

## **African Traditional Medicine and Economic Sustenance in Nigeria**

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**Abstract:** Medicine in African traditional religion transcends healing and encompasses wellness and wholeness. This paper establish that traditional medical system is practiced among all aggregates of human person; although some countries have developed their traditional medicine systems to the point of international acceptability, hence it is often contended that modern medicine is the summation of all traditional medical systems. It is this medical system that catered for the health of Africans/Nigerians before the introduction of orthodox medical system by the missionaries. The methodology adopted for this study is analytical. The study is therefore intended to examine the role of African traditional medicine in sustaining Nigeria economy. The paper recommends that is a means of generating money to boost Nigerian economy. The paper underscores the need for the federal government of Nigeria to assist Nigeria traditional doctors who are competent and hold the license of national association of Nigerian traditional medical practitioners (NANTMP). It is high time for Africans/Nigerian to replace synthetic imported products from Europe with traditional herbal drugs as the earlier legislate from of health care delivery.

**Keywords:** Traditional Medicine; Synthesis Drugs; Packaging; Efficacy; Good health, Balance Diet

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### **INTRODUCTION**

Medicine deals with the preservation and restoration of health. Its curative aspect lies in the fact that it helps the body to return to its normal state after a period of brief illness. It is also preventive in that it tones up organs of the body thereby buildings up resistance against infections.

Quarcoopome [1] submits that in the traditional understanding medicine is closely associated with religion, because it is the possession of the divine healer who dispenses it through the medium of a priest or medicine an. The general belief is that the knowledge of medicine came directly from the Supreme Being and it operates through the tutelary divinity or spirits. The divine minister of health among the Yoruba is Osanyin and among the Igbo the divine portfolio of medicine is held by Agwu. From this tutelary divinity the traditional doctor receives the call to be a doctor and therefore practices his science always with reference to the divine healer.

### **THE EFFICACY OF AFRICAN TRADITIONAL MEDICINE**

African traditional doctors often claim that they were taught medicine by the divinities or more generally in dreams or in trances during meetings with spirits in the forest. Some claims to have been carried

away by the spirits into the world of spirits where they remain for say a year or more, feeding on plants, alligator's paper and hearbs and being taught the function and work of every leaf and plant. Some also say that when faced with difficult cases, especially those that had defied orthodox treatment; they go to into divination to know the power and facts behind the whole thing and the kind of treatment to apply. In short, it is the general accepted that African traditional medicine is better and powerful than synthesized or artificial brewed drugs of the whites.

The spiritual element in African traditional medicine has made some Africans to believe strongly that the indigenous medicine is potent and efficacious refined medicine. However, it is this same spiritual element that has caused friction in the attempt to generate traditional medicine into the health care delivery system in African countries. Quarcoopome posited that a few western trained African doctors recognize this spiritual frame of reference in the traditional medicine and in consequence of this refer certain medical cases to traditional doctors.

### **AFRICAN TRADITIONAL MEDICINES AND SYNTHESIZED MEDICINES IN NIGERIA**

Okpako [2] argued that as long ago as the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the great Dr. Ogunmola Sapara, one

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of the few modern physicians in Nigeria to have developed interest in traditional remedies in allopathic practices, had advocated a careful use of herbs, leaves and roots used by the traditional physicians. Since then and especially since independence, hardly a day passes when our leaders do not call on Nigerian scientists to exploit traditional sources for drugs or on the authorities to accord traditional healers official recognition especially among the international agencies like the Organization for African Unity (OAU). World Health Organization (WHO) are also convinced that African traditional remedies are worthwhile.

The repeated drawing of attention to traditional medicine has yielded two types of results. Firstly, a great many scientists—chemists, phytochemists, biochemists, pharmacologists, physicians etc. now spend a great deal of time and money looking for drugs in traditional herbal remedies. Secondly, many governments have established official bureaucracies such as boards to cater for traditional medicine, and traditional healers themselves seeing the positive posture of governments, have organized themselves into associations in different parts of Nigeria and are clamouring for recognition. These activities are accompanied by increasing and evermore fantastic claims of curative achievement by articulate urban-based traditional healers as they grow in confidence. It is worth to note that the day is imminent when drugs extracted from herbal remedies should replace synthetic imported products from Europe, and when traditional medicine should replace allopathic medicine as the legitimate form of health care delivery.

