



GOA Community Services – View Me (GOA CS-VM)

THE RISING DANGER IN NIGERIA'S FOOD CULTURE

Health Article

Author: GOA Community Services Science Research Institute

Date: 12/3/2025

An official resource prepared by GOA Community Services – View Me (GOA CS-VM)

The Chemical Fermentation of Cassava for Fufu (Akpu)**

A Scientific Report from the GOA Community Services Science Research Institute (GCESSRI)

Introduction

Across many communities in Nigeria GCESSRI discovered fufu (akpu) remains a cherished staple — a food deeply rooted in tradition, family, and culture. Traditionally, its preparation involves natural fermentation of cassava in clean water for several days until it softens, breaks down, and becomes ready for processing.

But today, a shocking and dangerous trend is emerging.

In markets and food-processing areas across the country, some vendors have begun adding detergents, bleaching agents, strong alkalis, and other industrial chemicals to speed up cassava fermentation. This practice is not only illegal but also life-threatening.

GOA Community Services Science Research Institute (GCESSRI) has conducted a detailed analysis to address:

What actually happens when detergent or chemicals are used in cassava fermentation

The toxic compounds present in such chemically processed fufu

The potential short-term and long-term health effects

How the public can protect themselves from this rising food corruption

This article serves as a scientific alert — a call to defend public health from the greed of vendors who value profit more than human life.

1. WHAT DETACHES TRADITIONAL FUFU FROM MODERN CHEMICALLY-PROCESSED FUFU

Traditional Fermentation

Proper fufu preparation involves:

Peeling fresh cassava

Soaking it in clean water only

Allowing natural bacteria to break down the starch

Producing lactic acid that gives fufu its flavour and aroma

Softening the cassava without chemical contamination

This process is safe, natural, and aligns with human digestive physiology.

Chemical Fermentation (The Dangerous Shortcut)

Some vendors now add:

Detergents

Liquid soap

Bleaching powders

Industrial caustics

Metal-based whiteners

They use these to:

Soften cassava quickly

Whiten it unnaturally

Produce a smoother texture

Shorten production time from days to hours

But these substances were never intended for human consumption.

2. WHAT HAPPENS TO THE FOOD WHEN DETERGENT IS ADDED

When detergent or industrial chemicals enter cassava fermentation:

Surfactants break down cell walls too aggressively

Synthetic perfumes bind to cassava starch granules

Phosphates and sulfates remain trapped inside the food

Bleaching agents act on natural cyanide compounds, altering their chemical structure

Heavy metals present in some detergents accumulate in the soaked cassava

These chemicals do not disappear after washing or cooking — they bind to the starch.

Thus, people end up eating more than fufu...

They are eating industrial waste residues.

3. HEALTH EFFECTS OF CHEMICALLY-PROCESSED FUFU

A. Immediate Dangers

Stomach pain and irritation

Vomiting

Diarrhoea

Mouth and throat burns

Headache

Allergic reactions

Sudden weakness after eating

These symptoms often go undiagnosed because victims assume it's "normal stomach upset."

B. Long-Term Damage

Continuous consumption leads to:

1. Liver Damage

Detergent chemicals are metabolised in the liver. Over time, they cause:

Liver inflammation

Fatty liver changes

Toxin buildup

Possible liver failure

2. Kidney Breakdown

The kidneys struggle to filter synthetic chemicals and heavy metals absorbed into the cassava.

3. Cancer Risk

Some detergent compounds such as:

Linear Alkylbenzene Sulfonates (LAS)

Optical brighteners

Formaldehyde traces in bleaching agents

...are classified as possible carcinogens.

4. Nervous System Damage

Metal-based whiteners and bleaching chemicals can cause:

Tremors

Numbness

Neurological decline over time

5. Reproductive Problems

Chronic exposure to these chemicals may cause:

Hormonal imbalance

Infertility

Pregnancy complications

4. WHY VENDORS DO IT: THE GREED-FUELED CORRUPTION

Unscrupulous food vendors use chemicals because:

It cuts fermentation time from 3–5 days to 6–12 hours

It produces whiter, smoother fufu

It attracts more buyers

It increases profit

But the cost is your health.

And sometimes — your life.

No culture should be preserved at the expense of human safety.

5. HOW TO PROTECT YOURSELF AND YOUR FAMILY

A. Buy Cassava and Process at Home

If possible:

Buy raw cassava

Peel it yourself

Ferment using only clean water

This is the safest option.

B. Buy From Trusted Vendors

Look for vendors who:

Ferment cassava in transparent, clean containers

Do not hide their production process

Are willing to show the soaking area

Avoid vendors with:

Uncertain, hidden, or dirty fermentation environments

Suspiciously white or overly soft fufu

A strong perfume or chemical smell

C. Know the Warning Signs of “Chemical Fufu”

Too white

Too smooth

Ferments unnaturally fast

Has a chemical scent

Unusual burning sensation in the mouth

Leaves soap-like residue on plate or hand

D. Demand Change

Educate family members

Share health information

Report factories using detergent

Public awareness is the first step toward food safety reform.

6. CONCLUSION: WE MUST DEFEND THE FUTURE OF OUR FOOD

The fermentation of cassava with detergent, soap, or chemicals is a silent public health crisis. What people eat daily is being corrupted by greed, ignorance, and exploitation. Nigeria has a rich food culture, but that culture must remain healthy, safe, and respected.

The GOA Community Services Science Research Institute GOA CS-VM Health Education will continue monitoring this dangerous trend and publishing evidence-based reports to protect public health.

Food must nourish — never poison.

And no vendor has the right to compromise the health of a nation for quick profit.

Prepared and presented by GOA Community Services – View Me (GOA CS-VM)