

# Rooted in Tradition, Thriving in the Present: The Future and Sustainability of Herbal Medicine in Nigeria's Healthcare Landscape

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## Abstract

The utilization of herbal medicine in Nigeria is deeply embedded in the nation's cultural heritage and healthcare traditions, representing a unique fusion of indigenous wisdom, diverse ethnic practices, and abundant natural resources found across the country's varied landscapes. This comprehensive exploration delves into the multifaceted dimensions of herbal medicine in Nigeria, including its historical, cultural, economic, and healthcare aspects. It highlights the rich indigenous knowledge of medicinal plants passed down through generations, the cultural significance of herbal medicine, its economic impact, and its role in complementing modern Western medicine. Despite its promising prospects, the sector faces challenges related to safety, regulation, and sustainability. However, efforts to address these challenges, coupled with increasing recognition and integration of herbal medicine into mainstream healthcare, position Nigeria for a future where herbal medicine continues to contribute significantly to the healthcare landscape.

**Keywords:** herbal, medicine, culture, healthcare traditions, indigenous, medicinal plants, tradition, remedies

## 1. Introduction

The use of herbal medicine in Nigeria represents a profound and enduring facet of the nation's cultural heritage, healthcare traditions, and socio-economic fabric. With a history that spans centuries and embraces the wisdom of diverse ethnic groups, the utilization of medicinal plants in Nigeria occupies a pivotal place in the lives of its people (Akinyemi, 2000; Abd El-Ghani, 2016). This practice is not only a testament to the resourcefulness and resilience of the population but also a testament to the significance of nature's bounty in providing remedies for a wide spectrum of health-related challenges.

Nigeria's unique landscape, which encompasses lush forests, expansive savannahs, and fertile riverbanks, offers a rich reservoir of indigenous flora. Within this botanical wealth lies a vast repository of medicinal plants, each harboring a treasure trove of healing potential. The indigenous knowledge that has evolved over generations forms the bedrock of traditional healthcare in Nigeria, weaving a tapestry of cultural traditions, beliefs, and practices that continue to resonate with the majority of the population (Newman et al., 2000; Khan, 2002).

This comprehensive exploration delves into the multifaceted dimensions of herbal medicine in Nigeria, seeking to uncover the deep-rooted connections between nature and healthcare, the cultural significance of indigenous healing practices, and the modern-day relevance of these age-old remedies. It endeavors to shine a light on the historical roots of traditional medicine, the economic implications for livelihoods, and the evolving interplay between herbal remedies and the contemporary healthcare landscape (Cox, 2005; Kumar et al., 2005; Pei, 2005; Abd El-Ghani, 2016).

Nigeria's journey through the landscape of herbal medicine is a testament to the harmonious coexistence of the ancient and the modern, where centuries-old healing traditions and the latest scientific advancements converge in

a dynamic interplay. This investigation unveils the wealth of knowledge held by Nigerian communities, highlights the challenges and opportunities facing the integration of herbal medicine into mainstream healthcare, and underscores the importance of preserving and respecting the cultural heritage of traditional healing practices in this diverse and vibrant nation (Gill, 1992; Sofowora, 1993).

This review delves into the extensive use of herbal medicine in Nigeria, encompassing its historical, cultural, economic, and healthcare aspects.

## 2. Historical Background

**Indigenous Knowledge:** Herbal medicine in Nigeria is an integral part of the country's diverse cultures and ethnic groups. Indigenous knowledge of medicinal plants has been passed down through generations. Indigenous knowledge of the use of herbal medicine in Nigeria is a rich and diverse field that has been passed down through generations within various ethnic groups and cultures across the country. This knowledge has been a fundamental part of healthcare and healing practices in Nigeria for centuries.

### 2.1 Key Aspects of Indigenous Herbal Medicine Knowledge in Nigeria

**Cultural Diversity:** Nigeria is a highly diverse country with over 250 ethnic groups, each having its own indigenous knowledge of herbal medicine. This diversity has resulted in a wide array of traditional healing practices and remedies.

**Oral Tradition:** Indigenous knowledge of herbal medicine is primarily transmitted through oral tradition. Elders, traditional healers, and herbalists within communities play a pivotal role in passing down their expertise and wisdom to the younger generations (Gamaniel, 2005; Herfon, 2006).

**Plant Identification:** Indigenous knowledge includes the identification and classification of various medicinal plants found in Nigeria's diverse ecosystems. This knowledge encompasses not only the plants' names but also their properties, habitat, and seasonality. Traditional healers and herbalists possess deep knowledge of which plants to use for specific health conditions. They can identify the right plant or combination of plants to address a particular ailment. Their identification methods are based on a combination of traditional practices, observation, and cultural knowledge. Here are some common ways in which natives identify medicinal plants.

### 2.2 Visual and Sensory Clues

- **Leaf Shape and Characteristics:** Natives often pay close attention to the shape, size, color, texture, and arrangement of leaves. They recognize the unique features that distinguish one plant from another.
- **Flower Characteristics:** Flowers are significant for identification. Natives observe the color, shape, size, and fragrance of flowers, as these attributes can be key indicators of a plant's identity.
- **Smell and Taste:** Natives may use their sense of smell and taste to identify medicinal plants. Some plants have distinct odors or flavors that are indicative of their medicinal properties.
- **Texture of Plant Parts:** The texture of plant parts, such as leaves, stems, and roots, can be important. For example, fuzzy or prickly leaves may indicate certain medicinal properties.
- **Local Names and Folk Taxonomy:** Natives often have local names for medicinal plants that are distinct from their scientific names. These names may reflect the appearance, use, or folklore associated with the plant.
- **Experience and Trial:** Natives gain practical experience by using medicinal plants in their daily lives. They learn through trial and error, as well as by observing the effects of these plants on themselves and others.

**Preparation and Administration:** Indigenous knowledge includes the methods for preparing herbal remedies. This may involve techniques such as drying, crushing, boiling, or maceration. The timing and dosages for administering these remedies are also part of this knowledge.

