**About the use of clones in teak**

An analysis of the advantages of vegetative reproduction for teak plantations:

Planting teak calls for having access to and making use of the best available plant material. This article highlights the restrictions inherent to the sexual and vegetative reproduction of this species, by helping to select the best techniques for creating large-scale plantations.

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Teak (*Tectona grandis*) has gained a worldwide reputation on account of the attractiveness and the durability of its wood. Market demand has prompted the establishment of plantations within and beyond its native countries. According to BALL et al. (1999), the earliest plantation of teak, apart from Java, has been traced back to 1680, date of its first introduction as an exotic species in Sri Lanka. Teak planting in India began in the 1840s, but main planting activity took off from 1865 onwards, also involving Myanmar and Indonesia. Nigeria was the first country outside Asia where teak was introduced in 1902, followed by Ghana in 1905, then Côte-d’Ivoire in 1929, while its introduction to Tropical America occurred first in Trinidad in 1913, then in Honduras, Panama and Costa Rica between 1927-1929. The reported teak plantation area was estimated at 0.89 million ha in 1970, reaching 1.72 million ha in 1980 and 2.2 millions ha in 1990, of which more than 90% was situated in Asia (BALL et al., 1999). Despite all these efforts invested in planting activity, teak timber resources currently available are far below the needs of the huge worldwide market demand (BALL et al., 1999).

The venue of the last Teaknet meeting held in 1999 in Chiang Mai (Thailand) offered an opportunity to review the possible limiting factors responsible for this situation. Lack of planting stock, especially of superior quality, was unanimously identified as the primary cause of this deficit in teak timber, highlighting the limits of conventional ways of propagating teak by seeds, and consequently the urgent need to consider other alternatives for increasing the productivity of teak plantations. In this respect, vegetative propagation techniques, especially the clonal option (photo 1), merit special attention in view, on one hand, of the resulting advantages obtained for many species (ZOBEL, TALBERT, 1984; AHUJA, LIBBY, 1993), and, on the other hand, of the latest advances in vegetative propagation techniques for teak (GAVINLERTVATANA, 1998; GOH, 1999; MONTEUUIS, 1999; WHITE, GAVINLERTVATANA, 1999).

**Photo 1.** One year-old monoclonal teak plot in Sabah (East Malaysia, north of Borneo).  
*Parcelle monoclonale de teck de un an au Sabah (Malaisie orientale, nord de Bornéo).*
OPTIONS FOR PRODUCING CLONES OF TEAK

GENERAL CONSIDERATIONS ABOUT CLONING

Cloning is a way of vegetative propagation occurring naturally in different tree species. It has been used for centuries by plant propagators to maintain or “fix”, regardless of the successive generations, the superior characteristics of particular genotypes, referred to as cultivars for fruit trees and ornamental plants (HARTMANN et al., 1997). The rationale of cloning forest trees has already been much discussed (ZOBEL, TALBERT, 1984; TIMMIS et al., 1987; AHUJA, LIBBY, 1993). The main interest lies in the possibility to duplicate, in theory on an indefinite basis, through mitotic cell divisions, selected individuals, while preserving their whole genetic identity and structure. This is a fundamental difference with sexual propagation by seed in which each seedling is genetically different. In terms of plant improvement, cloning allows to capture and transfer to the asexually obtained offspring the integral genetic value – comprising both the additive and the non-additive components – of the selected donor tree (photo 2), also called ortet in forestry, from which they are derived (ZOBEL, TALBERT, 1984). This is of paramount importance in view of obtaining superior quality planting stock, since variations due to non-additive gene effects can exceed 50 % in certain forest tree species, especially affecting major features such as form, vigour, wood characteristics... which are known to be usually under polygenic control and not so well inherited sexually (TIMMIS et al., 1987; CHELIAK, ROGERS, 1990).

Various vegetative propagation techniques can be considered for cloning, as described in HARTMANN et al. (1997), the success of which depends upon the specific characteristics of the ortet (MONTEUUIS, 1989).

