

EXPLORING THE CULTURAL TOURISM POTENTIALS OF NIGER DELTA, NIGERIA: A FOCUS ON SEIGBEIN FESTIVAL OF KABOWEI KINGDOM

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ABSTRACT

Apart from the enormous oil and gas in the Niger Delta region of Nigeria, it is endowed with a lot of festivals and cultural events that are tourist attractions, and qualifies it as a tourism destination; exploring them would add to the socio-economic development of the area. One of such is the Seigbein festival of Kabowei Kingdom, a subset of the Niger Delta. The numerous cultural tourism potentials it exhibits indicate it is a money spinner if adequately explored. This paper, which is based on the Transformation and Commodification theories, relied on library and archival sources as methods to identify and highlight the tourism components in the Seigbein festival as well as suggested steps that could be taken to boost the potentials inherent in the festival as a tourism product. It concludes that if the multiple cultural tourism offerings in the festival, alongside that of other festivals and cultural products in the region are tapped, it will not need to be crying about underdevelopment because both local and foreign investors will be attracted to the area to invest their money. Recommendations are made thus: security should be enhanced for potential tourists, and more money should be allocated to the culture and tourism sector in the annual budgets of the States in the region.

Keywords: - Culture, Festival, Niger Delta, Seigbein, Tourism.

INTRODUCTION

The Niger-Delta region concerned in this chapter is the area limited by the tributaries of river Niger. The area is bounded in the north by Enugu, Ebonyi, Anambra, Kogi, and Ekiti states, with the Atlantic coast forming the general boundary in the south. The region comprises about 1,600 communities in nine states, namely, Abia, Akwa Ibom, Bayelsa, Cross River, Delta, Edo, Imo, Ondo, and Rivers, with more than 20 million people. According to Ekpo (2004, p. 1), the Niger Delta is a geographical area measuring about 70,000 square kilometers; it lies in the southern-most part of Nigeria, stretching from the Nigeria-Cameroun boundary in the east to the Ondo-Ogun States' boundary in the west.

The region is well endowed with abundant resources that include crops (arable, vegetable, ornamentals, and tree crops); fishery (fin & shellfish in fresh, brackish & saltwater); forestry resources (Mangrove Swamp Forest, Timber and Wildlife), natural lakes, and rich mineral deposits and human resources. Enehikhuere (2008, p.26) notes that "the Niger Delta area occupies a land space of over 20,000 square kilometers. It is believed to be the largest wetland in Africa and among the three largest in the world richly blessed with oil and contributes immensely to the economy of

Nigeria. Corroborating this view, Guanah (2010, p.2) cites Sooze who referred to Ayegbunam as observing that "The region contributes 35% of Nigeria's national export and about 85% of the federal government revenue".

The region is also endowed with diverse distinctive cultural and nature-based tourist pulls emanating from its many different communities and ethnic languages and groups that are rich in content and history. With this, the Niger Delta is an eligible, veritable, and viable market for cultural tourism in the international market. Some of Niger Delta's cultural heritage has the robust components of drama, musical display, cultures, festivals, dance, masquerade performances, artifacts, marriages, lifestyles, nature resorts, arts, food, archeological features, values, dressings, cuisines, language, traditional music, totems, rituals, and rites. These are natural endowments that are potential world cultural tourism products if properly harnessed. Akama (2002) posits that these are the very tourist attractions that people from foremost tourists producing countries are considering. Hence, Nigeria's Minister of Information and Culture, Alhaji Lai Mohammed, restates that the Federal Government is committed to supporting and elevating the nation's numerous festivals to enable them to contribute their quota to Nigeria's economic development, while also preserving the nation's rich cultural heritage (Nwosu, 2017).

Tourism has been a source of revenue for many nations of the world. It helps to boost nations' socio-economic growth, increases employment as well as preserves natural heritages and where they are located. Many countries all over the world are keying into tourism for economic reasons. International tourism receipts earned by destinations worldwide have skyrocketed from US\$2 billion in 1950 to US\$104 billion in 1980, US\$495 billion in 2000, and US\$1260 billion in 2015 (Emakunu, 2021). Projecting the tourism industry, according to UNWTO's long-term forecast report *Tourism Towards 2030*, International tourist arrivals worldwide are estimated to increase by 3.3% a year between 2010 and 2030 to reach 1.8 billion by 2030. Between 2010 and 2030, arrivals in developing destinations (+4.4% a year) are projected to increase at twice the rate of those in advanced economies (+2.2% a year). The market share of developing economies increased from 30% in 1980 to 45% in 2015 and is expected to reach 57% by 2030, equal to over 1 billion international tourist arrivals (United Nations World Tourism Organisation *Tourism- UNWTO*, 2016, p. 3).

