# TOURISM POTENTIALS OF THE NATIONAL *IWA JI* FESTIVAL IN IGBO-UKWU SOUTHEAST NIGERIA

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DOI: https://doi.org/10.33281/JTHS20129.2020.1.4

## Abstract
*Festival tourism is one of the mainstays of the tourism industry in many countries. In Igbo-Ukwu Anambra State Nigeria, Mbido Igbo Cultural Association, an organization that champions the revival, preservation and promotion of Igbo arts and cultural heritage has repackaged Iwa ji festival for the promotion and sustainability of Igbo culture and tourism development. Iwa ji festival is celebrated annually in honor of the Supreme God and other divinities for the gift of the new yam. This paper examines the tourism potentials of the festival. It was established that events during the festival such as yam competition, wrestling competition, exhibitions in National Museum, National Gallery of Art, and Centre for Black African Art and Civilization (CBAAC) have the propensity to attract international and national tourists if properly repackaged. It was also noted that quality social facilities such as good road network, and accommodation as well as the hospitality of the host community are equally essential for tourism development. The paper offered recommendations on how to upgrade the National Iwa ji festival to international standard. Qualitative method was utilized in data collection and the data collected were analyzed descriptively.*
**Keywords:** National *Iwa ji* festival, Tourism, Mbido Igbo Cultural Association, Igbo-Ukwu, Festival

## Introduction
Tourism is the study of people's satisfaction of their leisure needs outside their everyday environment. According to Lawuyi (2011:156), "the concept of tourism implied a sense of exploration and of an ecstasy of seeing the spectacular, of witnessing the strange, the extraordinary thing beyond the range of every day observation or occurrence, as many places can offer". In the same vein, cultural tourism involves every movement of persons which satisfies the human desire for diversity that results in new knowledge, experience and encounter (Agbasiere, 2019). Lawuyi has offered the reasons that motivate tourists to travel as including the desire to witness something new, unique and impressive. Tourists, according to Getz have demonstrated that escapism, in a way of generating new outlook on life and living, leads people to event for as they move to their tourists' destination, they learn from entertainment, socializing, and doing something new, that is novelty seeking (Getz, 2010). It is a quest for self-authenticity which is a modern version of the universal human concern with the sacred (MacCannel, 1999 cited in Urry, 2002). In fact, for the modern man, the concern for authenticity is a value and ideal that result from the experience of the inauthentic and alienation of modernization (Jafari, 2000). The search for authentic experiences, as in


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cultural festivals, whose prime focus is the action of the benevolent, reconnects with the pristine, the primitive, the natural, that which is as yet untouched by modernity (Cohen, 1988 cited in Stronza, 2001) gave rise to festival tourism. Festival celebration is connected to the growth of tourism in recent times. This is probably because the increasing wave of globalization gave rise to the need to reinstate identity.

Indeed, the growth of tourism has equally pressured local actors and groups to improvise on past traditions as well as create new ones to fit the constraints and opportunities of the present (Gotham: 2005: 321). Consequently, many countries of the world have reconstructed their cultural festival to revive culture, reinstate identity and promote tourism. In this light Mbido Igbo Cultural Association, a non governmental organization that champions the revival and promotion of Igbo culture recontructed *Iwa ji* festival in Igbo land to integrate Igbo people, preserve and project Igbo culture and identity, at the same time promote tourism. *Iwa ji* festival was chosen for reconstruction because the festival cuts across all Igbo communities. The association incorporated certain aspects of Igbo culture that are on the verge of extinction and other foreign elements in the reconstructed *Iwa ji* festival. The festival was elevated to a national event. This is justified by the participation of federal parastatals (CBAAC, National Museum and the National Gallery of Art Igbo-Ukwu) in organizing and hosting *Iwa ji* festival. *Iwa ji* festival is a cultural tourism project. It laid emphasis on rituals and performance and the people celebrate the historical, political and religious significances in their lives. The tourism project has all the indices of an ideal cultural ceremony, which include local languages, gastronomy, the technology of the past, clothing, leisure activities and educational program among others (Cooper, 2000 cited in Sdrali and Chipazi 2007). The organizers of *Iwa ji* festival therefore made efforts to project the community and present its values for the world to recognize and visit. Clearly, the mission of cultural festivals is not just to benefit tourists, but also to benefit the community. Truly, if the community does not support it, there is very little likelihood of a successful or sustainable tourism festival (Wanhill and Jasen-Verbeke, 2008: 158). And if the community does not stand to benefit, they would not exert so much energy to attract tourists to specific places and to overcome challenges of seasonality in doing so. Along these lines, this study investigates the tourism potentials of the National *Iwa ji* Festival in Igbo-Ukwu, Southeast Nigeria.

