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# ETHNOBOTANY GUIDE

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August 2013

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## Introduction to Bio-Human Ecology and Ethnobotany Research

*A guide to help prepare research team-members for work in the field*

### Ethnobotany Research Team

*Social Policy Ecology Research Institute (SPERI) and Mekong Community For Ecological Trading (MECO-ECOTRA)*

The BHE ethnobotany research follows the long history of SPERI and the MECO-ECOTRA in supporting empowering and promoting the indigenous ethnic minority communities in the conservation and preservation of biodiversity.

The BHE Ethnobotany research aims to help achieve these goals by having a careful look at the relationship between indigenous professors (ethnic minority community members such as healers, herbalists, wild collectors, farmers) and the plants that they use. The results of this research are used to create useful products to serve the needs of the communities, MECO-ECOTRA network and SPERI.

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## General Rules Fieldwork

*Ways to make sure the whole research process is open to changes at any time and everyone is happy and feels comfortable.*

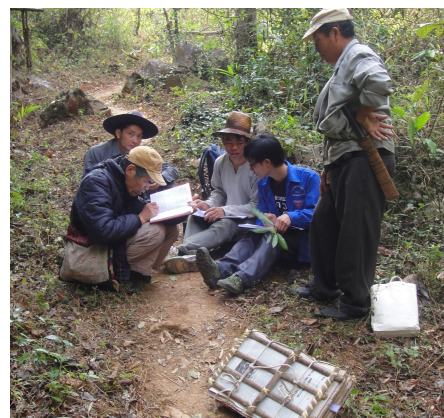
The following list of general rules for fieldwork is essential in keeping an effective and efficient friendly and happy research team and a happy community.

### Make Decisions Together

*Making decisions about the research can be complicated and time consuming but it is important that everyone understands and is satisfied with the decisions and the process.*

### Plan Ahead

*All the researchers should clearly understand the objectives of the research and should be well prepared to fulfill their task on the research team. They should all feel comfortable and have a clear idea about what is going to happen.*



*Hmong Elder Xeh KwB Yaaj of Long Lan village in Luang Prabang Laos (standing left), teaches the research team (from left to right) Botanists Mr. Vũ Văn Căn, Hmong YIELDS Mr. Giàng Seo Anh and Mr. Vàng Sín Min, SPERI researcher Mr. Lê Hồng Giang*

### Go Slowly

*'Slow and steady wins the race'. Taking the time to carefully and accurately listen to the indigenous professor and correctly record what they teach, as well as correctly identifying and recording (photograph herbarium sample) of the plant is essential.*

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## Specific Objectives of the Research

The specific objectives of the Bio-Human Ecology (BHE) and Ethnobotany research can be divided into three parts, based on the process of designing and implementing field research in ethnobotany with indigenous professors.

### 1. Organizing and Preparing the Research Team

One of the aims of the research is the training of young researchers in the technical skills of field research and ethnobotany/botany as well as the soft skills of working with a dynamic community of all skill levels. At the same time these young researchers learn the traditional practices and cultural significance of plants and their conservation.

All the researchers should clearly understand the objectives of the research and should be well prepared to fulfill their task on the research team. They may be responsible for taking photos of indigenous professors and plants, of using a GPS for location data, marking and storing specimens in a herbarium, working with a botanist in technical botanical identification of plants, or, more importantly in recording the knowledge shared by the indigenous professor about plants.

The team should develop a draft of a questionnaire based on the overall objectives of the BHE research and on the specific objectives of the expedition (e.g. forest conservation, edible plants etc.).

The team should not only have a clear understanding of the objectives and the overall process of the research and its link to the MECO-ECOTRA goals but should also be prepared to share this with the community and ask for feedback and changes to be made (each research team member and each indig. prof. has the right to suggest changes at any time).

### 2. Working in the Community

Working in the community should start with a careful explanation of the overall objectives, the MECO-ECOTRA network and the specific objectives of the BHE Ethnobotany research along with the draft questionnaire and the introduction to the research team and technical aspects of the research. Ideally, the community members will accept the research proposal and find ways to make it fit to their needs. They will take control of the research and research design and identify the indigenous professors in their community who will take part as well as the places to visit etc. They will redefine the questions as well.

