



**PROTA**

**P**lant Resources of Tropical Africa

**R**essources végétales de l'Afrique tropicale

BRIEF REPORT

**Second PROTA / CTA International Workshop and Investors' Forum,  
24-25 September 2007, Nairobi, Kenya**

***'AFRICAN PLANT DIVERSITY: USE IT AND DO NOT LOSE IT !'***

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## 1. Problem statement

Dependence of rural communities in sub-Saharan Africa (about 44% of the population) on plants for their livelihood and well-being is immediate. In tropical Africa about 7,000 plant species provide a variety of foods, fibres, medicines, building materials, fuel, etc., for personal use and for sale in local, national, regional or international markets.

Information on these plant resources is stored in an overwhelming amount of international and local literature, which has been accumulating at an exponential rate, especially over the last decennia.

For the user in tropical Africa, the information has become inaccessible, partly because of its sheer volume, partly because it is scattered over several continents, several languages and numerous types of publications.

Due to a lack of awareness, the plant resources are generally under-utilized.

## 2. PROTA objectives

The PROTA programme aims to condense the existing wealth of information to manageable proportions (4,000 review articles grouped into 16 commodity groups) and to make this **knowledge synthesis** readily and freely available by means of webdatabases, a multi-volume handbook, and a series of CD-Roms. The distribution is done in close cooperation with the EU/ACP Technical Centre for Agricultural and Rural Cooperation (CTA).

Through **stakeholder consultations** per commodity group, recommendations are subsequently formulated on promising species and technologies, development opportunities, research gaps, thesis subjects, conservation needs and policy measures aimed at industry, extension and rural development, education, research, and government.

The PROTA **pilot projects** capitalize on specific chances for impact on people who depend on those plants. In partnership with grassroots organizations, promising species or technologies are tried out in local communities in an effort to improve livelihoods.

## 3. Objectives of the Workshop & Investors' Forum

The Workshop was a forum for workers in extension and rural development, industry, vocational training, higher education, research and government, and for investors/donors to interact in order to:

- seize opportunities for application of PROTA's information in extension work, education and training, research, industry and government policies.
- demonstrate the usefulness of PROTA's information in assisting above-mentioned target groups to improve the livelihoods of rural communities.
- help in setting priorities for the Second Implementation Phase 2008-2012 and 'pledging' support for the programme.

A PROTA Board meeting was scheduled immediately after the workshop in order to transform recommendations in firm decisions without delay.

## 4. Overview

### 4.1 Opening and keynote addresses by NEPAD and FARA

The 120 Workshop participants were welcomed by the host, Dr. Dennis Garrity, Director General of the World Agroforestry Centre (ICRAF), who underlined the common elements in the mandates of ICRAF and PROTA regarding the sustainable utilization of African plant resources.

The Chair of the PROTA Board of Trustees, Prof. Martin Kropff gave an overview of the PROTA output during the First Implementation Phase and officially launched PROTA 14: Vegetable oils, fresh from the press.

He stated that *“..... Africa first of all needs to accomplish its own brand of ‘green revolution’ to ban hunger and malnutrition and reach food security. Then there is a general feeling that Africa might find a niche in high-value and specialty crops in the bio-based economy. A green revolution programme focusing on a small number of major food crops carries the danger of marginalization of other useful biodiversity, and it is exactly in this category that Africa’s specialty plants might be identified. PROTA’s work will help in mitigating the negative side-effects of a ‘green revolution’ programme...”*

In his keynote address, Dr. Sloans Chimatiro (NEPAD Secretariat) noted *“..... that the need to improve access to multi-sectoral data on the plant resources is critical if agricultural scientists in Africa are going to develop sustainable ecosystem management plans that will enhance rural and agricultural development. NEPAD is delighted with the work PROTA is doing and fully endorses this initiative because it has the potential to add value to the ongoing continental and regional programmes by enhancing the role of science, technology and innovations in agricultural productivity...”*

