
The Place of Cultural Festivals in Meeting the Challenges of National Development in 21st Century in Nigeria: Ònúnú Festival in Nsukka - Ịdẹkẹ Igbo as a Focus

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ABSTRACT

The study explores the place of cultural festivals in meeting the challenges of national development in 21st century in Nigeria with particular focus on the ònúnú festival in Nsukka-Ideke Igbo in Enugu State, Nigeria. The paper argues that cultural festivals like ònúnú festival, occupy significance position in the socio-economic lives of the Nsukka people. The study is therefore, borne out of the conviction that repositioning certain Nigerian cultures like ònúnú festival will in no small measure help to surmount the challenges of national development in 21st century Nigeria. The central question this study addresses is therefore the extent to which cultural festival contribute to national development. The study adopts a descriptive survey method as research design and analyses its data descriptively. The study gathers the necessary information for the study through unstructured oral interview, personal observation and introspection. The findings of the study reveal that cultural festivals embrace a lot of the peoples' world view so much that, its place in understanding the culture and social life of a group cannot be over emphasized. For instance, family structure, belief patterns, political form, economic organisation, hospitality and recreational activities are all aspects of the peoples' culture embedded in the cultural festivals. The result of the study proves that socially, festivals accord people a nice forum for interaction and peaceful co-existence.

KEYWORDS: Cultural Festivals, Challenges, National Development, 21st Century and Nigeria

Introduction

A lot of countries in the world are faced with many challenges to their national development. These challenges have unpleasant consequences for their citizens, their neighbours, and the world at large. Nigeria is not an exception. Nigeria is faced with challenges to national development, many of which could be traced to such matters as religious, political, ethnic, regional, or national issues. At times, these challenges, like conflicts, menace the prolonged existence of the richly endowed multilingual, multi-ethnic, and multi-cultural nation of Nigeria and have greatly contributed negatively to its efforts to achieve lasting peace, development, and all-round progress (Eme, 2017). As a matter of fact, how to meet the challenges of national development in 21st century Nigeria has been a topical issue in recent times, as these challenges are all over the place around us and even within us. There are challenges such as bribery and corruption, poor leadership, unemployment, conflict resolution, insecurity, kidnapping, and poor infrastructural facilities, among others, in the family, at work, in religious and business places, in

villages, towns, and states, among various groups such as ethnic, linguistic, religious, cultural, and political groups. When these problems arise, the basic concern of every peace-loving person or group is looking for a way out of them or how to overcome them. As a result, Nigeria is, therefore, in urgent need of addressing and getting rid of these challenges to allow national development. As such, Nigeria as a nation should obtain or borrow a leaf from her different cultures to reap the maximal benefit of having varieties of culture or cultural diversity.

Culture refers to the people's way of life, which is learned by the members of society and transmitted from one generation to another. Tylor (1871) defines culture as that complex whole that includes knowledge, beliefs, arts, morals, laws, customs, and any other capacities and habits acquired by man as a member of society. Sanderson (1988), from a boundary perspective, asserts that culture is the totality of the ways characteristic of the members of a society, including tools, knowledge, and patterned ways of thinking and acting that are learned and shared, and not the direct product of biological inheritance. Emeana (2001) explains that culture is the totality of the way of life evolved by a people in their attempt to meet the challenges of living in their environment, which gives order and meaning to their social, political, economic, aesthetic, and religious norms and modes of organisation, thus distinguishing them from their neighbours. Also, Eme (2017), in her own contribution, avers that culture is the way of life of a people, which incorporates their world view in its entirety. In this study, we define culture as the way a community thinks and behaves, which is peculiar to them. In this study, we take Nigerian festivals to be festivals celebrated by Nigerians with a Nigerian audience in mind.

Festival, which is often marked as a total or national holiday, is an event ordinarily celebrated by a community, and focusing on some characteristic aspect of that community and its religion or cultures (*Wikipedia; the free encyclopedia*). Festivals often serve to fulfill specific communal purposes, especially, in regard to commemoration or thanksgiving. Food is such a vital resource that many festivals, are associated with harvest time. Religious commemoration and thanksgiving for good harvests are incorporated in the events that take place in autumn, such as ònúnú festival of Nsukka-Ideke Igbo and Halloween in the northern hemisphere (www.google.com/sea). From the available literature, there are more than 42,000 known major and minor festivals in the country, but the majority of them are specific to barangay (village) level (Picard, David, Robinson & Mike, 2006). However, in Ancient Greece and Rome, festivals such as the saturnalia were closely associated with social organization and political processes as well as religion (Rasmus, Iddeng & Jon, 2012). But in modern times, festivals could be attended by strangers such as tourists, who are attracted to some of the more eccentric or historical ones. Philippines is one good example of a modern society with a large number of festivals, as each day of the year has at least one specific celebration.

