

**TOURISM, THE DIASPORA AND IKEJI FESTIVAL OF ARONDIZUOGU:  
CULTURE AND THE EXIGENCIES OF MODERNISM**

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**Abstract**

*Festivals are a prime example of the richness and diversity of a people's culture. It is often said that the greatness of a culture is embedded in its festivals. Celebrations such as the Ikeji festival, demonstrates the creativity, grandeur and cultural values of the Arondizuogu people and by extension, the Igbo of South-eastern Nigeria. The significance of this festival, touted as one of the biggest cultural festivals in Igboland<sup>23</sup>, to the Aro community must be enormous, such that every year, thousands of Aro people spread across several cities in Africa, Europe, Asia, and the Americas must return home to their ancestral homeland to celebrate the Ikeji festival with their families. This research investigates the role of tourism and the diaspora connection to African cultural festivals, using the Ikeji Festival of Arondizuogu as a case study. The significance of this study lies in the question - why has the Ikeji Festival retained its relevance and fame, despite the great magnitude of external migrations from Africa to Europe, America, and Asia in the 21st century? Does the Ikeji festival have any tourism value? What role does the diaspora have to play in relation to the Ikeji festival? The study collated primary data from ten (10) Aro communities in Southeastern Nigeria, including Arochukwu, the parent community. Secondary data was collected through books, journals, conference papers, newspaper publications and online articles. The hermeneutic and thematic methods of inquiry were employed by the researchers given the very nature of the subject of research. It discovered that the diaspora have a fundamental role to play for the sustainability of the Ikeji festival.*

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<sup>23</sup> Tunde Akinbode, Nigeria: Ikeji Festival, Uniting People Around Culture, This Day Newspaper, 8th May, 2007. <https://allafrica.com/stories/200705090192.html> accessed on 7th October, 2022.

**Keywords:** Festival, Diaspora, Tourism, Ikeji, Arondizuogu, Igboland, Arochukwu

## **Introduction**

In traditional Igbo society, in Southeast Nigeria, yam is the king of crops. To express their reverence for this staple, most Igbo communities organise new yam festivals known as *'iri ji* (yam feast), *iwa ji* (yam slicing), or *ike ji* (yam tying)<sup>24</sup>, filled with celebratory funfairs, masquerade displays and thanksgiving to celebrate the end of the farming season and a successful harvest of yams.

However, the Ikeji festival of Arondizuogu seems to differ from the Ikeji of other Igbo communities, in its theme, activities and period. The first distinguishing factor of the Ikeji festival of Arondizuogu from all other Ikeji's is the period of celebration - the Ikeji of Arondizuogu celebration does not coincide with the timing of other new yam festivals. While other Igbo communities celebrate their new yam festival at the end of the rainy season in August or September in line with the Igbo culture and calendar, the Ikeji Arondizuogu is held in March or April. That the Ikeji festival is fixed before the traditional period of yam festivals in Igboland suggests that the festival holds unique cultural connotations that transcend yam celebration for the people of Arondizuogu, otherwise called the Aro (*Ndi Aro*).

Ikeji is more a festival of thanksgiving and propitiation than it is a yam harvest celebration. It is also an avenue for the community to retell and remember the history and stories that unite them, for disputes to be settled, and peace brokered between kindreds. Through the Ikeji festival, marriages have been formed, business partnerships consolidated, and lifelong friendships borne. The Ikeji Arondizuogu has in recent times, transcended beyond a local festival of thanksgiving and atonement to an annual homecoming and reunion feast, drawing Aro sons and daughters from all over the world back home to reignite their cultural values and the reason they are called *Ndi Aro*.

## **Origin of the Ikeji Festival in Arondizuogu**

The Ikeji festival is celebrated by the Aro people of South-eastern Nigeria. The term 'Aro' means 'community'. The Aro are primarily people who originate from Arochukwu in Abia state. However, due to the strong economic and religious

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<sup>24</sup> Nonso Egbo, Iwa-Ji, The New Yam Festival in Igbo Land, published 18th October 2021. <https://guardian.ng/life/iwa-ji-the-new-yam-festival-in-igbo-land/> . Accessed on October 5th, 2022.

power wielded by the Aro during the mid-18th century, the Aro easily expanded into other settlements through conquests, and established the Aro confederacy everywhere they went. The people of Aro can be found in about 250 settlements mostly in South-eastern Nigeria<sup>25</sup>. Some of the Aro settlements spread across the five south-eastern Nigeria states include: Aro Ngwa in Abia State; Aro Ndizuogu in Imo State; Aro Ajalli in Anambra State; Aro Nzerem in Ebonyi State; Aro Ezeagu in Enugu State, among many others<sup>26</sup>.