Identifying culture and tourism potentials as an area Africa can tap from to bring about swift developments in rural areas and also create numerous jobs, Guanah (2021) cites ATTA as declaring that the World Travel & Tourism Council (WTTC) research found that tourism in Africa was mainly (71%) leisure-driven, with the remainder (29%) being business-driven. Similarly, domestic tourism is recorded to have contributed 56% with international tourism contributing 44% to Africa's tourism industry. The tourism sector in the Niger Delta of Nigeria is one of the sectors with an abundance of potentials. The numerous cultural pieces it is blessed with can make it a vibrant market for cultural tourism if properly harnessed. However, Crotti and Misrahi (2015) lament that despite the prevalence of rich cultural resources in Africa, which have a lot of tourism elements, they are not well leveraged. Vaugeois (2010) believes that most developing countries have the basic raw materials required to establish a tourism industry; whether using its heritage, architecture, landscape, water, or people.

Most tourist sites and events in the world today have their roots in the culture and festivals of their host communities. Hitherto, Nigerian's Niger Delta has been known for its vast rich oil and gas while the rich culture and festivals of the area are neglected. One such festival which is a viable tourist attraction that can make the Niger Delta a tourism destination is the Seigbein festival of

Kabowei Kingdom in Delta and Bayelsa State of Nigeria. Therefore, it is against this backdrop that this chapter attempts to showcase the cultural tourism potentials of the Seigbein festival. It presents the Izon/Ijaw worldwide view from the prism of love and peaceful coexistence even in the reality of past disagreement and animosity with one another.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

The Niger Delta area stands as a major source of income to the Nigerian economy. Ironically, this same region has been experiencing incessant instability due to underdevelopment, which, of course, has negatively been affecting the nation's economy. It then reasonably follows that anything that can ameliorate the lives of the inhabitants is worth concentrated academic investigation. One likely variable is to now focus on other God-given gifts in the area that can be tapped, and that is, developing the abundant cultural festivals in the region into tourism products.

Even though tourism is a money-spinner, yet it has not been fully explored in Nigeria. The Niger Delta area has a lot of tourism products that are bound to further open up the area for development. Most of these tourism products are already with the people in form of festivals, dance, and so on, which are termed as "living culture" (Akama, 2002). It becomes imperious to analyse the festivals in the region in view to identifying the tourism potentials in them, hence the focus on Seigbein festival of Kabowei Kingdom.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

This study aimed to establish that the Niger Delta area of Nigeria has a lot of cultural festivals that could be converted to cultural tourism products, thereby becoming an extra source of revenue for the region. It is also to highlight the tourism potentials in the Seigbein festival, and suggest ways on how to make it an acceptable cultural tourism product to be patronised by both local and international tourists.

THEORETICAL CONSTRUCT

This study is moored on the Transformation and Commodification theories. The Transformation Theory was propounded by Paul Adrien Maurice Dirac (Dirac, 1958). He first experimented with it when he carried out his study on quantum mechanics. The transformation process entails the changes a quantum state undergoes in the time, whereby its vector moves between positions or

orientations in a Hilbert space. According to Seliger (2002), the transformational theory is defined as the long-term process of structural shifts that result from changes in institutions. For many years now, the theory is commonly applied to studies on tourism destination organisation and expansion. It has been made popular and employed successfully in tourism destination and product studies by Char-lee McLennana in her study of the "tourism transformation process: An inquiry into the three main processes" (McLennana, 2011), and other studies. Bernhard Seliger likewise used it in his study of tourism dynamics in Central and Eastern Europe (Seliger, 2002). This theory claims that a tourism destination consists of the products it offers; it is when such identified products are nurtured and developed that they invariably assist in transforming the economic landscape of the destination. The transformation theory plainly emphasises the need for a strong structure and institutional framework to engender social change. It states that transformation generally fails when there are poor government institutions and inappropriate government actions, indicating a lack of application of knowledge and decision-making tools to enable the government to appropriately guide social change while still providing integration and stability (McLennana, Ritchieb, Ruhanenb & Moylec, 2013). The theory is appropriate for this study because it provides the steps and processes that can be taken if the Seigbein Festival is to be developed to the level that it will become a tourism destination. The literature reviewed also aligned with the core canons of transformation theory within the sphere of tourism and economics discourse.

