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Forest Research
Institute (F.R.I.)
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IUFRO Conference on Gender and Forestry
November 16th till November 19th 2008

Gender Roles in Utilization of Medicinal Plants in the Miombo Woodlands

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Key Words: Medicinal plants; gender; conservation; Miombo woodlands; Tanzania

Abstract: A study to uncover gender roles knowledge in utilization of medicinal plants for primary health care and community well-being was conducted around the Miombo woodlands of Western Tanzania. Information gathered through 115 interviews in six villages revealed significant differences in utilization roles between men and women. Men seem to dominate the traditional healing system, medicinal plant trade in formal and informal markets and as specialists treating diseases different from those women treat. However, both men and women equally share responsibilities in processing of plant remedies, and treating diseases affecting women and children. It can be concluded that, the existing gender role differences in utilization of medicinal plant resources at Urumwa should be valued, recognized and taken into account when developing strategies to improve the primary health care system. There is a need for communities around Urumwa to change taboos and culture which hinder women's participation in traditional healing to sustain the primary health care system. Knowledge should be transferred to the young generations without excluding girls. This can be achieved through community sensitization using both seminars and mass media from the government and other institutions interested in medicinal plant aspects.

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