**Cultural Significance:** Indigenous herbal medicine is often deeply intertwined with cultural beliefs and rituals. Rituals and ceremonies are sometimes performed alongside the administration of herbal remedies, reflecting the cultural significance of healing practices.

**Healing Methods:** Traditional healers in Nigeria use various methods beyond just ingesting herbal remedies. These may include massages, incantations, divination, and spiritual rituals to promote healing and well-being.

**Role in Primary Healthcare:** Indigenous herbal medicine serves as a primary healthcare system in many rural and underserved areas where access to modern healthcare facilities is limited. People often turn to traditional healers as their first point of contact for healthcare needs.

**Interactions with Modern Medicine:** Indigenous herbal medicine knowledge is increasingly being integrated with modern healthcare practices in Nigeria. Traditional healers and medical practitioners are finding ways to

collaborate, ensuring that patients receive comprehensive care.

Challenges: Indigenous knowledge of herbal medicine faces challenges, such as the lack of standardization and regulation, which can lead to variations in the quality and safety of remedies. Additionally, the potential interactions between herbal remedies and modern pharmaceuticals need further research (Omotayo, 1999; Gamaniel, 2005).

Table 1. List of Medicinal Plant species (Abd El-Ghani, 2016)

Families	Species	Local names	Part used	Medicinal uses
Acanthaceae	<i>Acanthus montanus</i>	Urunhishi	Stem-twig, leaves	Syphilis, cough, emetic, urethral discharge
	<i>Adhatoda buchhoizii</i>		Fruits, whole plant	Rheumatism, anti-inflammatory
	<i>Asysasia calyciana</i>	Orole	Leaves	skin diseases, weak erection,
	<i>Asysasia gangetica</i>	lobiri, inana, ntiaturu	whole plant	snake antidote, piles, urethral discharge
	<i>Barleria opaca</i>	Arenikosun	leaves	jaundice, laxatives, snake bite, hemorrhoids
	<i>Barleria maderaspatensis</i>	ewe-asaju, ewe-isaju	whole plant	snake bite antidote
	<i>Hygrophila auriculata</i>	mafowa, bayingiwa	whole plant	craw-craw, bacteriostatic
	<i>Hypostes forskaei</i>	Ogbigbo	whole plant, roots	skin infections
	<i>Hypostes vertillaris</i>	Ekere	whole plant, leaves	sore, fever, antiseptic, chest pains
	<i>Justicia flava</i>	odian, oridun	whole plant	fungal skin diseases, malaria, stomach disorders
	<i>Justicia insularis</i>	isepe-akera	whole plant	measles, mallpox
	<i>Nelsonia compestris</i>	dandun-makiyaya	leaves, juice, twigs	yellow fever, inflammation, schistosomiasis
	<i>Phaulopsis falcisepala</i>	Apa-ogbe	whole plant	wounds, skin parasites, laxative
Amaranthaceae	<i>Achyranthes spera</i>	hakorin maciji	leaves, roots	stomach disorders, abortion, malaria
	<i>Alternanthera repens</i>	Dagunro	whole plant	dysentery, antimicrobial, filariasis
	<i>Alternanthera selsilis</i>	maikai dubu	whole plant, leaves	snake antidote, piles, astringent, antibacterial
	<i>Amaranthus spinosus</i>	Nanijingasaya	whole plant	abdominal pain, ulcers, gonorrhoea
	<i>Amaranthus viridis</i>		leaves, roots	antihelminthics, dysentery, antiparasmodic, diuretic
Anacardiaceae	<i>Celosia laxa</i>	Mannafaa	leaves	antiscorbutic, purgative
	<i>Celosia argenta</i>	fara-layatu	leaves, seeds	skin diseases, diarrhoea, antiscorbutic, anthelmintics
	<i>Philoxerus vermiculatus</i>		leaves	hernia, inflammation
	<i>Anacardium occidentale</i>	kasu, kanju	bark, leaf, fruits	malaria, elephantiasis, leprosy, ringworms
	<i>Antocaryon micraster</i>	ifa-okete, egin-agbo	leaves, fruits	general toxic, laxative
	<i>Haematostaphis barteri</i>	jan danya	stem, bark, root	emetic, tonic, hepatitis, sleeping sickness
	<i>Heeria insignis</i>	kasheshe, hawayenzaki	leaves, stem, root, bark	anthelmintics, aphoradisiac, galactagogue
	<i>Isolana campanulata</i>	Aghakeze	root, stem, bark	bronchial infections, skin diseases, hematuria
	<i>Mangifera indica</i>	Mangoro	leaves, roots, stem, bark	high blood pressure, skin lesions, insomnia
	<i>Monodora tenuifolia</i>	Sinin	leave, roots	Antihemorrhage, toothache, skin diseases
Annonaceae	<i>Annoa squamosa</i>	Sharp -sharp, mbugo ago	Leaves, fruit, stem	Anaemia, dysentery, ulcer, anti-tumor
	<i>Annona sanegalensis</i>	`	Root, bark, leaves, seed	Cancer, cough, venereal diseases
	<i>Anoridium manni</i>	Ewuro -igbo	bark	Diarrhoea, cough, fever, rheumatism
	<i>Clestopholis patens</i>	Apako	Leaves, bark	Respiratory diseases, tuberculosis
	<i>Enantia chlorantha</i>	Osopupa, kakerim	Bark	Typhoid fever, hepatitis, jaundice, fever
	<i>Greenwayo dendronsuaveolens</i>	Agudugbu	roots, leaves, bark	Easy labour, weak erectile
	<i>Hexalobus crispiflorus</i>	lapawe, apara, oji ogoda	roots, whole plant	gonorrhoea, cough, malaria
	<i>Monodora myristica</i>	Abo-lakoshe, ehuru	seeds	constipation, lice, guinea worms

