

# **Brewing of Indigenous Alcoholic Beverage (Burukutu) And Economic Development In Makurdi LGA Since 1976**

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## **ABSTRACT**

**T**raditional alcoholic beverage has occupied a large space in the socio-cultural history of the People of Benue State dating back to pre-colonial period. The survival of this industry in this area is however linked to the activities of women custodians. This study examined the role of Women to the survival of *Burukutu* industry in Makurdi LGA of Benue State. The idea for the study originates from the desire to understand the role of Women to the continued existence of *Burukutu* in modern Makurdi LGA alongside different brands of modern beer. The study adopted the multi-disciplinary and qualitative methodology based on the use of primary and secondary sources of data for its analysis. The study established that amongst the Tiv, *Burukutu* has occupied a central position in the social and cultural make of the people since pre-colonial era. Apart from being used as an element for the expression of greatness and prestige amongst the Tiv, certain festivals and rituals such as initiation into *kwav*

and cultic institutions like *biamegh* were carried out with the use of *burukutu*. The colonial period however threatened the existence of *burukutu* due to the British abrupt deployment of policies such as the 1917 Native Liquor Ordinance. The rising level of nationalism and the activities of war veterans in Makurdi in the closing days of colonialism however re-awakened the demand and consumption of *burukutu* up to the post colonial era. Many factors encouraged the demand and production of *burukutu* in the post independence era in Makurdi. The socio-political unrest experienced in Tivland in the early years of Independence pushed many people to urban areas like Makurdi who depended on local foods and drinks for survival. The civil war periods and the state creation equally gave a major impetus to *burukutu* production and consumption. In modern times, economic changes and inflation of modern beer have provided a fertile ground for *burukutu* brewers who are making brisk business in Makurdi since the creation of Benue State in 1976. Women have effectively and efficiently employed their enterprising skills and knowledge to exploit the potentials that exists in this local alcoholic processing venture through which it has continued to exist. These women are however constrained with the existence of economic, political and cultural barriers such as government policies and cultural belief systems. The study recommends that government and NGO intervention programs such as loans and grants should target women local beer brewers.

**Key words:** *Burukutu, Economic Development, Women.*

## **Introduction**

Women all over the world are believed to be involved in various agricultural activities, particularly in the areas of food crop production, food processing and marketing. These activities are a measure of women's contributions to economic growth and national development from their respective regions. In Nigeria,

women have demonstrated their capacity in contributing to socio-economic development through different productive ventures such as in agriculture, food processing and in trade. This women contribution to economic growth and development is significant in addressing common challenges of hunger, poverty and the existence of indigenous knowledge systems<sup>1</sup>.

Amongst the Tiv of Central Nigeria, women contribution is evident in the continued survival of many industries such as pottery and alcoholic beverage drink or what many refers to as the traditional beer industry. As noted by Dzeka and Hanior<sup>2</sup>, the role and relevance of women in the indigenous system in Tivland in historical terms cannot be overemphasize with regards to the continued existence of traditional drinks and condiments. If not for women, Brewing of *Burukutu* should have long gone extinct.

This paper examines the role of women in the continued existence of traditional alcoholic beverage (*Burukutu*) in Tivland with particular focus on Makurdi LGA since 1976. The study also interrogate the impact and opportunities brewing and marketing of *Burukutu* has created for women dealers on one hand and its contribution to socio-economic growth in Makurdi LGA.

### **Conceptual Clarifications**

**Burukutu:** This is an alcoholic beverage brewed from the grains of guinea corn and millet. It is the most populous beer in tropical African countries like Nigeria, Togo, Kenya, Ethiopia and Burundi<sup>3</sup>. It was a major alcoholic drink in the Traditional Tiv society that plays both cultural, health and economic roles<sup>4</sup>.

**Economic Development:** This refers to the process of improving the living standard of a people due to a combination of improved infrastructure and economic empowerment. Economic development according to prof Meier and Baldwin refers to a process by which an

economy's real national income increases over a period of time<sup>5</sup>. From the perspective used in this study, economic development means the contribution that *burukutu* processing and marketing has made to the economic transformation of women and Makurdi LGA in general in areas of food and income generation, poverty reduction, revenue generation, trade expansion and the growth of markets<sup>6</sup> etc.

