Leveraging Efik Cultural Festivals as Strategic Tools for Tourism Development and Poverty Reduction in Calabar, Nigeria

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Abstract: The paper aim to assess the extent to which traditional festivals of the Efik people can be used in the development of tourism and poverty reduction in Calabar, Nigeria, with reference to their cultural significance and tourist potential. This study employed an ethnographic exploratory research design, and both primary and secondary data collection methods comprised of direct observation, Focus Group Discussion (FGD) and Key Informant Interviews (KII) using the Rapid Rural Appraisal (RRA). The study uncovered many splendid, beautiful festivals as the *Iboku* boat regatta, *Nyoro Ekpe*, *Utomo Obong*, *Mbono Iban*, *Anko* festival, and *Mbok*. The study also supports traditional Efik festivals as key performers and enablers of business and revenue for the state and the local people, other media firms, artists, craft makers, and tourists. This, in turn, means that the generation of poverty is checkmated. Consequently, the study is a contribution to the knowledge of the traditional Efik festival because it noted its modification; it is also a contribution to the stated elaboration on the festivals and the tourism sector in the state.

Keywords: Traditional festivals, poverty eradication, tourism and economic development, sustainable tourism, Calabar, Nigeria.

Introduction

It is generally acknowledged worldwide that festivals have been part of the social system for many years, and have been recognised as important facilitators in economic regeneration and cultural enlightenment. In other countries also, nations such as China, Brazil and Spain for instance have seen their cultural festivals as a way of attracting global appeal hence improving their local economies through job creation (Tavares et al., 2024; Zhang & Dai, 2021). Such cultural events are important not only in terms of their attempts to maintain cultural differences, but, along with this, they also bring income and improvement in infrastructures, so we can explore poverty eradication or, in general, cultural development as a successful integration of tradition and modernity as the source of economic stimulation (Etsename & Ojo, 2024; Wojciechowska, 2021). The cultural diversity that is characteristic of Nigeria provides a good background to use the traditional festivals for economic and social gains. Nevertheless, most of the Nigeria's states, including Akwa ibom state, Edo state, Anambra state, Ekiti State, and Enugu state struggle with such economic issues as high level of unemployment and poverty (Akeh et al., 2023; Chinanuife & Eze, 2024;

Eneyo & Archibong, 2024; Olorunsola et al., 2023). The diverse traditional festivals in Calabar, with their well-entrenched cultural and social importance and potential for a large turnover of visitors, remain a rather untapped resource in reversing these economic misfortunes. These festivals not only attract customers but also act as windows through which to market local arts and crafts, music and dance, communication and other cultural products hence contribute to economic growth and the improvement of the tourism sector.

While many earlier research works have explored the effects of cultural festivals on tourist and economic activities in different global regions, such as the Rio Carnival festival of Brazil, the Diwali festival of India, Okorobo Festival in IfakiEkiti, Ekiti State, Nigeria, and the Argungu Fishing festival of Kebbi state, Nigeria (Adiele , 2022; Eba, 2023; Eneyo & Archibong, 2023; Machado, 2020; Olubunmi-Ojo et al.,2021; Onihunwa et al., 2023; Udonwa et el., 2022; Yadav et al.,2022), none of them have focused on the specific opportunities available in Traditional Efik Festivals in Calabar. This research void is important because it fails to explore the possibility of using Efik festivals to spur tourism growth and reduce poverty in Calabar. Filling this gap is crucial to realising these events' socioeconomic opportunities by integrating them into sustainable tourism strategy. This paper is therefore concerned with assessing the role that traditional Efik festivals in Calabar have played in the development of tourism and poverty eradication. It examines the impact of these festivals in local economic development and the wellbeing of the state. The study investigates several recognisable festivals in the area and the role they can play in attracting tourists and, therefore, bringing income. The aim of this study is to increase awareness of the Efik festivals with an appeal to involve them in the more comprehensive perspective of the state's tourism and economic development policies in order to benefit the entire state.

