

## TRADITIONAL MEDICINE AND FEMALE HERBAL VENDORS IN LAGOS NIGERIA

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**ABSTRACT:** The importance of health in every nation of the world including Nigeria is underscored by the redefinition of national security to include issues of health to make the concept of health security more relevant to the challenges states faced in the Post-Cold War era. For instance, in 2000 the United Nations Security Council adopted a resolution identifying HIV/AIDS as a threat to International Peace and Security.<sup>7</sup> Health is also the subject of three of the Eight Millennium Development Goals. During the period, health achieved an unprecedented recognition as a key driver of socio economic progress. The protection and promotion of health has also become a measurement of good government at national and international levels. All these have given health an entry into diverse studies by practically every discipline conceivable.

The traditional means of healing which was prevalent during the pre colonial days was unfortunately mystified and demonised in the colonial period. However, the world is beginning to wake up to the reality of the relevance of the practice to the overall desire for health in every ramification. Orthodox medicine and therapy have limitations and deficiencies which may find succour in traditional medicine. This is the reason for recent focus on traditional medical practice. Health is fundamental in human existence. Health issues have dominated several discourses both at national and international levels, yet very little attention has been paid to the theme of Female Herbal Vendors in existing literature on Medical Practice and alternative health therapy in Nigeria. It is this scenario that underscores the importance of this study.

The aim of this study is to examine the nature and impact of the Female Herbal Vendors on health development in the country. Specific objective include: to determine the nature and patterns of the relationship between traditional medicine and orthodox practice.

The study adopted the multi-disciplinary approach in its analysis. It employs a historical, expository, interpretative and analytical method. Besides, the concepts and analytic tools of the political scientists, economists and sociologists were employed throughout the analysis.

### I. INTRODUCTION

Traditional medicine has evolved over the years in Nigeria. It refers to health practices, knowledge and beliefs incorporating plants, animals and mineral based medicines, spiritual therapies, manual techniques and exercises, applied singularly or in combination to treat, diagnose and prevent illnesses or maintain well being.<sup>1</sup> The use of plants as medicine to cure or prevent illness and to lubricate the wheels of social interaction at the interpersonal and group level is a behaviour that predates civilisation, and in today's civilisation, it is found in every society irrespective of its level of development and sophistication. In spite of the millions of chemical compounds currently synthesised in the laboratory, and available for screening for action of therapeutic value, natural products, particularly of plants origin remain the most important sources of new drugs.

The drugs of today's modern society are products of research and development by major pharmaceutical companies but among the most important raw materials researched and developed are naturally occurring materials obtained from plants. Hence, when we take well packaged medicines today, it is well to remember that we might be taking a processed plant product. Interest in medicinal plants as a re-emerging health aid has been fuelled by the rising costs of prescription drugs in the maintenance of personal health and well-being, and the bio-prospecting of new plant-derived drugs.<sup>2</sup>

In Nigeria, the majority of citizens still use medicinal plants and visit traditional medicine practitioners for their health care need. It was reported by World Health Organisation (WHO) that in Nigeria, the ratio of Herbal Vendor to the population was 1:110, while the ratio of medical Doctors to the population was 1:16, 400.<sup>3</sup> It is admissible from the ratio that traditional medicine has evolved over the years to be the primary alternative

healthcare services to the people in local areas. Worldwide it is estimated that eighty percent of the population uses herbs; in the developing world rates could be as high as 95%. Exactly when Nigerians began to use herbal medicine is from time immemorial.

African kingdoms rely heavily on the use of herbs and roots to treat diseases as there were no hospitals and modern day clinics to treat indigenous people of Africa. The people planted the trees and plugged it when the need arise and it is adjudged to be very effective in soothing every ailment. The African people depend on subsistence means of planting trees for the collective use for the entire commodity. It was only recently that herbal trees and roots were sold when it was evident that most conventional drugs used today were made with herbs and roots. Since then it became commercialised as people began to establish stores for the deposition of herbal roots and leaves.

Female Herbal Vendors began to boil herbal concoction for the consumers in Nigeria as ways of providing immediate and affordable healthcare to the people. The increasing demand for the herbal concoction further expanded the scope of the trade as women begin to add the selling of other things. As more research progresses, specialist in herbal prescriptions since the early 1990s began to provide solution to ailment. They began to advertise on radio and television to display their herbal mixture and the kind of ailments they treat.

Herbal bitters had been used for medicinal purposes long before recorded history. Indigenous cultures in Africa and Native Americas used herbs as alternative therapy, to reduce inflammation, control pain, relax muscles and improve digestion and elimination, as well as boost appetite in some cases. But with the evolution of innovations, tablets, syrups and capsules, offspring of chemical analysis extracted from herbs took the place of bitters. Despite the oversight, which occurred partly due to fear of bitter taste, those who recognised the wealth of sweetness embedded in bitterness prevented its extinction. Herbal medicines are one type of dietary supplement. They are sold as tablets, capsules, powders, teas, extracts, and fresh or dried plants. Many people turn to bitters for different reasons: to maintain or improve their health.