On the other side, the commodification of culture theory is concerned with what occurs when culture is mass-produced and marketed in direct conflict with locally-based or community-based culture (Baran & Davis, 2010). According to this viewpoint, the media have evolved into enterprises dedicated to the creation and distribution of cultural goods. They can displace local producers of cultural products as a result of their increased economic power, to the detriment of people's daily life. Elite businesspeople hire low-wage labourers to piece together bits and pieces of folk culture, which they then sell for profit as a replacement for real folk culture. Westernised and other hybridised folk music, television shows, and movies are used to subvert the system.

Previously, "commodification" was viewed as a catalyst for capitalism, and hence as a negative force; as a result, earlier commodification theories believed that commodifying native culture leads to

alienation rather than protection (Kirsch, 2001; Sunder, 2005). Contrary to popular belief, commodification provides several benefits to the presenters of "commodified" cultures such as festivals, including economic rewards. This perspective is supported by Elizabeth Berkeley and Charles Haddox, as well as Stephen Lyon (as cited in Guanah, Emakunu, Okowa-Nwaebi & Egbra, 2020), who believe that cultural products are created for the community's internal economic growth or for export, which defines the amount of production. According to Mollie Lambert, Schiller's commercialization of culture theory states that seeing knowledge as a "product" helps explain the media's simple and comparable "products" (4). Festivals are veritable tourism products since they are based on a people's culture, and when such festivals are "commodified" or "commercialised," the people and the community (country) profit, and this can lead to economic prosperity.

CONCEPTUAL CLARIFICATION AND REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Festival Defined

The celebration or remembrance of a feast, event, or community gathering centred on a distinctive characteristic or subject of that community is referred to as a festival. It may be a festival in honour of a god, goddess, hero, or event during specific hours set aside by the community in the customary circle. A festival's origins might be historical, cultural, or religious. Festivals, according to Kukoyi et al. (2015), play an important part in the life of a community when people understand and use them to boost spirits, transmit knowledge, promote neighbourliness, and build community resilience (34).

As a type of cultural tourism, festival activities can boost economic growth, as well as the quality of life and wellness of inhabitants in the area where such festivals take place. The resilience demonstrated by festival creation, according to Kukoyi et al. (2015), illustrates the cyclical nature of change that has been welcomed without destroying the community (36). As a result, the festival may be considered to be an integral component of a people's culture since they are intertwined; as a result, both terms are used interchangeably in this article. Therefore, Seigbein festival is a product of cultural tourism.

Culture, Tourism, and Cultural Tourism

Culture can be termed to be the lifestyle that a specific group of people live, this said lifestyle is

not necessarily natural, but they are learned, therefore they are dynamic and susceptible to change as time goes on. Ayakoroma (2017) iterates that culture is the vehicle that drives tourism. According to Gartner (2001, p. 9), tourism is one of the most dynamic and rapidly growing sectors of the global economy with socio-economical dimensions worldwide; hence Vaugeois (2010, p. 4) suggests that “tourism may be a more viable alternative for developing countries”. Francis X. Hezel avers that “the success of national economies is driven by cultural factors more than anything else. The thrift, hard work, tenacity, honesty and tolerance are cultural factors that make all the difference” (as cited in Mainoma, 2017, p. 18).

According to Emakunu (2021), tourism has grown to become the third biggest industry in the world. It is on record that tourism destinations are increasing worldwide, and have opened up to and invested in tourism, turning it into an important driver of socio-economic advancement because it creates jobs and enterprises, export revenues, and infrastructure development. Tourism contributed 8.5% of Africa’s GDP in the year 2018, this is equivalent to \$194.2 billion. Africanews (2019) cites the 2019 Jumia Hospitality Report Africa as reporting that this growth record placed the continent as the second-fastest growing tourism region in the world, with a growth rate of 5.6% after the Asia Pacific and against a 3.9% global average growth rate.

Culture is what defines a people as who they are, distinguishing them from other groups of people in significant ways. With tourism and globalisation, however, a new phase of shared culture has emerged, where individuals may learn about and be indoctrinated into a society they were previously unfamiliar with. Cultural tourism, a rapidly growing tourism sector across the world, arose from this perspective. As a result of the intertwining of culture and festivals, cultural tourism provides travellers with the chance to have a great time while also learning about different cultures. Cultural tourism is defined by the International Council for Monuments and Sites defined as “that movement which involves people in the exploration or the experience of the diverse ways of life of other people, reflecting all the social customs, religion, traditions, or intellectual ideas of their cultural knowledge” (International Cultural Tourism Charter - ICOMOS, 1999, p.15). This is so because when it comes to discussing African culture as it relates to tourism, a ‘living culture’ of the African people is being referred to because it is

usually anchored on performances and dance, and the contemporary ways of life of indigenous African communities.