GRAFTING AND BUDDING

With teak, grafting and especially budding with success scores as high as 100 % in Thailand (KAOSA-ARD, 1998), have been the most widely practiced techniques for establishing clonal seed orchards or ex-situ gene banks. This is a low-cost technology applicable to any teak genotype providing basic requisites are fulfilled (HARTMANN et al., 1997).

Grafting or budding give rise to genetically “composite” plants (HARTMANN et al., 1997), made up of the genotype of the rootstock and of the selected genotype of the grafted scion. For this reason, serious consideration must be given to the danger of producing “illegimates” (BAGCHI et al., 1991). These shoots, which can hardly be distinguished from the expected grafts as they look very much alike, are from the same genetic origin, usually unselected, as the stock they originate from. Their occurrence has been reported as noteworthy in teak, especially in the event of graft failure (BAGCHI et al., 1991). In clonal seed orchards, such “illegimates” are likely to depreciate the genetic quality of the seeds produced, firstly when collected directly from such unexpected “mothers”, and secondly by polluting the genetic quality of the seeds produced by the surrounding “legitimates”.

The consequences can be even more serious when such “illegimates” are used as stock plants for large scale clonal propagation by cuttings for operational planting.

Another aspect associated with grafting or budding is the possible influence of the rootstock on the performances of the graft, for instance growth vigour which warranted for certain species, like apple trees, the adoption of cloned rootstocks in order to have a better control on the architectural development of the grafted cultivar, while improving the within-clone uniformity compared to the seedling rootstock option. This allows plantation density to be increased for improved yield from more accessible trees. Applications of such practices to teak seem worth considering for improving the productivity of clonal seed orchards.

Lastly, grafting can induce additional variability within clones due to the quality of the connection between the stock and the scion.

CLONING PLANTS ON THEIR OWN ROOTS

In view of this, it seems more advisable and safer to produce cloned plants of teak on their own roots which either grow or die, avoiding risks of obtaining illegimates. The main prerequisite however remains the ability of the selected genotype to produce adventitious roots, which has been observed to decline for teak as for other species with increasing physiological ageing (MONTEUUIS, 1989).

Layers

Successful propagation of teak by layering was reported for shoots sprouting from the stump of a 33-year-old felled tree (LAHIRI, 1985). Mound layering gave success rates ranging from 45 % to 81 % depending on the date of the experiment from 5 year-old felled teak trees (MONTEUUIS et al., 1995), but such techniques are practically not adapted to large scale operations.

Cuttings

Propagation by rooted cuttings has been proven for many species to be the most practical technique for developing large scale clonal plantations (ZOBEL, TALBERT, 1984; AHUJA, LIBBY, 1993). In the same way as for...
CLONES DE TECK

3.2. In vitro micropropagation by microcuttings.
Micropropagation in vitro par microboutures.

Photos 3. Availability of efficient mass clonal propagation techniques.
Des techniques industrielles efficaces existent pour le clonage.

3.1. Mist-system for mass propagation by cuttings in nursery conditions.
Bouturage industriel sous brumisation en conditions horticoles.

Photo 2. Candidate Plus Tree (CPT) for cloning.
Arbre « Plus », tête de clone potentielle.

Photo 4. Intensive cultivation of clones produced either by cuttings or microcuttings before planting.
Culture intensive de plants clonés, par bouturage ou par microbouturage, avant la plantation.
other species (Monteuis, 1989), juvenile teak plants have shown a
good potential for propagation by
rooted cuttings in several countries
in contrast to mature selected indi-
viduals (White, 1991; Dupuy,
Verhaegen, 1993; Kjaer et al.,
1999). It has recently been dem-
onstrated however that mature teak
trees can be cloned by rooted cut-
tings with average success rates of
70% obtained from several thou-
sand cuttings tested in operational
conditions (Monteuis et al.,
1995). It has been concluded from
this work that mass clonal propaga-
tion of mature teaks by rooted cut-
tings can be realistically envisaged,
providing a few basic requirements
are met (Monteuis, 1999). These
are principally the availability of a
reliable and suitable mist-system
(photo 3.1.), and special skills in
stock plant management in order to
stimulate the production of shoots
with a high potential for adventitious
rooting. In the conditions described,
as an indicative figure, 40 rooted cut-
tings from mature selected teak
genotypes could be produced annu-
ally per stock plant, which corre-
sponded to 600 rooted cloned cut-
tings per square metre (Monteuis
et al., 1995). Such scores can be
objectively further improved.

