

Introduction

India is one of the richest countries in the world in terms of biodiversity, and has 15 agro-climatic zones. Out of the about 17000-18000 species of flowering plants, more than 7000 are estimated to have medicinal usage in folk and documented systems of medicine like **Ayurveda, Unani, Siddha & Homoeopathy (AYUSH System of Medicine)**.

Medicinal plants are not only a major resource base for the traditional medicine & herbal industry but also provide livelihood and health security to a large segment of Indian population. About 1178 species of medicinal plants are estimated to be in trade of which 242 species have annual consumption levels in excess of 100 metric tons/year. The domestic demand of medicinal plants has been estimated 1,95,000 MT for the year of 2014-2015 and export demand of medicinal plants has been estimated 1,34,500 MT during 2014-2015. Total consumption of herbal raw drug in the country for the year 2014-15 has been estimated at 5,12,000 MT with corresponding trade value of ₹ 5,500 Crore. A major increase has been recorded in export value which has increased from ₹ 345.80 Crore in 2005-06 to ₹ 3211 Crore in 2014-15, registering a nine fold increase in during last decade.

In order to encourage **good agricultural and field collection practices** in medicinal plants (**GAP and GFCP**) and enhance quality and safety of these plants, the **National Medicinal Plants Board (NMPB)**, in collaboration with the **Quality Council of India (QCI)**, has launched a **Voluntary Certification Scheme for Medicinal Plant Produce (VCSMPP)**. QCI will manage the day to day operation of the Scheme.

Based on international best practices, the Scheme is driven by a **multi-stakeholder Steering Committee** at the helm and has based its certification criteria on the **WHO Guidelines for good agricultural and field collection practices**. The system of certification is based on guidelines provided in the international standard, ISO 17067, which guides development of product certification schemes worldwide and the certification bodies approved under the Scheme would eventually be accredited as per international standard, ISO 17065, by the **National Accreditation Board for Certification Bodies (NABCB)**, a constituent Board of QCI. Since NABCB has achieved **international equivalence** for its accreditation programme for product certification bodies by signing the **multilateral mutual recognition arrangement** of the **International Accreditation Forum (IAF)**, which is increasingly forming the basis of free flow of goods among countries through bilateral or regional free trade agreements, it is expected to facilitate exports of India medicinal plants in the world market.

It is expected that the Scheme would benefit not only the cultivators or collector of herbs but also the AYUSH industry with supply of assured quality raw material, traders and other users of herbs, and ultimately the consumers of herbal based products