## Study Context and Methods

The study site is located in Igbo-Ukwu, in Aguata local government of Anambra State, Nigeria. The town is situated about 40 kilometers Southeast of Onitsha and 16 kilometer from Awka, the state capital. Igbo-Ukwu has three quarters namely; Ngor, Ifite and Obiuno. It had a population of 75,000 according to 2006 census. Members of Igbo-Ukwu community are mostly Christians although a handful of them are devotees of Igbo Traditional

Religion. This minority still celebrates the 'Traditional' *Iwa ji* festival in shrines and the popular *Nkwo* Igbo market. As a matter of fact, new tubers of yam cannot be sold in this market until the performance of a ritual known as '*Ikpo Ji na Nkwo'*, (Mock yam sale). This is performed to notify everyone that the new yam is out and fit for consumption and can be sold in the market. The archaeological finds by Thurstan Shaw in the 1960's in Igbo-Ukwu have proved that Igbo people were adept in the use of metal. Igbo-Ukwu community is patrilineal in organization. In the past, agriculture was their major means of livelihood, but in contemporary times, most members of the community are civil servants, traders, and they cultivate crops on part-time basis. Some of them have moved outside their community in search of better opportunities. The field work for this paper was done in 2012-2014.

The researcher employed participant observation, key informant and in-depth interview as well as focus group discussion in collecting data for this paper. Participant observation was utilized in observing and recording the events of the National *Iwa ji* festival. Key informant interview was conducted with 10 community leaders of Igbo-Ukwu and 10 members of Igbo-Ukwu community including the traditional leaders of member communities, Chairman Mbido Cultural Association, Mr Okafouzu Ugochukwu, and the curators of National Museum Igbo-Ukwu, National Gallery of Art Igbo-Ukwu and Center for Black African Arts and Civilization. These people are knowledgeable about the festival. The researcher equally participated in the National *Iwa ji* festival for three consecutive years, observing and taking note of the proceedings of the festival. During the time of this field work, the researcher usually went to the field a month before the festival and this gave her the opportunity to participate and observe the preparation for the festival. She participated in the courtesy visits to some traditional rulers, the chief priest of the festival and some dignitaries. Secondary data were used to complement the primary data. Data were analyzed descriptively according to themes and presented in story form.

## Results

### National *Iwa Ji* Festival

National *Iwa ji* festival is organised by Mbido Igbo Cultural Association. a socio-cultural organization inaugurated in 2003 with the mandate to organize the National *Iwa ji* festival in Igbo-Ukwu. Mbido Igbo literally means the "origin of Igbo". It is a call for Igbo people to reflect on their origin and return to their root. The organization is an NGO that champions the revival, preservation and promotion of Igbo arts and cultural heritage. Cultural heritage, according to Onyejegbu, can be seen as a people's way of life, their traditional behavior including their ideas, indigenous crafts and artifacts which are passed down from one generation to another, and which are thought worthy of being sustained and maintained (Onyejegbu, 2014, p. 49). The association got the approval of the former Minister of Culture and Tourism, Ambassador Frank N. Ogbuewu on 3rd September, 2005 to organize

the *Iwa ji* festival. The festival was subsequently elevated to a national festival on 4th October, 2007 by Prince Tokunbo Kayode, the former Minister of Culture, Tourism and National Orientation. Thus, the National Yam House was built in Igbo-Ukwu by Nigerian Tourism Development Corporation (NTDC) under the leadership of its Director General Otunba Olusegun Runsewe and it was later commissioned by the Governor of Anambra State Mr Peter Obi on 25th August, 2008.

The association comprises twenty-six member communities which include, Igbo-Ukwu, Ekwulummiri, and so on (see Appendix I for list of member communities of Mbido Igbo Cultural Association). It is hierarchical in organization. The Board of Trustee members are traditional leaders of member communities. The traditional leader of Igbo-Ukwu, , is the chairman. Mr. Okafouzu Ugochukwu is the executive chairman of the organization. Every Igbo person is a member in principle, but has to register for membership with N1,000 and N150,000 to become a member of Board of Trustees. The association belongs to the Inter Agency Committee of Culture and Tourism Development. This agency promotes tourism in the southeast and comprises of agencies in culture and tourism at state and federal levels, which include; Nigerian Tourism Development Corporation, National Gallery of Art, National Council for Art and Culture, Centre for Black African Arts and Civilization, tourism boards in the five Igbo speaking States. These agencies synergize efforts to move the tourism sector forward in the southeast.

Among others, another r stakeholders in the National *Iwa ji* festival is Ọha na eze Ndigbo (see appendix II for the list of stakeholders of National *Iwa ji* festival). The festival was formerly celebrated in the first week of August but was later shifted to the last week of August after it had been made a national event. It lasts for one week (five working days). The symbol for *Iwa ji* festival depicts the hands of different traditional leaders of Igbo communities uniting together to cut the new yam. This symbolizes their unity in diversity as this symbolizes their unity in diversity as displayed in the festival.

