



BUSINESS CASE • NIGERIA

Kunun zaki: A journey across generations

Mary Magaji, Community Entrepreneur



Brief overview of the traditional fermented drink

Kunun zaki is a popular non-alcoholic cereal drink that is consumed in northern Nigeria. It serves as breakfast, appetizer, medicinal remedy, and is also consumed during social gatherings. The cereals used are millet, sorghum, and maize in decreasing order of preference.

Meaning “sweet beverage” in the Hausa language, kunun zaki is valued for its refreshing, mildly sweet-and-sour flavor, creamy appearance and nutritional value. It can be enhanced with spices such as ginger, pepper, cloves, and garlic, and enriched with ingredients like tiger nuts or peanuts, then naturally sweetened with sweet potato, sugar or honey.



The drink holds cultural, nutritional, and therapeutic significance. Commonly served at traditional ceremonies as an alternative to soft drinks, it also provides income opportunities and contributes to dietary diversity and food security. While consumed year-round, it is particularly popular during the dry season due to its thirst-quenching properties.

Deeply rooted in the traditions of rural Northern Nigeria, kunun zaki symbolises hospitality, togetherness, and warmth, playing a central role in family and community etiquette during social and cultural events. Its production is predominantly traditional and small-scale, typically carried out by women using simple household utensils, and it is widely sold in local markets, schools, car parks, and resorts.

Food Processor

Mary Magaji began her primary education in 1964 and completed it in 1971. She then proceeded to Women Teachers College (WTC), where she obtained her Grade II Teachers Certificate in 1975. Following this, she attended the College of Education, Minna, from 1976 to 1980, where she earned her National Certificate in Education (NCE). In 1980, Magaji enrolled at Ahmadu Bello University (ABU), in Zaria, to pursue a Bachelor of Arts in Education (English), which she completed in 1983.

In 1979, she was employed by the Ministry of Education as an English and Hausa teacher. She began learning to make kunun-zaki while in primary school, as the community in which she grew up was actively involved in its preparation. During her teaching career, she would prepare kunun-zaki for her colleagues for household use and special occasions; they would provide the ingredients, and she would make the drink free of charge.

After retiring from teaching in 2010, she continued producing kunun-zaki as an income-generating activity, primarily serving customers hosting celebrations and festivities. She now works closely with her daughter, who is engaged in the business of processing various foods and spices.





Value Chain

FARMERS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Carry out several essential tasks that span the entire process from cultivation to early-stage marketing. • Choose and use high-quality seeds, fertilisers and pesticides to enhance crop productivity. • Manage land preparation, sowing, crop maintenance and harvesting activities. • Post-harvest, the farmer typically undertakes drying, shelling and winnowing to prepare the crops for sale or storage. • Market the harvested products to traders or processors, or sell them directly in local marketplaces. • Engage regularly with suppliers of agricultural inputs, traders, cooperatives and processors to secure financing, inputs and access to markets.
TRANSPORTERS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Transport grains from the places where they are produced to storage locations, markets or processing plants. • They are responsible for the safe and efficient delivery of harvested grains to nearby storage facilities, collection points, warehouses or milling centres. • They act as intermediaries, connecting farmers, traders, processors and other stakeholders in the value chain, and facilitate the seamless movement of grains from farms to markets or processing units.
GRAIN TRADERS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Purchase maize directly from farmers and consolidate produce from various sources to create larger quantities suitable for trade. • Provide storage solutions to preserve the grains, aiding in supply management and minimising post-harvest losses, which can be affected by factors such as climate conditions, spoilage and conflict. • Some traders also carry out preliminary processing tasks, such as cleaning and sorting, to enhance the quality of the grains prior to sale.
PROCESSORS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Raw material preparation. • Sieving and filtration. • Quality control and flavouring. • Packaging and distribution.
MILLERS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Wet mills the soaked and fermented millet, along with spices, into a fine slurry. • This process breaks down the raw ingredients, releasing starches and other essential components that contribute to the distinctive texture and flavour of kunun-zaki. • Through effective milling, value is added by converting the materials into a form that is ready for fermentation and consumption.

Quote

” I started learning to make kunun zaki in primary school and continued during my teaching career. After retiring in 2010, I turned it into an income generating activity, serving customers at celebrations and festivities. I now work closely with my daughter, who processes various foods and spices. I enjoy learning every day and hope to grow my business into a recognised brand.



Gallery of Pictures

↓ Examples of harvesting, drying, storage, milling, fermenting, cooking, cooling and packing, as part of the process.

