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## ENTERTAINMENT AND HOSPITALITY ENTERPRISES IN IGBO LAND: THE EBONYI STATE EXAMPLE, 1999-2015

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### Abstract

Entertainment and hospitality industries are significant sectors of the Igbo economy. The study is a conscious investigation on the extent to which the Igbo of Ebonyi State extraction have engaged in the enterprises between 1999 and 2015. It is discovered that the enterprises are service-based, and are not optimally harnessed. They constitute cultural and traditional practices,

such as masquerade, cultural music and dance; modern practices, such as contemporary music and dances, sports, recreational and tourist centres, movie industry, and hotel management. Some of the areas in the industries developed with the people for fulfillment of religious and social demands. To sustain the practices, the socio-religious activities developed to possess socio-economic attributes in the area. This development however, encouraged entrepreneurs of Igbo origin to invest in the sectors with vigours within the period under study. The enterprises therefore, resulted in creation of increasing employment opportunities in Igbo land, and Ebonyi State in particular. Even as untapped opportunities abound, the areas exploited were not fully harnessed. To that effect, certain challenges facing the enterprises were examined. The work relied on both primary and secondary sources. Its data were analyzed qualitatively according to contents.

**Keywords:** Entertainment, Hospitality, Enterprises, Igbo land, and Ebonyi State

## Introduction

Ebonyi State is one of the states of the Igbo in the Southeastern Nigeria. It was created in 1996 with thirteen local governments of Abakaliki, Ebonyi, Izzi, Ohaukwu, Ezza South, Ezza North, Ikwo, Ishielu, Onicha, Ohaozara, Ivo, Afikpo South (Edda), and Afikpo North Local Government Areas. It shares from the rich cultural heritage, vibrant entertainment and warm hospitality of the Igbo. Its love for masquerade, storytelling, music, and dance created a thriving entertainment industry. Their tradition on hospitality that is rooted with the use of cola nut to receive visitors has supported a booming hospitality sector among the people of Ebonyi State.

The social and religious practices in the area needed to be made attractive to the people at all times. To sustain this turn of events, they undoubtedly developed economic characteristics. The entertainment and hospitality enterprises contributed notably to the economy of Ndi-Ebonyi. Masquerade, music, dance, sports, hotels, tourist and event centres emerged as providers of employment opportunities either directly or indirectly, and sources revenue. The industries therefore, endeared entrepreneurs and investors that hugely invested in them to maximize profits within the period under study.

## The Concepts of Entertainment and Hospitality

Scholars have conceptualized the concepts of entertainment and hospitality differently. Chris Rojek sees entertainment as activities that provide pleasure, enjoyment, or relaxation.<sup>1</sup> This implies that entertainment diverts people's attention from daily stresses and worries. It encompasses music and dance performances, games, among others. For John Storey, it is a complex and multifaceted concept that encompasses various forms of leisure activities.<sup>2</sup>

Raymond Williams seems to subscribe to the position of John when he declares that entertainment refers to a planned and organized form of leisure activity.<sup>3</sup> The two contributors believe that leisure activities are involved. They only differ on the ground where the latter accepts that the leisure activities must be planned. For the former, entertainment could either be planned, organized, and consciously provided or unplanned, but would be offered to create pleasure and relaxation.

Ellis Cashmore argues that entertainment serves as a social glue, binding people together through shared experiences, fostering a sense of community and social connection.<sup>4</sup> This position gives essence to collective enjoyment, emotional resonance, and social bonding in happiness. It brings out the sense of unity and cooperation that is fostered by entertainment. Herbert Gans further, sees it as a type of cultural product that provides escape and relaxation.<sup>5</sup>

The escape in this sense entails that entertainment temporarily reprieves people from daily stresses and worries and fosters fantasy and fiction, providing a healthy distraction. While the relaxation is characterized by leisure activities, comedic relief and laughter, and social interactions that are capable of reducing tensions.

David Novitz describes the concept of entertainment in relation to aesthetics.<sup>6</sup> This involves the appreciation and critique of artistic expression, cultural significance, and sensory experience. The aesthetic dimension of entertainment for example, captures its stunning elements. While Robert Stebbins discusses entertainment within the context of leisure studies,<sup>7</sup> Alan Albaran examines the entertainment industry's economic and cultural significance.<sup>8</sup> In the view of Robert, entertainment is a serious leisure which involves amateurism, such as playing music and acting, hobbyism and volunteering. The serious leisure is further noted to be enjoyable and fulfilling, possessing the capacity to enhance personal growth and self-expression, promote social interaction and community, and offer a sense of accomplishment. In the opinion of Alan, entertainment industry is a source of revenue, employment, and skill development. According to him equally, it (entertainment industry) fills a gap in cultural representation, preservation of heritage, cultural exchange, and identity formation.

