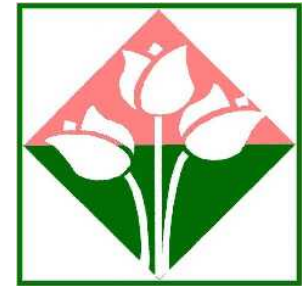


FEMATH



Aidemet Ong

IMPORTANCE OF TRADITIONAL HEALERS AND HERBALISTS IN SAFEGUARDING AND GROWING OF MEDICINAL PLANTS.

As part of the celebration of the 9th African Day of Traditional Medicine, in September 28th, 2011, the Non-Governmental Organization Aid to Development of Traditional Medicine (*Aidemet* Ngo) and the Malian Federation of Traditional Healers and Herbalists (FEMATH) have hosted a press conference on the topic "Importance of Traditional Healers and Herbalists in safeguarding and growing of Medicinal Plants." The aim was to highlight the contribution of the actors of the traditional medicine in protection and domestication of medicinal plants.

The press conference was held under the chairmanship of Dr Minkaïla Maïga, who represented the WHO. In his opening address, he said: "The theme of the African Day of Traditional Medicine this year is: *Conservation of Medicinal Plants: African heritage*. In this context, the traditional healers are engaged in the preservation of natural resources, contributing by this way to the environmental adaptation to climate changes. This action is of high importance for the whole health system".

In his speech, Mr. Mohamed Fall, President of FEMATH, said: "Currently FEMATH includes 125 associations from all the regions of Mali. In this context, we identified more than 5,000 traditional healers and herbalists. The activities of traditional medicine are based on medicinal plants. For this, the actors of traditional medicine are moving more and more towards the protection and growing of medicinal plants, while engaging in their controlled exploitation and rational utilisation. Some associations have already begun the cultivation of medicinal plants, while others dispose of fields for their protection and reintroduction". In conclusion, Mr. Fall said: "The interest of traditional healers for the protection of medicinal plants is obvious: if there are no more medicinal plants, there will be no more even traditional medicine".

This year's press conference was organized in partnership with the young association Mali Ko, whose objective is the promotion of socio-cultural values and positive traditions with Malian young people. Mr Idrissa Dicko, representative of Mali Ko, said: "The development of traditional medicine is one of the objectives of Mali Ko. So, today's topic is also one of ours. However, we believe that for sustainable development in Mali is necessary a strong alliance between tradition and modernity".

Then, Dr. Sergio Giani, Programs Officer of *Aidemet* Ngo, presented two examples of involvement of associations of traditional healers in growing and domestication of medicinal plants, especially in Bandiagara, with the support of the Ngo Terra Nuova and Italian Cooperation, and in Kadiolo, with the support of the Swiss Cooperation. Dr Giani said: "The traditional healers were involved with enthusiasm and efficiency in the activities of both projects. The expected results have been achieved and even exceeded. The availability of traditional healers to get involved in activities of protection and regeneration of endangered medicinal plants and promotion of biodiversity is well established, as they are culturally and professionally interested in preservation and sustainable use of medicinal plants".

Prof. Rokia Sanogo, President of *Aidemet* Ngo, presented the experiences to support herbalists women: "From 2005, in partnership with the ATTHB-Kenya Iriwaton, we launched the

campaign for adopting an herbalist, which has provided more than twenty-five herbalists of Bamako, mostly women, with kiosks for the sale of medicinal plants. The provision of kiosks was accompanied by training and monitoring activities. Funding was provided by various organizations: AEMETRA (Italy), Hope Foundation (Switzerland) and French Society of Ethnopharmacology". The Prof. Sanogo continued: "Currently, *Aidemet* Ngo is conducting, with the support of the Italian Cooperation, through UNOPS, an action-research on economic autonomy and empowerment of women, by the promotion of local knowledge on plants. Italian Cooperation, always through UNOPS, is currently also supporting some herbalists women adhering to the FEMATH. Overall, 40 other new kiosks and other work materials are being made available to herbalists women in Bamako and Segou, with the support of training targeted activities and self-managed micro-credit fund". In conclusion: "Women herbalists were able to adapt themselves to the challenges of urbanization and monetization. So, they respond well to a social demand and ensure availability of medicinal plants close to urban populations at affordable prices, while generating income that is invested to support the family economy, primarily to meet the expenses for health, nutrition and education of children. "

The press conference was held with the technical and financial support of the Swiss Cooperation Office in Mali, in accordance with the mandate given to *Aidemet* Ngo in July 9th, 2010. It was matter to develop a national political dialogue to take into account the resources of traditional medicine in strengthening local health systems and local development.

Bamako, October 2011