Families	Species	Local names	Part used	Medicinal uses
Araceae	<i>Anchomanes difformis</i>	abirisoko, hantsar gada, oje	roots	Diuretic, gonorrhoea
	<i>Andira inermis</i>	Gwaska	seeds, bark	skin diseases, antihelmintics
	<i>Caladium bicolor</i>	eje-jesu	leaves, rhizome	topical application for boils, convulsion, ulcer
	<i>Cercestics afzelii</i>		laves, stem, bark	Purgative
	<i>Colocasia esculenta</i>	gwaba, kokofun	tuber, leaves	anaemia, wounds, poison antidote
	<i>Culcasia scandens</i>	Agunnoma	leaves	Anaesthetic, pregnancy booster
Asclepiadaceae	<i>Aslepias curassavia</i>	Rizgar-kurege	root	Gastrointestinal disorders
	<i>Calotropis procera</i>	Tumfafiya	leaves, root, bark, latex	Elephantiasis, leprosy
	<i>Gymnema sylvestre</i>		whole plant	Diabetes, snake bite antidote
Amaryllidaceae	<i>Crinum glaucum</i>	isu meri	Bulb, flower-stalks	Antimicrobial, anti-allergic
	<i>Crinum jagus</i>	Obase, albasar kwadi	Bulb, leaves	Tuberculosis
Avicenniaceae	<i>Avicennia africana</i>	Ogbun, ofun	leaves, stem, twigs	Abortifacient
Apiaceae	<i>Certella asiatica</i>		whole plant	Elephantiasis, skin diseases
	<i>Eryngium foetidum</i>		Leaves	Ulcer, headache
	<i>Apium graveolens</i>	seleri-saladi	whole plant	aphrodisiac, stimulant, diuretic
	<i>Petroselinum crispum</i>	Pasili	whole plant	vitamin c, stimulant, asthma, conjunctivitis
Apocynaceae	<i>Adenium obesum</i>	Gariya	stem, roots, fruit, juice	wound dressing, cardiotonic, venereal diseases
	<i>Alafia barteri</i>	Agbari –etu	root, leaves	sickle cell anaemia, rheumatic pains, eye infections
	<i>Alstonia boonei</i>	Awun, ahun, akpi	root, bark, leaves	Breast development, filarial worms
	<i>Alstonia congensis</i>	Ahun, egbu	bark	malaria, toothache
	<i>Carpodinus dulcis</i>		whole plant	Galactagogue
	<i>Cryptostegia grandiflora</i>		leaves, latex	fungal infections, heart problems
	<i>Eruatamia caronaria</i>		leaves, stem, root	Anthelmintic, skin infections, toothache
	<i>Funtumia africana</i>	Akoire, mbamiri	leaves, stem, root	constipation, wounds, weak bladder, jaundice
	<i>Funtumia elastica</i>	ire, mba	stem, twigs, stem, latex	jaundice, piles, antipyretics
	<i>Hedranthel barteri</i>	Agbo, omode	leaves, fruit	convulsion, anti-tumour
	<i>Landolphia dulcis</i>	Ibo	stem, roots	Rheumatism, cough, kidney diseases
	<i>Landolphia owariensis</i>	panukuru, ciwoo, oto	fresh leaves, roots, seed	Malaria, gonorrhea
Balsaminaceae	<i>Impatiens balsamina</i>		whole plant	Antiseptic, fungicide
	<i>Impatiens glandulifera</i>	Touch me not	sap	Application on poison ivy rash
Bombaceae	<i>Adansonia digitata</i>	ose, igi-ose, kuka	leaves, fruit, pulp, bark	Fever, antimicrobial, kidney and bladder diseases
	<i>Bombax buonopozense</i>	Gurjiya	whole plant	Abdominal pain, blood tonic
	<i>Pachira glabra</i>	Epa-boro	stem, bark, seed	stomach disorders, headache, blood tonic
Bixaceae				

Families	Species	Local names	Part used	Medicinal uses
Burseraceae	<i>Bixa orellana</i>	osun-buke, ulla, ufe	fruits, seeds	malaria, kidney diseases, skin diseases
	<i>Boswellia dalzielii</i>	Hano	bark, gum, roots	urinary disorder, antiseptic
	<i>Boswellia SPP</i>	Juhii	bark	anti snake venom
	<i>Canarium schweinfurthii</i>	origbo, mbiji	bark	black tongue, roundworms, gonorrhea
	<i>Commiphora africana</i>	turari, dashi	roots, fruits	whooping cough, bronchitis
	<i>Dacryodes edulis</i>	elemi, ube	bark, roots, fruits	jiggers, skin diseases, elephantiasis
Bignoniaceae	<i>crecidentia cujete</i>	igi, iba	fruits	Receptacle for herbal medicines
	<i>Jacaranda spp</i>		leaves, bark	veneral diseases, spleen tonic
	<i>Kigelia africana</i>	pandoro, utu rubein	roots, fruits, stem, bark	kidney disorders, spleen infections, cough
	<i>Markhamia tomentosa</i>	iru-aya, aya	leaves	elephantiasis, oedema, rheumatism
Capparidaceae				
Combretaceae	<i>Boscia senegalensis</i>	Anza	leaves, fruit, bark	malaria, veneral diseases
	<i>Anogeissus leiocarpus</i>	Ayin, marike	Bark, leaves, seed	Taeniaceae, skin diseases
	<i>Combretum glutinosum</i>	Kattakara	leaves	childhood fever, milk preservation
	<i>Combretum grandiflorous</i>	Ikedike	leaves	Jaundice
	<i>Combretum mucronatum</i>	farar geza	root, leaves	Wounds
	<i>Combretum periculatum</i>	ogan, okan	twigs	Appetizer
Cannaraceae	<i>Cnestis ferruginea</i>	Amunketa, esise	fruit, seeds, bark, root, leaves	Snake bite, oral infections
	<i>Commelina diffusa</i>	Obogi, balasa	whole plant	yellow fever, oedema, itchin
	<i>Connarus africanus</i>		seed, root, bark	Anthelmintics
Cannaceae	<i>Canna indica</i>	Gwangwama	leaves	Asthma, malaria
Caricaceae	<i>Carica papaya</i>	Ojo, gwanda	leaves, seeds, fruits	Gonorrhoea, syphilis, mental disorders
Capparaceae	<i>Courbonia virgata</i>	Kumkum	Root, fruits, seeds	stimulant, chest pain
	<i>Capparis thoningii</i>	ewon, ekiri	root	Mentrl disorders, fever
	<i>Cleome ciliata</i>	Ekuya	leaves, seeds	Convulsion, wounds, sores
Cannabinaceae	<i>Cleome gynandra</i>	Ipiya	leaves, seeds	Rheumatism, ease labour
	<i>Creteva adansonii</i>	taniya,	leaves, seeds	Urinary disorders, antipyretic
	<i>Cannabis sativa</i>	igbo, wiwi	leaves, seeds, stem, twigs	sedative, lice, dyspepsia
Caprifoliaceae	<i>Lonicera caprifolium</i>		leaves, flower	Respiratory disorders, liver disorders
Cucurbitaceae	<i>Citrullus lanatus</i>	Egusi-baara	seed, leaves, fruit, pulp	woumb expeller, cystitis, diuretic
	<i>Coccinia grandis</i>	Gurjin daji	leaves, fruits	Depression, veneral diseases