Ònúnú festival of arts and culture is a very significant and popular festival the people of Nsukka annually celebrate to pay homage to their ancestral mother-Nkwq, and in jubilation that the earth goddess has answered the prayers of the people in the atonement of sins of the people, and for a good farm yield. It is also a ritual, which involves men, women and children in worshipping the earth goddess Nkwq. This festival occupies a very high place in the social life of Nsukka people because, it is a period when sober reflection are made by the people over their past lives and preparations are made for tasks ahead.

However, there is no successful research work carried out without a deriving force. Going through the available literature in relation to the topic of this study, it is observed that adequate attention has not been given to this area of study cultural festivals, especially as it concerns their

place in meeting the challenges of national development in 21st century Nigeria. That is, how Nigerian cultural festivals can be harnessed to help in solving some of the problems militating her national development. Actually, some research works are found to have been carried out in related areas like traditional dance, new yam festivals, Omabe festival and so on, but their investigations are mostly based on the content, and the number of ways in which festival is interpreted in relation to its definition and preparation. The previous works on festival, neglected the functions of cultural festivals in its entirety, especially, as it concerns their place in meeting the challenges of national development, in favour of its content, the ways in which cultural content is interpreted in relation to its definition and mode of preparation.

Besides, many scholars have written on Igbo cultural festival as if it is a homogenous entity, without considering the differences. The study on cultural festivals have been really carried out by many scholars in Igbo, but much attention has not been given to ònúnú festival of art and culture in Nsukka-Ideke Igbo. Rather, their attention are focused on traditional festivals in other parts of Igbo land. Even some of the research works that have been carried out on ònúnú festival their investigations are mostly based on the content, why and how ònúnú festival is celebrated in relation to its significance to Nsukka people, ignoring how it could help in meeting some of the challenges of national development, its conflict with modern life, the factors, which brought these conflicts and also assessing the present and the future prospects of ònúnú festival. Hence, ònúnú festival has not been studied in its entirety, despite the fact that it can be readily harnessed for the surmounting of the challenges bedeviling the national development in Nigeria. Again, there is no recorded evidence or documentation to the researcher's best of knowledge to prove that ònúnú festival of art and culture has been fully studied. Therefore, the problem, which this study set out to address is to investigate how Nigerian cultural festivals, could be exploited in overcoming the challenges of national development of 21st century Nigeria, using ònúnú festival as a focus; its socio-economic importance in the lives of the Nsukka people and to assess its conflict with modern life and the factors, which brought these conflicts and also assess the present and the future prospects of ònúnú festival. Moreover, the present generation is to blame, if some of the vital aspects of our culture, for example, festivals are not documented for posterity, hence, the need for the present study on ònúnú festival.

Despite the above motivation, this study is borne out of conviction that Nigerian cultural festivals like ònúnú festival and the cultures of the various cultural group in Nigeria can be readily harnessed for the meeting of the challenges facing the national development of the country. We advocate that the Igbo and other Nigerians should rise to the challenge of looking inwards for the solution of the challenges of national development. This, they could do by employing all the solution strategies that abound in Nigerian cultural festivals.

This study does not claim to be first of its kind. A number of researchers have been carried out on ònúnú festival. Nonetheless, this inquiry is novel because, it is unaware of any research findings that have focused attention on how to employ the possible strategies of developing a nation that abound in Nigerian cultural festivals, in meeting the national development challenges.

Review of related literature

Among the Igbos of Nigeria, there is a wealth of cultural heritage manifested in ceremonies and a myriad of other social institutions. These cultural activities, according to Ogunbiyi (1981), contain the germs of rich poetry, excellent music, and lively drama, which have not been raised

above their traditional level. Festivals are social events that do not occur anyhow; they occur on certain occasions, and as societies develop, festivals become more elaborate, numerous, and stylized (Idowu, 1962). He also avers that festivals are occasions for rejoicing, thanksgiving, and communing with the divinities and their children; on the other hand, they are a period for the special renewal of covenants.

Festival is also viewed as that which constitutes symbolically a renewal of the past in the present, a way of recalling a community of men (Matraux, 1962). In other words, festivity is a human form of play through which a man appropriates an extended area of life, including the past, in his own experience. No wonder Obaweya (1985) avers that:

Festival is an aspect of Arts and culture. It is the festival in a community that goes on to portray the type of culture the people have. For instance, dressing – it is easy to recognize a Yoruba dress when put on by a man or woman. A Hausa man is easily identified in his dress too. You cannot miss an Igbo, Efik, Ijaw, or Edo on his customary dress. Similarly, the type of costumes dancers put on during festivals would show the type of culture people have. Hausa costumes during festivals differ from the ones obtained in Igboland. The dancing mood also differs. Moreover, the type of hair-do or hair styles obtainable in Igboland differ from that of a typical Yoruba or Hausa.

