
Developing high valued products for wellness and body care

Ermias Dagne

*African Laboratory for Natural Products (ALNAP), Department of Chemistry,
Addis Ababa University, P.O. Box 30270, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia*
Email: edagne@gmail.com Websites: www.alnapnetwork.com and www.aritiherbal.com

Over the years through research and enterpreneurial activities, we have succeeded in developing numerous natural products for wellness and body care. We have focused on unique resources of our region, such as frankincense and myrrh, which are gums and resins that yield high valued extracts and essential oils enjoying worldwide demand. Frankincense is a general name for resins derived from trees belonging to the genus *Boswellia*. These resins are usually burnt for their aromatic smoke at coffee ceremonies, or subjected to steam distillation to obtain essential oils that are used for aromatherapy. Myrrh is a medicinal gum-resin obtained from the tree *Commiphora myrrha*, which yields a highly viscous product which is difficult to separate from water. To circumvent this problem, we have developed a co-distillation process in which a mixture of frankincense and myrrh is subjected to hydro or steam distillation to yield a new product that we called Fra-Myr, a product that has the desirable properties of both types of resins. Likewise Fra-Opo is a co-distillation product of frankincense and opoponax, a gum-resin obtained from *Commiphora guidotti*. Combination of myrrh extract with aloe gel yields Alo-Myr, a product that brings the healing qualities of two legendary natural products in particular for skin care and against inflammation.

Moringa oleifera from Asia is now cultivated in different parts of tropical Africa. There is only one other indigenous *Moringa* species in Africa namely *M. stenopetala* occurring in southern parts of Ethiopia that is used as food and medicine. A comparative chemical study of the Asian and African species is in progress in our laboratory. We also commercialize value added products from the leaves and seeds of the latter. We have established that the pressed oil from its seeds contain the highly desired behenic acid just like its Asian counterpart. We believe this result opens the door for the development of a wide array of skin care products comparable to the well known shea butter of W. Africa and Argan oil of Morocco. We are very much convinced that developing and marketing natural products for wellness, beauty and body care is one of the most rewarding challenges of our time. Such efforts will gradually transform Africa from a raw material exporting continent to one that also supplies the world with high valued ready to use products.