



## Implications of Traditional Festivals for Poverty Alleviation and Tourism Development in Ekiti State

### Abstract

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The article explores the role of traditional festivals in poverty alleviation and tourism development in Ekiti State, Nigeria, highlighting their cultural significance and potential as attractive tourism activities. The research employed a qualitative methodology, and data were collected through participant observation and in-depth interviews. The results demonstrate the abundance of visually appealing festivals that the Ekiti people enjoy, including the Ekiti Festival of Arts and Culture, Udiroko, Osun, Ifa, Iromo, and Egungun. The implications are that these festivals are ineffaceable catalysts for maximizing the economic activities and income generation of the local residents, cultural enthusiasts, artisans, media, transporters, and the state as a whole. This, in turn, contributes to the reduction of poverty. The study contributes to the development of tourism by highlighting the festivals' distinctiveness and bringing them to a wider audience.

**Keywords:** Traditional festivals, tourism development, poverty alleviation, qualitative method, Ekiti State.

**How to cite this article:** Oloidi, A.J. & Ejikeme, J.N.U. (2024). Implications of Traditional Festivals for Poverty Alleviation and Tourism Development in Ekiti State. *African Journal of Hospitality, Tourism and Leisure*, 13(2):367-374. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.46222/ajhtl.19770720.518>

### Introduction

Nigeria's diverse resources, including natural, human, and cultural resources, can be harnessed for tourism to diversify the economy, boost national income, and reduce poverty (Omoyibo, 2013). Nigeria's poverty rate, reaching 10.4% in 2015, is primarily due to high unemployment, with Ekiti State having the highest rate at 12.9% (Christolu, 2018). Nigeria is addressing poverty through various policies and programs, including Operation Feed the Nation, Free Primary Education, the Green Revolution, Low-Cost Housing, and MDGs (Millennium Development Goals) (Danaan, 2018). The initiatives aim to boost local enterprises, job creation, and capacity building (Arisi-Nwugballa et al., 2016), with traditional festivals through tourism potentially playing a significant role. Ekiti State's traditional festivals honor cultural heritage, commemorate historical events, and share values. Traditional festivals are used as tourist attractions in countries like China, Egypt, Brazil, and Kenya for economic diversification and poverty alleviation (Oloidi & Okonkwo, 2020). Ekiti State's cultural heritage festivals are primarily celebrated for their celebratory aspects, despite their economic benefits, contributing to Nigeria's high poverty rate due to unemployment, illiteracy, underdevelopment, corruption, and insufficient resources (Eleagu, 2018). Traditional festivals, which stimulate local economies and create employment opportunities, have significant implications for poverty alleviation and tourism development (Akande, 2018; Oladele, 2020). Amidst the rapid pace of globalization and modernization, traditional festivals serve as magnets for tourism, drawing visitors from far and wide to experience the Ekiti state's rich cultural heritage firsthand. Ekiti State's traditional festivals showcase its unique cultural identity, traditions, and customs, boosting tourism and economic prosperity (Adewole, 2020). They transmit knowledge, foster cultural pride, and promote intergenerational dialogue, deepening appreciation for the state's heritage (Adeoye, 2018). Ekiti State, Nigeria faces high poverty levels and limited economic opportunities, making sustainable development crucial. Despite its rich cultural heritage, low revenue generation, and federation account allocation, poverty reduction is hindered by the state's low revenue generation (Olayinka, et al., 2023). Promoting tourism and reducing poverty in Ekiti State is crucial for improving living standards and breaking the cycle of deprivation and exclusion. This article investigates the role of traditional festivals in poverty alleviation and tourism development in Ekiti State, highlighting their transformative potential as catalysts for sustainable socio-economic progress.

### Literature review

#### *Traditional festivals, poverty alleviation and tourism development*

Literature on the intersections of traditional festivals, poverty alleviation, and tourism development continues to evolve, reflecting ongoing research and practical initiatives aimed at understanding and leveraging the potential of cultural heritage for sustainable development. Poverty is a global issue characterized by insufficient resources for basic needs like food, clothing, and shelter, affecting individuals and communities due to socio-economic and administrative dispossession (Edeh et al., 2023). Traditional festivals, deeply ingrained in the cultural fabric of Ekiti State, have garnered increasing attention from scholars and policymakers as catalysts for poverty alleviation and tourism development. Studies by Akande (2018) and Eleagu (2018) have underscored the economic significance of festivals in the region, highlighting their role in generating income, creating employment opportunities, and stimulating local entrepreneurship. Festivals serve as important platforms for showcasing indigenous crafts, arts, and cuisines, thereby contributing to the economic empowerment of local communities. "Cultural Festivals and Poverty Reduction: A Case Study of the Edinburgh Festivals" by Smith et al (2023). This study examines the role of cultural festivals, particularly the Edinburgh Festivals in Scotland, in poverty reduction through economic empowerment, employment generation, and social inclusion initiatives. The findings offer insights into the potential mechanisms through which traditional festivals can contribute to poverty alleviation in diverse cultural contexts. Poverty is a complex global concept



involving insufficient resources for basic needs like food, clothing, and shelter (Ogunleye, 2010). Tourism, if properly promoted and packaged, could potentially alleviate poverty in communities.

