

## Oral presentation

### Identifying conservation priorities for medicinal plants: experiences from Tanzania

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**Introduction.** Identifying specific medicinal plants as conservation priorities has important implications for both ecosystem and human health. Due to the informal, heterogeneous, and clandestine nature of the phytomedicine trade, the evaluation of such species is complex. Appropriate methods to assess these plants include guidelines specified by the IUCN Medicinal Plant Specialist Group (MPSG) and statistical analyses; however they must be adapted to the unique characteristics of each research site.

**Objectives.** The objectives were to: apply MPSG guidelines to assess conservation priorities for commercially traded phytomedicines in Tanga, Tanzania; identify the strengths and challenges encountered using these guidelines and subsequent statistical analyses; and make recommendations for employing these tools elsewhere.

**Methods.** Drawing from market surveys and inventories, vendor interviews, and collections with harvesters, short lists of priority species were derived. Statistically estimated species accumulation curves and diversity indices to assess the sample of vendors and the diversity of ethnospices. Ethnographic methods (e.g., participation in and observation of collection, preparation, and distribution of plants; repeat open-ended interviews; focus groups) elaborated and validated findings, and assessed their significance in a broader context.

**Results.** The most comprehensive, meaningful, and reliable results are generated by customizing methods to the specific circumstances of the research site and population. In this case, it was necessary to apprehend local understandings of scarcity, demand, changes in availability, and economic value, which hinged on the diverse socio-cultural and economic influences on people involved in the medicinal plant trade.

**Conclusion.** Prioritizing species for conservation is most appropriate when considered in conjunction with local people's perceptions of plants and places that are deserving of attention. This can be achieved by integrating comprehensive, rigorous ethnographic methods (to identify how and what data to collect, and to validate and contextualize findings) with statistical analyses (which impart scientific rigor to these ethnobotanical data).

Keywords: Ethnomedicine, Methods, Trade

#### Selected References

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