The origin of the Ikeji festival in Arondizuogu is shrouded in mythology. Many versions exist. Uche Ohia, however, suggested that Ikeji began as a ceremony to mark the end of one planting season and the beginning of another<sup>27</sup>. According to Oghaji, the festival has its roots from its variant celebrated in Arochukwu, the parent community of Arondizuogu<sup>28</sup> long before Mazi Izuogu settled at Arochukwu. Oghaji further narrates that Ikeji Arondizuogu originated from the parent community - Arochukwu where it was celebrated around the month of September, in line with the Igbo calendar of new yam festival celebration. During that time, Mazi IHEME, who was a regent placed by Mazi Izuogu in the new Arondizuogu settlement to manage it, would travel to Arochukwu to celebrate the feast in his master's household and to pay him all the homage rites due to him as his master and lord, in accordance with Aro tradition.

Upon return to Arondizuogu, Mazi IHEME would return the favour the next year by extending an invite to his master Izuogu to the new settlement-Arondizuogu to officially seek his permission to till the land. This was usually done in March/April and was a celebratory occasion where Mazi IHEME would entertain his master to a grandiose feast and colourful masquerade displays during his stay. He called this ceremony *Emume itinye aka n'ubi*<sup>29</sup> (occasion of laying hands into the farmland), where Mazi Izuogu would bless the land before the people cultivate crops. This is the beginning of the changes to the Ikeji festival of Arondizuogu in comparison to other Ikeji festivals celebrated in Igboland.

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<sup>25</sup> Aro People, culled from the Wikipedia Encyclopedia, [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Aro\\_people](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Aro_people). Accessed on October 6th, 2022.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid

<sup>27</sup> Uche Ohia, Ikeji Festival of Arondizuogu: An Introduction. Silverduck Publishing Press, Nigeria, 2014. P. 2.

<sup>28</sup> Nat Okafor-Ogbaji, Ikeji Festival Arondizuogu, ancient and modern. Lagos Printing Press, Nigeria, 1998. P. 11-12.

<sup>29</sup> H. A. P. Nwana, Arondizuogu Traditional Values. Standard Publishers Ltd, Nigeria, 2005. P. 24 - 27.

After the death of Mazi Izuogu and Mazi Iheme, Mazi Iheme's descendants renamed the *Emume* feast to Ikeji. It then became the responsibility of Iheme's descendants to fix the dates of Ikeji Izuogu- the question as to why it was Iheme, a servant, and not Izuogu, his master, who enjoyed the privilege of fixing the date for Ikeji has been posed often. The reason is that Izuogu could not have fixed the date for his visit himself, he resided in Arochukwu till his death and only visited Arondizuogu on the request of Iheme. Mazi Iheme exercised the rights of a host and always fixed the date to coincide with the planting season so as to receive his master's blessings before tilling the land.

Till this day, it is Eze Iheme and his council of chiefs- *Akajiofor* who announce the date of the Ikeji festival.

### **Festival Days and their Significance**

In Igbo culture, there are four days in a week, seven weeks make one month, and thirteen months make a year. The four market days are Eke, Orie, Afor and Nkwo<sup>30</sup>. The Ikeji festival follows the traditional Igbo calendar days of Eke, Oye, Afor and Nkwo. Originally, the Ikeji festival lasted for eight days, i.e., two weeks; however, due to modern changes and urbanisation, the festival thrives on a shortened 4 day version. Each of these days - Eke, Oye, Afor and Nkwo has special significance.