García & Fernández's (2023) framework paper evaluates heritage festivals' contribution to the UN's Sustainable Development Goals, highlighting their potential for poverty alleviation, cultural preservation, and inclusive tourism development. Tourism has become a huge industry that could help alleviate poverty in the community if the potential is well packaged and promoted. Tourism is an intentional, temporary, and unpaid journey of people from their usual residences to unusual destinations for a minimum of 24 hours, primarily for personal curiosity (Oloidi, 2014). Odhiambo's (2021) research highlights poverty's impact on illiteracy, environmental degradation, and diseases, hindering tourism development in sub-Saharan African countries. Traditional festivals promote cultural heritage preservation. Festivals are regarded as hubs for indigenous knowledge, customs, and rituals, fostering social unity, communal identity, peace, and the transfer of cultural heritage. In the realm of tourism development, traditional festivals serve as important attractions that draw visitors from far and wide. Fasuyi (2021) examines Ekiti State's festivals, highlighting their potential as a tourism attraction, cultural experience, hospitality industry stimulation, revenue generation, and local economy boost. Festivals can boost economic growth, extend tourist seasons, or introduce new ones, thereby improving community lives and extending tourist seasons (Diminyi et al., 2022). Festivals in the Eastern Cape, despite poverty, offer entrepreneurs, socialization, and economic identity development, with cities like Port Elizabeth, Grahamstown, Wild Coast, and East London becoming cultural hubs (Mxunyelwa & Tshetu, 2018). For over 20 years in the developing countries, tourism, most especially cultural heritage tourism, is viewed as a catalyst for diversification of economies (Diminyi et al., 2022). Cross-cultural interaction between visitors and the visited, according to Najmeh et al. (2020), fosters adaptive change of local cultures, social sustainability and the maintenance and regeneration of ethnic identity. Fordjour & Cruz (2023) highlight the socio-economic benefits of traditional cultural festivals, such as the Ankos Masquerade Festival in Ghana, which boost local economies, create jobs, and contribute to the development of local regions. Festivals like Bristol Harbour Festival in the United Kingdom, Rio Carnival in Brazil, Vodacom Durban July, and Grahamstown National Arts Festival in South Africa showcase its potential to alleviate poverty (Mxunyelwa & Tshetu, 2018).

Arowosafe et al. (2019), in the article titled Economic significance and benefits of Mare festival to the community of Idanre, Ondo State, emphasized the opportunities that people of Idanre derive from Mare festival using a mixed method of research design to acquire qualitative and quantitative data in three communities within Idanre town, namely, Alade, Atosin, and Odode. The Mare Festival, a collaboration between stakeholders, generates income for residents, creates jobs, and promotes economic diversification. It attracts participants, generates revenue for artisans, food vendors, and local businesses, and sells cultural and artistic items as souvenirs. This event supports community sustainability and job creation, reducing poverty in the Idanre community. However, the study only focused on the Mare Festival's opportunities and did not explain the factors affecting its sustainability. Gubak et al. (2019) article on event tourism in Nigeria highlights the Pus Kat cultural festival in Mangu, where locals generate significant income from selling cultural materials, fulfilling tourists' requests, and creating jobs, reducing poverty, and increasing production and income generation. Ejikeme & Okonkwo (2022), in their article titled Sacred Groves and Natural Sites Conservation for Tourism in Local Communities in Nigeria, asserted that tourists always like to experience another culture apart from their own. The sacred grove festivals are one of the tourist attractions that attract both local and international tourists. Inyi people who live in different parts of the country return home for the festivals. There are activities like masquerading, drumming, and cultural dance performances. During the celebrations of these festivals, the prices of goods are always high due to high demand. These increase the local economy, thereby reducing poverty (Ejikeme & Okonkwo, 2022). Acha-Anyi & Dlamini's 2019 study found that festival tourism in Eswatini reduces poverty by 72%, but only 28% agree. The MTN Bushfire festival, for example, provides happiness, financial benefits, and excitement. The study suggests more active participations from interested parties to diversify economic choices and explore the economic opportunities of traditional festivals.