Microcuttings

Several published accounts from various countries have established
the possibility of cloning juvenile and also mature teak genotypes by
microcuttings in tissue culture condi-
tions at the experimental level (quot-
ed by Monteuis et al., 1998).
However, as far as we are aware,
such procedures have not been used
for large scale production, except in
Thailand in the late 1980s for in-
creasing the number of planting
stock (Kaosa-Ard, 1998). A private
Thai company has been following
up this mass micropropagation of ju-
venile genotypes as a mixture, and
referred to as “bulk propagation”,
for local markets and export, mainly
in the form of “stumps” after cultiva-
tion of the tissue cultured shoots in
local nurseries for several months
(Gavinlertvatana, 1998; White,
Gavinlertvatana, 1999). These
stumps consist of a few adventitious
roots and differ in this respect from
traditional stumps made of the tap
root of the seedling it originates
from. More recently, this company
has started to micropropagate clones from mature selected trees
referred to as “Elite” trees
(Gavinlertvatana, 1998; White,
Gavinlertvatana, 1999). Howev-
er, these selected clones are current-
ly (1999) supplied only as a mixture
(Gavinlertvatana, personal com-
munication). Surprisingly, such su-
perior tissue cultured plant material
has been only rarely used in Thai-
land to date.

A tissue culture technique for clonal-
ly mass propagating mature teak
genotypes was recently developed
in Sabah, Malaysia (Monteuis et
al., 1998), complementarily to the
nursery technique mentioned above
(Monteuis et al., 1995). The in
vitro protocols were designed to be
as simple as possible in order to be
easily applicable, even by non-spe-
cialists, and to cope with the con-
straints of large-scale application,
that is cost effectiveness, efficiency
and high productivity (photo 3.2).
Rooting was carried out in nursery
conditions under a mist-system with
more than 90% of success rate on
average. To date, more than
100,000 microcuttings have been
produced through this in vitro tech-
nology including clones from mature
genotypes (Goh, 1999). These mi-
croshefts were either sold locally
after nursery cultivation until they
had reached a stage suitable for
field-planting (photo 4), or dis-
patched, after proper conditioning
and under phytosanitary immunity,
to overseas users for further ac-
climatization and cultivation.

RESEARCH USES

Availability of teak clones on their
own roots must be objectively con-
sidered as a very valuable tool for
improving our knowledge about
their species, particularly in the field of ge-
netics, without the experimental
bias associated with grafted plants,
as discussed earlier. Various kinds
of information can be expected
from the use of clones, ranging from
basic to more applied levels (Zobel,
Talbert, 1984; Ahuja, Libby,
1993). Research areas of determi-
ning importance for the prospects of
clonal plantations are worth partic-
ular attention.

Within-clone
Variability

One of the prime interests of using
clones lies in the expected uniform-
ity of all the characters among the
clonal offspring issuing from the
same original ortet genotype with
the same genetic make-up (Zobel,
Talbert, 1984; Ahuja, Libby,
1993). This is of paramount impor-
tance in teak considering the high
variability of many traits existing
among seedlings, even when these
latter are genetically related – half-
sibs (Dupuy, Verhaegen, 1993).

Availability of clones allows rigor-
ous assessment of the influence of
various parameters on different
characters in the absence of any un-
expected genotypic interference as
faced when using seedlings as ex-
perimental material (Kjaer, Foster,
1996).

