

HISTORICAL SCHOLARSHIP, SOCIETY AND EDUCATIONAL DEVELOPMENT IN NIGERIA

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CHAPTER 9

A History of Traditional Herbal and Medical Association in the Ilorin Emirate, 1975-2010

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Abstract

Traditional medical and herbal practitioners have since time immemorial used their crafts to ensure the survival and sustainability of several African communities. Their knowledge, wisdom, technical know-how, herbal formulae and spiritual prowess had at one time or the other safeguarded their communities from calamities, epidemics, dangers, wars and crises that might have wiped-out such communities from the surface of the earth. Through their collaborations and association, the herbal practitioners secured a better bargain and protected the interests of their members in the colonial and post-colonial periods. The members of the Association of Traditional Medical Practitioners used their strength to secure unity, protection, security and an enabling environment for their operations. In the twenty first century, the Nigerian Association of Medical Herbalists collaborated with government and its agencies, and other professional associations such as the Nigeria Medical Association, West African Society for Pharmacology (WASP) and the academia to conform to standard and contemporary realities.

Keywords: Traditional Herbal and Medical Association, Ilorin Emirate, traditional medicine, *Oba Isegun*, Spiritualists.

Collaborations amongst Traditional Medical Practitioners in the Pre-Colonial Period

Traditional medical practitioners had operated in the Ilorin Emirate and other parts of Nigeria since time immemorial. They operated harmoniously amongst one another in dispensing their services to members of their immediate communities and beyond. Membership of professional bodies amongst them was an age-long phenomenon. It is important to note that African medicine and religion are completely inseparable. Therefore, membership of traditional religious cults determined and served as the earliest form of professional associations in Ilorin and several other parts of what later became known as Nigeria. Although members of these traditional cults were not directly involved in medical practices, the fact that

they were bound by oath, laws, taboos, secrets, worship and discipline which made them to regard themselves as members of a corporate society. They were easily identified by their symbols, insignia, signs, shrines, slogans, regalia and their oracles, which were always displayed in the members' day to day activities.[1]

They used their sacred and sacrosanct decisions and authority, and other measures to protect the interest of their members. To them, injury to one was injury to all. Members of these association were each other's brother's keepers, and were highly respected and regarded in their communities. Pre-colonial political class usually put their interests into cognizance in decision making process. Members belonged to diverse professions such as traditional medicine, hunting, long and short distance trading, and farming among others. Many at times, this association could be a religious cult of a family, clan or a village. Similarly, on many occasions, membership was determined by profession, just like *Ogun* cult was associated with hunting, blacksmithing and many others that had connections with iron.[2] Correspondingly, membership could also be determined by social class status just as in the case of *Ogboni* cult. Some cults such as *Mole* involved the association and collection of spiritualists and powerful people. *Mole* or *Ayilala* cult signified the collection of different powers of diverse powerful spiritualists also known as *Agbarijo*.[3]

The major justification for the membership of these traditional organizations was borne out of the need for protection, security, religious veneration and progress in their endeavours. Some diseases and ailments were commonly believed to have been influenced by the wrath of one spirit or the other. Therefore, native doctors' involvement in these associations was mainly to secure the potency of their medicines at all times, and to secure their protection whenever they encountered, healed or cared for patients with mysterious ailments.[4] It was also to enable them to have quick and sure access to the supernatural world, to make inquiries on the causes and remedies of their clients' ailments. For instance, herbalists, traditional birth attendants and bone setters that were worshipers and adherents of *Ifa* cult consulted the oracle to inquire the causes of the ailment, and the possible roots and herbs use or sacrifices to be offered to the traditional gods in healing and curing several health challenges.[5]

Apart from the fact that their cults or oracles were venerated on daily or timely basis, they were also adored on an annual festival, when all members were expected to be in attendance. For example, during the annual festival of the *Ifa* worshippers and cultists of Dada village, they offered sacrifice known as *Etutu Ilu* to prevent the outbreak and cure of measles and other deadly diseases.[6] In a related manner, Ilorin