In most parts of Europe and America, the majority of their cultural tourism is based on monuments, archaeological excavations, historical sites, but in Africa, our cultural tourism product is termed as “living culture” because it includes dance, masquerades performances, festivals, rituals, rites, and many others. Substantiating this stand, Akama (2002) cites Tomaselli as declaring that, “when we discourse about African culture as it concerns tourism, we are talking about a ‘living culture’ of the African people which is typically founded on performances and dance, and the contemporary ways of life of indigenous African communities” (p. 15).

Since cultural tourism may be defined as tourism that is based on a people's way of life, in this study, it is weaved around the Seigbein festival, which is an important element of the people of the Kabowei Kingdom in Nigeria's Niger Delta. As a result, festival may be considered to be an integral component of a people's culture since they are intertwined. Many African traditional festivals and performances also qualify as products of cultural tourism, and this is where the Seigbein festival of the people of Kabowei Kingdom of Niger Delta of Nigeria falls. The Kingdom is made up of communities from both Bayelsa and Delta States. In the Delta axis are: Koloware, Taware, Akoware, Oginware, Ekise, Osuware, Oruware, Afinaware, Okruware, Asideni, Preware, and Aven while the Bayelsa State axis has: Adagbabiri, Kabokiri, Aduku, Trofani, Asimabiri, Ekpereware, and Elemebiri. Patani town in Delta State serves as the headquarters with the Pere of Kabowei Kingdom as the traditional ruler.

History/Origin of Seigbein Festival

The Seigbein festival of the people of Kabowei Kingdom in Delta and Bayelsa States in the Niger Delta of Nigeria is a popular festival that entails celebration, repentance, dancing, initiation, cleanings, and fishing, among others. In a detailed fashion in his book entitled, “A Short History of Kabowei Kingdom”, Late Chief Emmanuel Ebiowei Guanah, JP, a former Peretuaowei (Kingmaker) of Kabowei Kingdom, expounded more on the Seigbein festival. According to Guanah (2010), the Seigbein festival typifies yearly penitence of past

sins, a memorial of Oproza the founder of the kingdom, and for blessings.

The festival is all-embracing because it is neither fetish nor a pagan culture founded on animistic heathenism, but a festival that has its origin in genuine repentance and turnaround from evil, bad and negative to achieve peace and progress in the society. Such turnaround is recorded in the bible where king Pharaoh had to ask for forgiveness from Moses and the Israelites he offended for the plague placed over Egypt to be removed as recorded in Exodus 10: 16-19 (Maxwell, 1982). The festival poses practical moral utility that is worthy of emulation. Because culture is dynamic, Christian prayer session has been introduced into the festival celebration. Hence, Guanah, Anho and Nkala (2020) posit that there are some values associated with African culture alongside those of Christianity and that the mass media can harness them for the peaceful co-existence and benefits of the society.

Guanah (2010) insists that the Seigbein festival does not in any way represent a fetish ceremony or a process of idol worship as misconstrued in some quarters, but rather it has become more of a period of sober reflection and a remembrance ceremony in honour of Oproza, the father of Kabowei. It is significant to note that some aspects of the festival, which are considered to be repugnant, such as Oloo (the ritual of women coming out scantily dressed) have been expunged from the festival.

Narrating the origin of the festival, Guanah (2010) states that when Oproza, the father of Gbarainowei, Kumbowei and Kabowei died, Kabowei was not around, having ventured to foreign lands engaged in piracy and other nefarious activities up the Niger River. Kabowei was a giant with enviable strength. Before now he had a strained relationship with his brothers because he continually harassed them when he was around, and even went to the extent of selling their children into slavery.

When he returned he was informed of his father's death, and that he had already been buried by Gbarainowei and Kumbowei. On hearing the news, Kabowei wept bitterly not necessarily because of his father's demise alone, but also because of his past bad acts against his two brothers, Gbarainowei and Kumbowei. Kabowei was depressed and remorseful. His children advised him to organise his own befitting funeral ceremony to honour his departed father (Oproza). Thereafter Kabowei is said to have picked up courage, quickly accepted the suggestion of his children, and proceeded to make appropriate

preparations to honour his father. Kabowei first made peace with his brothers by asking for their forgiveness. They forgave him, prayed for him, and counselled him to desist from carrying out any atrocity henceforth. He agreed and used the opportunity to invite his brothers to join him in the reburial of their father. According to Guanah (2010), the burial took 20 days. Kabowei Seigbein interprets to mean that Kabowei was throwing away his sins and bad deeds (Seigbein Tangbei).