On the part of hospitality, Immanuel Kant conceptualizes hospitality as a moral and political concept, emphasizing the importance of welcoming strangers.<sup>9</sup> This reflects the social, economic, cultural and personal benefits. Economically, hospitality supports tourism and local economies, attracts enterprises and investments, encourages diversity and innovation, creates employment opportunities, and stimulates economic growth and development. Jean Baudrillard analyzes hospitality as a ritual of social exchange, emphasizing its role in shaping social relationships.<sup>10</sup> This indicates that man owes attention, protection, love and care for strangers and visitors. At least it settles and relaxes their minds, and opens way for further interaction, cooperation, and relationship.

In the opinion of Zygmunt Bauman, hospitality is a moral obligation to strangers, highlighting its significance in modern societies.<sup>11</sup> Regarding to this, strangers are required to be provided with basic needs, emotional support and comfort, protection, and enabling environment for cultural understanding and exchange. Similarly, Conrad Lashley sees hospitality as a social exchange between hosts and guests, highlighting its commercial and cultural significance.<sup>12</sup> This implies that the social exchange supports economic activities, unveils cultural affinity, and opportunity to harness diversity. Generally, the views of scholars on entertainment and hospitality are unanimous in projecting their supports for good relationship, and cooperation to enable emotional and psychological stability, and facilitate cultural and socio-economic growth and development in any giving society.

### **Entertainment and Hospitality Enterprises up to 1999**

Since the earliest times, Ndi-Ebonyi have been involved in one activity or another demonstrating their talents and skills, creativity, ingenuity, enterprising spirit, and innovativeness in music, dancing, sports, tourism, and hotel management. They proved their abilities in areas of composing song and drama, singing, displaying drama and dancing.

The people of Ebonyi State were good entertainers whose traditional music and dances were employed for the purpose of entertaining both themselves and their neighbours. The music and dance groups that were found in different parts of the present day Ebonyi State, such as Ezza, Ikwo, Izzi, Ezzamgbo, Okposi, Uburu, Ivo, and Afikpo include Masquerade (*Mmanwu*), *Ogene*, *Edege*, and the *Ikpa* Dance Groups which were rich in entertaining people. Others as *Nwogbaego* and *Okombo* of Ezza, and *Owo* Dance Group of Okposi were not unconnected to the

delivery of entertainment function.<sup>13</sup> They used them to entertain both local and national audiences during festive periods and important occasions, such as New Yam Festival, socio-political events, birth, marriage and burial ceremonies. Music and dances of Ebonyi State origin were artistically and aesthetically displayed to thrill and give the desired pleasure to audience. The uncommon creativity and inspirational potentials inherent in the masquerade, musical and dancing performances, made them to be highly regarded by people of different cultures. They also attracted more patronage and good remunerations. These cultural and traditional music and dance groups from different communities and groups were often hired for their services in occasions and ceremonies.

It is doubtless that entrepreneurs, such as Emeka Onele, Igbiri Nwakpa, among others, raised their cultural and traditional musical groups that provided their services during different occasions and programmes in the state and beyond. These musical groups emerged as socio-economic institutions that were mainly operated as enterprises. They had staff that served as players and dancers. Other music and dance groups, such as Nkwa Umuagbogho and Nkwa Nwite of Ehugbo, Oji Anya Lere of Amasiri, Di Bugwu Cultural Dance of Edda, Nwogbaego of Ezza,<sup>14</sup> among others, equally operated in the area. These entertaining music and dance groups were for, among other things, fulfillment of cultural, traditional, religious and economic purposes.

These entertainment bodies featured during different festivals and programmes from one home or event centre to another in the state before 1999. In each of their outings, they usually realized both financial and moral supports from their audience and hosts. The warm reception, financial and moral supports were clear demonstration of their hospitable attributes to the entertainment groups. Until 1999 equally, football as another important element for entertainment was never institutionalized as a professional body in the state. Those that engaged in football were into it as a part of exercises, and extra-curricular activities in school. In other words, numerous people in the area participated actively and passionately in football as a part of exercises and pastimes, not mainly as a profession or source of income. Of course, the practices enabled them develop their talents and skills in football, but those talents and skills were never converted to wealth creation.<sup>15</sup>

Within the period under review, there was no impressive investment in the hospitality industry. People mainly received and hosted their visitors and strangers in their various homes. They did that with cola nut (oji), snuff, ground nut, palm wine and other kinds of drinks and items available during the period. The efforts of the hosts and hostesses to demonstrate their hospitable attributes promoted other economic activities, such as trade and farming in the area. It was few hotels, such as Ebonyi and Eagle Royal Hotels and Suites that were in existence in the state before 1999.<sup>16</sup> Among other factors, poor electricity supply and the sorry state of roads were responsible for unimpressive investment and development in the industry before 1999. The area was doubtlessly unattractive to investors and foreigners, thereby, discouraging investment in the hospitality, and other enterprises.

