



Project Fabio

Overview

In early 2013, the LTFHC began conducting research in the DRC under “Project Fabio,” named for an Italian doctor interested in naturopathy and ethnobotany and in whose name funds were donated. Through this research initiative, we have created a database cataloguing hundreds of indigenous plants used by traditional healers, as well as mapped the sources of these commonly-used botanical medicines and the ways they are prepared.

Crucially, Project Fabio has allowed the LTFHC to build relationships with trusted traditional healers in the community. Project Fabio will be immensely useful in providing baseline data for future evaluation of the significance and magnitude of traditional healers’ contributions to the public healthcare system in the DRC. This project also intends to assess the acceptability and feasibility of the introduction of botanical gardens as a way of conserving the biodiversity of the Lake Tanganyika Basin.

Background and Justification for Project

Traditional healers are central to local health care infrastructure in the Lake Tanganyika Basin, as often patients cannot travel to hard-to-reach health centers and instead rely on these local, traditional healers for care. Sixty percent of the population sees traditional healers exclusively. Effective new medicines can be developed from botanical remedies, cultivated, and used inexpensively. In the event that homeopathic remedies are ineffective or even harmful, we can better serve our patients by understanding what substances they use and under which circumstances.

Unfortunately, at this time there is little to no documentation of this homeopathic knowledge. As the Lake Tanganyika Basin undergoes ecologic and economic change, it is more important than ever to catalog the potential value of the environment, giving local populations leverage to protect their rights. Despite the forests of the Congo being known as the world’s “second lung”, there is little knowledge of conservation and environmental protection among both traditional healers and fisherman living in the basin. This has far reaching consequences not only for the environment as a whole, but for the maintenance of homeopathic remedies—some of which may have far-reaching healing powers heretofore unknown to the medical community.

Activity to Date:

In February 2013, the LTFHC conducted extensive research in Moba Territory DRC. Activities consisted of:

- Meetings with local governmental officials, as well as hospital and Ministry of Health officials to explain the project and the importance of creating a botanical garden and the homeopathic medicine manual. Everyone we talked to was interested and agreed to assist us.
- Two day workshop with 25 traditional healers
 - Day 1 detailed the importance of biodiversity, and how to protect and conserve natural resources
 - Day 2 discussed the advantages and disadvantages of the traditional medicines, the collaboration between traditional remedies and modern medicines, the importance of knowledge transmission to others, and the referral system between traditional healers and the general hospital
- Following the work shop, LTFHC staff members spent two weeks conducting individual on-site interviews.
- The result of this project is a homeopathic medicine manual cataloguing 200 species of TABWA MEDICINAL PLANTS in Kiswahili, French and English.

Next Steps:

- Conduct similar activities in Tanzania along Lake Tanganyika, where traditional medicine is also ubiquitous

Partnership Opportunity

Expansion to Tanzanian side of Lake Tanganyika

Estimated Budget:

\$50,000*

*includes Tanzania survey development, handbook production, traditional healer group conferences and one on one interviews, team transport and staff salary support