



Aidemet Ong

Aid to the Development of the Traditional Medicine

Non-Governmental No-Profit Organization

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The valorisation of resources of traditional medicine for an African and social vision of community health, based on solidarity.

The reflections of *Aidemet Ong* start from a critical analysis of health policy conducted in Mali, with the determinant support of Technical and Financial Partners. Although, since 1991, the emphasis was placed on community participation in the management of their own health, the proposed model remained alien to the habits, skills and everyday experiences of people, the vast majority of which (80 % according to WHO estimates) continues to use the traditional medicine for health care. The barriers that hinder people's access to the health system said “modern” are of geographic, socio-economic and cultural kind. It is for this reason that, despite the efforts, the impact of this modern system on the state of health of the population remains very light: for example, the infant mortality, between 0 and 1 year, for the last ten years, is 96 ‰; the mortality between 1 and 5 years is 128 ‰. Overall, 1 in 5 children dies before reaching the age of 5 years (EDS IV, 2006). It has been calculated that, with the current rate, Sub-Saharan Africa would fulfil the objective of the Millennium Development Goal regarding child mortality by the year 2165 (MDG Centre, Bamako, 2007).

However, the experiences of *Aidemet Ong* on the ground show that each time it was possible to establish a collaborative relationships and a frank and open communication between the actors of traditional and modern medicine, the results were positive for both systems and for the people.

It deals with creating social health alternatives based on solidarity, rooted in the local socio-cultural realities. But to do this, it is essential that the modern system is efficient and accessible, and the traditional system is organized and disposed to collaborate. When we

decided to approach the actors of traditional medicine, it has to be done with respect and attention, but we must also be willing to listen and work in accordance with the priorities that themselves express, using for the best all the available resources. Really, in the context of the Administrative and Health Decentralization, it's in the communal spaces lively and participatory that this collaborative process organized and evaluated between the two medicines should be tested. *Aidemet* Ong is trying to do it, with the support of the Swiss Development Cooperation, in three communes of the Kadiolo District, since 2004.

Aidemet Ong worked, among other things, in the area of the involvement of traditional midwives in the care of obstetric emergencies (Kolokani, Bandiagara, and Kadiolo) and of the taking in account the resources of Traditional Medicine in the fight against malaria (Sikasso). The results are clear.

But traditional medicine is a theme essentially crosscutting: *Aidemet* Ong worked also on a restoration and lasting exploitation project of medicinal species in Bandiagara and in the District of Bamako, involving traditional healers and herbalists in the preservation of biological diversity and the promotion of social economy.

Aidemet Ong could so present the results of these experiences in the political dialogue, thereby contributing to the definition and validation of the National Policy of Traditional Medicine, which was adopted by the Government of Mali October 12, 2005. Since March 2007, with the Pivot Group/Health and Population, *Aidemet* Ong is engaged in a campaign to promote its implementation.

The ambition of *Aidemet* Ong is to create the basis for the social recovery, in Mali and in Africa, of practices of the African Traditional Medicine. They existed in Africa long before the arrival of western medicine. They have resisted to colonization, despite the actions taken to marginalize and ban them. Can they now resist to the globalization? We think yes: reservoir of knowledge, philosophies and cosmogonies still substantially unexploited, the traditional medicine not only provides opportunities for effective and accessible treatment for diseases prevalent in the communities, but it is also a profound cultural heritage and a way to link people to their own history and culture.

Speech by Dr. Rokia Sanogo, President of Aidemet Ong, at the joint press conference with the FEMATH conducted in Bamako on August 27, 2007.