

**THE PROMOTION OF NIGERIAN ARTS AND
CULTURE THROUGH FESTIVALS**

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ABSTRACT

Nigeria is one of the largest, socially and culturally most diversified countries in Africa. Because of its diversity of people and culture, Nigeria over the years has been distinguished in the field of arts. The diversity of the country is reflected in the fact that the country has over 250 identified ethnic groups and three large ethno-linguistic entities. The cultural life in Nigeria is marked by tradition and traditional form of cultural events like festivals, arts exhibition, music and dance. This paper will examine the historical trends of arts and festivals as a manifestation of the people's culture. It will identify several festivals among the different cultural groups in Nigeria and also reveal the hidden treasure of Nigerian culture, its existence and diversity. It will analyze the different events that make up the festivals and survey its contribution to national development. At the end, the paper by contributing to knowledge, will present vivid account of cultural life in Nigeria both at the states and national levels. It will present festival as a tool for the promotion of culture, arts, national unity, and personal interaction, the coming together of different ethnic groups. Equally, the paper will identify culture as continuous and ever changing. This paper made use of both the primary and secondary sources of data collection which includes personal experiences and observations, use of library; published and unpublished materials, life histories, government reports, historical data and information along with previous research. It presents both historical and present form of happenings in the society today and the world at large. One of the findings was that cultural festivals aid the promotion of national unity and stability by encouraging mutual coexistence and relationship among the people. Among other recommendations, it was recommended that there is need to encourage and promote festivals at the national, state and local levels in the country for generations to come as this will encourage cultural identity and pride among the people of Nigerians.

KEY WORDS: Culture, Arts, National Festival, Problems and Challenges.

INTRODUCTION

Culture in a simple term is defined as the ways of life of people with a set of distinctive material, intellectual, spiritual, social, economic and political identity. According to Elizabeth Henshaw (1986), culture may be defined as “a realm of consciousness, and mind as the totality of consciousness of the individual, the man”. Haralambus and Holborn (2014) says that “culture is the whole way of life found in a particular society” (790), which can be distinguished from society to society although with a close connection between nations. Culture connects individuals and society to each other in language, norms, beliefs, arts, lifestyles, and ways of living together, value system, traditions and so on. Culture cuts across boundaries due to historical relations between groups like trade, inter-tribal marriages etc.

Culture creates some level of healthy interaction, communication, bond and link between social groups directly or indirectly. According to Peter Essoh (2006), “culture involves studying what people think, how they interact, and the objects they make and use”. To Unoh (1986),

Culture is the totality of the material, spiritual, artistic, intellectual and other accomplishments of a people which give some indicator of their way of life, their mode of existence and the byproducts of their type or level of civilization.

In the Cultural Policy for Nigeria part 1 section 1, subsection 1.1 defines culture as;

The totality of the way of life evolved by a people in their attempts to meet the challenge of living in their environment, which gives order and meaning to their political, social and economic aesthetics and religious norms and modes of organization, thus, distinguishing a people from their neighbors (1998).

Culture in its diversity is distinguished by virtue of its specific historical evolution and its unique characteristics making each culture structurally unique and original. Nigeria known and described as the Giant of Africa is rich and endowed with cultural resources. It is one of the largest and geographically, socially and culturally most diversified African country. In its diversity the Nigerian culture is reflected in over 250 identified ethnic groups, with three large ethno-linguistic entities which are the Yoruba, the Ibo, and the Hausa Fulani. There are also other groups like the Ijaw, Tiv, Ibibio, Efik, Kanuri and more than 300 other ethnic groups. Because of its diversity of people and culture, Nigeria has been distinguished in the field of arts, to include several festivals and other cultural forms. Examining the historical trends of arts and festivals as a manifestation of the people’s culture in Nigeria, the paper seeks to reveal the relevance of festivals in the promotion of culture, and its contributions to national development. Richard Campbell, Martin and Fabos (2013) have a different definition of culture relating to the happenings today in the world which is that; “Culture may be defined as the symbols of expression that individuals, groups, and societies use to make sense of daily life and to articulate their values”.

Culture as widely said is the way of life of the people in a given society. According to Biobaku following, Ebeogu as quoted by S. O. Unoh (1986). Culture is that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, customs and any other abilities acquired by man. Culture accordingly, encompasses those conventional understanding and practices which give a people its uniqueness and thus renders such a distinct from all others. And to OkonUya (1986) culture, is understood in this context as the total way of life of a people expressed in their technological, economic, social and political institutions and structures, as well as in their values and norms, is never static but resilient, dynamic, and adaptive, often responding to the challenges it confronts, whether from within or without.