### **A Brief History of brewing amongst Women in Makurdi**

The History of traditional beverages amongst the Tiv has a long historic root dating back to pre-colonial period. The *burukutu* (*msoron*) played a highly significant role in both the social and ritual ecosystem of the Tiv. On the social aspect, festivals, rituals and any dance that was organized, *Msorom* (*burukutu*) was brewed to be drunk for the number of days the festival lasted. Another area where the Tiv utilized *burukutu* was when a household head asked his wife to brew the beverage for him and he invited his friends for a drink<sup>7</sup>. As Akiga<sup>8</sup> noted, the man and his friend will drink and got drunk and struck up a song, shouted praises in honour of the man who hosted them. *Burukutu* was used as an element of social prestige amongst the Tiv where men showed their status amongst their peers<sup>2</sup>. It also featured prominently when a new wife was married where the kinsmen of the bridegroom supplied drinks for the marriage feast (*kwase kuhwan*). Particularly amongst the Masev part of the Tiv, there was another type of relations known as *ikar I nyoron* that was very important to the group and *burukutu* festival was normally held as part of the characteristics of the event<sup>9</sup>.

*Msoron* (*Burukutu*) was very prominent in the area of age grades (*kwav*) initiations and even during regular meetings. Here, if a man needed support for any purpose, he called his *kwav* (age mates) to support or help him. The commonest way of doing this according to

Dzeka<sup>5</sup> was to call the age mates to a dance at which he supplied them a lot of *tashi* (*burukutu*) and meat with food (*ruam*) and each of the members attended alongside the support he affords. Kwav also held different feast amongst members of the same age agnate and common feature of the day was to drink *msorom* (beer) to stupor<sup>10</sup>.

Other avenues where the pre-colonial Tiv people utilized *burukutu* (*msorom*) significantly were at funeral ceremonies and rituals and other social activities of the people. *Burukutu* played an important role in the ritual constitution of *akombo biam*, *biamegh* and *poor biam* which were traditional rituals that featured prominently in the Tiv socio-cultural world. Traditional alcoholic beverage also played a significant role in crop fertility and during group hunting games. At planting times, crops of all kinds were taken and placed near the *ilyum* (a cult responsible for crops) stones. The head of sorghum was cut and *burukutu* was poured over the *ilyum* stones and other the crops. This act was called *akombo a yia* (cult of crops). The centrality of *Burukutu* in Tivland manifested in the relevance of local drinks (*msoron*) in most traditional events and rituals of the people<sup>11</sup>.

However, it is imperative to note that the traditional alcoholic drink came under serious attack from the colonial institution through policy promulgations. Brewing and consumption of any traditional drink was abruptly abrogated by the colonialists when they had consolidated their authority in Tivland. Two laws were enacted to checkmate the production, distribution and consumption of locally produced alcoholic drink. The first law the Native Liquor Ordinance (NLO) which sought the control of Manufacturing as well as movement, and consumption beer in Northern Nigeria<sup>12</sup>. The Secretary, Northern Province sent a memo to the Resident of Benue province relying on Articles 2 and 3 of the Order in Council No 18 of 1917 Laws, Vol III, page 551 emphasizing that;

No person shall by himself or by anyone in his service manufacture or sell Native liquor—unless he shall first have obtained a license to manufacture or sell from the Native Authority. Any persons other than one duly licensed who is found in possession of Native liquor—shall be guilty of an offence against these rules<sup>13</sup>.

The letter adds that the holder of any license to sell liquor who;

- a) Permits drunkenness to take place on his premises;
- b) Sells native liquor to any person already in a state of intoxication or by any means encourages or incites any person to drink native liquor shall be guilty of an offence against these rules<sup>14</sup>.

It equally specified the penalty to be melted for the contravention of the above rules which was that;

Any person who contravenes or fails to comply with any of the above provisions of these rules shall be guilty of an offence and shall be liable to a fine not exceeding twenty five pounds or to imprisonment not exceeding six months or both such imprison and fine<sup>15</sup>.

This was the problem that confronted *burukutu* and other traditional drinks in Tivland during the colonial era given the position of the drink in the traditional Tiv society.

Women who were the custodians of *burukutu* were also later banned from social interaction, an avenue through which brewers had utilized to gather resources for brewing. It was a practice amongst the women of particularly Northern Ihyarev to converge on occasional basis to pull resources together for self help purposes to enable them process local beer and other condiments.

During these meetings, as Dzeka<sup>16</sup> explained, *burukutu* was brewed and drunk amongst members. This was a women's self help association and men were banned from attending such meetings. The British under the acting Resident of Benue Province, D.F.H Macbride, however sent letters in 1918 to Lafia, Tiv, Wukari and Idoma Divisions and declared such associations offensive and illegal. This development also affected Ihyarev women who were the main custodians of *Burukutu* in Tivland<sup>17</sup>.

