

CULTURAL INFLUENCE ON SOCIO-ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT IN MBAISE NATION: CHALLENGES AND PROSPECTS

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ABSTRACT: This research aims to investigate the extent to which cultural influences enhance the socioeconomic development of the Mbaise Nation, considering the challenges and prospects. The study was carried out to identify the major impact of culture on the socio-economic development of the Mbaise nation. The study was executed using both secondary and primary sources of data. The major data source was the secondary data. The secondary data covered published information in books and journals concerning the subject matter. The study discovered that cultural resources in Mbaise help attract lovers of culture and improve cultural acceptance. This means that Mbaise's cultural resources attract cultural enthusiasts, enhance cultural acceptance, and promote homecoming events. In addition, there are some challenges that affect Mbaise's cultural resources. Such include political factors, religious influence, Kingship tussle, the misconception about the worship of “Oji” by some Christians and lack of consultation, low level of participation, low level of recognition and publicity, leadership issues among the traditional rulers, misconception about “EyiriEyiObohia”, lack of general bride price in Mbaise, misconception about Mbaise people and the ideology of some families, low level of acceptance of the culture, the actual age for the “Iwaakwa” and the actual years spacing. It was recommended that the government and political officeholders stop interfering in cultural matters and stop influencing the activities of traditional institutions so as to achieve unity and progress in Mbaise cultural activities.

Keywords: Culture, Socio-Economic Development, Mbaise Nation, Cultural Resources.

INTRODUCTION

Mbaise is a conglomeration of five kinship groups with different migratory routes and who probably had cultures of separate but peaceful coexistence. The name ‘Mbaise’ was proposed by Mbaise pioneer politicians like Joseph Iwunna, Dennis Abii, Pius Nwoga and others, in a meeting of chiefs of the area presided over by the then District Officer, Mr. L. E. Chadwick. The Mbaise nation has numerous cultural activities, which, if well promoted, will lead to the development of the Mbaise nation.

The contribution of culture towards socio-economic development cannot be overemphasized. This is because of the fact that through the promotion of cultural activities for the people of Mbaise, the basic cultural values of the people will be known, and such will add positive values to their socio-

economic development (Carita & Caroline, 2021). However, it is unfortunate that the Mbaise people have numerous cultural activities, but these cultural activities are not known and not properly promoted to improve the socioeconomic development of the Mbaise people. Practically, many Mbaise communities have different unique cultural values like “Eyileye, Oboha”, “Iwaakwa”, “IriJiMbaise”, “OjiEzinihitte” and so on.

The above cultural values are not utilised to serve as tourism benefits for the communities during their celebrations. In addition, there are many places of historical significance in Mbaise (Seetanah, Padachi & Rojid, 2011). Most people within and outside Mbaise do not know about these significant places, which include the Catholic Diocese of Ahiara Mbaise; the Anglican Diocese of Mbaise; Alaogbaga deity; palm wine production in Itu; Small London in Obizi; Afor Ogbe Market; AforOru Market; Ahiazu Mbaise LGA (Local Government Headquarters); Best choice supermarket and bar; Sacred Heart Villa Secondary School Enyigugu; Non fee paying special vocational college; and Diocesan Specialist Hospital Obohia Ahiazu Mbaise. Such poor knowledge has hindered the socio-economic potentials of these places to Mbaise. There is no adequate literature on the impact of culture on the socio-economic development of the Mbaise nation. Hence, the challenges motivated this research.

In Igboland, there are many cultural activities. Cultural activities were handed over from generation to generation, and people still uphold their culture. For the people of Mbaise, the major cultural activities which have social impact, economic impact, cultural impact, and environmental impact for the people include the new yam festival of Mbaise, traditional marriage in Mbaise, Iwaakwa, Oji Festival in Ezinihitte Mbaise, Eyiri Eyi Obohia Mbaise dialects and places of historical significance in Mbaise. This study examines the role of cultural activities in Mbaise's socio-economic development, highlighting both their contributions and the challenges they face.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Culture

The concept of culture can be viewed as that which guides and directs human behaviour in a given context (Adeyeye, 2015). Culture is the essential character of a society that distinguishes it from other cultural groups. The underlying elements of every culture are the values, language, myths, customs, rituals, laws, and artefacts or products that are transmitted from one generation to the next (Lamb, Hair and Daniel, 2021). Culture refers to the set of values, ideas and attitudes that are accepted by a homogenous group of people and transmitted to the next generation. Zikmund and D’Amico (2016) are of the view that culture consists of values, beliefs, and customary behaviours learned and shared by members of a particular society. Culture determines what is acceptable within the society.