The capacity of rooted cuttings to
develop ontogenetically “true-to-
type” (Timmis et al., 1987;
Monteuis, 1989) seems to be ob-
viously the first area of investigation
to concentrate on, starting with the
ability to produce adventitious
roots. Such studies involve endoge-
nous and exogenous parameters
likely to interact. In the absence of
genotypic variability, the physiological aspects are logically assumed to play a key role in any deviation from the type observed, notwithstanding the influence of environmental parameters (MONTEUIS, 1989). The possibility of producing by adapted in vitro techniques (MONTEUIS in preparation) “mericlonal lines”, each issuing from one single meristem excised from the cloned plants, offers the opportunity to investigate at a more advanced level the possible sources of within-clone variability (photos 5).
In addition to these studies on cloning ability with regard to true-to-type development, within-clone variability investigations can be linked to many traits, including those of major economical incidence such as growth rate, trunk form, wood characteristics. Improving within-clone uniformity will reduce “C effects” (TIMMIS et al., 1987) for more accurate genetic parameter estimates (KAOSA-ARD, 1998), with particular mention for broad sense heritability (AHUJA, LIBBY, 1993).

**BETWEEN-CLONE DIFFERENCES**

Teak can thrive in a wide range of ecological conditions (WHITE, 1991; BALL et al., 1999), notwithstanding however significant provenance effects on several major traits (KAOSA-ARD et al., 1998). Noteworthy within-provenance genetic variation can already be assumed from limited and young progeny or even newly established clonal trials (KJAER et al., 1999). As for other species, between-clone differences, also referred to as inter-clonal differences (MONTEUUIS, 1989), may be observed during the clonal propagation process, which may require to adapt the propagation methods to reluctant genotypes. It is indeed hardly acceptable that capacity for clonal propagation by rooted cuttings, which is practically liable to improvement, overrides selection based on field criteria of major economic significance. Experience has demonstrated that these interclonal differences of responsiveness to true-to-type cloning by rooted cuttings – or microcuttings – was mainly due to unadapted techniques, especially when starting from mature genotypes for which efficient physiological rejuvenation must be considered as a determining prerequisite (MONTEUUIS, 1989). Use of clones may help in optimizing true-to-type cloning techniques by focussing on physiological aspects.

Bearing this in mind, the possibility of obtaining uniform clones from any teak genotype in the absence of depreciating “C effects” must be objectively considered as a valuable opportunity to further investigate the extent to which these teak genotypes can be adapted to various environmental conditions. Such genotype × site interactions can be examined with respect to different characters, especially those of economical importance with a view to clonal plantations. These encompass architectural growth patterns that can be useful for optimizing planting density and spacing according to the clones established either in the form of monoclonal blocks or as mixed plantations (photo 6), such as intercropping with seedlings or other crops in the case of agroforestry systems, as developed for instance in Malaysia for oil palm (TEE et al., 1995), in Vietnam for cashew and in Costa Rica for coffee and cocoa (BALL et al., 1999). Access to this kind of information can be used for growth modeling and associated economic simulations on a more accurate and reliable basis than when working with seedlings. Clonal resistance to pests, stem borers and especially defoliators is also worth investigating, in relation to the environment owing to the considerable damage they may cause to large scale clonal plantations. The influence of the environment on different aspects of sexual reproduction deserves special consideration in relation to seedling production and its decisive impact on breeding strategies, as well as the attainment of the flowering state upon which clear bole length in teak depends (KAOSA-ARD, 1998). Lastly, resort to tissue culture clonal propagation will allow the dispatch of clones to various destinations and the setting-up of intercontinental clonal tests for a better assessment of genotypic adaptability.

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Photo 6. Intercropping teak and oil-palm: a need for long clear bole and narrow crown teak clones. *Cultures associées de teck et de palmier à huile. Il convient de disposer de clones de teck caractérisés par de longs fûts et des houppiers étroits.*
GENETIC PARAMETER ESTIMATES

Using clones, especially on their own roots will greatly help geneticists to determine genetic parameters (Zobel, Talbert, 1984; Ahuja, Libby, 1993), particularly broad sense heritabilities for economically important traits, considering the uncertainties of the heritability studies carried out so far with grafted clones or seedlings (Harshap, Sorianegara, 1977; Gogate et al., 1997). Genetic correlations among traits, or between juvenile and mature manifestations of the same characteristics, especially for wood characteristics, as well as the magnitude of “C effects”, are also very useful information for adopting reliable tree improvement strategies, considering the urgent need for improved quality, higher productivity and shorter rotation plantations.