The above assertions seem to imply that festivals are inseparable from Arts and culture; hence, they are intertwined, intermingled, and dove-tailed. It is also gathered that the ways in which a group of people live, their beliefs, their religion, and what they make or create themselves for their use or enjoyment all come within what we describe as the culture of a people. Drawing upon the above assertions, culture is the sum total of the lives of people living in a particular area. These ways include their religions, art, language, literature, music, dances, dresses, technology, values, food, and customs. Arts, on the other hand, deal with carvings, drawing, and painting. People who belong to the same culture often have similar art forms. In Plateau State, for instance, we have the bronze carvings of the Edo people (<http://en.m.wikipedia.org/>). The traditional arts of Nigeria are kept alive by craftsmen whose works are respected and brought throughout the world. Craftsmen teach the younger ones, and the young ones develop the styles of their fathers and create works that are improvements and developments on their father's works (Ogunbiyi, 1981).

Mbiti (1975) asserts that African traditional festivals are important moments for sanctifying different rhythms of important moments in individual life and the community as a whole. Some of these moments, according to him, include birth, initiation, marriage, and funerals on the individual level, and harvest and planting festivals on the community level. Festivals, he claims, renew, unite, entertain, and sanctify different African communities. Therefore, traditional Africans derive great benefits from them.

Nwakoby (1986) says that festivals occur on various occasions, like when there is disharmony that may be latent but overtly manifested in the community. The manifestation could be an increase in incidents of death and sickness, which people rally around to restore normalcy. When this is achieved, the occasion will call for a festival. Also, some cases of spiritual disharmony may not be manifested by anticipation. If there is a feeling that the gods have not

been given thanks for favours bestowed on people or harvest seasons or thanked for the past season, it attracts festivals. There is a general feeling that a state of ritual disharmony is imminent or about to happen. These situations must be appeased through sacrifices, and by so doing, beliefs in them are reaffirmed. When conditions are fulfilled or the state of uncertainty is cleared, people rejoice and celebrate festivals. Social events like festivals occur and reoccur, not only because people use them as reasons or excuses to break away from their day-to-day duties but also because they fulfil certain needs of the society in question. Therefore, the essential functions of such events serve to justify their existence.

Building on Nwakoby (1986), a festival is looked upon as something organised around festive manifestations that fulfils the function of social and moral control as well as providing entertainment. These functions are essential because, without social or moral control, there could be no coherent social life (Beattie, 1964). Festive life perpetuates certain values of traditional society and even guarantees its survival. During the festivals, the traditional African society truly celebrated itself, its cohesiveness, and its belief systems (Eze, 1998).

Madueme (1978) examines what festivals are all about in Idemili. He sees them as socio-religious occasions when people gather together to make merry, give thanks to God, and the ancestors, kins and friends coming together to renew old acquaintances. Priests also abstain from certain activities during the festivals. Ozo (1988) investigates traditional festivals in Awka town and asserts that festivals in Awka town are periods—at a particular point in time—during which the community commemorates some important epoch in their lives. Ceremonies involve paying homage to the deities of the town through sacrifices, feasts, and some entertainments. Agwu (1984) examines festivals in Ariba and asserts that festivals are periods when all wrongs are corrected. He also said that sacrifices and dedications are offered to the ancestors to thank them and also seek their protection for the coming season.

Anigbo (1987) describes vividly some key festivals in Nsukka area, with particular reference to Ibagwa-Aka. These festivals are 'EgbaEzo', 'OnwaAsaa' and 'Omabe'. These festivals are occasions for mass return of kins, and political activities in which foods and drinks flow freely. In these festivals, the unity between God, the deities, spirits, ancestors and the people of Ibagwa are therefore great moments of commensality as Anigbo sees it. From the above, it is gathered that festivals are common to all hum societies, being the only means apart from worship, whereby a man has sought from time immemorial to express his awareness of transcendental being outside himself. 'Festival is also seen as organised around festive manifestations, which fulfill the functions of festivals social and moral control, as well as provide entertainment.

Every year the Nsukka people celebrate the New Yam Festival. This festival is in honour of the goddess of the earth who is believed to have made the soil fertile and, therefore, made yams big and plentiful. The Nsukka people call the goddess, 'fajoku' or 'Ala'. Obaweje (1985), says that the day before the festival, all the old yams are eaten by those who still have some left, as it is believed that the 'pots, mortars and all cooking utensils, and the houses of the celebrants are cleaned. Friends and relatives are invited to the festival. The head of the family sacrifices a new (cooked or roasted with palm oil) to the earth goddess. He prays through the earth goddess to the family ancestor for long life and protection for the family. He also prays for good weather and a better harvest in the coming year. This is followed by cooking and eating pounded yam, drinking palm wine and singing in praise of the yam goddess, the family and their ancestors.