With major changes initiated and implemented in Tivland, the Tiv people's old ways of life were gradually going extinct while the capitalist system being planted. Akiga lamented this development when he stated that;

for everything that belongs to the Tiv is passing away and the old people who should tell us about these things will soon be dead. it makes me sad to think that our heritage is being lost<sup>18</sup>---

The implication of all these to the indigenous knowledge of alcoholic beverages processing was that it became unavailable and underrated. Even when it later came back to life, the original relevance attached to *burukutu* due to its ritual and festive value was now completely lost on two grounds; the introduction of Christianity and the under-value of traditional ways of living in the name of modernity<sup>19</sup>.

Change in favour of *burukutu* and women custodians however came towards the closing days of colonialism. Returning war veterans gave *burukutu* consumption a boost due to a number of factors. Apart from the fact they possessed the high purchasing power, the war veterans were determined to uproot any element of the western culture in Nigeria as a way of protesting against colonialism and a demand for their freedom<sup>20</sup>.

In Makurdi, such war veteran returnees included but not limited to Gyuse Doki, Emberga Asamu, Bibi Angyo, Tse Zuul Ityungu all from Ipusu. Others were Ihundu Nongwa from Masev, Kwaghkar Korny and Chinyan Kperan from Tyoshin, as well as a Fulani man by name Alhaji Ali and Mr. Abadgu, a teacher and Makondu who later became the first indigenouse chief<sup>21</sup>. The large populations of these ex-service men were Tiv, many of whom spent all they gathered as veterans on drinks in Makurdi. As oral evidence has shown, such Tiv war veterans were doing nothing in Makurdi except patronizing *Burukutu* houses and feeling too proud to engage in the work of evacuating and loading bags of grains at the river side for the Royal Nigeria Company. The increasing population of war veterans and colonial agents in Makurdi created a lucrative market for women who brewed *Burukutu*. They made brisk business to a point that some of them like Pauline Anyebe built a corrugated zinc house from the proceeds of *Burukutu* commercialization. The period of the civil war (1967-1970) also created a lucrative market for brewers in Makurdi<sup>22</sup>.

### **The period 1976-2022**

Following the creation of Benue in 1976 by the Murtala Muhammed regime as a standalone state from the hitherto Benue/Plateau, major women brewers of Benue origin who had stayed and brewed alcoholic beverages in Jos some of whom were wives of military officers of Tiv and Idoma origins, had to come back to Makurdi. There was also increasing rural urban drift to Makurdi to exploit the emerging job and business environment of the new State Capital. The concentration of population in Makurdi provided an ample market opportunity for brewers of alcoholic beverages. The movement of people of other ethnic groups such as Hausa and Igbo during this time to urban centers in Tivland further consolidated the population growth of Makurdi and that provided an

astronomical increase in the demand for traditional beverages during this time<sup>23</sup>.

There is currently a growing obsession with Burukutu amongst all the classes of people both men and women in Makurdi. Before now, Peter Duru<sup>24</sup> revealed that the consumption of burukutu was associated with the poor and old on the streets of Makurdi, but all that has changed since 2010. Burukutu in Makurdi has become the choice drink particularly amongst those who before now were addicted to consumption of foreign processed beer of all brands (gulder, More, Star, 33, etc). According to Akase<sup>25</sup> burukutu is gradually taking over the place of modern beer due to its health and economic potentials. Many due to their love for the drink have coined different names based on the joints that they patronized and go a step further to form social clubs such as *burukutu* joints club, *ahua pure* club<sup>26</sup> etc.

The renewed interest and increase in patronage for burukutu has seen local brewers smiling to the banks with their financial status greatly being improved. This renewed interests and patronage to *Burukutu* has been attributed to its affordability and health benefits as compared to modern beer given the sharp rise in the cost of a bottle of beer which now goes for between N400 – N700 Per one bottle unlike BKT which goes for as low as N600 and N700 for a four liter bucket and as low as N50 and N100 per calabash<sup>27</sup>. There is still more to burukutu; it has been argued to be beneficial health wise. Achusal maintained that Burukutu gives you more blood in the body and controls your blood pressure among many other benefits in the body<sup>28</sup>.

The above factors analyzed revealed how women adopted to different historical phases and changes to ensure the survival and continuity of the Burukutu processing and sell in Makurdi. It has revealed the factors that have continued to provide the support system for the development of traditional alcoholic beverages and other non-alcoholic foods of Tiv traditional origins in the world

of modernity in Makurdi, the Benue State metropolitan capital. Burukutu has remained a major aspect of women entrepreneurship development in Makurdi LGA as evident in the existence of drinking joints at strategic areas in every market today and other busy areas in Makurdi LGA.