Emirate traditional healthcare givers such as herbalists, traditional birth attendants (*Elewe omo or Iya Abiye*), traditional pharmacologists (*Lekuleja*), traditional bone setters and many others who were members of the *Mole* cult used the liquid fluid extracted from snail placed on the oracle for twenty four hours to cure their sick clients. Clients with difficult and complicated health cases were advised to join the cult during its annual festival, where his or her case would be presented formally. In the annual *Mole* festival, members put on their regalia called *Pakaja*, believed to be scary to witches and other wicked spirits. New entrants with health challenges were thereby requested by *Mole* oracle to provide a particular delicacy (*Ase)* such as snail, fish, duck or pap to feed the congregants.[7] It was believed that consumption of the food by the congregants signified that members had bestowed and rendered their collective power and support in fighting evil spirits or witches or wizards which that were responsible for the membership and initiation of the new entrants as a result of sickness or misfortune they were afflicted with. After the cure of sickness or predicament of such new members, they became permanent members, and were given a symbol of the oracle to be with them and be inherited by their generations.[8]

Association of Traditional Medical Practitioners in the Colonial and Post-Colonial Periods

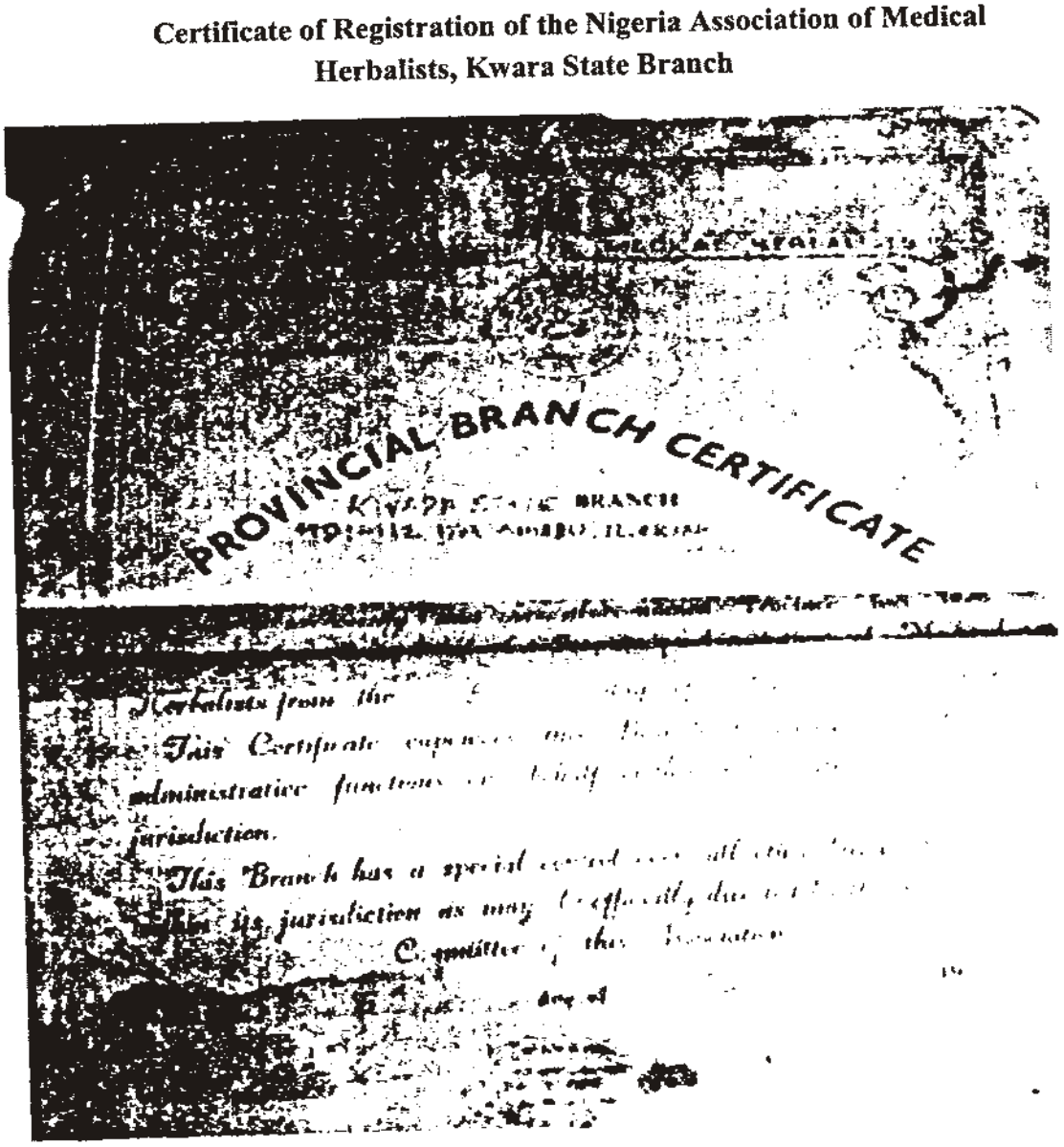
Transformation and change in the history of the guild system and professional associations evolved as a consequence of the civilization and modernity of the twentieth century. The foremost justification for the establishment and formalization of professional associations was borne out of the need for people related by the same interest, profession, skill and expertise to come together to protect the interests and rights of their members in the new political terrain of the early twentieth century. They came together to ensure that the best favour and bargain were guaranteed in the interest of their members in terms of taxes, duties and levy, land space allocation, permission and restriction under the new colonial government. Through their association, they wrote several petitions to protest against government's draconian policies towards their members. Therefore, several professional groups and associations such as the Market Women Association, Motor Transporters Association, the earliest of which was Nigerian Motor Transport Union (NMTU) established in 1932,[9] Lagos Truck Owners' Association, Native Doctors' Associations, the first of which was Tobalase Native Herbalists' Association founded in 1927,[10] Students' Association, Association of Artisans, labour and religious groups began to emerge. Subsequently, the Tobalase Native Herbalists'

