

**The Changing Nature of Tiv Economy and
Proliferation of Indigenous Medical
Practices in Tivland**

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Abstract

This research discussed the Tiv Economy and proliferation of Tiv traditional medical practices in Tivland. This study has argued that while other factors must have also been responsible to the proliferation of Tiv traditional medicine in Tivland, the quest for wealth amidst economic challenges is an important factor in the emergence of quacks in the practice. The methodology adopted in this research was the use of primary and secondary sources. The essential facts of the various sources comprises of unwritten and written sources, textbooks and unpublished materials. In the primary sources, oral interviews were conducted, from the available traditional medicine practitioners on the proliferation of Tiv traditional medicine. Areas of focus were on the hike in charges as well as authenticity of the traditional medicine and the administration of fake herbs. The Tiv economy was discussed with impact on traditional medicine. The paper suggested that traditional medical practitioners should also have their own areas of specialization and get them registered too.

Keywords: Proliferation, Quacks, Administration, Tiv Traditional Medicine, Quest for Wealth.

Introduction

The Tiv of central Nigeria are an ethnic group of semi-Bantu linguistic affinity.¹ They are believed to have also engaged in the practice of traditional medical practice similar to that of the Bantoid groups. They gave medical attention to the children, which is in the area of modern pediatrics. They also took care of pregnant women and ensured smooth delivery just like the modern gynecology. The latter was basically handled by women, mostly the aged. So many sicknesses were treated by the professional traditional doctors that were part of every lineage. There was also specialization in all the medical practices. Every ailment had some certain herbs that were administered and such herbs were only potent if they were administered by the people who had the responsibilities to do so. However, the changing nature of the Tiv economy that entrenched capitalism during the colonial era has radically transformed the philosophy behind medical practice. The quest to gain quick access to wealth made some people to seek for healing powers outside the Tiv cosmology. Thus, on the other hand, civilization and contacts with other ethnic groups made the Tiv people to have come in contact with unfamiliar sicknesses, therefore, making the search for external healing powers also necessary. It is pertinent to also note that some of the sicknesses would have been imported into Tivland by the overzealous insatiable people looking for means of survival. By and large, the Tiv traditional medical practice has undergone so many transformations, making the potent of it contestable by some people in recent times. This paper has analyzed the causes of this transformation, focusing on the changing nature of economy and its impact on traditional medical practice.

1 R. M. Downes "The Tiv Traditional Religion", (Nigeria Ibadan University press, 1971) pg.1.

Conceptual Clarification

Indigenous knowledge: indigenous knowledge generally refers to knowledge systems embedded in the cultural traditions of regional, indigenous or local communities. Indigenous knowledge includes hunting, midwifery, and traditional medicine.²

Medical practice: medical practice means a business through which one or more physicians practice medicine.³ Thus, Aghamelu, defines medicine from an Igbo perspective as something believed to control natural and supernatural powers to serve as a prevention or remedy. Furthermore, he outlines his definition of medicine to show that it is the treatment or prevention of diseases or any damage to the body or mind by the uses of some objects, which has the natural and supernatural powers to cure or prevent ailments. The implication of this elaborate definition of medicine by Aghamelu is that for the African, medicine goes beyond materials with alleged efficacy for the treatment of ailment or prevention of diseases to include objects or materials which exercise remote and miraculous effects on the efficacy of other objects.⁴ Writing on the concept of medicine Adega and Apenda, on their part contend that medicine refers to any substance that is used for the treatment of an illness. They are of the view that medicine can be in form of syrup (liquid), tablets or powdery.⁵ To them, as far as the restoration of health is concerned, medicine is important.

2 Internet source, Law legal dictionary Retrieved 20/02/2021.

3 A.M Adejo "Benue and National Integration during the Twentieth Century" quoted in T. Agena, *Inter-group Relations In The Lower Benue Valley Since 1900* pg.9.

4 F.C Aghamelu, "*Traditional African Medicine*", *Philosophical Foundations and Apologetics*. In Dukor, M (ed). *Essence: Philosophy and African Medicine*. (Satellite Town – Lagos: Essence Library, 2006) Pg.74-75.

5 A. Adega, A. Z. Apenda "*Constraints And Challenges in Traditional Health Care In Nigeria: The Tiv Perspective*". (Abuja, Roots Books And Journals, 2007) pg.83.

The Tiv Economy

The Tiv pre-colonial economy was basically agriculture which was also supported by other activities like blacksmithing, pottery, hunting, clothe weaving, hunting and others. Their contacts with the *chamba*, *Ugenyi*, Fulani, and Upper Cross River people taught them more fishing and trade. They used *tugudu*, Tiv clothe with stripes for exchange. The women also great influenced the economy. They controlled the farm while the men had the right over the quantity of the produce⁶.

During the colonial period the Tiv economy just like the economy of other African people was integrated into the world's capitalist economy, necessitating the shift in focus to cash crop production. The way life of the people changed in so many areas. They became individualistic and sought for money to conform to the tax regime that serviced the British administration. The people also became conscious of means or sources of income and pursued them with vigour. Some also started looking at alternatives including those that stood against cultural values of the Tiv people. Things like traditional medical practice also became commercialized since not all who held the medical practice as inheritance became traditional doctors.