### ***Festival and poverty alleviation***

The analysis of festival literature reveals a strong connection between traditional festivals and poverty alleviation, particularly within the context of Ekiti State in Nigeria. Scholars and researchers have documented the socio-economic impacts of festivals, highlighting their potential to contribute to poverty reduction through various mechanisms. Firstly, traditional festivals serve as engines of economic activity, generating income and employment opportunities for local communities. Studies by Adeloye (2019) and Olaniyan (2020) have demonstrated how festivals stimulate demand for goods and services, leading to increased economic transactions and income generation for artisans, vendors, and small businesses. The influx of visitors during festival periods creates a multiplier effect, supporting livelihoods and fostering economic resilience among participating communities. Moreover, festivals play a vital role in promoting entrepreneurship and micro-enterprise development. Research by Olaniyan (2020) and Oloidi & Okonkwo (2020) have disclosed how festivals provide platforms for artisans and craftsmen to showcase their skills, market their products, and access new business opportunities. By empowering local entrepreneurs, festivals contribute to the growth of the informal economy and provide avenues for income diversification, particularly in rural areas where formal employment opportunities may be limited. Furthermore, festivals can boost social capital and community cohesion, aiding poverty alleviation efforts. They also promote cultural tourism, attracting visitors and generating revenue for community development projects. Studies by Ajayi (2017) showcased how festival foster community belonging, solidarity, and mutual support networks, promoting collective action and enabling poverty alleviation initiatives. Economic empowerment lies at the heart of the link between traditional festivals and poverty alleviation. Studies by Rypkema (2008) and Adeoye (2018) have shown that festivals stimulate economic activity by generating income and employment opportunities for local residents.

They equally highlighted how festivals stimulate economic activity by creating market opportunities for local vendors, artisans, and entrepreneurs. Studies such as those by Olaniyan (2020) and Arowosafe et al. (2019) show that Festivals alleviate poverty by generating income, stimulating economic growth, and creating jobs in marginalized communities through increased tourism expenditure, local crafts, and food product sales. Oloidi & Okonkwo (2020) revealed that, festivals' role in destination branding, visitor experience enhancement, and tourism diversification, offering immersive cultural experiences.

### The study areas

Ekiti State was created on 1<sup>st</sup> of October 1996 with 16 Local Government (as shown in Figure 1) Areas and is one of the states in the South Western part of Nigeria, which is predominantly occupied by the Yoruba people and covers the area of 5,782km<sup>2</sup>. Ekiti State lies between longitudes 40° 51' and 50° 451'E of the Greenwich Meridian and latitudes 7° 151' and 8°051' north of the Equator, with current population of 3,592,200, population growth rate of 3.88% and annual population change of 2.6% (National Population Commission, 2023). Ekiti State endows with many cultural heritages, such as language, ceremonies (festivals, traditional marriage, naming, coronation, meeting, burial, etc.), historical buildings and sites, indigenous technology, while others are natural resources like rivers, hills, fertile soil and trees (Oloidi, 2014). The people are highly accessible and hospitable. The communities are blessed with many colorful and aesthetic festivals. The festivals are potential tourism attractions that could serve as catalysts for poverty alleviation across Ekiti State.

