



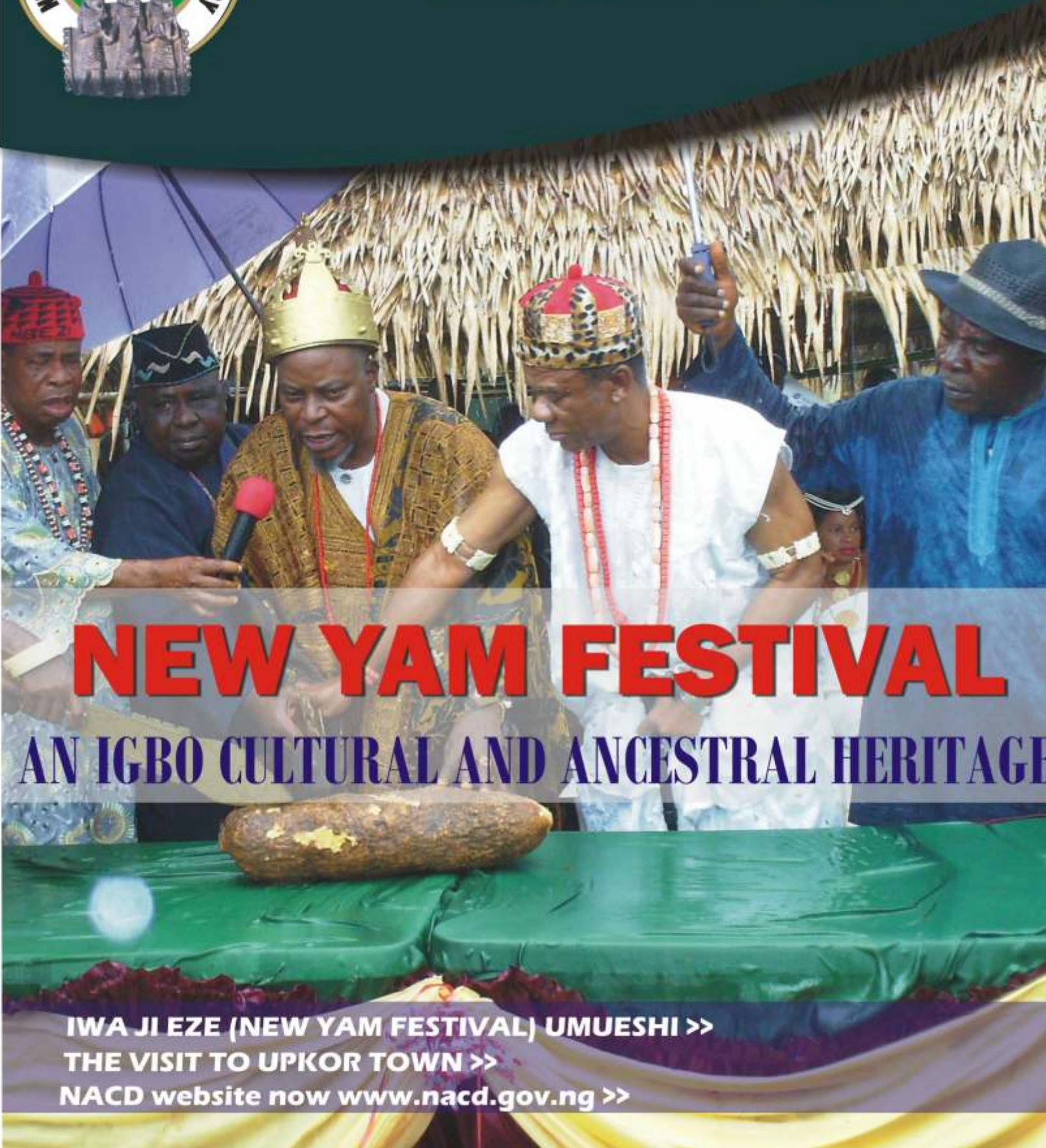
NEWSLETTER

12th Edition, August 2008

# NACD

[www.nacd.gov.ng](http://www.nacd.gov.ng)

PUBLICATION OF THE NIGERIAN ARTS AND CULTURE DIRECTORY PROJECT



## **NEW YAM FESTIVAL**

### **AN IGBO CULTURAL AND ANCESTRAL HERITAGE**

**IWA JI EZE (NEW YAM FESTIVAL) UMUESHI >>**  
**THE VISIT TO UPKOR TOWN >>**  
**NACD website now [www.nacd.gov.ng](http://www.nacd.gov.ng) >>**



# FROM THE EDITORIAL DESK

Welcome to the month of festivities. In line with our avowed commitment in bringing to your door-step the stories that make Nigerian arts, culture and tourism potentials unique, we once again ask you to join us in celebrating one of the country's rich cultural festivals; the Iwa Ji Ndi Igbo.