The idea of obtaining drugs from plants used by traditional healers is so powerful and plants are so plentiful in the Nigerian tropical rain forests that even very intelligent people think handfuls of scientists with minimum resources should be able to make Nigeria, within a short time, to be self-sufficient in drugs. The fact of the matter is after several decades of research into medicinal plants, there is, very little, indeed there is nothing, to show in the form of drugs. Failure is usually based on insufficient manpower, research underfunding and unreliable infrastructure.

Okpako [2] posited that the fundamental reason for failure is the expectation of drugs from traditional remedies is based on the assumption that the effectiveness of the traditional remedy is due to pharmacologically active chemicals present in these plants. Also, Ekeh buttresses Okpako's point by saying that modern scientists are entitled to think that a plant remedy can be therapeutically effective only if it contains pharmacologically active chemicals. But it is a known fact that the traditional doctors make no such assumption in using plants.

Treatment of disease in the traditional African medical method is a complex process of which divination and ritual propitiation of ancestral spirits are major parts. Traditional healers use herbs in the process but the rituals and sacrifices designated to harmonize the sick person with his entire environment are also major components.

In African medicine, herbal remedies are not perceived in the modern medicine. In the modern medicine, drugs are used on the basis of factual knowledge of their mode of action whereas in African medicine herbs are perceived to have powers beyond those which can be ascribed to chemical constituents [3].

Looking at the Nigerian traditional doctors, one will say with confidence and boldness that they have improved very well in the way they package their medicine not only that, they have their association—national association of Nigerian traditional medical practitioners (NANTMP). This association has a task force that is working to ensure that there are no quacks among the registered members. Just as there are quacks in other professions, there are traditional doctors that are also quacks as well. The unit goes from one place to another to make sure that those selling traditional medicines are registered members; ensure them how to package and produce safe drugs in a clean environment. Aside this, they need to ensure that their products are manufactured in conformity with NAFDAC'S (national association for food drugs administration control) laid down rules. It is only when they do this that they are qualified to take the membership certificate of NANTMP.

Also, before traditional medical doctors take the traditional medicine license, they are scrutinized. If a patient buys a presumably fake traditional medicine, it is the duty of the taskforce in that state to confiscate the medicine and seal up the place. Such a practitioner needs to register as a member of NANTMP. It is only by doing this that he can be trained to know the dos and don'ts of associated with herbal medicine.

Before now, none of the studies of traditional African medicine in Nigeria has revealed an indigenous system of dosage, but recently chief Omon Oleabehle, the National president, national association of Nigerian traditional medical practitioners (NANTMP) has revealed to people that currently, traditional medicines have indicated on their packs expiry date, length of time of usage and other helpful information such as the composition of the medicine. Herbal medicine does not in any way associate to idol worship as some people would believe; medicines are only made to cure different ailments.

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Modern drugs, being also powerful could also be poisons if not taken according to the doctor's directive, on the other hand if too little is taken, the disease is not treated, and worse still, the exposure of bacteria to a sub lethal dose of an otherwise powerful antibiotic, may trigger a resistance mechanism in the bacterium instead of killing it.

### **DIETING FOR GOOD HEALTH**

Health, according to the world health organization is not only a mere absence of disease but also a state of complete physical, mental and social well being of an individual. Seen in this light, perfect health is not feasible [4].

In a sense, it is natural to be ill but nature, in her kindness provides many remedies for ailments that we suffer. In short, nature has an abundance of health-care provisions which mankind can make use of in order to remain healthy until death.

A balance diet makes much sense if one would enjoy good health and long life. We are what we eat. Nutrition according to Beck is "the sum of the processes by which a living organism receives materials from its environment and uses them, to promote its vital activities [5]. Such materials are known as nutrients. In the sense of humans they are derived from food, with the exception of oxygen which is obtained from the air by breathing, and the term "nutrients" is commonly applied to any substance which, after being taken by mouth, is absorbed alimentary tract and used to promote body function. These nutrients may be classified as carbohydrates, fats, proteins, minerals, vitamins and water.

When we talk of balance diet, we are talking of these nutrients. And so, balanced diet, in our understanding simply, means a diet that contains seasonal fruit and green vegetables, protein, carbohydrates, fats, minerals and vitamins in proper proportion. It is clear that any disease caused by the deficiency of such more required food for the body cannot be cured without supplementing the diet.

