

life & living



For lovers of Abacha, it is 'till death do us part'

Abacha is a popular delicacy in the South-East area of the country, but recently six people died in Lagos State after eating it. JUDE OSSAI and CHUKWUMA OKPARAOCHA report that despite this tragic event, lover of Abacha are far from dumping their favourite food.

PENULTIMATE Thursday, six people were reported to have died in Isolo area of Lagos State, while about three dozen others were hospitalised. Initially it was said to be a case of diarrhea and cholera until it was discovered to be an outbreak traced to a popular delicacy called Abacha, a delicacy popular in the South eastern part of the country and in Isolo area of the state.

Commonly called African salad, Abacha is prepared from dried, shredded and fermented cassava, leaves of garden egg, stockfish, castor bean, palm oil and local spices.

Although I was not clear how the food became a delicacy, reports said it became common during the Nigeria civil war when food became very scarce and people had to make do with available food crop remnants such as cassava to sustain them in the war period and the resultant famine.

After the end of the war, Abacha became popular as many people within and beyond the East began to eat it with relish. Some even began to spice it up to make it appealing to a wider number of people.

In Lagos, Abacha joints dot many areas of the city, especially areas populated by people from the South East. Sunday Tribune visited one of such abacha joints in Cele-Ilasa area of Okota last the week to find out if people were

still eating the meal and to the surprise of the reporter, many customers were busy snacking on abacha.

From their responses, the report of the casualty recorded of people said to have eaten abacha had done little to dissuade lovers of the delicacy from further eating it.

According to one of them, Chidi, a day without abacha is not complete for him. "I am Igbo and you must have noticed our love for the meal. The deaths recorded from contami-

nated abacha is rather unfortunate, but that doesn't mean the food should be seen as bad or unhealthy. Cholera could break out from anything; today it might be abacha, tomorrow, it could come from another food.

"I have been eating it for over 15 years and I have never fallen sick for a day. I can't therefore, be discouraged by what has happened because I like the food. I know where I eat it and I am careful not to eat it just anywhere," he said.

SAanother resident of the area, Mrs Rachael Odika, said it was wrong for anyone to vilify the food, saying rather than see abacha as evil, non-lovers of the delicacy should find out why it had resulted in deaths.

"Abacha is one of the best meals anyone could eat. I love it and I am an expert in preparing it. But instead of criminalising it, as its already being done in some quarters, I think people, including the government, should investigate what has happened. In my opinion, I think it has to do with poor hygiene on the part of those that prepared the bad abacha that cause the cholera problem. This is so because the food does not require any

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