The 12<sup>th</sup> edition of NACD Newsletter focuses on the **Iwa Ji** at Igboekwu, Anambra State and the **Iwa Ji Eze Umueshi**, in Ideato South Local Government Area of Imo State. The NACD Project team was as usual on ground to bring to you the colourful and culturally rich events for your delight. The aim of this expo is to bring to your knowledge one of the unique cultural heritage of the Igbo people, which justifies the global acknowledge of Nigeria as the melting point of cultures, whose potentials cannot be over-emphasised in national development.

We also bring to you comments by subscribers world wide based on observations of past Newsletters and encourage you to come up with your views to enable us serve you better.

We will not rest on our oars, in bringing to you our esteemed readers, subscribers, collaborators and shareholders world wide the best of Nigeria's arts, culture and tourism ENDOWMENTS and POTENTIALS.

Once again join the Nigerian Arts and Culture Directory Project .....and experience Nigeria's Arts, Culture and Tourism at its best.

## EDITORIAL TEAM

**Prince Chinedu Obi - Editor-in-Chief**

**Ben Oti - Editor**

**Chidinma Iwuoha - Script**

**Boniface Ezenwa - Photography**

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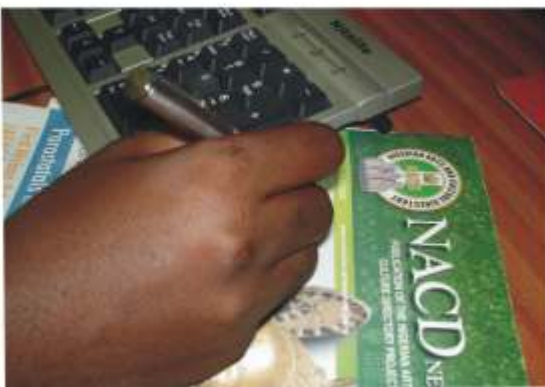
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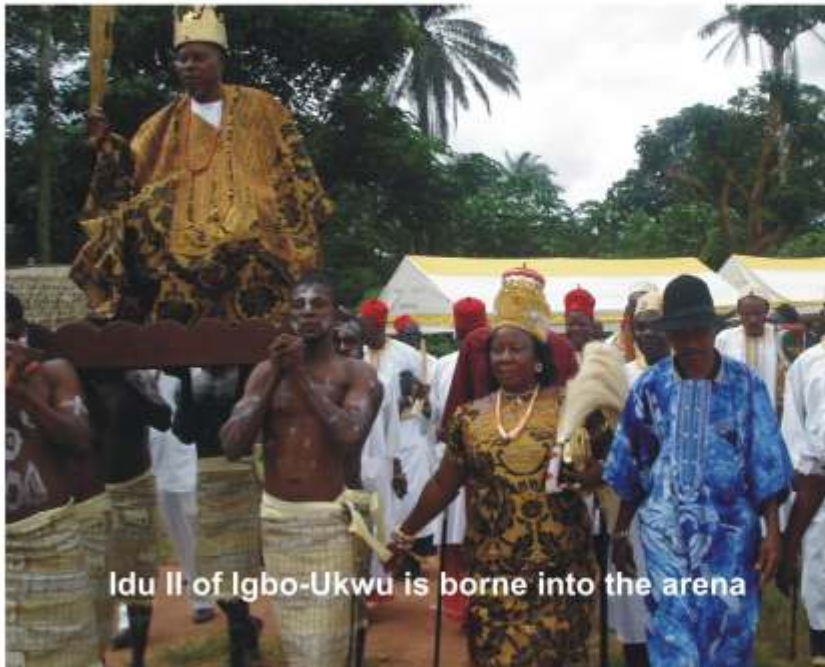




## NEW YAM FESTIVAL- AN IGBO CULTURAL AND ANCESTRAL HERITAGE

'Iwa Ji' in Anambra, 'Iri Aju' in Ebonyi; 'Iri Ji' and 'Ikeji' in Imo, 'Iri Anu' in Udi area of Enugu State; 'Eke Egwu' and 'Ihu Ji' in Igbo speaking areas of Rivers and Delta States respectively. Whatever name it is called, the New Yam Festival holds the same significance in terms of definition and content across the Igbo race. Prior to the advent of colonialism and Christianity, with the attendant shift of focus towards Christmas and Easter, the New Yam Festival had been the biggest and most important singular event with enough clout to make every Igbo indigene come running home from wherever he/she resides.