Understandably too, for chronic illnesses such as back pain or coping with stress related conditions, which may appear very difficult to manage, herbal medicines were also used. The driver that sits for long periods of the day takes bitters in the form of 'paraga' for back pain, boosting appetite, alertness, as energizer and to ward off colds. For instance, chronic back pain, which is an occupational disease of the factory worker, who is permanently standing up, can also be very difficult to treat satisfactorily. For this reason, many people resort to trying different types of treatment, including the use of Paraga (ethanol).

Beyond the use of herbs to improve the health, however, many now use herbs to solve sexual problems. However, this is not new in the Nigerian society. Body energizer or action pills have always been with Nigerians from the time, when women put basin on their heads, selling powdery substance to enhance manhood, to when some Hausa/Fulani men went about with different roots called 'burantanshi' or 'ogun aleko' by the Yoruba herbal sellers in Lagos Aphrodisiac, otherwise called libido boosters, are getting increasingly popular amongst young adults and sexually active men to boost their sexual prowess when meeting their wives or girlfriends.

The growing influx of sellers indicates that the sale of libido enhancers is an emerging booming business in Nigeria, with users increasing in bounds by the day. Just as there are local variants of aphrodisiacs such as a mixture of local gin and herbs, which come in forms called Agbo Gbogbonise, Sepe and Paraga, Opa eyin, Jedi, Sapele water, Afato, Opelebe, Dagrín, kainkain and karaole among others, there are the imported versions such as Viagra, etc. there are also well packaged industrially made variants in packets of pills, or tablet such as Spanish fly, Enpulse, Vimax, Virillis, M-Energex, High T, Male X and those in liquid forms like Alomo bitter which is very common among youths in western Nigeria especially Lagos.

While the likes of Sepe and Paraga have their target consumers made up of the mass of not so educated persons such as bus drivers, mechanics, labourers and the likes, the packaged variants reach to the elite and upwardly mobile individuals across sections of the society of the working class professionals.

#### **Herbal Medicine in Lagos**

Lagos State is a city in the South-Western part of Nigeria, located on the Bight of Benin. It is the largest city in Nigeria (in terms of population size), the chief port as well as the economic and cultural centre. The metropolitan area spreads over much of the state, covering about 3557 sq. km. It has a diverse and fast growing population resulting from heavy and on-going migration to the city from all parts of Nigeria as well as neighbouring countries. The population of its metropolis increased to about 10.1 million in 2003 and the United Nations predicted that the city's metropolis will exceed 20 million come 2010.

This population explosion means that the city's infrastructure will be under stress. The primary health care sector, largely the responsibility of the Local Government with support from the State Government, might not be able to cater for everyone in the state. Hence, TMPs will have more people coming to them for their health care needs. This invariably brings Herbal Vendor, which are and would be in high demand, under threats of extinction. This trend would have serious consequences on the survival of some plant species, hence the need to conserve them. Conservation of medicinal plants is, therefore, an important step that should be taken in order to prevent the extinction of threatened species of medicinal plants.

Herbal medicines are reliable alternative approach to health care delivery in Lagos. It is cheap, easily accessible and efficacious. Herbs are obtained from bushes around the neighbourhood and forests from adjacent states. Recipes for the treatment of common ailments which are reported almost on daily basis such as hypertension, dysentery, low sperm count and weak erection, coated tongue, pile, menstrual disorder, leucorrhoea and fevers were given by the practitioners. Apparently, daily health issues of Lagosians are partly taken care of by herbal vendor and its usage is on the increase in Lagos State. The efforts of the Lagos State Traditional Medicine Board and Nigeria Natural Medicine Development Agency are praised in facilitating recognition of herbal medicine in the metropolis.

### **Herbal Vendor in Oyingbo Market**

Oyingbo Market was established in the 1920s.<sup>5</sup> Then, it was a depot for agricultural produce. The development around Ebute-Metta, Oyingbo and the Lagos Mainland have had positive impact on the market; making it grow bigger not only in size but also in the volume of goods available in the market. In the 1930s, traders around Apapa Road were moved to the current location to further boost the size of the market, even as meat and livestock were among the goods available for customers.<sup>6</sup> As a major commercial centre, it attracted customers' patronage from every part of Nigeria. Ever since, the attempts to re-build the market which was constructed with wood, and has been gutted by fire several times proved abortive. Successive Administrations had made efforts to rebuild the market without any success.

In 1991, the then Chairman of Lagos Island Local Government Area, Mr. Babatunde Larinde demolished the market in a bid to rebuild it through partnership with the private sector. He invited the late business Mogul Chief M. K.O. Abiola to lay the foundation of the new market. Chief Abiola had promised to help attract the attention of the Nigeria Stock Exchange (NSE) to raise the needed funds for the project.<sup>7</sup> However, during his campaigns as the governorship candidate of the then Action Congress of Nigeria (ACN), the leader of the market, Alhaja Bashirat Balogun, appealed to Mr. Fashola to assist in rebuilding the market when voted into power. The new constructed four-floor massive complex is sitting on a 544 sq metre, and estimated to have been built at the cost of N1billion. Besides the 150-car capacity parking lot on the ground floor, the complex has 622 open shops; 102 lockup shops; 48 numbers of open offices, 134 toilets and six exit gates. Added that it stands on 8617 square metres (2 hectares of land) and could park 150 cars. The Commissioner said in addition to 632 open shops and 270 lock up shops of different sizes, there are also a bore-hole, a water treatment plant, a sewage treatment plant, open offices for banks, about 49 Insurance companies, a cold store for fish and meat sellers, Fire Service office and fire alarm points among other facilities.