Theoretical framework

Cultural tourism development model

To facilitate an understanding of the concept of utilisation of culture as a tourism product, a Cultural Tourism Development Model is presented below: The theoretical framework for this research is the Cultural Tourism Development Model (CTDM), which depicts cultural tourism from cultural perspective, economic perspective, and community perspective, and is situated within the sustainable development context. This model argues that because cultural festivals reflect historical and cultural values, they possess both in-use and in-chose benefits for economic development and poverty eradication (Dorcheh & Mohamed, 2013; McKercher, 2020). Murphy & Boyle (2006) and Quinn (2020) have also expounded this view arguing that cultural events such as traditional festivals not only maintain and promote cultural heritage but also owe credit to the economic development. They encourage tourism and as such push other related economic units and create employment opportunities within a particular region. From this premise, the model goes on to examine the role of conventional tourism festivals towards the promotion of sustainable tourism and local advancement as postulated by Dorcheh & Mohamed (2013) and Quinn (2020). It emphasises on the potential for cultural tourism as a source of producing sustainable economic returns because of the adoption of cultural assets of a given community. In real life, they are viewed as cultural events and as business and political tools for generating value and enfranchising people which are crucial for combating poverty (Cornwall & Brock 2005, Omori et al., 2025; Murphy & Boyle 2006). It will be seen that festivals help in showcasing and sales of local made items such as food stuffs and other craft and entertainment hence enhancing turnover and local businesses.

In this regard therefore, this research utilises the Cultural Tourism Development Model for analysing as well as enhancing the understanding of how and why the traditional festivals of the Efiks in Calabar, Nigeria can be optimally utilised to support the development of tourism and therefore ultimately, reduce poverty. Thus, extending the literature in the field, the research also identifies these festivals as viable source of real value adding to, and originating, tourist business. This in turn can heavily improve the socio-economic level for the inhabitants in this area or even the poverty level as well. Consequently, the CTDM is employed not only to prescribe and organise empirical work and attention, but also to offer policy recommendations that aim to increase the development usefulness of traditional festivals to eradicate poverty and advance community sustainability.

Literature review

Traditional festival, tourism and poverty eradication

Worldwide, the growing interest of scholars in the synergy between traditional festal tourism initiatives for the eradication of poverty, as appreciation of cultural heritage, is vital for sustainable development. Poverty is defined as scarcity of the basic necessities such as food, clothing and shelter and has occurred in various societies; has aggravated socio-economic disparities (Udonwa et al.,2022). In this connexion, it has been identified that there exists the potential for the traditional festivals to become the agents for the emergence of economy and tourism. And as revealed by Agbabiaka et al. (2023) and Attah et al. (2013), the economic benefits of these festivals have been discovered to be enormous in generating income, employment opportunities and encouraging local business ventures in different states within Nigeria and also in Calabar, Nigeria in particular. Cultural festivals, and their roles in the global economy and society have also been studies for example by Tobar & Ramshaw, (2022) and Udonwa et al. (2022) who investigated the implication of these festivals on local economy. This research also demonstrates how festivals are the economic enfranchisers and social inclusion and poverty reduction in diverse cultural settings.

Consequently, El Faouri and Sibley (2023) review the sustainability of heritage festivals from the perspective of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals and present the applicability of the festivals to cultural sustainability and tourism. It is quite clear that festivals make an impact on the local economy and the role of festivals in tourism. Doe et al. (2022) and Ma et al. (2021) describe how festivals play the role of tourists' attractions, which local and international tourists use to support the development of local economies and livelihoods. In addition, Eneyo et al. (2022) bring out the socio-economic use of festival in their discussion that; the Iboku boat regatta practice by the Efiks in Calabar, Nigeria aids in employment creation and the economic uplift of the area. This is a theme that keeps recurrent in the literature and Snowball & Ndhlovu (2021) and Machado (2020) noted that cultural festivals such as Rio Carnival and Grahamstown National Arts Festival can be utilised to combat poverty and encourage economic development. This body of literature combined, demonstrates the multiple functions of traditional festivals in economic development, poverty alleviation and tourism enhancement. Besides cultivating culture, the above festivals have significant roles in generating economic and social effects. Further academic discussion should stress the need to include cultural heritage into sustainable development more actively, enhance the application of Traditional Festivals for community enhancement and as a tool for diversifying the economy. This paper therefore emphasises the need to better understand culture and

cultural events and to more consciously use cultural events in today's world despite the complex relationship between cultural celebrations and socio-economic development.

