

## PROFILE:

**Name:** Dr Ifeyinwa Laretta Ihonor

**Category:** Wellness

**Country:** UK

**Discipline:** Herbalist & Alternative Medicine Expert

**LinkedIn:** <https://www.linkedin.com/in/laretta-ihonor/>

**Instagram:** <https://www.instagram.com/8within/?hl=en>



## IN-TREND'S TAKE:

**Who?:** Ifeyinwa Laretta Ihonor, medical doctor turned alternative medicine expert and founder of cacao & plant medicine apothecary, 8 Within.

**What?:** Ceremonial-grade cacao, hand-blended with powerful mood-boosting plant extracts and unique herbal tinctures from ancient plant medicine.

**Why?:** 8 Within weaves a rich tapestry of cross-culturally sourced plant medicines and practices into its products and ethos. A next generation wellness offering that aims to expand consciousness and elevate the mind.

**Date of interview:** 05/06/24

## INTERVIEW:

**Please could you tell us more about your transition from traditional medicine to your current field?**

I come from a family of doctors so I dived into it, got my degree and started practicing general medicine in the hospital. I didn't enjoy it and ended up retraining to be a journalist then started working in health apps. I was a TV producer for a while then I was in fashion but in the background, alternative medicine has always been really something that I do myself.

I love the idea of biohacking. That's one thing I got from my medical degree: the body is fascinating. I always wanted to know how made me realize there's got to be a natural way to do that.

In more recent years, I started travelling a more and spending time in India, Nepal, Bali, Hawaii and Costa Rica. I was getting more exposure to different plant medicines and practitioners.

**What are some key countries using ancient remedies and medicines?**

South and Central America is where I started with cacao, which originates in Peru. There are lots of sacred traditions with the Mayans and the Aztecs. African culture is very rich. There are so many ingredients that people don't know and overlooked magical remedies that will transform you.

Wellness

Cacao

Ancient Medicine

Plant Medicine

South Pacific is another big area where traditional healing is respected. You have shamans who are heralded. They have very strong traditions of using not just natural medicine herbs, but the elements. They see all these elements as creators and sentient beings that are giving us so many gifts.

### **And in Africa, who are the leading countries for alternative medicine?**

South Africa has a lot of rich shamanic cultures. They do a lot with, we call them oneirogens, the dream substances. In Central African countries, they do a lot with stronger plant medicines like Iboga, which have a deep culture that's a part of them. In Kenya, I came across mukombero, an East African plant, and people were shocked I hadn't heard of it. In West Africa, every area has their own different types of plants that they work with. Essentially everyone is working with the same element, which is this spirit and this universal consciousness.

### **The growing trend of ceremonial grade cacao: can you tell us more about it and where you see it going?**

The thing that's special about cacao is the several different molecules. The key one is theobromine which is a stimulant like caffeine, but works in the opposite. Both make you alert, but caffeine increases cortisol and closes your blood vessels which puts you in this angry state and crosses into your brain very aggressively.

The theobromine in cacao opens the blood vessels, lowering your cortisol levels while providing energy because suddenly blood is flowing all over. That's why people say cacao causes their heart to open. They feel this surge because suddenly blood is pumping everywhere, but because your blood vessels are open, you are more receptive and relaxed, not stressed by caffeine.

Cacao also increases different hormones in your brain that help increase things like serotonin and dopamine. From my medical background, once I realize that theobromine opens the blood vessels and increases blood flow to the brain, I saw that using other plant medicines in it would just speed up their delivery to the brain. That's the kind of cacao I make, it's all enhanced cacao that's infused with different plant medicines that affect the way you feel in the moment.

### **How we can make it more sustainable, because cacao is really not from our country and there's a crisis at the moment?**

It's the chocolate companies that have started hoarding chocolate, which has driven the price of cacao up. And because farmers in places like Peru (where I source) are obviously trying to make money, they've seen that suddenly it's a sacred commodity and so everyone is putting up the prices. You can see ayahuasca ceremonies popping up everywhere, but cacao is more accessible.

A lot of the people running the cacao ceremonies aren't really aware of the true cultural use of it or the spiritual meaning. They can make money quickly because it's fashionable and people think they're going to be saved through cacao. I think the shortage is going to fix that issue where people are suddenly being priced out of the market and they can't afford to be using it in that way. It's more ceremonial that you are using it to commemorate something or to ask for something, because that's the point.