Culture is comprehensive (Cochan, 2016). This means that all parts must fit together in some logical fashion. For example, bowing and a strong desire to avoid the loss of face are unified in their manifestation of the importance of respect. Culture is learned rather than being something we are born with. We will consider the mechanics of learning later in the course.

Socioeconomic Development

Socio-economic development means the level of improvement in human capital, infrastructure, socio-cultural and health/ educational development in the system (Ubah, 2023). To him, when there is a reduction in poverty, increase in employment opportunities, improvement in infrastructural facilities (road, electrification, pipe borne water), high level of political stability, improved maternal health and reduction in infant mortality, improved income and per capital of the citizen, we say that there is socio-economic development. Socio-economic development is in line with rural transformation. Its explanation is based on human capital and infrastructural improvement in majority of the regions, states and LGAs in the country.

Socio-economic development is the development that enhances the positive transformation of the country, which positively affects the existing nationalities, cultural backgrounds, and ethnic grouping in the nation (Kabuoh, 2017). It is the development that enhances infrastructural improvement – road construction/ rehabilitation, steady power, provision of portable water, housing, improvement of health facilities and human capital improvement (poverty and unemployment reduction, human capital/educational training and many others) (Yesufu, 2020). Based on the foregoing, we can deduct from the above that a country has achieved socio-economic development when there is a reduction in the level of poverty, unemployment, diseases, maternal and child mortality, improved transport system, food availability and quality, health care, level of per capita income and the state of agricultural economy etc in most of the regions or geographical area of the country. When the above basic developmental issues are highly positive, we say that there is socio-economic development.

When there is a reasonable progressive change from the previous state of things/low development status, we say that the country is in the development process (that is, developing nation); and when there are no reasonable improvements in the system, and there is even backwardness, we say that the country is underdeveloped. Nwankwo (2019) opined that Socioeconomic development is significantly related to the traditional democratic theory of development and self-help approach to community development. This is why we lay emphasis on the self-help approach to community development. One important element that runs through all the above postulations conceived by scholars is the people's initiatives to find lasting solutions to their individual and common problems, relying on their own resources as much as possible and assistance from outside the community, if any (Ndiba & Mbugua, 2018). Here, socio-economic developments are generally concerned about improvements in the quality of life, but community development may not be restricted to rural areas alone.

Impact of Culture on Socioeconomic Development of Mbaise Nation

The impacts of cultural issues were discussed thus:

1. Social impact

The social impact includes:

- a. **Attracting lovers of culture:** One interesting fact about the Mbaise cultural activities is the ability to attract thousands of Lovers of African Culture to Mbaise. Mbaise is now an annual tourist centre, as people visit different communities for their cultural activities (Uchendu, 2011). People from other continents of Europe, Africa, Asia and North America, as different parts of Nigeria and Igboland, troop in to experience the African culture and different communities in Mbaise in its best form. For example, during the new yam festival of Mbaise, Iwaakwa in some communities in Mbaise, Oji Festival in Ezinihitte Mbaise, Eyiri Eyi Obohia and so on, people come to Mbaise from different parts of Nigeria and even other parts of the world to witness and enjoy the cultural activities.
- b. **Cultural acceptance:** During the cultural events in Mbaise, people who visit to enjoy the culture come to accept the significance of the impact of the Mbaise culture. Iheanacho stated that some people, after witnessing a good and attractive cultural event, accept the culture and introduce it to their own community (Iheanacho, 2021). For example, some communities in Igboland do not engage in Iwakwa. Still, after visiting and witnessing the festival in some Mbaise communities, they introduced it in their own community, hence cultural acceptance.
- c. **Homecoming:** Usually, most people in different parts of Mbaise communities only come home during the Christmas period or during a community cultural event. Here, apart from Christmas, most people from different cities in Nigeria and outside Nigeria visit their Igbo community during cultural events (Madu, 2019). Some of the practical examples are that the communities that engage in Iwakwa normally go home to witness the event during its celebration, the people of Obohia normally travel home during Eyiri Eyi Obohia, and different people from different Mbaise communities travel home during the new yam festival of Mbaise and during the Oji Festival in Ezinihitte Mbaise. Outside Mbaise, the people of Arondizuogu travel home during their Ikeji festival and so on. It is very important to note that cultural activities in Mbaise serve as the annual homecoming of Mbaise people, just like other cultural activities in Nigeria.
- d. **Merrymaking:** One of the major social benefits of cultural activities in Mbaise is that the period of the culture serves as a merry-making time. During cultural events, families and communities provide assorted foods, drinks, and other entertainment for the host and visitors (Chukwuemeka, 2016). People kill goats, cows, chickens, and other animals to entertain visitors. Some people from other communities visit the communities that are hosting different cultural events to enjoy and merry with them.