It was an occasion for honouring *Ahajioku* or *Ifejoku* (as the Igbo deity of harvest is known in Imo and Anambra States respectively) for a rich and abundant harvest. The town's Chief Priest had the responsibility of leading the people in this sacred ritual to the shrine of *Ahajioku*, and offering the biggest of the yam in appreciation, while praying for a better harvest year ahead.



Idu II of Igbo-Ukwu is borne into the arena

In recent times, traditional rulers perform this lead function, which was formerly the prerogative of the chief priests. As custom demands and as the leader of the community, the traditional rulers lead their people in thanksgiving service sequel to the festival proper. One factor has however remained constant through the ages; there is a compulsory thanks-giving offering, which ushers in the yearly harvest of new yam and in essence, the harvest season.

It is a firm belief among Igbo people, like most other tribes in Nigeria, that appreciation of past favours is a guarantee for receiving greater ones.



### WHY NEW YAM FESTIVAL?

One may ask, Why not new cassava or cocoyam festival? Since all are valued staple crops among the Igbos. The reason for this special privilege accorded 'yam' as a crop is cultural and quite simple. By its very nature as the largest agricultural tuber in the land, yam has always been a man's crop as against



Beginning from July every year, the observance of the new yam festival commences across the land and continues till November, with some communities opting to merge theirs with Christmas and end of year celebrations.

In areas where the original concept of the festival is strictly adhered to, the new yam cannot appear in any of the town's markets till the festival takes place. The date is also chosen to fall on the town's market day, the most important day of the week to the celebrating community.

The Nigerian Arts and Culture Directory Project was on August 30<sup>th</sup> and 31<sup>st</sup> invited to the *Iwa Ji* Festival and *Iwa Ji Eze* (New Yam Festival) celebrations at Igbo-Ukwu in Aguata Local Government Area of Anambra State and Umueshi, in Ideato South Local Government Area of Imo State respectively. These two events have been selected as adequate depictions of what a typical festival of this kind looks like for easy assimilation by subscribers of the NACD Newsletter.

## IWA JI MBIDO IGBO 2008

### THEME: Showcasing the Best of Igbo Culture and Hospitality

In the 9<sup>th</sup> edition of the NACD Newsletter, readers were given a brief description of the activities lined up for this year's *Iwa Ji Festival* as outlined by the Mbido Igbo Cultural Association, whose Chairman; Mazi Okafouzu Ugochukwu and executive members were on a courtesy visit to the Project's secretariat in Abuja last March and again in August, 2008; this time in company of the Special Adviser to the Governor of Anambra State on Culture and Tourism; Mrs. Ella Nwabueze.



Idu II welcomes guests



Dance group from Ezinifite

True to their aspirations, this colourful festival was a week-long affair, and featured exciting programmes like the dedication of the **yam barn, wrestling matches, palm wine tapping and tasting contests** and other cultural side attractions. Our main focus however, is the grand finale, which took place on the 30<sup>th</sup> August and the activities that made the day.



The grand finale began with a rendition of the National Anthem, followed of course by the breaking of kolanuts in the Igbo traditional style. The large bowl of kolanuts brought in by the 'Oche Eze' (king's wife), began its journey from the host; Idu II of Igbo-Ukwu, His Royal Majesty, Igwe Dr. Martin N. Ezech, to royal fathers of Aguata origin and environs, who were much in evidence. It traveled onward to Mbido Igbo member-States, and finally to guests from other parts of the country. For the sake of the less informed, it may be pointed out that Igbo kolanut, once presented; makes a double journey before it is finally eaten. The first is the journey of acknowledgement, which has been described above. In this case, it is merely shown to representatives of the people. A person may pat the bowl and give a nod to signify acquiesce. At the end of this journey, the bowl returns to the host for blessing and prayers known as

'Igo Oji', while shouts of ise! Rend the air. The second journey of the kolanut then commences. This time all recognized titled men are served the bowl containing unbroken kolanut, who pick one each on behalf of

their respective communities. After this, the rest of the kolanut is broken and shared to guests and all present.