According to Talbot (1972), he says “Dancing affords the means of representing as perfectly as possible the otherwise inarticulate sense of the mystery of existence; the powers of the supernatural influences, the ecstasy of joy in life of youth, strength and love all the deeper and poignant feelings”.

Ònúnú festival manifests the recourse by the people of Nsukka, to the supernatural beings. According to Igwe P. Obayi of Nguru Nsukka in an interview conducted in reflecting the past said that ònúnú festival have every glory that could be found in a feast. According to the report of the Nsukka Town Union on festival, the feast is supposed to arouse interest as well as encourage arts, industry, and culture.

The above assertions seem to imply that festivals are holidays given in commemoration of significant events, objects or subjects in the life of a community, and are usually dominated by feasting. Again, culture, especially traditional festival, directs our pattern and standard of living, learning and distinguishing between habits such as personal cleanliness, eating habit, conducts towards others and attitudes towards authority.

Methodology

The study adopts a descriptive approach as research method. This method helped the researcher to gather information needed for the study from selected respondents who grew up in Nsukka and know the culture of Nsukka people very well. The research population comprised of the entire three quarters, which make up Nsukka town-Nkpxnanq, Nru and Ihe/Owerre in Enugu State. The study adopts also cluster sampling method with multi-stage selection. This method includes breaking down the population into sub-groups at a time until all the groups have been sampled. Nsukka-Ideke has three quarters namely: Nkpxnanq, Nru and Ihe/Owerre quarters. In each of these three quarters, the purposive sampling method was also employed to select only the respondents required for the study. Purposive, otherwise known as judgmental sampling technique was adopted to enable the researcher select and interview elderly men and women who are the custodians of the culture in the areas sampled. As a matter of fact, eighteen elders (men and women) from the three quarters participated in the study. That is, six participants from each quarter. The choice of six participants from each quarter was informed by the position of Willig (2001:29) who “suggests that focus groups should consist of no more than six participants. This is to ensure that all participants remain actively involved in the group discussion throughout the data collection phase”.

Discussion

Nsukka is culturally rich. That is, Nsukka is blessed with diverse cultures, which include among others; ‘omabe’ festival, new yam festival, ‘qnwaatq’ festival, ‘egbaqzq’, qnwáásââ’, ònúnú festival, qnwáísê’, and so on. Culturally, the people of Nsukka-Ideke are known by their qmabe festival, ònúnú festival and ‘qnwáísê festival, which is the new yam festival. The diversity of their cultures makes it possible that one culture or the other can readily provide whatever type of workable strategies we may need for the solution of specific problem bedeviling the Nsukka community and the nation at large. We shall examine the role of cultural festivals through the following subheadings;

History of Ònúnú Festival

Ònúnú festival, as an aspect of African traditional religion is as old as a man. Ònúnú festival being a vital instrument of religion in Nsukka town must have started simultaneously with the origin of the town. The history or the origin of ònúnú festival is surrounded in myth and legend. As a result of absence of written records, a reconstruction of the history had posed some problems for researchers. Information on the ònúnú festival is mainly through oral tradition from the elders. However, according to one of the versions of the origin of Nsukka people, ònúnú festival is as old as Nsukka people (Ugwu Vincent, C. 84 yrs, retired H.M., interviewed at Nsukka). According to this version of the story, Atta of Igala had four children who migrated from Igala and settled at various places in Nsukka area. One of the sons settled at Obukpa, the second settled at Okpuje, the third at Eha-alumona and the fourth son called Ideke settled at Nsukka. These four sons claimed a common ancestry in Asadu Atta of Igala. They were regarded as the sons of Asadu and this gave additional word to their names Nsukka AsaduIdeke, Okpuje and ObukpaAsadu. Ideke is said to be a very powerful and influential man who conquered all the neighboring towns around him. Infact, Ideke is the ancestral father of Nsukka.

His wife was Nkwo. Ideke had three sons namely Ezeoguda the father of Nkpuno quarter, Ezike the father of Nru and DialokeNdidiaba the father of Ihe/Owerre quarter. The people of Nsukka equally regard Nkwo Nsukka as their mother and as such pay annual homage to the Nkwo shrine mother Market during ònúnú festival. Ònúnú festival is celebrated every year in order to pay homage to their ancestral mother Nkwo. She (Nkwo) is seen as the spirit of fertility, the nearest and dearest of all the deities.

Nkwo is both spirit of the earth and also queen of underworld ruling the ancestors who are buried in the earth. She is the giver and the administer of all moral laws. Oaths are made in her name and she is invoked in law making. Crimes such as murder, theft, adultery and other poisoning and misshapes such as giving birth to twins, cripples and other abnormal children are offences against 'Ala' and must be purged by sacrifices to her in her shrines or 'Ala'. As a goddess of the earth and fertility 'Ala' receives special sacrifices at the beginning and end of harvest. Usually, a black hen or goat is slaughtered and wine poured into pots. Kola nuts are broken and prayers are made for protection in planting season, against poor harvest and to appease the 'Ala' for offences committed against her.

