

Country Experience on Regulation of Traditional Medicine in Eritrea

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Abstract : Eritrea is located along the Red Sea, north of the Horn of Africa, between Djibouti and Sudan and has a population of about 3.2 million as of 2010. It has six administrative regions; Anseba, Debub, Debubawi K'eyih Bahri, Gash-Barka, Ma'akel, and Semenawi K'eyih Bahri. Eritrea has got its independence in 1991 after 30 years war of liberation. The country is blessed with various medicinal flora and fauna, and marine and terrestrial biodiversity. Traditional Medicine (TM) has been an integral part of the Eritrean culture for centuries. So far, more than 19 TM modalities have been recognized, and are broadly categorized as; herbal, procedure-based and spiritual. Despite the availability of modern medicine to the majority of the population, TM is still widely practiced. The rationale behind widespread use is accessibility, affordability and cultural acceptability. Hence, TM is of great contribution to the Eritrean health care system. As a matter of fact, harnessing the potential contribution of effective and safe TM in order to attain Universal Health Coverage (UHC) has been emphasized in the WHO TM strategy 2014-2023. The Eritrean TM, however, was operating without regulation and reliable scientific justification behind its safety and efficacy. Thus, the Ministry of Health (MoH), in recognition of the role of TM in primary healthcare and safeguard public health, established a regulatory body for TM so-called as Traditional Medicine Unit (TMU) in 2012. The mission of the unit is to ensure rational TM use through an integrated health service delivery system and contribute to the country's economic and social development. The unit has established its national TM policy in 2017. The activities of the unit are guided by the National TM Advisory Committee (TMAC), responsible for the provision of technical assistance and advisory role. Moreover, the Legal Framework and Code of Ethics and Practice which provide a legal basis for the regulation of TM have also been drafted. In recognition of the importance of TM research and development, the unit launched a nationwide TM survey in 2017 and had surveyed two zones (Gash-Barka and Debub). The findings of the survey were subjected to a research dissemination workshop and publication in international journals. Furthermore, TM-related adverse events reporting tool (Green Form) aiming to guide regulatory interventions and researches have been established by the unit, and ever since reports are flowing. The unit has also been offering training to THPs, pharmacy students and health care professionals regarding TM and its regulatory activities. In addition, as part of the establishment of the national medicinal plants' database and herbal monograph, more than 329 and 30 medicinal plants, have been compiled respectively. In conclusion, TM is still widely accepted and practiced in Eritrea. The TMU ever since its establishment is endeavoring to ensure the safety and efficacy of the TM, and its integration in the mainstream health service delivery system.

Keywords : efficacy, regulation, safety, traditional medicine, traditional medicine unit, universal health coverage

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