

## PHARMACEUTICAL AND ECONOMIC VALUES OF TREES IN NUPE LAND : A POLITICAL ECONOMY

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### **Abstract**

*There are conflicting accounts of the exact ethnic and socio- cultural configuration of Nigeria. One account suggests up to Two Hundred and Fifty ethnic groups. While some suggest Two Hundred and Fifty (250) ethnic groups and Three Hundred and Ninety Four (394) language groups for the entire country. General Babangida is of the opinion that in the absence of an agreed actual number of ethnic nationalities in Nigeria, people see the country as made up of over Two Hundred and Fifty ethnic groups (250) or about three hundred (300) ethnic groups. The Nupe are one of these multi-ethnic groupings in Nigeria. The word Nupe is the bastardized connotation of an Arabic word "Nefin" which means fugitive. According to Ismaila (2002) Arab scholars like Ibn Battuta, El-Idris, North African traders and some Europeans refers to Nupe people as Nyffe, Nufe and Nefu. They are largely found around the confluence of Kaduna and Gbako Rivers as asserted by Obayemi in Ikimi (1980) or what is referred to as Middle Belt or North Central States of Nigeria, an area today consisting of Kwara, Kogi and Niger States. This paper using both primary and secondary data, examines the rich pharmaceutical endowment of Nupe land and its economic values. Given a committed political will, these ecological endowments can facilitate better life for the people, not only of Nupe land, but the entire Nigerian State. This paper recommends massive investment by the government and private investors in the development of the pharmaceutical trees and Sugar cane for ethanol fuel production.*

**Keywords:** Nupe Land, Ecological Endowment, Political will, Better Life

### **Introduction**

To apprehend why a given society or a collection of people exhibit glaringly certain behavioral patterns, dressing, craft, traditional medicine, trade, farm implements and farm produce etc, it is necessary to first understand their historical background and their physical environment. The importance of this lies in the fact that every society functions in a way that depicts its immediate environment, social, cultural and economic values. These ethnic nations are not found in a vacuum. They occupy geographical locations in Nigeria. Some of them are found in the Northern part and some in the southern part with further sub-divisions into Northwest, North East, North Central, South South, South West and South East. Among these groupings, some are considered as majority group like the Hausa Fulani, Yoruba and Igbo, while others are configured as minority group.

There are conflicting accounts of the exact ethnic and socio- cultural configuration of Nigeria. One account suggests up to two hundred and fifty ethnic groups. For example Meek (1931) and Bleambo (1990) in Onwuka (2002) found two hundred and fifty five ethnic groups in Northern Nigeria alone. While Bleambo configures two hundred and fifty (250) ethnic groups and three hundred and ninety four (394) language group for the entire country. General Babangida (2002) stipulates that in the absence of an

agreed actual number of ethnic nationalities in Nigeria, people see the country as made up of over two hundred and fifty ethnic groups (250) or about three hundred (300) ethnic groups.

However, Sokolouskii and Tishkov in Onwuka (2002) are of the opinion that ethnic divisions are created by the dynamics of elite competition within the boundaries determined by political and economic realities. It is a construction of cultural elites in a particular society to serve the economic and political ends of such elites. Essentially given the practical realities on the ground, these ethnic groups hold in high esteem their socio cultural and traditions of origin. These ethnic groups are naturally endowed with potentialities that can enhance their standard of living. In contradistinction, inept political leadership allowed these natural gifts to suffer total neglect. It is in this regard that, this paper examines the ecological endowments of Nupe land and its pharmaceutical potency.

### **The Origin Of Nupe**

The Nupe are one of these multi-ethnic groupings in Nigeria. The word Nupe is the bastardized connotation of an Arabic word “Nefin” which means fugitive. According to Ismaila (2002) Arab scholars like Ibn Battuta, El-Idris, North African traders and some Europeans refers to Nupe people as Nyffe, Nufe and Nefu. They are largely found around the confluence of Kaduna and Gbako Rivers as asserted by Obayemi in Ikimi (1980) or what is referred to as middle belt or North central states of Nigeria, an area today consisting of Kwara, Kogi and Niger States.

However, their origin is complex and sometimes contradictory. Some traditions claimed that the Nupe is indigenous to Africa. Other accounts however relate the Nupe people to migration. For example, according to Omolewa (2005) the Ebogi, a sub group of Nupe traced their origin to Fulani dynasty, while the Kyedeye claimed to have come from Idah. Interestingly Mallam Salihu Ibrahim (S. Ibrahim, personal communication December 2008) asserted that, the Nupe people have no hermitic, Asiatic nor Eurocentric claim to their origin. That all traditions leading to the origin of Nupe are indigenous to Africa. They belong to the Kwa group of West African languages, which include Igbo, Yoruba, Ijaw, Edo e.t.c

It is against this backdrop that the popular tradition of their origin was linked to Tsoede who according to oral tradition narrated by Alhaji Muhammadu Ndantsa Etsu Yankpa wuya is an Igala prince. (M. Ndantsa personal communication September 2008). His father went on hunting expedition when he got married to the daughter of the head of his host community. His birth was recorded at the absence of his father, and he was taken to Idah as a tribute to the reigning Igala king. Fortunately for Tsoede, he was said to have grown up in the palace near his father, the king amidst criticisms and rejections from his stepmothers.