Piddington quoted by Okwilaqwe (1986) says that “culture is that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, law, morals, customs and all other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society” (92). To Uchendu (1977); “culture is more than just a heritage, a historical product; it’s more than the expression of man’s mode of living, something that individuals in each society must undergo as a kind of fate or *ritesdepassage*” (35). With these definitions, culture is a reflection of ones way of life in conformity to their language, habitat, way of dressing, mode of eating, their relationship with each other, beliefs, moral, political and economic activities, social structures and leadership policies.

According to Brockett and Ball (2004):

Art is one method of discovering patterns that provide insights and perceptions or of raising questions about ourselves and our world. Thus, art may be viewed as one form of knowledge or way of knowing... Art lays claim to be serious (in the sense of having something important to communicate), but because its method are indirect (it presents experience but does not attempt to explain all of its ramification), it is often ambiguous and almost always open to alternative interpretation.

Arts is identified in all the creative disciplines as literature, drama, music, dance, architecture, poetry, visual arts etc.

Problems and Challenges of the Nigerian Festivals

Apart from the informative, educative, entertainment and celebrative aspects of festival in Nigeria as presented in the paper, it also faces multifarious problems and challenges. These include;

1. Lack of commitment on the part of government and private sectors.
2. Lack of modern infrastructures and facilities to aid in production of standardized materials to compete with the global market.
3. Training and retraining of cultural personnel either formal (University) or informal, attending (seminars and workshops) depending on the needs of the sponsored state, organization and its personnel.
4. None Generation of funds through private sectors.
5. Inadequate publicity of the festivals.

6. Lack of good road network, pipe born water and electricity, poor communication network.
7. Poor hotels and accommodation facilities.

This paper examines the context of culture in its diversity amongst the people of Nigeria. It identifies several festivals in Nigeria and also reveal the hidden treasure of Nigerian culture. It presents National Festival of Arts and Culture (NAFEST) as a tool for the promotion of culture, arts, national unity, personal interaction, and the coming together of different ethnic groups.

The paper made use of the primary and the secondary methods of data collection that includes personal experiences and observations, use of library; published and unpublished materials, articles, journals, life histories, government reports, historical data and information along with previous research. The study area of this paper is Nigeria and emphasis is on the Promotion of Arts and Culture through National Festival of Arts and Culture (NAFEST).

THE NIGERIAN CULTURE

Nigerian culture is being shaped by the multiple ethnic groups of about 1150 dialectics and over 521 languages. In other to preserve, promote and develop the Nigerian culture, the Cultural Policy for Nigeria was designed in 1998. Part 1 section 4.1 says that “the cultural policy shall be expressed in four broad categories of state namely: (1) a preservation of culture (2) promotion of culture and (3) the establishment of administrative structure and the provision of funds for its implementation”. The Cultural Policy for Nigeria is regarded as an instrument of promotion of National identity and Nigerian unity, as well as of communication and cooperation among different Nigerian and other African countries.

To promote, preserve and present the Nigerian culture, the Federal Ministry of Culture and Tourism was created. The Federal Ministry gave birth to the State Ministries and Local Government Tourism Board. There was also the introduction of the National Council for Arts and Culture (NCAC), in 1975. The NCAC was to foresee the encouragement and development of all facets of Nigerian culture and also to interact with the public and private organizations in the country. The States Arts Councils were saddled with the responsibility of developing, reserving, administering and promoting state cultural policies. This however was to be financed and supported by the Federal Government.

Cultural life in Nigeria is extremely marked by tradition and traditional forms of events like festivals, ceremonies, exhibitions, performance/theatre/drama, music and dance, arts and crafts, carnivals and so on. This could be traced to the introduction of and the hosting of the 2nd World Black and African Festival of Arts and Culture (FESTAC 77), organized with the aim of awakening the spat of African cultural consciousness. This cultural fiesta brought about the coming together of different African Countries that exposed the Africans to the relevant need for the promotion and preservation of culture. This event was made possible by the Centre for Black and African Arts and Civilization (CBAAC) in collaboration with higher institutions, researchers and other organizations. This singular act gave birth to a thread of unity and peace

of the people that bond the continent through its diverse culture. It was held in Nigeria from January 15 to February 12, 1977.