As the *Iwa ji* festival approaches each year, delegates of *Mbido* Igbo Cultural Association and Inter agency South-east visit the Commissioner for Information, Culture, Tourism and National Orientation in Anambra State to inform him about the event and officially solicit financial support from the governor through the commissioner. The delegates also visit the nominees for chieftaincy titles and the award recipients to invite them to the event and, at the same time, solicit for financial support to fund the event. Series of meetings are organized at the Yam House to plan for the festival, making arrangements and assigning duties to members in preparation for the festival. The first meeting is with the southeast representatives. The meeting comprises of representatives from different sections of southeast, Nigeria. Subsequent meetings are held with members within Anambra State. During these meetings, the organizing committee deliberates and makes decisions concerning the traditional leaders they would visit, and the masquerades they would invite to the event. Other aspects of the plans are arrangement for

contracting clearing of the festival arena, alongside provision of, seats, canopies, public address system, foods and drinks. There has to be consultations also with the rain makers to assist in 'weather control'. Thereafter, invitation cards are sent to dignitaries which include, the traditional leaders selected from each of the five eastern states scheduled for visit.

The National *Iwa ji* festival involves a range of activities, which are summarized briefly below based on the 2013 edition**.**

**Day1.** The interdenominational service in 2013 was introduced in the program of National *Iwa ji* festival by the traditional leader of Igbo-Ukwu to give the event a Christian outlook. This was done in consideration of those who regard the *Iwa ji* festival as a 'heathen' feast. The service was titled "Interdenominational Thanksgiving Service and Peace Initiative" anchored by Igbo-Ukwu Born Again Christians.

**Day 2:** Delegates of Mbido Igbo Cultural Association and staff from the different federal parastatals in Igbo-Ukwu paid courtesy visit to selected traditional leaders from the five eastern regions. Prior to their visit, they informed the traditional leader of their proposed visit. The date and time of their visit was then fixed.

**Day 3**: Lecture and exhibition was conducted at the Centre for Black African Arts and Civilization to enlighten participants on African arts, Igbo origin, culture and strategies for sustainable agriculture. The Yam show for *Iwa ji* festival 2013 was conducted on the afternoon of the third day. A procession took place to showcase the new yam. It was conducted by Igbo-Ukwu Youth Council and'*Ikorobia Etiti*' (Etiti Young Men) with new tubers of yam harvested by the traditional leader of Igbo-Ukwu, amidst singing and dancing. This was done to announce to everyone that the new yam is out and is fit for consumption.

**Day 4:** Masquerade display at Dege's compound to commemorate this event. Later in the afternoon, art exhibition was declared open at the National Gallery of Art Igbo-Ukwu. National Gallery of Art Igbo-Ukwu hosts *Iwa ji* festival in Igbo-Ukwu for a day. This involves art exhibition, entertainment and refreshment. There is also Folklore Narration, Best Palm wine Tapper Competition as well as Wrestling Competition.

**Day 5**: This is the grand finale and the activities include Dances from South-East States, the opening of National Museum Exhibition for festival by National Commission for Museum and Monument (NCMM), *Iwa Ji* Living Awards, Biggest Yam Competitions, Chieftaincy Title Conferment, Showcasing the New yam in the public, Osadebe Jnr and Mgbajala Ifite Awka Night, show at Chief Bart Nwibe House in Etiti village

## Discussion

## Tourism Potentials of National *Iwa Ji* Festival

This section examines the contribution of some activities to National *Iwa ji* festival in the light of their contribution to cultural revival and tourism promotion. These include

**Courtesy Visits to Traditional Leaders of selected Igbo Communities:** The courtesy visit to traditional leaders in each of the five Igbo speaking states in recognition of their position in Igboland, a kind of politicizing of the festival and subtle or overt campaign for revival of Igbo culture. There is now a platform to enlighten the traditional leaders on the need for lgbo cultural revival, through the National *Iwa ji* festival and rationale behind its reconstruction. When these visits are done, there is opportunity to emphasize Igbo nationalism in the prayers said at every spot. There is also the opportunity to get important people in each community to support the project. According to Mr Okafouzu Ugochukwu, one of the executives of Mbido Igbo Association,

> *Yam festival is a people's festival. The Igwes are the custodians of people's culture. So the community will not celebrate the yam festival without informing the Igwes. When they go to the Igwe and say, 'We have fully prepared for this event', he gives his blessings.* (Okafouzu Ugochukwu, Personal Communication, August, 2012).

For as many Igwes as may be inclined towards attending the event as desirable the festival becomes the event that presents a Pan Igbo identity.

