

Chapter Fourteen

TIV TRADITIONAL MEDICINE AND NEED FOR THE PRESERVATION OF THE ECO-SYSTEM

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Executive Summary

The paper investigated Tiv Traditional Medicine and the need for the preservation of the Eco-system. The aim was to identify traditional medicine as impetus for the conservation of the environment. This is owing to the fact that the effectiveness of traditional medicine is a reality in many cultures and among Tiv people in particular. The fact that traditional medicine is practised side by side with orthodox medicine had proved its worth. However, with the emergence of globalization, environmental degradation has become a nightmare. Human activities like deforestation, urbanization, modernization and mechanization have contributed hugely to the depletion of the environment. A phenomenological method was adopted. Historical and expository approaches were deployed. Findings of this paper indicated that; Tiv traditional medicine is an essential part of the people's culture; that the eco-system is been aggressively depleted due to human activities; and that with proper orientation, our eco-system will be saved through

aforestation and stricter laws. It was concluded that, Despite the challenges of globalization on traditional medicine, it has persisted and will hopefully continue to be regarded by a greater number of people as effective and acceptable health care system.

Keywords: Tiv, Traditonal Medicine, Orthodox Medicine, Ecosystem, Environment

Introduction

The role played by plants and other natural resources in traditional healthcare promotion and medicine is one that cannot be over emphasized. According to Ama (2021, Oral Interview), man has overtime suffered from common as well as complicated illnesses ranging from headache, fever, stomachache and epidemics. Atagher (2021, Oral Interview) emphasizes that in all these predicaments, man learned overtime to deploy various parts of the plants traditionally for the relief of certain illnesses and to cure even chronic ailments. Thus, traditional medicine acted as protection against a variety of diseases and disorders from time immemorial. According to Gera, et al (2015), the Plant kingdom is well endowed with a variety of phytochemicals that are important in healthcare promotion, disease prevention and has remained the foundation for the discovery of innovative drugs.

Consequently, the use of traditional medicine as a source of medicine has not been strange among the Tiv of North central Nigeria. Gera *et al* (2015) aver that, from generation to generation, the Tiv have used traditional medicine as the first line of action in outbreak of illnesses. The young ones learn from the adults who possess a good knowledge of plants that cure a variety of illness including diarrheal. Atagher (2021, Oral Interview) adds that, even with the introduction of orthodox medicine, traditional Medicine remains a viable alternative to

primary healthcare delivery among the Tiv. This is as a result of its effectiveness and continues utilization among consumers. Adega *et al* (2020) note that, Tiv Traditional Medicine is as old as the Tiv themselves, and that the practice of traditional medicine came into being as soon as the Tiv became feeble and frail due to infirmity, ill health and old age; thus needing some form of medicine for the restoration of his/her health. Accordingly, Tiv traditional medicine at its inception was purely made up by the products of nature such as barks of trees, shrubs, roots, stones, sand and animal matter.

However, notwithstanding its relevance of plants and their products in traditional medicine, many plants spices suffers some level of extinction among some Tiv. Tondo (2021, Oral Interview) emphasizes that desert encroachment, urbanization, and loss of interest in the practice of traditional medicine are the causes. Ama (2021, Oral Interview) suggests that this is because the introduction of orthodox medicine has been found to be more convenient by many people; hence little attention is given to preservation of medicinal plants. This paper examines the effectiveness of traditional medicine in the treatment of diseases among the Tiv people of Benue State and the need to preserve the environment. The crux of the paper is to identify with traditional medicine as a strong reason for the preservation of the eco-system.

The Tiv People

Tiv is an ethno-linguistic nation in Nigeria that ar inhabitants of the larger part of the Middle Belt Region. Wegh (1998) identifies Tiv as the name of an ethnic group in Nigeria; the name of their language and the name also stand for their ancestor-Tiv. Thus, Tivland covers an area of about 30,000 square kilometers stretching from about 6-30c to 8-10c-north latitude of 8 to 10 east

longitude. Wegh (1998) further points out that, Tiv people constitute approximately a total population of over 7 million individuals throughout Nigeria and the 4th largest ethnic group in Nigeria. Tiv language is widely spoken in Nigerian.