Association approved by the Colonial Government in Lagos transformed to Nigeria Herbal Union in 1945.[11]

Developments in Lagos soon extended to other parts of the country. Alhaji Ahmadu Tannantannan pioneered the struggle by gathering several other traditional medical practitioners in all the nooks and crannies of Ilorin Province, to come together under an umbrella. Alhaji Ahmadu Tannantannan in conjunction with several other colleagues of his brought a branch of the Herbal Union to the Ilorin Province and got it registered with the Federal Ministry of Labour in 1960.[12] Traditional herbal practitioners such as bone setters, traditional birth attendants, herbalists, traditional psychiatrists, traditional ophthalmologists, traditional circumcisionists (*Oloola*) and others in Ilorin and other districts such as Offa, Omuaran, Oro, and several others became members, and paid their dues on a regular basis. At that point in time, membership of the Union was compulsory because the association was empowered by the Federal Ministry of Labour to sanction any erring members and those that refused to join the association.[13] Through this association, practitioners such as traditional birth attendants, herbalists, bone setters, and many others engaged in their profession with more confidence and channeled their grievances through the association to any quarters. They were involved in several litigations to protect the interest and rights of their members who were denied free access to operate in their communities. They met once weekly to discuss the progress, and shared innovations and problems amongst themselves.[14]

In the early 1970s, Amalgamation Herbal Home also brought a registered association of some sort from Ile-Ife to Ilorin, and the Ilorin Emirate Traditional Herbal Practitioners maintained the membership of the two associations simultaneously. However, the existence of the Amalgamation Herbal Home was short-lived, and its leaders later joined the Herbal Union. In 1978, the Herbal Union was transformed into the Nigerian Association of Medical Herbalists, headed by Chief Dr. T. O. Lambo.[15] The Kwara State branch of the Nigerian Association of Medical Herbalists was constituted and inaugurated on June 5, 1978, under the Chairmanship of Chief B.O. Ajayi.

Certificate of Registration of the Nigeria Association of Medical Herbalists, Kwara State Branch



Source: Picture taken by the Researcher on April 12, 2019.