2. Economic impact

The cultural activities in Mbaise have economic benefits for the people. Besides being fun, well-managed cultural events offer a lot of economic benefits to communities. These events are meant to be entertaining to visitors and attendees. And for the communities that host them, they are meant to be profitable. In addition to making profits for the organizers, festivals can have a significant economic impact on the local community and the businesses within it (Anyanwu, 2023). Over the years, and most probably since Nigeria gained her independence, cultural events in Mbaise were regarded by most people as just a social and cultural festival. The economic impact could be summarized thus:

- a. **Self-help infrastructural development:** Before the cultural activities in many communities in Igboland, the community stakeholders tried as much as possible to improve the infrastructural development of their community through self-help. In Oboha communities in 2012, for example, the Obohia Progressive Union carried out rural road gridding to maintain their rural roads before the Eyiri Eyi Obohia festival (Awusionu, 2022). Some communities within the Mbaise nation have renovated popular markets, community-based electrification projects, and so on to improve their community before the cultural events.
- b. **Improve trade and economic development:** Cultural event brings improved trade and economic development because before such cultural activity takes place, there is always an increased level of people traveling to the event grounds (Igbokwe, 2017). Host community members who are into trade and other economic activities achieve more sales in their commercial engagements. Here, the hotel business, restaurant business, local trading and so on boom very effectively.
- c. **Business investment:** During cultural activities, people come home to invest in one business or the other using the opportunity provided by the cultural activities. Some people from the community who are based in different cities, in some cases, see the need to invest in some businesses in their localities and enjoy economic development (Uchendu 2011). This means that cultural resource helps to increase business investment for the host communities in Igboland in particular and Nigeria in general.

3. Cultural impact

Just like other events associated with culture and tradition, cultural events in Mbaise have been facing misconceptions often emanating from ignorance. It is therefore very important and crucial to note that early Christian Missionaries, who could not understand Igbo culture and tradition in typical Eurocentric style, regarded it with wide suspicion and went to the extent of ascribing it to paganism in a bid to discourage their adherents from participating in the festival (Madu, 2019). However, numerous Mbaise cultures, like the new yam festival of Mbaise, traditional marriage in Mbaise, Iwaakwa, Oji Festival in Ezinihitte Mbaise and Eyiri Eyi Obohia Mbaise, dialects were able to survive this early colonial Christians. Still, misconceptions about the Mbaise festival continued to evolve despite the overzealous Pentecostalism, which tends to view every cultural expression as Christian.

It is therefore important to note that Mbaise culture (which includes the new yam festival of Mbaise, traditional marriage in Mbaise, Iwaakwa, Oji Festival in Ezinihitte Mbaise, Eyiri Eyi Obohia Mbaise dialects) has become widely accepted as a cultural heritage worthy of preservation. Hence, it is celebrated with great aplomb. Clergy (especially those of the Orthodox Church) participate in Mbaise cultures and enjoy the festival (Anyanwu, 2023). With time, hopefully the greater awareness will become more evident that Mbaise cultural activities (the new yam festival of Mbaise, traditional marriage in Mbaise, Iwaakwa, Oji Festival in Ezinihitte Mbaise and Eyiri Eyi Obohia Mbaise dialects) are not in conflict with any aspect of the Christian religion or any religion for that matter. If not for any other matter, people will understand that Mbaise's cultural resources represent a practical demonstration of the love and thanksgiving that is associated with all religions.