Traditional festival and poverty reduction

The review of festival literature shows that traditional festivals have been closely tied with poverty reduction especially in relation to the Efik people of Calabar in Nigeria. Several authors and researchers have established the social-economic effects of festivals. emphasising their possibilities to affect poverty in one or another way. First of all, traditional festivals play as promoters of economic growth, investment and job creation for natives. Studies by Attah et al., (2013) and Eneyo et al., (2022) have also shown how festivals enhance consumption of products and services hence enhanced demand. trade and earnings for artesian, traders, and other small businesses personnel in the economy. The number of visitors during festival cycles generates a knock-on effect helping sustain the lives of the people and the economy of the groups involved. However, festivals are very central to the promotion of entrepreneurship and micro-enterprise development.

Research by Ona & Solis (2017) and Onihunwa et al. (2023) have revealed how festivals offer opportunities for artisans and craftsmen to display their products. their skills, promote their goods as well as secure other business ventures. Thus, by enhancing local people's opportunities to become business owners, festivals enrich the process of the development of the informal economy and become a source of additional income in rural areas. were otherwise, more conventional employment prospects might be scarce. In addition, festivals can increase the social capital and community. cohesion, in the process helping poverty eradication. They also encourage cultural tourism as people travel to those places and make sales for Community development projects. Ejikeme & Okonkwo (2022) and Udonwa et al. (2022) was able to present through his studies that festival bring about togetherness, unity and comradeship. cooperation structures which enhance group cooperation and support poverty eradication programmes. Economic empowerment lies as the essence of the relationship between traditional festivals and poverty relief.

Studies by Adeoye (2018) and Camargo et al. (2020) the cases have established that festivals work as a catalyst for economic development since they create income and jobs within the residents of the host community. They equally pointed out how festivals mobilise economic demand through the provision of market opportunities for local producers, craftsmen etc. and entrepreneurs. The works of Adeloye (2019) and Arowosafe et al. (2019) established that Festivals reduce poverty. through income generation, promoting economic development and employment opportunities for deprived groups by tourism promotion. consumption, craft, and food product expenditure, craft, and food product sales. Udonwa (2022) found that: The role of festivals in destination branding, aesthetic, visitor experience improvement, and tourism sector differentiation, which provides cultural experience tourism.

The Efik people, their ancestry and tourism

Efik: An energetically culturally and historically developed nation in the South-South Nigeria is an active component and an organic part of the culture and economy of South-South Nigeria. Both are cultural people with diverse and elaborate practices that have become part of the cultural diversity of Nigeria. As one of the earliest Nigerian people to have contact with the Portuguese traders the Efiks have always been involved in a foreign trade that included exportation of slaves across the Atlantic (Northrup, 2000). For a long time, people called them Calabrese which was later referred to and by the British missionaries changed to Calabar or a direct translation from the original language welcomes which means ‘‘come live and be at rest” (Amalu & Ajake, 2012; Eneyo & Essien, 2024). This name also carries out their tradition of being good hosts and diplomats as well too. Also, the Efiks has twelve traditional kindred groups; *Abayen, Adiabo, Enwang, Eki,Eniong, Iboku, Ito, Itu, Mbiabo, Obutong, Usukakpa,* and *Ukwa* (Eneyo & Essien, 2024; Eneyo et al.,2022). Together, these clans make up the Efik people, well known and historically referred to as Efik Eburutu. This documentation emphasizes their ethnic origin and relation with history, which is a very important icon to the Efik people in Nigeria and other parts of the world. The clans and their customs and political organization add to the socio-cultural life of the city and place it as the main protector of Efik culture.

