

Editorial

Many hands make light work...

The basic research component of IBSAR was at a critical crossroad. As many of our future products will be developed through basic research, it became necessary to design a strategy to maximize the chances of obtaining funds for this program. These additional funds were required to allow IBSAR to handle the unique problems associated with transferring multidisciplinary technology from basic research to applied research and eventually to commercialization. In the fall of 2003, I was approached by my colleague Ahmad Smaili, Associate Professor of Mechanical Engineering, to send a brief description on the cancer drugs research projects pursued in my laboratory. Ahmad forwarded the document to an investor, Mr. Yusuf Jameel, who in a former meeting with Ahmad expressed interest in funding projects on the use of natural products in cancer prevention and treatment. Mr Yusuf Jameel is a well-known Saudi investor who has consistently recognized the historical importance of medicinal plant research in the Arab world and who strongly believes in the need to revive this history through supporting the efforts of Arab researchers' contribution to this field. During the first scheduled meeting with Mr. Fuad Lahham, financial manager of Mr. Yusuf Jameel, I saw ground for potential agreement: Mr. Jameel's desire to revive research on medicinal plants of the Middle East was in line with my research interests. In the midst of our discussion, it became apparent that I could go beyond my research area to include IBSAR and was confident that as a group we could peak the interest of a potential investor. This stemmed from my strong belief in teamwork-my motto has always been "the most important factor for success is the long sustained efforts of a team of individuals that goes far beyond any effort made by one individual".



I thereby decided to introduce Mr. Lahham to Salma Talhouk Director of IBSAR, who played an instrumental role in peaking Mr Jameel's interest by presenting the various activities of IBSAR and the coordinated efforts and strengths of this multidisciplinary group. On 17 October, 2003, Salma and the Cancer Research group of IBSAR (Nadine Darwiche, Marwan El-Sabban and myself) discussed in an informal presentation the vision and mission of IBSAR and the emerging connections between plants, cancer, inflammation, and nutrition, among other exciting areas. In our presentation we outlined the approaches of IBSAR that aim at optimizing, through research and community outreach, the development of measures to protect Biodiversity in Lebanon.

Both Mr. Jameel and Mr. Lahham were impressed with the high caliber of AUB faculty and the state-of-the-art research conducted by the group in an exciting supportive environment. As a product of this presentation, Mr. Jameel requested that we submit a detailed proposal on the achievements of the group and the future research of IBSAR. By taking an organized planning approach, Salma and some members of IBSAR spent the next two months writing a proposal that highlights what has been achieved and the future directives of the group. The proposal was submitted on Dec. 15, 2003. On July 2004, Mr. Jameel granted IBSAR 1.2million USD to pursue research on indigenous plants of Lebanon. We thank Mr. Jameel for his contribution and trust in IBSAR. I am confident that we will continue to work collaboratively and cooperatively to deliver the best possible results. The challenging years lie ahead of us!

By Dr. **Hala Mohaseb**



News

Letter from Dr. Jose Zaglul to IBSAR

I am on my way back, after enjoying a special week in Lebanon and in AUB with all of you.

Going to AUB as a student was a unique experience. I was born in Costa Rica and grew up there. Coming to Lebanon was a curiosity. I planned to stay for a year and ended up living there for 8 years. I got my Bachelor's and MS' in AUB in agriculture. Indeed those years were magic. It was probably my youth who helped out but I am sure, it was AUB, Beirut, the great friends and the environment which made those years so special. I returned home to Costa Rica in 1973, worked for a few years (3½) got married and went to the States to get my Ph.D. Since then I have mainly worked in the academic world.

Departing Lebanon to the tropics of Latin America did not detach my heart from Lebanon and AUB. It was with great pain and sorrow that I lived abroad during the war in Lebanon. At times, I felt like betraying the country that made my life flourish. I took the best out of it and the worst happened to Lebanon while I was far away, living a comfortable life while the country and my friends suffered a meaningless war. I had nothing to contribute to ease the pain to my countrymen and women.