### **ECONOMIC IMPACT OF BREWING *BURUKUTU* ON WOMEN IN MAKURDI LOCAL GOVERNMENT AREA SINCE 1976.**

To appreciate the economic impact of *Burukutu* on women, it is important to investigate how these women have engaged in this trade as a means to explore their entrepreneurial quest, which constitutes a very vital component of human resources in development of various facets of individual livelihood and by extension the society in general. The survey and oral expositions shows that *Burukutu* houses have created locations and venue where people meet to drink and relax. As people patronize these places, the women are involved in commercial activities directly and indirectly which becomes a source of income and funds to develop and contribute to their families' welfare.<sup>29</sup> This position was asserted by Agbalun Awuan:

I have worked in different *Burukutu* houses and I have paid my sons school fees to the university level and more so now, I own my personal *Burukutu* houses.<sup>30</sup>

In similar experience in view to another economic benefit Rose Agula explained that:

I feed my family from this business and much more, I help my husband in taking care of the children school needs and many things in the house.<sup>31</sup>

This is a practical illustration of the Marxist Feminism aspect of labour in a capitalist economic system which is namely productive labour. These women are involved in productive labour which is considered as the efforts or work directed toward services and goods that have monetary value of compensation hence, the producers of

the goods and services are paid or rewarded for their labour.<sup>32</sup>

Through the *buruku* houses, several women have attained their financial and they have contributed to the wellbeing of their households by paying children school fees even up to advanced level thereby giving the next generation a better leap for economic opportunity. Wan kwem asserts that;

I have worked in *Burukutu* business for more than ten years. It has been my major source of income. The guinea corn is also used for food. I have paid my children's school fees from this business and most importantly, I take care of my children's health issues from this business and to be truthful, when I take it, I forget my worries and my sorrows. It serves as a source of comfort.<sup>33</sup>

Another *Burukutu* entrepreneur, Mrs Shagba explained that:

I have inherited brewing from my mother. I have successfully used the trade to help my family. I have bought land and built a house from the earnings from the business. I have also trained many others especially my children in the trade. This is a good source of livelihood.<sup>34</sup>

The views expressed shows that *Burukutu* production and sale has contributed enormously to the economic improvement of these women entrepreneur such that it created an avenue to employ many more women. It has reduced the level of women over reliance on the male partners as a source of livelihood.

Baba kucha Utebe<sup>34</sup> asserted that Tyungu Tse Zugh's compound, a house which was known for its quality production of *Burukutu* and still is, created the Wurukum market that is functional today. *Burukutu* sale and fish trade in the house expanded to the market we have today<sup>19</sup>. This implies that women *Burukutu* brewing skills directly or indirectly can be said aided in the development of Wurukum market which has greatly

contributed in developing other women entrepreneurs with a vast array of skills and trade.

According to Zaki Tile Chagu, *Burukutu* is an ethnic invention conserved by women from generation to generation which has also given women value in the sight of their husbands.<sup>20</sup> A woman's contribution especially economically makes her valuable. Her entrepreneurial skill as a woman gains the trust of her husband. Her creativity and economic innovation develops the confidence imposed in her personality. Her husband is respected at the city gate, where he takes seat among the elders of the land.<sup>35</sup>

According to Talatu Danger:

*Burukutu* has given me a source of income to help my family. I earn money from this trade to contribute in financing the tuition and fees of my four children in college.<sup>36</sup>

Another *Burukutu* entrepreneur, Agbadam Ehase, explained that;

I have three children and two in primary school and this trade and skills in production of *Burukutu* is my source of support to the needs of my children as well as my husband. My contributions in supporting my family through this trade cannot be taken for granted by my husband. He appreciates my contribution.<sup>37</sup>

Yet another *Burukutu* entrepreneur, Omata Izegwa, elaborates.

Brewing of *Burukutu* has given me an employment. I do not need to wait on government every month for salary. I create my salary and also contribute to making people happy as they gather to enjoy our creativity and food. This trade has been helping me to cater for my children and also provide for the needs of one in primary school.<sup>38</sup>

These views expressed show that brewing and sale of *Burukutu* has a tremendous positive impact on the economic development of these women. This means that

there are potentials and numerous inherent capabilities in this *Burukutu* entrepreneurial venture since Benue State was created in 1976. These perspectives also reflect that as far as *Burukutu* business is concerned the women's position in nurturing and conserving *Burukutu* indigenous knowledge has an ability to provide wealth and a sustainable income. This process of earning money in a productive manner is a positive economic developmental step for women in Makurdi Local Government Area.

