

An evaluation of the properties of medicinal plants in the Alawwa Forest

Fareena Ruzaik -Lecturer

Department of Geography, University of Colombo

fareena@geo.cmb.ac.lk

Abstract

Components of medicinal plants have been used in traditional folk medicine to treat various human ailments. The different components of the plants such as leaves, barks, roots, seeds, fruits, flowers, gum and stem are used by the inhabitants to fulfill their medicinal needs. In this context, the Alawwa Forest is fairly dense with indigenous and exotic species together with varieties of medicinal plants. Therefore the Alawwa Forest has been selected as the study area under study.

The prime objective of this study is to quantify the properties of existing medicinal plants and provide suggestions to manage the forest through stakeholders' participation. In this regard, data has been collected through a field survey and discussions with dedicated medical personnel (*Vethamahaththayas*). The stratified random sampling technique was used to collect the field information.

It was identified that the different components of the plants species were largely used by surrounding inhabitants for their medicinal needs. 52 varieties of medicinal plants have been identified in the study and they were analyzed according to their components. Thus, the usage of plant properties, such as leaves (25.6%), barks (21.2%), roots (15.6%), seeds (12.2%) and fruits (11.1%) were frequently used for the treatment of different ailments. The remaining 14.38% includes flowers, gum and stem which were used by the inhabitants.

The results revealed that approximately 30% of the people are aware about the uses of medicinal plants. The majority of the people utilize the forest for different purposes carelessly due to the lack of education and awareness about medicinal plants. Many medicinal plant species have become extinct /endangered as a result of human interventions. It is therefore necessary to consolidate stakeholders' involvement to enrich plant diversity.

Key words: Component, Indigenous, Medicinal plants, Stakeholders and Diversity