



**World Health  
Organization**

REGIONAL OFFICE FOR **Africa**

**Editorial: August 31<sup>st</sup> 2020:**

## **African Traditional Medicine 18<sup>th</sup> Day 2020**

**Message of WHO Regional Director for Africa, Dr Matshidiso Moeti**

Every year on 31 August, we celebrate African Traditional Medicine Day, and this year, we are looking back on the progress in the past 20 years towards raising the prominence of traditional medicine in national health systems.

Traditional medicine has been used for centuries to improve well-being and it continues to play a central role in health care. It draws on the continent's rich and unique biodiversity of aromatic and medicinal plants. It is also a promising industry that African countries can do more to export internationally.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, African traditional medicine took the spotlight, starting with widespread discussion of COVID-organics as a potential remedy for the virus. Action has accelerated to study this remedy, with a view to scaling-up production if it is shown to be effective.

WHO and Africa CDC have supported this process through development of a master protocol for clinical trials of traditional medicines for COVID-19 and establishment of a regional Expert Advisory Committee bringing together experts from across the continent to oversee the study of COVID-organics and other potential remedies.

These most recent steps build on two decades of action to raise the profile of African traditional medicine, and I would like to share some of the tremendous progress that has been made.

Forty countries now have traditional medicines policies, up from eight countries in 2000, and many have integrated traditional medicine in their national health policies and established regulatory frameworks for traditional medicine practitioners. Academic institutions in 24 countries now offer traditional medicine

courses to pharmacy and medical students. In 17 countries, referral pathways are established between traditional and conventional health practitioners, and eight countries are strengthening integrated delivery of conventional and traditional medicine services. In Ghana, availability of integrated services has doubled from 19 facilities offering these services in 2012 to 40 in 2020.

Ghana, Mali and South Africa have established partial health insurance coverage for traditional medicine products and services thus protecting people from financial hardship in line with action towards universal health coverage.

There are now more than 34 research institutes dedicated to African traditional medicines. In 15 countries public funding is allocated on a regular basis to traditional medicine research. Almost 90 domestic marketing authorizations have been issued for herbal medicines and over 40 such medicines are included in national essential medicines lists. Large-scale cultivation of medicinal plants is also increasing, along with local production of herbal medicines.

These achievements show the significant progress that has been made in the regulation and promotion of African traditional medicine. To build on this, more data is needed on the safety, efficacy and quality of traditional herbal preparations, as well as stronger enforcement of regulatory frameworks and better platforms to share and safeguard traditional medicine knowledge for future generations. Africa's biodiversity, and so too traditional medicine, is also under threat from climate change and mitigation measures are needed.

In recognition of the need for further action, I want to add my voice to the call for the Third Decade of African Traditional Medicine. This will help to ensure African traditional medicine is exploited to its full potential.

I call on governments, academic and research institutions, practitioners, and the private sector to strengthen collaboration. By working together, stakeholders can improve access to quality traditional medicines delivered by health-care teams integrated into national health systems.

It is my personal ambition that African traditional medicine be more fully recognized internationally. I assure you of WHO's commitment to promoting safe and effective traditional medicines for better well-being.