Werner [6] argues that to be healthy and strong our bodies need a balance different nutritious food every day. At every meal we should eat something from each of these four classes of food groups, that is, body-building food or proteins, energy-building food or proteins, energy food or carbohydrate, energy storage food and protective foods: those rich in vitamins and minerals

This is a pointer to the fact that one should eat right, that is, to eat a balance of different food the body needs. As a matter of fact to be healthy a person needs to eat enough food mentioned above: in Africa as a whole, many people get large amount of starchy energy

food like rice, maize, cassava, yam or plantain, but not enough body-building and protective like beans, eggs, nuts, meat, fish and so on. Such persons can be malnourished even though they eat a lot of starchy food.

All that we want to stress is that nature grows the required vegetables and fruits e.t.c suitable for the nourishment of the body in all different areas and seasons. In a sense, we can say that in order to be healthy and have pure blood. Being pure simply means that the blood stream is not clogged with right waster matter; the cells are well nourished with right nutrients in a balanced level as needed [4]. The point which needs to be made here is that we Africans should cultivate the attitude of eating nutritious food and have enough rest, an adage says health is wealth.

### **NIGERIAN OIL ECONOMY**

According to Chuka [7] Shell petroleum development company was the first oil company that entered Nigeria for oil exploration in 1937, and discovered oil in commercial quantity at Oloibiri and Afam, both in Niger delta in 1956. By 1958, oil exploitation had begun. From a few thousand barrels per day in the late 50s and early 60s production increased accounting for 93% of Nigerian foreign exchange. It is worth to note that throughout these periods, especially between 1960 and 1970, non-oil exports, mainly agricultural products dominated exports of oil accounting for over 80% of total exports. From 1970 onwards crude oil had replaced agricultural products as the single largest source of foreign exchange.

The rise of oil to prominence in Nigeria to the neglect of other income-generating programmes has posed several social, political and economic problems. The over dependence on a single source of revenue, and foreign exchange assets are factors fraught with great danger to our country, Nigeria.

Before the oil boom, Nigeria derived her foreign exchange earnings, government revenue and investment funds from several export commodities such as cocoa, groundnut, cotton, rubber, palm produce e.t.c but the economy, since the boom has been mono export. The fortunes of the Nigerian economy there tend to fluctuate with the global oil marketing problem. This has crippled the state of its provisioning power to the citizenry. This work is therefore a clarion call to the Nigerian government to assess and make use of traditional medicine as one of her revenue. Traditional medicine has potential to generate money for Nigeria than that of crude oil that our government has since focused attention on. Our leaders should encourage our traditional doctors how to improve their products like that of India and China by so doing, our medicine would be promoted and have global acceptability.

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## CONCLUSION

According to Sofowora [3] indigenous medicine is the total combination of knowledge and practice, whether explicable or not, used in diagnosing, preventing or eliminating a physical, mental or social disease, and which may rely or in writing.

Traditional medicine is not only emphasizes diagnosing, prevention and cure of disease but also enhancement of life and means of achieving one's aspiration. The repeated drawing of attention to traditional medicine is because of its values and power to cure every ailment. Since illness and misfortune are mainly due to malevolent forces, the medicine man does his best to satisfy the spiritual aspect of the nature of the malady. This paper is of the opinion that African traditional medicine has a brighter future and if properly harnessed by the Nigeria government it can bailout this country from her economic problems. Very few people today are in doubt of our traditional doctors or practitioners. I want to say here emphatically that traditional medicine-men possess a large and verse of knowledge on medical herbs and therapeutic system.

Jegede [9] is of the opinion that many aspect of the practice of healing are scientific no aspect of it is a science. They use scientific and religious techniques but not in the western scientific sense. In the indigenous science of traditional medical practitioners, science and religious, physical and spiritual, natural and supernatural's are inseparable. Nevertheless, African medicines are beyond physical understanding because to the Africans, medicines are powers which God (the Supreme Being) puts into herbs therefore, African medicine has power to cure every ailment while the Supreme Being performed the total healing.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

Medicine deals with the preservation and restoration of health. Its curative aspect lies in the fact that it helps the body to return to its normal state after a period of brief illness. The writer considers it necessary to voice a call for action in the following recommendations: There is a need for the federal government of Nigeria to assist Nigeria traditional doctors by given grants repayable loans and encouragement.

Nigerian traditional medicine needs packaging therefore, our traditional doctors should improve on how to make their products acceptable by the people globally.

The National Association of Nigerian Traditional Medical Practitioner' task force should flush out the quacks among the professional traditional doctors. There should be training and retraining of the qualified traditional doctors organized by the Nigeria governments. Also, Nigerians should cultivate the habit

of eating balance diet; this would prevent them from sickness all the time. Lastly, traditional doctors should be allowed to work hand in hand with the orthodox doctors in our conventional hospitals.

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