**Courtesy Visits to *Ezemụọ* (chief priest of the festival):** *Iwa ji* festival is usually preceded by a courtesy visit to the *Ezemụọ* (chief priest) of the festival. Now Christian Pastors, mostly Catholic priests are consulted and they consent to playing the role. However, according to Mr Sunday Okeke, one of the executives of Mbido Igbo Cultural Association, 'Some Christian religious leaders approached to be the *Ezemụọ* of the National *Iwa ji* festival declined on basis that the festival is a 'heathen' feast (Sunday Okeke, Personal Communication, July 2013). For instance Msgr. B.K. Nwazojie who was the *Ezemụọ* of the festival for about three years was the secretary of Inculturation in the Catholic Church. He strongly believes that Igbo people should not abandon their culture in the name of Christianity, but rather, retain certain aspects of Igbo culture which are ennobling, and good.

Courtesy call on the *Ezemụọ* before the National *Iwa ji* festival is done to give the festival a Christian outlook by way of the *Ezemụọ* praying to God for blessings and success of the *Iwa ji* festival. But the visit also widens the scope of participation in the event and by this, increase the number of tourists interested in watching it. *Ezemụọ* of *Iwa ji* festival 2012, Msgr. B.K. Nwazojie, affirms that:

> *Ije be Ezemụọ wee jee nata ngọzi, nata ya okwu ọnụ ya, nata ya ikike, ebe ọ bụ Ezemụọ, ọ ga- agwanụ Chukwu a na-efe, ọ si jee ka ọ si e jena? Na Chukwu na- agba ndi na- e jelụ ya ozi izụ. Ya bụ izụ ka o nenee ka amalụ ife mụọ kwụrụ. Ọ bụrọ ajọ mmụọ kama ọ mmụọ nke Chukwu. Ọ ife mgbe ochie afụ ka a na-achọ ka e mee ka ọ mawanye mma n'usoro nke Chukwu.*

This means:

> Visiting the *Ezemụọ* is to receive blessings, to get his word, authority as the chief priest. He will enquire from God whether to celebrate the festival or not, for God speaks to his messengers. The enquiry is to find out what the spirit says. It is not the evil spirit but the Spirit of God. It is the things done in the past that we want to make more beautiful in the way of God (Nwazojie, Personal Communication August, 2012).

The *Ezemụọ* is officially invited to the festival because his presence during the festival will convince Christians that the festival is not a 'heathen' feast and they can participate.

## Exhibitions and Lectures at Centre for Black African Arts and Civilization (CBAAC) Building:

There are permanent pictorial exhibitions of African Arts at CBAAC building for aesthetic purposes and for educating the people about African Art. Lectures in CBAAC are centred on agriculture and traditional values that are fast being jettisoned by the people. In National *Iwa ji* festival 2012, the theme for the lecture was Agricultural Transformation for Food Security through Yam, Cocoyam and Sweet Potato Production by J. C. Okonkwo, J.G. Ikeorgu and G.O. Chukwu. The guest lecturer was Dr. J.G.Ikeorgu. The other guest lecturer, Dr. Nwaezeigwe from UNN delivered a lecture on 'The Concept of Aro-Okigbo as a Historical Misnomer: The Historical Conspiracy of a Histrionic Igbo Hegemony'. In his paper, Nwaezeigwe debunked the claims of historical primacy of Aro sub-culture group over the rest of Igbo people.

The curator of CBAAC used the event as a platform to publicize CBAAC and its objectives. The Deputy Director for Information, Culture and Tourism, Mrs Obiageli Okoli, submitted that the lecture is needed because with it, certain issues regarding Igbo people as a nation and the need for a revival is stressed. In addition to viewing these works of arts, and learning more about African arts and culture, especially Igbo culture, there is entertainment and other activities geared towards cultural and identity preservation and attraction of tourists.

**Yam Show:** Yam show undertaken by Igbo-Ukwu Youth Council during the National *Iwa ji* festival can be said to be the reconstructed version of the Mock Yam Sale organized by members of Igbo Traditional Religion in Igbo-Ukwu. It shares the same objective with the Mock yam sale, which shows the matured new yam to all and sundry. However, it does not mock the old ones. Moreover, during the Mock Yam Sale, '*ụmụ ụtụ*' (members of Igbo traditional religion), after the chief priest have performed the kolanut ritual in the shrine, proceed from the shrine of deity, *Udo* to *Nkwọ* market and then move back to the shrine after performing the ritual in the market. On the other hand, members of Igbo-Ukwu Youth Council, after the traditional leader of Igbo-Ukwu has performed kolanut ritual, proceed from Dege's compound to *Nkwọ* market and then to St. Martin's Catholic Church. That is, the change occurring is from Traditional Igbo Religion to Christianity and those who can handle the transformation effectively are the Christian leaders.