Activities were shared among his sons and grandsons, with Taware, responsible for dictating and announcing the commencement of the burial ceremonies. Taware was also responsible for performing special ceremonies known only to him for twelve days, referred to above as the Amateri Ritual. After the Amafini with a gunshot, all activities were unfolded and the festivities proceeded in full swing. Guanah (2010) explains that in the time of Kabowei, when the ceremonies were in full swing, leading his children in procession, Kabowei danced from one end of the community to the other professing his misdeeds and asking for forgiveness, saying, 'Enemieseimene akene ebuomo, enemieseimene ke emo tangbeiyo, eneseimene pua teinfa' (p.38). These wordings when translated conforms to, 'Forgive me for all my sins, I am throwing away my sins, my sins should disengage from me and flow away with the river waters and tides'. This was how the burial transformed into a yearly festival.

THE PERFORMANCE OF THE SEIGBEIN FESTIVAL

The festival, holds yearly in April, and lasts for twenty days. Guanah (2010) observes that the Seigbein festival is the only common festival in Kabowei Kingdom. It is the one event that binds and brings together all the communities that make up the Kingdom; it's "a good period for people to forgive one another, confess their sins, and pray to God for forgiveness, peace, and plenty as our ancestors were doing" (p. 38). It involves all Kabowei children coming out and dressed gorgeously in their best. It attracts visits from Kabowei sons and daughters in Diaspora, who pour home during the time of the celebrations to actively participate and observe and enjoy the funfair as the case may be.

In the eight-day window of celebration during these twenty days, a lot of activities take place, these include fishing events in lakes Onise-Da, Onise-

Yin, and Abari Opu-Duno (Opu-dunor comes yearly or once in three years, depending on community's decision, but it must fall during the Seigbein festival) that are located in the Kabowei Kingdom. Other events are football games, swimming races, canoe races, wrestling ties, Omeinjo, Owusei (masquerade dance) and Apia Ogele (a warrior dance involving the use of cutlasses) dances by Ekise community; Owainbede Kirigbele dance by the Orioware community; Amayanrin Ogele and Azo) a special masquerade performance) dance by Osuoware community; Opuobori dance (Elephant Dance) by Taware community; Oyibowei dance by Trofani community; Tuno dance (a flag performance to honour dignitaries and prominent members of Kabowei society) by Abari community. According to Ariye (2017), Asamabiri, Ekperiwari and Elemebiri communities also have their own special performances peculiar to them that come up occasionally within the time frame of the Seigbein festival.

As previously stated, the Seigbein consists of a series of activities lasting a total of twenty days, with twelve of those twenty days devoted to a ritualistic and spiritual closure of the Kingdom known as Amateri (Community Closure), during which all celebratory activities are suspended and the people remain solemn and reflective.

The first twelve days of the Kabowei Seigbein is a time of calm, exemplifying a period of dos and don'ts, absolute stillness, soul purification, abstinence from social activities, and numerous other concurrent amusements. The importance of absolute quiet during Amateri is so great that if a local dies during this time, no drums can be played, and no extravagant grieving, burial ceremonies, or celebrations can be held anywhere in the Kingdom. Tawareowei is in charge of formally proclaiming the Amateri's enthronement, as well as performing the cleaning rites and other purification ceremonies and rituals involved with the closing process (Amateri). After a series of rites and purification ceremonies.

On the twelfth day of the Amateri, the Amafini (Opening up of the Community) takes place in the evening, and all sons join the ceremony with *Fenitudu* (kindling of fire). In each palour, fanfare, the firing of guns, and other activities take place. It is dedicated to a form of commemoration and celebration based on family reunion; camaraderie, oneness, unity, and prayers. The Trafenituu, which corresponds to the social calendric days of

Akeinbuomobai, Biribai, and Akelambai, is a time when each extended family gathers its sons and daughters, young and old, to feast together. These family meetings are conducted by the patriarchs of each family lineage, who give prayers of good fortune to everyone and settle outstanding squabbles and quarrels amongst and among family members, to enthrone permanent peace and oneness among all.

A significant aspect of this ceremony is that the food for the get-together feast is prepared using only three pieces of firewood, hence the name (Trafenituu – meaning three pieces of firewood), and these pieces of firewood are taken to and dropped into the river on the third day of this particular celebration, to flow away with the tide and currents. The significance of this is that all issues that have harmed the extended family's unity and oneness have been resolved through the feasting together process, and the dumping of used firewoods into the river symbolises the cleansing and washing away of all negative encumbrances that are thought to be carried away by the river. This step also serves as a herald and notice for the Seigbein Festival.

