

The **second WHO Global Summit on Traditional Medicine**, held in New Delhi, India, on 17–19 December 2025, has the theme of “Restoring balance: The science and practice of health and well-being”. The Summit aligns with the [Global Traditional Medicine Strategy 2025–2034](#), which recognizes Traditional Medicine as a living science that contributes to universal health coverage, health equity and sustainability. The Summit serves as a global platform to accelerate implementation of the new strategy, foster partnerships, and translate pledges and commitments into concrete action.



For more information, contact: tmcentre@who.int

Parallel session 1.B

Traditional Medicine knowledge – balancing access and benefit-sharing

Plenary 1 and associated parallel sessions will serve to anchor the Summit’s vision of balance across body, mind, community and the planet, as aligned with the Global Traditional Medicine Strategy 2025–2034 and global declarations.

This parallel session aims to facilitate dialogue on equitable, legal, social and ethical frameworks for accessing and utilizing Traditional Medicine knowledge (TMK). It will examine critical questions such as who controls TMK, who benefits from it and who is left behind. Participants will explore historical and contemporary drivers of imbalance in access and benefit-sharing (ABS) – from colonization and commodification to intellectual property regimes and inequitable global markets, while identifying examples of fair benefit-sharing and equitable governance from around the world that illustrate both the harms of exclusion and the promise of equitable sharing. Panellists will reflect on power, rights and justice in the governance of knowledge, and propose strategies that ensure reward for knowledge holders, practitioners and communities. The session will also examine what could have been possible if such imbalances had not existed, and how pathways of restitution, recognition and fair benefit-sharing can be created.

Rationale

TMK embodies an interconnected worldview linking human health, ecological sustainability and cultural continuity. It includes the utilization of plants, animals and minerals for healing (1,2). Over time, this knowledge has informed the discovery of major pharmaceuticals, cosmetics and other industrial products, leading to the appropriation of these natural resources for commercial purposes. Examples include aspirin (willow/*Salix*), artemisinin for malaria (sweet wormwood/*Artemisia annua*), vincristine/vinblastine for childhood cancer (rosy periwinkle/*Catharanthus roseus*) and many others (3). Indeed, the WHO estimates that 40% of pharmaceutical products originate from traditional medicinal plants. While such pharmaceuticals have transformed global health, they also raise critical questions about fair recognition and benefit-sharing with the communities from which this knowledge originated (4,5). Ensuring equitable access to and fair benefit-sharing of TMK contributes to a world of holistic balance by recognizing the rights and contributions of Indigenous Peoples and local communities, promoting ethical knowledge exchange, and encouraging biodiversity and sustainable use of natural resources (6–8). It also supports broader WHO goals on health equity, universal health coverage, biodiversity conservation and the One Health approach, and complements global commitments under the Nagoya Protocol on Access and Benefit-sharing, the Convention on Biological Diversity, the WIPO Treaty on Intellectual Property, Genetic Resources and Associated Traditional Knowledge, and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly SDG 3: Good Health and Well-being, SDG 10: Reduced Inequalities, SDG 12: Responsible Consumption and Production, and SDG 15: Life on Land (8–10).

Objectives

- Generate practical, action-oriented outcomes that advance equitable and sustainable approaches to accessing and sharing TMK.
- Contribute to guidance for WHO Member States on integrating ABS principles within national Traditional Medicine and biodiversity frameworks.

- Identify practical mechanisms for cross-sectoral collaboration among governments, Indigenous and local communities, researchers and international organizations.
- Propose models for community-led governance of TMK, ensuring respect for cultural integrity, intellectual property rights, and free, prior and informed consent.
- Outline initiatives for training, dialogue platforms and knowledge-sharing networks to strengthen national capacities for implementing ABS frameworks.
- Formulate next steps for aligning these outputs with the Global Traditional Medicine Strategy 2025–2034, the Nagoya Protocol and relevant SDGs.