Preparations of the Ònúnú Festival

The preparations of 'OnwaOnunu' (month or season of Onunu) is participated by all in the town. Both the elders, women, men, youths and even kids are all involved. Onunu festival is celebrated at the beginning part of the year. It is celebrated in Nkwo arena on Nkwo market day. It is a ritual involved in worshiping earth goddess 'Nkwo'. What marks the beginning of onunu is 'EgwuOkam'. This 'egwuOkama' is a process in Onunu performance. The people that perform this 'EgwuOkama' are called the 'Umuozo'. Members of this 'Umuozo' are only people from Nguru in Nkpuno quarter and people from Edem in Nru because they are the eldest in Nru. They use to touch all the villages that constitute the three quarters that make up Nsukka town. This signifies the triumphant entry into the holy week. The holy week lasts for sixteen days.

This has great educational value. When the 'egwuOkam' are going on by the 'Umuozo', they touch every areas of our culture reminding the elders of what they knew before about their past and informing the young ones of what they never know, thereby enriching the peoples knowledge about their background. The duration of the festival is regarded as a holy week when all corrupt

practices should be avoided; all kinds of mourning are also avoided, funeral rites are not performed.

However, immediately the 'Xmxqzq' announces the date of onunu festival, both men and women start buying things for the occasion. As one goes about looking for money for the occasion, as one goes about looking for money for the occasion, one also prays that he or she does not die during this period. The reason being that any death during this period is regarded as an abominable death. In short, the preparation generally can be likened to Christians preparing for Christmas feast, when people run around for money to purchase food, clothings and so on.

The chief priests of various shrines in Nsukka town make sure that all their ancestral shrines (ónúńà) are cleared and rebuilt, if damaged. The priests also purify themselves spiritually in readiness for Onunu festival. They make sure that all the sacrificial materials are ready enough for the period of the festival. Women keep the environment clean, they also decorate their huts after plastering them with red soil-that is in the case of those who live in mud houses. However, in modern times, where most buildings are cemented, they rather scrub and scrub and keep everywhere clean. It is also the responsibility of the women to make sure that their children's clothes are well tailored and washed clean.

During this period, women normally pay special attention to their daughters. They provide them with all sorts of things that will make them look very beautiful before the eyes of some prospective suitors. Affluent husbands buy clothes for their wives to express their love for them. In a case where a man is not able to provide for his wife, the woman provides for herself, if she can. At the eve of the festival, wrestling is usually held by able bodied men to inform people that the festival comes up the following day.

The Celebration of Onunu Festival

On the day of the onunu festival, most civil servants leave their various places of work, farmers leave their farms, and traders close their stores and shed, all to be involved in the celebration. The sense of belonging generated by being a part of the celebrations has both social and psychological values.

The festival is celebrated in Nkwo market arena on Nkwo market day. The activities involved in Onunu festival is bridged into two phases – the morning phase and the afternoon phase. However, on that day, nobody tells anybody that the ceremony has started. In the like manner, every family is expected to cook 'Okpa' (ground pea) on the day of the festival. Some parts of the 'okpa' are taken to Nkwo for her divine protection throughout the period of Onunu. 'Umuada' who are looked upon as the moral custodians of Nsukka town and the agents of Nkwo are staged there to receive the 'okpa'. When the 'okpa' is brought, it is shared among the 'umuada' and all that are there. The taking of 'okpa' to Nkwo arena has no fixed time. One takes hers as soon as she finishes cooking. New born babies during the period of onunu festival are also taken to the Nkwo shrine by their mothers on that day with some balls of 'okpa' to thank Nkwo for giving them the babies. This is done in the morning before the actual outing.

The first groups of the entertainers are the 'umuada' as a group are very important in the lives of Nsukka people. Membership cuts across categories of women. Titled women, the very aged, middle aged ones and some young ones are all found here. For one to be a member of this 'umuada', she must be an indigene of Nsukka both by birth and by marriage. They come in mass with their musical instruments made up of mainly hollow calabashes decked with some beads

outside them. Teach and every one of them has a staff of office 'Abara' (a traditional pan made of a very big calabash cut into two halves). They dress in their best attires consisting of costly clothes and expensive beads called 'Aka'. When they start their music, it is open to everybody. Some expert dancers of the music move their legs in an intricate form that it is used to dramatize the respect, the value, and the importance of the music to the titled women. When women dance the music, they dance towards the Nkwo shrine, kneel in front of it, touch the ground with two hands and retouch their chests with the same hands.

The afternoon phase is declared open by another group of dancers known as the 'IgedeNkwo' a musical group made up of young and middle aged men dressed in traditional regalia. The group is from 'Umunkporogidi' in Nru quarters. The chief priest of Nkwo divinity comes from there. When they arrive at the Nkwo arena, everyone dance to the rhythm of the music.