Cutting of the new yam

## CUTTING OF THE NEW YAM

Cutting of the new yam, which is the highpoint of the event follows the blessing and breaking of kolanut. Accompanied by other royal fathers, *Idu* and *Oche Eze* Igbo-Ukwu move to the newly commissioned yam barn where the *Igwe's* wife loads up a basket with the choicest of the newly harvested yams. The basket is placed on her head and with her entourage moves around the arena amidst cheers and trumpeting for the ceremony of yam cutting. Finally, the new yam is presented and placed before the *Idu* and other traditional rulers. Holding a golden sword, *Idu* is joined by other traditional rulers; after the customary rites preceded by prayers thanking God for all his blessings. The *Idu* holding the golden sword jointly with other traditional rulers cut the biggest piece of yam into two. Thereafter, all dance around the arena to the beat of two giant *ikoros* (slit drums). According to tradition, this particular dance can only be performed by titled men and flouting of this rule attracts the anger of the gods. The entertainment aspect of the event commenced at this point with dances and cultural displays, while *Idu* went ahead with the conferment of chieftaincy titles on deserving men and women already chosen for the honour.



## CONFERMENT OF CHIEFTAINCY TITLES AND AWARDS

Prince Jimmy Asiegbu of Ezinifite, Aguata, Chief Chris Okonkwo, Mr. Sebastian Umeobi, Mr. Cyril O. Ike all natives of Igbo-Ukwu the host town, and Sir K.N.Onyejeocha of Ngodo Isuochi in Abia State received chieftaincy titles, while Madam Josephine Osuokwu received the Agbomma Igbo award of honour.

The process of investiture followed the traditionally stipulated pattern beginning with the ushering in of an awardee into the centre of the arena by the Idu II of Igbo-Ukwu, the traditional prime minister (*Onowu*), the *Oche Eze*, other traditional rulers and members of the Idu's cabinet.



Idu gives him a hand fan on which is inscribed his new title. This hand fan is believed to be symbolically sacred and capable of blowing away evil from the chief's path, ensuring success in whatever he lays his hand on. It also gives him the right to mingle with traditional rulers and titled chiefs at both informal and formal outings or gathering, in which case the mode



of greeting is by striking the outer side of the fan three times with that of the other chief or titled fellow. This method of greeting is strictly restricted to titled men. The awardee is also given an *odu* (elephant tusk); a symbol of his new class; used as a horn to alert people to the presence of an important personality. This completes the process of investiture and thereafter, the Idu pronounces his title. He then embraces the new chief; leads a celebration dance round the arena, accompanied by other traditional rulers, dance groups, friends and well wishers.

## CULTURAL GROUPS AND REPRESENTATIONS

Participation at the *Iwa Ji Mbido* 2008 took a *national* outlook in terms of representation by cultural groups from across the old eastern region that played a key role towards the success of the event. There were colourful cultural troupes from Cross River State, Akwa Ibom, Bayelsa, Delta, Imo, Abia, Ebonyi, Enugu, Rivers and of course, host Anambra State. The Mbido Igbo Association, organizers of the event has a vision to create an all-Igbo yearly festival, to serve as a home coming event for all Igbo people at home and in the Diaspora and to serve as a medium of cultural exchange between her and her brothers and sisters in



other parts of the country. This explains the diversity in the cultural troupes that graced the year's event. Among whom include **The New Dawn Entertainers** of Uyo, the **Kesimekpa Dance Troupe** of Calabar, the **Eziokwu Bu Ndu Dance group** of Igbo-Ukwu, the **Akunechienyi Dance group** of Ezinifite, the **Igba Ndi Eze group** of Igbo-Ukwu, the **Inyom Odu Society** of Igbo-Ukwu, the **Odinana Amaokpala Dance**, the **Ukpa Mgborogwu group** of Ukpok and the **Emmanuel Anglican Church Cultural Dance** of Ezinifite. Several

