

The implementation of the “Raincoat Package” in Albania

The mission to Albania of Dr. Maria Pia Macchi
20th to 24th June 2005

Foreword

The mission was carried out in the framework of the IDEASS activities for the promotion of “The Raincoat Package” in Albania. This innovation, developed by the Herbal Folklore Research Centre of Tirupati, India, represents an important option for the improvement of harvests that is compatible with the principles of development policies and for the organic treatment of soil, plants, animals and human beings with parts of the *Neem* plant (*Azadirachta indica*).

In Albania, a continuous increase of vineyard and fruit trees areas has been registered during the last years and the cultivation of organic products begins to be a reality. Taking into consideration the negative effects of pesticide use, alternative pest management is considered a national priority. For this reason, since June 2004, the UNDP/UNOPS/IDEASS Initiative in collaboration with the IFAD/UNOPS/PASARP Programme, carried out activities to promote the “Raincoat Package” in the country, stimulating a great deal of interest among national and local political and scientific authorities, such as the Albanian Ministry of Agriculture, the Plant Protection Institute of Durres, The Fruit Tree Research Institute of Vlora, the Federation of Myzeqeja Farmers of Lushnje, the Albanian Organic Agriculture Association, the Chambers of Commerce of Durres and Lushnje, as well as many Albanian Municipalities and a relevant number of farmers.



With the collaboration of these Institutions and personalities, in November 2004 IDEASS identified the area between the two Albanian cities of Durres and Vlora as the more appropriate to localize a Neem experimental cultivation. Two LEDAs (Local Economic Development Agencies) operate in this area and have identified the environmental sector as one of their main interests, both for sustainable tourism and organic cultivation projects, and offered their cooperation to manage the “Raincoat Package” project.

The mission to Albania of the anthropologist Dr. Maria Pia Macchi was held from 20th to 24th June 2005. Dr. Macchi is a Neem cultivation expert, the focal point in India of the Italian NGO COE and the President of “Magia Verde”, an Organization with relevant activity on the diffusion of Alternative Medicine techniques. The objective of the mission was to identify the characteristics of an experimental project of Neem cultivation in Albania, as well as to bring scientific assistance and information to the Albanian actors interested in economic development projects related to the cultivation of Neem plants and to the Neem fruits utilization and processing, in the framework of the IDEASS Initiative. The mission delegation was composed by Dr. Maria Pia Macchi, the International Ideass Coordinator Mr. Piero D'Onofrio, the UNOPS/Pasarp Programme Coordinators of the interested areas, and by the Albanian agronomy consultant from the Plant Protection Institute Dr. Joseph Tedeschini.

Meetings in Tirana (20th June)

On the first day of the mission, the agenda was presented to the UNOPS/PASARP Programme and to the Academy of Science of Albania, which is the national partner to the Initiative.

A work meeting with the Albanian Organic Agriculture Association was organized. The Association presented its activity and offered all the possible collaboration for the achievement of the project's goal. In particular the

Association offered its immediate collaboration, through its offices in Tirana, Durres, Orikum and Vlora, in order to:

- Verify the environmental and technical needs for the implementation of a pilot-project for the cultivation of the Neem plant in Albania;
- Verify the effectiveness of the “Raincoat Package” transference, with reference to the Albanian environment and to the solution of local problems (i.e. soil erosion, deforestation, presence of harmful insects, crop protection, etc.);
- Implement the transference of scientific experiences in the different uses of the Neem plant and fruits, through meetings with the competent institutions and with the numerous scientists and agronomists that take part of the association or are closely connected with it.

Region of Durres (21st June)



On the second day of the mission, a meeting was organized with the Director of the Plant Protection Institute of Durres, which was founded in 1971 and depends on the Albanian Ministry of Agriculture. The Institute promotes practices that encourage the safe and efficient use of pesticides and supports the farmers in the application of integrated pest management strategies. During the meeting, the Director stressed the importance and the interest for Albania in the use of Neem derivatives and proposed to conduct a detailed experimentation of the Neem oil properties in the near future, as well as to train farmers on the utilization of this product. The institute also ensured its full commitment to bring a number of Neem plants to its farmlands at Rrushbull, near the City of

Durres.

