

Global Health Support Programme Practice & Policy Briefing

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Global Health Support Programme

GHSP, jointly launched by Chinese government and United Kingdom government, is a China-UK partnership contributing to improve global health policy and outcomes. The programme will help China improve its contribution to global health and achieve the potential of its collaboration. GHSP is scheduled to be implemented from 2012 to 2019 with a total budget of £12 million funded by UK DFID.

Promoting Traditional Chinese Medicine in Nepal: How to Break through the Bottlenecks?

The application of Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM) in Nepal has stagnated for years and the promotion of TCM has been confronted with many dilemmas. However, with the two countries cooperation under the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), it has brought opportunities as well for the two countries to communicate and cooperate in traditional medicine (TM), especially TCM. China can promote TCM in Nepal by preferentially supporting Chinese (aided) organizations such as the China Medical Team (CMT), the Confucius Institute, the National Ayurveda Research and Training Center (NARTC), and so on. The basic strategy is to enlarge the impact of services, education and scientific research in TCM to strengthen the People to People ties, which will pave the foundations for the TCM services and products to be further applied in Nepal. In order to break through the bottlenecks, at current stage, both China and Nepal need to closely work together to identify Nepal's healthcare demands for TCM, strengthen inter-ministerial coordination for trans-national TCM promotion, clarify the developing directions for TCM promotion, and establish bilateral platform for TCM collaboration.

The Application of TCM in Nepal Still at Early Stage

In 2017, Nepal had a population of 29.3 million, the GDP per capita was 730 USD and the life expectancy per capita was 70 years old. It is one of the poorest countries in Asia and the world. Lumbago, iron deficiency anemia,

chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, depression, and migraine are the top five causes of years lived with disability (YLDs). Due to the shortage of health resources and limited access to healthcare services, TM has played

a significant role in protecting the health of the population. Seventy percent of the Nepali residents use TM services. Ayurveda, the traditional medicine of India, has played a dominant role in Nepal's TM system.

Acupuncture has been included into Nepal's TM system to treat general diseases with remarkable therapeutic effect such as lumbago, migraine, facioplegia, amyosthenia, limbs pain, and so on. However, TCM services represented by acupuncture have not been

preferentially developed in Nepal and have limited impacts. Except physical therapies such as acupuncture, massage and cupping, other Chinese herbal medicines have not been licensed to enter Nepal's drug market. Such TCM application status has stagnated for years. It is necessary for China to figure out current difficulties in promoting TCM in Nepal, and to break through the dilemmas by taking advantage of the BRI cooperation opportunities of the two countries.

Current Difficulties of Promoting TCM in Nepal

● Incomplete regulations for TCM development:

Compared with Ayurveda, the legal status of TCM in Nepal is much lower. Ayurveda has comprehensive market entry policies and regulations, while only acupuncture among other TCM services and products has been included into the license certification scope by law, and acupuncturists are not allowed to prescribe drugs. Although the acupuncturists of the CMTs in 1999-2018 have provided nearly 20 years of TCM services, none of them has acquired the license for practice, and this has restricted them from further promoting TCM. On the other side, there lacks of policies and regulations regarding the market entry, local production, sales, and clinical application as regards to Chinese herbal medicines.

● Limited TCM knowledge among local residents:

Only a few number of institutions, organizations and professionals are engaged in the promotion of TCM in Nepal, and there lacks of platforms for cooperation and communication centered on the promotion of TCM between China and Nepal. The Chinese Medicine Doctors' Society of Nepal has just less than 30 members. Neither the Confucius Institute nor the China Culture Center in Nepal (CCCN) has professional

faculty in TCM. There are only 2 acupuncturists in the CMT and 1 acupuncturist in the NARTC. Only two members from Arniko society, an association of Nepali students studied in China, have learnt the Traditional Chinese Medicine Course during their study in China, and they just provide a limited number of acupuncture and massage services in practice. The number of professional doctors in TCM clinics are limited and their levels of TCM practice skills vary. Therefore, the population of patients using TCM services in Nepal is small. The public's awareness of TCM is mainly limited to rehabilitation treatments such as acupuncture and massage, and they lack understanding on the application of Chinese herbal medicine.

● Lack of strategic planning and coordination for TCM promotion:

TCM promotion: The Chinese government has made substantial investments in the CMT and their working hospital (B.P. Koirala Memorial Cancer Hospital, BPKMCH), the Confucius Institute, the NARTC, and the CCCN. However, as the main functions of these actors are not TCM promotion, their respective activities in TCM promotion are small in scale and fragmented, thus having limited impact. In particular, after the construction and transfer of the NARTC from

Chinese government to Nepali government as part of aid, it lacks of joint planning and orientation on TCM development. Moreover, as it lacks of probing investigations as well as promotion programs targeting at residents' healthcare demands for TCM, TCM

promotion activities in Nepal are constrained in specific institutions and population groups, and have yet to fully consider how to meet the healthcare needs of local people.