Families	Species	Local names	Part used	Medicinal uses
Crassulaceae	<i>Citrullus colocynthis</i>	Egus bara	whole plant	Antimicrobials
	<i>Cucumeropsis manni</i>	Eyen	leaves	Milk laxative
	<i>Coccinia barteri</i>	ewe-ojo	whole plant	Veneral diseases
	<i>Cucumis melo</i>	Burji	leaves,root	Fungal diseases
	<i>Cucurbita maxima</i>	Kabewa	seeds,fruits	tape worms,taenicides
	<i>Cucumis prophetarum</i>		fruits,pulp	Vermifuge
	<i>Bryophyllum pinnatum</i>	Abomoda	leaves,root,leaf -sap	
Brassicaceae	<i>Kalanchoe crenata</i>	ejeti,onwa	whole plant	small pox,convulsion,asthma
	<i>Brassica oleracea capitata</i>	Kabeji	leaves,seed	Antimicrobial
Celestraceae	<i>Celestrus indica</i>	ponju-owiwi	root,leaves,twigs	Antimicrobial,asthma,malaria
Chaillatiaceae	<i>Celestrus senegalensis</i>	Isepolohun	leaves,stem,root	Oedema,laxative,gonorrhea
	<i>Dichaetalum baneri</i>	Ngbu ewa	seeds	Cough,rheumatism
Cochlospermaceae	<i>Cochlospermum planchorii</i>	Rawaya	roots,stem-bark	Gonorrhoea,menstrual disorder
	<i>Cochlospermum tinctorium</i>	Balagande	whole plant	Virginal discharge,bilhazia
Chenopodiaceae	<i>Chenopodium ambroiodes</i>	asin,arunpale	whole plant	Anthelmintics,tumour
Cyperaceae	<i>Cyperus esculentus</i>	aya aya	whole plant	to induce vomiting,menstrual discharge
Asteraceae	<i>Mariscus alternifolius</i>	Ranransa,ikeregum	stem-bases	Gonorrhoea,healing wounds
	<i>Acanthospermum hispidum</i>	kashin yawo	whole plant	yellow fever,turbaculosis,cough
	<i>Achillea millefolium</i>	Yaro	flowers,leaves,seeds	haemostatic,wounds,piles
	<i>Ageratum conyzoides</i>	Urata	whole plant	wounds,ulcers,sleeping sickness,eyewash
	<i>Ambrosia maritima</i>	Makarfo	whole plant	syphilis,stimulant
	<i>Aspilla africana</i>	yunnyun,kalankuwa	leaves,flower	skin rashes,cleaing sores,corneal opacities
	<i>Bidens pilosa</i>	abere,langanran	whole plant	anaesthetic,easy labour,abdoinal pains
	<i>Blumia auria</i>		whole plant	antipyretic,gastro intestinal pains
	<i>Centaurea perrottetii</i>	Danyi	whole plant	skin infections,syphilis
	<i>Chromolaena odorata</i>	akintola,obiarakara	leaves,stem-twigs	Antimicrobials,haemostatic,skin diseases
	<i>Chrysanthelium indicum</i>	Abilere,oyigi	whole plant	boils,gonorrhoea,jaundice
	<i>Conyza canadensis</i>		whole plant	gonorrhoea,genital diseases,antibacterials
	<i>Conyza sumatrensis</i>	Olowojeja	whole plant	Antipyretic,asthma,tuberculosis
	<i>Echinacea purpurea</i>		rhizome	Antimicrobial agents
	<i>Eclpa prostrata</i>	Abikole,arjoku	leaves	Elephantiasis,liver ailments,convulsion
	<i>Elephantapus scaber</i>		root,leaves	fever,cough
	<i>Emilia coccinea</i>	Odundun	leaves,root,sap	ulcers,hernia,messles
	<i>Galinsoga parviflora</i>		leaves	wounds,analgesic