History of Tiv Indigenous Medical Practice

The twenty-first century is witnessing a turning point in the study of traditional medicine in respect to its procurement, preparation and application to remedy human health problems. The movement from chemically synthesized drugs in pharmaceutical industries to drugs in containing the standard proportion of substances stresses the need to update pieces of information and further studies the chemical composition and their reaction of all kinds.⁷ In line with this, an examination of the indigenous healing systems to the Tiv which comprises several ideas and practices becomes imperative. Usually armed with their faith and medicine from a combination of many

6 A. Adega, A. Z. Apenda "Constraints And Challenges in Traditional Health Care In Nigeria: The Tiv Perspective". (Abuja, Roots Books And Journals, 2007) pg.83.

7 M.J. Ballick, "Medicinal Plants". (Grolier International Encyclopedia Vol. 13, 1998), pg. 266.

plants, the medicine men/women do their best to provide assistance to all those afflicted with various kinds of diseases. However from this point of view, culture and religion are probably the most important factors in this human enterprise, anthropologists are unanimous that without religion and culture, there can be no society; and without religion, culture and society, there can neither be humanity nor medicine. From this perspective of human nature, medicine is acquired through religion and culture, and this can only be effectively accomplished in a social context.⁸

The Tiv indigenous medical practices were very effective and are still very effective if the people practicing the art of healing are real medicine men with full indigenous knowledge of healing. The sources and origins of Tiv traditional medicine are numerous. Though the idea of curing illness is as old as man himself, the sources of the healing art in Tiv differ from person to person. Most traditional healers claim they have some mystic powers to heal in addition to the roots, leaves, bark and several other elements that they use. Certain healers claim they obtain the healing from their dreams and such divine powers are usually not transferable except they remember whether or not the gods or persons who gave them asked them to do so. In this category, even the charges are prescribed to them in such dreams and they have no right to increase them.

Some Tiv hunters have acquired the art of healing by watching the behaviors' of animals and birds such as monkeys and baboons (*bagu*) and *Turtur* (*Senegal coucal/ centropus Senegalensis*) in the bush. For example, when one of such animals is injured through arrows, gunshots or snake bite, the unhurt one could collect a particular leaf (herbs), chew it and apply to the affected part of the wounded one. Sometimes the chewed leaves or herbs are pushed into the mouth of the injured or sick animal. Such leaves have become useful to man in healing cuts and wounds. Mellah also corroborates that the Tiv learnt the healing process from animals hence animals were their eye

8 U.M Ushe "kpor of Tiv culture" Nigeria, (Enugu: San Press 2007), Pg. 20.

openers as to what plants they were to take for food or medicine. Mellah maintains that the Tiv, as keen watchers of the environment and nature, observed species of animals eat certain foods and since these did not harm them, they (Tiv) collected those for the critical experiment before consumption as food and for medicinal purposes.⁹

In subscribing to the above view Aposu further explains that in their bid to regain their health, the Tiv made enquiries from his acquaintances in order to obtain medicine. He maintains that when the Tiv saw a plant that was pleasing to the eye, they tasted it and their reaction to such a plant showed whether it was medicinal, poisonous or edible. The spirits also showed some medicinal plants to the Tiv to enhance their survival in terms of ill-health and hunger. The struggle to maintain good health was because *Aondo* (God) created Tiv in good health and illness came as an infringement on this perfect state which necessitated his search for medicine to restore his health. Concerning the structure of Tiv medicine, on the whole, we can generalize and say that the indigenous society had and has an all-embracing, supernatural, or metaphysical theory of disease. Running throughout all these researches we notice a basic pattern and a basic philosophy in spite of the acknowledged regional differences in African medicine. It is obvious that the Tiv believes firstly that disease is caused by spirit or supernatural agency, and secondly that many illnesses can be alleviated or even cured by the administration of one of many remedies found in nature.¹⁰ However, the modern Tiv economy has a tale on the traditional medical practices in Tivland to the extent that in order to make a living there is high proliferation of Tiv traditional medicine and fake traditional medical practitioners are everywhere in Tivland. These herbalist are unqualified they just get herbs from anywhere without knowing the sicknesses they cure.

9 C. Mellah, "Between Tiv Farmers And Fulani Herdsmen, Healing the Rift". In Anyam A.E *Materia Medica in Tiv Traditional Medicine*", (Makurdi, Obeta Continental Press, 2019), pg.51.

10 C. Mellah, "Between Tiv Farmers And Fulani Herdsmen, Healing the Rift". pg.51.

Proliferation of Indigenous Medical Practices in Tivland

Aluko maintains that Tiv traditional medicine has largely remained an effective part of the Tiv cultural existence hence it has helped relatively in bringing a man to a state of stable health. This is to say that traditional medicine has given its practitioners a way of life.¹¹ As a result of the above, some have turned the practice of medicine into an avenue of making money. Victor Semali states that most of the new traditional health practitioners in the name of performing rituals of healing (*akombo*) normally ask for goat and chickens. It is true that these animals are used for rituals but most of the people requesting for this items presently do not know anything about rituals but are just using that avenue to enrich themselves and they are also hungry for meat.¹² This is the limit it has gone to. The patient remains with the sickness whether it has a spiritual cause or not.