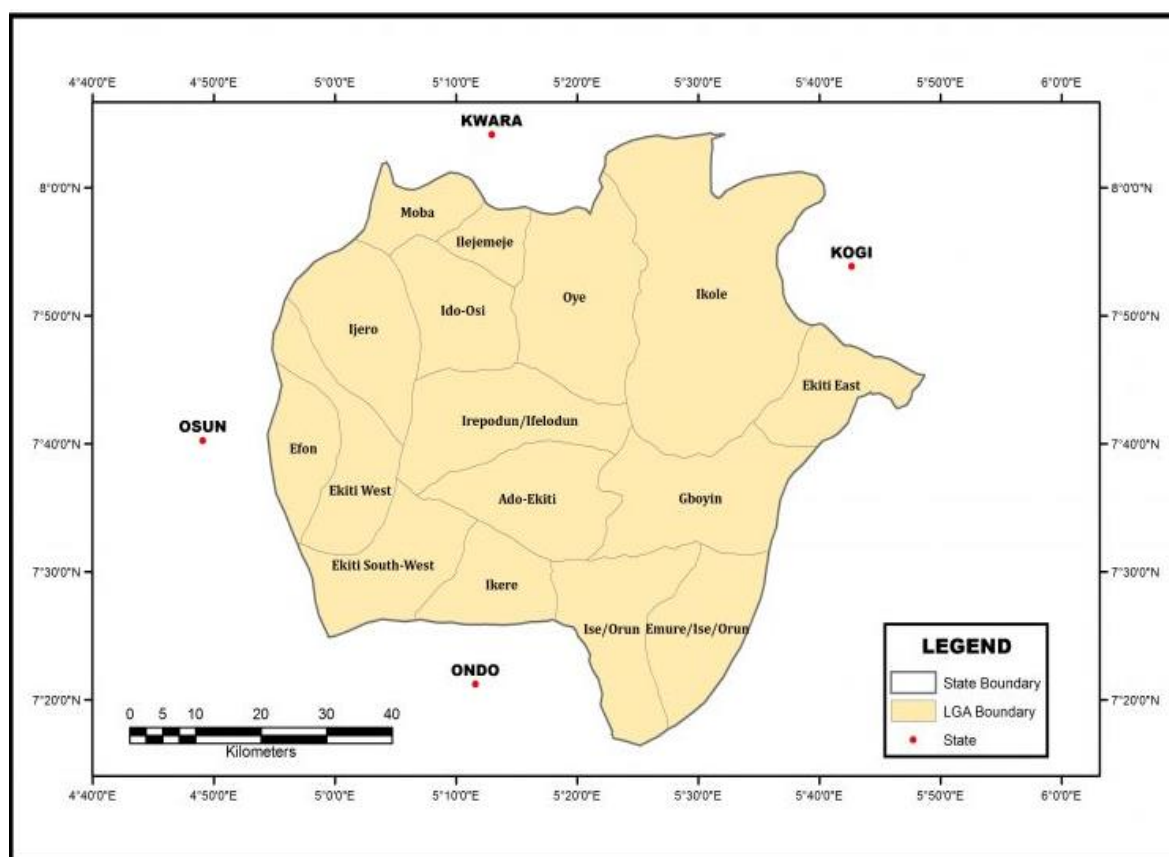


Figure. 1:

Map of Ekiti State showing Local Government Areas and their headquarters

### Methodology

This study adopted ethnographic research method in which qualitative data were acquired in the field from the custodians, artisans and people, who are knowledgeable about the topic under research. To acquire verifiable and reliable data, 50 key informants were selected using purposive and convenience sampling methods and interviewed, using semi-structured interview guide, recording tape, writing materials, and camera as instruments of data collection in the field. The key informants were selected because they are culturally and economically inclined and ready to transfer their knowledge without any form of biased. Participant observation was also relevant in the work to acquire more first-hand information and pictorial evidences to authenticate the findings more. Out of 50 key informants, 30 respondents (60%) are male and 20 respondents (40%) are female; those between 25-44 years are 20 (40%), 45-64 years are 20 (40%), and 65 years and above are 10 (20%). The traditionalists are 16 (32%); civil servants are 14 (28%) while artisans/traders are 20 (40%).as presented in Table 1 below.

Table 1: Demographic of informants

Sex	F	%	Age Intervals	F	%	Occupations	F	%
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Male	30	60	25-44	20	40	Traditionalists	16	32
Female	20	40	45-64	20	40	Civil Servants	14	28
			65 & above	10	20	Artisans/Traders	20	40
<b>Total</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>100</b>		<b>50</b>	<b>100</b>		<b>50</b>	<b>100</b>

## Findings and discussion

### *Selected traditional festivals and their tourism potentials in Ekiti State*

With participant observation and in-depth interviews, Ekiti State's unique traditional festivals attract tourists, despite low public awareness and some local celebrations lacking modernization. Apparently, the level of publicity has increased the economic status of some of the communities, specifically Ado Ekiti, due to the regular influx of tourists and cultural enthusiasts. Some of the gathered festivals in Ekiti State include Udiroko, Amomo, Elemi, Opa, Egungun, Ifa/Orunmila, Osun, Igun-Olori, Airegbe, Oitado, Igoke Olodooye, Odun Iyan, Odun Ijesu, Ukereje, Ladunwo, Iromo, Ogbese, Ogun, Ayan, Alayere, Oro Ibeji, Olua, Obanifon, Elefon, Ekiti Festival of Arts and Culture, Okudi, Okorobo, Olosunta, Odun Asa, Opa Oguru, Odun Iyan, Orara, Oloba, Sango, Oya, Aje/Olokun, Orisa Ojido, Egeegu, Ade, Odede, Odun Oba, Ekiti Parapo, Orara, Ajele, Odun Olofin and others. It was revealed that, if well packaged and promoted their implications to poverty alleviation would be beneficial. Few of these traditional festivals are cursorily explained below.