At the death of his father he sought refuge in his mother’s home, which is Nupe land. Oral tradition has it that his eventual departure from Igala kingdom was connected with the defeat he suffered in the contest for the royal seat of his father (Ndagtsu, 2008). On his way to his mothers country home, he went away with the royal insignia of Igala kingdom and a bronze canoe. Obayemi in Ikimi (ed) (1980) has suggested that he was assisted by Kyede, the Nupe sub group found around Riverine areas, to pilot the canoe to the other bank of the River Niger. On arrival, he meets a weak confederation of Nupe political entities and as usual, with all power-seeking princes, he established himself and took over the control of the entire Nupe land.

Essentially, Omolewa (2005) said that

*There were over a dozen of such semi independent states in Nupe land out of which only two have extended their influence over their immediate settlement. Kede which was an important trading and fishing town extended their influence to bank of river Kaduna. The second was Beni which was a confederation of smaller settlements located along Kaduna and Gbako rivers*

Nonetheless, both oral and written tradition of Nupe origin accepted the central position of Tsoede who united the autonomous component units of the confederation into single Nupe political entity. He built a new settlement at Gbara and introduced a new code of justice and taxation system. He undertook several military expansionist expeditions out of which he attacked Yagba, Abunu up to the interior part of Yoruba land. His success in these attacks was connected with the establishment of a very powerful, agile and indomitable Calvary force. Omolewa further assert that Tsoede who was the first to adopt the title of Etsu, and commanded a Calvary force of about Five Thousand, Five Hundred and Fifty Five (5,555) horses. With this formidable force under his command, it was a task accomplished to attack and defeat weaker communities within the confluence of River Benue and River Niger up to Yoruba land. Michael (1970), Nadel (1961 and 1970) have documented records on Nupe history

#### **The Economy of Nupe Land**

The Nupe economy is largely agrarian like other subgroups within Africa. They are mostly subsistence producers using communal effort. Being primary producers, farming is the main stay of the economy. They produce mostly crops such as Maize, Millet, Yam, Beans, Rice, Melon, Pepper, Sugar Cane, Groundnut, Cassava, and Guinea Corn. Consequent upon this, land becomes very essential. There are two types of farm holding in Nupe land namely, the extended family farm holding (Etako) and the nuclear family farm holding (Buchpa). Labour is provided on the extended family farm by all members of the family. While in that of the nuclear family, the man, his wife and children work on the farm. There is also what is called "Egbe" a collection of able bodied men of the community that provide labour on the farm of an old or sick man. It is the sole responsibility of the man on whose farm the labour is provided to provide free food and wine to the group members. In addition to this, aged grades called the "Dizoro" organized themselves and work on each other's farm. There is another form of labour called "sofa" in which a debtor is expected to send one of his son or relations to work for his creditor until the creditor become satisfied.

In spite of all these communal efforts, production in Nupe land was largely determined by the geography of the area and the fertility of the land. Salawu (2004) observed that those in trans-Kaduna, Bini and Badegi areas cultivate grains such as Rice, Millet, Guinea Corn, Yam, and Sweet Potatoes. While those in forest zone of Kusopa areas produce Kola nut, Banana and Palm kernel. Other subgroups that fall within the Riverine areas like Kyadeya and Batachizhi combined fishing with canoe transportation. They ferry men and their goods across River Niger. These people also produce Rice in large quantities. They also grow Groundnut, Shea nut, Mangos, Sugarcane and vast natural flora species for industrial and pharmaceutical raw materials. The entire Nupe land is also blessed with solid minerals like Brass, Bronze, Aluminum, Glass and Petroleum resources.

### **Pharmaceutical Trees of Nupe Land and Their Economic Values**

It is not an exaggeration, if Nigeria is said to be abundantly endowed by nature. Each Region of the Federation is naturally endowed with both Flora and Fauna species in large commercial quantities. Unfortunately, given the Nigerian leadership character, these vast natural resources are left unexplored for human use. Scholars in the ranks of Ake (1981 and 1985), Achebe (1985), Caporaso and Levine (1992), Anifowose and Emenuo (1999), wrote extensively within the context of political economy how public governance failed to provide public goods for common consumption in the society. Consequent upon this, primitive accumulation took the center stage resulting to pervasive poverty in the society. (Fanon 1968, Engels 1977, Frik and Swanepoel, 2000). It is against this backdrop, Abdullahi, Muhammad, and Abdulkadir (2003) opined that

Since the beginning of civilization man has explore plants for Food, Clothing, Fuel, Timber and Phyto medicine. In spite of the influence of modern technology and orthodox medicine, Man's dependence on plant has in no way decreased, yet there is no documentation of the plants explored for their economic or ethromedical value in many parts of Nigeria including Nupe land.