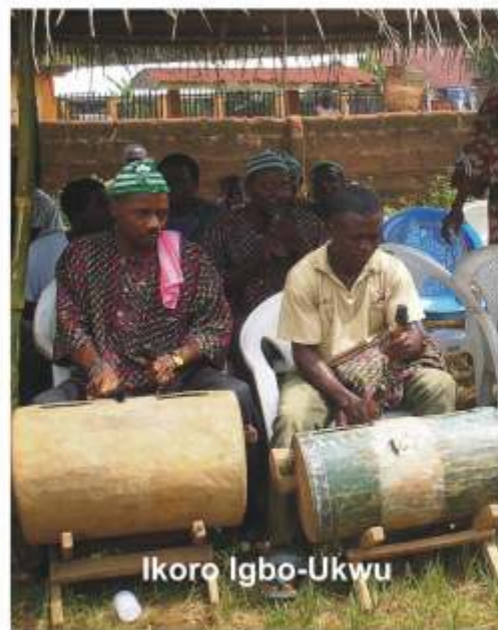
masquerade societies equally made the day colourful and entertaining.



Ukpa Mgborogwu group, Ukpok



Igbodiegwu group of Umunze



Ikoros Igbo-Ukwu



Kesimekpa Troupe of Calabar



New Dawn Entertainers, Uyo



Akunechienyi dance of Ezinifite





## IWAJI EZE (NEW YAM FESTIVAL) OF UMUESHI 31<sup>st</sup> AUGUST 2008

## THE FESTIVAL

In continuation of coverage of this year's Igbo traditional new yam festival the NACD team was in **Umueshi**, an ancient kingdom in Ideato South Local Government Area of Imo State, to witness the *Iwa Ji Eze ceremonies*, (cutting of the King's yam) of His Royal Highness **Eze Christopher Chidi Obi Eshi III of Umueshi**. Like its counterparts all over Igbo land, this New Yam festival was celebrated with pomp and pageantry, as it ushers in the season of harvest.

Amidst thanksgiving and showers of blessings both from the traditional ruler of the kingdom and Christian leaders, the people turned out en masse in support of the young *Eze*, who happened to be performing his first official outing as the traditional ruler of Umueshi as custom demands. The young *Eze* recently mounted the throne of his forefathers, on completion of the compulsory one year mourning period of his late father, His Royal Majesty Eze C.A.D. Obi, Eshi II of Umueshi, who joined his ancestors in December 2005.

The day began with a celebration church service presided over by the Catholic Bishop of Orlu Diocese, Most Rev. (Dr) Augustine Ukwuoma, at St. Andrews Catholic Parish at 10 a.m, which lasted for about 3 hours, after which the *Eze* returned home around 1pm to prepare for the festival proper.



Paying homage



Eze and Ugoze Chris Obi with cabinet members

At 3pm, His Royal Highness Eze Christopher Chidi Obi in procession was ushered into the palace reception hall by the traditional Igba Otu (royal drummers) dance group accompanied by his wife, Ugoeze Uchenna Obi, cabinet members, traditional chiefs and titled men, all dressed in colourful traditional wears as called for by the occasion, while the people dance to the rhythm of the drums with shouts of long live the Eze.

After all had taken their places, opening prayers were said and the process of presentation, blessing and breaking of kola nut began.



## PRESENTATION OF KOLANUT

Like other communities in Igbo land, every traditional event commences with the traditional breaking of the kolanut. However, there was something unique about the breaking of kolanut during the Iwa Ji ceremony of the ancient kingdom of Umueshi. The kolanut accompanied by a keg of palm wine as custom demands is first presented to the Eze by the palace officials led by the Ugoeze (Wife of the traditional ruler) and the Eze's mother. Once the kolanut is presented, other groups follow by presenting their own kolanut, namely;

**Umuada Umueshi** - married daughters of the town who had come from different places where they are married as a mark of their support and solidarity for their brother the Eze. This group of women wields a lot of influence in the affairs of any Igbo community.

**Umuada Okorobi** - these are married daughters from the Eze's kindred who also gave him a tray of kolanuts for entertainment of his visitors.

**Alutaradi Umueshi - (Women Wing of Umueshi Town Union)** the women wing of the town union, which is the ruling body of the town presented another tray of kolanuts to the Eze on the occasion.

**The Eze's wife (Ugoeze)** presented him with kolanuts in a beautiful bronze vessel. She was accompanied by other wives of her husband's kindred, who came in singing songs of victory for stress associated with the mourning period, which they had survived.

