection and do the pricing. Collectors don't take their products individually to the market.

The price of a kilo of Rubia in 2015 was Nu.45/-. So, collectors could make an average earning of Nu.13, 500/- in a season.

Collectors find that earning from Rubia collection is reasonable. This is because they don't have any input for the Rubia's growth yet they can harvest.

In addition, Rubia collection doesn't incur heavy labor requirement and excessive work load. Similarly, collectors needn't have to worry about the market and the transportation charges. The traders collect right from their door steps.

Opportunities ahead:

For now, only the stem is used and marketed. But the leaves remain as residue. However, it is the leaf that has more coloring properties. According to the collectors, the leaves are very light and thus hard to get enough quantity.

Here, the opportunity foreseen is powdering the leaves and setting the different price tag to it instead of dumping it as residue. The other opportunity foreseen is that of the value addition. Instead of selling Rubia as raw stuff, the collectors can explore the possibilities of grinding and powdering.