That pain lived with me for many years, and still persists.

Times have changed and I have had a chance to come back to Lebanon. In my new acquaintances in AUB I have found Salma and Rabih Talhouk, Marwan Saban and Fadia Homaidan, Nadine Darwish and many other who have introduced me and made me part of the IBSAR group.

I have learned to appreciate you all as professionals and friends. You have taken up crucial task for Lebanon and hopefully for the Middle East. So soon after the devastating effects of the conflict that Lebanon lived for such a long time you have decided to promote the conservation and the proper use of the biodiversity of the Semi Arid Regions. This is an incredible change that require not only the commitment of special people but also requires immense will and convencing power to change regulations, influence the government and carry scientific research to find out ways to take the best advantage while protecting the biodiversity.

This is not an easy task. Many other countries with more resources and better natural conditions are still behind you in assuming such responsibilities. You have made a remarkable job in gathering professionals from different departments of AUB and outside AUB, around a common cause. You started basically with no structure, and little economic means, but with a lot of enthusiasm and a common goal.

You have persisted and moved ahead with determination and now are getting the recognition you deserve. There is still many challenges in front of you, but you have the determination and the capacity to overcome the barriers and succeed in your dream. You as scientists now, that disappearance of biodiversity is the disappearance of progress for humanity.

I am proud to be associated with you. Through this association I wish I could contribute in my humble capacity for the welfare of Lebanon and to the dream of making Lebanon and the Middle East, a place for progress and peace.

It is people like you who can change the world and make a difference.

Thank you for having me with you and for considering me part of your team.

Jose A. Zaglul

Jose has provided us with unconditional guidance and support since the inception of IBSAR. He has accepted to serve on IBSAR's advisory board, which he is helping develop.

"IBSAR: Booklet"

This summer the outreach committee initiated efforts to prepare a booklet about IBSAR. Committee members held meetings to discuss booklet sections and decide on the layout and select a designer. A draft was prepared by Miss Asma Lakkis and Miss Dana Radi. In the coming months, the new stepping-stones foreseen are finalization of the text, adding the touch of art and identity to the booklet, fine-tuning the production and printing before of the end of the year

WHO on proper use of traditional medicines

The use of traditional medicine (TM) and complementary and alternative medicine (CAM) has increased significantly over the past few years. In this context, guidelines were developed to provide governments and other stakeholders an overview of the general principles and activities necessary for the development of reliable consumer information. These also constitute a useful reference for consumers TM/CAM therapy that is safe and effective

(Full text: <http://www.who.int/medicines/library/trm/Consumer.pdf>)

For your precious contribution to this invaluable newsletter, including the editorial section contact M. Daouk at me11@aub.edu.lb
Submission deadlines 20th of each month.

New Upcoming "Eco Health"



ECOHEALTH is a new international journal focusing on the integration of knowledge at the interface between ecological and health sciences. It is built on the foundation laid by the complimentary journals *Ecosystem Health* and *Global change and Human Health*. ECOHEALTH provides a gathering place for research and reviews to integrate diverse knowledge of ecology, health and sustainability at

the scientific, medical, local or traditional levels. (Available on line: <http://www.springerlink.com>)

Visit by Dr. Jose Zaglul

To follow up on the planned collaboration between EARTH University and IBSAR, Dr. Jose Zaglul (president of EARTH university) made a brief visit to AUB this past spring. During his stay Dr. Zaglul met with IBSAR members and conducted preliminary discussions for the preparation of a joint proposal with IBSAR and the Digital Documentation Center.

Workshops

"Round tables series: Priorities assessment and capacity building needs for Biodiversity Conservation"

(June 9, 2004, AUB) IBSAR represented by Riad Baalbaki, Elsa Sattout and Salma Talhouk organized a round table meeting to present the status of Lebanon in relation to the Convention on Biological Diversity and the National biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan (NBSAP). During the meeting a preliminary plan to define the national needs in capacity building and priorities was developed by participants. (Attendance: 34 participants).