Families	Species	Local names	Part used	Medicinal uses
	<i>Laggera alata</i>	agemo-kogun, eru-tabo	leaves, root, sap	fever, pneumonia, tapeworms
	<i>Laggera aurita</i>	taba-ebora	whole plant	malaria, gastrointestinal pains
	<i>Matricaria recutita</i>		flowers	Analgesic, antispasmodic
	<i>Microglossa abzelii</i>		leaves, stem	tuberculosis, respiratory infections
	<i>Microglossa pyrifolia</i>		leaves, root	antipyretic, abortifolant
Dichapetalaceae	<i>Dichapetalum toxicarium</i>	alo, ikunmu-agbo	stem, bark, twigs, leaves	jaundice, poisonous to animals
Discoreaceae	<i>Discorea dumetorum</i>	Esuru, gussami	tuber, leaves	Analgesic, psychic trouble
Dracaenaceae	<i>Dracaena mannii</i>	peregum, akuku	root, leaves, fruit	Antimicrobial, skin diseases
Ebenaceae	<i>Diospyros canaliculata</i>	owe, orioje	bark, leaves	Antimicrobial, leprosy
	<i>Diospyros mespiliformis</i>	kalwa, ige	root-bark, stem-bark	Bilharzia, fertility regulation
Euphorbiaceae	<i>Acalypha fimbriata</i>	Kandri	leaves	syphilis, asthma, antimicrobial, antifungal
	<i>Acalypha godseffiana</i>	Jinwinini	leaves, twigs	skin infections, antimicrobials
	<i>Acalypha wikesiana</i>	Jiwene	leaves, twigs	antimicrobials, constipation
	<i>Alchornea laxiflora</i>	Pepe, ijan	Stem, root, leaves	Veneral disease, antioxidant
	<i>Antidesma venosum</i>	Aroro	stem, bark	Anthelmintics
	<i>Bridelia ferruginea</i>	iri, kirni	leaves, stem, bark, root	insomnia, mouth wash, gonorrhea
	<i>Croton lobatus</i>	eru, namijin zaki, bansaa	root, bark, leaves	guinea worms, urinary disorders
	<i>Croton zambesicus</i>	Ajekobale	leaves, twigs	file, gonorrhea
	<i>Drypetes florabunda</i>	Asokara	stem	toothache, oral hygiene
	<i>Erythrococca anomala</i>	iyere-igbo	fruits, leaves, leave-sap	joint pains, taeniicide
	<i>Euphorbia balsamifera</i>		stem, latex	Dysentery
	<i>Euphorbia deightonii</i>	ora agogo	leaves	women sterility
	<i>Euphorbia heterophylla</i>	Egele	leaves, roots	skin diseases
	<i>Euphorbia hirta</i>	nonon kurciya, odane	whole plant exudate	asthma, cough, shape of breasts
	<i>Euphorbia kamerunica</i>	oro, ukoko	latex	Aid umbilicalcord drop-off
	<i>Euphorbia laterifolia</i>	oro were	leaves exudate	dermatosis, constipation
	<i>Makaranga barteri</i>	asasa, owariwa	leaves, stem, bark	dysentery, urinary disorder
	<i>Mareya spicata</i>	Uhosa	leaves, fruits, bark	skin infections, tape worms
	<i>Microdesmis puberula</i>	Aringo, ukperi	leaves, seeds, bark	eye drop, diarrhea
	<i>Phyllanthus amarus</i>	geron tsuntsaye	whole plants	jaundice, insomnia, antimicrobials
Flacourtiaceae	<i>Caloncoba echinata</i>	Ntuebi	whole plant and exudate	skin infections
	<i>Caloncoba glauca</i>	Kakandika	seed, root, bark	leprosy, skin lesions
Geraniaceae	<i>Mansonia senegalensis</i>		oil	Emmenagogue
Hypoxidaceae	<i>Curculigo piloza</i>	Doyar kurege	roots	Leukaemia, gonorrhea

### 3. Cultural Significance of the Use of Herbal Medicine in Nigeria

#### 3.1 Rituals and Beliefs

Herbal medicine in Nigeria is inextricably intertwined with the tapestry of cultural practices and deep-seated beliefs, often accompanied by elaborate rituals and ceremonies that encapsulate the profound significance of herbs in the lives of the Nigerian people. These rituals and beliefs are a tapestry interwoven with traditional healing practices, encapsulating the spiritual, social, and cultural essence of herbal remedies. At the heart of this cultural tapestry lies a pervasive belief among many Nigerians in the spiritual and supernatural powers vested in medicinal plants. Herbalists and traditional healers serve as vital intermediaries between the realms of the physical and the spiritual, invoking deities or spirits during the intricate process of preparing and administering herbal remedies.

The rituals that envelop herbal medicine are often replete with offerings, designed to appease the spirits or deities intricately linked with the realm of healing. These offerings manifest as sacrifices, libations, or symbolic tokens crafted to honor the spiritual dimensions. Chants and prayers, laden with incantations, reverberate



through these rituals, serving as poignant cries seeking divine intercession and blessings for the healing journey. Rituals and ceremonies become an integral part of the administration of herbal remedies, and community members often gather to partake in these sacred events. The proceedings adhere to specific protocols and feature dances and songs that are choreographed to invoke the healing effects desired. Traditional healers and herbalists don distinctive clothing and adornments, imbued with spiritual symbolism, signifying their roles as the custodians of healing wisdom.

The journey to administer herbal remedies commences with the ancient practice of divination. Traditional healers employ various methods to diagnose ailments and determine the precise herbs or treatments required (Amira et al., 2007; Ogbera et al., 2010). These methods encompass the casting of oracles, deciphering signs within nature, or communing with ancestral spirits. Certain medicinal plants are believed to flourish in close proximity to sacred sites or shrines. These locales hold an esteemed place as powerful convergence points of spiritual forces, elevating the potency of the remedies harvested therein.

The transmission of herbal medicine's wisdom is a narrative woven through the fabric of oral traditions and ancestral sagas. These teachings underscore the sanctity of plants and the imperative of safeguarding and respecting the legacies of traditional healing practices. Cultural taboos intersect with the use of medicinal plants, unveiling strictures such as prohibitions linked to specific periods or individuals. Violating these taboos is held to invite misfortune and harm. In a testament to the collective spirit, the administration of herbal remedies often becomes a communal endeavor, with communities uniting to underpin the healing process, proffering aid, and actively engaging in rituals that echo the significance of collective well-being.

Notably, in certain instances, traditional practices have amalgamated with elements of Christianity or Islam, epitomizing the fluid adaptability of indigenous rituals to changing cultural and religious landscapes. Herbal medicine ceremonies transcend the realm of physical healing, emerging as passages to spiritual rebirth and rejuvenation. This intricate process signifies a return to a state of equilibrium and harmony with the spiritual world (Kunle, 2009).

