**The PhytoKat project in Katanga DR Congo: a multidisciplinary approach for solving environmental and societal problems**

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As is the case in most African countries, DR Congo faces multiple health problems, notably a limited access to conventional medicine. For most people, traditional medicine (TM) is the primary, and often the only, accessible source of care; TM covers the primary health needs of 80% of rural and urban populations who mainly rely on plants as sources of drugs. Considering the rapid population growth (3.5%/year in RDC), the demand for medicinal plants implies a risk of extinction for several species, which requires to supplement supply by agriculture, possibly family farming.

The WHO advocates the modernization of TM in developing countries for primary health care to face health challenges such as malaria or infectious diseases. The PhytoKat pilot project aims to establish the necessary foundation for progress in this direction in Katanga by *(i)* evaluating the conditions for integrating traditional practices in modern medicine; *(ii)* deepening the botanical, agronomical, pharmacological and chemical studies of interesting plants; and *(iii)* developing, in the context of a regional erosion in plant diversity, an urgent inventory of medicinal species current distribution for a reasoned conservation strategy.

Through a multidisciplinary team including agronomists, chemists, pharmacists and veterinarians, the project aims at correcting the gaps identified by the recent Joint Context Analysis, performed in DR Congo at Belgian government initiative, for the domains environment / natural resources: *"Lack of information, knowledge and awareness among decision makers and local communities on the benefits of biodiversity-related development"*.