1. **Eke Odu:** The first day is on Eke market day -EKE ODU. The Eke Odu is the largest market in Arondizuogu town. It is during Eke Odu that shopping for all foodstuff and wares needed during the festival are made. Eke Odu Ikeji begins as early as 6am and may continue till twilight around 7pm. Every male adult, especially male heads of families, would endeavour to buy at least one live animal for Ikeji rituals. These animals are not due for slaughter until the next day being Oye Egbu<sup>31</sup>.
2. **Oye Egbu:** It means "Oye of Slaughter". This is the day when all the livestock purchased the day before are slaughtered and processed. The *Obi* (family altar) is carefully cleansed and prepared for the sacrifices. It is

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<sup>30</sup> Anayo Benjamin Ossai, Time in Igbo Cosmology: The Ritual and its Values; Kanu, I. A. *Igbo-African Market Days and the Conservation of the Eco-System*. In I. A. Kanu (Ed.). *African Indigenous Ecological Knowledge Systems: Religion, Philosophy and the Environment* (41-56). Maryland, USA: Association for the Promotion of African Studies. ISBN: 978-978-997-555-6. DOI: [10.13140/RG.2.2.21355.67368](https://doi.org/10.13140/RG.2.2.21355.67368), 2021.

<sup>31</sup> Uche Ohia, P. 5.

believed that the good ancestral spirits visit the *Obi* on this day to commune with their descendants. The significance is that people are very careful of their words and actions so as not to anger the ancestors who would come visiting<sup>32</sup>.

3. **Afor/Nkwo Oso Mmonwu:** Afor is the day of masquerade displays while Nkwo is the main carnival day when all old, new, and ceremonial masquerades assemble at the central area. From all the communities of Arondizuogu and beyond, hordes of exotically dressed masquerades accompanied by their exuberant entourage trudge out towards central arenas in Arondizuogu (*Nkwo Achi, Nkwo pericoma, Ama Edward*). The highlight of Ikeji is the captivating parade of assorted masquerade groups who engage their spectators in the race known as *Oso mmonwu*. These two days are the most anticipated days of the festival which leaves an exciting spectacle of enchanted spectators at the end."<sup>33</sup>

According to Uche Ohia, the festival continues the succeeding week on Eke day, called **Eke Nwusa Akpata**<sup>34</sup>, and this is the last day of Ikeji Arondizuogu festivities. On this day, all the masquerades assemble at the market square to stage their final display in the festival. At the end of the displays, all masquerades are expected to discard their whips (*akpata*) hence the title *Eke Nwusa Akpata* (*Eke* for the discarding of whips).

Below is chant by young boys on Nkwo, a day before Eke Odu Ikeji:

<b>Igbo</b>	<b>English</b>
Ta bu Nkwo	Today is Nkwo
Echi bu Eke-Odu Ikeji	Tomorrow is Eke Odu Ikeji
Nwanne ya bu Afor	The next is Afor

<sup>32</sup> Ibid

<sup>33</sup> Ibid

<sup>34</sup> Uche Ohia, Ikeji Festival: A Harvest of Thrill and Frills

Ozo bu Nkwo	Another is Nkwo
Anyi ga eme mmonwu, nwanne	we shall masquerade, brother <sup>35</sup>

### Post-Festival Days

Whilst Ikeji Festival officially ends on Eke Nwusa Akpata day, according to Nwana, in practice, Ikeji continues for another four days as the masquerades take part in various masquerade displays in markets<sup>36</sup>. The *Izu Ahia Mmonwu* constitutes the traditional concluding part of the Ikeji festival and belies the fact that originally, Ikeji ran a full course as an 8-day festival. The abridgements of the Ikeji to a four-day festival illustrates the dynamism of Igbo culture, the exigencies of modernity which have made an eight-day ceremony impractical<sup>37</sup>.

### Festival of Masquerades: Ikeji Masked Spirits and their Significance

1. Among the Igbo, masquerades are surrounded by myths and treated with reverence. This is because they are held to embody the spirit of the ancestors. They are therefore not regarded as human but as spiritual beings with supernatural attributes<sup>38</sup>. By Arondizuogu tradition, it is a taboo for any part of the masquerade to be exposed by anyone, it is also a taboo to fight with, unmask or to call a masquerade by a human name. The masquerade's apparel is made up mostly of silk, wool, and cotton. Some appear in calico or other coarse fabrics. Some others appear in materials made of nets, feathers, and smoking pots<sup>39</sup>. The purpose being to evoke fear, according to Ottenberg, especially among the excited spectators<sup>40</sup>. The masquerade speaks in a guttural voice, sometimes it recites traditional poetry like a troubadour; other times it displays acrobatic dance steps to

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<sup>35</sup> J. G. Okoro, A Brief History of Arondizuogu, University of Ibadan Publishers, 2002. P. 266

<sup>36</sup> Nwana, P. 31.