### **Entertainment and Hospitality Industries, 1999-2015**

The return to democracy in 1999 provided more opportunities for some people of Ebonyi State to receive supports from either their family members, friends, politicians, philanthropists, groups or government to utilize their talents and skills in the areas of entertainment and hospitality. Kelechi Miles Augustine (Tecno), Chrismathner Chimaobi Owoh (Zoro), Genevieve Ogbuewu (Splash), Patrick Nnaemeka Okorie (Patoranking), Angela Okorie, Johnson Timothy Ogbonna (TJ Wonder), Ada Ogochukwu Ehi (Ada Ehi), among others, are recognized as people

of Ebonyi State origin whose impact on the areas of music, dance and movie cannot be denied.<sup>17</sup> Admittedly, they were not Ebonyi State-based performers in the enterprises, but their accounts in the industries remains incomplete until they are built with their source (state of origin).

Yet, several musicians and performers of Ebonyi State-based that had the skills and talents to compose music and perform in foreign genres, styles and media lacked capital, and sponsorship. For examples, Emmanuel Nwite, Prosper Nwankwo, and Ndubuisi Ezaka Oka are among the people living with the talents and skills required in the industry, but were victims of lack of supports to make exploits in the fields. Investing in reality or live shows became very lucrative owing to the increasing patronage in the enterprise since 1999. Many among the politicians and top public servants of the period regularly demanded for the services of the people in reality show in the industry. Among such institutions include *Ije Nwoke Le Nwaanyi*, Osuofia Jesus International Band and Nwokoye Band groups. Some of these institutions were often paid and sponsored by politicians to raise albums mainly to praise and sell them to the public.<sup>18</sup>

Among the actors and actresses of Ebonyi State origin include, those as identified-above, Grace Amah, Chacha Eke, Chita Agwu, Diamond Adaeze Igwe. Others as Joseph Ongele, Amuche Okeh, Uchenna Ukpa, Chukwuma Igboke, Eunice Chukwu, Enyi Christian, Celestine Onele, Patrick Edene, Utobo A. Utobo, Friday Nwefuru, Cornelius Nwafor and Michael Eze tried to show their talents and skills by levying themselves to sponsor production of their movies known as Panki Festival, Girls for Free and Tax Collectors.<sup>18</sup> These entrepreneurs could not excel in the enterprise due to lack of fund and sponsor(s). In spite of the fact that they succeeded to produce those ones, they generally lacked financial power and supports to grow in the enterprise.

Football as an important element of entertainment and hospitality enterprises was first institutionalized within the first decade of the creation of the state. Ebonyi Angels FC was a football club in Ebonyi State whose origin is traced to 1999. They played games in Abakaliki between 1999 and 2008 when the club was sold to Anambra State. Ebonyi Angels FC was renamed Anambra United FC.<sup>19</sup> This was how Ebonyi State and its citizens lost the medium through which some talented and skillful players of Ebonyi State could have risen to both national and international recognitions. This similar circumstance hindered the growth of talented footballers and other athletes that were not limited to Okwudili Uka, Uchenna Nwaliegu, John Nwankwo and Augustine Awaza in footballing. They were doing creditably well in football, but lack of sponsors and finance beclouded their success.

In terms of hospitality, the people of Ebonyi State are naturally and traditionally accommodating and hospitable. They demonstrated this, through giving warm reception to virtually every visitor to the home of any well-meaning Ebonyi person. It is this character of accommodating and caring for visitors that encouraged some of their business entrepreneurs to invest in hotel and hospitality enterprises both in different parts of the state and beyond. Grace Court Hotels and Suites by Samuel Ominyin Egwu, the Salt Spring Hotel and Suites by Ali Julius Ucha, Top View Hotel and Suites by Godwin Chukwu, Monavis Hotel and Suites by Monday Okeh, Darling Star Hotel and Suites by Chinedu Ugota,<sup>20</sup> and numerous others are owned and managed by entrepreneurs whose origin is traced to the state. Even as the enterprises remained sources of income, they created numerous job opportunities to both the indigenous and non-indigenous peoples of the state who served in different capacities and earned their living.