Objectives and process of the research should be carefully explained to each new indigenous professor and the research team should be open to suggestions and changes whenever these come up (the whole process should be open to changes at any time and everyone should be happy and feel comfortable with the process. Making decisions about the research can be complicated and time consuming but it is important that everyone understands and is satisfied with the decisions and the process).

The research team should work carefully to accommodate each new indigenous professor and to be welcoming, accepting, playful and open to the new ideas and ways of communication and work. During the research process the research team should make sure that everyone understands the process and the plan for the day/overall trip etc. even if this takes up a lot of extra time it is worth it. Everyone should understand clearly what is going on and why. If not it can cause a lot of trouble later.

It is important that the research team and indigenous professors are working in a comfortable atmosphere and that both are clearly interested and excited. If this is not the case then it is necessary that the group leader, or individual members talk about it and make changes where necessary. If the team is bored or tired then the indigenous professor is too.

Open to surprises to ensure the inspiration of the Indigenous professors and the research team. If something is especially interesting and inspiring then everyone should take time to learn more about it and explore.

### 3. Keeping Accurate Records

It is very important that the team members are all keeping accurate records and are all keeping track of the same things. When the indigenous professor offers a new plant with new information then the lead researcher will tell the team about the identification marker (usually a combination of numbers and letters i.e. HEPA01). The entire team should be sure to make a note of this identification marker and to make sure that all information (i.e. GPS, Photos, notes, questions, plant samples) are marked with this. Losing track of the sample or the photo may cause the entire transfer of knowledge to be lost. ❖

## RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

The objectives of this research thus far have been to investigate cultural practices and biodiversity preservation with traditional healers in the Dzao, Hmong, Lư-Lào, Mã Liềng, Sách, Tày, Thái, Xinh Mun, and Kinh ethnic group (Vietnam's majority) in Northern Vietnam, and the Hmong indigenous people of Long Lan village, Luang Prabang Province, Lao People's Democratic Republic.

## BHE ETHNOBOTANY RESEARCH EXPEDITIONS

### BHE ETHNOBOTANY KICK-OFF MEETING

VIENG KEO, LUANG PRABANG, LAO-PDR  
SEPTEMBER 2012

A Kick-off meeting was held with MECO-ECOTRA Indigenous Professors, Laos Hmong Association, local Governments and local and international academics to explain and contextualize the research and ask for feedback and suggestions.

### LONG LAN RESEARCH EXPEDITIONS 2012-2013

LONG LAN VILLAGE, LUANG PRABANG LAO-PDR  
SEPTEMBER 2012 AND JANUARY 2013

BHE Ethnobotany research with 14 Hmong indigenous professors based on an extensive list of questions about plant uses, changes, and challenges in maintaining plants and traditional practices over time from early settlement of Long Lan to present day.

### HEPA BHE RESEARCH EXPEDITION

HUMAN ECOLOGY PRACTICE AREA (HEPA), HA TINH VIETNAM  
NOVEMBER 2012

BHE Ethnobotany research, organized by HEPA's Ban Điều Hành, with the Dzao, Hmong, Lư-Lào, Mã Liềng, Sách, Tày, Thái, Xinh Mun, and Kinh ethnic groups.

## Make Suggestions and be open to Changes

*Each team-member and indigenous professor should feel free to offer ideas and suggestions and also be open to others to make the research run smoothly with a happy team and happy community.*

## Pay Attention

*Don't lose track of the information e.g. pay attention and keep track of the marker identification for each new plant. – Pay attention especially to surprising and new ideas and information about plants and communities.*

## Be Accommodating

*Make sure that all indigenous professors and team members feel comfortable and are safe (e.g. young indigenous professors might not feel comfortable sitting or a long time talking about plants whereas older indigenous professors might prefer it).*

## Be Informed

*Make sure everyone knows the plan and understands what is happening and how. It can save a lot of time and trouble if everyone understands and agreed with what is happening (they will follow and be helpful and not disruptive and confused).*

## Respect the Research Equipment

*Take care of research equipment and ask for help in learning how to use it properly. – The GPS, camera and herbarium may seem like complicated tools at first but once you gain confidence and learn how to use them they are easy.*

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*At the Human Ecology Practice Area(HEPA) the Dzao healer Mrs Triệu Thị Khang, walks and talks with Hmong student Giảng Thị Chung during BHE Ethnobotany research expedition.*