### **CHALLENGES OF BREWING *BURUKUTU* BY WOMEN IN MAKURDI LOCAL GOVERNMENT AREA**

Inasmuch as there are positive effects of brewing *Burukutu* by women in Makurdi Local Government Area, there are inherent challenges that cannot be easily wished away if logical and sensible conclusion could be made from the entrepreneurial venture and application of indigenous knowledge in the process.

There are common challenges that women in *Burukutu* entrepreneurial exploitation face which are generally societal inclined, such as the cultural view of women position in a society of a developing nature. The religious dogmatism and fanaticism is another problem that cannot be ignored. There are economically inclined obstacles that are common to women in business which is particularly perceived to be promoted by typical African perception of women struggle to achieve economic independence. This is engraved in such statement below, which is specific to an ethnic group but generally alleged to be applicable to a vast majority of African cultures.

Women are created for man. They are made to satisfy man in every way. The success of a woman is seen in how well she is able to take care of her man. Also, a woman is one who speaks only when asked to.<sup>39</sup>

The above is a cultural dogmatic inclination. Women have to struggle and battle through such ideas to have time and improve themselves and business. This is a

battle to release self from impoverishment, inferior status in the family and locality. Therefore businesses like *Burukutu* production and sales is a total rebellion against supposed normal nature of total submission to only a man's desire to totally control a woman's whole life for his personal parochial satisfaction thereby restricting women to only reproductive labour and production. It also serves as a strong avenue for criticism against men who have allowed their women to venture into such aspect of entrepreneurship. This disparagement is capable of breeding insecurity in such men resulting in distortion of their mental health which can negatively impact on family relation, trust, name and growth.

The poor economic situation of women generally is a challenge. This is because starting a business involves cost. Therefore, without minimal financial ability, it is impossible to start.. In Nigeria, women are predominantly among the poor and they are more in the rural areas.<sup>40</sup> The lack of funds to develop business and increase market share by women is the challenge most women face in the *Burukutu* trade. Ashi Yamen shared her, experience and that of many women like her

To start this business, some women borrow millet, firewood and they venture into production. It takes courage and faith to do this. They produce and sell then pay back their creditors and women that helped them in the process. *Burukutu* is about cooperation among women since it takes a united front to prepare it.<sup>41</sup>

The social challenge of interaction with drunken males who are capable of sexually harassing those women entrepreneurs is a potential challenge that cannot be ruled out. The danger of physical assault and fight by drunken people is obvious. The issue of aggressive wooing by both rich and poor drunks is a huge temptation to the women so much that it challenges the wisdom of husbands allowing their wives to engage in this type of trade. As

Wombo suggested in her article the role of women in development of small scale business in Benue State Nigeria, which states thus;

The female path to entrepreneurship is reflection of women's frustrations encountered at the domestic front, cultural pressures and expectations to maintain sexual piety, as well as sound moral reputation which are brought to bear on women.<sup>42</sup>

The challenge of balancing market forces to get even and make a profit is tough because the cost of grains may increase rapidly due to environmental factors but the price of a calabash of *Burukutu* may have to remain the same. The labour issues and how to classify the wages of labour and cost of material input makes it confusing and frustrating. This issue as observed by Rose suggests that; "One must have cooperation from our fellow women to make quality *Burukutu*. It is about togetherness that *Burukutu* is produced. It is all about unity"<sup>43</sup>

The ability to balance family life and *Burukutu* business is a tricky path that requires strategic planning since every woman becomes a house manager by default. And the various roles she has to play are so involving. It is a challenge to spare time to run her business given the intensive nature of *Burukutu* processing and production. The cooperation among these women is essential to their individual and collective success in each and every *Burukutu* consumption point of sale<sup>44</sup>.

## CONCLUSION

The brewing of *Burukutu* by women in Makurdi Local Government Area since 1976 logically and symmetrically illuminates the fact that the application of indigenous knowledge by women has clear economic impacts. These are largely positive even though with some array of challenges which are insignificant to the progressive impact on their economic development and contributions

to their family development and survival. It also points to the fact that there are great potentials inherent in *Burukutu* enterprise. This is because it provides employment to many women, feeds many homes, provide funds for school fees, increase family harmony and cooperation among couples toward their wellbeing and most importantly help develop a cooperative spirit among women as they build personal self worth, and financial independence. The need for unity, respect, trust and understanding among both women and their husbands, and also among women themselves as they plough their trade is very important. The link between entrepreneurial capacity of women brewing *Burukutu* and their economic development is seen to be positive and also significant in Makurdi Local Government Area of Benue State.

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