The Female Herbal Vendors were among the first set of market women who occupied Oyingbo market and there is no specific date of when the first Herbal Vendor began to operate. The market served as an epicentre for trading of all commodities as traders from other major markets in Lagos flock to Oyingbo market to purchase their commodities in large quantities. The strategic nature of the market makes it a dependable market for wholesales of commodities.

The Elewe-omo is very important to the development of Oyingbo market. They have helped to provide alternative healthcare for people. They prescribe herbal medicines such as herbs and root for Lagosians and also sell in large quantities. Most of the Herbal Vendors' who sell at Adekunle market in Bariga often visit Oyingbo market to buy herbs and roots. This is because there is little or no farm in Lagos where herbs and roots are planted. Most of the herbal medicines are products of the interior, particularly Ibadan. Mrs. Folashade Akande<sup>8</sup> who sells herbal medicines in Oyingbo market opines that she travels to Oyo State to buy herbal medicines simply because it is cheap and the original leaves and herbs were planted in that locality. Several stalls are occupied by Female Herbal Vendors at Oyingbo market. Most of the Herbal Vendor used kempt and make shift stalls to display the herbal medicines because of the nature of the commodities to enable it visible for the public. Only recently when Governor Fashola demolished and rehabilitated the market that the Female Herbal Vendors were given permanent stall by the Lagos State Government to sell their goods.

### **Herbal Vendors in Bariga Market**

Bariga is a city in Lagos State and it is part of Somolu Local Government of Lagos State. Until 2003 when Lagos State government under Senator Bola Ahmed Tinubu created new Local Council Development Authority

out of the existing 20 Local Government established by the 1999 constitution of Nigeria. Bariga LCDA was carved out of Somolu local government. It is one of the most heavily populated LCDA in Lagos. Exactly when Elewe-omo began operation in Bariga market cannot be established judging from, the fact that the use of herbal medicines was the major dependent source of healthy living by the indigenes of this district. The Female Herbal Vendors (Elewe-omo) occupy the famous Adebayo market in Bariga. Adebayo market is located at the heart of Bariga, close to First Bank, located on the heart of Bariga. The Herbal Vendors occupy twelve stalls in the market. The market was constructed in 2000 by private sector in line with market transformation agenda of the Local Government.

The Female Herbal Vendors hold their meetings every Thursday of the week at Fafunke market in Somolu. The association consists of every Herbal Vendor and those who did not attend meetings were fined N200 weekly. In a situation where herbal vendor do not register, a special task force has been set up to arrest illegal vendors and those who go contrary to the rules of the organisation are prosecuted. The Iya Egbe is the head of the association and there is also Baba Egbe (father of the association) who serves as adviser and help to resolve crisis rocking the association. Election is conducted for the Iya-Egbe who stayed in power for as long as possible till death. It is after the demise of the Iya-Egbe that a new Iya Egbe is elected by member.

#### **The Impact of Government in the Operations of Traditional Medicine:**

Government is an institution of a state and the machinery through which a state is governed. Its impact directly affects public sectors. Since it is the responsibilities of government to provide infrastructural facilities such as hospital which focus on health of the citizens, government role in the orthodox and traditional medicines cannot be over emphasised. The role of any government is the protection of lives and property as well as the welfare of the citizens. These roles are well captured by the government's intervention in the preparation, operations and administration of traditional Medicare in Nigeria. Government play a fundamental role in moderating and supervising the activities of organization - public and private in Nigeria. The members and trainees gather at Alausa, the Secretariat of the Lagos State Government for Seminars, Conferences and Lectures on what is needed to improve and expand the primary Health Sector.

The World Health Organization (WHO) set up a method that allows the orthodox medicines to come out and challenge traditional medicines which are the oldest form of treatment known to mankind.<sup>1</sup> The orthodox medicine practitioners began to challenge Traditional Medicines on the ground that the herbs and roots are not well regulated for local health care delivery and consumption. As part of the globalization trend, the WHO came to Lagos State to set up a board of Traditional Medicine Centre with the aim and objective of training Lagosians who are interested in the practice the profession of Traditional Herbal Practitioner (THP).<sup>9</sup>

As it is obtainable in the orthodox medical practice, there are several branches in the Herbal medical professions these include but not limited to; the traditional bone setter who specializes on setting and treatment of dislocated bones and joints using herbs and leaves for the healing process. There is also the Elewe-omo which is the central focus of the study this category specializes on prescribing herbs and roots for patients with different forms of ailments. There is also the Traditional Herbal Attendant (Onigbebi), popularly referred to as Midwives in the orthodox medical practice who specialize on assisting pregnant women to deliver safely through the use of herbs and roots.