### *3.2 Community Engagement*

Community engagement is a cornerstone of herbal medicine in Nigeria, representing a multifaceted process that actively involves community members in various facets of herbal medicine, spanning accessibility, knowledge transmission, and sustainability.

Within the rich tapestry of Nigerian communities, the traditional knowledge of medicinal plants is a cherished legacy passed down through generations. Elders, venerable traditional healers, and experienced community members are the custodians of this wisdom, ensuring the perpetuity of herbal medicine practices. Each community possesses its own revered traditional healers, herbalists, or diviners renowned for their expertise in herbal medicine (Egharevba, 2012). These healers bear the mantle of diagnosing and treating ailments within the community, and they serve as the vital link to the world of herbal remedies. Communities hold a treasure trove of wisdom regarding the medicinal plants native to their unique environments. They possess a profound understanding of where these plants can be found, how to prepare potent remedies, and the precise conditions for their usage.

Herbal medicine is often the first port of call for primary healthcare needs within communities. Common ailments, injuries, and minor illnesses are routinely addressed using locally available remedies. Community members actively partake in some herbal medicine rituals and ceremonies, often involving prayers, dances, and cultural practices that reverberate with the community's core beliefs and values (Oreagba et al., 2011).

An inherent respect for the environment and its sustainability is a hallmark of communities engaged in herbal medicine. Ethical harvesting practices are diligently followed to ensure the enduring availability of medicinal plants, underpinning a commitment to preserving natural ecosystems. Herbal remedies are readily accessible to community members at minimal or no cost. This accessibility is particularly invaluable in areas where modern healthcare facilities may be scarce or financially burdensome. The utilization of herbal medicine forges a sense of collective well-being, unifying communities in their resolve to support the healing process, extend assistance, and ensure the recovery of their members (Igboeli et al., 2010).

The local naming of medicinal plants is a distinct feature, with each community bestowing specific names steeped in local folklore and narratives that enrich the cultural identity of the community. Traditional birth attendants hold a significant role in maternal and child healthcare within some communities, employing herbal remedies during pregnancy and childbirth. The vibrant pulse of community life often centers around local marketplaces where medicinal plants and herbal remedies change hands. These marketplaces serve as dynamic hubs where traditional medicine knowledge intersects with commerce.

Herbal medicine is more than a practice; it is a reflection of the cultural identity of communities, encapsulating their unique history, values, and beliefs. In certain instances, community engagement extends beyond the realm



of traditional healing, embracing the integration of traditional practices with modern healthcare. Collaboration between traditional healers and medical practitioners offers a more holistic approach to healthcare, encapsulating the essence of a community's well-being.

#### **4. Economic Impact of Herbal Medicine in Nigeria**

The utilization of herbal medicine in Nigeria wields a substantial economic influence that ripples across diverse sectors, imparting a significant footprint on the livelihoods of many and casting its influence upon the nation's economic landscape as a whole.

Within this domain, an extensive array of economic opportunities flourishes. Employment prospects beckon for a wide spectrum of individuals, encompassing herbalists, traditional healers, plant gatherers, herbal medicine producers, and vendors popularly known as *alagbo* and *onye ogbu* in Yoruba and Igbo lands respectively. For many, their very subsistence is intricately tied to the herbal medicine sector. In addition to offering employment, herbal medicine fosters small-scale farming activities through the cultivation and sustainable harvesting of medicinal plants. These botanical endeavors serve as economic catalysts, breathing life into local communities by creating income-generating prospects.

Furthermore, the economic vibrancy emanates from the vibrant local marketplaces that thrum with the buying and selling of herbal remedies, medicinal flora, and related products. These marketplaces are not just hubs of commerce; they are the lifeblood of local economies, uniting sellers and buyers in a dynamic tapestry of trade. In this interconnected web of trade and commerce, the herbal medicine sector transcends national borders. Medicinal plants are procured and vended domestically, but they also embark on journeys to foreign shores, contributing to both local and national economies and bolstering Nigeria's global economic presence.

The economic dimensions of herbal medicine also extend to the sustainability of traditional healing centers, where people seek alternative healthcare solutions. The fees charged for these services bolster the income of traditional healers and invigorate the local economic landscape. In parallel, the preparation and production of herbal remedies fuel small-scale manufacturing and the sale of herbal medicines. This economic sector pulses with vitality through the production and dissemination of herbal products, supporting local businesses and communities.

Tourism and research burgeon as well, as Nigeria's rich herbal medicine heritage draws the attention of tourists and researchers alike. These pursuits propel tourism-related businesses, comprising accommodations, travel, and cultural exchange programs, further enhancing economic prospects. Simultaneously, the burgeoning interest in herbal medicine has kindled a surge in research and development endeavors. Universities and research institutions spearhead studies centered on medicinal plants, offering employment opportunities to researchers and fostering innovation (Ekpendu et al., 1998; Balansard & Timon, 2000).

Within this vibrant landscape, women often take center stage as active participants in the cultivation, harvesting, and processing of medicinal plants. This not only elevates their economic status but also empowers them socially. Small enterprises dedicated to various facets of herbal medicine, such as packaging, marketing, and product distribution, find fertile ground for growth. Their emergence fosters economic dynamism within local communities. The global stage beckons as well, with Nigeria's rich biodiversity and traditional knowledge of medicinal plants opening doors to export opportunities. Medicinal plants and herbal products, when transported to international markets, bolster foreign exchange earnings and solidify Nigeria's presence on the world economic map.

Collaboration between the herbal medicine sector and the pharmaceutical industry fuels research and sparks economic development. This synergy is not only an economic driving force but also a conduit for the integration of traditional wisdom into modern healthcare (Principe, 1991). Ultimately, participation in the herbal medicine sector represents not only a diversification of income sources for many families and individuals in Nigeria but also a means of reducing economic vulnerability. It paints a narrative of resilience, sustainability, and economic vitality that underscores the diverse economic tapestry woven by the use of herbal medicine in Nigeria.

