



PRESS RELEASE

PhytoTrade links with the PROTA programme

PhytoTrade recently established links with PROTA (Plant Resources of Tropical Africa), a programme co-ordinated by the University of Wageningen. The PROTA-UK office is hosted by the Royal Botanic Gardens at Kew in the UK. With the first volume in a 16-part PROTA handbook series about to be released, the connection was well timed.

Through its institutional networks in Europe and Africa, PROTA is working hard to establish a major reference point documenting tropical Africa's useful plants. Africa boasts one of the largest floras of the world's continents; in tropical Africa, over 7 000 plant species are used by people. Because so many livelihoods depend on plants, careful management is crucial to safeguard them for future generations. PROTA's broad vision for rural development, through informed resource management and biodiversity conservation, coincides in some ways with PhytoTrade's objective to uplift rural livelihoods through sustainable use of natural resources.

Information products for the future

PROTA information products are designed to be readily accessible to the people who manage plant resources and help plant users in Africa. They include workers in sectors like rural development, policy making, education and academic research, and international associations such as PhytoTrade. By producing information tools, PROTA can help its target users, in turn, to empower plant-users in specific local conditions: farmers, forest-dependent communities, cottage industry communities, and of course many women. Since plants species known in tropical Africa sometimes occur in northern and subtropical Africa too, the benefits of PROTA extend to the whole continent.

Over a ten-year period, the PROTA programme will result in a collection of over 7 000 comprehensive review articles - one for each plant species used in tropical Africa - divided into groups according to their use. PROTA review articles cover a range of topics, from local plant names to chromosome numbers, and summarise the properties that make each species valuable to people. Like PhytoTrade, PROTA tracks down obscure published literature, as well as significant scientific and popular press, to compile species review articles. They are packaged in three product forms: an illustrated database of review articles available on the Internet (www.prota.org), and volumes of the PROTA handbook in print and on CD.

From output to impact

Species review articles are not the only way in which PROTA distributes information. Special products, prepared in consultation with users, are published to accompany each volume of the handbook series. The first of these - *Vegetables* - is about to be launched. Upcoming volumes on *Medicinal Plants* and *Dyes & Tannins* are among those scheduled for publication in 2005.

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