The Kwara State Branch of the Nigerian Association of Medical Herbalists was headed by B.O. Ajayi as the President and Alhaji Tijani Taiye Power as the Secretary General between 1978 and 1980. Mr. Aniyikaiye and Mr. Kalejaiye also served as president and secretary respectively of the association between 1980 and 1985. It is important to note that the problem of disintegration and division of the central association (Nigerian Association of Medical Herbalists) began in 1982

when Mr. Kalejaiye, the then State President with the collaboration of the National President of the association in Lagos (Chief Dr. T. O. Lambo Afin) refused to step down after the expiration of his tenure in office.[16] Crises ensued as a result of his refusal to leave office. The antics of the Kwara State President and the complicity of the National President prompted the majority of the members most especially those from the North to renounce their membership and joined the Northern axis of the Nigerian Association of Medical Herbalists headed by Princess Aisha Buba Bayero, the daughter of 13th *Emir* of Kano.[17]

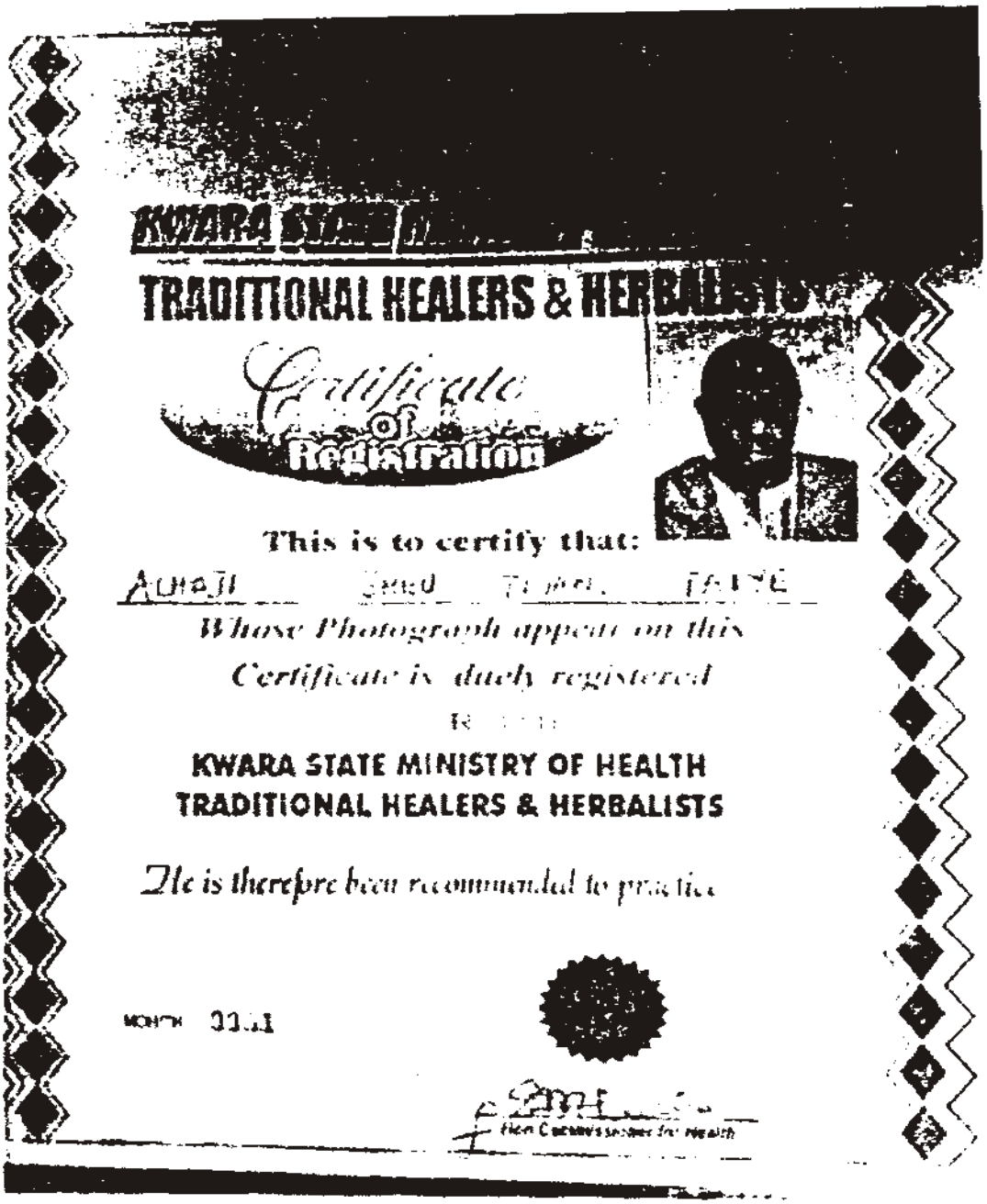
However, a form of disintegration and disloyalty to the central and the only recognized Nigerian Association of Medical Herbalists also emerged in 1983, when the 9th *Emir* of Ilorin Alhaji Zulu Gambari appointed and turbaned Alhaji Momonu Ahmed Gambari as the *Oba Isegun* of Ilorin Emirate. By that conferment, Alhaji Momonu Gambari became a highly revered chief and a member of the Ilorin Emirate Council. He was given a staff of office and his authority became binding on all traditional herbal practitioners operating in the Ilorin Emirate.[17] From then, the authority of the turbaned *Oba Isegun* often collided with that of the Mr. Babatunde Oloro, the then Kwara State President of the Nigerian Association of Medical Herbalists on the issues of registration, union dues, meeting attendance and many others. These disagreements resulted in litigation between the two parties in 1985. The outcome of the court case resolved that the *status quo* should be maintained, and Alhaji Momonu Ahmed Gambari that was turbaned by the *Emir* should exercise his authority on the traditional medical professionals in Ilorin Emirate, and president of Nigerian Association of Medical Herbalists to oversee the activities of all members in Kwara State.[18]

