

## Making wastelands productive with *Saccharum* cultivation in District Karak

Amjad Ali<sup>1</sup>

District Karak, situated in the southern part of NWFP, has dry tropical climatic conditions. The area comprising sandy desert in the south (adjacent to District Lakki) is considered suitable for the cultivation of *Kana*. The *Saccharum munja*, a local variety of *Kana*, is a prominent feature of the landscape. However, the utility of this specie is limited due to fewer and shorter shoots. It is therefore commonly used in combination with Mazri leaves, which have much stronger fiber. The same is also used as fuel and for making roofing material.

In year 2004, the project team learnt that wild cane (wild *Kana*) is widely cultivated by farmers in District Lakki for producing longer and stronger canes as oppose to shorter and weaker canes of local *Kana*. The farmers, mostly women, used these canes for making a number of products, which fetched them good income. The species was recognized as *Saccharum spontaneum*. It has been cultivated in the dry tropical tracts of Lakki and adjacent districts as a commercial enterprise since long. Wild *Kana* raw materials including stalks and leaves were used for making various products like cane / straw curtains (Chikks), roofing material, furniture and other decorative products.

The presence of local *Kana* in Karak and the climatic conditions revealed that the area is suitable for cultivation of Wild *Kana*, which has better economic value. The project assessed technical feasibility and social acceptability of cultivating Wild *Kana* in Karak. The Farm Forestry Support Project promoted Wild *Kana* in district Karak with an objective to enhance the productivity from sandy deserts and contribute to the income of poor farmers, mostly women who were already engaged in this activity. The project has involved local NGOs (Khwendo Kor and YARAAN) and CBOs in the project activities in the district. FFSP facilitated the partner organizations' and



selected farmers' exposure visit to the District Lakki Marwat for observing wild *Kana* growing practices and its utilization in value added products. The exposure visits to various sites in Lakki Marwat helped farmers understand



<sup>1</sup>Regional Coordinator, Farm Forestry Support Project

the financial potential of kana cultivation. They saw local farmers engaging in planting of wild *Kana* on wastelands and around the fields. They also learnt about the planting techniques and visited places where they were making various value added products. The farmers decided to initiate the *Kana* cultivation in their area on pilot basis.

The initial results were highly encouraging. Both the partner organizations started experimenting with wild *Kana*. The encouraging factor was the 80% survival rate in all plots. This provided a great impetus for local farmers to benefit from this opportunity. These plots also served as demonstration for the neighboring farmers besides being a source of suckers at local level for further replications. The economic comparison of the two species provides justification for this venture:



Species	Cost/acre (Rs)		Income/acre (Rs)	
	Rs.	Details	Rs.	Details
<i>S. Spontaneum</i> (Wild <i>Kana</i> )	2,100**	350 suckers required per acre, costing Rs. 6 each with transportation*	15,376***	Production: 248 bundles of stalks per acre, each fetching Rs.62 in local market
<i>S. Munja</i> (Local <i>Kana</i> )	0	Suckers available free of cost locally.	4,500	This includes a variable number of bundles with different sizes, costing from Rs. 5 to Rs. 20

\* This does not include labour costs, usually provided by farmers themselves in both cases.

\*\* This is only an investment in the first year. Suckers will be available from the crop locally in subsequent years.

\*\*\* This does not include the extra income obtained from sale of leaves.

Since the technical feasibility of wild *Kana* is proven in Karak, a large-scale production on vast tracts of sandy desert can be encouraged. The project intends to utilize the services of Master Trainers from District Lakki to train local wild *Kana* growers in manufacturing value added products. The project is extending support in strengthening market linkages (local and national) for promoting wild *Kana* as a viable cottage enterprise for local women in the district.