<sup>37</sup> Uche Ohia, 21.

<sup>38</sup> Kanu, I. A., Masquerades in African Philosophy and the Issue of Nation Building. *Indian Journal of Applied Research*. Volume. 4. Issue. 9. pp. 4-7. 2014.

<sup>39</sup> Uche Ohia, Ikeji Festival, 12.

<sup>40</sup> Simon Ottenberg, Illusion, Communication, and Psychology in West African Masquerades, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/3696962>, Society for Psychological Anthropology Ethos Journal, Vol. 10, No. 2, 1982. P. 149.

thrill the crowd of spectators. Each masquerade bears a specific name. Some very important Ikeji masquerades include Mgbadike, Ojionu, Okwomma, Onyekuruye, amongst many others. Each of these masquerades have special significance to the Aro people.

The masked spirits are held in high prestige and dignity; therefore, all the initiates of the masquerade cult are strictly cautioned against exposing any secret of the cult. Defaulters are held ransom to punishments which often include disqualification from the masquerade cults.

### **Modern Trends in the Ikeji Festival**

One of the major changes that has influenced the Ikeji festival is religion. Just like other Igbo communities in the precolonial era, Christianity had found its way into Arondizuogu communities and existed side by side with the Igbo Traditional Religion in the mid-19th century<sup>41</sup>. By the early 20th century, Christianity had already modified some cultural practices of the Ikeji festival. One notable example is the eradication of the *Ime chi umunwanyi*. This was a sacrifice performed by Arondizuogu women to their *Chi* (personal god) on the eve of Eke Odu day. This sacrifice involved the sprinkling of a hen's blood on a small earthenware, aimed at thanking the ancestors for keeping them in good health<sup>42</sup>. However, the practice is no more in existence because the Christian religion kicked against it<sup>43</sup>. According to Raphael Okeke:

The priests preached against it in church, they said it was devilish to sacrifice to dead people who could not return to life, and we asked, what about the sacrifices of hens and goats we present to the church each Thanksgiving Day, is it not the same? Some women have since stopped the Ime-Chi and instead go to church on Oye day to do the same thanksgiving<sup>44</sup>

Even so, most Christian family heads have discontinued the ritual ceremonies associated with the *Oye Egbugbu* day. As hitherto explained, the *Oye Egbugbu* day is one of the significant days of the Ikeji festival where families, led by the male head, offer sacrifices of atonement in the Obi, to appease the ancestors for

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<sup>41</sup> J. G. Okoro, a Brief History of Arondizuogu, P. 268.

<sup>42</sup> R. O. Igwegbe, The Original History of Arondizuogu 1635 - 1960. Aba, 1962. P.63.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid

<sup>44</sup> Oral interview, Chief Racheal Okeke, Patron of Umuada Group at Ndi Ejezie Community, conducted by Precious Okoye on 21st June 2014 at Ndi Ejezie Village, Arondizuogu.

previous wrongdoings. This practice which holds the core meaning of *Emume Ikeji* (Ikeji ceremony) has waned with the rise of Christianity in the community. Another spectacular influence of Christianity on the Ikeji festival is the extinction of the *Ito Ebune* (untying the ram) ceremony. In the old dispensation, *Ito Ebune* held sway during the Ikeji festival<sup>45</sup>. The *Ito Ebune* is held in the village square, where middle aged men fight each other to untie and take home a fat ram tied to a big tree, much to the glee of the large crowd of spectators. However, *Ito Ebune* has become unfashionable today as the most Christians avoid the ceremony for fear of being categorized as fetish.

