

BRIEF HISTORY OF TEAM CENTRE/ TOLU ODUGBEMI MEDICINAL PLANT GARDENS

As a child I recall that, my parents (Chief Benjamin Adeniran Odugbemi of Okejege Okeigbo and Mrs Dorcas Ileola Odugbemi nee Fasehun) used local herbs *Alstonia* spp (Ahun) and *Harungana madagascariensis* (Asunje) freshly collected and prepared brews for us to treat malaria when at Aiyede Ekiti in the 50s. The use of local plants including yunyun to treat fresh wounds remained in my mind. Later other foreign drugs including paludrine and M&B emerged for use to treat malaria and diarrhoea.

Perhaps this was the beginning of my interest in flowering plants. This also influenced my academic interest in medical microbiology and management of health conditions with fondness of scientific names led me to my interest in plants of medicinal importance. I started to locate medicinal plants and plant them in my back garden. I started with the ornamental plants then gradually started acquiring more land for plants of medicinal importance and household food crops. As my interest in medicinal plants grew, so did my back garden in my village in Oke-Igbo, Ondo State.

In 1993, my wife Chief Titi Odugbemi (nee ALA of Oke Ayedun Ekiti), myself and children (Tolu jnr, Funmi, Tomi and Tunde) moved to Okeigbo during the June 12 political crisis. I was thrilled that we finally have a country home. I wanted beautiful flowers all around. I set at-planting in earnest, investing money and energy on my dream beautiful house; all these was during the political crisis (1993) (Abiola crisis). We planted pawpaw, oranges, guava, lime, pineapple etc all these fruits and other plant parts are recognised and used locally for herbal medicines. The land being a virgin land (jungle) had strong woods like Iroko, Ahun, Igi-Ade, oruwo etc. People came asking for leaves, barks and fruits of some of our plants for use as treatments for different ailments while the ornamental flowery plants were collected for interior decorations. I recall Chief Fatanmi a community leader who had good knowledge of herbal medicine showed interest and in the assorted plants including *Sanseveria* spp oja ikoko (Snake plant). That was fascinating and challenging. Naturally, ideas and urge to know and acquire more medicinal plants got greater. Eventually, every available space in between flowers were taken over by medicinal

plants from different parts of Nigeria- Ekiti, Ondo, Edo, Oyo, Borno, Kwara, Osun, Oyo, Kano, Niger etc.

Whenever I was invited as an External Examiner to various tertiary institutions in Nigeria, I took such opportunity to visit surrounding area villages armed with a camera or smart phones to scout, search and photograph for plants used locally there for treatment of various illness. I picked seeds and cuttings for planting at Okeigbo medicinal plants farms.

I had many samples of plants and parts of plants that I started taking to Forest Research Institute of Nigeria (FRIN), Ibadan, Nigeria for identification by experts like Baba Benjamin Daramola, Mr. Odewo and co.

PUBLICATION OF OUTLINES OF MEDICINAL PLANTS in 2006:

It was an exciting time moving around villages in Nigeria to photograph medicinal plants. By about the year 2006 I had acquired enough plant materials and plant pictures to publish a book. The book with input from family, friends and leading educationalists was publicly presented at a well-attended ceremony at the University of Lagos. The Chief Launcher was my cousin Mrs Tolu Akingbola and the Book reviewer was Professor Oyewale Tomori, a friend who happened to be familiar with my usual habits of disappearing into villages and farms after meeting sessions. The medicinal plants website designed by Engr. Oluwaseyi Awobusuyi was launched at the same ceremony. This medicinal plants website has created more awareness over the years on the use of local plants for herbal medicine. In the course of the book review, Professor Oyewale Tomori in his joking style made some remarks on incantations on 'ogbo' which did not affect 'oyinbo' headmaster who wanted to punish erring students. That made me curious to know if incantations have any effect on those who do not understand the language?

Pa Oba Jacob F Ala, Alaaye of Oke Ayedun Ekiti, my father-in-law gave me access to his town's traditional Chiefs to discuss any aspect of traditional medicine with me without hindrances. I embarked on more adventures on searching for plants with encouragement from my brothers Temitayo, Wole, Leke, Sisters Toyin, Olanlesi and Cousin Femi Odugbemi and co. Mr. Femi Odugbemi is Film Producer/Director of international repute has been pushing so that his film

crew will come on ground to produce a documentary. The eminent Okeigbo herbal practitioners Rev. Peter Fabeku, Chief Ayingun Damilola Ogungbemi, Mr. Adesaanu, Mr Ademola, Ikoko and co were always available to join me on field trips.