Apart from the above or furthermore, there is the Alagbo who hawks cooked herbal concoction on the Lagos Streets. In most cases they secure an apartment or outlets where the wares are displayed for the public to view, test and patronize. Here mixed herbal concoctions of all types are dispensed to patients depending on their complaints and diagnosis.<sup>10</sup>

One of the fundamental areas of conflict between the orthodox and the traditional medical practice is the issue of dosage of pharmaceutical administration. This problem of dosage in which the traditional medical practitioners are accused of administering overdose herbs and drugs generated a lot of controversies between the orthodox medicine practitioner and traditional counterpart as the former claims that the later has no regulation in the preparation, administration and dissemination of the herbs. They contend that a specific dosage should be put in place to avoid overdose for herbal medicine patients and patrons. This challenge prompted the World Health Organization to take a step to regulate and institutionalize the use of herbal drugs and consequently, the Lagos centre is empowered to train students in all the aspects relating to the processing, manufacturing, administration and distribution process involved in becoming a successful Traditional Herbal practitioner.

#### **The Process of Training and Recruitment of Students and Apprentices:**

Training is a function of human resources management concerned with organizational activity aimed at bettering the performance of individuals and groups in organizational settings. Training is pivotal to the success

of herbal vendors in Lagos to enhance perfection in the discharging of their duties. The training process is fully interactive in order to stimulate active participation of all participants. The medium of communication is usually the mother tongue of the immediate community.<sup>11</sup> Resource persons are usually sourced from the academia, research institutes and among the veteran practitioners across the country. In most cases, veterans are invited from countries which heavily depend on use of herbal medicines such as India, Indonesia, and China to educate the students on possible ways of doing their work.<sup>12</sup> The students undergo theory and practical trainings as video evidences of how herbal roots and leaves can be used to produce medicine and the rations and measurement to be taken depending on the nature of the diseases.<sup>13</sup>

The training process is carried out by a state institution of learning sponsored by the World Health Organization and is also regulated by (NNMDA) Nigeria Natural Medicine Development Agency.

The traditional herbal centre is an institution of learning responsible for providing alternative healthcare therapy to Lagosians. The organization welcomes everybody irrespective of your background and ethnic affiliation to join in the business. The Herbal vendor activities are regulated by the Nigeria Natural Medicine Development Agency (NNMDA). NNMDA is an agency under the federal ministry of science and technology.<sup>14</sup> It is a parastatals of the federal government established to implement governments strategic mandate for the research, collation, documentation and promotion of traditional medicine.<sup>15</sup> As part of the training mandate of the agency, it conducts training across the country on zonal basis. To date, the agency has conducted a total of 30 interaction section and over 12,000 traditional Medical Practitioners (TMP) have been trained. The training is aimed to develop a critical mass of knowledgeable. TMPs do not only have their products and practice improved but are now able to disseminate appropriate health education and information.

The training programme is divided into two; the first is observed at the Lagos State centre while the second is observed at the Iso Elewe-omo. For the Lagos state centre, trainees obtained a form of N6, 000 at the centre in Lagos and undergo screening and interviews were conducted for them to ascertain their state of commitment and volition. They are also aware of the need to privacy and secrecy which is paramount in medicine profession. They learn how to attend to customers, diagnose the nature of the sickness if it is inherited or not.<sup>16</sup>

Other things they learn at the centre include the measurement dosage, and how to preserve the herbs. They were also informed of the need to be hygienic which is very important in the profession. Trainees were told to desist from the use of ethanol, sapele water and others inimical mixture and Aromatic schnapps was recommended for the mixture of herbs. This is because of the recommendation it receive from National Agency for food and Administrative Control (NAFDAC). Trainees are also advice against taken of herbal medicine with orthodox medicines which is very common among people and were warned of the danger in it.<sup>17</sup>

### **The Structure of the Organization**

Every association has an organization which helps to promote and cater for the wellbeing of the profession. The Herbal Vendor association holds their meeting at Abubakar Street in Bariga.<sup>18</sup> Mrs. Felicia Oyekola is the Iya Egebe. She serves as the Iya Egbe of all the Female Herbal practitioners in Bariga and termed as Onisegun-general. The Baba Egbe is Chief Mojeed Alepolare and both serves for eight years mandate. They were only called upon in time of urgency.<sup>19</sup>

For the general meeting, Mr. Ishola Abayomi is the chairman of the organization while Mrs. Omosufo serves as the treasurer. Mrs. Shade Animashaun serves as the secretary and chief Ojasogbon is the vice president of the association in Bariga market. The holds meetings every Tuesday and issues affecting their members and possible ways of improving their business are discussed.

In Oyingbo market, the head of the Herbal Vendors is Mrs. Folashade Ojo. The vice is Mrs. Azzizat Hassan. They also have other positions such as secretary, treasurer, welfare officers, social officers, Public relation officers. Matters of urgent important are discuss in the meeting on possible way to improve their productivity.