**Exhibitions at National Gallery of Art Igbo- Ukwu (NGA):** People express their feelings and beliefs through works of art. The art works exhibited during *Iwa ji* festival take the minds of the people back to their cherished cultural values and history. From the perspective of Stanley, a staff of NGA Igbo-Ukwu, the rationale for organizing the exhibition during the *Iwa ji* festival is to make,

> *it possible for us (staff) to also find an avenue to play our part in fulfilling the mandate for which we are established as a parastatal of culture and tourism. The exhibition is usually for people to come and see creativity of our artists that we have around the environment. This also gives artists in this land an avenue to exhibit their talents and skills in art. This is the major joy of every artist. To be able to show what he is doing for people to appreciate* (Stanley, Personal Communication, August, 2013).

The point here is that, although National Gallery of Art Igbo-Ukwu is under the Federal Ministry of Tourism, Culture and Orientation, *Iwa ji* festival is part of the Igbo people's cultural heritage and identity. This, according to Stankova and Vassenska (2005) is the distinguishing characteristic of a local group .Thus, it becomes necessary for the organization to be a part of the festival. Quite aside from the archaeological discoveries of art works in Igbo-Ukwu attesting to the level of civilization of Igbo people, the exhibition affords the artists the opportunity to showcase their talents within a creative agenda. The context of the festival is now a platform for the highest expression of artistic talents in the area, whether it is in the form of art, music, drama and oral communication' (Owusu-Frempong, 2005:732). Tourists come not just to promote their work and appreciate others' talents, but also to market their ideas within the broad stream of Igbo nationalistic feelings, history and

agenda. There is a ready crowd in this setting waiting for such intellectual and practical excursions.

**Carrying Traditional Leaders into the Festival Arena:** The carrying-in of traditional leaders into the festival arena is a form of respect to these leaders. This is not really an indigenous aspect of the Igbo-Ukwu *Iwa ji* festival. But it has historic value. It is the reenactment of how the warrant chiefs were conveyed to special events during the colonial period. In those days, six able bodied young men would carry a warrant chief in a kind of weaved chair '*ọmọ ọku*' to court and other special events. In this wise, this serves as an avenue to commemorate history. It may not, however be, according to Ichie Ezechukwu Umeokwonna, a history that the Igbo people are proud of as those warrant chiefs had no regard for their carriers. (Ichie Ezechukwu, Umeokwonna Personal Communication, August, 2012). It is noteworthy, however it may tend to add color to the event and make the entrance of the traditional leaders remarkable.

**Yam Competition:** This involves farmers bringing the best and biggest yam tuber harvested to the *Iwa ji* festival. The tubers of yam would be weighed and the farmer with the biggest yam rewarded. The reason for the inclusion of yam competition in the National *Iwa ji* festival is to rekindle the interest of Igbo people in agriculture. An informant, the chief priest of the festival Msgr Nwazojie opines, that yam competition is an encouragement to hard work and initiative and push in life and also increases socialization (Msgr Nwazojie, Personal Communication, August, 2012). Truly, there is need to encourage Igbo people to take to farming especially that of yam crop as it is part of Igbo identity. In the same vein, hard work which is also part of Igbo identity is promoted as laziness is abhorred in Igbo culture. On the issue of socialization, yam competition would attract yam farmers from different parts of Igbo land to the festival to showcase their products. As they come, they exchange ideas on how to improve their crop yield. Again, competition is a good sport incorporated into festival for touristic purposes because as tourists view the tubers of yam brought for competition, it adds to the excitement of the event thereby promoting tourism. In other words, a kind of commercialization of the festival.

**Palm Wine Tapping Competition:** Palm wine tapping competition is done during this festival because palm is a product of harvest: it is also meant to emphasize the importance of palm wine in Igbo culture. Prince Enyi, curator of National Museum Igbo-Ukwu submits,

> *It is still a side attraction, even though the palm wine is present at all Igbo celebrations. When you talk of palm wine being present, at times people don't recognize the tapper of palm wine. It is a way of recognizing them that the festival organizers invite the*

> *palm wine tapper. So that, they would kind of, show their skills. We try to encourage the palm wine tappers. That's the reason why we bring them in* (Prince Enyi, Personal Communication, August, 2013).

Indeed, the inclusion of wine tapping competition is expected to add color to the event, resuscitate the profession and encourage palm wine tappers. In addition to this, the competition is included in the National *Iwa ji* festival for touristic purpose, that is, an avenue created to engage tourists during *Iwa ji* festival as the sport adds to excitement of the festival.

**Wrestling:** Wrestling is a major recreational activity in Igboland. According to HRH Igwe Ebelendu, the traditional leader of Aguluezechukwu, a member of Board of Trustees Mbido Igbo, the reasons for the inclusion of wrestling matches are:

> *Fancha bu omenana Igbo.* Encouragement *ka a malu ha ka esi eme ya mbu. O omenana na-anwu anwu, ana-achozi ka e revive o o ya. Uru o balu n'obodo bu iji maa onye bu di ike.* A strong man, a man who is physically strong.

