

Artemisia – fighting malaria with local inputs

Bionexx

Malaria is claiming many lives on the African continent. Artemisia Annuia is a medicinal plant that has been used in traditional Chinese medicine for the last 2000 years. The World Health Organisation are recommending Artemisia Annuia in Africa because Malaria has developed some resistance to existing treatments. However, it is estimated that 185 million doses would have been needed in 2005 alone, but supply can only satisfy half this demand. Pharmaceutical laboratories are keen to scale-up production so costs can come down and thus be more affordable to lower-income population.

Bionexx vision is to provide these laboratories with the active ingredient – artemisinin – by getting the local population to take part in the cultivation of Artemisia and thus contribute to Madagascar's rural development.

The idea for the project was born in 2004 during a meeting between Charles Gibrain, the founder of Bionexx, and Dr. Yusuf Hamied, the owner of the Indian pharmaceutical generic manufacturer CIPLA who was looking for an alternative supply of artemisinin. In the long term, Bionexx plans to produce enough Artemisia to produce 30 million treatments to fight against Malaria.

Much of Bionexx's success so far has been thanks to its ability to mobilise both local and international stakeholders into action. Locally it has managed to get NGOs on board to persuade farmers to enter the supply chain and internationally it has managed to secure funding to research and refine the Artemisia cultivation techniques.

Bionexx will provide farmers income security by guaranteeing a fixed price at the beginning of the season. Access to a new market will boost the local economy, whilst still allowing them to combine Artemisia with subsistence agriculture.