On the side of the Christian faith, the church forbids those practices seen as unscriptural. In the words of Uche:

The Ikeji festival is an Arondizuogu cultural festival celebrated before or after the Easter period. The church prohibits idol worshipping or sacrifice of animals to dead relatives - this is not biblical and should be avoided by every Christian. Instead, they should come to church, thank God for the opportunity to see another Ikeji, then go home and eat their meals with gratitude. Please note that the church does not stop its members from enjoying the masquerade displays, but only prohibits them from participating in the masquerade performances as the masquerade or its entourage.<sup>46</sup>

From the foregoing, one can say that with the advent of Christianity, some intricate features of the Ikeji festival has eroded. However, Nwana argues that although Ikeji is not a Christian ceremony, the church does not reject its essence but only asks that it should not offend its faith<sup>47</sup>. He emphasises that the church allows participation by its members to the extent the individual considers spiritually wholesome<sup>48</sup>. Uche Ohia holds that some clergymen participate in the cultural extravaganza<sup>49</sup>. It may, therefore, be concluded that the Christian religion does not reject the festival itself, only those practices that involve the veneration of the people's ancestors or masquerade performances.

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<sup>45</sup> R. O. Igwegbe, P. 65.

<sup>46</sup> Oral interview, Fr. Uche Peter Mbonu, catholic Priest at Ndi Amazu Community, conducted by Precious Okoye on 21st June 2014 at Ndi Amazu Catholic Church, Arondizuogu.

<sup>47</sup> H. A. P. Nwana, 22

<sup>48</sup> Ibid

<sup>49</sup> Uche Ohia, 12.

Modernity and urbanisation have also engendered significant modifications in the Ikeji festival celebration. One example of this is the introduction of alien instruments that were until hither to unknown to the festival, like the trumpet, which has increasingly become a popular appliance at Ikeji festival parade arenas. The trumpet has, more than any other instrument, raised the tempo of Ikeji from the bucolic sound of a rustic festival to the loud and urbane sound of an international carnival<sup>50</sup>. After the 2010 FIFA World Cup, the South African horn known as the Vuvuzuela also made an appearance at the Ikeji festival.

Another effect of modernity evident in the Ikeji festival is the abridgment of the festival duration from eight days to four days. This is because urbanisation has made it difficult for both employers and employees to leave their jobs for the entire eight days. This was not so in the pre-colonial era when most families resided in the villages, where farmers participated in the complete eight days of the Ikeji. In similar vein, as Igwegbe notes, women no longer fear masquerades as much as they used to in the past<sup>51</sup>, "this is because of formal education which has dispelled certain cultural myths like the belief that masquerades are terrifying spirits who live in anthills. This does not mean that they do not stay at a respectable distance when the masquerade approaches, but they do this to avoid the masquerades' whips and not the fear of being attacked by spirits, so to say<sup>52</sup>. However, despite these modern trends and changes, the Ikeji festival has remained an important annual reunion ceremony for Aros at home, Aros in the diaspora, and Igbo people in general.

### **Tourism in the Ikeji Festival**

The Aro are the most dispersed group in Igboland. They can be found in every state in South-eastern Nigeria<sup>53</sup>. This ubiquitous nature of theirs is reflected in the celebration of Ikeji in many non-Aro communities. It is a common practice for pre-Ikeji cultural displays to be held in some major cities in Nigeria. Usually, this takes place in the week preceding the main Ikeji festival. For instance, pre-Ikeji carnivals are held annually in Surulere in Lagos, Okigwe in Imo state and Abuja. The Ikeji festival is also celebrated beyond Nigerian borders, for example, Ikeji

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<sup>50</sup> Ibid

<sup>51</sup> R. O. Igwegbe, P.64.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid.

<sup>53</sup> Wikipedia article, The Aro People, [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Aro\\_people](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Aro_people). Accessed on October 4th 2022.

Canada, Ikeji London and Ikeji New York, to name a few<sup>54</sup>. If these variants of the Ikeji festival do not alter the core version and practice of the Ikeji, local laws permit flexible interpretations and creativity in the diasporic Aro celebration.