### **Certificates obtained**

Those who attend the school at Alausa are awarded Certificate of attendance at the end of the training section for participation as a sign of commitment and professionalism. Convocation ceremony also takes place at the secretariat to celebrate a successful weeks of study. Those who serve as apprentice at the shop also get certificate. Usually, because it takes many years before an apprentice who learn from one person business to be freed, apprentice prefers to go to the school at Alausa.<sup>20</sup>

### **Types of Diseases and Required Treatments**

This is the treatment recipes for some of the common ailments which affect people in Lagos State as part of the comprehensive interviews of market women in Lagos markets Oyingbo and Bariga market.

**(1) HYPERTENSION**

- (a) Leaves of *Persea americana* are made into shreds, dried and taken as infusion.
- (b) Leaves of *Senecio bialfrae* added to fermented seeds of *Parkia biglobosa* are used to prepare soup which is eaten. Leaves of *Talinum triangulare* or *Basella alba* may also be used.
- (c) Kola nut's mistletoe mixed with honey is also effective.

**(2) DYSENTERY**

- (a) Decoction of the leaves of *Grewia flavescence* is made and drunk.
- (b) Leaves of *Parquentina nigrescens*, *Jatropha gossypifolia*, *Pergularia daemia*, *Ocimum gratissimum* and *Momordica charantia* are all powdered together and taken with cold pap, or as decoction.

**(3) LOW SPERM COUNT AND WEAK ERECTION**

- (a) Powdered *Piper guineensis* and extract from 10 big onions are poured into honey and boiled between 5-10 minutes. A cup to be taken in the morning and at night.
- (b) *Manihot esculenta* root, *Dioscorea sp.* tuber, *Garcinia cola* seed, *Cola nitida* cotyledon, dried *Zea mays*, *Cnetis ferruginea*, seeds of *Mucuna sloanei*, unripe *Musa parasidiaca* and *Piper guineensis* are all ground together with sugar, and taken with water or cold pap.
- (c) The same plants as the foregoing in addition with *Klainedoxa gabonensis*, sugar and pure bee-honey are mixed together. A spoonful to be taken like that or with cold pap.

**(4) COATED TONGUE**

- (a) Bark of *Khaya ivorensis*, bark of *Pycnanthus angolensis*, bark of *Hymenocardia acida*, bark of *Bridelia ferruginea*, bark and root of *Rauvolfia vomitoria*, bark of *Alstonia boonei*, twigs of *Citrus medica*, bark of *Enantia chlorantha*, bark of *Melicia excelsa* are all cooked and the decoction to be taken.
- (b) *Costus afer*, bark of *Khaya grandifoliola*, bark of *Bridelia ferruginea*, fruit of *Alchornea cordifolia*, bark of *Bridelia micrantha*, bark of *Pycnanthus angolensis*, sulphur, and lime water all poured into a container. One tablespoon of the extract to be taken before breakfast.

**(5) PILES**

12 seeds of *Croton penduliflorus* and 7 cubes of sugar are ground and poured into bottle containing kernel oil (30cl), then left for 7 days, after which the first dose of two tablespoonfuls will be taken. Later, one spoonful every morning is to be taken before breakfast. The drug is to be taken at four days interval.

**(6) MENSTRUAL DISORDER**

Water or alcohol extract of the leaves of *Dalbergiella welwitschii* mixed with potash is to be taken for 3 days, morning and evening.

**7. LEUCORRHOEA (VAGINAL DISCHARGE)**

- (a) Root of *Glyphea brevis*, root and leaves of *Senna podocarpa*, *Senna alata*, *Allium ascalonicum* and potash are put together into a container, and hot water poured on the mixture. The recipe is left till the next day. The patient uses one glass cup of the recipe every morning before breakfast for 3 days. The preparation is also suitable for seminal discharge in men.
- (b) Root of *Croton zambesicus*, 3 seeds of *Garcinia cola*, *Acacia nilotica* leaves, 3 seeds of *Aframomum melegueta*, leaves of *Mimosa pudica* and small quantity of potash are ground together, and taken with cold pap.<sup>21</sup>

**8. FEVERS**

A decoction of the root of *Sphenocentrum jollyanum*, *Zingiber officinale*, bark of *Khaya grandifoliola*, root and bark of *Rauvolfia vomitoria*, bark of *Alstonia congensis*, root and bark of *Senna sceptabilis*, root of *Zanthoxylum xanthoxyloides*, leaves of *Ocimum basilicum* and is taken for fever.<sup>22</sup>

There is also ewe-pear which is used to cure High Blood Pressure. There is also Ewe Bontuje funfun/pupa which cures ringworm. There are also Egbe Egbesi, Epo Mango, Awopa which cure Typhoid and malaria fever. For treatment of chronic diseases such as Cancer, Epo-Idon, Epo-Awun, Epo-gbetun are recommended for the treatment. For the cure of gonorrhoea, the leaf of Asun egba is used. Patient will cook the leaves with water and drink trice daily. The ewe lapalapa funfun cures blood-stooling. We also have Enukopire used for the cure of Fibroid, Sand pepper leave (ewe Ipin) used to cure hypertension, Egbo-aidontoro used to cure pile, iregbe-ako used to cure Ulcer.<sup>23</sup>

Another plant whose health benefit is widely known in 'Dogon Yaro' plant (Neem tree). The Neem tree (*Azadirachta indica*) is thought to have antifungal, antibacterial, anti-microbial, anti-oxidant and anti-malarial properties amongst many others. Only recently that herbal vendor knows longer use it because of high concentration of aspirin.

