

Thousands of Herbal Plants Have Not Been Used in Indonesia

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Indonesia is a country with high biodiversity of no less than 30,000 species of plants in the country's tropical rainforest. Of this figure, 9,600 species have medical benefits.

"Unfortunately, not all have been used as medicines, only 200 species have been used as the raw material for traditional medicine industry," said Prof. Dr. Ratna Asmah Susidarti, M.S., Spt., when presenting her speech during her professorship inauguration on Tuesday (17/1) at the Senate Hall UGM.

Presenting a topic titled *Herbal Plants as Source of Bioactive Compounds: the Role in Therapy and Development of New Drugs*, Ratna said use of plants as drug raw material in the global level is not optimum, either, with only 15% of 250,000-500,000 species across the world have been tested phytochemically. Only 6% of plants have been tested for their biological activity. Research data showed 122 compounds have been used as drugs from 94 species.

Seeing this condition, Ratna saw that the opportunity to get new active compounds are open. Use of plant botanical source as the starting point for herbal drug development program is beneficial in her



opinion. One of the reasons is that most selection of seeds of species for research is based on long term use by man. This approach is based on assumptions that active compounds isolated from the plant are safer than from plants that have no history of being used by man.

Besides, origin isolate can be directly used as drugs, even developed into new molecules to resolve the limited origin molecule problems. However, development of natural source of herbal drugs has weaknesses, too, among others are exploitation of natural resource and high cost exploration. Even so, Ratna reiterated the need to use herbal plants to give high benefits to the society. It should, however, pay attention to sustainability for environmental sustainability development. Research that is integrated, comprehensive, and sustainable for new drug development has also to continue. The government needs to provide facilities and funding to support the research. "Hopefully, the development of new drugs can reduce the dependence on imported drugs," she said.

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