Consequently, these developments also prompted the big-wigs of the Nigerian Association of Medical Herbalists in Kwara State to leave the body and form their own association which made them independent of the old central association. For instance, Baba Awogbemi who was the Secretary when Mr. Babatunde Oloro was the President in 1985, renounced their membership and withdrew to found his association known as *Aloogunlode* group.[19] Other associations such as *Ifarefa*, *Ewesowapo*, *Iwajowa*, *Ewegbemi* and many others soon emerged.[20] Later on, some leaders conferred on themselves the title of *Oba Isegun* and became the heads of their respective areas in Ilorin Emirate and several other parts of Kwara State. For instance, there were *Oba Isegun* in Dada, Okelele, Sango, Adeta, Oloje, Isale Koko, Oke-Oyi, Bode-Saadu, Lanwa, Ejidongari, Olooru, Oke-Ose and Ogele amongst others.[21]

On many occasions, factions broke out simply because of the dissatisfaction of some members who felt that the leaders were favouring and making their preferred candidates more relevant than others. There were minor differences between the modes of operation of these associations. They also held their meetings on weekly or bi-weekly basis to discuss the problems, challenges and way forward concerning traditional herbal practitioners in their areas of influence, with the hope and assurance that their interest, messages and grievances would be conveyed through their leadership to the appropriate quarters such as the security agencies, National Association of Food and Drugs Administration and Control (NAFDAC), media outlets, Ilorin Emirate Council, local, state and federal governments. However, the members of these associations became rivals in their respective communities.[22] The Kwara State Ministry of Health did everything humanly possible to resuscitate the old centralized system and mode of association, and bring the whole practitioners under an umbrella in order to ensure easy monitoring, regulation and supervision of the activities of the native doctors. It employed several strategies and called a number of meetings all to no avail.[23] The Ministry of Health, under the Commissionership of Dr. Abdul Fatahi Alade in 1999, established the Board of Traditional Herbalists and used it as a medium to regulate the activities of the practitioners in terms of issuance and renewal of certificate of operation, timely monitoring, approval of their activities and products such as *Ipate Isegun* open trade fair and their branded herbal medicine.[24]