4. Environmental impact

Environmental impact deals with the issues of the ecological system, air and water pollution, land pollution and so on. Cultural resources have an impact on the environment of Mbaise people. For example, there is always a general clean-up in any community that is hosting any cultural festival or other cultural activities (Igbokwe, 2011). In the communities that have Iwaakwa as a culture, the communities physically engage in environmental cleanliness, through which they clear glasses, maintain their roads, remove dirt from the goitre and so on. Before any new yam festival of Mbaise, traditional marriage in any family in Mbaise, Iwaakwa, Oji Festival in Ezinihitte Mbaise, Eyiri Eyi Obohia and so on, the people engage in environmental maintenance to make sure that the places are clean to attract and entertain visitors.

However, scholars like Ubah have stated that some cultural activities sometimes bring environmental degradation and pollution to the host communities (Ubah, 2023). Here, during any event, people gather in a particular city, market square, or village hall for the show. During this period, 90% of the population did not use a refuse basket, they did not care about environmental cleanliness and so on. Here, the people who leave within the host area, in most cases, suffer the consequences of an unhygienic environment.

The Challenges to Cultural Activates and Socio-Economic Development of Mbaise

The major challenges to different cultures are discussed thus:

Factors Affecting the New Yam Festival in Mbaise

There are many factors affecting the new yam festival in Mbaise. Some of the factors include:

- a. Political factor:** Many politicians within and outside Mbaisewant to use the new yam festival to score high political points. This is because the new yam is the highest cultural event of all Mbaise people (Ubah, 2023). For example, there was little political conflict during the festival in 2013, 2014, 2022, and so on based on the activities of political actors like former governor RochasOkorocha, Hon EmekaIhidioha, Sen. Hope Uzodinma and so on. Some people do not like attending the new yam festival because of political disagreements.
- b. Religious influence:** Religious influence is a major challenge to all cultures (Chukwuemeka 2016). Some people of Mbaise whose religion does not encourage the new yam festival do not attend the event, notwithstanding how attractive it may be. Religion has helped to introduce division among the people, hence affecting the culture.
- c. Kingship tussle:** The power for the new yam festival is vested in the eze-Mbaise. There is always endless conflict or crisis involving different traditional rulers in Mbaise. The challenge of who is actually the real king of all kings is a very big challenge as it concerns Mbaise culture and the new yam festival (Anyanwu, 2023). During the new year, all village traditional rulers and councils will be present. However, the challenge that normally arises is who the main Eze-Ndieze is.

Challenges of Oji Festival of Ezinihitte

Like other cultures, there are many challenges affecting the Oji festival of Ezinihitte. They include:

1. **The challenge of host:** The actual place to host Oji festival of Ezinihitte is a major challenge. Some communities have been advocating for a central place which will be permanent, some stated the need to make it rotatory, and others believe it should be at the palace of Eze-ndieze of Ezinihitte (Awusionu, 2022). This challenge is yet to be resolved totally, though there exist some relative peace among the traditional council.
2. **The misconception about the worship of oji by some Christians:** There has been an accusation to the people of Ezinihitte that the Oji Ezinihitte festival is not a Christian culture but a culture which is used to promote and worship the cola nut (Igbokwe, 2017). This reason is that the traditional council representative of Ezinihitte usually goes on the radio to educate the people on the significance of Oji Ezinihitte culture and to tell them the need to continue its promotion, as the festival is not against any religion.
3. **Lack of consultation and low level of participation:** The traditional council of Ezinihitte Mbaise, in most cases, is not effectively consulting and interacting with the general people of Ezinihitte on the way to improve the Oji festival and encourage its growth (Iheanacho, 2021). The traditional council have been accused of not involving the village heads, the town union executives, and youth representatives in the best ways to improve the festival, and such has made the festival stagnant and has led to a low level of participation from all quarters.

