

abstract

Traditional medicine is defined by the World Health Organization as the sum total of knowledge or practices whether explicable or inexplicable, used in diagnosing, preventing or eliminating physical, mental or social diseases. Traditional medicine has persisted in Kenya over the years despite it being outlawed under the Witchcraft Act of 1925 and therefore being practiced underground until 1963. Despite the tremendous contribution made by the Western trained health care providers to the health care delivery in this country, the traditional medical practitioners still have a vital role as 70-80% of the population still rely on them. There is need to strengthen the already existing traditional medicine because of the current challenges of provision of health care which includes issues on affordability of the conventional drugs, accessibility to modern hospitals, drug resistance, existing and emerging diseases and adverse side effects of the conventional drugs. There is a renewed interest by many stakeholders on traditional medicine and research is being undertaken though not coordinated. There are very few scientifically validated herbal products in the market as most of the research is still at the laboratories level. There is an enormous potential in Kenya to exploit the already existing traditional medicine with its many plant species documented to have medicinal value for both human and animals. In order to maximally exploit this potential now and in the future, there is an urgent need for finalizing the national policy framework on the promotion of traditional medicine which will be the base for defining the role of traditional medicine in national health care programmes. This will ensure that necessary regulatory and legal mechanisms are created for promotion and maintaining good practice, authenticity assurance, safety and efficacy of therapies, equitable access to health care resources and information about these resources.