

New treaty on search for life-saving medicines in remote areas

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Real-life scientists, whose work has overtones of Indiana Jones as they search for plants in remote areas of the world that could become the source of life-saving new medicines, are currently trying to figure out how a new international agreement on biodiversity will affect their work. That's the topic of an article in Chemical & Engineering News (C&EN), ACS's weekly newsmagazine.

C&EN Associate Editor Carmen Drahl explains that environment ministers from 200 countries hammered out the agreement late last year. Called the Nagoya protocol, it extends a 1993 United Nations treaty declaring that nations have sovereign rights to the biological materials within their territory. Those materials — which include [plants](#), microbes, and other living things — have been a rich source of so-called "[natural products](#)." Almost 70 percent of today's medicines are either natural products or are derived from natural products.

The new treaty clarifies what agencies scientists who collect plant and other materials should approach for official clearance. It also requires countries that ratify the agreement to establish a "national focal point," such as a university, government agency, or other contracting institution, for making such decisions. In addition, biodiversity-rich nations would receive compensation for medicines and other items commercialized from natural products discovered in their country. Many natural product hunters are grateful for the clarity the treaty provides. But some worry that it could also trigger new regulations that could delay or stifle their searches.

More information: "Navigating Nagoya" This story is available at pubs.acs.org/cen/science/89/8909sci1.html

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