Unlike many other ethnic groups, the Efiks are brought to recognition because of attention given to the possibility of solving every problem and the taking of the option of peace and not war. Their system of government is kingship and they are among the few Nigerian Treaty Kings that the people still practice diplomacy till today (Inyang, 2022; Agba, 2010; Eneyo & Itu, 2024; Udonwa et al., 2024). Other practices like the “*Nkuho*” (fattening room) are therefore symbolic and realizations of culture and culture as power, positioning the Efiks squarely within the discourses of cultural tourism and Africa’s emergent economy (Eneyo & Essien, 2024; Okonkwo & Oguamanam, 2013; Udonwa et al., 2022; Inyang, 2022). The Efik peoples are indigenous to Calabar and are therefore an important part of the city’s ethnic fabric. Another one is cultural troupe performance such as the *Ekpe* masquerade, *Abang* dances, *Nnabo*, *Akata, Tinkoriko*, *Atat Ekpa*, *Ekpe Obon*, *Nkanda*, *Edesi Nnuk*, *Ekpenyong Nnuk*, *Nyok*, *Ibiom*, Ukwa, *Ekon Ikon Ukom*, and *Iban Isong Efik Eburutu*, and the night time *Anko* festival are some of the cultural endowments of Calabar. As a result of the long time that the Efiks have been staying in that part of the world for more than 4000 years, they have equally influenced that part of the world. Akpabuyo still boasts of what used to be ‘trade by barter’ which manifests today in such market as *Esuk Mba* Market among others. These aspects of cultural heritage, history and geography create the perfect setting for the analysis of this cultural tourism and support of indigenous entrepreneurial ventures in Calabar. Because of collective endeavours, work ethic, the pursuit of stability as well as good housing, the Efiks have been very central to the social, economic and cultural reformation of Calabar.

Research methodology

The study focuses on Calabar, Nigeria located in the South South region of Nigeria. Geographically positioned at coordinates 4.95° N latitude and 8.35° E longitude (see Figure 1), Calabar is bounded by the Great Kwa River to the east and the Calabar River to the west, with lush forests and undulating terrains enhancing its natural beauty. Historically significant as a major coastal city, Calabar served as a center for trade and diplomacy, with its accessible waterways playing a critical role in the transatlantic slave trade and other international commerce. The city is renowned for its natural and cultural attractions, including the Slave Museum, the Botanical Garden, the Drill Monkey Ranch, and the 11-11 Cenotaph (Aga, 2009), all

of which underline its historical and ecological value. Dominated by the Efik people, Calabar is widely celebrated for its vibrant cultural festivals, particularly the Calabar Carnival, Africa's largest cultural festival, which attracts thousands of tourists annually. This carnival, along with other traditional festivals such as *Ekpe* and *Anko*, reflects the rich heritage of the Efik people while contributing to economic growth through tourism. The Efik people, known for their hospitality and cultural sophistication, play a vital role in preserving and promoting these festivals, which serve as platforms for showcasing their traditions and boosting the local economy. In addition to its cultural wealth, Calabar's natural endowments, including its waterways and forests, complement its cultural attractions, enhancing its potential as a sustainable tourism destination. This combination of historical depth, cultural vibrancy, and natural resources makes Calabar an ideal study area for exploring the impact of traditional festivals on tourism development and poverty eradication.