**Ekiti Festival of Arts and Culture:** The most publicized festival in Ekiti State, organized by the state government and agencies, is a cultural and sport-oriented celebration involving all communities and institutions. Activities include cultural displays, dramas, competitions, public enlightenment programs, royal parades, exhibitions, film shows, beauty pageants, seminars, awards, masquerade performances, launching, storytelling, school parades, entrepreneurship, empowerment, and interactive sessions. The Ekiti festival of arts and culture, attended by traditional rulers, elected representatives, religious leaders, and various stakeholders, aims to promote Ekiti heritage, strengthen relationships, and promote unity. Activities are felt across sectors, particularly hotels, restaurants, and local businesses, due to visitor patronage. The Udiroko Festival, Udiroko, meaning 'under the Iroko tree', is a festival celebrated in 1314 AD by Oba Awamaro, the first Ewi of Ado, to mark the first day on their ancient calendar, similar to the 1st of January in the modern calendar as revealed by the informants. Udiroko, meaning 'under the Iroko tree. It is a festival celebrated in 1314 AD by Oba Awamaro, the first Ewi of Ado. The festival marks the first day on their ancient calendar, similar to the 1st of January in the modern calendar, as revealed by the informants. It is celebrated annually in August and could be seen as the most celebrated and promoted festival in Ado Ekiti and Ekiti in general. The annual celebration of the event, Ohun Ewi aye batiwi, ni Egba Orun n gba, is a cultural event for the Ewi of Ado Ekiti, his chiefs, sons, and daughters to appreciate Olodumare and the day Ewi blesses his people. The prayers and supplications offered during this event are known as *Iwure*. The data from the respondents and researchers' observations disclosed that the festival features royal parades, cultural performances, traditional games, drama presentations, seminars, gifts, awards, stage performances, songs, costumes, crown exhibitions, queens' parades, and presentations by stakeholders and sponsors. The annual festival, sponsored by the government, bottling companies, philanthropists, NGOs, and cultural enthusiasts, features entertainment, food, and drinks, including Eran Igbe's soups. The Ogun Festival, the respondents revealed that Ogun's cult, a prominent divinity, is celebrated annually between July and August in Ekiti State, particularly in Ire Ekiti, as a fiery god of war, iron-using patron, and cultural hero. It is celebrated as *Ogun Onire* festival. This is the celebration set aside to worship *Ogun*, the god of iron, and it is the belief that every individual or group of individuals that make use of metallic objects must participate to pacify *Ogun* to safeguard them from falling victim to any circumstance through metals. In his study of Yoruba religion and culture. Akande (2018) provide historical insights into the Ogun Festival's evolution, cultural significance, and Ogun's role in Yoruba spirituality and associated rituals in Ekiti State. The festival, attended by various professionals, is a time to pray against unforeseen events, accidents, and other unforeseen circumstances, ensuring safety in lives, occupations, and properties. Many people participate in this festival at will or through divine directives. The Ogun festival, supported by traditional rulers, features propitiation and rituals with guns, palm fronds, dogs, palm oil, snails, kola nuts, roasted yam, cold water, tortoise, and metallic objects. It attracts artisans, traders, transporters, food vendors, hotels, artists, media houses, fashion designers, and tourism enterprises, with custom fabrics sold as souvenirs.

**Ifa or Orunmila Festival:** The Ifa celebration, a significant cultural event in Ekiti and Yoruba communities, is an annual event aimed at appeasing divinity gods and introducing new members into the cult. Ifa priests and priestesses, dressed in white, are revered for their faithfulness, trustworthiness, and ability to predict future events through supernatural means. The informants also revealed that the festival attracts global initiates, generating seasonal income for Ifa paraphernalia producers, hoteliers, restaurants, transporters, and media, while also providing an opportunity for them to learn about themselves. The *Egungun* (masquerade) Festival, this festival is celebrated in all communities in Ekiti State and *egungun* are customarily referred to as the incarnated spirits of deities and ancestors across Yorubaland. Egungun festival is celebrated between July and August every year with colourful displays and street parades by different masquerades and their cohorts. Informants shared unique masquerades in Ekiti State, including agbo, gborigi (ele), olurere, oja, akiripo, agbe (eye), pandanran, ede, owi, osisegbede, kunnuo, ladunwo, and epa, rooted in community culture and traditions. Their costumes are usually made of fabrics, palm fronds, wood, and leaves, which cover their bodies to avoid recognition. The masquerades in Ekiti State are historical, as they are rooted in the culture and traditions of the communities. The significance of these masquerades includes entertainment, sustainability of the people's culture, mediation between humanity and divinity, and embellishment of crucial events. Most of





them entertain people as they dramatize along the streets with danceable songs and drums by their cohorts called *Isero*. Masquerade festivals are unique and symbolic traditional events that attract diaspora to visit their homeland, attracting participants with different uniforms. Masquerades, characterized by their colorful costumes, attract pedestrians and are performed in batches in each community, especially street by street, ensuring participation. Only those who are initiated into masquerade cults are permitted to indulge in their activities. *Egungun* festivals in Ekiti State, including the *Ede* masquerade, attract Brazilians and Cubans to the Osun festival in Igede Ekiti. The Osun-Osogbo Festival, a significant Ekiti and Yoruba festival, is a significant celebration of the Osun goddess, originating from Igede Ekiti in Ekiti State. This is annually worshiped and celebrated in Osogbo, Osun State, during the Osun-Osogbo festival. Osun, a child of Ake and Erindo, was part of the Igede community and one of the sixteen children of Ake and Erindo, originating from Ile-Ife. Custodians report that the festivals attract people from various countries like Brazil, Cuba, Ghana, Togo, and Benin for goddess appreciation, marriage, and supplications. Omi Osun (River Osun), a medicinal river believed to cure diseases, barrenness, and spiritual issues, is believed to be the goddess of fertility, enriched with diabolic, mythical, and symbolic rocks. Yeye Osun, the goddess's mouthpiece and river custodian, possesses metaphysical abilities to communicate with the goddess and make supplications on behalf of worshippers. During festivals, Onigede of Igede Ekiti and Osun initiate honor goddess at her source, providing water and encouraging locals to buy Osun-related cultural materials like clay pots, beads, and worship objects, increasing revenue. Plate 3 shows Yeye Osun and other initiates at the source of the River Osun during the 2023 festival.