FESTAC 77 later gave life to the beginning of National Festival of Arts and Culture and even Abuja Carnival. There are also other festivals like; Durbar Festival, Boat Regatta Festival, Argungu Fishing Festival, OsunOsogbo Festival, Eyo Festival, Sharo/Shadi Festival, New Yam Festival, Kwa-Ghir Festival, encouraged in different states, hosted across the country showcasing fascinating and enchanting cultural celebrations of diverse nature and colours promoting creativity.

According to Ayisi (1972), “festival combine economic and religious activities, for they are observed with material things”. With the essence of festival in one’s society, it varies according to the ecology and social structure of the people. Festival in one’s society is to celebrate ones nature, the cosmological ideas, celebrate life, growth and fertility, celebrate the ancestral spirits of the land etc.

THE NATIONAL FESTIVAL OF ARTS AND CULTURE (NAFEST)

In Nigeria, National Festival of Arts and Culture date back to the end of civil war in 1970. It was specially designed by the Government to foster cultural interaction and reconciliation as well as build bridges of understanding and friendship across the nation. There had been several cultural activities celebrated at different times across different states in Nigeria before the introduction of the National Festival of Arts and Culture. For Adadeji (1975);

The early Festival of the Arts and Culture took place within the premise and under the eegis of the British Council which had initiated and fostered the growth of clubs or societies for music, drama, fine arts as part of its own programme of cultural enlightenment and imperial responsibilities.

Years after years, the Nigerian government continued in the promotion of culture through the umbrella of the National Festival of Arts and Culture (NAFEST). It is an annual event organized by the National Council for Arts and Culture (NCAC) towards the end of the year, between October and December. Participants and contingents are drawn from different states including the FCT. The National Festival of Arts and Culture opens yearly with colourful and richly designed costumes and traditional attire exhibitions of different states in an open arena like the stadium. The states match alphabetically in their traditional attires to their own traditional music and dance steps. Also on display are masquerades from different states with spectacular colours and costumes. The costumes and clothes used by different states are either sworn, woven, dyed or embroidered.

After the official opening ceremony of the festival, other designated events automatically kick starts in the evening at different venues as planned by the host state. Presentations in the festival are purely traditional and indigenous bringing together contingents from the grassroots to showcase their rich cultural heritage. The festival is a series of

competitions and the competitions divided into various age groups so that children, youth, adults and the old might take part and compete against each state. The children participate in the moonlight games, essay, arts painting and ballad display, the youths got involved in the wrestling contest and the women participate actively in dancing. To D. Cannon as quoted by Umokoro (2002), the Nigerian Festival of Arts “is to encourage Nigerian artists, craftsmen and musicians to try and to keep on trying to produce articles of artistic value which are truly Nigerians”.

Festival could be seen as cultural and multicultural celebrations, seasonal events, historical commemorations, community celebrations and entertainment, and even religious celebrations. These celebrations or a form of gathering may be entertaining in nature, conducted or organized by a person or group of persons, organization, firm, association, or even the government within and outside a particular locality and may not be limited to things as carnivals, sports, concerts, music performance, dance and drama presentation, arts and craft, fairs, etc. Festival may be seen also as the coming together of people from different tribes and culture or the same tribe to celebrate as identified in their culture and the way of life of that given society. According to Hunyadi, Zsuzsa, Perter and Janos (2006), “cultural events concentrated in a few days (Weeks) have been known throughout the entire history of humankind”. He went further to say that there is no precise definition of festival although it has its basis to some sort of historical root used by a set of people to attract the attention of casual visitors, travelers and tourist.

According to Nigeria Magazine, The all Nigerian Festival of Arts (1970) “was the gathering of the tribes, a display of skills that dipped deep into the rich store of the country’s cultural heritage”. The festival consist of competitive and noncompetitive events like drama; showcasing good habits of love, caring, sharing, honesty, hard work, creativity, vision, costumes and relationship of the people of Nigerians. There are also folklore, storytelling/traditional moonlight games, epics, ballad, musical display, dance, games, traditional wrestling riddles, proverbs, arts and craft, traditional furnished apartments, traditional wardrobe, children essay writing, children arts paintings and drawings, traditional puppetry, poetry, state documentary.

Exhibition of Arts and Craft: ranging from pottery, baskets, coral beads/necklaces, glass beads, metal/rubber anklets, masks, leather works, bags, shoes, hats, caps, beaded shoes, leather and woven shoes, ivory bangles, bracelets, beautiful Nigerian fabrics and designs; embrioded, woven, dyed or printed, wood carvings, sculpture, cane works and raffia. The arts and craft help to provide lucrative employment to the artists and also eradicate poverty and act as a tool for economic empowerment for the states and the nation at large.