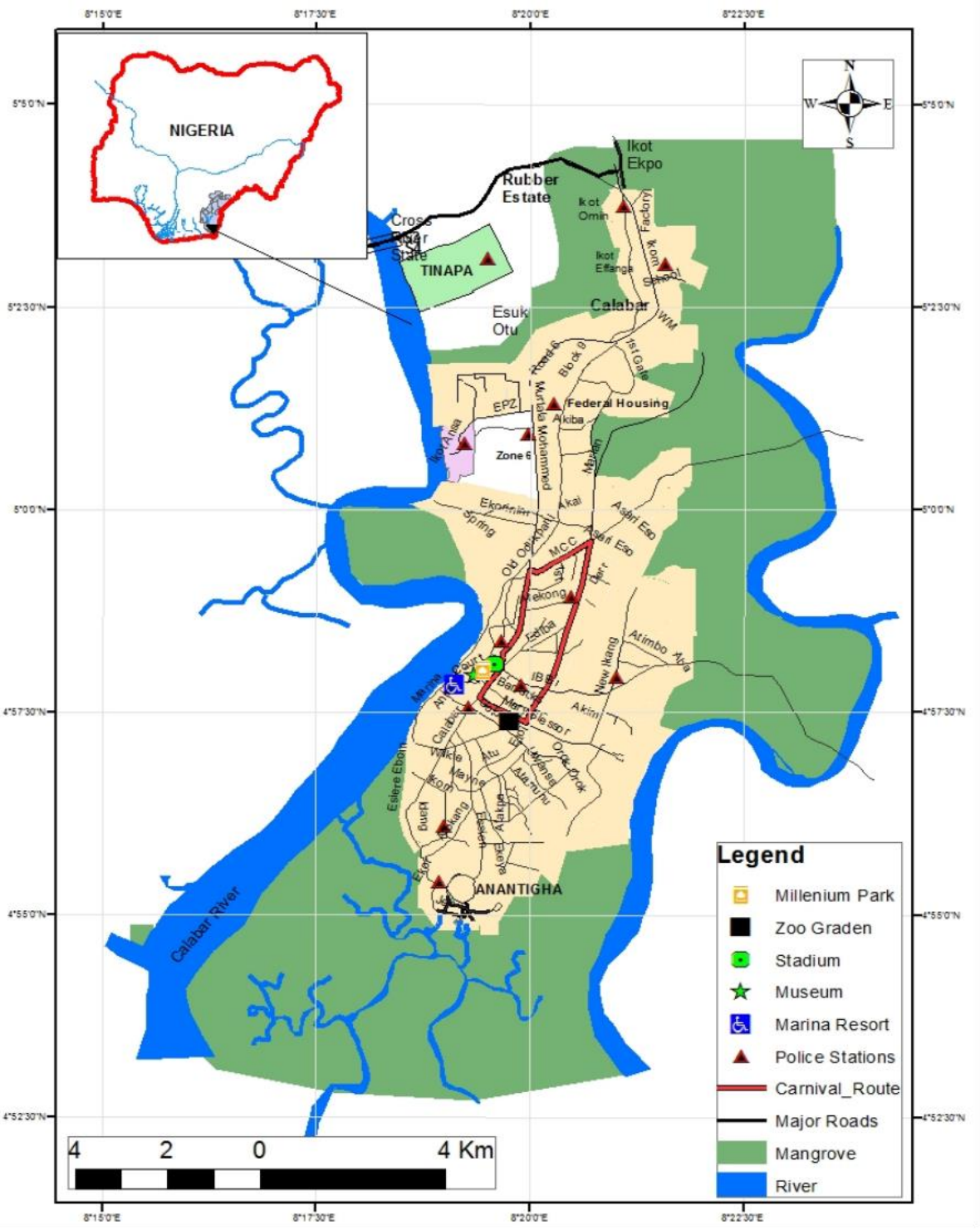

Figure 1: The study area (Calabar)

Source: Adapted from Cross River State (CRS), Nigeria Survey map (2024)

Leveraging Efik Cultural Festivals as Strategic Tools for Tourism Development and Poverty Reduction in Calabar, Nigeria

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This study adopted exploratory anthropological research approach to gather data on the role played by traditional Efik festivals on tourism development and poverty alleviation in Calabar Nigeria. More specific, the study concerned the question in what measure cultural, social and economic aspects of these events enable major change. The application of ethnographic technique provided deep insights regarding the festival perception and values of the Efik community. It aimed at the elucidation of the role of these festivals as multipliers of the processes of socio-economic change in the neighborhood with emphasis on qualitative impacts. The research relied mostly on qualitative data, with secondary data used for validation and contextual comprehension. The primary data came from direct field observations, interviews with key informants, and focus group interview. The interviews had two basic goals: first, to determine the distinctive characteristics of chosen traditional festivals and their associated tourist opportunities; and second, to assess the festivals' ability to alleviate poverty and promote tourism growth. Because of its dual character, the data gathered covered both the cultural and commercial aspects of the festivals. Secondary data were acquired from journals, government documents, newsletters, and other authoritative magazines to back up the conclusions. Data were gathered from numerous respondents involved in traditional Efik festivities, either directly or indirectly. The study sample included those who were directly involved in or affected by traditional Efik celebrations. They comprised representatives from the 12 ancient Efik Kingdom clans, festival organisers, artists, artisans, traders, tourists, and government stakeholders such as the Cross River State Tourism Bureau and the governor's event planning division. The study's many sources guaranteed that it included a wide range of viewpoints on the festivals' cultural relevance and economic benefits. These groups were chosen based on their extensive knowledge of the festivals, which allows them to contribute unique insights into the role of festivals in promoting tourism and alleviating poverty.