### Contribution and Challenges

Across the globe, herbal vendors have become alternative system of healthcare delivery among every stratum in the society. It is interesting to note that China and India, the world most populous countries share larger percentage in the world global usage of herbal medicines.<sup>24</sup> The World Health Organization estimates that eighty percent of the population of some Asian and African countries presently uses herbal drugs for some aspect of primary health care.<sup>25</sup> In Africa, the trend was only on increase with Nigeria taking a lead in the sub-Saharan region of Africa.<sup>26</sup> As at 2006, the population of Lagos State was 17.5 million, (based on the parallel survey conducted by the state during the National Census)<sup>27</sup> thus making it the most populous state in Nigeria. The inhabitants of Lagos often consult herbal vendors for treatment of all kinds of ailments. The trend was further recognized with the role of government and the assistance she provided to alternative health care sector of the National health system. Judging by the global acceptance, Nigeria adjusted to the system of using and consulting herbal medicines seller/Elewe-Omo for their health requirements and needs.

### Contributions

- The female herbal vendors have helped in several ways to improve the health condition of Lagosians and more importantly in the area of creating employment opportunities for the female gender in the informal sector of the Lagos economy. The increasing number of herbal vendors shows the wide acceptance of the practice and prescriptions in Lagos as people of all ages resort to the use of herbal medicines for the treatment and management of various ailments. Some group of Lagosians also depend on the herbs for prevention of various forms of diseases<sup>28</sup> The wide acceptance has led to the establishment of institutions which helps to regulate the activities of the body. In Bariga market, there were eight stands in Adebayo market alone which has a cumulative of forty two stands dedicated to the female herbal vendors.<sup>29</sup> The numbers of herbal vendors in Oyigbo market were much on the high totally fifteen major stands and retail shops.<sup>30</sup> Through their various bodies and institutions, they were able to Create a collaborative environment of trust, open communication and research;
- Support scientifically rigorous and ethical studies of Lagos psychotherapies and health care systems;
- Train scientists to conduct the highest caliber research in complementary and alternative medical practices;
- Promote conservation of plant biodiversity and protection of indigenous knowledge;
- Communicate evidence for the safety and efficacy of indigenous physiotherapies and CAM to health care providers and the public; and
- Advance the health and well-being of the Lagosians. Confirm these terminologies

### Importance of Herbal Vendors/Herbal Medicines

Herbal medicines are relatively cheap in comparison to the conventional form of medications and consultations. It's a service affordable to many, unlike other forms of medication which can create a big hole in patients' wallets. Herbal medicines can be consumed without the aid of any kind of complicated prescriptions. They are accessible from local drug stores and some corner shops. Herbal medicines are known to be more productive in comparison to other forms of medication in curing certain medical conditions and ailments. Unless mixed with other chemical components, they are known to be all natural. One of the greatest benefits associated with herbal medicine is the near non existence of side effects. Also, they tend to offer long lasting benefits in terms of overall wellness and wellbeing.

Obesity is a growing problem which is known to have hazardous issues on an individual's health. Herbal medicine can help one deal with the problem of obesity very effectively without consuming much time and efforts.

Herbal medicines and health remedies have a lot of benefits, the greatest being that it does not interfere with the body's natural healing process. Enumerated below are the various prominent advantages of going herbal to treat ailments that may range from sicknesses as simple as common cold to ailments as considerably complex as diabetes or cancer.

### Natural Healing

As mentioned before, herbal medicine doesn't obstruct the body's self-healing abilities in any way. On the contrary, they enhance the biological healing machinery so that the recovery process gets accelerated and the body is able to maintain an ideal internal environment that is crucial for such recovery. A lot of herbs work by stimulating various glands so that appropriate hormones are activated. These hormones carry the distress signal

to the relevant parts of the physiology to either induce or inhibit certain biological processes in order for the healing process to take place.

### **Continued Benefits**

A lot of herbal remedies come with special instructions about diet, rest, and exercises that enhance the potency of the herb by preparing the body in such a way that it responds to the treatment in the most effective and desirable way. These dietary and lifestyle changes ultimately help the patient by getting their bodies into a healthy rhythm. When these changes become a habit and are followed even after recovery from the ailment, chances of future occurrences of the same malady are greatly reduced. Better Immunity Owing to their tendency of enhancing the body's natural healing process and correcting bad habits that lead to ill-health, herbs contribute towards strengthening the immune system. This, in turn, fortifies the body's natural defenses against pathogens that are responsible for primary as well as secondary infection.<sup>31</sup>

