

XV. THE PROSEA PROJECT (PLANT RESOURCES OF SOUTHEAST ASIA)

P.C.M. Jansen

POB 341, 6700 AH Wageningen, The Netherlands

In the Bulletin of 1986 (p. 281) the revival of the PROSEA Project has been announced. Some more information on its background and progress seems in order.

Historical background. In the field of plant resources of SE. Asia there are no other publications giving such thorough and comprehensive information than K. HEYNE's 'De nuttige planten van Nederlandsch-Indie' (1927), and I.H. BURKILL's 'A dictionary of the economic products of the Malay Peninsula' (1935). (For India there is the many-volumed 'Wealth of India', which presently is being updated. Ed.). The reprint of both voluminous and outdated books in 1950 (as 'De nuttige planten van Indonesie') and 1966, respectively, proves that there is definitely a need for such information.

During the past 20 years the Agricultural University, Wageningen, The Netherlands, was asked several times by Indonesia to re-issue 'Heyne' in an adapted, more up-to-date version. Several false starts have been made in the past to do so. In the early 70's a detailed proposal was drawn up by the Department of Plant Taxonomy, which also included cooperation with the Herbarium Bogoriense, the Rijksherbarium, and the Tropical Institute, Amsterdam. On this base in 1973 Indonesia made a formal request to the Dutch Government to take care of the project. In the same year the International Agricultural centre advised positively, but in 1974 the request was rejected by the Dutch Secretary of Development Cooperation. Another proposal made in 1978 was similarly treated. In 1983 the University was approached again, which in 1985 resulted into an initiative whereby the University wished to support the publication of a handbook on Plant Resources of South-East Asia.' This led to the PROSEA Project.

Within The Netherlands besides the Institutes mentioned above scientific support and cooperation has been promised by the Wageningen Departments of Forestry and Tropical Crop Science. Financial support has been promised by the Dutch Departments of Education and Science, of Agriculture, and Foreign Affairs through the latter's Department of International Cooperation.

Under SE. Asia is understood Malesia and parts of Burma to Viet Nam. The working language will be English.

In 1986 PROSEA published a 78-page 'Proposal for a handbook' (E. WESTPHAL & P.C.M. JANSEN, Eds.), which dealt with the needs and objectives of the Project, the framework of the Handbook. As examples it contained the treatment of 17 SE. Asian useful plants by 22 Dutch specialists. This may serve as a base for discussion for the scientific, organizational, and financial aspects of the Project. In August and September this 'Proposal' was presented officially to the authorities of Indonesia and Malaysia. It was then widely distributed and free copies can still be obtained from the above address.

Objectives. The Project is to make a survey of the knowledge of plant resources in SE. Asia, to summarize it, and publish it for use in education,

research, industry, etc. The results will be stored in a computerized data bank for reference and updating.

Stages of implementation.

- The first, preliminary, stage (1985-1986) was directed towards the publication of the 'Proposal'.
- In the second, preliminary, stage (1987-1990) the Project will be further defined, so that together with the 'Proposal' a definite proposal can be presented to the agencies in SE. Asia. Cooperation with them will be discussed to result in a plan of mutual operations concerning manpower, organization, and finances.
- The third stage (1990-1995) will concern the actual publication.

The Handbook. It is proposed to treat about 5,000 taxa in about 6,000 pages, divided over 30 to 40 commodity groups (e.g. pulses, root and tuber plants, edible fruits and plants, timber trees, vegetables, medicinal plants, etc.). Publication will be by these groups. For each taxon the following headings will be provided: scientific name, incl. author(s) and its original publication, family, chromosome number, vernacular name(s), origin and present distribution, uses, economic and production data, properties, description, growth and development, other botanical information, ecology, propagation, husbandry, diseases and pests, harvesting, yield, handling after harvest, genetic resources, breeding, prospects, literature, author of the treatment.

About a quarter of the taxa will be illustrated.

Each commodity group will have a specialist editor, who, together with the editor in chief and invited specialists from all over the world, will compose the contents of the group.

Present situation.

- To guide the Dutch part of PROSEA a Board of 8 Trustees has been nominated representing the cooperating Institutes.
- At the University 10 persons in full- or part-time have formed a workgroup, to:
 - prepare discussions with potential SE. Asian partners on all aspects of the Project;
 - prepare preliminary lists of the taxa to be dealt with;
 - prepare the organizational aspects of the Project;
 - organize the computerized documentation;
 - to contact potential donors;
 - to contact potential cooperators (Institutes, authors, editors);
 - to prepare a proposal for the SE. Asian partners to organize a PROSEA Symposium in SE. Asia;
- to start with the preparatory work on some commodity groups.

Call for cooperation. It will be clear that the Project can only succeed with the full support of as many agencies, research institutes, and individual specialists on SE. Asian plant resources as is possible. We invite suggestions and criticisms and ask for your active supportive interest. Please ask for the 'Proposal' and the PROSEA Newsletter for more information.