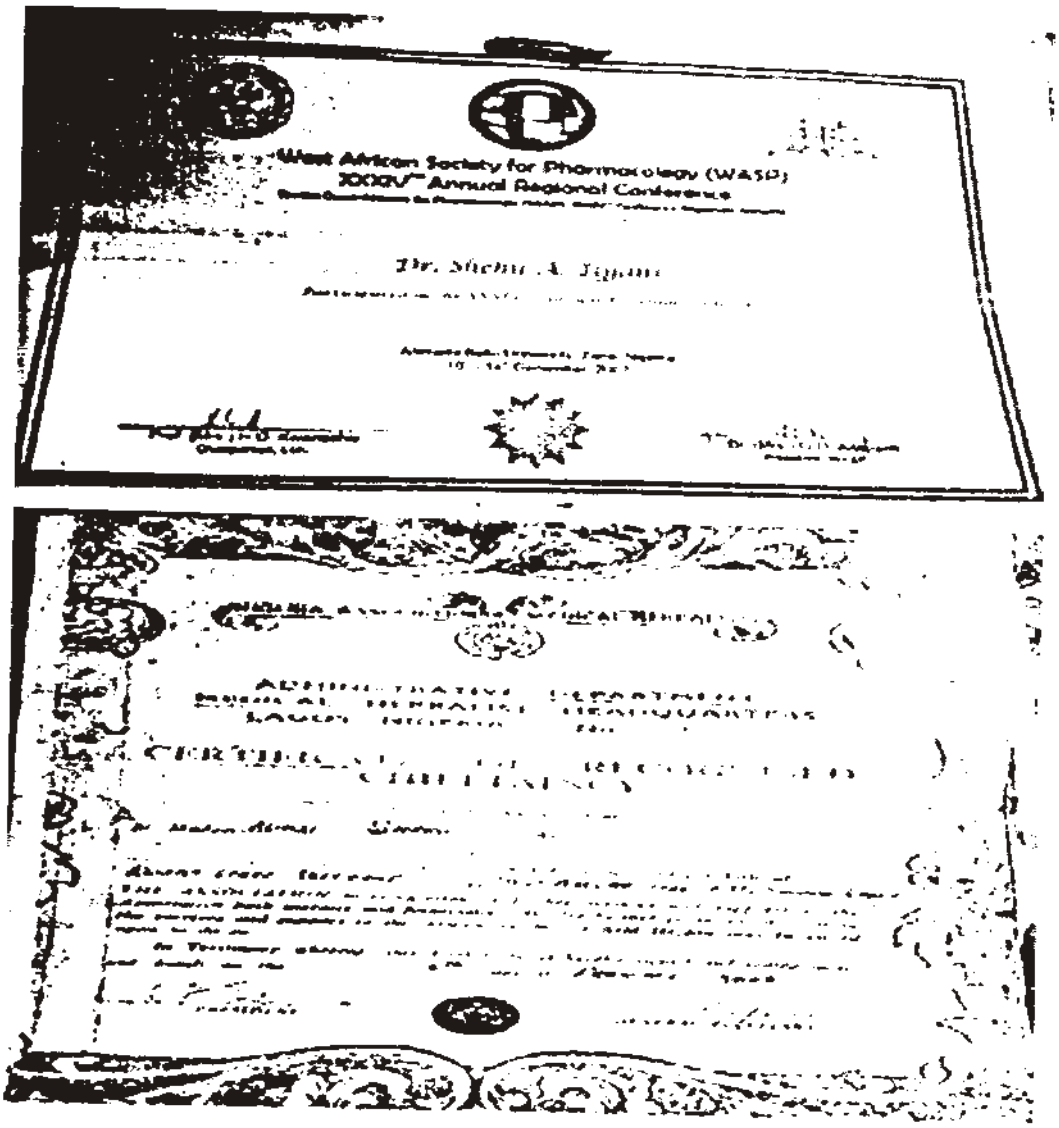
In 2005, when Alhaji Shehu Tijani Taiye assumed the leadership of the association of traditional medical herbalists in Kwara State, he tried his best towards restoring the unity, discipline and decorum that had once reigned in the association. He made use of his personality and charisma to secure the support of the State government in ensuring that members complied and conformed to national code of conduct and standard. Through his efforts, licenses were obtained and approved for several trado-medical outlets, and he also ensured mass registration of traditional medical practitioners in Kwara State. More so, he sought the collaboration and acceptance of the Nigerian Medical Association, West African Society for Pharmacology (WASP) and the academia. Through this, sensitization seminars, workshops and symposia were organized to enlighten traditional health practitioners on topics such as hygiene, referrals, standards and contemporary medical ethics.

