

Ethnobotany/ethnopharmacology and mass bioprospecting: Issues on intellectual property and benefit-sharing

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Abstract: Ethnobotany/ethnopharmacology has contributed to the discovery of many important plant-derived drugs. Field explorations to seek and document indigenous/traditional medical knowledge (IMK/TMK), and/or the biodiversity with which the IMK/TMK is attached, and its conversion into a commercialized product is known as bioprospecting or biodiversity prospecting. When performed in a large-scale operation, the effort is referred to as mass bioprospecting. Experiences from the mass bioprospecting efforts undertaken by the United States National Cancer Institute, the National Cooperative Drug Discovery Groups (NCDDG) and the International Cooperative Biodiversity Groups (ICBG) programs demonstrate that mass bioprospecting is a complex process, involving expertise from diverse areas of human endeavors, but central to it is the Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) that recognizes issues on genetic access, prior informed consent, intellectual property and the sharing of benefits that may arise as a result of the effort. Future mass bioprospecting endeavors must take heed of the lessons learned from past and present experiences in the planning for a successful mass bioprospecting venture. © 2005 Elsevier Ireland Ltd. All rights reserved.

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