Taware draws the entire cleansing process to a stop by firing a gunshot extremely early in the morning, formally marking the end of all ceremonies. The Oloo cleaning rite takes place on the thirteenth day, between 4.00 and 5.00am., and is conducted by older female members of all Kabowei villages who are dressed in scanty attire (nearly naked) and carrying burning firewood (twinkling bonfires). Men are not allowed to come out during the ritual, since any man spotted outdoors at this time was deemed taboo. In essence, like the Fouwisai Ogele, its symbolism is meant to drive off evil spirits, bad omens, diseases, and curses from the land. According to Guanah (2010), during this event, the ladies come out with their flaming firewoods to sweep the community downwards into the river, asking for forgiveness, peace, unity, and abundance while uncannily chanting the Oloo ceremonial song. Ariye (2017) adds that the Osuoware kicks off festivities with a warming-up dance called Amayanrin Ogele. In the Kabowei social calendar system, this day is known as Akelainbai. The young and old of Osuoware process across the community, accompanied by coordinated orchestral drumming and singing, to entertain with dance and gyrations, announcing that the period of closure and insulation has been formally lifted and that the community has

been opened for social activities to resume unhindered.

This is followed by the Fouwisai Ogele, when the joyful ecstasy intensifies. Akoware, Ogeinware, and Afenaware Communities execute it, and it appears between midday and night time. The significance of this dance is that it symbolises an endeavour to expel all evil spirits and demons from the Kabowei market. The dancing party attacks the market, symbolically ransacking sheds and things for sale, on the last day of the Kabowei three-day market stretch (Opufou Akenbai), armed with sticks and other light non-lethal weapons. The intention is not to cause undue hardship to sellers and buyers by destroying their wares, but rather to represent a systematic action of warding off perceived negative spirits from the land. The spiritual thought behind this is that evil spirits and other associated forces easily mingle with humans in market spaces, spreading their negative aura. As a result, the entire practice of the Fouwisai Ogele is to cleanse the market area to avoid any emission of evil. The procession winds its way through town before arriving at the Agadabga Shrine in Ogeinware (Ariye, 2017).

The Pere Ogele (Crown Procession) takes place on the sixteenth day of the celebrations. The inhabitants of Okruware Quarters in Patani, who are the guardians of the Kingship Institution of the Kingdom, exemplify and reflect the majesty, power, and prestige of the Kingship in an elaborate dance parade across the community on the Akenbai day of the social calendar. They do so by donning red regalia, the royal colour, along with beads and other imperial symbols.

The Biri Erioba Ogele (The Beautiful Wife's Dance) is the highlight of the Seigbein festival's seventeenth, eighteenth, and nineteenth days. Married ladies in the Kingdom's many groups come out beautifully dressed in expensive and beautiful gowns, adorned with beads and other ornaments, on these days. The celebration moves across the community, showing off the beauty of femininity and marriage, as a group or individually – depending on the number of celebrants for the year – joined by family, in-laws, well-wishers, and accompanied by melodic singing and drumming. The high point of the event occurs when the celebrant's spouse endears his bride by showering her with presents and other pleasantries. It is not unusual for the husband's family, friends, and other

well-wishers to express their gratitude to the Biri Erioba Wife with cash and gift goods.

On the twentieth day of the Feast, the Seigbein celebrations come to a close. It is held at Adagbabiri, according to Ariye (2017), which is home to the 'war deity' (kina – the Kabowei deity of battle). On this day, Adagbabiri warrior men, accompanied by others from all villages and accompanied by a powerful woman and girl procession, process with the deity from one end of the community to the other, beginning at the deity's shrine. This action is a display of Kabowei Kingdom's military strength, and it involves the use of weapons and live ammunition. As the party moves from one area of the village to the next, the weather turns gloomy, and as soon as the last parade concludes, the heavens open up with torrential rain, according to Ariye (2017). He reiterates that this event may be described as an unexplainable occurrence linked to the ceremony's timing, which corresponds with the start of the rainy season.

SEIGBEIN FESTIVAL AS A VIABLE TOURIST ATTRACTION

Since the Seigbein festival is a “living culture” that can attract tourists from far and wide; it can be turned into a cultural tourism product. All that is needed to be done is to work on how to translate the festival to a money-spinning event alongside the importance it holds to the hosts and visitors alike. The Small and medium-scale entrepreneurs in Kabowei specifically, and Niger Delta at large, can profit hugely from Seigbein festival becoming a tourist product as the area experiences a massive inflow of tourists. The festival will further give entrepreneurs photographers, commercial motorcycle riders, local petrol station operators, water and food vendors, hotels, restaurants, chemists/Pharmacies, souvenir sellers, GSM service retailers, and so on the opportunity to make extra money outside their usual incomes. The benefits indirectly impact the region. Guanah, Emakunu, Okowa-Nwaebi and Egbra (2020) add that “outside economic gains, other benefits derivable from festival processions include making people happy, moral sanctions against social and traditional authorities, renewal of the communal life of the people involved, and entertaining and reducing of tensions” (p. 192). To successfully transform the festival will demand meticulous planning and implementation processes that involve taking a holistic look at it from the production stage to the consumption stage where the tourists will come around.

