

## **Utilitarian Value of Ground Nut Among the Nupe Women of North Central Nigeria**

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**ABSTRACT:** *Agriculture and manufacturing activities is as old as production of goods and services in African society. In the production of goods and services women formed a sizeable population of the labour force. This has not been an exception in Nupe land. The friendly nature of ecology of Nupe land made it possible for production of ground nut in large quantity that allowed for its utilization in different forms most especially by the women. Thus the plants, the nuts and the shell are used by women in different forms. It is on this premise that the study examined production, utilisation, marketing and consumption of groundnut among Nupe women. The study uses historical research methodology of oral interaction, reconnaissance survey and unpublished and published materials in collection of data and analyses. The study revealed that Nupe women played supportive role in cultivation through planting, harvesting, and separation of pod from plants to processing into different bye products and marketing.*

**KEYWORDS:** utilitarian value, ground nut, nupe women, north central, Nigeria

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### **INTRODUCTION**

The interaction between man and man on one hand and interaction with his environment on the other influenced his wellbeing and level of development. His level of development is a product of his understanding of the environment he lives in. Understanding of his environment manifested in his identification, exploitation and utilisation of resources in production of goods and services. The exploitation and utilisation of the resources also depended much on the level of adaptation of relevant technology. This no doubt, the people of North Central Nigeria and Nupe in particular have been able to achieve overtime in the process of production of goods and services as they understand their environment, identified, exploited and utilised varieties of resources (agricultural, mineralic and aquatic) adapting appropriate knowledge and technology at their disposal.

The people of North central Nigeria and indeed Nupe people in particular due to mastery of their environment and adoption of appropriate technology have been engaged in varieties of economic activities which in some cases have led to specialisation. For instance Kyadya and Bataci who lived on riverine area took to fishing and canoe transportation and cultivation of marshy land for rice, sweet potato and sugar cane respectively<sup>1</sup> and those that lived in the hinterland due to environmental factor of land and water cultivated varieties of crops ranging from grains, cereals to legumes.<sup>2</sup> Also, those that lived in environment with mineral resources and agro raw materials became actively involved in craft/manufacturing activities such as pottery, blacksmithing, textile, shea butter, bean cake etc.<sup>3</sup>

The level of success in the economic activities among Nupe people made them not only produced for their immediate consumption or for future uses but even for exchange as production went beyond subsistence level. Also their level of specialisation in chosen economic activities made them excel that attracted commendation from others. For instance Schon who was amazed by the utilisation and production in iron sees Nupe land ‘as a country of iron’<sup>4</sup> while Barth noted that ‘the Nupe have excelled in industry from very remote times and rival the inhabitants of Kano in the arts of weaving and dyeing’.<sup>5</sup> On food production, it was reported that Nupe depended not only one crop of which some are sown and harvested twice in a year.<sup>6</sup>

As noted earlier, Nupe people have been active in both agricultural and manufacturing activities over time as both male and female played key roles in the production process and provision of services. However, certain occupation or economic activities were divided along gender.<sup>7</sup> For instance blacksmithing, tanning and ridge making in crop production are exclusively reserved or dominated by men while women played supportive role of planting, transportation and marketing of produced. Women were also exclusively involved in shea butter, bean cake and *kulikuli* making. In utilization of crops, some are mainly food crops such as rice, beans, yam while others served dual purposes of food and agro-raw material for craft and manufactured goods. For example guinea corn, groundnut and maize. It is on this note that we examined groundnut production in Nupe land as a multipurpose crop and its utilisation by women in different forms of economic activities.

### **The Study Area**

The word Nupe refers to a people and their spoken language and by extension their land which they called *kinnupe*- Nupe land. They are found in North Central Nigeria around the confluence of Niger –Benue rivers where they lived on both side of Niger extending to the frontiers of Borgu and lower basins of Kaduna.<sup>8</sup> They occupied the land between latitude 9°20 and 8°20 north covering about eleven thousand two hundred (11,200) square kilometres.<sup>9</sup> The land is not more than two hundred feet above sea level with the highest point not more than 800ft.<sup>10</sup> This made *kinNupe* to be mostly plain land. The land is dissected by river Niger in to two. They shared border with Gbagyi in the east, Kambari and other ethnic groups to the north, Igbira and Yoruba to the west and south respectively. Nupe land is today spread over three states of Niger, Kwara and Kogi in a contiguous land only separated by rivers.

Nupe land and indeed central Nigeria is transiting vegetation zone between the northern savannah and the forestry belt of southern Nigeria. This made most of the area to be covered by guinea savannah vegetation that shares characteristics of both forest and savannah. The belt

is characterised by fairly distributed rain fall that lasted between six to eight months and decreases from south to the northern fringes. The average temperature is 27° celcius.<sup>11</sup> The soils are generally fertile and well drained with the exception of areas around river course that are swampy most especially in the rainy season.<sup>12</sup> This made the land to support both tree crops, tubers, legumes, grains and cereals, hence the vast majority of the population took to agriculture. One of the major crop cultivated is ground nut which is the focus of this study.