As Ikeji Festival has grown over the years, it has gained recognition on a global scale and shown that it has the potential to generate revenue for the tourism industry in South-eastern Nigeria. The fame and pageantry of the Ikeji festival has yielded a lot of benefits to the Aro communities where it is celebrated. The Aro communities witness a cataclysmic increase in trade and commerce, due to the high influx of visitors who patronise local businesses and remitting foreign exchange back to the community. It has also boosted the hospitality sector, as new hotels and short let apartments are constructed each year to accommodate the teeming number of guests witnessed during the Ikeji festival. The community, and state government also benefit from revenue generated through the activities of visitors and guests. In recent years, local traders have expanded their businesses to make increased profit during the festival; there is also a witnessed surge in prices of commodities, which may be attributed to increased demand of goods during this period. This has the potential of generating higher revenue for the community. The Ikeji festival has also drawn the attention of the Ministry of Culture and Tourism, the State Government, a few prominent members of the community, and two of Nigeria's largest telecommunication companies who now support and promote the event as part of their strategies for economic development, nation building and cultural tourism<sup>55</sup>. Due to this, the festival's host community experiences unprecedented growth, and the local economy is becoming more diverse.

Not only has tourism facilitated economic development in the community, it has also upheld the social image and perception of the Aro people as a cultural force in Igboland.

### **The Diaspora community and Ikeji festival**

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<sup>54</sup> Harry Nwana, Ikeji Arondizuogu: The Return of the good times, <https://www.vanguardngr.com/2010/04/ikeji-arondizuogu-the-return-of-the-good-times/> (accessed on October 5th, 2022)

<sup>55</sup> Chinonso Iwuagwu, The Impact of Cultural Heritage on Socio-economic Life of Arondizuogu Community in Imo State, Nigeria (A Case Study of Ikeji Festival). [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/286929263\\_THE\\_IMPACT\\_OF\\_CULTURAL\\_HERITAGE\\_ON\\_SOCIO-ECONOMIC\\_LIFE\\_OF\\_ARO-NDIZUOGU\\_COMMUNITY\\_IN\\_IMO\\_STATE\\_NIGERIA\\_A\\_CASE\\_STUDY\\_OF\\_IKEJI\\_FESTIVAL](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/286929263_THE_IMPACT_OF_CULTURAL_HERITAGE_ON_SOCIO-ECONOMIC_LIFE_OF_ARO-NDIZUOGU_COMMUNITY_IN_IMO_STATE_NIGERIA_A_CASE_STUDY_OF_IKEJI_FESTIVAL), 2020.

The Diaspora occupies a special place in the development of any nation. Thus, the Government of Nigeria has long acknowledged the importance of engaging with the Diaspora towards national development. In this respect, Nigeria had hitherto adopted a multifaceted approach, containing a variety of initiatives, rather than a singular, focused policy approach<sup>56</sup>.

The word diaspora has a rich historical line. It is derived from two Greek words *speiro* which means *to sow* and *dia* which means *over*. It was first applied to people who have been forced to leave their national territories after suffering persecution and banishment. Thus, it is commonly linked to the Jewish people's exile from their historical homeland and settlement in different parts of the world. The concept has also been used in relation to the displacement of the African and Irish peoples<sup>57</sup>.

This notwithstanding, the International Organization for Migration (IOM) defines Diaspora as members of ethnic and national communities who have left but maintain links with their homeland<sup>58</sup>. For the African Union, "The African Diaspora consists of peoples of African origin living outside the continent, irrespective of their citizenship and nationality and who are willing to contribute to the development of the continent and the building of the African Union."<sup>59</sup> Taking from the framework of the National Migration Policy, Nigerians in the Diaspora are described as: "people of Nigerian nationality and/or descent who have migrated to or were born and live-in other countries, who share a common identity and a sense of belonging"<sup>60</sup>. Aligning definitions with the Constitution

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<sup>56</sup> National Diaspora Policy 2021, Federal Republic of Nigeria, p. 14

<sup>57</sup> Kanu, A. I; Omojola, I. O.; Bazza, M. B., "A review of national policy on Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) in Nigeria". *Nnadiabube Journal of Social Sciences* Vol. 2. No. 1. 2018, pp. 1-15; Kanu, A. I; Omojola, I. O.; Bazza, M. B., "The National Migration Policy: A Critical Review". *Nnadiabube Journal of Social Sciences* Vol. 2. No. 2. 2019, pp. 94-106.