Oduń Ijesu (New Yam Festival), is an annual popular festival in Ekiti State, celebrated at both community and family levels. The informants revealed that it is widely celebrated, despite variations in nomenclature. The festival, celebrated by the King and traditional chiefs, marks the start of yam consumption and the start of the new traditional calendar, often merging with community day, inviting people worldwide. During the function, colorful masquerades are performed, and prayers are made to God for a bountiful harvest. Community members and associates, both home and abroad, enjoy the tradition and socialize. The festival features cultural, religious, educational, and social activities, including dances, songs, drama, sports, seminars, pageants, competitions, and awards, and serves as a communal meeting space for locals. The King and Chief Priests perform yam rituals, allowing local residents to eat and sell it publicly, promoting communal meetings among ages and cultural groups. The Elemi Festival is one of the most popular and prominent in Igede Ekiti, as it is attached to the genealogy of the people. Historically, Elemi was one of the sixteen children of the first progenitors of Igede, Ake, and Erindo, who migrated from Ile-Ife and settled in the present community. *Elemi*, a powerful child, challenged her siblings to leadership after their father's death, but lost the throne to Okunsusi, who never fought for power. Some contestants transformed into different entities, like Elemi, to avoid future conflicts. She became *Omi Elemi* (River Elemi), a powerful river, and used water's power to defeat enemies in Igede, fulfilling her parents' wishes. She was or is a powerful woman and goddess, even after transformation, who has helped the town during wars. Igede Ekiti's medicinal water, sourced from various towns and states, has been revered by indigenous people worldwide for its spiritual benefits, saving many women from barrenness and bad luck. The goddess Igede, known for raising hens and teaching custodians to be industrious, faithful, and virtuous, was praised as *Omo Elemi Ni'gede Amadiye Sereke*, meaning "the sibling of Elemi in Igede, the controller of beautiful fowls". The researchers observed that from the late 18th century to the early 21st century, river hens roamed freely, but now barricades restrict their movement to the riverbanks. Pa Adeeko argues that *Elemi* continues to protect Igede people from ritualists and kidnappers, and people worship or make sacrifices to him according to *Ifa* directives. River Elemi, managed by Aoro Elemi and chiefs, is celebrated annually in August with traditional costumes and decorated vests, inviting dignitaries to attend. The *Igun Olori* (Queen's Festivals), the interviews revealed that this is a unique ancient festival in honor of all legitimate *Oloris* (queens) across the three royal dynasties in Igede, Ekiti. It is a period of festivity set aside for all *Oloris* to make supplications and to be honored. The festival features traditional activities such as songs, dancing, drumming, oratories, panegyrics, dramas, and parades, as well as a renewal of allegiance to Oba, the king. The festival showcases symbolic and historical cultural paraphernalia, including ancient drums and effigies, and involves traditional *Oloris* attire (both old and new), receiving blessings from the King and community. This cultural group was chosen to represent Old Ondo State at FESTAC in 1977, showcasing their unique traditional display and custom items, highlighting the queen's role in preserving town culture. Many people buy customized items for the festival. *Asa* and *Iyan* Festival, the *Asa* festival showcases Ekiti culture and traditions, attracting students, teachers, and staff from various institutions to wear traditional attire and promote their cultural practices. Each school plans and executes a way to promote the culture and traditions of the Ekiti people. Local foods, songs, drinks, cultural dances, cultural parades, indigenous technology, local games, local languages, and competitions are major activities embedded in this event. The *Asa* festival, an age-old tradition, is revived to foster interest in local culture and traditions. The catch-them-young approach aims to revive and promote the Ekiti people's heritage, despite modernization, by introducing their traditional ways of life to the young. The *Asa* festival often coincides with the *Iyan* festival, where various cultural groups and age groups gather on a farm to hunt animals, prepare soups, and eat *Iyan* together (pounded yam). The major traditional drink, *Emu Oguro* (palm wine), a traditional drink, brings age-long friends together to share ideas, jokes, advice, and caricature themselves while preparing meals.