Challenges of EyiriEyiObohia

Obohia is one of the culturally inclined communities in Mbaise in general and Ahiazu Mbaise in particular. The challenges of Eyiri Eyi Obohia include:

1. **Low level of recognition and publicity:** Only a few people within and outside Mbaise know about the Eyiri Eyi Obohia cultural festival (Madu, 2019). This is because of the low level of media publicity in radio, TV, newspapers, and social media. This challenge can be solved if there is a high level of publicity.
2. **Leadership issues among the traditional rulers:** There are disputes among the traditional rulers and communities in Obohia; hence, the issue affects the progress of Eyiri Eyi Obohia (Uchendu, 2011). The issue sometimes arises from the best time to fix Eyiri Eyi Obohia, the actual traditional ruler or council to fix it, and the role of each community in Obohia during the event of EyiriEyiObohia.
3. **Misconception about EyiriEyiObohia:** There is a high level of misconception on the origin of Eyiri Eyi Obohia. Some believe the origin is connected to the dirty, traditional worship system and traditional rituals (Igbokwe, 2017). Others believe it was instituted by the forefathers of Obohia to enhance cultural relevance, unity, traditional understanding and development of the communities.

Major Problem Facing Iwaakwa

There are certain challenges facing Iwaakwa in Mbaise. The challenges are:

1. **Low level of acceptance of the culture:** Iwaakwa is not generally an all-Mbaise culture (Ubah, 2023). Few communities practice it, and most communities see it as not part of Mbaise culture and refuse to recognise or accept it.
2. **The actual age for the Iwaakwa:** there is no single or generally accepted age for Iwaakwa for the communities that practice it. In most cases, it is believed that 25 years and above can engage in it. However, because of lack of generally accepted year, most people do it even in their 40s or even more, and such has attracted much criticism.
3. **The actual year spacing:** Some communities believe that Iwaakwa should come every 2 years; others put it at every 3 years, and so on. There is no agreed-upon spacing on the years to hold it (Awusionu, 2022). Some communities have even shifted their own for reasons best known to them.

Problems of Significance Places in Mbaise

There are many issues affecting importance of significance places in Mbaise. Such challenges are:

1. **Poor infrastructural development:** There is a lack of proper road infrastructure in the communities where people can go for tourism. There is also a low level of electricity supply in such places.
2. **Lack of maintenance:** Most significant places have a low level of maintenance (Chukwuemeka, 2016). Most ancient places are damaged, and there is no government support or community/individual support for maintenance.
3. **Insecurity:** Most people do not like to visit importance places in Mbaise because of insecurity in the south east part of Nigeria.

Methodology

The researcher employed the following methods for the purpose of this study.

- ❖ **Research Design:** descriptive research design was employed for the study. This is to enable the researcher use secondary sources of data for the study.
- ❖ **Source of Data:** The data were collected through secondary sources, via published works like journal, and books.
- ❖ **Data Analysis:** For the purpose of this study, the researcher employed content and documentary analysis. This is true because the study is based on secondary data only.

Conclusion

The researcher has examined the impact of culture on the socio-economic development of the Mbaise Nation. The study was carried out to identify the major cultural activities that encourage all-around development in the Mbaise Nation.

The cultural activities have many challenges affecting their growth and development. Some of the challenges include misconceptions about Mbaise people and Mbaise culture, low level media and stakeholders promotion of Mbaise culture, political interference from political stakeholders to the Mbaise culture, low level of public recognition and public promotion of Mbaise culture, neglect of Mbaise dialect, chieftaincy tussle among the tradition council within Mbaise land, lack of general agreement on issues pertaining to date of cultural events, location of cultural events and appropriate people to fix the date for cultural events.

Recommendations

The study recommends:

1. Cultural activities within Mbaise should be effectively utilised to attract and encourage social development, infrastructural development, unity among the people/community and sustainability of the cultural activities.
2. The government and political officeholders should stop interfering in cultural matters and influencing the activities of traditional institutions to achieve unity and progress in Mbaise cultural activities.
3. The people of Mbaise within and diaspora should be reoriented to the need to speak and promote the Mbaise dialect so as to showcase Mbaise culture to the global world.

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