Membership Certificate Issued by the Kwara State Government


KWARA STATE
TRADITIONAL HEALERS & HERBALISTS
Certificate of Registration
This is to certify that:
Whose Photograph appear on this Certificate is duly registered
KWARA STATE MINISTRY OF HEALTH
TRADITIONAL HEALERS & HERBALISTS
He is therefore been recommended to practice

Source: Picture taken by the Researcher on April 13, 2019.

Certificate of Conference Attendance at the Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria, and Certificate of Chieftaincy Issued by Nigeria Association of Medical Herbalists in Lagos



Source: Picture taken by the Researcher on April 14 and 15, 2019.

Conclusion

This study examines the history of traditional medical practitioners and their efforts to unite for recognition and qualitative service delivery. It traces traditional medical practice since pre-colonial period when traditional medical practitioners practiced

10. NAI/1927 & 1941/248/83 Permits: Tobalase Native Herbalist Association.
11. Oral interview Alhaji Tijani (Taiye Power), herbalist, Irewolede Area behind New Yidi Praying Ground Ilorin. 26th November, 2019. 81 years old. Although other associations were registered since 1927, they were not as popular and widely recognized as Tobalase Herbalists' Association. Members of the Association were well educated, exposed and highly influential in Lagos and several other parts of Nigeria. It was these qualities that prompted them to think of transforming the Association to Herbal Union in 1945, the one which was meant to cater for the interest of herbalists throughout the federation.
12. Oral interview Alhaji Tijani (Taiye Power).
13. Oral interview with Asoo Awogbemi, herbalist, Kankatu Road, Ilorin. 24th December, 2018. 63 years old.
14. Oral interview with Alhaji Momonuhu Ahmed, herbalist and *Oba Isegun* of Ilorin Emirate, Ita-Amodu Area, Ilorin. 25th November, 2019. 83 years old.
15. Oral interview with Alhaji Momonuhu Ahmed.
16. Oral interview with Mr. Babatunde Oloro, farmer and herbalist, Agbabiaka Area, Ilorin. 16th October, 2019. 70 years old plus.
17. Oral interview with Mr. Babatunde Oloro.
18. Oral interview with Mallam Oseni Bisiriyu, herbalist and *Oba Isegun* of Ejidongari, Akerebiata Motor Park, Ilorin. 20th November, 2019. 70 years plus.
19. Oral interview with Mallam Oseni Bisiriyu.
20. Oral interview with Mr. Samson Agbaje, herbalist and farmer, Baale Compound, Oke Ose. 17th November, 2019.
21. Oral interview with Mr. Samson Agbaje.
22. Oral interview with Alhaji Folaranmi Bunyamin, retired Assistant Director in Kwara State Ministry of Health. Sawmill Garage Area, Ilorin. November 2nd, 2017. 68 years old. He retired as Assistant Director of Administration and Planning in the Ministry of Health and was vested with the responsibilities of coordinating the activities and practices of raditional medical practitioners. He, several other ministry officials and many key players in the field of traditional medicine called meetings, conferences and seminars towards harmonizing and bring the practitioners back under a centralized association.
23. Oral interview with Alhaji Folaranmi Bunyamin, Retired Assistant Director in Kwara State Ministry of Health. Sawmill Garage Area, Ilorin. November 2nd, 2017. 68 years old. However, the efforts of the committee towards harmonizing the traditional medical practitioners were fruitless, and the then commissioner was advised by the team in the ministry and the big-wigs among the practitioners to establish the Board of Traditional Herbalists. The Board was comprised of him, the Commissioner as the Chairman and many bigwigs in the practice as members. They were vested with the responsibilities of issuance of certificates and permits to the practitioners.