<sup>58</sup> IOM, Needs Assessment of the Health Sector, 2014; IOM, *World Migration: Managing Labour Mobility in the Evolving Global Economy* (2008)

<sup>59</sup> African Union, Report of the Meeting of Experts from Members of States on the Definition of African Diaspora, 11 - 12 April 2005 Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

<sup>60</sup> National Migration Policy, Federal Republic of Nigeria, 2015; Kanu, I. A., "The Economies of Poverty and Migration in Africa". *Journal of African Studies and Sustainable Development*. Vol. 2. No. 3. 2019, pp. 42-51; Kanu, I. A., "Migration and Religio-Political Insecurity in Africa". *Journal of African Studies and Sustainable Development*. Vol. 2. No. 4. 2019, pp. 36-43; Kanu, I. A., "Igbo Migration and the Future of Traditional Paradigms". *Journal of African Studies and Sustainable Development*. Vol. 2. No. 5. 2019, pp. 34-42; Kanu, I. A., "Migration, Globalization and the Liquidity of African Traditional Religion". *Journal of African Studies and Sustainable Development*. Vol. 2. No. 6. 2019, pp. 1-12; Kanu, A. I; Omojola, I. O.; Bazza, M. B. "An Evaluation of the Labour Migration Policy for Nigeria". *Nnadiabube Journal of Education in Africa*. Vol. 4. No. 1. 2018, pp. 1-11.

of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, 'Diaspora' refers to "Nigerians who live and work abroad and who maintain links with the country and show clear interest in contributing to the socio-economic, political, technological and industrial development of Nigeria"<sup>61</sup>.

The need for the involvement of the Diaspora in the Ikeji Festival is based on the fact that over the years, governments, organizations, communities and individuals have come to recognize the importance of mobilizing and engaging Nigerians in the Diaspora as strategic partners in the national development process. Thus, the need to engage Nigerians in the Diaspora in relation to Ikeji Festival is based on the recognition of the huge human capital and resources of the Diaspora as major contributors to national development<sup>62</sup>.

The Diaspora can promote Ikeji festival through various means; however, for the purpose of this research, the following have been enumerated:

#### **a. Promotion of Creativity**

The National Policy on Diaspora describes the diaspora within the context of a resourceful dimension of the Nigerian community:

Nigerians in the Diaspora are among the most educated and successful of the immigrant population in many countries. A significant percentage of them are professionals with specialization in fields such as medicine, education, information technology, real estate, law, banking, and engineering etc. Nigerians in the Diaspora, especially the professionals, constitute a large pool of well trained, skilled, and experienced human capital; the critical mass that the country requires to drive its technological advancement in the 21 st century and beyond<sup>63</sup>.

To meet national and international standards, the creative input and resources of the diaspora are indispensable for the recreation and development of the Ikeji Festival. Creativity is required for the purpose of sustainability. Given that the festival is now open to national and international tourists, it requires being developed to such an extent that it satisfies the expectations of tourists- this is

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<sup>61</sup> The Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, 1999

<sup>62</sup> National Diaspora Policy 2021, Federal Republic of Nigeria, p. 19; Kanu, A. I; Omojola, I. O.; Bazza, M. B., "National Policy on Diaspora Matters: A Review". *Nnadiabube Journal of Social Sciences* Vol. 2. No. 2. 2019, pp. 1-13

<sup>63</sup> National Diaspora Policy 2021, Federal Republic of Nigeria, p. 18

very important as there is a connection between satisfaction and participation. The quality of satisfaction that tourists get during such festivals will determine if they will attend the following year. For the purpose of sustaining this participation, the knowledge and input of the diaspora for creativity is necessary.

### **b. Promoting Ikeji Festival through Financing**

The Diaspora contribute to national development not only through their expertise but also through their financial resources. The National Policy on the Diaspora holds that: "It is therefore acknowledged that the significant number of Nigerians in the Diaspora, when put together with their resources and where properly harnessed, have the potential to positively impact on the country's socio-economic development"<sup>64</sup>. Much cannot be achieved regarding Ikeji festival without the financial involvement of the Diaspora, especially in the funding of the ceremonies associated with the festival- what such a funding does is that it raises the festival beyond its local status and makes it presentable to the national and international communities. Tourists who visit will need accommodation and recreation places- these are areas where the funding and investments of those in Diaspora can be of immense help.