An important event that usually features in each Nkwoònú festival day is the one called 'òròme'. In this event, a girl (12-15 years) who is supposed to be a virgin is carried by a woman round the Nkwo market. The girl will be standing on the shoulder of the woman and the girl almost naked except 'ijigida' and pant just enough to cover her private part, should neither laugh nor talk. Rather she will be dancing with her chest and hands to the tune of the songs. The girl will be given a green leaf to put in her mouth which will prevent her from talking or laughing. A large number of women do cluster round the woman carrying the girl while singing, dancing and praising the Nkwo deity. The virgin is usually carried to the front of Nkwo shrine where she is allowed to dance the music of 'Igede' Nkwo. After dancing, she is returned to the spot where she was picked, lowered to the ground and led home by her relatives without delay.

She goes home using her hack in the olden days but these days the person can go home her front, but she will not turn back. There is a very strong belief by the Nsukka people that any girl that undergoes this exercise will be very fruitful through Nkwo divinity. In the olden days, it was a must that at least two girls from each of the three quarters that make up Nsukka town-Nkpunano, Nru and Ihe/Owerre must perform this act. Nowadays, it is very disheartening to learn that because of education and Christianity, it is becoming more and more difficult to find young girls who will give themselves willingly up for the exercise; whereas in the past there used to be competition.

Another event that features on NkwoOnunu festival day is 'IGBA-ECHI'. 'Igba-echi' is the wearing of coiled rods of golden colour. The 'Echi' is made up of one quarter rod coiled in about one quarter diameter circumference up to the length of about two feet. They are normally two for each leg. There are two types of 'Echi', 'NneEchi' and 'Ishi-Echi'. NneEchi is worn by matured girls who are ready for marriage or those who have just been engaged. The Ishi-Echi is worn by girls who are not up to the age of marriage.

Girls who wear this 'Echi' are usually dressed in a very costly material tailored purely in a traditional way. The girl's dressing will show either that the girl is engaged to an affluent young man or that she is from a rich family. The 'Igba-Echi' could be compared to 'irumgbede' in other parts of Igbo land. If a matured girl wears this Echi and fails to get married to any man at the end brings a disgrace to the family. This is because there is a belief that Nkwo will definitely give the person a husband. This Echi is traditionally worn by beautiful ladies. Parents of such girls use this 'Igba-Echi' ceremony starts from home of the girl in question. Before the girl leaves for Nkwo arena, there use to be merriment between the girl's relatives, friends and well wishers. On her way to Nkwo arena, she is usually followed by relatives and admirers especially some young

men who will carry Dane-guns, booming away shots on her head as she walks majestically, proudly and arrogantly towards the Nkwo arena. On her arrival at the Nkwo arena there are usually shouts of praises from the audience, where some people are motivated to spray money on her. It is the belief of Nsukka people that anyone who wears 'Echi' will be fruitful – Nkwo will bless the person with many children.

At the close of the events, various groups of men and women are seen in almost all the nooks and cranny of the market arena discussing, exchanging views and ideas, jubilating, drinking and eating. By so doing, they learn about people's pattern of behavior.

The Closure of Events

After five days of NkwoOnunu festival which must be on Nkwo market day, all married women (i.e. those who are indigenes of Nsukka, both those married outside Nsukka and within) will all take tubers of yam, tobacco, kolanuts, fowl or goat (depending on one's capability) to their fathers' houses as a homage to their ancestral fathers. This is called 'Igo-Nna'. This 'Igo-Nna' signifies women's appreciation of their survival, to their ancestral fathers. Their parents will sue the presents they brought to do sacrifices to their ancestral fathers. The visiting daughters usually pass the night in their maiden homes. They do not usually go home on the same day. In reciprocation, their parents and relatives present them with gifts of food items like tubers of yam, cocoyam's, money, and sometimes clothing's. This is usually done to thank and encourage their daughters to continue remembering them. The women also buy kolanuts which they present to the eldest man of the village where they are married to. Women who are unfaithful, do not perform this rite. The kolanuts are used in praying along with the 'Odo' (the symbol of truth and authority) to express gratitude to their ancestral fathers for their divine protection.

The impact of onunu festival on the younger ones

The ònúnú festival embraces a lot of the peoples' world view so much that its place in the understanding the culture and social life of a group cannot be over emphasized. It marks the end of the dry season and the triumphant entry into the rainy season ushering in the farming period in the community. The festival also perpetuates the yearly appeasement of the god and in the face of the present threat to traditional religious beliefs of the people is unquestionable. Before the coming of the Europeans, the festival accords the Nsukka people a nice forum for interaction and peaceful co-existence. In addition, the ònúnú festival enables the Nsukka people to maintain a sacred trust, especially those at the helm of ritual affairs – worshipping the earth goddess Nkwq – the ancestral mother of Nsukka – Ideke people.