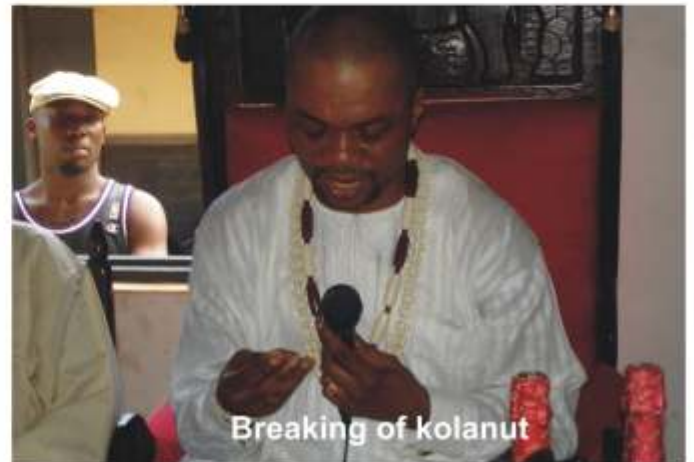
Finally, the **Eze's first sister** (Adaeze) who is also the first daughter of the Eze's nuclear family presented a tray of kolanuts to her brother, the Eze.



Presentation of kolanut

The cultural significance of the traditional kolanut presentation by the women is to show their traditional support for husbands and as a mark of hospitality and friendship to guests, friends and well wishers.

On receiving the kolanut, the Eze raises the kolanut bowl up for the people to see, amidst cheers and adulation. The Eze then proceeds with the traditional movement of the kolanut; first he calls on elders within the royal family and each of the 15 (fifteen) villages represented by their heads to acknowledge the presence of the kolanuts and after its blessing, come forward and pick a piece of kolanut on behalf of their villages, starting with the eldest to the last according to genealogical order of birth, being a people with one common ancestry, **Eshi**.



Breaking of kolanut



## CUTTING OF THE YAM



Cutting of new yam

After the presentation of the kolanut, the mood of the scene changed as a long procession of women suddenly emerged from various parts of the compound led by the *Ugoeze*, bearing big tubers of roasted new yams, a cooler of specially prepared oil bean sauce preferred by the people, and a large tray, empty but for a sharp butcher's knife, which *Ugoeze* herself carried, singing traditional melodies in appreciation of the people and the guests present. Placing their burden before the Eze and members of his cabinet with practiced ease, they retreat from the arena amidst cheering and clapping.

Taking one tuber of yam from the heap, the *Eze* placed same on a separate tray, took up the knife and began the ritual. As he prayed, he imbued the yam with miraculous powers of fertility, healing and success. The people signified their consent with shouts of *Ise!* He proceeded to cut the yam, bisecting it vertically into two halves.

This was an emotional moment for many as they shed tears of joy, and thanksgiving to God for keeping them alive to witness another yam harvest. *Eze* took a piece of yam, dipped it in the oil bean sauce and ate. Immediately, his cabinet members followed suit and everybody else is served with the roasted yam and oil bean sauce.



Eating time

While this was going on, groups and individuals came up one after the other to pay traditional homage making brief speech and pledging allegiance to the throne. While this was going on, traditional delicacy of the people, **Ji-akpu** (a sliced cassava delicacy popular among the Igbos) was served, as well as *fofofo* with assorted varieties of soup, rice and chicken to ensure that everybody had enough to eat and to spare. Palm wine and drinks of various types were served. As the merry making continues, the *Eze* takes his leave from the venue amidst dances and cheers across the ecstatic crowd. The event came to an end when *Eze* and his entourage began the royal dance, which ushered them from the **Obi** to the inner chamber, where the *Eze* retired to attend to his visitors. The celebration marks the beginning of the new yam festival, which commences the following day with the entire community awash in festivities, dances and entertainment of visitors.





## THE VISIT TO UKPOR TOWN

Preceding the Iri Ji Ndi at Igboukwu the NACD Research team as part of its mission on Friday, the 29<sup>th</sup> of August 2008, had cause to visit Ukpork town in Aguata Local Government Area of Anambra State at the instance of the Mbido Igbo Cultural Association. This documentation exercise happens to be

the first of its kind in Ukpork and the people's excitement was palpable as the research team discovered on getting there.

At 2:52pm, the team led by the Head, Research and Documentation; Mr. Ben Oti, who represented the Project Director, Prince Chinedu Obi, was received by the Palace Secretary of the town; Chief C.O.C. Ugboaja in the town hall. Also present were community leaders and the people's

representatives. The NACD team visited two amazing sites, namely, **Okpu Ana Natural Springs** and **Dike's Ancient War Tower** in Ukpork that hitherto remained hidden from tourists view.

