

Anne Ouma

Wednesday June 29: Room SB415 Community Engagement: Working Across Different Scales & Issues, 2:30-2:55

Title: From Gift to Commodity: Perspectives of Traditional Healers on Commercialisation and Commodification of Traditional Medicinal Knowledge in the Eastern Lake Victoria Region.

Affiliation: PhD scholar, Umeå universitet

Contact: anne.ouma@geography.umu.se,anncofm@yahoo.com

Abstract: For all the revolutionary changes in human health care in the 21st Century, life in many parts of Africa begins with and is sustained by the support of traditional medicine. The importance accorded to commercialization and marketing of traditional medicine (TM) and effects of urbanisation on these has grown in the past few decades. Despite the importance of traditional medicine and its increased commercialization for both rural and urban populations, few geographers have investigated how and what effects increased urbanisation and mobility has on this resource. The purpose and contribution of this article is to examine how commercialisation of Traditional medicinal practices are affected by urbanisation and on-going socio-spatial transformations in Mwanza (Tanzania) and Nyanza (Kenya) in the Eastern Lake Victoria Region. Both the formal and informal discourse is examined. It examines the rural-urban dynamics in relation to commercialization and uses of traditional medicinal plants. Factors which are affecting the rural and urban linkages related to use, commercialisation and management of Non Timber Forest Products (NTFP's) and Traditional Medicine (TM) as an example of NTFP's are presented. Urbanisation and increased commercialisation of traditional medicinal products are seen to be transforming the practices and attitudes towards TM.

Gendered implications are examined on how men respective women address commercialisation and the use of TM in view of these socio-spatial transformations. We argue that the uses of NTFP's and TM have changed over time and space with new issues emerging relating to urbanization, domestication and a degrading ecosystem. The context of the study comprises rural and urban settings in Mwanza (Tanzania) and Nyanza (Kenya) in the Eastern Lake Victoria Region. In-depth and semi-structured interviews, participant observational sessions and focus group discussions were conducted with a snowball sampling technique, stratified by gender and generation. With the help of literature review and empirical material we analyse how urbanisation and commercialisation due to migration are transforming Traditional medical practices in the study region.

The guiding questions and issues include; what are the rural and urban linkages related to use, commercialization and management of TM and what are the gender implications of those linkages? ; How have the uses of TM changed over time and space and what new issues have emerged relating to urbanization, domestication and a degrading ecosystem?

Respondents in providing perceptions on issues and factors surrounding TM, enabled us to frame empirical analytical themes which show generational differences in attitudes towards commercialisation of TMs. These themes are aggregated into environmental (biodiversity loss), socio-economic and socio-cultural including acculturation, changes in social norms and individual factors including an emerging and more complex form of medical pluralism. Increased rural-urban migration has lead to socio-spatial and intergenerational issues that have specific impacts on access to and use of TM. Despite some identified major challenges to the continuity of the use of TM, the study defines some key roles of TM in primary health care and for sustaining livelihoods as well as providing developmental impetus to the health sector in general in both space and place in the region of study.