Meaning:

> They are all Igbo culture. Encouragement. This is for people to know how it was done in the past. It is a culture that is dying, that is being revived. The importance of wrestling is that it is used to determine a strong man. A man who is physically strong (HRH Igwe Ebelendu, Personal Communication, July, 2013).

The inclusion of wrestling in National *Iwa ji* festival is to serve as an encouragement to individuals and Igbo communities that still engage in wrestling. It is for young people to witness how wrestling was done in the past as most of them have not witnessed Igbo wrestling contest before. Wrestling is included to serve as entertainment to tourists and add to the excitement of the event.

**Folktales:** Folktales are fictious stories in Igbo culture which perform entertainment and didactic functions. They are stories about the Igbo culture and its acceptable standard of behavior. Ichie Ezechukwu Umeokwonna, the secretary of *ọzọ* institution Igbo-Ukwu opines:

> *Ọtụtụ ihe kwesiri ka nwata malụ wee bụrụ ezigbo mmadu na obodo dicha n' ime akụkọ ifo. Akọọ ebe mbe na agụ zuru ohi, ifu afụfụ onye zuru ohi tara. Mgbe ahụ, nwata ahụ aghọta na-izu ohi adihu mma. Na*

> *akụkọ ifo ka ndi Igbo si akụzi ihe nine di ha mkpa na* society.
>
> Meaning
>
> Most things a child is supposed to know to be a good member of his community are embedded in folktales. In a story where the tortoise and the lion stole, you will see the punishment for stealing. Then, the child will understand that stealing is not good. Igbo people use folktales to teach all that is important to them in the society (Ichie Ezechukwu Umeokwonna, Personal Communication, August, 2013).

In the same vein, the traditional leader of Ikenga, Igwe Alupuo, argues that folktale is included to encourage the younger generation to know there are folktales in Igbo culture (Igwe Alupuo, Personal Communication, July, 2013). The inclusion of folktale session during *Iwa ji* festival is to enliven the event, resuscitate folktales and sustain the tradition. Another reason is that as folktale narration is a form of entertainment in Igbo culture, it is incorporated to engage tourists during the festival.

**Chieftaincy Title Taking:** Traditionally, in Igbo culture, there are titles such as *Eze Ji* (king of yams) for a very successful yam farmer; *Ogbuagu* (killer of lion) for an adroit hunter who had killed a lion. However, in this modern time, most Igbo people trade and some engage in white collar job. Individuals who have contributed to the development of their community by providing infrastructure or carrying out humanitarian services, such as awarding scholarship to indigent students, are appreciated by conferring them with chieftaincy titles. Of course, a chieftaincy title recipient must be a person of integrity or the members of the community will object. According to Mr Prince Enyi, the curator Federal Museum Igbo-Ukwu,

> *Actually, the chieftaincy aspect of the festival to me is like an avenue to recognize certain people in the society and then raise some fund to cater for the other aspects of new yam activities. The chieftaincy recipients are supposed to pay some amount of money that will be used to sponsor some other activities of the Mbido Igbo so that's why the chieftaincy title thing* (Prince Enyi, Personal communication, August, 2013).

The inclusion of chieftaincy title in the National *Iwa ji* festival is first, to appreciate this category of people, and more importantly to raise fund to support the festival and provide motivation for the traditional leaders who conduct the ceremony; since, the chieftaincy title recipients are required to pay

a certain amount of money before acquiring the title. This is a radical departure from the traditional style of chieftaincy title taking procedure.

**Traditional Dances:** The invitation to various dance troupes from different Igbo speaking states, according to most informants, is to show that Igbo people have a good dancing culture and to showcase this to the world, entertain the people, make the event lively. The various dance groups invited display their dancing skills, as well as learn new steps to improve on their skills. In addition to this, Pius Okeke, a member of Mbido Igbo Association, submits that he believes that tourists relax more after watching the various cultural dance groups display (Pius Okeke Personal Communication, August, 2013). The reasons for the invitation of various dance groups during this festival are properly captured by Chuma Ojukwu, a senior civil servant at National Museum Igbo-Ukwu, who hinted:

> *I believe dance is in everything Igbos do. If they don't dance, is like they are not happy. To show they are happy with the event, they bring in dancing troupes from the Igbo speaking states to come and perform and showcase their different dance steps. And it is also a way of promoting dance groups from different areas, when the tourists come, they know that this and this people are good in dance* (Chuma Ojukwu Personal Communication, 2013).

Dancing is an element in thanksgiving rituals, and whether it is for the appreciation of traditional deity or the Christians' God, it makes statement of cultural sense of aesthetics and the content of self-other relation.

