

Traditional Medicine in Africa, edited by Isaac Sindiga, Chacha Nyaigoti-Chacha & Mary Kunanah, East African Educational Publishers, Nairobi, 1995. ISBN: 9966-46-548-0, pp 197 + Preface, maps, tables and references.

The volume opens with an outline of the motivation behind the workshop that culminated in the publication of the book. The workshop was motivated by the fact that the majority of Kenyans – rural and urban, illiterate and literate – spanning a myriad of ethnic and religious affiliations, utilise traditional medicine at one time or another. The volume consists of conceptual and empirical papers organised into chapters.

In an introductory article, Sindiga sets out a case for the incorporation of traditional medicine in official health care. Providing a general overview of the theory and practice of traditional medicine, the author stipulates that if the goal of health for all by the year 2000 is to be realised, there is need to pay more attention to primary health care, which entails utilisation of traditional medicine.

The empirical papers by Wandibba, Gitae, Kawango and Sindiga gives the theoretical aspects of the book a solid base in terms of empirical case studies. These authors examine in substantial detail the traditional medicine of the Babukusu, Agikuyu, Luo and Gusii.

In the last chapter the editors, albeit speculating and prescriptively, integrate the themes of the articles in the volume by focusing on areas of future concern with regard to the traditional medicine in Africa. Drawing almost exclusively from Kenyan examples, the editors identify three areas of immediate concern in traditional medicine: traditional medicine and health care policy; professionalisation of traditional medicine; and material medica in traditional medicine. For instance in the case of health care policy, the authors observed that “...*whereas traditional healers recognise biomedicine and refer their patients there, the reverse is not true.*” This state of affairs is later attributed to the perceived and actual competition between biomedicine and African traditional medicine for the clients. Thus though traditional medicine was officially recognised in Kenya in 1979, up to now little has been done at policy levels because biomedical practitioners, whose negative attitudes towards traditional medicine have changed little, are still in control.

In addressing these emerging concerns, the editors not only map out the direction traditional medicine is likely to take in future, but also acknowledge that traditional medicine, like other forms of culture, has inherent dynamism. It would probably have been futile if the editors had not tied up the rather diverse theoretical and methodological articles by abstracting elements of linking them to the future.

This book is quite valuable in that not only does it provide useful data on the various aspects of traditional medicine, but also defines its role in the provision of health care. Thus it is both informative as well as evaluative.

The book will no doubt be useful to community health workers, health researchers, health practitioners, policy makers and planners. Discipline-wise, students of medical anthropology, medical sociology and community health will find the book quite useful.

However, many readers might find the title "Traditional Medicine in Africa" rather too broad. The editors' attempt to justify this title on the basis of "*inclusion of several new chapters....to improve the conceptual foundations of the work and case study coverage*" seem not convincing enough since virtually all contributions (including the conceptual ones) draw heavily from the Kenyan situation. In fact, a casual look at the the list of contributors to the volume indicate that the authors are mostly Kenyans and they researched on Kenyan communities. The inclusion of conceptual papers notwithstanding, the title "Traditional Medicine in Kenya" seems more appropriate.

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