

MESSAGE AT NATIONAL DIALOGUE ON RETHINKING NATURAL MEDICINE IN NIGERIA 9-9-24

Hon'ble Minister of Innovation, Science and Technology, Traditional Ruler, DG, NNMDA, Distinguished guests both from Nigeria and abroad, Ladies and Gentlemen.

It gives me great pleasure to be a part on the discussion on "Re-Thinking Natural Medicine in Nigeria" being organized by Nigeria Natural Medicine Development Agency (NNMDA).

In today's world, affordable healthcare for populous countries like India and Nigeria, is a goal that we are diligently trying to pursue. This is marred by rising costs, pandemics, control of the manufacturing knowhow by technology owning countries. We are aware of the issues related to vaccine hoarding and shortage of medicines and APIs during the COVID pandemic. India was an exception in sharing more than 218 million vaccines during the Pandemic free of charge, including to Nigeria. The world has come out of the pandemic with revised goals and agendas in healthcare where every country is prospecting self-sufficiency in the matters of affordable healthcare and easy availability of medicines. However, these the processes and systems need time and resources to be put in place.

This gap in the healthcare is being bridged by Government of India though its two flagship schemes "Ayushman Bharat" and "PMBJP". Combined together, they intend to provide universal healthcare to all Indians and at the same time, bring the cost of treatment by producing generic medicines locally. You would be happy to know that during the Joint Trade Committee Meeting which was held on 29 April 2024, Government of India has offered cooperation in these two areas, besides others, to the Federal Government of Nigeria, so as to bring affordable healthcare and affordable medicines to all.

At the same time, I would like to inform the gathering about the robust alternative medicine systems Ayurveda, Unani, Siddha and Homoeopathy which complement the original healthcare system and which are being actively promoted by Government of India for providing preventive healthcare to all. Government of India has set up a separate Ministry called AYUSH to work on traditional medicine syste. The tradition of using natural products for their medicinal values is not just a medical system but a manifestation of our symbiotic relationship with nature. The Indian traditional medicine systems are a well-documented system of healthcare, wherein prevention of disease and promotion of health are both given due consideration. To give two examples, the

treatment of COVID effectively and predominantly included the well known traditional methods of boosting immunity. Similarly, the method of Rhinoplasty, even today, follows the same technique that the father of Ayurveda, Sushuruta developed in 600 BCE. Modern medicine is like “intelligence” with lots of support, equipment and aides, while traditional medicine is like “wisdom”, which inspite of the fact that the knowledge passed down through generations have efficacy, needs to be validated using modern techniques in a normative manner for general acceptability. It is for us to bring to the modern world the best practices and effective treatment methodologies of ancient traditional medical practice and validate them through scientific means to gain more acceptance in today’s world. India is actively undertaking this job.

The Nigerian Traditional Medicine system has an equally strong tradition and plays an important role in the Nigerian healthcare. Nigerian Authorities, NNMDA included, are exploring the options for further popularising this system through scientific re-verification and incorporation in the healthcare routines. I believe that both our countries can come together to synergize and to learn from each other. The cooperation between India and Nigeria in the field of traditional medicine goes long back, which has emphasized interaction, cooperation and training. Hon’ble DG of NNMDA himself has been a beneficiary of the C V Raman Scholarship provided by Government of India.

I would also like to inform the gathering that India and Nigeria are in the process of finalizing a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) for collaboration in the field of traditional medicine for mutual recognition of Herbal Pharmacopoeia, establishment of traditional medicine Research and Health Centers. It would be beneficial for both the sides if this MOU could be concluded early to serve our respective populations, and all others, through the knowledge that has accrued over thousands of years.

Once again, I convey my congratulations to NNMDA for initiating the discussion on “Re-Thinking Natural Medicine in Nigeria”, the outcome of which, I am confident, will provide the roadmap for further development of the traditional medicine system of Nigeria, which, in turn, will enable Federal Government of Nigeria to achieve the target of providing universal and affordable healthcare to all.

My good wishes and regards to all present. Thank you.

G. Balasubramanian