#### **5. Healthcare and Treatment**

##### *5.1 Complementary Medicine*

The synergy between herbal medicine and modern Western medicine in Nigeria exemplifies a holistic healthcare approach that leverages the strengths of both traditional healing practices and contemporary medical science. This symbiotic relationship is particularly pronounced in Nigeria, where a significant segment of the population seamlessly integrates herbal medicine into their healthcare regimen alongside Western medical treatments.

The coexistence of herbal medicine and modern Western medicine affords individuals a more extensive spectrum of healthcare choices. This diversified approach empowers patients to make well-informed decisions about their health, acknowledging the importance of patient autonomy. Herbal medicine deeply resonates with the cultural

and spiritual beliefs of many Nigerians. It offers a comforting sense of familiarity and cultural continuity in healthcare practices, allowing individuals to access care that harmonizes with their deeply held cultural values.

Moreover, herbal medicine plays a pivotal role in preventive and palliative care. Traditional remedies are esteemed for their potential to enhance overall well-being and to manage chronic conditions or alleviate symptoms, providing a holistic approach to healthcare. In underserved and rural areas where access to modern healthcare facilities can be scarce, herbal medicine serves as a primary source of healthcare. It offers accessible and cost-effective solutions to address common health issues, ensuring healthcare equity. Traditional healers and herbalists occupy a significant role in Nigeria's healthcare landscape, often acting as the initial point of contact for individuals seeking medical advice and treatment. Their expertise and familiarity within the community make them trusted healthcare providers.

Herbal medicine is widely deployed to combat diseases such as malaria and tropical illnesses, which are prevalent in the region. Herbal remedies have demonstrated efficacy in both treatment and prevention, alleviating the burden of these diseases. Many herbal remedies are derived from locally available plants and are prized for their natural origins and affordability. This accessibility ensures that a broad cross-section of the population can benefit from herbal medicine.

During health crises or outbreaks, herbal medicine can serve as a complementary measure, fortifying the capacity of the healthcare system to cope with surges in demand for medical services. The integration of traditional knowledge about medicinal plants with modern medicine fosters innovation in healthcare solutions. Collaborative efforts between researchers and healthcare professionals are instrumental in validating the potential of traditional remedies and harnessing their benefits. The use of herbal medicine also aids in curtailing the overuse and misuse of pharmaceutical drugs, particularly antibiotics, which can lead to drug resistance, a growing concern in global healthcare.

Beyond the physical aspects of healthcare, traditional healers frequently provide psychosocial support, encompassing counseling and guidance, further enhancing the holistic nature of healthcare. Recent years have witnessed an increased emphasis on research and evidence-based practices in herbal medicine. This focus is pivotal in ensuring that traditional remedies meet modern healthcare standards in terms of safety and efficacy (Oguntade et al., 2011; WHO, 2004). Collaborative initiatives between traditional healers and medical practitioners are emerging, fostering an environment of mutual respect and shared expertise. These endeavors are dedicated to delivering a comprehensive and integrated approach to patient care, drawing upon the strengths of both traditions.

The complementary relationship between herbal medicine and modern Western medicine in Nigeria is a pragmatic response to the diverse healthcare needs of the population. It pays homage to cultural traditions, fosters innovation, and, above all, strives to enhance the overall health and well-being of the Nigerian people. As the healthcare landscape continues to evolve, the synergy between these two approaches remains integral to the country's healthcare system, emphasizing the enduring relevance of both traditions.

## **6. Challenges and Concerns on the Use of Herbal Medicine in Nigeria**

The utilization of herbal medicine in Nigeria, deeply rooted in both culture and the healthcare system grapples with a spectrum of challenges and concerns. These issues encompass safety, regulations, sustainability, and accessibility, collectively underscoring the need for a comprehensive response (Lambo, 2007; Adefolaju, 2014). One of the foremost concerns is the absence of standardized quality control and safety protocols for herbal remedies, instigating apprehensions regarding inconsistent product quality and purity. This variability can result in adverse effects, including toxicity and side effects, necessitating stringent quality assurance measures (Miller et al., 2000; Oreagba et al., 2011).

Accurate plant identification stands as a critical pillar of herbal medicine. Misidentification can lead to the inadvertent use of incorrect plant species or plant parts, engendering potential health risks. The importance of precision in this regard cannot be overstated. Some herbal substances harbor the potential for toxicity or adverse reactions when consumed without appropriate knowledge and dosage guidelines. The lack of universally recognized dosing standards exacerbates health risks, demanding education and clear guidelines for users (Joseph et al., 2016; Mekuria et al., 2017; Pearson et al., 2018).

While numerous traditional remedies boast a rich history of use, not all have undergone scientific scrutiny to validate their safety and efficacy. This gap in research poses challenges to the integration of herbal medicine into mainstream healthcare, prompting a call for rigorous scientific evaluation.

The regulatory framework governing herbal medicine in Nigeria often falls short, with weak enforcement. This lacuna invites unscrupulous practices, such as the sale of unregulated or adulterated herbal products, highlighting the need for strengthened regulations. Overharvesting of medicinal plants for commercial purposes poses environmental concerns, jeopardizing habitat sustainability and plant species. Sustainable harvesting practices

are pivotal for the conservation of these invaluable resources.

The commercialization of traditional knowledge raises ethical questions, especially when indigenous communities are not equitably compensated for their contributions to herbal medicine research. Ensuring ethical practices is an imperative aspect of the herbal medicine landscape. The schism between herbal medicine and mainstream healthcare translates into missed opportunities for integrated patient care. Collaboration between traditional healers and modern medical practitioners remains limited, emphasizing the need for greater synergy.

A significant portion of the population lacks comprehensive knowledge about herbal medicine, including its potential risks and benefits. This knowledge deficit can lead to misguided healthcare decisions, reinforcing the importance of public education. Exaggerated or unsubstantiated claims by certain herbal practitioners can mislead patients, deterring them from seeking appropriate medical care when necessary. The pursuit of profit-driven motives, sometimes at the expense of patient well-being, further underscores the need for ethical standards in herbal product marketing.