OPERATIONAL USES

In addition to their interest for research activities, teak clones can be profitably used for planting activities, basically through the production of improved quality seeds from clonal seed orchards, or of rooted cuttings for operational planting.

CLONAL SEED ORCHARDS

Clonal orchards of teak have been set up in many countries with the aim of producing as many genetically improved quality seeds as possible (Kaoasa-Ard, 1998). The seed producers used have been thus far clonally propagated mainly by bud grafting, despite noticeable risks of illegitimate occurrences which may induce a noticeable depreciation of the genetic value of the seeds produced from these orchards, as developed above. Propagation of clones on their own root system will avoid such risks of obtaining illegitimates, which must not be underestimated in teak (Bagchi et al., 1991).

Besides this aspect, teak clonal seed orchards seem far from fulfilling the expectations of tree breeders, and more particularly of teak plantation managers (White, Gavinertvatana, 1999). The time required for reliable selection of clones with a good combining ability for characters of major economical value remains a serious impediment, in spite of alternative solutions for shortening the delays (Kjaer et al., 1999). For instance, improving clear bole length consists in deferring the attainment of the flowering stage; in other words, it results in lengthening generation intervals. Low overall seed productivity from seed orchards, especially those established in Asian countries, remains a serious handicap (Kjaer et al., 1999). In Thailand for instance, 1 ha of clonal seed orchard can establish only 16 ha of plantations annually (Kaoasa-Ard, 1991; quoted by Kjaer, Foster, 1996). This is less than the quantity of seeds produced from natural stands and might be due to the fact that the clones are issued from “Plus” tree selection only, then established in different regions where environmental conditions are not optimal for seed formation (Kaoasa-Ard et al., 1998).

CLONAL WOOD PRODUCTION PLANTATIONS

Rationale

The rationale for developing clonal plantations of teak for wood production has been recognized several times (Wellendorf, Kaoasa-Ard, 1988). This is achievable today considering the possibility of clonally mass producing any selected teak genotype by cuttings (Monteuiuis et al., 1995) or microcuttings (Monteuiuis et al., 1998) with sufficiently high success rates to be compatible with large scale production in cost effective conditions. The availability of such vegetative propagation techniques is indeed a helpful solution for overcoming problems of lack of planting stock from seeds (Kjaer et al., 1999; White, Gavinertvatana, 1999), highlighting the superiority of cloning over the bulk option and being aware of the respective advantages and disadvantages of nursery and tissue culture techniques (Monteuiuis, 1999).

In addition to these quantitative arguments, propagation by cuttings or microcuttings will ensure the production of clonal offspring of the same genetic quality as the original selected ortet they derived from. In contrast, the genetic superiority of plants obtained from seeds is more uncertain despite the severe space and time restrictions associated with conventional breeding programs as proposed by Wellendorf and Kaoasa-Ard (1988) and Kaoasa-Ard (1998). From Kjaer and Foster’s assumptions (1996), it will take at least 50 to 70 years before genetically improved teak plantations can be harvested, without specifying the relevant gain. Kjaer et al. recently (1999) further stressed the fact that such breeding strategies will remain greatly penalized by low seedling productivity. These aspects have been recently developed by White and Gavinertvatana (1999) who concluded that the “seedling route” “is outdated and actually represents a deterrent to wide scale increased productivity in teak plantations”, and as such to commercial teak plantation investment. This unvarnished statement is based on practical data and reliable information gathered from long experience in teak genetic improvement by conventional methods. According to these authors, the magnitude of the real genetic gain associated with the seedling route has yet to be
clearly defined, and the basic question of knowing whether all the efforts made over the past decades have been worthwhile remains... This is undoubtedly a major concern for potential investors, for whom a rapid pay-off is a decisive argument. Practical and theoretical information supports the view that for teak greater genetic gain can be expected from the clonal forestry option than from seedling forestry, as demonstrated for other species (Zobel, Talbert, 1984; Timmis et al., 1987; Ahuja, Libby, 1993). The fact that major private companies have developed industrial plantations from selected clones (Ahuja and Libby, 1993) rather than from seedlings is a meaningful illustration of this.