## OKPU ANA NATURAL SPRING

This spring whose source is unknown simply gushes out of large boulders embedded in a cliff and is regarded as the purest waters to be found anywhere. To access its waters, a person has to descend virtually into the bowels of the earth by means of steps constructed by the people for the purpose.



Okpu Ana Natural Spring

The people of Ukpork are very proud of the mystery spring, as they lead tourists to its banks and encourage them to take a drink. The spring forms a stream at the bottom, which has a beautiful bed of white clay, giving it an entirely surreal atmosphere. The quiet and serene environment of the spring is conducive for camping and picnicking or simply for a quiet time of meditation.

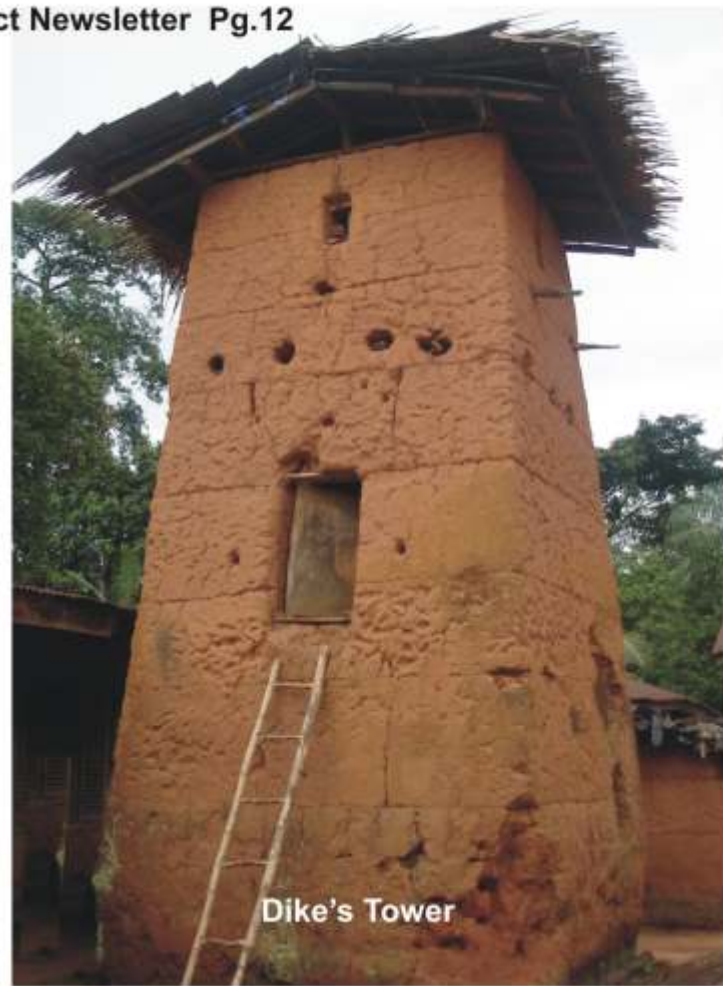
## DIKE'S ANCIENT WAR TOWER

Any person referred to as Dike in Igbo land is a great man and must have performed an extraordinary feat to deserve the title. In times past, it was used for great warriors who had shown exceptional bravery at war. Dike Madueke, who lived and died in Ukpork before 1700, falls under this category. The greatest warrior in the land, he had led the people to victory in many wars, perfecting a strategy that enabled the town defeat their enemies all around. The first European merchants who came to Ukpork town met such stiff resistance from the



local soldiers that they had to retreat for reinforcement. In the process of perfecting his war strategy, Dike Madueke erected in his family compound, a twenty-foot tall multipurpose pyramid tower that aided the people in times of war. Its interior has three decks, spy holes are all around it and with the aid of ladders, the people climbed from one deck to another. A sentry is constantly posted on the top deck from where he observes the surrounding area and reports the movement of soldiers from every direction. The middle rung is reserved for sharp-shooters armed with guns and darts. The height gives them the advantage of reach over enemy soldiers.