For Torkula (2004), the Tiv originates among the Bantu people who once inhabited the central African continent in the Shaba area of the present day Democratic Republic of Congo. They migrated to the Benue valley having sojourned in a mountainous region known as the *Swem* in the south eastern Cameroon over centuries. Their migration is laden with series of wars, conquests, displacements and with setting on-the-run other ethnic groups as the people descend and occupied the Benue plains in 1500AD.

Hagher (1990) emphasizes that the Tiv people depend on agricultural produce for commerce and life; therefore, land is essential to them. They conceive land as the land of their fathers that is sacred. Religiously, according to Dzurgba (2007), the Tiv acknowledges *Aondo* as the Supreme Being who created the universe and directs all its affairs; a belief not very different from the Christian conception of God. Tivland is surrounded by neighbouring ethnic groups like the *Alago*, *Angwe* and *loro* in the north, the various ethnic groups in *Ogoja* collectively known as *Udam* in the south, the *Jukum*, *Chamba* and *Mumuye* in the east and the *Idoma* and the *Igala* on the west respectively. The climatic condition in Tivland is determined by two major seasons: the rainy and the dry season. The rainy seasons start from April and ends in October, while the dry season begins in November and ends in March of the following year. The temperature is usually between 80 and 90 degrees Fahrenheit (Atel, 2004).

Tiv Traditional Medicine

Tiv Traditional Medicine refers to local and unorthodox substances obtained locally from the barks of trees, roots, shrubs

and animal parts (Adegga et al, 2020), for the purpose of healing or cure. Over time, the tiv have systematically observed various ailments and have developed ways of tackling the traditionally in accordance with its peculiarities. According to Afella (2015), the Tiv people usually prepare medicine in various forms. There are those that are prepared in liquid forms made from fresh leaves, stems, roots, backs of plants, shrubs, soil and animal parts. There are also liquid medicines made from dry materials of some of the materials just mentioned. These materials are sometimes grounded in powdery form and licked or taken orally in paste food (*Ibier*). Tiv traditional Medicines are also prepared in paste form to be robbed on the affected part of the skin. Drying medicine materials and also pounding them are methods devised by the Tiv for preservation or storage of medicines for future use.

According to Apenda (2016) the practice of ethno-medicine or traditional medicine is based on the practitioner's knowledge, which is derived from their indigenous world-view, myths and beliefs which include the healing techniques transmitted from generation to generation over centuries. Gbenda (2007) points out that there are several justifications for the use of herbs by the various traditional healers surfacing from their therapeutic values, focusing on the three major aspects of a human person, namely; physical, spiritual and psychological therapy. Chiichi (2012) corroborates that:

The Tiv concept of medicine is holistic like elsewhere in Africa. The holistic health care is an integrative approach, balancing the mind, spirit, and body. African medicine makes little distinction between body, mind and spirit. In treatment, the whole person is treated including the physical, social and spiritual milieu deemed necessary for

total health. The wholeness of the patient is considered paramount in the healing process (p.59).

Ama (2021, Oral Interview) acknowledges that Tiv traditional medicine cuts across all facets of human life. In other words, all forms of disease or ill health such as fever, cough, snake bites, fractures etc, have their treatment procedures and plants to be used. Gbenda (2007) corroborates that diseases like stroke (*akpiti*), cough (*hoo*), malaria (*ayaakule*), madness (*ihundugh*), bone setting (*kuhe zoloon*) and in several other cases, various herbal products are used to effect healing. Emphasizing the centrality of Tiv traditional medicine, Apenda states that:

The fact that Tiv traditional medicine treats several health related problems which western medicine still finds it increasingly difficult to comprehend, also entails that traditionally, every Tiv healer is essentially significant in the ability to handle various methods in healing, especially in some healing centers where professional matters are tackled from “wholistic” point of view. In this regard, many diseases/ sicknesses are named after the parts of the human body affected or the objects associated with such problems, and specific herbs that could be used in healing are given their names depending on the ecology of the people (p.244).

