

REVIEW OF THE BOOK “AFRICAN HERBAL PHARMACOPOEIA” BY BRENDLER, T., ELOFF, J. N., GURIB-FAKIM, A., PHILLIPS, L. D.

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The publication of yet another herbal pharmacopoeia on the numerous African medicinal plants is indeed an intellectual thing of beauty and it is our joy forever. On this note, therefore, I wish to congratulate the Association of African Medicinal Plants Standards (AAMPS) based currently in Mauritius, and the team of editors who had brought this intellectual masterpiece into existence.

Sadly indeed, the story of herbal pharmacopoeia for African medicinal plants is very short in history. Various previous national attempts in Africa to produce herbal pharmacopoeia have at best, yielded mere “attenuated” or “diminished” or “incomplete” plant monographs or just an ethnomedical assemblage of literature materials on African medicinal plants. The first successful attempt was the publication of the 105-plant African Pharmacopoeia (AP) which was published by the defunct Organization of African Unity’s Scientific, Technical and Research Commission (OAU/STRC) in 1985, followed by the book of medicinal plant analysis as the volume II in 1986. The Ghana Herbal Pharmacopoeia (GHP) was published in 1992 with a second edition published in 2007 followed by the Nigerian Herbal Pharmacopoeia (NHP) in 2008. Meanwhile, the OAU/STRC embarked on the publication of national ethnobotanical floristic texts resulting from organized surveys carried out by African experts across west African coast. Such texts are available for South west Nigeria, Ghana, Senegal, Cameroon, Benin etc. All of these earlier documentations are now stretching their hands of fellowship to African Pharmacopoeia as the newest entry into the herbal pharmacopoeial family in Africa. They have constituted formidable partners in progress for Africa.

I would like to open this brief review by welcoming the pharmacopoeial publication into the league of earlier texts of similar nature in the field of African medicinal plant documentation. The usefulness of a herbal pharmacopoeia in a resource-limiting continent like Africa, cannot be over-emphasised. Firstly, it would facilitate and fast-track the long awaited and most needed official recognition of African traditional medicine in the region, the evolution of herbal industry in the AFRO region, improved health care delivery among the people as well as bringing about job and wealth creation, through poverty alleviation. Furthermore, it would provide the necessary quality control and monitoring templates for the national or sub-regional Food and Drugs Administration and other relevant drug regulatory/registration authorities on safety of herbal medicines, submitted to them for human and animal health.

The new African Pharmacopoeia is a 288-page book, consisting of 51 plant monographs (even though the AAMPS original target was 50) with therapeutic indications that covered many diseases and over 30 widely distributed plant families among which Apocyanaceae appeared in five monographs followed by Asclepiadaceae offering four monographs. Each of the plants was subjected to literature search to provide relevant data under a set of monograph template which represented an assemblage of physical, chemical, botanical, ethnomedical, quality control, pharmacological, toxicological, therapeutic and other regulatory standards. The complete data for each plant, using the above template, became the set of pharmacopoeial specifications, which when collected together constituted a monograph while all the monographs for the 51 plants were put together in a book to make the African Herbal Pharmacopoeia. Of notable significance, are the types of markers specified for herbal safety monitoring and quality assurance validation for both the raw materials and subsequent finished products. Safety is a major consumer concern while quality control is a regulatory apparatus. Professionally therefore, every plant contained in this book has henceforth become an official drug raw material which can be formulated into an official herbal drug product, registrable by the Food and Drugs authorities provided the overall manufacture complies with the pharmacopoeial specifications therein. In due course, it is expected that a number of the monographs would become attracted to the world herbal producers and may compete as articles of global trade to the credit of the African region e.g. *Acacia senegal* gum, *Aframomum melegueta* fruit, *Aloe ferox* juice and gel, *Catharanthus roseus* leaf, *Rauwolfia vomitoria* root, *Moringa oleifera* leaf and fruit, as well as *Strophanthus gratus* seed and *Sutherlandia frutescens*, etc. The African Herbal Pharmacopoeia (complementary to the AP, 1985; GHP, 1992, 2007; and NHP, 2008). as evidence of standardization of the medicinal plants is what the herbal industry has been waiting for before patronizing African medicinal plants. The same information would facilitate the support of all categories of healthcare works in supporting the integration of traditional medicine.

Besides being a great advancement beyond the information contained in the 1985 African Pharmacopoeia (AP), there are other peculiarities that won my admiration in the herbal pharmacopoeial design, namely: the colourful photographs, the colourful chromatograms, the clinical data, spectroscopic spectra, bibliography etc. The living database in the AAMPS secretariat in Mauritius would provide an avenue for easy up-dating for future editions.

However, it is expected that the second edition (which should come in a few years) will indicate the countries and tribes of origin of the vernacular names, as well as endeavour to provide microscopical information

for both the fresh and powdered samples of all the plants as an invaluable and indispensable herbal pharmacopoeial standard required for validation and in detecting adulteration especially where pieces of specialized equipment (HPL, uv/visible, IR) are unaffordable. These and other notable gaps (as stated in the “forward”) should be provided in future editions which should also reflect greater uniformity of standards.

As I encourage the Association of the African Medicinal Plants Standards to provide us with the second edition on time, I wish to sensitize all the nations of Africa to embark on individual national herbal pharmacopoeiae consisting of plants of local peculiarity that would further complement the efforts of the existing texts.

It is therefore, my delight to commit the use of the first edition of the African Herbal Pharmacopoeia (AfrHP) to all individuals with herbal medicine interest, herbal industrialists, all categories of plant scientists, traditional medicine practitioners, Food and Drugs authorities, relevant national and international Agencies promoting the healthcare utilization of medicinal plant resources.