### **History of groundnut production**

The origin of ground nut is uncertain but became known in around 950BC and first noted and utilised in Sothern America. It was reported that the earliest place of cultivation was in Peru. From Peru it spread to neighbouring area of Brazil and southern American communities where explorers and Christian missionaries most especially Portuguese brought it to Africa in around 16<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>13</sup> The crop was to later be exported from Africa to North America by slave traders or merchants.<sup>14</sup> The crop later became a household crop in areas with tropical climate across the world.

Groundnut got to West Africa sub-region through the Portuguese and was cultivated in northern Nigeria long before the British conquest and imposition of colonial rule. It was reported and important to note that during slave trade, groundnut was used to feed slaves while waiting or on board the ships from the ware houses along the coast of West Africa to the new world.<sup>15</sup> During the colonial administration in Nigeria cultivation of ground nut was encouraged and became one of the major cash/commodity crops in Northern Nigeria which gave birth to Northern Regional Groundnut Marketing Board.<sup>16</sup>

### **Ecology, Morphology, and Groundnut production in Nupe land.**

As noted earlier, Nupe land has a fairly distributed rain fall of about 6 months and fertile soil that support agricultural activities. This made the area favourable for groundnut production in large quantity. In cultivation process, groundnut requires a well spread rain fall of about 4-5 months or 25 to 35 inches. The crop being a drought tolerant one needs only temperature of between 18<sup>o</sup> and 32<sup>o</sup> Celsius for growth and productivity.<sup>17</sup> Shallow and moderately fertile sandy loamy soil rich in calcium, phosphorus and highly acidic to neutral PH range of 5-7 for pod formation is also required.<sup>18</sup>

Groundnut is of different varieties that included bunch or erect type, creeping type, Kano local, Kano 50 and castle cary. It is a seasonal crop that has a central up right stem with many lateral branches. It may have a tap root or lateral root system where pods are produced. Each pod contains between 1-6 seeds that are used for planting,<sup>19</sup> among others. The seeds are planted using mechanical or manual means of ploughing, harrowing or ridging. 2-3 seeds are planted in a hole of 4cm depth and a spacing of at least 15cm.<sup>20</sup> Groundnut can be cultivated alone or inter crop with maize, guinea corn, millet or sorghum.<sup>21</sup> It also require regular weeding before flowering. Harvesting is done by pulling or use of hoe. The nuts or pods are removed from the plants. After the nuts might have dried the seeds are removed or shelled from pods by pounding in mortals, stick beating or use of decorticating machine.<sup>22</sup>

Cultivation of groundnut in Nupe land is not much different from what is obtained in some parts of North Central and other parts of Northern Nigeria. The entire process began with land preparation that involved site clearing and burning of crops (if it is a new site) and making of

ridges usually in row. The ridges could be made depending on the size of land either by individual effort, *efako* house hold, *dzoro* and *egbe* invitational and of recent paid labour.<sup>23</sup> This is followed by planting which began with selection of good seeds. The seeds are planted in a hole by the use of stick, hoe, human heel and thumbs.<sup>24</sup> The planting are usually done by people of all ages; elderly men and women, adults and children depending on the availability of labour. Apart from planting of groundnut alone on a field, it was also inter planted among or between the rows of others crops must especially, sorghum, millet or corn.<sup>25</sup> The inter cropping of groundnut with others crop had the advantage of provision of nitrogen fixation to the soil that increased fertility of soil and serves as cover to the soil which prevent erosion.<sup>26</sup> Groundnut plant is equally included in crop rotation method, so as sustain the fertility status and composition of the soil.<sup>27</sup> Weeding are done at interval but stopped at the flowering period. Harvesting was done using the same labour available and transported home by women and children.

Plate A. Groundnut plants and pods



### **Economic uses of Groundnut**

Groundnut production is of immense economic value to both the producers and end users. Its economic value made it to be widely known in virtually all parts of the globe. However, our concern is on the utilisation of groundnut from the plant to seed pods by Nupe women of North Central Nigeria. The class of women involved are mostly illiterates who lack basic education or those who dropped out of school either at primary or secondary school level. They are also based in rural areas or semi urban centres such as local government headquarters that included Mokwa, Kutigi, Bida, Agaie and Lapai in Niger state and Tsaragi, Lafiagi and Patigi in Kwara and Lokoja in Kogi state. Of recent, educated Nupe women entrepreneur have joined the process to add value to it.