It is instructive to note that, in Nupe land, there are a lot of plants that are very rich in medicinal value and can be processed for commercial purposes, but they were neglected over time. Some of these plants are discussed below as documented by Abdullahi, Muhammad and Abdulkadir (2003)

1. **Botanical Name:** Aloeveral **Nupe Name** – Echi-dungi

**Morphological Description:** Herb, bulbous plant with variable dimension. The leaves are erect, long lanceolate with sharp (spiny) serated margins. The leaves are arranged in a close rosette. They are thick, fleshy often covered with waxy bloom, light green with white spots and the entire arrangement is marbled.

**Medicinal Value:** Anticancer, anti poison, intestinal ulcer and Vermifuge, cures impotence and suppressed menstruation pains. In preparation, the leaves and the root are infused with Alliumcepa and taken half cup at a time. It contains Anthraquinones, glycosides, aloin and resin

2. **Botanical Name:** Achyranthes aspera L **Nupe Name:** Egyagi **Yoruba Name:** Aboro

**Morphological Description:** Herb, annual, erect, hairy attaining a height of between 0.5 – 2cm. Stem is much branched and woody at based, the leaves are opposite.

**Medicinal Value:** To aid rapid walk in a child. To relief headache due to fever. It is prepared by decoction and three hand full drink for long period of months. Decoction and steam bath. It contains Alkaloid and potassium salt.

3. **Botanical Name:** Alternanthera Sessilis (L) **Nupe Name:** Masantogi **Hausa Name:** Makaidubu **Yoruba Name:** Dagunro

**Morphological Description:** Herb, annual, semi, prostrate with erect shoots up to 5cm high. The stem is round, rooting at nodes and slightly hairy. Leaves are opposite, broadly lanceolate 2-8cm long and 1-2cm broad.

**Medicinal Value:** It is used as vegetables and for treatment of fever. Its mode of preparation is decoction and taken orally. It contains alkaloids.

4. **Botanical Name:** Amaranthus spinosus L **Nupe Name:** Ekan-shanshangi  
**Hausa Name:** Manijin gasaya **Yoruba Name:** Tete elegun **Igbo Name:** Inine ogwu

**Morphological Description:** Herb, annual, erect, branched and un branched about 60cm high. Leave are oral, 7cm by 5cm broadest near base, obtuse, acuminate petiole long and reddish.

**Medicinal Value:** It is used for abdominal pain, astringent, diarrhea, eczema, pile, snakebite, ulcers and dysentery. It is taken thrice daily by decoction of the leaves. It contains Tanin, Saponin, Hydrocyanic acid.

5. **Botanical name:** Anacadium Occidentale L **Nupe Name:** Kashiwu, Eko nasara **Hausa Name:** Kashew **Yoruba Name:** Kaju **Igbo Name:** Akwe-olu, Kausu, Okpo-kpo

**Morphological Description:** Tree about 8-10m high branching very low with a large crown that drop to the ground. The leaves are simple oval, broad 12cm by 10cm, connate at base round at apex with a stout stalk.

**Medicinal Value:** It is used as food and for the treatment of malaria fever, asthma, diabetes, dysentery, toothache and sore gum.

It is taken by chewing or decoction daily. It contains tannins, cardol, sitostein phenol, gallic acids, anacardic acid, and resorcinol derivatives.

6. **Botanical Name:** Heliotropium Indicum L **Nupe Name:** Eti-gulu **Hausa name:** Kalkashin korama **Yoruba Name:** Agogo igun ogbe- akuko

**Morphological Description:** Herb, annual 20-100cm high with pubescent stem bearing alternate branches. The leaves are alternate, oblong-ovate, lamina 4-12cm long and 2.4cm wide with irregularly toothed margins and slightly winged stalkes 15-20cm curled backwards towards the tip. The tip is also narrower bearing numerous small white lavender or purple flowers in the upper surface arranged in two closely packed rows. Each flower is lobe having 2 united angular nutlets. Seed is one per pair of nutlets.

**Medicinal Value:** It is used for convulsion anti worms, cancer and dysentery. In preparing it, the whole plant is used. It is infused to be taken orally for treatment of convulsion in children and dysentery. It is also infused and mixed with clay to be taken orally to arrest abortion. It constituents include Alkaloids, indicine – N – oxide saponins tannins.

### Conclusion

The ecological endowment of Nupe land is the great treasure upon which Niger State lay, but un tapped for the benefit of the state. It should be noted that, in spite of the large land mass of Niger State, her economic potentials are not harnessed to enhance her internally generated revenue (IGR). It is against this backdrop that successive governments in Niger State depends largely on the Federal allocation which the electorates are told always by the political class that is not enough to provide their basic needs. Consequent upon inadequate revenue, infrastructural deficit remain an eye sore on the face of Niger State.

### Recommendation

Given the enormity of this natural endowment of Nupe land of Niger State, this paper recommends among others that, the Niger State Government should partner with the private sector to develop the herbal potentials of Nupe land. The local people with traditional herbal knowledge should be empowered by the government and private credit institutions to develop the herbs for trado - medicine. Scientists in the ranks of

Abdullahi, Muhammad and Abdulkadir should be given the necessary support to conduct researches with a view to develop the Nupe herbal trees for the purpose of local pharmaceutical use and exportation for foreign exchange

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