The festival occupies a very high place in the social life of both the young and old of Nsukka people. It is a period when sober reflections are made by the people over their past lives and preparations are made for tasks ahead. The ònúnú festival also manifests the recourse by the people of Nsukka, to supernatural being for the solution of problems considered super-human. Besides, the period create a good opportunity for young men and women who do not want to marry from outside Nsukka to get to know one another.

Drawing upon the above assertions, it could be said that ònúnú festival is deeply rooted in Nsukka-Ideke soil and has the significance of, among others, fostering communal bond among the Nsukka people (old and young) both those residing in Nsukka and those of them in Diaspora. It establishes a cordial relationship between Nsukka people, their neighbouring communities and even expatriates who come around in modern times to 'participate' in the festival.

The socio-economic importance of ònúnú festival in the lives of Nsukka Ideke Igbo people

Maximized level of socialization is offered during traditional festivals, ònúnú festival is not an exception. Festival days are unique occasion for a wide range of culture and social education for the children. As such, constitute mandatory period of recreation and relaxation for the adults and children. People assemble and exchange views and ideas on the day of the festival thereby learning more about peoples' pattern of behaviour socially. Again, the observance of the holy week in the ònúnú festival has also some social functions to play. This is because, it is a period when sober reflections are made by people over their past lives and preparations are made for task ahead. Also, in this period of holy week, all corrupt practices are expected to be avoided. This is because it is a period of reconciliation and peace making. Husbands shown their love for their wives by buying them special gifts like wrapper.

Ònúnú festival has also positive economic importance. It is a period of economic boom to traders. Cloth dealers make a lot of profits because almost every woman buys a news wrapper. Because of this, some women store baskets of kolanuts, ground pea, and condiments, which they sell during this period of ònúnú, which will help them purchase the wrapper. Also, well, they do realize reasonable sums of money. Wine dealers of all sorts make enough profits at this time. Gun powder dealers also make a lot of profits during this period. Also through that, festival speed up the economic development, because people buy more goods and services during festivals because they get discount on luxury items and various attractive schemes on products and services from sellers. That increase banking and cash transactions. More items sold, mean more tax collection for the government. More people get money and it increase more investment later.

In spite of the above positive roles of the festival, the multiplicity of festivals have adverse effects on the economic life of the people. During this period of festival (ònúnú), the people of Nsukka-Ideke have used some of the activities of the festival as an avenue to waste money. Money is lavished on materials, and such economic waste jeopardizes the progress of the town. As a result, people should be reminded or cautioned that while trying to socialize both vertically and horizontally, they should not spend without reservation. They should always remember that tomorrow is another day. Hence, moderation as a virtue should be applied.

Onunu festival in education: Its educative important

Ònúnú festival has also educative importance. It educates people on the culture of the land. Young ones learn some cultural aspects of our life on the process of ònúnú festival. This fulfils one of the aims of community's festivals, which is to celebrate the culture of the community. Therefore, social and cultural benefits are achieved in the process of staging the event-festival. It also creates awareness among youths, and make than feel that they too belong.

Ònúnú festival has also moral lesson to impart. This is because, the main performers in the ònúnú festival include the xmxada who are looked upon as the moral custodians of Nsukka Ideke by reacting against immorality and punishing immoral youths, they teach the young ones good moral and good behaviour (Eze, 1998). Hence, it educates the young ones morally, and also create harmony with nature. Through, ònúnú festival, the youths and young ones of Nsukka-Ideke learn that Nkwq is the ancestral mother of Nsukka-Ideke. This awareness also helps to maintain the cultural heritage of the people.

Ònúnú festival also helps to spread brotherhood and faith among Nsukka people, and in between all the humans just like every other festival. People on festival are connected with God and

lessons. Connection with God creates a positive attitude in their behaviour towards other people. Positive behaviours towards everyone no matter the religion, colours and occupations is attained that period. This sense of respect for everyone spreads brotherhood, love and faith in the society, which will in turn bring social development of the entire nation.

Ònúnú festival in national development

The several million years of human existence led to the development of varieties of cultures, which ònúnú festival of arts and culture is one. The place of these cultures (festivals) in national development if properly handled cannot be over emphasized. Good (1973) aptly captures this, where he defines culture as the aggregate of the social, ethical, intellectual, governmental, artistic and industrial attainments, characteristics of a group, state and nation and by which it can be distinguished from or compared with other groups, state or nations, it includes ideas, concepts, wages, institutions, associations and material objects. Abstracting from Good's definition of culture, there is no way any nation can attain maximum development without involving its culture(s). This is because, culture directs our pattern and standard of living, learning and distinguishing between habit. Cultural festivals like ònúnú festival serve as a glue in our life that keep us attached to relationships in society. When we are together as a family, friends and society, it creates sense of unity. And unity, they say is strength, for united will stand while divided will fall. Besides, unity is the most powerful weapon to fight with any obstacle in life. Hence, unity is what Nigeria as a nation, needs most now to meet her national development challenges.