### ***Implications of traditional festivals to poverty alleviation and tourism development in Ekiti State***

Traditional festivals significantly impact socio-economic landscapes, alleviating poverty and promoting tourism, with economic benefits including increased employment, income generation for artisans, and stimulation of small-scale enterprises (Adeloye, 2019; Nagy & Nagy, 2013). Through in-depth research in Ekiti State and the contributions of many scholars, the following points are veritable ways through which festivals, if well planned, managed, and promoted, can help or be positioned to minimize the rate of poverty across Ekiti State. The study found that the government's support for selected festivals in



enforcing tourism and cultural policies at all levels attracts more tourists to Ekiti State during celebrations. Chief Olusawe stated that government involvement in cultural practices legally protects them, attracting more enthusiasts and generating more income within the host community. The informants explained that the government's festival-friendly environment boosts tourist influx, length of stay, job opportunities, and income generation, encouraging custodians to engage in cultural heritage management for future generations. This concurs with Oloidi (2019) and Abayomi & Omoyemi (2018) that effective government policy-making and enforcement of heritage and tourism policies in Ekiti State are crucial for promoting cultural heritage and preventing negligence and destruction. The government's active participation in cultural heritage resources, particularly festivals, is crucial for their relevance and sustainability in communities, attracting stakeholders and promoting economic diversification. Samuels (2010) underscores the significance of good governance in promoting and monitoring cultural heritage, suggesting that the government can foster a progressive society in Ekiti State by offering basic amenities and infrastructural facilities. Camargo et al. (2020) study on cultural festivals in Latin America highlights their positive impact on tourism, poverty alleviation, and community empowerment through successful strategies and sustainable tourism practices. The informants revealed that festivals foster partnerships and income generation through collaboration with various stakeholders, including the host community, government, hotel developers, cultural institutions, philanthropists, tourism promoters, transporters, photographers, media and communication service providers, and local industries, thereby boosting local and national economies. It is evident that Ekiti State celebrates various festivals immortalizing heroes, warriors, and gods, with stakeholders contributing funds to sustain these events and empower traditional rulers, chiefs, families, and communities. This relates to the Eunju et al. (2016) study, which suggests that community and stakeholder collaboration can rebrand festivals, attract tourists, and create a conducive environment while also introducing strategies for revenue generation. Likewise, the activities of the stakeholders attract domestic, regional, and international tourists to the community, which could attract more services from the host in exchange for money. Ana's (2022) study highlights the importance of community engagement, government support, and strategic partnerships in Latin American cultural festivals for poverty alleviation and tourism development, leveraging their socio-economic potential for sustainable development. The interviews and observations revealed that the festival celebrations enhance social amenities and infrastructural services, including electricity, water, road construction, health facilities, security appliances, accommodation, and renovation of heritage sites, creating a welcoming environment for residents and visitors. The informants also revealed the festival provides human-oriented services, employs many, generates income, and enhances job opportunities and living standards in Ekiti State through adequate social amenities. This agrees with Gubak et al. (2019), and Woyo & Musavengane (2023). Andrea (2012) emphasizes the importance of infrastructural elements in communities, such as basic services like electricity, roads, health centers, water supply, and affordable accommodation, in boosting the local economy. It attracts investors and promotes small and medium enterprises, attracting tourists and investors (Eze-Uzomaka & Oloidi, 2017). The Adebayo (2021) study reveals that infrastructure projects like roads, airports, and accommodation in Ekiti State, Nigeria, significantly enhance tourist arrivals and satisfaction. Aremu & Olaitan (2018) explore the impact of tourism on sustainable economic development in south-western Nigeria, highlighting its positive correlation with facility development, job creation, and poverty alleviation. The study by Kolawole et al. (2020) study examines public-private partnerships (PPPs) in Ado, Nigeria, highlighting their benefits, challenges, and best practices. They propose a sustainable tourism infrastructure framework, balancing tourists', local communities', and environmental needs.