"The Health and Medicinal Benefits of Six Wild Edible Plants in the North East of Lebanon"

(July 24, 2004) At the conclusion of data collection activities for a joint research project between IBSAR, represented by Malek Batal and Salma Talhouk, and McGill University's School of Dietetics and Human Nutrition in affiliation with the Center for Indigenous Peoples' Nutrition and Environment in Canada, represented by MSc. student Zeinab Jeambey and Dr. Timothy Johns, a lecture was organized and attended by 101 representatives from various communities in the North East of Lebanon, at the Ministry of Social Affairs' Center for Developmental Services in the town of Hermel.

The lecture was meant as a tool to increase awareness about the current threats to biodiversity, and the health, medicinal, nutritional and economic value of wild edible plants that grow naturally in the rural environment. The lecture also stressed the importance of recording and preserving the traditional botanical knowledge, an important identification tool for the benefits of these plants, which is being rapidly eroded.

At the end of the lecture the following was recommended:

- To increase lectures and training sessions about biodiversity in general and plant importance in specific, especially in remote rural area
- To record vanishing traditional botanical knowledge
- To conduct practical workshops informing people, and especially the young generation, about the edible and nutritious plants in the environment
- To support local environmental associations and to work with them closely on the biodiversity conservation in the rural areas
- To work closely with professionals (agricultural engineers and environmental scientists) in Hermel on the identification of wild plants that are unique to the area and that are known to have great health benefits.

"Cultivation and production of medicinal and aromatic herbs"

(July 26, 2004) A workshop organized by Khaled Slim (Field coordinator), Ibrahim El Saliby (production coordinator), and Marwan Ghosn (Research assistant in extraction of essential oil) was given at the Agricultural Research and Education Center (AREC). The event started with a field visit to field plots. Results and cultivation protocols were discussed.



This was followed by a presentation on essential oil market and quality standards.

The instructors then opened a discussion session and the audience proposed that IBSAR produces a monthly

newsletter raising scientific issues related to essential oil and herb products production and other subjects of benefit to the sector (attendance: 13 participants).

Biosafety project

"2nd National Workshop: Review the Findings of the Surveys, Identification of Gaps, Needs & Priorities"

(July 30, 2004, AUB) Objectives of the workshop were: Analysis of findings of the surveys on biotechnology, GMOs, laws and legislations in Lebanon and Identification of needs and areas to hold training workshop (Attendance: 50 participants).

Meetings, contacts & Seminars

An American group of Lebanese descendents visited Lebanon for the first time in August 2004. During their stop at AUB, a group of IBSAR members hosted the visitors for cakes and juice and introduced to them to the concept of nature conservation in Lebanon and the goals and mission of IBSAR. People enjoyed it and we hope that some of these members will help in conserving biodiversity in the region (Attendance: 40 persons).



Thesis Seminars

A. Zeaiter (an Msc student, Major: Plant Protection; Advisor: Dr. Efat Abou Fakhr Hammad) gave a presentation entitled: "Screening selected indigenous plant species against *Bemisia tabaci* and chemical isolation of bioactive fractions".

H. Ibrahim (an Msc student, Major: environmental policy planning; Advisor: Dr. Hala Mohtaseb) gave a presentation entitled: "A Biodiversity Policy Framework for Lebanon"

H. Shaib (an Msc student, Major: Animal Sciences; Advisor: Dr. Elie Barbour) gave a presentation entitled: "PCR use in epidemiological study of avian mycoplasmosis and control of Gumboro by herbal extracts"

Publications from IBSAR

A. Zeaitir, Msc thesis: " Screening selected indigenous plant species against *Bemisia tabaci* and chemical isolation of bioactive fractions".

H. Ibrahim, Msc thesis: "A Biodiversity Policy Framework for Lebanon".

H. Shaib, Msc thesis: "PCR use in epidemiological study of avian mycoplasmosis and control of Gumboro by herbal extracts"