In support of the prospect of Tiv traditional medical efforts, several authors have made efforts to document the medicinal uses of plants in Tiv land against infectious diseases. For instance Gera et al (2015), Adegbo (2020) and Afella (2015) have surveyed and documented several medicinal plants used among Tiv people of central Nigeria for the treatment of disease. Several species of plants are identified from different species. A similar survey was carried out by Tor-Anyii (2003) who documented the medicinal plants used by the Tiv people for antivenomous applications.

Traditional medicine and medicine men can be categorized severally depending on the kind of treatment they offer. In his investigation, Chiichi (2012) identifies the following; herbalists (*mbawanicigh*), ritualists (*mbasoronkwagh*), diviners (*mbakpehen ishor*), traditional surgeons, Orthopaedics (*mbazoron lkyuhe*), traditional midwives (*mbakoron mar*), traditional psychiatrists (*mbasoron ihundugh*). Similar to scientific or orthodox medicine, traditional medical experts diagnose and identify sicknesses especially, ordinary before they administer treatment. In this way, treatment is based on manifest symptoms. Chiichi (2012) adds that Tiv traditional Diagnosis is achieved by visual assessment or inspection of the affected parts of the body e.g skin, eyes, urine, and faeces.

Traditional Medicine and the Eco-System

An ecosystem consists of the biological community or locality, and the physical and chemical components that make up its non-living or abiotic environment. The study of the eco-systems mainly consists of the study of certain processes that link the living or biotic components to the non-living, or abiotic components. Simply put, the eco-system is the environment in its natural habitat. Recently, it has become known that accelerating changes are occurring at the global scale in the eco-system. According to Darley and Kent (2013), a wide range of environmental problems have emerged which include global warming, the depletion of ozone layer, the acidification of surface waters, the destruction of tropical forests, the depletion and extinction of species, and the precipitous decline of biodiversity. In his view, Ama (2021, Oral Interview) admits that, the damage against the eco-system is affecting humanity than expected. Yet, while all of these challenges have objective or physical expression, their causes and their possible resolutions

are invariably bound up with human attitudes, beliefs, values, needs, desires, expectations, and behaviours.

Park (2001) reports that around half of the world's mature forest have been cleared by human activities in form of deforestation. In Benue state, and particularly among the Tiv, deforestation has taken place on a very large scale. This has contributed to rising case of environmental degradation and loss of forest reserves at a significant pace. Tondo (2021, Oral Interview) points out that, deforestation occurs for a variety of reasons, but the majority of deforestation now occurs when tropical forests are cleared for agriculture and cattle grazing, urbanization, development of infrastructure such as road construction, drainage channels and establishment of institutions. Benue being predominantly an agrarian state, this fact cannot be imagined. Other forms of deforestation among the Tiv include the destruction of trees for charcoal production and the selective logging of forests for timber. The forests, not only cover the earth's surface, they are an essential part of the global eco-system and of the biosphere which help to regulate climate as well as a medical reserve. The forests also protect soils from erosion and provide habitats for a vast number of medicinal plants and animal species.

Following from the above Ama (2021, Oral Interview) laments that, human activities are a major threat to medicinal plants and animals. The spread of disease, the destruction and degradation of their habitats, and direct exploitation have become a point of concern. Atagher (2021, Oral Interview) remarks that, the human population has increased over time and along with the increase, there has been a need for increased food production. This situation has added to deforestation in a bid to prepare lands for agriculture. Orbunde (2021, Oral Interview) submits that these warning signs of the ecological crisis cannot be regarded as problems requiring solutions by specialists alone; rather, these

crises are essentially human problems and they are intimately related to the question of what it means to be human. In order words, efforts at resolving these crises must be collaborative.

