

**Ethnobotany, biodiversity and malaria in Nakai-Nam Theun NBCA, Laos: Three Ph.D. projects in a Sida-SAREC funded collaboration between the National University of Laos and Uppsala University, Sweden. (Poster)**

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**Introduction**

Starting January 2006 the Department of Biology, National University of Laos and the Department of Systematic Botany have started a collaboration funded to Sida-SAREC to train three Ph.D. students at Uppsala University. The projects evolve around ethnobotany, biodiversity studies, and malaria prevention in the inaccessible Nakai-Nam Theun National Biodiversity Conservation Area in the Annamite mountains bordering on Vietnam. The Nakai-Nam Theun NBCA was chosen for fieldwork, because the 2001 review of the Laos protected area system pointed out that the Nakai-Nam Theun National Biodiversity Conservation Area has the highest need for development, harbors the richest biodiversity, and would be the most effective area for improvement.

**Objectives**

The objectives are to study: 1a) The taxonomy of *Amomum* (Zingiberaceae) for the Flora of Cambodia, Laos, and Vietnam; 1b) The feasibility of micropropagation of *Amomum* to create a cash-crop alternative to wild crafting; 2a) The biodiversity of ethnobotanically used plants in the area; 2b) The spread of ethnobotanical knowledge between ethnic groups and mountain valleys; 3a) The incidence of malaria, and the traditional knowledge about natural mosquito repellents; 3b) The effectiveness of impregnating mosquito nets with natural or chemical repellants.

**Methods**

Study objectives 1a and 2a require extensive collection of herbarium vouchers. Objective 1b will be studied using micropropagation techniques through Khon Kaen University, Thailand. Objectives 2a and 3a will be studied using semi-structured interviews and forest walks. 3a will be done with the help of doctors from the Faculty of Medicine, NUOL, and 2b and 3b will be analyzed using various statistical methods.

**Results**

During the first three months of this project a preliminary study of the genus *Amomum* has been finished, and a few hundred herbarium vouchers have been collected in the NBCA, of which at least one is a new species to science.

**Conclusion**

This collaboration will hopefully initiate a lasting and ongoing tradition of ethnobotanical research in Laos. It will result in a better understanding of the value of plants in the livelihoods of the peoples in the Nakai-Nam Theun NBCA, and will hopefully improve their situation through knowledge on efficacy of traditionally used plants, introduction of clonal *Amomum* varieties, and introducing mosquito nets and a sustainable impregnation system based on naturally available plants. In addition it will result in the training of three Ph.Ds., a number of scientific publications, and probably a lot more.

**Keywords:** Ethnic minorities, South East Asia, Medical Entomology, Biodiversity Studies

**Selected References**

None

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