Increased yield, higher uniformity for economically important traits and shorter rotations are all strong incentives for developing teak clonal plantations without much detrimental incidence on the quality of the end-use product (Bath, 1999). Properly selected and wisely deployed clones will thus maximize short-term returns from suitable planting sites, which are dramatically shrinking in surface area (Bath et al., 1999). Utilization of clones can be profitably adapted to intercropping after proper selection, on crown form especially. Planting density and silvicultural practices must be defined accordingly, in the same way as for intensive management systems consisting in harvesting several times from the same stumps, taking advantage of the specific coppicing ability (Martin et al., 1999). Such practices look very attractive for enhancing plantation yield similarly to the “ligniculture” systems considered for other species (Touzet, 1981; Martin et al., 1999), while significantly reducing planting and (micro)cutting costs. As regards these financial aspects, it has to be emphasized that clonal plantations generally require less planting stock than plantations established from seedlings, which compensates, at least to a certain extent, for the higher cost of (micro)cuttings.

### Requisites

There is still a basic lack of reliable and concrete data on the practical use of teak clones which are highly needed before safely deploying clonal plantations as recommended by Wellendorf and Kaosa-Ard (1988), being aware of the risks associated with clonal forestry (Zobel, Talbert, 1984).

Firstly, the quality of the adventitious root system formed from cuttings must be seriously examined. In certain conditions, teak cuttings are prone to callus formation which may hinder the development of vigorous roots emerging directly from the shoot for a better vascular connection (Hartmann et al., 1997). Ultimately, the success of the plantations established from cuttings will depend on the capacity of the adventitious root system to ensure good anchorage to the soil, in other words, good plant stability, as well as a good physiological status compared to seedlings which have a tap root. This is a fundamental difference between embryogenesis- and organogenesis-issued plants (Cheliak, Rogers, 1990; Hartmann et al., 1997). Such root quality investigations are also applicable to microcuttings which in our case were rooted ex-vitro to produce roots physiologically more functional and more adaptable to natural conditions than those developed in vitro in agar (Monteuis et al., 1998).

In the same way as highlighted for other species (Zobel, Talbert, 1984; Ahuja, Libby, 1993), the genetic uniformity of teak clonal plantations must be considered a major concern especially with regard to the following aspects:

- Clonal susceptibility to pests.
- Proper clone × site matching with regard to traits of major importance.
- Number and genetic relatedness of the clones used, which can be safely established as a space-time mosaic of monoclonal plantings (Zobel, Talbert, 1984; Wellendorf, Kaosa-Ard, 1988).

### CONCLUSION

There is currently a basic deficit in teak timber resources while suitable planting sites are diminishing. The recent teaknet meeting held in Chang Mai (Thailand) in 1999 highlighted the need to develop more productive teak plantations than most of those established so far by conventional ways which seem to have reached certain limits in this respect. This should warrant the development of alternative options with particular emphasis on clonal plantations considering the potential gain which can be expected with reference to other species. Recent advances in clonal propagation technologies are strong incentives for intensifying actions along these lines, for which most of the information available so far is mainly speculative. Reliable knowledge and guidelines are urgently needed from practical clonal experiments before scaling up the process to clonal plantations for better teak resources management, taking into consideration the commercial as well as the biodiversity issues.