**Exhibition at National Museum Igbo-Ukwu:** The museum organizes special exhibition of different species of yam crop and implements used for its cultivation. The exhibition helps to publicize the museum and make tourists aware of its presence. It motivates them to visit the museum during the festival. According to Prince Enyi, the curator of National Museum Igbo-Ukwu, the

> *Tourists come to learn how people used artifacts in the past and how it added to their development. Because whatever invention that is made now or that will be made in future, must take its origin from the artifacts in the museum* (Prince Enyi, Personal Communication, August 2012).

The exhibition in the Museum does not just showcase artefacts, it is a centre of memories of the past as are indicated in values identities, and standards that have constituted Igbo-Ukwu culture and their pride. This view aligns with Gertz's opinion that, 'Festivals and other planned events can foster

and re-inforce group identity (Gertz, 2010:5). Those who share the ideals and values of this identity share resource, nurse the same concerns and subscribe to the same destiny (Lawuyi, 2004: 42).

Indeed, there are other factors that promote tourism such as the hospitality of the host community. Tourists avoid tourists' areas where the locals are hostile and visit hospitable areas because no individual would want to relax in a hostile environment. It was noted in the course of this research that because members of Igbo-Ukwu community are hospitable to tourists, those who came from other states, or countries, to the community want to come again. Yvonne Bassey, a woman from Akwa-Ibom, testifies to the host's hospitality:

> *I find Igbo people to be very welcoming people, they are very kind and they are very friendly. You get complete strangers who want to make you more comfortable, give you a seat, make you have something to drink, make sure you have something to eat in an event and that is wonderful. I think this is what we should borrow a leaf from, for the rest of the states let us live together in unity because that is where our strength lies* (Yvonne Bassey, Personal Communication, August, 2012).

By local perspective of the natives, as well as organizers of the events, anyone who is not a registered member of Mbido Igbo Association is a tourist. This perspective covers those from within Nigeria that visited, especially from the southeastern part of the country. The international tourists, presently, come in trickles. Eze, Ada came from Awka, but has been attending the event for the past five years. She comments:

> *Mmemme a na-ejikọta ndi* Igbo. *Ana m abia the* last day, last day *ka a na-achikọta ihe nine ọnụ* because *I bia* first and second day *enwesi major thing mana the main Iwa ji, I lee anya, I ga afụ mgbe Igwe wara ji.* So, *na mbọsi ikpeazụ bụ the* last day *ka a na-eme the* major *mmemme ana-eme, ndi nine abia kwuo* opinion *ha gbasatara ihe ụfọdụ n'ana* Igbo. So, *ana m abia* only on Saturdays.

This means:

> The ceremony integrates Igbo people. I always come on the last day, all activities is finalized in the last day because when you come on the first day and second day, there are major event but the main yam cutting, you saw when the traditional leader cut the yam. So, the major event is done on the last day. Everyone will come and express his opinion concerning certain things in Igbo land. So,

> I come only on Saturdays (Eze, Ada Personal Communication, August, 2013).

What we also noticed is that most people come only on the last day of the festival, and most probably because, as Eze, Ada had said, it is to witness the cutting of the new yam which takes place on this day. What, in fact she appreciates most and others also do, is the integrative potentials of the *Iwa ji* festival for Igbo nationality. Thus, in line with Cudny's opinion that festival creates a broad social capital which helps people to develop interpersonal relationships (Cudny, 2013). With the local experience connecting with the wider Igbo experiences an otherwise community affair has become a Pan Igbo rally for identity, identification, and the promotion of Igbo values. Consequently, the Igbo, at home and in diaspora, are willing to link up with the theme of the project, which seems to be gradually deviating from the original concern with human productivity and achievement, and the integrative nature of Igbo-Ukwu cosmology. *Iwa ji* festival celebrates not just human achievement but also its survival on the strength of fertility potency; and in the ceremony man and his spiritual world are one in the desire to sustain their mutuality so that they can continue to co- exist.

On the long run, the availability of material capital is a determinant factor for a sustainable tourism development. From Cernat and Gourton's perspective, "infrastructure assets are key requirements to sustainable development since accessibility of specific tourism destinations depends on the quality of the overall infrastructure" (Cernat and Gourton, 2011 cited in Ayeni, 2013:5). Tourists are attracted to destinations that have the necessary infrastructure provided to ensure their comfort; and often the quality of the infrastructure is under consideration in their rationalization of the destination worth patronizing. As Ukpokolo and Okoye (2013 noted, 'For tourism to flourish in any nation there is need for infrastructural facilities' (Ukpokolo and Okoye, 2013:87). There must be good roads, security, accommodation, eateries, water and toilet facilities. These are necessary for the comfort of tourists during their visit. In the case of *Iwa ji* festival, the state of the infrastructure available for the use of the tourists leaves much to be desired and this accounts for low patronage by "foreigners". For instance, the road leading to Yam House is in a poor state, and there is limited accommodation available for tourists within Igbo-Ukwu. Therefore, some tourists had to use accommodation facilities in the neighboring communities such as Ora-eri, Awka Etiti. There is no traditional cooking restaurant in any of the government parastatals or Yam House in Igbo-Ukwu. The toilet facilities are limited in number in all these sites. Lack of adequate material infrastructure appears to pose a serious challenge to motivate increase in the number of tourists. An indisputable fact however, is that the festival has huge tourism potentials.

