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Traditional Knowledge of Orang Asli Documentation Efforts: Towards Commercialization of Some Selected Potential Medicinal Plants Species in Peninsular Malaysia

Intan Nurulhani, B., Madihah, M.N., Badariah, M., Norini, H., Lim, H.F., Nik Musaadah, M.,
Tan, A.L., Fadzureena, J.

Forest Research Institute Malaysia (FRIM)
Kepong, 52109 Selangor, Malaysia
Email: intannurulhani@frim.gov.my

In Collaboration with;

Semelai TK Committee, Pos Iskandar, Tasek Bera, Pahang; Jahai & Temiar TK Committee, RPS Banun, Gerik, Perak; Jahut TK Committee, Kg Paya Mendoi & Kg Seboi, Kuala Krau, Pahang; Jakun TK Committee, Kg Bangkong, Pekan, Pahang; Semai sub ethnic, Kg Ulu Geroh, Gopeng, Perak; Temuan sub ethnic, Kg Pulau Kempas & Bukit Cheeding, Kuala Langat, Selangor; Semoq Beri sub ethnic, Kg Sungai Berua, Kuala Berang, Terengganu; Orang Kanaq sub ethnic, Kg Sungai Selangi, Kota Tinggi, Johor; Che Wong sub ethnic, Kg Sg Enggang, Lanchang, Pahang; Bateq sub ethnic, Kg Aring 5 & Mendriq sub ethnic, Kg Kuala Lah, Gua Musang, Kelantan; Lanoh sub ethnic, Kg Air Bah, Lawin, Perak; Kintak sub ethnic, Kg Bukit Asu, Pengkalan Hulu, Perak; Kensiu sub ethnic, Kg Lubok Legong, Baling, Kedah; Jahai sub ethnic, Kg Sg. Rual, Jeli, Kelantan; Temiar sub ethnic, Pos Tuel, Lojing, Kelantan; Semelai sub ethnic, Kg Sg. Lui, Jempol, Negeri Sembilan; Mah Meri sub ethnic, Kg Bukit Bangkong, Sepang, Selangor; Orang Kuala sub ethnic, Kg Sri Pantai, Batu Pahat & Orang Seletar sub ethnic, Kg Simpang Arang, Gelang Patah, Johor.

Abstract

As a party to Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), Malaysian government through Forest Research Institute Malaysia (FRIM) has implemented a national project on documentation of medicinal plants used by Indigenous People (Orang Asli) in Peninsular Malaysia since 2007. To date, FRIM has scientifically documented medicinal plants based on traditional knowledge (TK) of all 18 Orang Asli sub-ethnic groups. In each study area, the documentation process involved namely; i) rapid rural appraisal, ii) awareness workshop, and iii) socioeconomic survey. iv) Based on the survey findings, two phases of training workshops on preparing herbarium specimens scientifically were conducted. These lead to plants identification and the development of database on medicinal plants used by Orang Asli in Peninsular Malaysia. In the process of documenting their TK, Prior Informed Consent (PIC) is crucial to ensure full collaboration from the Orang Asli sub-ethnics and success of the project. Selected medicinal plants species collected during the workshop were subject to further lab analyses to reaffirm the traditional uses and also to examine whether there is any other new biopotential value (such as anti-cancer). To date, 91 medicinal plants species were selected for chemical and biological screening in FRIM. A total of 33 species were discovered to have more than three (3) bioactivities which may include anti-microbe, anti-oxidant, anti-inflammatory, anti-diabetic and anti-cancer. Based on lab analyses, prototype products were developed from selected species – a way forward to commercialization. To assess the commercialization potential of the selected species, availability of their resources also need to be surveyed. Subsequently, this leads to an inventory of these 33 potential plants in its natural state. With assistance of local Orang Asli, the inventory is to identify the distribution of these medicinal plants in the nearby forest. Efforts were also geared towards collection of germplasm for plant propagation and tissue culture activities.

Keywords: Traditional knowledge, medicinal plants, documentation, inventory