### ***Groundnut plant as fodder or feeds***

From planting to harvesting of groundnut takes about three to four months to get matured. The plant once it germinate and began to grow produces runners or stem either horizontal or vertical.<sup>28</sup> From the ground level of the root to the highest height groundnut grow to a height of 30cm. These parts of groundnut including the roots are used by women to feed animals either in its green or dried form. For preservation of the plants, it is dried after harvesting and cut into pieces for bagging which can last over a year or more.<sup>29</sup>

Plate B1. Groundnut plant cut into pieces as feeds B2. Dried cut feeds being fed to animals by a woman



### ***Groundnut as food***

Among the Nupe people groundnut is also consumed as food in different ways or forms. Firstly, the unshelled pod can be roasted or parboiled and eaten most especially during leisure hours. Secondly, the shelled nut is also roasted and eaten or sold as food. The roasting is done by women using a fairly wide pan placed on fire and continuously being turned till it become dried

and brown. The roasted groundnut are then sold using different packages such as bottles, polyten bag and old newspapers.<sup>30</sup> The roasted groundnut is eaten alone or with soaked garri or even with pap.

Plate C. Roasted groundnut in bottles and polyten bag



In semi-industrial activities women crushed or grind the nuts to produce oil. Prior to the use of grinding machine, grinding stones or pounding in a mortar were the commonest ways of grinding. The grinded groundnut now in semi-liquid (butter or molten) form using hands or in a mortar and pestle was turned severally adding little water at interval to extract oil out of the residue. The oil is gradually scoop in to a provided neat plate or container.<sup>31</sup>The groundnut oil is used for domestic activities of cooking, frying and industrial purposes. It also forms article of trade.<sup>32</sup>The residue from groundnut after oil might have been extracted from it is further processed and moulded into different shapes and fried into *kulikuli*. The shapes may be a three centimetre long, a pebble size, a circular ring form and a bottle top size or more.<sup>33</sup>The *kulikuli* is eaten as food along with *pap*, *ka'fa*, soaked garri, or further crushed and mixed with vegetable before being eaten. In fact, the demand soared when it became part of the condiment for soup and embellished in to vegetables such as lettuce and cabbage.<sup>34</sup>

Plate D. Varieties of fried *kulikuli*



*Kulikuli* being fried





*Kulikuli* is produced in two varieties namely unsweetened and sweetened. The unsweetened is the traditional one which has survived the taste of time through centuries. The unsweetened is also of two types; one with salt and the other without salt. The one without salt were and still being produced on request by and sold to Yoruba people with Bida, Mokwa and Jebba as centres of production and exchange. The sweetened *kulikuli* emerged in the second half of twentieth century when granulated sugar was added to the residue before frying and since then its demand has been on increase.<sup>35</sup>

Apart from the residue being processed in to *kulikuli*, women also traded with it and sold to animal feeds manufacturers. The residue is used in making poultry feeds to feed birds. Women who have added poultry keeping to their economic activities purchased the feeds for their birds<sup>36</sup>

The groundnut shell that used to be a waste product has now become important economic resources among Nupe women. Firstly, those that keeps birds or into modern poultry used the



shell as floor bedding to avoid fungi and development of disease from their droppings. The birds droppings are also used as feeds to fish for those who have fish farm or collected as manure on crop farms.<sup>37</sup> Secondly, the shells are used as source of smoke to keep flies away from cows or cattle kept at home by women.<sup>38</sup>

### ***Groundnut and its product as article of trade***

In traditional economy of northern Nigeria communities, gender consideration was paramount in choice of occupation and division of labour.<sup>39</sup> Women often played supportive role in occupation that requires hard labour or highly labour intensive but dominated food processing, allied activities and marketing of farm products. It is on this note that women in Nupe land dominated processing and marketing of food, hence groundnut and its by product formed articles of trade among Nupe women. This was made possible according to Ezeokeke that;

Gender division of labour in agriculture made provision for agricultural produces and processed food stuff to be disposed off by women. Consequently quite a lot of Nupe women engaged in petty retail trading in varying degrees. They were further engaged to go into this form of petty trading because it involved little capital and it competed minimally with child care and other domestic duties.<sup>40</sup>

This made women in Nupe to be actively involved in trading and attendance of markets. Hence, Schon and Crowther reported that women were the most numerous and predominant in market attendance and activities in Nupeland.<sup>41</sup>

Among the articles of trade by women include oil and other by products of the crop whose demand has been on increase most especially *kulikuli* done with sugar that is being exported.<sup>42</sup>

## **CONCLUSION**

We have observed that groundnut production in Nupe land dated long before colonial era. However, its cultivation and processes was influenced by gender which led to division and utilisation of labour therein. While men made ridges and tendered the crops to maturity, women helped in planting, harvesting and separation of pods from plants and processes that followed. Women also processed groundnut into different foods and market its product. We can thus conclude that Nupe women are entrepreneurs who earned their living not completely depending on their husbands.

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