The celebration of cultural festivals offer a sense of belonging for religious, political, social or geographical groups, contributing to group cohesiveness and nation at large. That notwithstanding, the cultural festival (ònúnú festival) establishes itself as an ideal space for the community to discuss issues they could not otherwise, discuss elsewhere, which could improve on national development. As a matter of fact, Nigeria as a nation should obtain or borrow a leaf from her different cultural festivals to reap the maximal benefit of having cultural diversity. For example, she (Nigeria) can copy the Igarra culture, where people holding public offices at all levels of governance are made to meet regularly with the people to give adequate account of their stewardship (See Eme, 2017). The festival (ònúnú) accord people of Nsukka-Ideke as well as tourists a nice forum for interaction and peaceful co-existence. When a country is at peace, of course development at all levels will flow. Ònúnú festival as well as the like cultural festivals of Nigeria play important function in building the country in developmental wise. However, for the many cultural festivals of Nigeria to play a significant role in national development, each community should bring to the fore and publicise all its cultural activities that are worthy of emulation by the government and interested groups for communities well-being and development.

Ònúnú festival and western values

Traditional festivals, embrace a lot of conflicts so much so that they have undergone many changes. With the arrival of the European missionaries and their preachings of good news in Nsukka town (Ideke), our traditional festivals and religion came into a very strong conflict with Christianity. This conflict started to affect all aspects of our cultural behaviour. The youths began to give deaf ear to the belief and practices of our traditional religion.

Ònúnú festival is not exceptional in this cultural conflict with the foreign religion (Christianity). The mode and method of celebrating ònúnú festival began to change with advent of Christianity.

Those who were formerly active participants were no more interested in the celebration. As such, it is no longer a general affair because, there exist some misconceptions about ònúnú festival. As a result, the ceremony began to die gradually, the sacredness of the festival began to be exposed to the believers and non-believers of the religion. Also, the attractions and joy, which the religion brought along with it began to fade away. The celebration of ònúnú festival is no longer what it used to be in the past. This is because, the youths concern themselves with the festival only on the sociological aspect. In so doing, they neglect the spiritual importance, which is the core of the festival that necessitates the festival.

The advent of western values such as education and Christianity changed the cultural live of Nsukka people and distorted the neat pattern from 1857 onwards. This disturbance changed the traditional world view from codical to lineal pattern. The adherents of the missionaries boycotted their traditional worship and festivals, and accepted names like Benson, Comfort, Nelson, Peter, Paul, Boniface, and so on, which replaced traditional names like Oyodo, Odo, Nkwq, Oriè, Ohe, Ugwu, Nkwja, Idenyi, among others. This re-orientation constitutes a serious threat to the existence of traditional festival, which ònúnú festival is one.

Summary and conclusion

This paper has shown that in Nigeria, there are challenges of national development. Also, the paper has tried to establish the place of Nigerian cultural festivals in building and developing the country, using ònúnú festival of Nsukka-Ideke Igbo as a focus. The study has shown cultural festivals of Nigeria as an indispensable and veritable tools in meeting the challenges of national development in 21st century Nigeria. The paper advocates that if these cultural festivals are properly handled, they will contribute immensely to national development of Nigeria. And anything that will help Nigeria to move forward especially, in meeting the national development challenges is, therefore, of paramount important. It is very impossible for any individual, group or institution to truly embrace peaceful co-existence and national development without borrowing a leaf from the cultural festivals. Nigerian cultural festivals provide much of the necessary solution to meeting the national development challenges as they afford a sort of reunion between friends and relatives. As a result, government at all levels must learn to harness this, rather than try to shy away from it.

The paper has also shown the moral importance of cultural festivals in the Igbo traditional religion context. However, culture is dynamic – it changes with time. In the same way, festivals change in their modes and patterns of celebration, but the new pattern of celebration presupposes some connections with the past. However, we are of the view that Nigerians can surmount the challenges of the national development in a maximized form and achieve a nation of their dream by repositioning, and ‘apt’ use of certain cultures, availing themselves of Nigerian cultural festivals and utilizing the positive cultures of different ethnic groups to bridge and pave way for national development in Nigeria to take shape.

Recommendations

1. The Nigerian government, in collaboration with local authorities, should actively promote cultural awareness and education about festivals as this can be achieved through school curriculum integration, workshops, and public campaigns, fostering a sense of pride and appreciation for indigenous cultural heritage.
2. Digital platform should be utilized to promote festival and other cultural events in Nigeria. This will not only broaden the reach, attract a wider audience, and create a global interest but will also promote economic development in Nigerian.

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