### **Metabolism and Nutrition**

A stronger immune system and a holistically regulated diet and lifestyle lead to improved metabolism, which in turn leads to better absorption of nutrition from one's diet. That is why most herbal treatment regimes forbid, or at least limit, the intake of junk food and food that is too oily or contains stimulants such as caffeine. The reason is twofold - junk food doesn't give the body the required quantity or variety of nutrition and stimulants interfere with the function of the medication. In essence, lack of proper nutrition gets in the way of the treatment's focus towards strengthening the biological defenses and by interfering with the action of the medicinal herbs, stimulants diminish the efficacy of the treatment. Hence, both are either limited or eliminated from the diet, leading to diminish one's psychological dependence nutritionally deprived "comfort food"<sup>32</sup>

### **Side-effects**

Although it would be wrong to say that the risk of side-effects and allergies do not exist in case of herbal remedies, it is also true that since the healing process is closer to how Nature intended it, the contraindications are minimal when herbal medication is taken as per prescription and under the supervision of a qualified practitioner of Ayurvedic healing, Naturopathy or any other equivalent alternative healing method that involves the use of Mother Nature's bounties. However, unsupervised consumption or overdose may lead to unpleasant side effects that may range from something as mild as digestive discomfort to something as lethal as toxicity and death.<sup>33</sup>

### **Defect of the use of Herbal medicines**

Herbal medicines are known to be ineffective against serious ailments. Herbal medication cannot cure a broken hand, nor is it able to deal with heart attack related issues as effectively as a conventional medicare.

In some instances, individuals switch to herbal medication without realizing that the symptoms can be linked to a different ailment. Unlike, conventional medication which involves constant monitoring of the patient's health dictates, herbal medicines are taken without prescription which means that in some cases, individual might be undergoing a trial and error process with their medication. Although herbal medicines have the potential to cure many ailments, the curing period is usually longer in comparison to conventional medication. One needs to have immense patience while undergoing herbal treatment.

Herbal medicines can cause allergic reactions in some cases. Before resorting to herbal medication it is necessary to ensure that the patients are not allergic to the particular herb that the patients will be consuming. Conventional medication can also cause allergic reactions, but they are usually taken upon prescriptions which is why the chances of allergic reactions are less. The government does not approve of any kind of herbal medication. It's usually consumed upon the person's own risk, and when it comes to branded herbal supplements one can't expect any kind of quality assurance.

### **Challenges**

The National Botanical Centres are not well equipped and while staffs are not well trained on ways to preserve herbal leaves and garden and the need for reproduction. Unlike other part of Africa such as Ghana, Kenya and South Africa, wherever the preservation of botanical garden are taken seriously, it is not so in Nigeria as gardens were left unkempt and unproductive for herbal trees reproduction

Nigerian government cannot fulfill the potentials of establishing a robust Botanical garden like the Brooklyn Botanic Gardens, Herb Garden which explores the origins, botany, and beauty of the plants know as food. Reflecting the diverse cultures and culinary traditions of Brooklyn's neighborhoods, the Herb Garden serves as a vibrant living classroom where the community can learn practical urban food gardening techniques and tips for making sustainable food choices. The garden is designed to be a decorative but utilitarian potager, or kitchen garden, that freely mixes medicinal and culinary herbs, vegetables, berries, fruit trees, and flowers

Apart from the challenges from the size of the government, the female herbal vendors were also faced with a lot of challenges in the course of operating an effective and smooth business. One of the problems is the failure of

the government to integrate the orthodox medicine practitioners with the herbal vendors. Government does not seem to recognize the need for partnership of the two alternative health care system in improving the health condition of the society, Mrs. Atinuke Adeyemo posits that the inability of the government to fully organize congress which would integrate the two organization is a major challenge. If this is done, there will be intermarriage and cross fertilization of ideas between us and the medical doctors since some medical doctors do visit us for assistance on traditional health care delivery We are very efficient and effective in assisting pregnant women through the giving of necessary herbs with will allow smooth delivery. Once government intervene and fully recognized our potentials, infant mortality rate in orthodox hospital would be drastically reduced.<sup>34</sup> Alhaja Idiat Adebari also corroborated this position on possible recognition of government and its long term effect of reducing death of child at birth.<sup>35</sup>

The female herbal vendors also complained of state government's inability to give those grants and loans. This would help them a lot to purchase all the necessary items needed. In most cases, an herbal vendor cannot buy all that is needed in the rural market and needs to depend on others who may have in stock the missing commodities to complete the concoction. Mrs. Sadia Alimi, popularly known Iya Ibeji complained of paucity of funds as a major challenges facing her and blames government for not fully committed to helping the sector in areas of granting loan and other miscellaneous as its done in other sector of the economy.<sup>36</sup> She maintain that some patients were not able to pay for all the herbs and roots needed to rescue them but the doctrine of their trade allows them to help the people even if they do not have money. She opines that this is the possible areas which the government would be needed most because their market is pejoratively described as Oja Olokun or Oja-Anu (Mercy market).<sup>37</sup>