The ground floor of the tower is the most spacious and acts as a refuge for women and children, considered the most vulnerable in war times. While men fight, they ensure by this means that their loved ones are protected from attack. Dike's tower has recently been reduced in height to enable maintenance and preservation of this important historical monument. It has survived till this moment due to the special architectural skill that went into its construction, which according to the people, has been lost ages ago. Dike Madueke is also reputed to have been a powerful rainmaker in his day. The art of rainmaking in Igbo land is one that can only be inherited; a jealously guarded secret of the families that are its custodian. Emmanuel Madueke, a direct descendant of Dike Madueke is presently in charge of this art as was evident during the research visit. Haven been informed of the visit and its significance, he promised that there would be no rain for the duration and though the clouds were very heavy at a point, the rains remained at bay. The NACD team was informed that the rain stone was already smoking and truly, the smoke could be seen gushing out from somewhere within the inner compound. The walls hedging the Madueke family compound are as old as the tower itself as most of them are standing as strong as ever.



Dike's Tower

## CULTURAL DISPLAYS

**Also on display during the visit is the traditional dance the Ukpa Mgborogwu and the Egbenuoba cultural dances**

### UKPA MGBOROGWU GROUP

In an unforgettable performance of Ukpor war dance, an ancestral heritage of the people, able-bodied young men, dressed in loin cloth, wielding cutlasses and local instruments chanted war songs. A young man carried a woven crib of palm fronds in which an iron pot of charcoal fire raged. Another held an iron staff to which was attached iron rattles and tiny bells. This staff is the group's source of power as it jingled along with every step of the bearer. The group's magician, a particularly muscular young man stepped out to perform his art.



The pot of burning charcoal is brought from the crib and one by one, the magician swallows them. A plate of broken bottles is brought out next and the magician swallows them in handfuls. Next, a long rope is gradually extracted from his mouth which he never swallowed in the first place.

## EGBENUOBA CULTURAL DANCE

Ukpor is a town known for war since its earliest days. Many women participated actively in war and their dance patterns tell a lot about this. At Dike's tower site, the visiting NACD Team had a glimpse of the historical Egbenuoba war dance performed by a group of women. Dressed in war regalia, complete with caps and ranks, they wielded wooden guns and cutlasses and with fluid movements, which very much resembled the organized advance and retreat of an artillery brigade, kept the audience spell bound. It was not so much dancing as a marching parade; it is a heroic display of a people who are at all times ready to make the needed sacrifice to protect their land and its people. It is said in these part of Igbo land that Ukpor has never been defeated in war. [More stories on the Ukpor visit](#) can be glanced from the Anambra State web page of the NACD site.



Ukpa Mgborogwu group



Egbenuoba dance group



# Comments

Thanks Prince Obi for the informative document as well as the invitation to the opening of ARESUVA. This is a welcome Project with great potential. I will share it widely with diverse organizations and groups that I either lead or interact with. Regrettably however, I will not be able to attend due to other previous commitments outside Nigeria. I wish you a successful launch.

With my best personal regards.

**Professor Esogbue**  
Atlanta GA, USA

Thanks Prof, for your words of encouragement which continues to energise us.

**We appreciate your contributions towards spreading the good news of the Project to those you interact with especially in your line of work. Please keep the lights shining.**

Thank you so much for your e-mail. I find the attachment very useful and educative. I will deeply appreciate it if you keep me on your mailing list

Best Regards

**Kris Okoro**

**Dear Kris, we will definitely do our best to ensure that you continue to receive the monthly NACD Newsletter. Continue with us as we take the sector and**

**indeed the nation to new heights of awareness, to the global community.**

We acknowledge the receipt of your mail and fantastic works.

What kind of barter can you do with the Microfinance Newspaper, a sister company to us at Innerveil Limited.

**Femi Oye**

**There are several ways to partner with a newspaper house of the kind you mentioned. These will be in terms discussed and agreed upon by yours and our marketing teams as areas of collaboration will need to be highlighted and fine-tuned. Thanks for your continued support for the NACD Project.**

Thanks for the NACD Newsletter, it is quite refreshing to read about the efforts made to keep heritage alive. The richness and diversity of our culture should really be documented as you do and I commend your effort and hope that you achieve your vision.

**Clara Okoro,**  
Brandworld Media.

**Many thanks to you Clara for your encouragement; it is the boost we need in order to serve our esteemed readers. Keep us posted with your comments to enable us reach our goal.**

# Social Diary



## MARITAL BLISS

**Jude Eziuka of the NACD Project's Research and Documentation Department and his lovely wife, Nkechi tied the nuptial knot in a moving ceremony at the Treasure Field Assembly, Independence Layout, Enugu.**



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