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**The Role of Traditional Knowledge (TK) in the
National Economy: The Importance and Scope of TK,
Particularly Traditional Medicine in Tanzania**

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**THE ROLE OF TRADITIONAL KNOWLEDGE
(TK) IN THE NATIONAL ECONOMY: THE
IMPORTANCE AND SCOPE OF TK,
PARTICULARLY TRADITIONAL MEDICINE
IN
TANZANIA.**

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INTRODUCTION:

Traditional health practices in Tanzania have existed for a long time even before the arrival of foreigners. People over the centuries, has developed a wide variety of technologies with due regard to the nature and the ecosystem. Exploration of medicinal properties of plants, extracts of animals and marine life had created through careful observation, trial and error, a vast heritage of knowledge and expertise in different ethnic cultures and civilizations. Most of such indigenous knowledge was handled down, through the ages, by oral tradition. The practices in general have had to meet the need of the local communities. In Tanzania over 60% of health seeking population have a traditional healer as the first point of contact. Likewise majority of people depends on traditional medicine for primary health care. Currently, it is estimated that there are about 75,000 traditional health practitioners in the whole country, exemplifying a ratio traditional health practitioner/peoples population as 1:400, while that of doctors/patients is 1:20,000. Of this great work force of traditional health practice, the practice constitute the main part of their daily earning. Although traditional medicine, plays a great potential in the primary health care till to date there is no effective utilization of the practice and medicinal remedies through science and technology .However, the growing recognition of traditional medicine in health care system may facilitate the change in consciousness with regard to the political economy.

TRADITIONAL MEDICINE AND THE NATIONAL ECONOMY:

Tanzania`s economy depends on agricultural exports of crops such as Coffee,Cotton,Tea,Sugar cane products,Tobacco,Cashewnuts, Pyrethrum,Cloves, medicinal products etc. Although medicinal products(flora/fauna) are not basically recognized as an important source of economic gain to the National economy,individual people and or companies has found this to be one of the area for economic gain.

Despite the worth of resources available,the sector has not fully developed due to the absence of suitable mechanism of herbal medicines control. Tanzania has many medicinal plants,but there is no systematic way of organizing the market,trade and integrate the development of medicinal plants from the production to consumption to boost export of herbal formulations.Medicinal plants sector has a number of stakeholders having divergent interests.Each stakeholder is interested in strengthening specific aspects of his sector only ignoring the overall development.Several constraints exist due to inadequate awareness,inadequate investments in research and development,manufacturer-exporter dissonance,lack of quality and standardization norms,and lack of adequate marketing and trade informations.Lack of software industry for medicinal plants processing is also another big obstacle for further development of traditional medicines (medicinal remedies).Besides the fact that medicinal plants can be viewed as a possible bridge between sustainable economic development and affordable health care system but its development is still at rudimental stage.

To date,with the free market economy the country is experiencing economic gain many people who have engaged themselves into this business.

The export of medicinal flora and fauna is growing fast with the free market economy. Various nations are becoming important countries for the importation of Tanzanian medicinal flora and fauna. In the year 1997, 1998 and 1999 Tanzania exported a total of 7,421,711 Kg, 5,771,022 Kg and 7,005,091 Kg worth Tanzanian Shillings 4,571,007,283; 5,654,410,071 and 6,832,312,356 respectively. The export quantity and value has increased tremendously. Sea products takes about 47.48%, 60.11% and 74.62% for the years 1997, 1998 and 1999 respectively. In 1999 for example the country exported medicinal products which was 31.63% of the total government drugs expenditure (21.6 billion Shillings).

The European herbal market is positively influenced by the growing interest in the complementary and alternative health care solutions. In 1999 it was estimated that the World market for remedies retail sale prices was approximately 20 billion US\$. As shown in table 2: African nations together with middle east countries herbal medicines sale was just 0.19 billion US Dollars which was about 0.97%, of which Tanzania contributed very little about 0.194%.

Figure I:Export earning for the year 1997-1999.

S/No	EXP. ITEMS.	1997 QUAN. IN KGs. `000	1997 VALUE IN TSHs. `000	1998 QUAN. IN KGs. `000		1998 VALUE IN TSHs. `000	1999 QUAN IN KGs. `000	1999 VALUE IN TSHs. IN `000
1	Plants & Plants parts used in perfumery, pharmacy etc.	363.9	458,961.4	287.6		468,951.3	370.9	884,676.6
2	Natural gums, Resins Gum-resins Balsams.	1506.5	412502.1	943.2		215561.5	870	354774..6
3	Garlics	1007.4	64896.7	1071.2		119178.5	537	68132.6
4	Sea-weeds Algae.	2476.7	776524	2185.8		1380701.5	3869.7	1529980.5
5	Sea fauna eg. Sea horse.	1047.2	2858123.1	1283.2		3470017.3	1357.6	4004748.0
6	TOTAL	7421.7	4571007.3	5771.0		5654410.1	7005.1	6832312.4

CONCLUSION:

Traditional medicine is a medicinal practice based on individual country`s culture,tradition and customs.In Tanzania over 60% of all health seeking population has a traditional healer as the first point of contact.Out of 75,000 traditional health practitioners over 2000 are in urban areas where they depend solely on traditional medicine practice for their daily earning.Although Tanzania has no proper regulatory mechanism to control its medicinal flora and fauna,still individual people do export these products and earn a substantial amount of money.If proper regulatory mechanisms were in place and science and technology were also used to improve the quality of the export products then the export earning would have been increased.Taking an example of China,India etc countries which has proper regulatory mechanism,high information awareness towards the importance of traditional medicine and the pharmaceutical processing industrially their export earning is high. Tanzania being one of the tropical countries with good environmental conditions for better living of the flora and fauna,if could have good regulatory mechanisms ,the country`s herbal medicine industry, could have been increased. Increase in herbal medicine production could have improved export and hence improve the export earning.More people would have been involved in the business and hence improve their poverty status.