Standardized education and training for traditional healers and herbalists are vital to ensure a comprehensive understanding of the plants they employ and the application of sound healthcare practices (Barnes, 1999; Anthony, 2002; McCrea et al., 2011). Stigmatization of herbal medicine use, in some instances, compels individuals to conceal their reliance on traditional remedies from healthcare professionals, ultimately undermining opportunities for integrated care. The protection of indigenous knowledge and intellectual property rights within the herbal medicine sector often falls short, exposing traditional knowledge to exploitation without just compensation (Batta, 2012). Resolving these multifaceted challenges and concerns necessitates a comprehensive approach involving regulatory reforms, robust research initiatives, widespread education, and enhanced collaboration between traditional healers and modern healthcare systems. Through recognition and concerted efforts to address these issues, Nigeria can harness the advantages of herbal medicine while prioritizing the well-being and safety of its population (Adepoju et al., 2008).

## **7. Future Prospects on the Use of Herbal Medicine in Nigeria**

The future prospects of herbal medicine in Nigeria are promising, as this traditional healthcare system is poised to play an increasingly vital role in the country's healthcare landscape. There is a global trend toward natural and holistic healthcare solutions, and as awareness of the potential benefits of herbal medicine increases, the demand for natural remedies is expected to rise in Nigeria.

The integration of herbal medicine with modern Western medicine is gaining traction, and collaborative efforts between traditional healers and medical practitioners are likely to expand, providing patients with more comprehensive and integrated care. Continued research into the safety and efficacy of traditional remedies is anticipated, and scientific validation of herbal medicines will enhance their acceptance and integration into mainstream healthcare. The Nigerian government is increasingly recognizing the need for effective regulations in the herbal medicine sector, and regulatory reforms, if properly implemented, will help ensure product safety and quality.

Herbal medicine is deeply rooted in Nigerian culture and traditions, and efforts to preserve and celebrate this cultural heritage will continue to drive its usage and acceptance. Herbal medicine presents economic opportunities for local communities, particularly in the cultivation, processing, and sale of medicinal plants, contributing to poverty reduction and rural development.

Sustainable harvesting practices will gain importance to protect plant species and their habitats, and conservation efforts will promote the long-term availability of medicinal plants (Williamson et al., 1998). Nigeria's biodiversity and traditional knowledge offer opportunities for international trade in herbal products, potentially boosting foreign exchange earnings. Public awareness campaigns and education on the proper use and risks of herbal medicine will become more widespread, helping individuals make informed healthcare choices (Oshikoya, 2008).

Herbal medicine is well-suited for preventive healthcare and managing chronic conditions, and the emphasis on preventive care is expected to increase in the future. Advances in telemedicine and technology can help bridge the gap between urban and rural areas, making herbal medicine consultations and advice more accessible. Universities and research institutions are likely to engage in more extensive research on medicinal plants, creating opportunities for collaboration between traditional healers and researchers (Bennett et al., 2000; Oreagba et al., 2011).

Participation in the herbal medicine sector will continue to serve as a source of income diversification for many individuals and families. The complementary nature of herbal medicine with modern medicine will be further recognized and utilized, offering a holistic approach to patient care. Collaborations with international organizations and research institutions can provide access to resources, knowledge exchange, and funding for herbal medicine research and development (Fakeye et al., 2007; Adisa et al., 2006).

Nigeria's rich heritage in herbal medicine, coupled with a renewed focus on research, regulation, and cultural preservation, positions it for a future where herbal medicine will continue to contribute significantly to healthcare. As the nation grapples with healthcare challenges and seeks affordable and culturally relevant solutions, herbal medicine is expected to play an increasingly vital role in meeting the diverse healthcare needs of the Nigerian population.

## 8. Conclusion

In conclusion, the utilization of herbal medicine in Nigeria is not merely a practice but a profound and enduring facet of the nation's cultural heritage, healthcare traditions, and socio-economic fabric. Spanning centuries and drawing wisdom from diverse ethnic groups, the use of medicinal plants occupies a pivotal place in the lives of its people. It reflects the resourcefulness and resilience of the population and underscores the significance of nature's bounty in providing remedies for a wide spectrum of health-related challenges.

Nigeria's unique landscape, encompassing lush forests, expansive savannahs, and fertile riverbanks, offers a rich reservoir of indigenous flora, each harboring a treasure trove of healing potential. Indigenous knowledge, passed down through generations, forms the bedrock of traditional healthcare, weaving a tapestry of cultural traditions, beliefs, and practices that continue to resonate with the majority of the population.

This comprehensive exploration has delved into the multifaceted dimensions of herbal medicine in Nigeria, revealing the deep-rooted connections between nature and healthcare, the cultural significance of indigenous healing practices, and the modern-day relevance of these age-old remedies. It has shed light on the historical roots of traditional medicine, the economic implications for livelihoods, and the evolving interplay between herbal remedies and the contemporary healthcare landscape.

Nigeria's journey through the landscape of herbal medicine is a testament to the harmonious coexistence of the ancient and the modern, where centuries-old healing traditions and the latest scientific advancements converge in a dynamic interplay. The investigation has unveiled the wealth of knowledge held by Nigerian communities, highlighted the challenges and opportunities facing the integration of herbal medicine into mainstream healthcare, and underscored the importance of preserving and respecting the cultural heritage of traditional healing practices in this diverse and vibrant nation.

The challenges and concerns surrounding herbal medicine are acknowledged, from safety and regulation to sustainability and accessibility. However, there is an optimistic outlook for the future. As global trends shift towards natural and holistic healthcare solutions, herbal medicine is expected to play an increasingly vital role in Nigeria's healthcare landscape. Integration with modern medicine, rigorous research, strengthened regulations, economic opportunities, and a focus on preservation and cultural heritage will collectively shape the path forward.

In essence, herbal medicine in Nigeria is not just a chapter in history but a dynamic force that continues to evolve, adapt, and contribute to the well-being of the Nigerian people, firmly rooted in tradition yet embracing the possibilities of the future.

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