Following this meeting, the delegation visited these agricultural areas and verified the possibility to transfer around 50 Neem plants.

Another meeting was held with the Durres Local Economic Development Agency “Tauleda”. The Agency director presented the LEDA’s activity and its priority interest in agriculture development projects, particularly for the region’s poorest areas. Another field of interest, connected with the Neem project, relates to the plant adaptability to the urban soil, in order to create a “green belt” around some recently drained grounds which do not offer good living condition to other kinds of plants.

The director of Tauleda accompanied the mission delegation during all the following field visits of the day. The first one was a visit to Rromanat, where a field was identified in a specially protected position, whose owner will follow the growing of the Neem plants in collaboration and under the close control of Tauleda. It was suggested to take about 10 Neem plants to the identified farmland and to plant them near the field boundaries and close to the entrance path. In case of good plant-growing results, this model will be replicated in other agricultural fields in the same area.



The mission also identified the northern limit for the growth of the Neem plant, which corresponds to the Rodoni Cape area, about 30 Kms north of the City of Durres. The area presents favorable conditions as to the quality of the soil, although climatic risks exist due to the winter temperature that can fall below 0°C. For this reason, it was suggested to bring a limited number of plants on experimental grounds.

The following visit was to Draç, a locality close to Ishem village. Here a farmland was identified, owned by a local farmer that intends to start an eco-tourism activity in collaboration with Tauleda. The farmer is particularly interested in the organic cultivation and in the production of the insect-repellent oil. In this



farmland, which is situated in a very favorable position close to a small lake, it will be possible to plant around 30 Neem trees. It was also proposed to create an “organic demogarden”, where the Neem plants can grow in association with other local medicinal plants. During the visit, it was also possible to meet with other local farmers, who expressed their strong interest in replicating the experimentation in their own farmlands.

All the areas visited in the Durres region guarantee good possibilities for the growth of the Neem plants, due to their position and to the strong farmers’ motivation. The three areas selected have different ecosystems, each of them being interesting for the project implementation. Anyway, due to the area climatic conditions, Dr.

Macchi recommended to transfer no more than one hundred plants to the Durres region during the project experimental phase.

Region of Lushnje - Divjaca (22nd June)

In the Lushnie region, which is situated in the central-southern part of Albania and is characterized by an important natural protected area, the mission met on 22nd June with a delegation of the Municipality of Divjaca, composed by the Mayor, the Vice-Mayor, the local authorities, technical personnel and agronomists. The delegation provided geo-morphological and meteorological information on the region and stressed the interest in the introduction of the Neem cultivation in some specific areas with relevant risk of erosion. All the participants to the meeting were well informed on the "Raincoat Package" innovation characteristics, since they had read the IDEASS brochure and met the Initiative coordinator in Albania. The meeting gave the participants the possibility to acquire more detailed data on the Neem cultivation. Also, they expressed their interest in the introduction of the Neem plant in some park areas intended for eco-tourism activity.

A field trip allowed to identify some key areas close to natural lakes. Both local climate and soil composition resulted suitable for the plant growth. Anyway, Dr. Macchi recommended not to introduce the Neem plants in the park area due to the soil high salinity and because this would alter its natural bio-diversity. In the other selected areas it will be possible to transfer about one hundred Neem plants.

Region of Vlora (23rd June)



The Region of Vlora, which is situated in the southern part of the country, proved to be the most appropriate for the plant introduction, due to its favorable hot climate and to the average annual temperature and rainfall. A first meeting was held on June 23rd in the city of Vlora with the Directorate and the personnel of the Fruit Tree Institute of the Ministry of Agriculture, which is highly competent in the production of greenhouse vegetables and offered close collaboration to the project implementation.

An exhaustive visit to the Institute main greenhouse in Vlora and to the micro-propagation laboratory confirmed the high quality level of the structure and the good competence of the technical and scientific staff.

Here, it will be possible to follow all the phases of the Neem growth during the first year of adaptation, which is necessary before transplanting the plants in the ground.