Opportunities in Promoting TCM in Nepal

- **Benefits Nepal has gained from China's foreign aids for its TM development:**

Nepal has relatively good policy environment, clear plans and regulations for Ayurveda development. However, its developing progress has been slow due to lack of infrastructure, funds, professional device, human resources, and technologies. There are only two Ayurveda hospitals in the whole country, with only 50 and 15 beds respectively. They are far from meeting the needs for TM development. Nepal's cultivation of advanced professionals in Ayurveda mainly depends on the support of India, while the cultivation of professionals in acupuncture mainly depends on the support of China to provide scholarship for the trainees/students to study in China. NARTC, the only TM institute at the national level in Nepal, was built by China with an investment of 48 million RMB Yuan in infrastructure, together with an afterwards donation of 12 million RMB Yuan worth of equipment and medicines. The Center's follow-up activities on TM research and training still depend on China's further assistance.

- **Increased potential demands for bilateral TCM cooperation between China and Nepal:**

In recent years, some Chinese institutes, enterprises and industrial associations have started to explore the possibility of promoting TCM education/training, services, products and models in Nepal. Some former government elite, universities and other institutions in Nepal have also shown explicit interests in cooperating

with China on local planting of Chinese herbs, TCM education and training, joint establishment of TCM community clinics and promotion centers, joint scientific research, etc. These potential demands for exchange and cooperation can not only help both sides to understand the TM development of the other country, but can also contribute to the formation of complementary advantages among TCM, Ayurveda TM, and modern medicine, so as to further meet the healthcare demands of the Nepali people.

- **The BRI's policy impact on transnational cooperation in promoting TCM:**

In May 2017, China and Nepal formally signed a cooperation Memorandum of Understanding on the BRI. In June 2018, China and Nepal issued a joint statement and signed more than ten bilateral cooperation documents. The major improvement of these external environments has further facilitated the use of the TCM related BRI policy documents issued by the Ministries of China, such as Ministry of Commerce, Ministry of Education, National Health Commission, State Administration of Traditional Chinese Medicine, Ministry of Culture and Tourism, and other related ministries and commissions. All the above BRI policies made it possible to build a bilateral TCM cooperation platform, gain supports from multiple actors, and conduct TCM related production, teaching, research, and application, so as to strengthen the People to People ties of the two countries.

Policy Recommendations

● To strengthen inter-ministerial coordination for transnational promotion of TCM:

The division of work among China's various ministries and commissions should be clarified. In terms of major problems that require inter-ministerial coordination, these problems should be solved through the BRI Construction Work Leading Group of the National Development and Reform Commission as well as the inter-ministerial level Joint Meeting Regulation organized by the TCM Working Department of the State Council of China. The resources of various TCM actors, such as the Confucius institute, the CCCN, the CMT, and relevant TCM institutions aided by China, have yet to be further integrated. In the future, all major decision concerning the TCM investment in Nepal, are advised to be made with the mutual participation of all relevant ministries and commissions, so as to maximize the effect of foreign aid China provides to Nepal.

● To clarify the functions of relevant Chinese (aided) organizations and institutions in Nepal:

China should list TCM promotion as one of the priority developing directions for the Confucius Institute set in Kathmandu University. It is advised for China to support a Chinese TCM university to cooperate with a Nepali university to do pilot undergraduate degree education in acupuncture and massage, so as to cultivate more local professionals who can master Chinese language and have multi-

disciplinary perspectives. Both China and Nepal are advised to work together to solve the license problem of the current acupuncturists in the CMT, and also support them to conduct more TCM promotion activities. The CMT acupuncturists can be allowed to work in the two places of both BPKMCH and NARTC. China can use foreign assistance as a tool to negotiate with Nepal, so as to guide and support the NARTC to further cooperate with Chinese institutions to conduct comparative studies in herbal medicines of the two countries. In this way, the scientific evidences can be generated and used by Nepal government to formulate relevant policies and regulations on TCM application.

● To build up a bilateral platform for triggering TCM cooperation:

China and Nepal should support establishing partnerships among universities and institutes for joint scientific research on all kinds of problems regarding industrial production, teaching, research and application encountered in TCM promotion in Nepal, so as to meet the demands for TCM development. The publicity of the BRI centered projects that are released by all relevant ministries and commissions of China should be strengthened. It is suggested that all the relevant bidding information be posted in the website of the Chinese Embassy in Nepal, so as to attract the attention of relevant institutions in China and Nepal to jointly apply for these TCM projects.

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