On display also is **traditional cuisine**. Nigeria has more than 100 types of foods and cultural dishes from the hundreds of ethnic groups. They come with different nutritional values and freshness which each method of preparations depends on the people. To be put on display during the food fair competition are traditional cuisine like; okpono soup, egusi soup, edikanikong soup, afang soup, eba, ewedu, ekpankukwo, ufensala, but to mention a few. The state choses a spokesperson who is well vested with the food and methods of preparation to

represent them during the competition. She will present in details the principle sources of food, the ingredients and their preparation methods, when and what time the food is supposed to be served. Their method of preparation differs among the various tribes even when the same food stuffs are being used.

Cultural market for shopping; at the venue of the festival, there are also provided spaces for the states and other business people from the different states to display and also make sales of their traditional articles like the arts and crafts, textiles and fabric, shoes, makeup materials and jewelries. The traditional fabrics and attires ranges from *adire, tye and dye, agbada, raphis, babariga, jumper, shokoto, etibo, akwete, opushirti, mkpin, ofongisin, onyoyo, woko* and so on, reflecting the various cultural backgrounds of Nigerians, with various designs made by designers with local fabrics. The cultural market display and sales encourage the socio-economic growth of local items like the textile industries, creating jobs opportunities for the populated youths in the country.

Traditional wrestling; this is the introduction of sportsmanship spirit in the festival. This is the selection of young energetic youths poised to display their strength, tactics and skills. From among the competitors, a winner will emerge as a national wrestler and the champion to represent Nigeria in any international wrestling competition. The traditional wrestling competition, promotes healthy competition and strength building at family, village and clan level.

Traditional music and dance competition; in the festival, there is cultural expressions through dance, music, various masquerades displays like the *Ekpo Masquerade, Eyo Masquerade, Ekpe Masquerade* etc. There is also competition in Nigerian orchestral music, solo instruments ranging from string, wind, percussion, songs and dance. The festival helps to showcase the science of dance design and choreography of the different people.

Traditional furnished apartment; this aims at showcasing indigenous shelter, looking at the structural design of the apartment, the exterior and interior decoration and the materials used for the building. Each state is expected to build/construct their own shelter/traditional furnished apartment, using the raw materials from their states as influenced by their environment and weather. These materials ranging from wood, raffia, thatch or mats for roof, mud walls at times with clay or charcoal motifs on the walls to create meaningful designs. Some with bamboo, showing that the products are from swampy or rain forest areas.

Essay writing and children's drawing; at some point in the festival, there was an introduction of children essay writing, drawing and painting competition, involving schools and youths to participate in the festival. Children's drawing and painting was introduced as one of the competitive events to encourage the involvement of youths and also produce young and vibrant artist in the society.

The National Festival of Arts and Culture is one of the fastest growing forms of tourism in the country in the course of touring and visiting different states every year as they play host. The festival attracts visitors also to the host states cultural sites and monuments. Each state in Nigeria has various attraction sites ranging from rainforest, beaches, lakes, oceans, waterfalls,

wildlife, deserts, mountains, mangrove forest, beautiful and enormous rivers and manmade attraction sites. Such sites include;

Ibeno Beach	-	Akwa Ibom State
Azumini Blue River	-	Rivers State
Agbokim Waterfalls	-	Cross River State
Abraka Gordon River-		Delta State
Maiyegun Beach	-	Lagos State
Ndibe Beach	-	Ebonyi State
Pategi Beach	-	Banks of River Niger
Owu Waterfalls	-	Kwara State
Gurara Waterfalls	-	Minna
Tarkwa Beach	-	Lagos
Ikogosi Warm and Cold Spring		Ekiti State
Obudu Cattle Range	-	Cross River State
The Long Juju Shrine	-	Abia State
Ogbunike Cave	-	Anambra State
Osun shrine	-	Osun State
Ife Encient City	-	Ife, Oyo State
Jos Wildlife Safari Park-		Jos
Wase Rock	-	Jos
Tinapa Resort	-	Cross River State
Orole Hills	-	Ekiti State
Dying Pits	-	Nasarawa State
Kano City Wall	-	Kano State
Millennium Park	-	Abuja
Wiki Warm Spring	-	Abuja

