

The Role of Indigenous Knowledge in the Provision of Health Care in Malawi

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ABSTRACT Malawi has rich indigenous knowledge (IK) but lacks coordination processes to promote utilisation of IK in economic development. Indigenous Knowledge Centre (IKC) was established in 2009. IKC's goal is to compile, preserve, manage and promote IK; and strengthen Science, Technology and Innovation (STI). This paper looks at innovative methods to harness IK in healthcare provision in Malawi where some people resort to traditional healthcare because modern hospitals are inaccessible; lack drugs, personnel and laboratory equipment; and staff are presumed to ill-treat patients. Malawi's maternal mortality is 984 maternal deaths per 100,000 live births. Traditional Birth Attendants (TBAs) are discouraged from using medicinal plants because they cause ruptured uterus, a major cause of maternal mortality. Hospital records show that TBAs delivered at least 1,100 babies per month. The study by the IKC found that trained TBAs were still using medicinal plants. A total of 107 plant species were used in pregnancy and 128 for under-five cases to treat different ailments. Most of the medicinal plants were administered without dosage guidelines. Although TBAs were banned from practicing, some trained TBAs were still assisting pregnant women to deliver. Those that were afraid delivered with the assistance of village elderly women. Because modern and traditional healthcare systems operate side by side, there is a need to integrate the two systems. Medicinal plants need to be analysed; safe dosages established and toxic plants identified to guide evidence-based policies.