

MUTHI Publishable summary report Final

It is recognised that research must be a basis for better health throughout Africa (e.g. Global Ministerial Forum on Research for Health, Bamako 2008, Beijing declaration 2008). As a consequence it is a priority to build research capacities in the African continent that will set good standards for the development of improved health security and systems in the future. In several African countries western medicine is not widely available, and WHO has recognised the role of traditional medicine and its practitioners in primary health care. MUTHI is a Coordination and Support Action project under the EC's 7th Framework Programme (Health). The overall objective of the project is to create sustainable research capacity and research networks between the participants in Africa (Mali, South Africa and Uganda), collaborating neighbouring institutions, and the European project participants to obtain improved health in Africa. We have identified needs and started to develop and deliver research training programmes. The research institutions from Africa taking part in the project have implemented research methodologies so that they are able to improve traditional medicines, identify bio-active compounds, and clinically evaluate and register medicinal products that are used for the treatment of illnesses that are frequent in African countries.

In most African countries the availability of so-called western medicine is scarce, and there is still a living tradition for the use of herbal remedies for treating the ailments the local population suffer from. Several of the remedies used have never undergone any quality control, neither on the chemical or biological side, nor on the possible toxicological problems may some of these plant products give rise to. When the MUTHI Project started there exist limited laboratory facilities, including personal skills, for analysing natural compounds, and clinical trials on herbal remedies were non-existent for most products. It was also important for the practitioners to improve their knowledge of intellectual property rights (IPR).

The overall objective of MUTHI was to create sustainable research capacity and research networks between the participants in Africa, collaborating neighbouring institutions, and the European project participants to obtain improved health in Africa. The primary object of research was thus traditional medicine and the project did especially focus on the products present in water extracts. Training in all the mentioned methodologies was finalised in period 3 of the MUTHI Project and now, all the African partners are able to perform both the chemical, biological and toxicological methods important for determining what products in the plants that are responsible for the bioactivities. They have all been trained in how to perform RTO (Retrospective treatment outcome) studies, as well as in preparing MOUs with traditional healers; they know how to deal with IPR (Intellectual property rights) as well as how to apply to ethics committees in the relevant countries for performing the RTO studies.

All the four African partners have also been trained in research methodologies that they can utilise in the future in collaboration with the European partners; they have been trained in conference presentations and also in writing research publications for peer reviewed international journals.