*“.... As PROTA is moving into the Second Implementation Phase, NEPAD is calling on PROTA to undertake the following:*

- *harmonize its strategies in line with sub-regional and country level initiatives using the CAADP (Comprehensive Africa Agriculture Development Programme) and FARA (Forum on Agricultural Research in Africa) frameworks.*
- *using the current PROTA data base as a benchmark for guiding African scientists into information gaps and areas which require more scientific research to generate new knowledge.*
- *pay particular attention to scientific capacity gaps and facilitate capacity strengthening of sub-regional and national institutions to assist the continent to accelerate implementation of CAADP.*

Dr. Kyetere, Chair of FARA, confirmed that PROTA’s elaborate information on traditional as well as modern food crops makes an important contribution to fighting hunger and arriving at food security, but commended PROTA also for planning other commodity groups with largely untapped economic potential such as the Ornamental plants (PROTA 4).

## 4.2 PROTA in the global and African setting

On the first day, PROTA's work was put in the global perspective of the CBD (Convention on Biological Diversity), GSPC (Global Strategy for Plant Conservation) and the MDGs (Millennium Development Goals).

Information management and utilization are major challenges facing agricultural research today. The EU/ACP Technical Centre for Agricultural and Rural Cooperation (CTA), also co-organizer of the event, explained its role and its close linkage with PROTA.

## 4.3 Commodity groups

PROTA's three-step approach in bridging the gap between scientific information and end-user impact, developed during the First Implementation Phase 2003-2007, was highlighted and demonstrated for 3 commodity groups: Vegetables (PROTA 2), Dyes and tannins (PROTA 3) and Cereals and pulses (PROTA 1).

Progress in 3 other commodity groups was reviewed: Medicinal plants (PROTA 11), Timbers (PROTA 7, supported by ITTO – International Tropical Timber Organization) and Fruits (PROTA 6, adopted by GlobalHort – Global Horticultural Initiative).

A special session was devoted to the overview of African vegetable oils (PROTA 14) and their role and potential as edible oils (such as the domestication of *Allanblackia*) and as feedstock for biodiesel (such as *Jatropha*).

## 4.4 Cases and posters

On the second day, the floor was to the users of PROTA information (10 oral and about 40 poster presentations) highlighting cases of impact. Some examples:

- PROTA information on *Gnetum africanum* led the Office of the Special Assistant for Food Security to the Governor of Akwa Ibom State in Nigeria to prepare an extension guide on this wild, overexploited leafy vegetable aimed at sustainable use and domestication.
- PROTA's database of 'grey' literature in Ghana revealed that 95% of student thesis research is taking place on a handful of subjects and a handful of crops; the universities use the data to avoid duplication, for diversification of thesis subjects and more efficient use of scarce resources.
- The Botswana College of Agriculture made a case of the importance of PROTA information in its curriculum; this is also evidenced by the fact that Botswana is one of the top users of the PROTA webdatabase.

- The successful demonstration of 3 poorly known indigenous leafy vegetables in PROTA pilot projects in Kenya, within the context of the Farmer Field School and Self Help Group programme.
- PhytoTrade, the Southern African Natural Products Association, focuses on developing a sustainable and ethical natural products industry; it handles many enquiries on plant species for which PROTA is the number one reference material.
- The AAMPS (Association of African Medicinal Plant Standards) is developing trading standards for African medicinal plants, thus making a first step in the development of an African Herbal Pharmacopoeia; AAMPS greatly values PROTA's overview of local information.
- The Associazione Mondo Giusto is implementing a PROTA pilot project with the objective to help a local community of silk weavers in two villages in Madagascar to set up a sustainable supply of natural dyes and tannins derived from the local dye plants *Danais ligustrifolia*, *Labourdonnaisia madagascariensis* and *Indigofera arrecta*.
- International Commodity Platforms, bringing together various public and private players in the supply-chain, are to use PROTA information as a promising tool for the identification of new crops and products for sustainable agricultural and commercial development.

