



14 September 2022

**Re: Recommendation letter for the IAPT Biodiversity Challenge grant  
Application**

I write this letter in strong support of the application for the IAPT Biodiversity Challenge grant entitled **Improving collections of the seasonal, herbaceous plants from the laterite plateaus (sky-islands) of the Western Ghats, India**, submitted by Dr. Vinita Gowda (IISER Bhopal).

Western Ghats are recognised as one of the biodiversity hotspots and the lateritic plateaus are undoubtedly one of the most fascinating places in Asia. Yet much of the flora is still poorly known on these plateaus due to ephemeral nature of these plants, which appear for only a few months a year. And when they appear, it is during the rainy season, which makes high-quality plant collections notoriously difficult.

I have known Dr Vinita Gowda for nearly 20 years. After her PhD in Smithsonian Institution, she has returned to India and dedicated her life to developing the next generation of young Indian botanists. This included establishment of her lab and team of people working on plant taxonomy, systematics and ecology, capacity building and public outreach by making plant information on local flora available to public. She has also established a herbarium in IISER Bhopal, which is now registered in Index Herbariorum as BHPL herbarium.

I believe, that the IAPT funding for this grant will go a long way towards the enriching herbarium collections of this understudied group of plants and will significantly add to our understanding of the flora of lateritic plateaus in Western Ghats. I am also sure, that the photographic material collected during this project will reach far beyond the academic audience.

With the best regards,

Jana Leong-Skornickova, PhD., FLS  
Principal Researcher & Editor of the Flora of Singapore  
SING Herbarium, Singapore Botanic Gardens