By efforts and providence, late Baba Daramola a dedicated retired but not tired worker at FRIN Ibadan became a friend and resource person. Even, after Baba Daramola retired from FRIN, I facilitated University of Lagos to engage Mr. Daramola and Mr. Odewo as curators during my tenure as Vice-Chancellor. I also engaged Baba Daramola as curator for Ondo State University of Science and Technology (OSUSTECH), Okitipupa in 2011 when he set up OSUSTECH HERBARIUM. Some university staff were reassigned to understudy Baba Daramola as an Expert on caring for Herbarium and field work. After my departure from OSUSTECH, Okitipupa in 2015, Baba Daramola and myself became friendly and closer. Dr. Ahmed Habeeb and Professor Sambo Zailani are great friends who facilitated many of my village trips in Maiduguri.

As knowledge of medicinal plants increased, more land-extending to Egbatedo, Alapata, Igbo Oya, Progress etc was acquired, more money was being spent and interest and passion increased.

Baba Daramola became an asset enriching our interest with his experiences and readiness to travel to far and remote areas of Nigeria.

It has been a mixture of blessings. Talk of falls on motor bike (Okada) with bruises and loss of valuables. There were encounters with fierce looking hunters whose language I did not understand. Insects' bites that led to my collapse that could have been fatal but for Divine intervention. The sweet part is the forest of mature medicinal plants we see today. It has all been worth it!

Prof Tolu and Chief Mrs Titi Odugbemi as far back as 1997 had been conducting various programmes to positively influence their community. In an effort to make this better organized the TEAM centre was formally established as an initiative of the Tolu Odugbemi Foundation in 2017. The name TEAM CENTRE derives from TEAM standing as an acronym for Teaching Entrepreneurship and Mentoring and the Centre was launched 8th of November, 2016 and started activities 1st February, 2017. As the name implies it is a centre that encourages teaching, entrepreneurship, and mentoring.....to promote health through research, support educational institutions and skill acquisition programmes, preserve and

promote culture and promote national development by supporting health, education and agriculture.

Visitors and research students come from time to time to the TEAM CENTRE, Okeigbo and enjoy its serene environment. Eminent members of the society who have visited the TEAM CENTRE include Engr. Bolaji Ipaye and Dr. Mrs Taiwo Ipaye, Hon Tunji Bello and Professor Mrs Ibiyemi Olatunji- Bello, Mrs Toyin Oguntoye accompanied by her son Foluso. Staff and students from the University of Lagos, University of Benin, University of Medical Sciences, ONDO City, etc have also visited. The Vice Chancellor of the Mountain Top University (MTU), Professor Elijah Ayolabi, the Management Team including the Librarian Mrs Bunmi Akinade have visited several times with blessings and support from Professor Daniel Kolawole Olukoya The Chancellor, MTU and General Overseer of MFM.

Dr. Fatima Kyari, Director, Institute for Advanced Medical Research and Training (IAMRAT) College of Health Sciences. University of Abuja; Dr. Ahmed Habeeb of University of Maiduguri, Professor Sambo Zailani and Professor S. Olu Oduntan, Dr. Mrs Lara Roberts and Dr. John Olowoyeye and Bunmi Olowoyeye continue to encourage and show interest to see to the growth and development of the TEAM CENTRE.

The visit by Professor Adesegun Fatusi, FNAMed Vice Chancellor, University of Medical Sciences, ONDO City to the TEAM CENTRE, OKEIGBO on 29th of November 2020 opened discussion on partnership between the VC and Professor Tolu Odugbemi of the TEAM CENTRE. Professor Olumide Ogundahunsi accompanied by Professor Oyewale Tomori visited the TEAM CENTRE, Okeigbo on 3rd February 2022. These early interactions and shared interests between reputable Academics from UNIMED and discussion with Professor and Mrs Tolu Odugbemi consolidated the thinking and plans to the signing of Memorandum of Understanding between UNIMED, ONDO City and the TEAM CENTRE, OKEIGBO on the 2nd of February, 2023. Therefore, Professor Tolu Odugbemi agreed and signed the MOU with UNIMED as it aligned with the objectives of the CENTRE to promote learning, research, and conservation.

The main goal of this partnership is for the TEAM CENTRE and UNIMED to advance knowledge through sound research work and capacity building that may lead to Certification in Herbal Medicine, conservation of the medicinal plants and research into their uses.

Professor Tolu Odugbemi

10th of May, 2023