The way forward is to implement the following suggestions, among others:

CREATE AWARENESS

There is a need to create awareness to draw the attention of potential tourists locally and internationally. All available avenues should be deployed to advertise the festival for the world to see and to be aware of it so that it can be patronised. This is in agreement with the truism by Steuart Henderson Britt (as cited in Apoki, 2018, p. 8) that “doing business without advertising is like winking at a girl in the dark. You know what you are doing but nobody else does.” Both conventional and social media are very effective avenues for promoting tourism potentials to bring about development.

This can be achieved, to a large extent, through the mass media, especially social media with its various platforms which include WhatsApp, Telegram, Instagram, YouTube, Twitter, Facebook, and others. Indigenes should not count on the government to do this for them, rather, they should embark on aggressive publicity of the festival themselves. They should post various aspects of the festival on social media so that indigenes in the diaspora that could not attend, and potential tourists can catch a glimpse of how it is being done. Since the world is now a global village, it will be seen all over. These advertisements can influence other prospective tourists to attend subsequent episodes. The services of travel agencies can be engaged too to publicise the festival to their clients

PUBLICISE PEACE-BUILDING POTENTIAL

The conflict resolution component of the festival should always be emphasised anytime publicity about the festival is being done. Since conflict and disagreements amongst humans are inevitable, festivals, like the Seigbein festival, can be used to foster unity and build peace culture thereby enhancing national development. They are natural habitats for disputers to congregate and resolve issues that might have defied other conventional means of settlements because the atmosphere during the festival is considered to be cordial and sacred. These cultural mechanisms which are avenues for peaceful interactions have the propensity to end enmity and rancour among people and bring about needed development. Festivals encase possibilities for people to settle their differences amicably without resorting to violent actions as ably displayed by Kabowei, the progenitor of the

Seigbein festival on one side and his brothers and the community people he offended on the other side.

This is what Nigeria needs at this point that some citizens are expressing their grievances about the goings-on in the country, and some are agitating for the restructuring of the country. Some sets of people are even calling for secession from Nigeria. The truth must be told, at present, Nigeria’s unity is fragile because it seems to be now established on nepotism and clannishness. Seigbein festival presents the platform for warring groups to put aside their differences, bury the hatchet, and get reconciled after major disagreements, with the guilty apologising to the offended were they were wrong, and the wronged forgiving the offenders so that we can all move forward as replicated in the steps taken by Kabowei in asking for the forgiveness of his people he has offended, with the latter forgiving him, which led to the restoration of peace in the land.

Festivals, such as Seigbein, can break down the wall of hostility that separates people, and by this ending the age-long suspicion of one another and unite us. With this, we can then live peacefully together not minding where we come from as individuals. Awodiya (2016) says Nigeria needs cultural rebirth because the neglect of core cultural values by the Nigerian people is responsible for the incessant civil unrest, youth restiveness, militancy, oil and sea piracy, illegal bunkering and oil pipeline vandalism, kidnapping, armed robbery, bomb attacks and other crimes in many parts of the country.

PROVIDE ESSENTIAL INFRASTRUCTURE

To attract and sustain increased tourists’ traffic to the festival, there have to be adequate infrastructural facilities, and the issue of security and the safety of the lives of tourists and their personal property has to be taken very seriously. Standard hotels and restaurants have to be built around. When they are patronised by visitors who buy food, drinks, and whatever they offer, the government generates money in form of taxes which ultimately develops both the local and national economy.

The hotels and restaurants should parade both intercontinental as well as local dishes that visitors may want to taste for the first time. It will bring about the popularisation of our local cuisines, after all, foreign cuisines like spaghetti, Pizza (Italian names) are local to the people of China before they became popular. The Izons/Ijaws of Niger Delta have a popular cuisine known as kekefiah. This delicacy is

not only nourishing in terms of nutrients, but it is also medicinal because of the ingredients used in preparing it. It is made up of unripe plantain which is rich in iron and good for handling overweight. Plantain is said to be a rich source of fiber, vitamins A, C, and B-6, and the minerals magnesium and potassium (Cafasso, 2019).

