Social Impact Projects: A Hand Up

Nepal's 2015 earthquakes had devastating effects on Nepal: nearly 9,000 people were killed and over 12,000 schools and 1,200 health facilities were damaged or destroyed. Families in affected areas lost everything and years later, many are still working to rebuild their lives. The dōTERRA Healing Hands Foundation has contributed to relief, longer-term reconstruction efforts, and community-benefiting projects in multiple communities throughout Nepal. In partnership with the nonprofit organization CHOICE Humanitarian, as well as local governments and communities, the dōTERRA Healing Hands Foundation has supported numerous projects in Wintergreen and Spikenard oil-producing communities, including:

- Construction of Sanskriti Sadan Secondary School in Archaleni, Lamjung (500 students)
- Construction of Sharada Secondary School in Dhamilikuwa, Lamjung (700 students)
- Construction of Gokul Ganga Higher Secondary School in Rasnalu, Ramechhap (700 students)
- Rebuilding more than 50 earthquake-damaged homes.
- Expansion of the Primary Hospital in Palung, Makwanpur (serving over 100,000 people), as well as equipment for a heated baby birthing center.
- Construction of a new hospital in Rasnalu, Ramechhap to serve approximately 21,000 people in the region.
- Reconstruction of the Agara Health Post benefiting 9,000 habitants.
- Construction of the Veterinary and Agricultural Lab facility as part of the Janakalyan Secondary School in Makwanpur. This two-room lab benefits over 1,245 students and farmers from the community. Students learn new agricultural techniques and distillation methods, while local farmers can visit to test soil quality and plants for disease.
- Water supply system providing potable water for 325 families and schools in one of the country’s poorest communities in Thaha Municipality, Makwanpur District.

In partnership with the nonprofit organization Days for Girls, the dōTERRA Healing Hands Foundation has funded the distribution of more than 30,000 feminine hygiene kits and critically important education to adolescent girls throughout Nepal.
Nepal’s Unique Landscape
Nepal is a geographically, culturally, and linguistically unique country. Because of its location directly on the collision zone of two tectonic plates, Nepal is home to many of the Himalayan Mountains, including Mt. Everest and 8 of the 10 tallest peaks in the world. With mountains in the north, hills and lakes in the center, and dense forests in the south, Nepal’s landscape reflects the cultural variety of its 30 million inhabitants.

About 70% of the Nepali population works in agriculture, using terracing in the hilly regions to improve livelihoods to various communities across the country, and 30 million inhabitants.

Harvesting and Oil Sourcing
Wintergreen
Wintergreen grows in the foothills of the Himalaya, making Nepal and China the sole regions of the world with endemic, wild harvested Wintergreen. The Wintergreen plant, which grows between 300 and 300 cm tall, prefers a cool climate in heavily forested areas.

The forests where Wintergreen grows naturally are managed by Community Forest User’s Group (CFUGs) who oversee managed Wintergreen collection to present over harvesting. Harvesters and distillers work with the CFUGs to follow their management plans, which allow wild harvesters to collect the Wintergreen leaves in specific areas that rotate each year.

To harvest Wintergreen, harvesters must travel through steep, muddy mountain sides, collecting leaves from the shrub. After the raw material is hand-collected, harvesters bring the leaves in large baskets carried on their backs to the distillation unit where the owner of the distillation unit will weigh the leaves, pay the harvester, and run the distillation. The distillation process lasts at least 14 hours, and prior to distillation the leaves typically soak in warm water overnight, which helps to ensure release of the essential oil. Unlike most essential oils that float on water, Wintergreen oil has a higher density than water, so it sinks before it is separated.

Most Wintergreen harvesters are women who harvest the leaves during the early mornings before they start their daily household tasks. Often, the money they earn from the sale of the leaves supplements essential household costs, such as sending children to school or buying food.

Spikenard
Spikenard grows at higher elevations than Wintergreen, in the sub-alpine and alpine regions of the Himalaya, between 3,000 and 5,000 meters (9,800 to 16,400 ft). Spikenard, or Nardostachys Jatamansi, is a flowering plant of the Valerian family that grows in the Himalaya of Nepal, China, and India. The plant grows to about 1 meter (3 ft) in height and has pink, bell-shaped flowers. As an endangered plant, Spikenard is subject to CITES regulations, which limit the amount and frequency of harvesting.

As such, all Spikenard oil sourced by doTERRA is CITES-compliant to help ensure that this plant can continue to be protected for generations to come. The dark green Spikenard oil is distilled from sustainably harvested roots gathered from community forests in Nepal. Harvesters must climb, sometimes for days, through steep mountain sides to reach the open rocky places where Spikenard grow, to hand-collect roots from the plant. Because the harvest time for Spikenard is a very short window of time, the harvesters generally set up a base camp in the mountains from which to work. Working on exposed mountain sides, harvesters are unprotected from harsh weather conditions as they dig up the plants, clean off the dirt, and repel a small percentage of the root so that the Spikenard can continue to grow.

After about 15 to 20 days, harvesters carefully climb down the mountain, carrying the roots in large baskets or on their backs. High elevations, steep and uneven terrain, unpredictable weather, including heavy rains that wash out the hikes, contribute to the precarious journey. Once home, harvesters dry the roots for several days before they sell it by weight to the owner of the distillation unit. The oil is then extracted through steam distillation.

Co-Impact Sourcing Initiatives
Together with our Co-Impact Sourcing partners in Nepal, doTERRA has also been very active in facilitating supply chain improvement and sustainability programs for Spikenard and Wintergreen, including:

- Development of Good Collection Practices (GCP) and Good Manufacturing Practices (GMP) Manuals;
- Development and facilitation of sustainable harvesting training seminars for Spikenard harvesters, Wintergreen harvesters, and Community Forest User Groups;
- Training seminars for Spikenard essential oil producing enterprises on GMP to improve oil yields and product quality;
- Development of nurse training and monitoring plans to test Spikenard and Wintergreen cultivation; and
- Designing model solar drying facilities in Spikenard collection-clusters.

These supply chain improvement initiatives help to ensure that harvesters and distillers make a fair wage and optimize oil yields to make best use of these important natural resources.

References:

Wintergreen distillation, Dolakha District

Annapurna Mountain Range, South Nepal

Cō-Impact Sourcing Initiatives
- Development and facilitation of sustainable harvesting training seminars for Spikenard and Wintergreen; and
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