During the same day, more visits were realized to others agricultural areas owned by the Institute.

A meeting organized with the Vlora Local Economic Development Agency "Auleda" allowed to identify the economic development projects related to the cultivation of the Neem plants and to the Neem fruits utilization and processing which could be implemented after verifying the Neem adaptation in the Region.

Following this field visit, the possibility to transfer about two hundreds Neem plants in the selected areas of the Vlora region was taken into consideration.

National meeting in Tirana (24th June)

A National Work-meeting on the IDEASS Initiative "Raincoat Package" was held in Tirana on June 24th, with the participation of all the involved actors and of the Albanian Vice-Minister of Agriculture. During the meeting, the participants examined the possibility to introduce the Neem plants in the country. Dr. Macchi presented an exhaustive report on her mission and illustrated the characteristics of the innovation, with the help of a detailed power-point presentation, implemented in India and in other countries, including USA and Italy.



The following proposals where discussed:

1. Introduction of *Azadirachta indica* in the Albanian selected areas on experimental grounds. In this case, it was proposed to introduce 400 one-year-old plants from India in September-October 2005, which will be kept in greenhouses for one year and then transplanted in the ground on April 2007.

2. Implementation of training courses on the Indian organic cultivation techniques (Vrkshayurveda) for the local farmers, promoting the use of local plants and techniques. This project should be accompanied by a detailed data collection on the Albanian medicinal plants and their local uses.
3. Importation of organic Neem oil-based pesticides (in particular it was suggested to introduce the oil produced from the seeds). Organization of training courses on the use of the Neem oil in the Albanian cultivar. Experimentation and investigation run by the competent Albanian scientific institutions and research centers on the oil use and effects.

At the end of the meeting, the participants asked for a close monitoring of the plant introduction during the first project phase to prevent negative or unexpected effects on the local flora and fauna. All the National authorities attending the meeting, in particular the Ministry of Agriculture and the Forest Research Institute guaranteed the supervision of their agronomists and experts. The participants also stressed that the "Raincoat Package" transfer process will probably take a long time to be concluded. For this reason, it will be recommendable to adopt the above mentioned proposals (no.3 and 4) in a short time.

Finally, a further positive effect of the innovation was disclosed, consisting in an important incentive for the valorization of the knowledge of the local species that could support the development of organic agriculture in Albania in a significant way.



A mission of Dr. Vedavathy, the President of the Indian Herbal Folklore Research Centre and author of the innovation, will be held next autumn, in the framework of the IDEASS Initiative. During this new mission, training sessions in organic farming and in the use of wild plants as pesticides will also be organised. This is a further innovative field where the Indian Institution excels and that may provide, together with the Neem-project implementation, significant support to the transfer of plant protection knowledge and technologies to Albania. Dr. Vedavathy could also follow the transfer of the Neem plants from India to Albania.

Dr. Maria Pia Macchi

Published articles

During the June 24th meeting, interviews with the participants were made by the Albanian press. The event was reported by numerous Albanian newspapers and TV channels, which provided information also on the mission activity.

Newspaper articles:

- **PANORAMA Newspaper**, June 25, 2005 – Indians bring in Albania a 4500-year old tree. Vice Minister of Agricultural and Food: "We will implement the experimental phase".
- **Dita Newspaper**, June 25, 2005 – "Tree of the Century" also in Albania.
- **Gazeta Shqiptare Newspaper**, June 25, 2005 – The curative tree at only 1 Euro.
- **Korrieri Newspaper**, June 25, 2005 – "Tree of the Century", UNOPS present the Medicine Tree.
- **Metropoli Newspaper**, June 25, 2005 – NEEM 400 trees will be planted in Albania.
- **Shekulli Newspaper**, June 25, 2005 – article on line

TV and radio broadcasts:

- June 24, 2005 - **News 24 TV** - Newscast, Feature on Raincoat Package IDEASS Initiative
- June 24, 2005 - **Top Channel TV & Radio** - Newscast, Feature on Raincoat Package Meeting
- June 24, 2005 - **Radio Tirana** - Newscast, Feature on Raincoat Package Meeting