### **c. Promoting Ikeji festival in Diaspora**

The framework of the National Diaspora Policy is designed in such a manner that the role of the Diaspora in promoting local culture in their destination countries is given a principal place. The Diaspora, based on this document, are expected to:

Extend incentives and encouragements to Nigerians in the Diaspora to promote Nigeria arts through the teaching Nigerian languages and culture in destination countries; Government shall continue to encourage relevant sectors to participate in Diaspora socio-cultural and economic events; Connect Nigerian youths in the Diaspora and in Nigeria for the purpose of sharing cultural knowledge and insights<sup>65</sup>.

The advantage of roping in the Diaspora in local festivals like the Ikeji festival is because of their capacity to give local festivals national and international attention. The absence of such attention reduces such events to a local affair. Promoting it in Diaspora has consequences for the indigenous people in the

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<sup>64</sup> National Diaspora Policy 2021, Federal Republic of Nigeria, p. 18

<sup>65</sup> National Diaspora Policy 2021, Federal Republic of Nigeria, p. 29

diaspora as it provides education for them, especially their children; it is also a way of connecting back to home and culture, and therefore, a way of renewing their identity.

#### **d. Promoting the Visitor Economy of Ikeji festival**

Those in Diaspora can promote Ikeji festival through being present during the annual celebrations associated with it. It is not just their presence that is appreciated, but being present along side their friends from abroad. Such presences has great economic consequences not only on the products produced by the Arondizuogu people but also in shaping the preparations for the next year as the preparations are based on the demands during the previous year. It also creates a connection between the local people and tourists as many tourists keep relationships with the people in the local community for the purpose of research or buying of local products online.

#### **e. Promoting Place-image through Ikeji festival**

The people of Arondizuogu have been erroneously categorized negatively as fetish and diabolic people. This image has kept many people away from the Arondizuogu people and festivals. Such images about a people can only be changed through contact with the people. The involvement of the diaspora in Ikeji festival celebrations can have positive consequences on improving the image of the Arondizuogu people. Their presence will not only attract friends, but also award none-indigenes the opportunity to encounter the Arondizuogu people and culture in a way that differs from wrong narratives.

### **Conclusion**

The greatness of a culture is embedded in its festivals<sup>66</sup>, and the Ikeji festival is one of such. Notwithstanding that the Ikeji festival was not originally meant for the generation of tourism, the passage of times and metamorphosis of culture has

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<sup>66</sup> Siddharth Katragadda , 'Face the Festivities' in Times of India, October 13, 2019 Edition. <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/life-style/fashion/designers/face-the-festivities/articleshow/71536291.cms> accessed on 1st October, 2022.

led to new grounds. The Ikeji festival possesses a strong place marketing or tourism which flows from its significant secondary outcome. It is in this sense that it cannot be equated with events solely planned for tourism. However, given the changes in people and form over time, the idea of tourism in relation to Ikeji festival has become indispensable, and, therefore, makes this study not only significant but contemporaneous.

Ikeji celebrates the identity, culture and traditions of the Arondizuogu people of Eastern Nigeria<sup>67</sup>. The advantage of involving the Diaspora in Ikeji Festival is that it will enhance, mobilize and harness the potentials of Nigerians in the Diaspora for sustainable national development of the country and state in the area of tourism. For this to be achieved, it is necessary to identify the sources of the potentials of Nigerians in the Diaspora that can contribute to The development of the festival; to develop robust and dynamic strategies targeted at harnessing Diaspora resources in favour of the festival; to respond to the challenges and needs of the Nigerians in the Diaspora to participate in the festival; to improve and sustain strong socio-cultural and economic relations with Nigerians in the Diaspora for national development; to enhance policy coherence and consistency through strategies that facilitate synergy between existing Diaspora actions; to create awareness among Nigerians in Diaspora to invest in the festival; to strengthen the relevant institutions for the coordination and proper administration of Diaspora issues, especially as it relates to festivals.

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<sup>67</sup> Kanu, I. A., "Ikeji Festival of Arondizuogu: Retelling the Stories and Rekindling the values of an Ancestral Homeland". *International Journal of Religion and Human Relations*. Vol. 9. No. 1. 2017, pp. 156-179

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