## Conclusion

The National *Iwa ji* festival lasts for a week (five working days). It commences with courtesy visits to three (3) traditional leaders selected from any of the five (5) southeastern states in recognition of their position in Igbo communities, publicize the festival as well as enlighten them on the need to support the festival. The courtesy visit to the *Ezemụọ* (chief priest of the festival) usually a Christian priest is to give the event a Christian outlook, request the *Ezemụọ* to pray for the success of the festival and encourage participation. The exhibitions and lectures in CBAAC building are fixed to publicize the agency, provide entertainment and enlighten tourists on key cultural issues and methods of agriculture. The exhibition at the National Museum is to showcase the cultural materials therein and encourage tourists to visit the place. Also, exhibition in the National Gallery of Arts Igbo-Ukwu provides opportunity for artists to showcase their talents and entertain tourists some of whom can buy arts work they appreciate. The folktale sessions provide entertainment and sustain the culture of story telling. The grand finale is at the Yam House Igbo-Ukwu. The events on this day include, masquerade displays, wrestling matches, palm wine tapping competition, poetry recitation among others. These events entertain tourists and sustain these cultural activities which are on the verge of extinction. Chieftaincy title conferment are done to appreciate the contribution of the recipients to humanity and equally raise money for the festival. These events are put together to project and sustain Igbo culture and identity. It was also noted that with proper organization and packaging, the National *Iwa ji* festival has the propensity to attract both local and international tourists. Notably, however, it has been observed that paucity of social infrastructure such as good roads, accommodation, eateries and toilet facilities pose a serious threat to the survival of the festival.

The following recommendations are made based on the findings of this research to improve the tourism potentials of the National *Iwa ji* festival:

- There is need to provide adequate infrastructure particularly good roads to make mobility easy for tourists during visits.
- Stakeholders, particularly, the government of Anambra State need to support the National *Iwa ji* festival to make it more meaningful and at par with other cultural festivals in Nigeria.
- Management should welcome and actively monitor the concerns of all legitimate stakeholders and should take their interest appropriately into account in decision and operations of the festival.
- Stakeholders have a right to know what the festival achieved. Reporting back to stakeholders is an essential part of promoting the profile and acceptance of the festival.
- There is need to create wider publicity for the National *Iwa ji* festival through the media, Internet and churches to attract substantial interest of the people in the festival and its sponsorship.

- Workshops and seminars should be organized for the traditional leaders of Igbo communities who may not be willing to participate in the National *Iwa ji* festival to enlighten them on the benefits of cultural tourism and National *Iwa ji* festival.
- There is need for proper management and organization of National *Iwa ji* festival to improve its standard and make the festival more attractive to local and international tourists.

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## Appendix I

## List of Member-Communities of Mbido Igbo Cultural Association kpo

1) Azigbo, Anambra State
2) Akwaeze, Anambra State
3) Achina, Anambra State
4) Akpu

5) Amaokpala Anambra State
6) Akwaihedi, Anambra State
7) Amaja, Enugu State
8) Ekwulumili, Anambra State
9) Ekwuluobia, Anambra State
10) Ebenato, Nnewi South Anambra State
11) Ezinihite Aguata, Anambra State
12) Ibeagwa-Aka, Enugu State
13) Igbo-ukwu, Anambra State
14) Igogolo, Enugu State
15) Isiochi, Abia State
16) Iseke, Anambra State
17) Isuofia, Anambra State
18) Nike Iheaka, Enugu State
19) Omogho, Anambra State
20) Owerre Ezukala, Anambra State
21) Owerre Nkwo Oji, Imo State
22) Ozubulu, Anambra State
23) Ukpor, Anambra State
24) Umunze, Anambra State
25) Uga, Anambra State
26) Unubi, Anambra State

## Appendix II

List of Stakeholders of National *Iwa Ji* Festival

1)Nigerian Tourism Development Corporation.

2) Federal Ministry of Tourism, Culture and National Orientation.

3) National Root Crop Research Institute, Umudike.

4)International Institute of Tropical Agriculture, Ibadan, Oyo State.

5) Anambra State Government.

6) Igbo Communities at Home and in the Diaspora.