Yankari National Park-	Abuja
Kainji Lake -	Kwara State
Olumo Rock -	Ogun State
Nok Village -	Kaduna State
Mabari Cultural Centre	Imo State
Silicon Hill -	Enugu State
Chief Nana's Palace -	Delta State
Okomu Wildlife -	Binin City
Bible She, Araya -	Delta State
Slave Trade Relics Badagry	Lagos State
Confluence River -	Lokoja. Kogi State
BirikisuSingbo Shrine-	Ogun State
IdanreHills -	Ondo State
Legendary Lord Luggard Bridge	Kaduna State
Kerfena Hills -	Zaria
Bar Beach -	Lagos
Somorika Hills -	Edo State
Keyarimi Park -	Maiduguri
National War Museum-	Abia State
Uburu Salt Lake -	Cross River State
Igbo-Ukwu -	Anambra State
Rojenny Tourist Village	Anambra State
Benue Hills -	Benue State
Lake Chad -	Borno State
Ezeagu Tourist Complex	EnuguState
The Iron of Liberty -	Kogi State

Owu Waterfalls	-	Kwara State
Dr. LadiKwali Pottery Centre		Niger State
Bida Brass Works	-	Niger State
IdanreHiils	-	Ondo State
Mambilla Plateau	-	Sokoto State
The Slave Masters Lodges		Akwa Ibom State
Wiki Warm Spring	-	Abuja
Ido Cenotaph		
Ado-Awaye Suspended Lake		
University of Ibadan Zoological Garden		
Mande Cane Village		
Freedom Park		
Barup Waterfall		

There are so many wonderful tourist attraction sites in different states in Nigeria but to mention a few. Visiting different states, you get to visit also their tourist and attraction sites.

FINDINGS/CONCLUSION

The researcher wishes to present the following findings and conclusions:

Festivals in Nigeria are rooted in the tradition of the people and it helps reveals the hidden treasures of culture in Nigeria. Nigerians cultural diversity has given birth to several festivals that is most cherished by many. The National Festival of Arts and Cultures in Nigeria is an avenue also for talent hunt like good and beautiful dancers or performers might be handpicked into the National Theatre Troup as a performer for life to represent Nigeria in other competitive events within and outside the country. It brings about new and hidden talents to life and new aesthetic forms.

National Festival is not just organized for the sake of entertainment, but it presents a platform to showcase and grow the cultural essence and existence of each state in the country. It is also a place to promote our own indigenous culture, arts, artifacts, handicrafts, furniture, dress and the rest. It creates jobs, promote tourism and generate wealth for the states and the country at large. As a means of promoting employment opportunities, it gives the artist and the artisan a chance to present and sell their handmade crafts, art works and finished products on demand to the immediate market.

National Festival of Arts and Culture is a big event that gathers visitors not just from the host states or from other states in Nigeria and also tourists from different continents in the world. It increases knowledge of the country's culture, state and region which helps to improve on local infrastructure. It brings about National Unity in diversity that is the coming together of people from different ethnic groups under one umbrella. It gives opportunity for investors due to the friendly weather of the country. It is an opportunity that creates links with other parts of the state either by road network, air or through the river.

Generally, cultural festivals aid the promotion of national unity and stability by encouraging mutual coexistence and relationship among the people. It helps to improve and boost the country's economy. It also reduces political crisis and misunderstanding between the people, bringing about national stability. Festivals encourage sampling of the lands traditional rhythms. Festivals present the uniqueness of one's culture and it is one of the fastest growing form of tourism in the country. It encourages the discovery of new arts forms, cultural interaction, promotes cultural and creative industries, cultural diversity, strengthen local values and tradition and enrich cultural experiences.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the finding made, the following recommendations are deemed necessary:

1. There is need to encourage and promote festivals at the national, state and local levels in the country for generations to come. This will encourage cultural identity and pride among the people of Nigerians.
2. With the uniqueness of festivals in Nigeria, government and private sectors should sponsor the states, by providing funds and not looking at the initial benefits.
3. They should be able to provide the artist, designers and the states with modern infrastructures and facilities to aid in the production of standardized art materials to compete with the global market.
4. The Federal Ministry of Culture and Tourism and other government owned ministries should send their cultural personnel for training and retraining either formal which is the University education or to attend workshops, conferences and seminars within and outside the country to gain more knowledge as a cultural and tourism officer. The essence is because most of these cultural and tourism officers were handpicked and employed by the government, some without the basic qualifications needed for the job.
5. Considering the fact that lack of good road network, pipe born water, electricity, poor communication network, hotels and accommodation facilities can hinder the influx and attainment of tourist from different parts of the states for the festival, government and other private sectors should endeavour to provide the necessary facilities for the host states and in different other locations in the country. In all, festivals promote love for culture and not for money.

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