

Worldwide access to healthcare

The challenges of traditional medicine integration in D.R. Congo tackled through the PhytoKat project (ARES)

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Abstract:

The WHO advocates for integrative medicine, i.e. healing-oriented medicine, (i) which takes into account the whole person (body, mind and soul), including all aspects of the mode of life; (ii) that emphasizes the therapeutic relationship using all appropriate therapies, both conventional and alternative. This encouragement of 'integration' goes hand in hand with the call for a modernization of Traditional Medicine, with the WHO prioritizing issues of quality, safety and efficacy.

In Africa, Traditional Medicine remains predominant; almost 80 % of the rural and urban population resort to this practice rather than modern medicine, whether for trauma, mild or severe illness. Traditional treatments, of great diversity, are largely dominated by the use of herbal recipes. Traditional medicine is strongly rooted in society and represents a part of African heritage and culture that must be respected and protected.

The major challenges and problems related to the integration of traditional medicines, the procedures recommended by the WHO and the means of their practical application will be illustrated through the PhytoKat pilot project, a Congolese-Belgian development project currently being implemented. in Katanga, D.R. Congo. This project aims to train, through research, a critical team of young scientists from different disciplines (pharmacy, agronomy, chemistry, veterinary) trained to work together on common objectives: (i) the definition of conditions for the introduction of traditional practices in the modern medicine (quality of traditional healers and diagnoses; quality, effectiveness, safety of their treatments); (ii) documentation of the medicinal plants used, taking into account ethnomedical, botanical, chemical and biological aspects; (iii) the possibilities of conservation and local production, in a context of regional erosion of plant diversity and excessive harvesting of certain vulnerable medicinal species; (iv) a local variation of the European definitions of plants for "well-established" and "traditional" uses which will make it possible to regulate in a simple manner the placing on the market of the most used plants.

Keywords: WHO, herbal medicines, *Vitex sp*, biodiversity, integrative medicine