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Traditional Use of Medicinal Plants among Local Healers in Bié Province, Angola

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Abstract

The redistribution of the population during the Angolan civil war forced people to settle in large numbers in small areas, which has resulted in accelerated degradation of vegetation and soil. Families in Bié province are considered the most vulnerable in terms of food security and health. In Angola, the indigenous medicinal plant knowledge has not been systematically studied to date. Our study documented and analysed indigenous knowledge of 10 traditional healers in two localities in Bié province in Angola through participatory observation, semi-structured interviews, transect walks and calculation of following quantitative ethnobotanical indices: the relative frequency of citations, informant consensus factor, informant agreement ratio, fidelity level, cultural value index and Sørensen similarity index. Gender was presented equally among the herbalists (50 % male, 50 % female). Medicinal plant use reports were mostly distributed among the group of gastro-intestinal disorders (84 use reports), and pregnancy/birth/puerperium disorders (49 use reports). A total of 56 plant species distributed among 54 genera and 30 botanical families have been documented. The most represented botanical families encountered were Fabaceae (16 species), Apocynaceae, Asteraceae, Rubiaceae and Euphorbiaceae (4 species). The study has revealed 12 plant species not previously documented for the medicinal use, several of them with considerable local cultural importance: *Scleria induta*, *Vernonia britteniana*, *Oxygonum pachybasis*, *Droogmansia dorae*, *Brachystegia gossweileri* and *Aeschynomene dimidiata* or *Searsia squalida*. The plants with the highest cultural value in our study are commonly used in surrounding countries and Africa: *Securidaca longipedunculata*, *Garcinia huillensis*, *Annona stenophylla*, *Azelia quanzensis*, *Strychnos cocculoides* or *Eriosema affine*. Trees (34 %) and shrubs (37 %) were the prevailing plant life forms used in the traditional medicine of Bié province. Roots were the plant parts mostly used (70 %) in traditional medicine and collection from the wilderness was extremely prevailing in Bié province in Angola. Therefore, risk of loss of plant resources is increased in the area, also because of common land clearing processes. The study has documented a diverse system of traditional plant knowledge which urges for continuous research in Angola as well as for further pharmacological studies to validate the use of selected medicinal species.

Keywords: Angola, Bié province, Chokwe, medicinal plants, quantitative ethnobotany, traditional healers, Umbundu