

ARTEMISIA NEWSLETTER 2

7 July 2004

The following developments have taken place since our last Newsletter.

1) WHO WILL TAKE THE PLUNGE?

WHO (World Health Organisation) is backing up its recent endorsement of artemisia with some \$540 billion via the Global Fund. This handsome sum seems destined however to go to the pharmaceutical corporations, to enable them to bring down the prices of their ACTs (Artemisinin Combination Therapies), and will thus unusually be subsidising the rich to help the poor. The aim of this praiseworthy effort is to bring the price of a dose down below a dollar. However, millions of people throughout the tropics cannot afford even that, so the main malaria problem will not be solved. Artemisia leaf could provide a more complete cure for less than a quarter of that price. Our anamed friends Keith and Martin have already written to the WHO to this effect, suggesting that some funding could be found to promote the cultivation of artemisia and its use in tea form. They point out that very large numbers of lives could thus be saved at a cost lower than that of the cheapest (and no longer effective) antimalarial drug chloroquine.

2) NEW PROJECTS IN JAVA.

Ruslan Morris, a Subud entrepreneur who builds hotels and time-share apartments in Indonesia, has proposed 3 projects – in West, Central and East Java. He will focus first on the West Java one at Lembang, where he has recruited Pak Prasono, an experienced ethnobotanist Ph.D, to oversee the technical aspects of cultivation. The Lembang site is at a cool altitude where there are tracts of now unused Government land where conifers had once been grown. Ruslan is approaching the officials to see if this land could be used for really large plantations of Artemisia (if found suitable for its growth). This would mark a sea-change from our original concept of having local people everywhere grow their own village plots of the herb. We are finding in fact that artemisia will not easily grow everywhere; Rungan Sari is a case in point. For optimum cultivation, artemisia needs cool conditions, shade and moisture – hard to find in many tropical locations.

Ruslan's viewpoint is that it could be grown on a large scale at a suitable altitude, and then distributed around an extensive area. This would obviously entail more organisation for labour, machinery, storage, transportation and so on, so it would be a product to be sold at a price to cover all this. Further, we might package it for ease of transport and end-use, in tea-bags or sachets. The operation might in fact become a social enterprise where a reasonable profit would accrue to all concerned, with the community still getting the cure at a really low price relative to those of the pharmaceutical industry. It is reported that Kenyatta University in Kenya is about to purchase a sachet machine for SH600,000 (probably about \$3,000); costs like these would have to be factored in.

3) DEVELOPMENTS ELSEWHERE.

The Portuguese Ambassador to Indonesia is intending to introduce Artemisia into the ex-Portuguese islands like Flores (remember, East Timor already has Imron's

project). A pack of 1,200 seeds and full instruction kit have been sent to him via Wayne Lerrigo.

Interest has been shown by members in the USA for prospective projects in South America and Cuba, but nothing definite has yet emerged.

At the Future Skills and Sustainable Development Conference in Bradford a talk was given by Dr. Matthew Jack, resulting in strong interest from participants from Sudan and other countries. The Chinese Ambassador to Australia was intrigued by our venture, though we pointed out that the original development had taken place in her country 2,000 years ago! (It was noted that over those millennia no signs of malarial resistance to the herb had been observed).

The Democratic Republic of the Congo still hosts our most advanced project. The leaf preparation is now being used successfully to cure malaria patients in the Susila Dharma clinics there.

4) THE WAY AHEAD.

The advantages of large-scale artemisia cultivation are becoming obvious.

Strategically-placed plantations in cool, moist areas where shade can be provided could act as distribution points for accessible areas in many countries. This would be particularly apt where most of the population lives in hot, dry, low-lying parts, as is found in Indonesia for instance, and in towns where people might not have land available. The setting-up of micro-propagation facilities in a smaller number of sites could make large numbers of seedlings available readily, though this might not prove necessary in areas where the seeds could be easily grown. Production of a saleable, packaged article could also lead to employment and improved livelihoods for local people.

Our original aim of having village plots would still apply in all the many places where artemisia could be grown without too much difficulty. Even in the unfavourable conditions at Rungan Sari, the new crop of seedlings was growing healthily (and shadily) when I visited recently.

Care must be taken to keep the profit margin on the low side, for two reasons:

- a) to reach the millions of poor people who could not afford even the heavily subsidised ACT prices, and
- b) to ensure we do not breach the terms of the Swiss seed suppliers' agreement with anamed as the sole non-profit organisation licenced to use the A-3 hybrid.

What profits are made should go to the local people, to anamed to fund their research and seminars, and to the other participating organisations to cover their costs plus some small motivational gain.

All of these points need much discussion between all concerned, via email and (where possible) meetings. Your comments are needed!

Sachlan

Susila Dharma Britain and Kalimantan Support Group