Apart from the practice of demanding for goat and chickens for healing rituals, the fake traditional medical practitioners in Tivland are charging a lot of money on their medicine. The Tiv indigenous art of healing was not in that form, some people acquired their healing art in their dreams. Anyam supported this view by stating that:

Most traditional healers claim they have some mystic powers to heal in addition to the roots, leaves, bark and several other elements that they use. Certain healers claim they obtain the healing from their dreams and such divine powers are usually not transferable except they remember whether or not the gods or persons who gave them asked them to do so. In this category, even the charges are prescribed to them in such dreams and they have no right to increase them.¹³

11 E. A Anyam "*Materia Medica in Tiv Traditional Medicine*". In Tiv traditional medicine, (Makurdi: Obeta continental press, 2019), pg.51.

12 T. Aluko, "The Impact of Traditional Medicine on the Health System in Nigeria" (Abuja, Roots Books and Journals, 2007), pg. 428.

13 E. A Anyam "*Materia Medica In Tiv Traditional Medicine*". In Tiv traditional medicine, pg.51.

Some Tiv medical practitioners also have decided to increase the price of their medicine thereby increasing the amount of hardship in the country. Apart from that, the orthodox medicines are so expensive causing untold hardship to the people who are sick. Those who could not afford the orthodox medicine still turn back to traditional medicine but traditional medicine is becoming something else this days. Olumba reiterates this fact when he notes that the amount payable on any traditional medical product is relatively cheap. He further enumerated other factors which make the prospects of traditional medicine very bright to include the fact that the services of traditional doctors are tailored to the needs of the people; it creates room for confidentiality.¹⁴

In some cases traditional health practitioners are not supposed to collect more than 10 naira for the services they offer because they are supposed to be after the wellbeing and stable state of their society not money. Dooshima Atime a traditional health practitioner whose area of specialization is to treat shingles (*usu*) but not every aspect of it, she quenches the internal heat the patient feels known as *usu pilin* in Tiv language (to quench fire) but does not treat the sores. After the person is healed internally, she refers the patient to another traditional health practitioner to heal the sores. According to her till now the fee for that medicine is 3kobo and she does not even have the right to increase it.¹⁵ Another herbalist in Gboko Semali Dyegh collects a twig of bush as fee after rendering his services to a patient. He is a specialist in the treatment of *kwambe* (whitlow) and *Ayavkyule* (yellow fever).¹⁶ There is doubt that the proliferation of traditional medicine in Tivland is creating doubts and reducing the impact and value traditional medicine had on the Tiv society. In fact Aluko maintains that many of

14 P.N Olumba "elements of Educational Technology in Traditional medicine". In religion, medicine and healing. A publication of the (NASRED). Ikeja –lagos: free Enterprise, 1995, pg.114.

15 Dooshima Atime, oral interview, 40 years, herbalist Gboko local Government 22/03/2021

16 Semali Dyegh, oral interview, 85 years, medicine man Yandev Gboko local Government 23/03/2021.

the practitioners have had to depend on it to earn a living, which can undoubtedly be said to be a positive impact on society.¹⁷

The Way Forward

To control the proliferation of Tiv traditional medicine, the real Tiv traditional health practitioners should register their medicines with the government. Anyam supported this view by stating that “...the National Agency for drug Administration and control (NAFDAC) should verify traditional medicine and give approval numbers to drugs they have verified and found potent.”¹⁸

Another way of maintaining the value of traditional medicine is to establish hospitals for traditional health care delivery or they should be incorporated and recognized. There is the need, therefore, for the government to also come out openly and support traditional medical practice in the attempt to enhance health care provision in the country. The government by according recognition to traditional medicine will also support the quest for the patronage of local content.

Also, the colleges/faculties of medicine and Health sciences in Nigeria universities should place greater interest in traditional medicine.¹⁹ While the pioneering roles of the universities of Lagos and Ibadan in introducing a diploma programme in herbal medicine are appreciated, others should also key in so as to ensure quality control and stop the proliferation fake practitioners.

Conclusion

The smooth development of Tiv traditional medicine has been hampered by the modern economic challenges which have led to the proliferation of Tiv traditional medicine. This has constituted the greatest problem to the advancement of this indigenous knowledge system and this research has been

17 T. Aluko, “The Impact of Traditional Medicine on the Health System in Nigeria”, pg.428.

18 E.A Anyam “*Materia Medica in Tiv Traditional Medicine*”. In *Tiv Traditional Medicine*, pg.51.

19 A. E Anyam, “*Materia Medica in Tiv Traditional Medicine*”, pg. 215.

undertaken to proffer solutions to this problems. It has suggested that recognition should be given to the traditional health system. It is only by so doing that quacks will be sent out of the practice.

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