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À PROPOS DE L’UTILISATION DE CLONES CHEZ LE TECK

Les ressources actuelles en bois de teck sont très insuffisantes pour satisfaire l’importante demande sur le plan mondial, en dépit des plantations réalisées plus ou moins récemment dans de nombreux pays tropicaux. La raréfaction des terrains adaptés à l’espèce constitue un argument supplémentaire en faveur d’une gestion plus intensive des plantations par rapport aux systèmes traditionnels en vigueur, fondés sur l’utilisation de semis. Dans ce contexte, l’intérêt du clonage mérite d’être considéré à plusieurs titres. Pour le clonage des génotypes de teck, diverses techniques de propagation végétative sont disponibles, grâce à la mise au point récente de protocoles qui permettent la production industrielle de clones par bouturage ou par microbouturage. Par ailleurs, la multiplication de clones « francs de pied » peut être mise à profit pour enrichir les connaissances sur l’espèce, notamment en génétique dont l’intérêt pour les plantations est manifeste. Ces nouvelles techniques de propagation clonale peuvent s’appliquer directement aux plantations, par exemple pour la mise en place de vergers à graines clonales, dont l’identification génétique est plus sûre que celle des vergers issus de greffage. Cependant, les problèmes liés à la qualité des graines produites et à leur quantité insuffisante ne sont pas encore résolus. La mise à profit de ces techniques dans le but de développer des plantations clonales industrielles pour la production de bois intéressant vivement les investisseurs. Les apports des progrès technologiques et de l’utilité des informations en termes d’optimisation de la valorisation du bois dans un contexte commercial très incitatif. Néanmoins, actuellement, l’essor de ces plantations clonales est encore freiné par la rareté des informations disponibles sur le plan expérimental.


A B S T R A C T

ABOUT THE USE OF CLONES IN TEAK

Despite the more or less recent establishment of teak plantations in numerous tropical countries, there is currently a serious deficit in teak timber resources available to fulfill huge worldwide demand. The diminution of suitable planting areas is an additional incentive for developing noticeably more productive teak plantations than what has been done so far based on the use of planting material traditionally produced by seeds. In this respect, prospects associated with the use of teak clones is, objectively speaking, worth considering. There are several options for cloning teak genotypes, with special mention for the recent development of efficient mass clonal propagation methods by cuttings or microcuttings. Production of clones on their own roots can be used for research purposes aimed at improving our knowledge on teak, more particularly in the field of genetics with beneficial outcomes for the plantations. Such clonal propagation techniques can also be used at the operational level, for establishing for instance clonal seed orchards in safer conditions than by grafting or budding, despite the severe limitations as regards the quality and quantity of the seeds produced. Another alternative consists in developing clonal wood production plantations of improved yields, shorter rotations and homogenous quality. This option appears very attractive from the point of view of many investors, especially when considering the technological advances and findings for maximizing returns on the one hand, and commercial challenges on the other. More reliable data are still needed however at the experimental level before developing large scale clonal plantations of teak on a sound basis.

Key words : Tectona grandis. Clones. Plantations. Tree improvement.

R E S U M E N

A PROPOSITA DE LA UTILIZACIÓN DE CLONES EN LA TECAL

A pesar de las plantaciones de teca, más o menos recientes, acometidas en numerosos países tropicales, los recursos actualmente disponibles de madera de teca son ampliamente insuficientes para satisfacer la importante demanda mundial. El enrejimiento de terrenos adaptados a esta especie es un argumento más a favor de la necesidad de intensificar la gestión de las plantaciones respecto de los sistemas tradicionales, todavía vigentes, basados en la utilización de semilleros. En este contexto, merece la pena considerar de forma objetiva el interés, en distintos niveles, de la clonación. Para la clonación de genotipos de teca, se pueden examinar varias técnicas de propagación vegetativa teniendo en cuenta las nuevas perspectivas posibilitadas por el reciente establecimiento de convenciones que permiten la producción industrial de clones de teca mediante estaquillado o microesquejado. La multiplicación de clones « francos de pie » puede aprovecharse para incrementar nuestros conocimientos sobre la especie, especialmente en el campo de la genética que presenta un evidente interés para las plantaciones. Estas nuevas técnicas de propagación clonal pueden emplearse también en las plantaciones, por ejemplo, mediante la creación de huertos clonales de simientes, que son más seguros en lo relativo a la identidad genotípica que los procedentes de injertos, pero que no por ello solucionan los problemas relacionados con la calidad de semillas producidas en número insuficiente. El aprovechamiento de estas técnicas en el desarrollo de plantaciones clonales industriales para la producción de madera suscita el interés de los inversores, conscientes de la importancia de los progresos tecnológicos y de las informaciones útiles para valorizar lo mejor posible esta madera en un contexto comercial en pleno desarrollo. No obstante, la expansión de estas plantaciones clonales se halla actualmente penalizada por la escasez de información disponible a escala experimental.

