

## Hajia Taimako makes strides in herbal medicine

Dr Hajia Salamatu Ibrahim Taimako is quite famous in Tamale, the capital of Ghana's Northern Region and the award winning, herbal expert and healer has even achieved some fame in Germany. Five years ago, the University for Development Studies (UDS) granted her an honorary doctorate degree.

For many years, Taimako's formidable family business had carried out a great deal of research and development work in the fields of herbs and healing, in collaboration with German friends, including the GTZ (Gesellschaft fur Technische Zusammenarbeit).

Exactly a year ago, the old lady and her youngest daughter and manager, Faiza Ibrahim Taimako, travelled to the south of Germany.

When Salamatu Taimako was born roughly 79 years ago in Tamale, no one could have predicted her enormous success. Her mother, a birth attendant, was well-versed in the healing properties of herbs; yet healing in the comprehensive tradition going beyond the hardships of expectant women was a typical male pursuit.

Her mother also worked from morning until night as a potter and baker - her father was a, butcher - and Salamatu, one of her 13 children, had to help out at a very early age. School was out of the question.

At the age of eight or nine, the girl learned from her mother, plants that could offer relief from which ailments and where they could be found.

Careful observation is also one of the main strengths of Salamatu Taimako, explains Faiza Taimako, the youngest of Salamatu's six daughters and three sons.

"My mother often observes the behaviour of the farm animals for hours - she sees exactly what they are lacking and watches which plants they eat. She apparently is still learning new things all the time, even today. Sometimes, she'll come in with a plant and say, cook this, we're having it for supper tonight, and we really have no idea what it is, laughs Faiza Taimako.

Salamatu Taimako married at about age 25. Her husband cared for orphans and his father, like Salamatu Taimako's grandfather, was a healer - so a great deal of knowledge merged together as well as the will to allow the inquisitive young woman to take part in it.

She first moved to Kumasi in the Ashanti Region with her husband. There, an entirely new aspect was added to what she knew of the healing art, but was able to practice only more or less "on the quiet."

In the Ashanti Region - unlike in the north medicine was paid for with cash. She, therefore, manufactured the medicines from herbs and was lucky that her husband supported her, for example, by selling her medicine, which she was not allowed to do on her own.

In about 1967, the family returned to Tamale, primarily, because Salamatu Taimako wanted her children to grow up close to their grandmother. Ten years after their return, her husband passed away and Salamatu Taimako worked even harder in her healing and herbal studies.

Over the years, the industrious one-woman enterprise became a proper family business, in which her children are each involved today in their own capacity. .

One of the tasks is the growing of medicinal plants. Their natural occurrence has been decreasing so rapidly in recent years that healers either have to travel very far to collect plants or they must grow their own individual herbs. A healer without plant production, says Salamatu, does not work at all.

She herself planted mainly trees and eventually on such a grand scale that she became active with a teaching and experimental farm through a Rural Forestry Programme that is still expanding and prospering today.

As the old lady says with self-confidence "Good medicine sells itself,"but in the meantime, the family business not only sells medicines very successfully but also dries fruit, as well.

Among the countless number of plants with medicinal benefits is Salamatu's "favourite plant", a tree: The Moringa. "It strengthens the immune system", she explains in a statement translated to this writer, "It purifies water and is called 'mother's best friend' for very good reason". "Even during the dry season, the Moringa still has green leaves"; she commends her favourite tree, which is eaten as a healthy vegetable. From root to crown, every part of the Moringa is used: Leaves, seeds, blossom. "This tree is a true benefactor!"

For a long time, Salamatu's knowledge of plants and healing has been viewed by academic practitioners in a rather condescending way.

"Healing was somehow out", remembers Faiza Taimako, one of Salamatu's children who will follow in her mother's footsteps.

The neglected and gradually eradicated medicinal plants and the spread of academic medicine were a crisis for the knowledge of traditional healers.

Yet, in the meantime, things have advanced. A while ago, the traditional healers founded an association of which Salamatu Taimako is member. She has been working side by side for many years with some physicians and with no reservations on either side, as she emphasizes.

It is really not surprising, for over the years, her profound work has been acknowledged by far more than her patients. The ministries of Health and Agriculture have honoured her with medals over the years.

In awarding her an honorary Doctorate Degree five years ago, the University for Development Studies (DDS) praised her as an "eminent indigenous knowledge practitioner, environmentalist and illustrious entrepreneur". This makes her the "friend of the poor and marginalized rural population", it continues, a "role model".

Source: Daily Guide

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