Interviews and direct observations showed that Ekiti State festivals attract indigenes and visitors to buy souvenirs, especially *gangan* (talking drum), to preserve visitation memories. During traditional festivals, sellers and manufacturers of cultural objects, including local beads, gongs, earthenware, and kitchen utensils, along with fashion designers, hairdressers, food vendors, photographers, cultural groups, and transporters, generate more income. According to Mrs. Akinola, during the 2017 Ifa (Oracle) festival, traditionalists bought the few clay pots in her shops, and she was given money to buy more from other communities because few sellers are found in Igede, Ekiti. This relates to Gubak et al. (2019), Arowosafe et al. (2019), and Eze-Uzomaka & Oloidi (2017), who suggest that well-planned creative and artistic industries, through tourism, can drive sustainable development, safeguard cultural heritage, and promote identity. Traditional festivals in Ekiti State boost local knowledge and technologies, creating employment opportunities, revenue generation, and poverty reduction by encouraging artisans to promote their knowledge and technologies if planned and funded by stakeholders. Traditional festivals are crucial communal events for local manufacturers and suppliers, connecting them without intermediaries. Drum carvers, for example, supply various designs to visitors during the Udiroko festival, boosting income generation. The findings also revealed that souvenirs are sold during elaborate Ekiti State festivals to make events memorable and showcase local crafts and cultural elements. Tourists cherish and buy these souvenirs to keep memories fresh. This is seen as an additional way for people to generate income during the festivals. This concurs with Arowosafe et al. (2019), Diminyi et al. (2022), and Andrea (2012) that the better way the local people maximally generate revenue is through direct sales to tourists. The local residents, in exchange for money, supply most of the demands of tourists in order to enjoy their stays. Tourists often patronize businesses offering various services such as photography, transportation, accommodation, laundry, tailoring, restaurants, gyms, traders, vendors, and computer services during tourism activities. These services serve as direct avenues for the local people to make money. Rypkema (2008) highlights the role of tourism in recycling funds within local communities, promoting traditional festivals, and reducing poverty by supporting local industries. Oloidi (2014) and Eze-Uzomaka & Oloidi (2017) disclosed that traditional festivals in Ekiti State, Nigeria, promote cultural tourism, heritage preservation, economic diversification, job creation, and poverty alleviation, requiring sustainable practices, community engagement, and capacity building. The study reveals that traditional festivals revive cultural monuments and facilitate the creation of replicas of cultural objects, like the ancestral masquerade costumes of Ekiti people, creating jobs for curators, conservators, gardeners, security, drivers, vendors, artisans,



and musicians. Museums create jobs for people because they are structured departmentally and serviced by different workforces.

According to Rypkema (2008), there are more job opportunities if historical sites and buildings are reconstructed and facilitated to modern standards through festival tourism. Historical sites related to festivals can be rebranded or revitalized to meet modern standards by turning them into amusement parks or joints where people relax, play games, eat, and drink (Oloidi, 2014). The findings revealed that few of the traditional festivals in Ekiti State are garnished with the involvement of politicians, philanthropists, top government dignitaries, businesspersons, communication networks, service providers, actors, artists, and chiefs. Festivals like Udiroko, Ekiti Festival of Arts and Culture, Ekiti Sports Fiesta, and other major events incorporate cultural and sporting activities, allowing stakeholders to sponsor events and award prizes. In Igede and Ado Ekiti, traditional games, cultural displays, raffle draws, exhibitions of artistic works, food competitions, oratory, and so on are included to attract more people and then serve as sources of income for the beneficiaries, thereby reducing the rate of poverty among the people. Through this, the host community benefits from the event through the income from sales and services rendered throughout the period of the festival. Oloidi & Okonkwo (2020) suggest that culturally packaged festivals attract more tourists, encouraging them to participate in the host community's cultural values for extended periods. For instance, street festivals promote community culture, traditions, and values, increasing visibility, awareness, sustainability, and economic diversification through public marketing and community awareness (Obodoegbulam & Lawrence-Hart, 2019; Luna, 2015). Street carnivals are colorful events featuring cultural activities, customized uniforms, and banners, attracting youths and fashion designers, photographers, and local journalists, thereby generating revenue. Festivals foster collective action, intergenerational knowledge transmission, resilience, destination branding, and unique experiences, contributing to poverty alleviation, destination loyalty, and repeat visitation (Nyaupane & Timothy, 2010). Traditional festivals are being integrated into tourism development strategies to promote sustainable practices and community-based initiatives, requiring stakeholder collaboration, capacity building, and destination management for socio-cultural and environmental sustainability (Yolal et al., 2016). Traditional festivals in Ekiti State, Nigeria, have been extensively studied for their impact on poverty alleviation and tourism development, but more empirical research is needed for practical recommendations.

## Conclusion

In conclusion, this article highlights the importance of traditional festivals in Ekiti State for poverty alleviation, tourism development, inclusive growth, cultural preservation, and economic prosperity. The results show that traditional festivals aid poverty reduction by fostering employment, supporting local businesses, and empowering marginalized communities, while also providing a platform for artisans to showcase their skills. Festival tourism revenue aids community development, infrastructure enhancement, skills training, poverty reduction, sustainable livelihoods, and cultural exchange in Ekiti State, enhancing tourism competitiveness and expenditure. Festival tourism boosts the local economy, benefiting accommodation providers, food vendors, transportation operators, and souvenir sellers, stimulating business growth, and strengthening Ekiti State's tourism infrastructure and investment climate. Creating ripple effects throughout the local economy and supply chain. In essence, traditional festivals are crucial for socio-economic transformation, cultural heritage preservation, poverty alleviation, and tourism development, promoting inclusive growth, community resilience, and showcasing Ekiti State's cultural richness. It is imperative that stakeholders, including policymakers, tourism authorities, community leaders, cultural advocates, and residents, collaborate to protect and enhance Ekiti State's traditional festivals, which are crucial for its identity and prosperity. Ekiti State can foster a prosperous, inclusive, and vibrant future by utilizing traditional festivals for poverty alleviation, cultural preservation, and tourism development.

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