The study population was 300, and 216 respondents were sampled, yielding a response rate of 72 percent. The study included 12 key informants from the Efik ancestral clans, as well as 204 other participants, including artisans, traders, festival organisers, visitors, locals, and government officials, all of whom had significant knowledge about the study's objectives. The 72% selection is based on Saunders & Townsend (2018) and Saunders et al. (2018) recommendations, which advocate for a sample size greater than 70% in qualitative research to ensure diversity of perspectives. This resulted in a sample that was both representative and manageable for the proposed qualitative analysis. Purposive sampling was used to choose respondents who had a strong grasp of and involvement in traditional Efik celebrations.

The samples were designed such that only persons capable of providing significant and unbiased information participated in the study. Convenience sampling was used to assess participant availability and willingness. These strategies were effective in providing broad coverage of multiple points of view while keeping the viability of the data collection procedure. In addition, direct observations, focus group discussions and semi-structured interviews were used throughout data collection period. The interviews were conducted in two stages: the first phase comprised 12 carefully selected important informants from each Efik ancestral clan who provided detailed accounts of various events and associated tourism potential. The second stage had 204 participants, including locals, craftspeople, merchants, officials, and festival organisers. This stage sought to study the impact of traditional festivals on poverty reduction and tourism in a larger context. Focus group discussion provided group perspectives on the events, whilst direct observations provided firsthand information regarding cultural display and commercial activities. Voice recorders and notepads were used to accurately document responses and events. Thematic analysis was used to examine coded qualitative data, which included detecting patterns of themes related to the role of

festivals in tourism and poverty. The acquired data was organised and processed into narrative descriptions of trends. To maintain the study's qualitative focus, the analysis prioritised the avoidance of statistical tools. Secondary data were cross-checked with primary data to improve the reliability of the findings. This methodological approach made it easier to analyse the cultural and economic aspects of the Efik traditional celebrations.

Results

Traditional festivals celebrated in Calabar

The responses drawn from direct observation and interviews show that the Efik people, has a rich and diverse cultural calendar of traditional festivals which are so vibrant in the area. The respondents reveal that these festivals include *Iboku* Boat Regatta, *Nyoro Ekpe*, *Utomo Obong*, *Mbono Iban*, *Anko* and *Mbok*. These festivals in particular reflect the culture of the Efik people, and their historical relation to their past. The most outstanding activity is the *Iboku* Boat Regatta, which is held along the Calabar River. The respondents explain that during the festival they observe stunning boats sailing and observe the performances of live traditional music and dance to get the idea about the maritime culture of Efik people. In furtherance of the above, the respondent further reveals that the regatta contributes towards the promotion of the work of local craftsmen and the reinforcement of the Efik's cultural profile. Likewise, *Nyoro Ekpe* is a meaningful traditional masquerade, during which Ekpe masquerades appear from different royal families to show their skills. This one is danced by the members of Ekpe society, and has its religious and communal aspects of Efik culture; it is accompanied by a rich stage dressing and a complex dance routine. The findings also reveal of *Utomo Obong* Festival which is a glamorous event that celebrates the Efik traditional kingship. Since their royalty is one of the few in Nigeria that has diplomatic treaties, the festival is symbolic of the Efik people's diplomatic past as well as their respect for both peace and leadership. In addition, it was discovered that the *Anko* Festival, which is a nocturnal festival that is celebrated only by the initiates of Efik, was in fact an important rite that maintains several religious practices and reemphasizes the religious principles of the Efik people. Also, *Mbok* and *Abang* festivals were noted as changing performance indicators of strength, dexterity and creativity. Such competitions are not only participated by people from within the locality but also witnessed by people from other parts of the world. Combined, these festivals depict the cultural diversity of the Efik people, and their efforts in the promotion of their culture within the society and tourism importance.