Bridges should be constructed, and roads leading to the various sites where different aspects of the festival take place should be made durable and motorable, especially roads in Patani, the epicentre of the festival. There should steady supply of electricity and water, at least, during the festival, taking into consideration the epileptic nature of electricity supply in the nation. Where the tourists have to travel via the rivers, covered canoes and houseboats should be provided.

UTILISE ALL OPPORTUNITIES OFFERED BY THE FESTIVAL

There are a lot of opportunities that the Seigbein festival offers that Kabowei indigenes can weave around and build their local economy around. This includes capitalising on the fishing events that take place in Onise-Yin, Onise-Da, and Opu-Duno lakes in the cause of the festival. They can be converted to fishing festivals. Fishermen from within and outside can be made to register to participate while dances and live music bands performing are engaged to entertain guests to give them a carnival touch. To generate additional revenue, tickets can be sold to tourists, fish buyers, vendors, and other visitors that come around. The local communities that host these events should be made to participate fully so that the dividends can spread to them too.

Also, since most of the towns and villages in Kabowei Kingdom share precincts with Rivers Nun, Forcados, and Niger, most of their waterfronts that are suitable sites can be converted to beautiful beach resorts with modern infrastructure that can attract tourists. Similarly, boat regatta, swimming competitions, canoe sprints, and rowing can take place on these rivers during the festival. These can present unique experiences to potential tourists from around the world. If well managed, it can lead to a deep treasurable, and satisfying experience on the part of the tourists.

As long as the festival brings business opportunities to the people, they should take every advantage it offers as it becomes a brand; souvenirs like branded bangles and brackets, fez caps, printed shirts, cell phone covers, mufflers, belts, handcrafts, carved small canoes can be produced in commercial

quantity and sold to visitors and tourists. These commercial assets have marketing values that can rake in revenue, not only for the locals but also for the government.

ENHANCE SECURITY

Apart from the developmental and commercial aspects of the festival which are key and paramount, security issue has to be addressed too. Some nurse the notion that the Niger Delta area is volatile, security-wise. This may discourage a lot of potential tourists from visiting the region. To disabuse the minds of such people, governments at both the local and states levels must ensure that there is adequate security for all visitors during the festival. They should endeavour to put in place a formidable security architecture that visitors can trust and rely on.

TRAIN TOUR GUIDES

Trained tour guides should be handy to take tourists around, and give them historical briefs about the various aspects of the festival, and the different sites and paraphilia associated with the festival. These guides should be vast in the history, custom and tradition of Kabowei Kingdom so that they can answer questions posed to them by guests intelligently. They must be fluent in speaking the dialect, and also develop interest in learning foreign languages (including other Nigerian languages) because tourists will come from within and outside Nigeria. Such guides should deck in the local fabric and dresses of the ijaw people. This will advertise the dresses to the visitors who may be interested in buying them to wear, or as souvenirs to give to their friends back home.

CONCLUSION

It is quite glaring that the Seigbein festival can become a world-class tourist product, and the Niger Delta of Nigeria a much-desired tourist destination if the right steps are taken by the people of Kabowei Kingdom, the local governments it is located, the Delta and Bayelsa State governments represented by the States' Ministry of Culture and Tourism, and the Federal Ministry of Culture and Tourism. If they work in synergy, the tension in the Niger Delta will reduce drastically because most of the jobless youths will be engaged in rendering one service or the other during the festival. There are tourism products spread all over the region.

If the multiple cultural tourism offerings in the festival, alongside that of other festivals and cultural products in the region, are tapped, it will not need to be crying about underdevelopment because both local and foreign

investors will be attracted to the area to invest their money. The dynamism in the Seigbein celebration has brought about the giving of chieftaincy titles to deserving Kabowians and outsiders.

Also, as a way of publicising the festival, the media and various writers should present a unique spatial cadence about festival in the Nigerian tourism sector employing techniques that will attract the attention of potential tourists to the festival. With the agenda-setting power the media possess, they can give prominence to any issue or event when they choose and decide to do so. When it comes to promoting our culture and festivals too, they should not relent in bringing this power to play; in fact, they should be at the forefront of doing so because that will go a long way to benefit the society at large. The role

of the media in promoting the trio of festival, culture, tourism, and their allies should be considered as a sacred duty to be executed urgently.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Security should be enhanced for potential tourists to feel safe to come around during the festival.
2. More money should be allocated to the culture and tourism sector in the annual budgets of the States in the Niger Delta region.
3. Prospective investors with the flare for tourism can be engaged to sponsor the fishing festivals in the Onise-Yin, Onise-Da, and Opu-Duno lakes and the proposed canoe sprint, boat regatta, and the profits shared among the stakeholders at the end of the day.

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