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Medicinal Flora from S. Tomé, Africa

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Introduction

S. Tomé (ST) archipelago is only slightly bigger than the Seychelles, the smallest country in Africa. Located in the Gulf of Guinea, at about 1º north of the Equator, ST had 215,056 residents in 2019, most of which (66%) lived under the poverty line of 3.2 dollars per day.

Material and Methods

Exotic species and natural remedies have enriched this native pharmacy, meaning ST Equatorial Island.. During the year 2019, the Institute of Geography and Spatial Planning (IGOT), from the University of Lisbon, conducted a survey to four categories of informants, in the capital city of S. Tomé and environs: 1) the food, spice and natural medicines growers (20 %); 2) the fruit, fresh legumes, staples, and healing plant collectors (74 %); 3) a couple of traditional medicinal practitioners (4 %); 4) service providers that sold dried plant portions either, like a botanical garden guide (2 %). The survey gathered 111 different plant species, half of which possessed curative properties.. Botanical identification of species used the Royal Kew Gardens norm, available online.

Photo 1: Quissobó (*Borago africana*)

Results and Discussion

According to Pape and Andrade (2015), it was in the 1920's that hospitals were built all over the island of ST, as any cocoa plantation (roça, in Portuguese) with over 1,000 workers was obliged by law to have its own hospital. In fact, slavery was abolished in 1869 and, from then onwards workers were sought after in Angola, Cabo Verde (both Portuguese colonies, those days) and in other western African countries. Endemic diseases needed specialised care, such as malaria and cholera. The Equatorial and biodiverse rich ST environment possessed several anti-malarial and anti-diarrhoeal plant species, as is the case with the quinine tree (*Rauvolfia caffra*).

Several plant species have dual uses, such as maquequê *(Solanum macrocarpum*), photo 2, consumed as food and medicine, for its anti-anaemic properties. It is a nutraceutical and it had six (6) occurrences in the 2019 survey of the University of Lisbon. Other species necessary to make the calulu, the local delicacy, also nutraceuticals are: the African basil *(Ocimum gratissimum);* Selô-sum-zóm-maiá (*Eryngium foetidum*), a species consumed in the Amazonian city of Belém (Madaleno, 2002), with duck or fish, whereas calulu is usually cooked in ST with chicken or fish; Quissobó, a natural antibiotic from ST, is applied against genital diseases.

Photo 2: Maquequê

Conclusions and Outlook

ST residents have faith in the curative powers of nature. During the IGOT scientific mission to ST, the survey included interviews to traditional healers, one of which was also a midwife. They are highly respected women in the island, because they are responsible for childbirth and are also responsible for young babies health troubles, as access to conventional care is reduced by transportation and pharmacy costs. Therefore, the answer to the research question: "How can the city residents solve their mild and chronic health troubles when they lack financial resources for their daily needs, such as food and shelter?" is to use TMK, meaning, traditional medicinal knowledge and healing plant species, exotic or native. The expectation is to feed the database about healing flora from Africa, with fifty-six (56) medicinal species collected during fieldwork, in 2019.

References

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