Tourism Potentials of Efik People in Relation to Traditional Festivals in Calabar

The interviews with key informants and direct observations show that tourism opportunities inherent in the traditional festivals of the Efik people in Calabar are enormous. The respondents which comprised 12 members of the ancestral clans, festival organizers, artisans, and traders all emphasised the importance of these festivals in attracting both domestic and international tourists, thus enhancing socio-economic growth of the area. Their responses indicate that the economic contributions were the most frequent theme identified during the interviews. *Iboku* Boat Regatta and the *Nyoro Ekpe* were found out to be key economic activities that need to be promoted. This regatta is normally done on the Calabar River and attracts many tourists who in turn cause high demand for accommodation, foods and related artifacts. Hotel operators and guest house owners ascertained that their places were fully booked especially a week before the festivals

due to the high flow of visitors. Craft vendors and artisans reveal that the sales of Efik decorated ornaments and textiles increase during such occasions as tourists consider it important to take home souvenirs of Efik origin. Likewise, the food sellers pointed out that the customers in particular yearned for traditional Efik foods, which enhanced the economy of the area. From the interview section, the respondents reveal the cultural importance of the festivals are a tool for passing and displaying heritage of the Efik people. They further stated that the *Nyoro Ekpe*, which is performed mostly by members of the Ekpe society, as floored by the level of choreography as well as colourful dressing code. This dance is as much a performance as it is a metaphor for Efik religion and culture. The *Utomo Obong* Festival that celebrates the Efik kingship system was said to be an important event that also reflects the role of the area in diplomacy and peace making. This carnival has a treaty monarch – Obong of Calabar in attendance and because of this, it draws in other dignitaries and international carnival enthusiasts who want to experience the cultural richness of this festival.

These festivals complement the study areas natural and historical attractions and this makes Calabar an interesting tourist destination. To this end, the 12 key informants noted that many tourists who attend the festivals also visit the slave museum, SPAR shopping mall, botanical gardens and the drill ranch, thus the arts, history, and nature tourism product. This dual appeal situates Calabar in a strategic place of cultural tourism, where these festivals serve as a door way to the other tourism products in the city. However, the key informants identified some factors that have to be overcome if the full tourism potentials of Efik festivals are to be realized. These are; weak promotion, lack of appropriate festival facilities and infrastructures, and the fact that festivals should be organized in a more professional manner. But the prospects are vast, if more attention is paid to innovative investments into digital advertising, infrastructural development and better cooperation between governmental institutions and native inhabitants.

Traditional Efik Festivals: Driving Tourism Development and Poverty Eradication.

The study, which is based on interviews and focus discussions with stakeholders, established that, indigenous festivals performed by the Efik people of Calabar have potential impacts for tourism and poverty eradication. From 90% of the responses, festivals are regarded a strong part of the socio-economic life of the community as they play the role of cultural pass, economic development, and community mobilization. Among these festivals, tourism development is found to be the most important implication as the *Iboku* Boat Regatta and the *Nyoro Ekpe* attract both the domestic and international tourist. In form of interviews, informants depict that the local hospitality industry such as hotels and guest houses are fully booked during festival periods which in turn, creates a multiplier effect on other sectors such as transport, food and beverages and entertainment. Craftsmen and business people selling locally made products also report increase in sales of souvenirs with Efik motifs and symbols to support the contention that the festivals are economically beneficial. The economic advantage is also realised through poverty reduction since youths and women engage themselves in vending, dancing and organizing the event.

Most of the informants said that the festivals bring about the concept of a seasonal economy in that businessmen benefit from the owners of the various facilities. Vendors, transporters and service providers also opine that they earn a lot of income during these occasions and thus there is social economic justice in the society. Besides the economic effects these festivals also provide an important representation of community pride and past cultural history. Through dance, drama, singing, feasting and the presentation of

Efik culture and artefacts it is possible to disseminate information to all, thus passing the traditions of the Efik people down to future generations. This exchange creates better appreciation and understanding of the cultural history of the region thus placing Calabar on a better pedestal as a cultural tourism destination. Findings further reveal that the festivals also promote the development of facility, because the authorities, charitable foundations, and private investors also see the opportunities for the development of the area in these events. Some of the things that informants said that have become worse include roads, electricity, and water supply in Calabar have received boost during festival periods. But the study also highlighted problems that need to be solved to make the best out of traditional festivals in Calabar. These are lack of promotion, lack of festival facilities, and poor or insufficient planning and increased need for modernisation in the sphere of festival organisation.