The role of Tiv Traditional Medicine practice in the management of the environment is immense. Chiichi (2012) acknowledges that Tiv Traditional medicines are natural ingredients provided for man by the creator himself to enable man live a healthy life. These natural ingredients are indigenous to any given culture right from the period of creation and are found within the environment; hence the need to protect it. Ama (2021, Oral Interview) emphasizes that, the preservation of medicinal plants and other natural resources is essentially the preservation of the environment or the ecosystem. Orbunde (2021, Oral Interview) corroborates that, when nature is preserved for the purpose of obtaining medical plants, the environment will by extension be conserved. Atagher (2021, Oral Interview) adds that, it is a mutual vista whereby; the requirement to safeguard medicinal plants leads to the preservation of the entire eco-system. At the same time, the desire to preserve the environment leads to the preservation of medicinal plants.

In spite of the effectiveness of traditional medicine in Tiv society, recently, there has been rising environmental challenges that threaten the existence of plants spices that are rich in traditional medicine. Chiichi (2012) admits that globalization is the major propblem of traditional medicine. He adds that, the challenges of globalization on traditional health systems are influenced by cultural mistrust and stereotypes, religion, education and civilization, urbanization, modernization, industrialization and technological advancement. These factors pose greater challenges to traditional medicine and healing in Tiv society. The

above challenges are entrenched in both external and internal factors to deter traditional medicine from its global health status.

Scientific and Technical Advisory Panel (STAP, 2018), on “Integration: to solve complex environmental problems” reports that environmental challenges are complex and interlinked, not only in themselves but also with social and economic issues. Addressing these interconnected and interacting environmental and social challenges requires systems thinking; this is fundamental to better integration. ‘Systems thinking’ examines the relationships between the different parts of a system, for example, the food supply system, or a commodity supply chain, especially cause and effect relationships, and positive or negative feedback mechanisms, between the biophysical and socio-economic features of the system. ‘Systems thinking’ also considers the interactions between components of a system across different locations and organizational levels, as well as over time. Many of these relationships are non-linear. Understanding the connections between variables helps to identify points for effective intervention.

This present paper is conceived within an understanding that the effectiveness and inescapable nature of traditional medicine in Tiv society is definitely an impetus for the preservation of the eco-system. Many Scholars of Tiv Traditional Medicine such as Gbenda (2007), Chiichi (2012), Afella (2015), Apenda (2016), Adegba (2020) have expressed the inescapability of traditional medicine in their works. For instance, Gbenda (2007) acknowledges that there is abundant justification for the use of herbs by the various traditional healers evolving from their therapeutic values, focusing on the physical, spiritual and psychological therapy. According to Gbenda (2007) diseases like stroke (*akpiti*), cough (*hoo*), malaria (*ayaakule*), madness

(ihundugh), bone setting (*kuhe zoloon*) and in several other cases, various herbal products are used to effect healing.

Furthermore, Chiichi (2012) notes that, traditional plants in Tiv society did not only provide conventional pharmaceutical drugs, the traditional healers provide clientcentered, personalized health care which is holistic and channeled to meet the needs and expectations of the sick. Apenda (2016) corroborates that the belief in traditional healing is sacrosanct because there is some disease which western medicine could not permanently cure. The patients especially when the illness is protracted tilt towards the belief in super natural causation; thus, establishing a psychological satisfaction and impressive mystical environment for the healers to machinate upon them. Adega (2020) affirms that Tiv Traditional Medicine has made significant and considerable impact on the health needs of the Tiv and the healthcare delivery system in Nigeria generally.

Conclusion

This paper focused on the Tiv Traditional Medicine and the preservation of the eco-system. It was found that the Tiv strive to promote, maintain and restore good health and well-being at all times. They develop unique indigenous and conventional healing traditions developed and defined by their culture, beliefs and environment, which satisfied the health needs of their communities over centuries. Traditional medicine is a cultural treasure of the Tiv community around the world and encompasses all kinds of unconventional medicine and indeed any kind of therapeutic method that has been handed down by the tradition of a community or ethnic group. With the depletion of forests and its materials, the threat for traditional medicine has doubled. The result of the studies expressed above has justified the continued relevance of Tiv traditional medicine to the

society. Based on the findings above, this paper concludes here that consideration be given to the environment so as to preserve the forest resources.

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