Building on the Summit’s theme of “Restoring balance”, the session will translate dialogue into concrete recommendations for policy, collaboration and implementation. These outcomes will contribute to a roadmap for fair, transparent and sustainable ABS in Traditional Medicine, ensuring global collaboration that honours both scientific innovation and cultural heritage.

Guiding questions

1. **Knowledge sharing versus protection:** How can Traditional Medicine practitioners and communities share their knowledge without losing control or facing exploitation?
2. **Protection versus innovation:** How can TMK be protected while still encouraging innovation, product development and integration into health systems?
3. **Community rights versus public health needs:** How can community ownership of TMK be respected while ensuring access to effective traditional medicines for all?
4. **Standardization versus cultural integrity:** How can treatment guidelines and quality standards be developed fairly, without eroding traditional practices and values?
5. **Benefit-sharing versus research collaboration:** How can researchers, companies and governments ensure equitable benefit-sharing when TMK informs new discoveries or products?

Session format

The proposed session format involves a moderator introducing the topic, followed by a keynote presentation to frame the topic. This will be followed by a Slido quiz, which the audience will answer in real time. After the quiz, there will be a panel discussion with technical experts from different regions based on the guiding questions, with each panellist having 2–3 minutes for each reply. Guiding questions will also be displayed on a PowerPoint projection to allow audience members to think about the questions during the conversation. The moderator will then facilitate questions from the audience, depending upon time available, and each panellist will conclude with a 1-minute “take-home message” that includes one to two actionable commitments to strengthening equitable access to and benefit-sharing of TMK. The discussion will inform the Summit outcome document and contribute to shaping a fair and inclusive global framework for the governance of Traditional Medicine knowledge.

References

1. AERAS. A rhizomatic review of traditional medicine: Evidence across four realms. Geneva: World Health Organization; Forthcoming.
2. Kumar P, Pratt B. Traditional medicine and healthy ecosystems for holistic health and wellbeing: Synergies and shared values – A report for the WHO Global Traditional Medicine Centre. Geneva: World Health Organization; Forthcoming.
3. World Health Organization. Traditional medicine [Internet]. 2023. (<https://www.who.int/news-room/questions-and-answers/item/traditional-medicine>).
4. Morrison C, Humphries F, Lawson C. A regional review of genetic resource access and benefit sharing – Key issues and research gaps. *Environ Policy Law*. 2021;51:273–296. doi:10.3233/EPL-201028.
5. Willcox M, Diallo D, Sanogo R, Giani S, Graz B, Falquet J et al. Intellectual property rights, benefit-sharing and development of ‘improved traditional medicines’: A new approach. *J Ethnopharmacol*. 2015;176:281–285.
6. Global Traditional Medicine Strategy 2025–2034. Geneva: World Health Organization; 2025 (Health Systems Performance Assessment (HSPA) toolkit for universal health coverage).
7. World Intellectual Property Organization. Intergovernmental Committee on Intellectual Property and Genetic Resources, Traditional Knowledge and Folklore (IGC): Consolidated Document Relating to Intellectual Property and Genetic Resources. Geneva: WIPO; 2022 (https://www.wipo.int/edocs/mdocs/tk/en/wipo_grtkf_ic_42/wipo_grtkf_ic_42_4.pdf).
8. World Intellectual Property Organization. WIPO Treaty on Intellectual Property, Genetic Resources and Associated Traditional Knowledge. Geneva: WIPO; 2024 (<https://www.wipo.int/wipolex/en/text/592504>).

9. Convention on Biological Diversity. Nagoya Protocol on Access to Genetic Resources and the Fair and Equitable Sharing of Benefits Arising from their Utilization to the Convention on Biological Diversity. Montreal (Canada): Secretariat of the Convention on Biological Diversity; 2011 (<https://www.cbd.int/abs/doc/protocol/nagoya-protocol-en.pdf>).
10. United Nations. Transforming our world: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Resolution adopted by the General Assembly on 25 September 2015, A/RES/70/1. [Internet]. New York: United Nations; 2015 (https://www.un.org/en/development/desa/population/migration/generalassembly/docs/globalcompact/A_RES_70_1_E.pdf).