Discussion

This research reveals the complex connection between traditional Efik festivals and tourism development and poverty eradication in Calabar. In accordance with the Cultural Tourism Development Model, these festivals are cultural and economic by nature. They are used for the promotion of Efik cultural heritage as well as the growth of the socio-economic sectors. Some of the cultural events such as *Iboku* Boat Regatta, *Nyoro Ekpe* were regarded as economic events with cultural effects because people from all over the world come to the area to participate in the festival. These festivals are in agreement with Eneyo et al., (2022) and Tavares et al., (2024), who postulated that cultural enhanced festivals are crucial in sustainable tourism and community transformation. The economic impacts highlighted in the present research support the idea of festivals as a means to increase the flow of traffic and stimulate local industries such as hotels, restaurants, and artisan crafts, and boost the development of communities.

Further, this research highlights that the festivals act as instruments of cultural transmission and community organisation. Accompanying colours, these festivals help promote Efik culture to the future generations and also increase cultural competencies in the viewers. This is in accordance with the principles of the Cultural Tourism Development Model, which provides for the use of cultural resources as potential for socio-economic growth. As it was expected and in parallel with the work of Etsename & Ojo (2024), Eneyo & Itu (2024) and Zhang & Dai (2021) who looked at cultural festivals in Latin America, the results indicate that Efik festivals offer not only entertainment value but also cultural education that enhances the region's identity and the appeal of cultural tourism. In this case, the two functions of the festivals are perceived with regards to the reiteration of culture alongside economic productivity.

Nevertheless, some issues remain: insufficient promotion, unpopulated festival environment, and an objective need for the modernisation of the festival industry. To optimise the level of tourism and economic benefits of these festivals, it is important to meet these challenges. These results support Agba, (2010) and Udonwa et al. (2022) who stressed on appropriate governance and involvement of people in cultural heritage marketing. It is also assumed in the study that by investing in digital advertising and infrastructure, as well as in public private partnerships, could help turn these festivals into world-class events, thus increasing their potential for poverty eradication and sustainable tourism. Therefore, by linking the study with the theoretical framework, the study emphasises the role of cultural festivals in both economic and cultural regeneration, and thereby supports the belief that traditional Efik festivals can be the foundation for achieving other developmental objectives in Calabar.

Conclusion

This study reveals that the traditional festivals in Calabar are used to promote tourism, reduce poverty and cultural conservation. The importance of these festivals to Efik people is great and they support economic development through employment, promotion of local businesses, and uplifting of the underprivileged. The results indicate that the festival brings revenue and benefits to service providers including lodging facilities, food and beverage operations, artisans, transportation services and souvenir vendors. Economic activity increase leads to community development and infrastructural setting for sustainable livelihoods thereby positioning Calabar as a culturally competitive and artistic tourism destination. *Iboku* Boat Regatta and *Nyoro Ekpe* are traditional Efik festivals that serve as means of preserving Efik cultural history and as a means of promoting cultural exchange and commerce.

Therefore, these festivals become catalysts for tourism growth, facilitators of community recovery and generators of ripples within the supply chain that in turn improve Calabar's physical infrastructure for tourism and investment. Efik traditional festivals are vital catalytic forces for socioeconomic change as they combine cultural promotion with economic development. However, the full potential of these events cannot be realised without collaboration between stakeholders including policymakers, tourism marketers, cultural bearers and citizens in dealing with challenges such as lack of advertising and infrastructural limits. Hence the need for the requisite backing in the design, promotion and marketing of Efiks traditional festivals, the city could use such events to draw the much-needed economic growth and development that will assure the city of the future it deserves in the global sphere while at the same time preserving its cultural values.

Recommendations

1. The government, especially the CRSTB and the Culture and Tourism related government agencies should give priority to infrastructural improvement like roads, electricity and festival facilities to improve the tourism experience and maximize the economic benefits realized during the festival period.
2. Digital marketing and inventive advertising should be used by stakeholders to promote and attract both local and international visitors to Calabar's traditional festivals.
3. Government agencies, corporate investors and local communities should collaborate to modernise festival organisation to promote long term tourism development and poverty alleviation, while conserving cultural authenticity.

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