S Y N O P S I S

L'ensemble des plantations de teck – estimées à 2,2 millions d'hectares en 1990, dont 90 % se trouvent sur le continent asiatique – ne parvient pas à satisfaire l'importante demande de bois sur le plan mondial. De plus, la disponibilité en plants de qualité demeure bien inférieure aux besoins pour accroître les plantations et incitent au recours à la multiplication végétative. Plus particulièrement, la multiplication clonale devrait pallier les insuffisances liées à la production traditionnelle de plants à partir de graines.

POSSIBILITÉ DE PRODUIRE DES CLONES DE TECK

L'intérêt fondamental du clonage réside dans la possibilité de régénérer, théoriquement à l'infini, des plants de même constitution génétique que la « tête de clone » (ortet) sélectionnée initialement. L'ensemble des caractéristiques originales, normalement préservé au fil des générations successives de propagation clonale, garantit une meilleure valeur commerciale.

Différentes techniques de clonage sont possibles pour le teck, à commencer par le greffage qui est utilisé depuis longtemps pour mettre en place des vergers à graines de clones. Cependant, à cause des rejets de greffe, des risques existent d'obtenir des « illégitimes ». En revanche, la production de plants sur leurs propres racines, ou « francs de pieds », permet, entre autres avantages, de remédier à ce problème. Bien que le marcottage soit possible à partir de matériel âgé, la production en masse de matériel cloné à des fins de reboisement n'est possible, en réalité, qu'à partir de boutures ou de microboutures. Récemment, dans des conditions pilotes de propagation clonale industrielle, au Sabah, cent mille microboutures ont été produites in vitro et acclimatées avec plus de 90 % de succès.

INTÉRÊT POUR LA RECHERCHE

Comme c’est déjà le cas pour de nombreuses autres espèces, disposer de clones de tecks « francs de pieds » pourrait être très utile pour approfondir les connaissances sur cette espèce, jusqu’au gène-type, de manière plus fiable qu’à partir de plants greffés. La variabilité intra-clonale devrait renseigner sur les potentialités de clonage conforme de l’espèce, en fonction de l’âge et de l’origine génétique des ortets d’origine, par comparaison aux populations issues de semis, éventuellement demi-frères, voire plein-frères.

La comparaison de plusieurs clones dans différents sites devrait permettre de cerner les interactions clones x environnement et de mieux sélectionner les clones en fonction de leur développement sur divers terrains de plantation. La sélection pourrait également porter sur le développement du couvert végétal, en vue d’une association avec d’autres plantes (plantations mixtes).

Enfin, l’utilisation de clones peut servir à évaluer un grand nombre de paramètres génétiques, telle que l’héritabilité (au sens large), notamment pour les critères ayant des répercussions économiques majeures.

INTÉRÊT POUR LES PLANTATIONS INDUSTRIELLES

Le clonage du teck peut être justifié dans le cas d’une production massive de plants de qualité génétique élevée, sous la forme de semis issus de vergers à graines clonaux, ou sous la forme de boutures ou de microboutures clonées. La première option, privilégiée jusqu’à ce jour, est globalement et fréquemment décevante, du moins pour satisfaire les attentes des investisseurs privés qui sont intéressés par des plantations de qualité, hautement productives et exploitables le plus tôt possible.

Etant donné cette situation et l’enjeu économique, les plantations industrielles clonales paraissent plus attractives, surtout lorsque l’on se réfère au succès obtenu avec d’autres espèces forestières. La raréfaction des terrains disponibles pour le teck, les résultats des analyses technologiques du bois, les possibilités offertes par les nouvelles technologies de clonage et de valorisation du bois sont autant d’incitations à intensifier la culture du teck. De nombreuses informations sont attendues sur le plan expérimental qui devraient permettre d’établir sur de nouvelles bases des plantations susceptibles de répondre à la forte demande internationale, tout en garantissant une bonne gestion des ressources génétiques de l’espèce.