#### 4.5 Way forward

The 'Way forward' session started with the presentation of an External Review Report (*Dr. Dindo Campilan & Dr. Reinout de Hoogh, June 2006*) on the achievements of the First Implementation Phase 2003-2007:

*"... PROTA successfully achieved the major target outputs in knowledge synthesis corresponding to the available funding. Also, the 2003-2007 experiences provided convincing evidence that PROTA's unique three-step approach of knowledge synthesis, dissemination and utilization is a viable formula to contribute to poverty alleviation at grassroots level. PROTA is on its way to become a full-fledged information brokerage programme. It can be expected to yield valuable lessons and insights to potentially improve its own performance, as well as to guide similar future programme initiatives. In order to realize the targeted development outcomes of poverty alleviation on a wider scale, a longer timeframe and additional resources are required and justified. PROTA deserves further support to complete its unique mission."*

The External Review made 7 specific recommendations for the Second Implementation Phase 2008-2012.

PROTA's Co-Chair, Dr. Zacharia Magombo, then presented proposals for 'The Way forward in 2008-2012', addressing the major recommendations of the External Review.

The excitement in Africa about PROTA is such that there is call for greater African ownership and wider participation. A 'roadmap' is being drawn for careful alignment of PROTA with ongoing activities under the African agenda, and for broadening the African PROTA consortium.

The many aspects of PROTA offers a large array of investment opportunities, whether in:

- knowledge synthesis (core products),
- stakeholder consultations (special products),
- end-user impact (pilot projects),
- adoption of specific commodity groups (concept notes available),
- the French version of the information system,
- further development of the Target Group Address system,
- sponsored distribution of PROTA output to specific African target groups (in addition to the CTA-sponsored distribution),
- African capacity building in knowledge synthesis or in rural development dynamics,
- international commodity platforms,
- structural involvement of South Africa in PROTA,
- a good monitoring and evaluation framework.

#### 5. Investors' Forum (pledges for 2008-2012)

PROTA's Project Document for the Second Implementation Phase 2008-2012 foresees the completion of 8 commodity groups, i.e. the knowledge synthesis on 3,500 useful plants (2,000 review articles), 6 stakeholder consultations following the completion of the respective commodity groups, and 30 pilot projects for end-user impact. The total budget for the 5-year period amounts to €11.4 million.

The Investors' Forum led to firm pledges amounting to € 4.7 million:

- € 2.5 million from the 9 cooperating institutions (staff services under new Agreements of Cooperation 2008-2012 between the PROTA Foundation and FORIG in Ghana, CNSF in Burkina Faso, CENAREST in Gabon, NHBG in Malawi, PBZT in Madagascar, Makerere University in Uganda, Agropolis in France, Royal Botanic Gardens Kew in UK, and Wageningen UR in the Netherlands).
- € 1.7 million from Netherlands Government sources (Ministry of Agriculture, Nature and Food 2008-2012; Directorate General for Development Cooperation 2008; Organization for Scientific Research 2008-2011).
- € 0.5 million from international sources (International Tropical Timber Organization 2008; AU/ACP Technical Centre for Agricultural and Rural Cooperation 2008-2012 in the form of sponsored distribution of PROTA output).

## 6. Conclusion

The International Workshop showed that there is much excitement about PROTA's contribution to the use and conservation of the great heritage of African useful plants. PROTA is urged to align closely to the African agenda set out by the African Union (AU), the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD), the Forum for Agricultural Research in Africa (FARA) and sub-regional and national organizations and develop into an Africa-based organization to ensure sustainability.

A financial basis for the Second Implementation Phase 2008-2012 has been realized but it is far from sufficient for the realization of PROTA's ambitions.

A second chance to realize such a comprehensive overview of Africa's useful plants will not easily come by. A highly experienced team of experts and an extensive network of institutions, scientists and stakeholders is required. PROTA has gained this experience, first through the PROSEA programme 1987-2002 in South-East Asia, and subsequently over the past five years in Africa.

**MAY WE SOLICIT YOUR SUPPORT !**

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