

Aloes and poverty alleviation in Kenya

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The drought in recent years has led to increased poverty in arid areas of Kenya, with the death of livestock and the inability to grow food crops. *Aloe vera* (Linné) Burman fil. has been used as a medicinal plant for over 2000 years, and the recent increase in the sale of *Aloe vera* products in pharmacies has led to an interest in harvesting the medicinally active exudates from aloes in Kenya, *Aloe vera* is not Kenyan, and the indiscriminate harvesting of wild aloes has become a threat to the local species. Moreover, three of the 58 known species native to Kenya are poisonous, and so correct identification of the species is important. In 2004 a national committee, the Kenya Aloes Working Group (KAWG), was established to deal with this problem. We have set up a system for encouraging farmers in arid areas to develop plantations from propagated material of appropriate species, and register them with the CITES authorities to facilitate the issue of export permits if the produce is not all used locally. KAWG is also developing a marketing system to ensure that the farmers receive a fair price for the produce. Large-scale seed raising has started, and one of my research students has been developing a protocol for tissue culture. As succulent plants, aloes are able to survive drought, and this crop should continue to provide an income to farmers whose regular crops have died.