There is also the challenge of security. Most of the female herbal vendor interviewed complained of lack of security. They maintain that most of them travelled to the hinterland especially Oyo and Osun state to purchase their items at a cheaper rate than buying in whole sale at Oyingbo market. This is because those who sell herbs and roots at Oyigbo market also buy directly from the hinterland and if miscellaneous and other expenses are added, there would be the cost of purchase will be high, so they prefer travelling to the hinterland to buy their stock, and in most cases, they were attacked by armed robbers on the road.<sup>38</sup> Mrs. Ajoke Banjoko recounted the day she woke around 5.00 am to travel to Oyo state to purchase their stocks and how she was attacked on the road and all the capital were whisked away by armed robbers. She blamed government for this shortcoming.<sup>39</sup>

### Conclusion

This study has assessed the role of female herbal vendor in Lagos state and Nigeria in Particular. It examines the root of herbal vendor from time immemorial in ancient traditions of the Chinese to the present state. Attempt was also made of the importance and contribution of herbal vendors to the development of the Lagos state of Nigeria. Also references on the breakdown and important implication of health related challenges were also addressed. More importantly, the role of the government of Lagos state and federal government in particular to address health challenges through the provision of finance and opportunities have also been addressed. From the analysis, it is clear that herbal medicines are a formidable alternative healthcare service delivery in Lagos. This is very common among people of different social strata in Nigeria as both rich and poor take solace in the usage. The mode of training of apprenticeship were also addressed extensively and attention was also given to challenges that herbal Vendor faced in Lagos market especially Bariga and Oyingbo market.

The activities of female herbal vendor were not fully monetized by the federal government of Nigeria. Even NITDA, the federal government agency which regulates the activities and provides logistic and other support to herbal vendors has performed below expectation. The role of the state government in giving herbal vendors necessary boost through programmes and seminars on health matters and training should be acknowledge. Hence, the fact cannot be denied that herbal medicines are formidable alternative medicines in Lagos and Nigeria in general.

### Recommendations

Perhaps the most important strategy for the safe use of herbs is to integrate evidence-based herbal medicine knowledge into the Nigerian medicine healthcare curriculum. Several strategies may help with the management of herbs. They include: educating providers and patients about the possible benefits and risks of herbs, encouraging providers to ask their patients about their use of herbs without being judgmental, ensuring open communication with patients. Patients should also be careful when claims are made for a particular herb and should only purchase herbs from a reputable provider, company, or internet site.

For many, who have championed the cause of alternative medicine, a classification is also proposed for adverse effects associated with herbal medicines, and medical practitioners are encouraged to include use of these preparations in a patient's drug history and in reports of suspected adverse drug reactions. Practitioners should be able to advise their patients appropriately about the potential of the herb to cause a change in blood pressure. According to them, patients with hypertension are cautioned by their doctors on the need to be very careful about keeping their blood pressure within acceptable limits.

It is apparent that the use of herbal medicine in Lagos State is on the increase. The ubiquitous presence of herb and herbal products marketing both in the conventional and unconventional way of selling drugs as well as the sexes and number of people that are involved in the trade is a confirmation of this assertion. Others are the year of expertise, had standard of living and material achievements pointed to the fact that the trade is lucrative in Lagos. Moreover, patronage and usage of traditional medicine cut across the social strata of Lagosians.

The Herbal Vendors remain in the business because of cheap source of raw materials, ease of preparation, overwhelming patronage, government recognition of their practices, drug effectiveness report from users and due to the fact that it is the practitioners' main source of livelihood. However, a more serious government intervention is required to uplift the quality status of the traditional medicine practice in the country. The frantic efforts of Nigeria Natural Medicine Development Agency and Lagos State Traditional Medicine Board should be praised in ensuring safe delivery of medicinal preparation in the country. It was extremely difficult to obtain information from the practitioners; to combat this, the patent rights of herb sellers should be protected by government. Conservation of these plants is paramount in order to avoid extinction through education, establishment of medicinal plant farms, sustainable harvesting approaches and setting aside of thick forest in the local communities as special forest. Strategies for the safe use of herbs should include educational efforts directed at both the consumers and healthcare providers about the benefits and dangers of herbs and encouraging providers to ask their patients about their use of herbs without being judgmental, ensuring open communication with patients.

The ministry of health and the district health team should guide the population in Lagos on proper use of traditional medicine giving particular attention to issues of efficacy and safety. Ministry of health and other stakeholders should undertake an inventory of the most useful traditional Medicines/herbs and create a catalogue for easy research and guidance to the users. The Lagos state government in collaboration with Somolu and Lagos Island Local government with the assistance of ministry of health should formulate a Traditional medicine by-law to regulate the practice. The ministry of health should establish more health centres nearer to the people and equip them with drugs to reduce dependence on traditional medicine.

The draft policy on traditional medicine should be quickly formulated to guide the traditional medicine practice paying specific attention to issues of efficacy, quality and mode of herbal preparation. The ministry of health, District health department and other stakeholders should sensitize the population in Lagos to change their beliefs in traditional medicine which has affected their modern health care seeking behaviour. (Some individuals still think that certain herbal can cure everything and they end up not visiting any doctor). Traditional medicine should be included in primary and secondary school curriculums beginning from primary level to enable children grow up with an informed mind. The ministry of Health should integrate a component on traditional medicine in the national health strategic plan. There should be a deliberate effort to women health related issues in district since they are most affected and can influence behavior change at household level.

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