On the whole, considerable rate of development in Ebonyi State since 1999 made the state to become more attractive to people. The creation of Ebonyi State in 1996 and the subsequent return to democracy in 1999 opened a way for the accounts of Abakaliki and Ebonyi

State in general to be re-written. The evidences of development remained observable in the areas of transport and communication facilities, expansion of health services, education, and provision of electricity. This doubtlessly encouraged increasing investment in entertainment and hospitality facilities in the state. Rather than government, the principal actors in these enterprises were individuals and groups. This circumstance motivated numerous entrepreneurs to invest in the enterprises with the purpose of competing effectively in the businesses through, among other things, creativity and innovativeness to maximize profits. The impressive engagement of groups and private persons in the enterprises resulted in their emergence as both social and economic institutions. Although the institutions as at the period developed more economic attributes than social features. So, efforts to maximize profits became more central in the enterprises, especially among private individuals that engaged in them as their businesses.

### **Challenges of Entertainment and Hospitality Industries in Ebonyi State**

Entertainment and hospitality enterprises were faced by numerous restrictions and difficulties within the period under study. These obstacles are not limited to insufficient infrastructure and funding, poverty, and poor training.

Poor and inadequate infrastructure is an alarming challenge to the growth and advancement of entertainment and hospitality industries in the state.<sup>21</sup> This involves limited digital infrastructure, such as poor internet and streaming services emanating from inadequate communication facilities; insufficient power and water supplies, and insufficient venues and transport facilities. These adversely affected investment and performances in the enterprises. The modern facilities that could have encouraged settlement of people and economic activities in the state are deficient. So, cases of brain drain or labour flight are not unexpected in a society like Ebonyi State. Skilled artists and entertainers migrated to other states in Nigeria and beyond searching for better opportunities, and more favourable environment to operate.<sup>22</sup>

Poverty and inadequate financial support to numerous artists, entertainers and entrepreneurs of Ebonyi State origin were limitations to the success of entertainment and hospitality industries. Many potential artists, entertainers, footballers and entrepreneurs had their talents and skills cut-short and undeveloped as a result of fund insufficiency. Government, politicians, and wealthy people from the state could not rescue the wasting talents and skills by empowering the potential artists and entertainers to make exploit and prosper seamlessly in what they could do well. To that effect, many of them as earlier-identified in **Entertainment and Hospitality Industries, 1999-2015**, could not succeed in the industries.

Limited access to professional training and capacity building for the potential artists and entertainers was as well, a factor responsible for poor success of the people in the enterprises.<sup>23</sup> Many among them lacked exposure to the required training which would have been helpful in developing and building the talents and skills more strongly, and to the national and international standards. In this circumstance, the affected ones could not fully harness the opportunities in the industries. As such, they lacked the abilities to participate vigorously in the highly captivating and competitive industries. It cannot be wrong to say that the industries capture attentions of virtually all categories of people in the world. So, effective and professional trainings are required for consistent improvement on creativity and innovativeness in the professions.

Limited audience and customers to the industries in the state equally discourages entrepreneurs and investors from investing in the industries.<sup>24</sup> No doubt, small market size and low disposable income among the people in the state resentfully affected demand for entertainment and hospitality services. Although it is evident that the rate of demand for the services began to improve since 1999, but it was at slow pace. Democratic government at local

and state levels, politicians and others were more encouraged to demand for the services. It is partly argued that the services helped them to attract and retain supporters in their various fields. The increase in demand for their services was as well, due to the considerable increase in disposable income among the people. The area of sports however, suffered ruinous negligence within the period. The Ebonyi Angels FC that was established in 1999 was sold in less than a decade. Yet, no other replacement or substitute was established either by government, group(s) or individuals between 1999 and 2015.

Generally, these obstacles resulted in among other things, limited job opportunities and poor career growth, low remuneration and poor conditions for work, making the industries unattractive, limited creativity and innovativeness, poor quality of entertainment and hospitality services, dependency on external talents, artists, musicians and performers, and difficulty in maintaining high audience and customer satisfaction in the state. These circumstances amount to decreasing the pace of promoting cultural heritage of the people. It equally affected revenue generation and profitability. Doubtlessly, brain drain or labour flight became unavoidable.

To save this situation, both government, group(s), and individuals must inject more decisive supports. These critical stakeholders are to create conducive environments for promotion of culture, career growth and development, talent and skill development and retention programmes, sponsoring training and capacity building programmes, ensuring hospitality and tourism development trainings and programmes, efficient collaboration with educational institutions. All these would bring to bare the opportunities to partner with international organizations and leverage technology for entertainment and hospitality transformation.

### **Conclusion**

Entertainment and hospitality industries in Ebonyi State cradle tremendous potential for growth and development. Unfortunately, the enterprises were not fully tapped before and within the period of study. Certain factors, such as insufficient infrastructure and funding, poverty, and poor access to training and capacity building were however, responsible for under exploitation and slow pace of development of the sectors. These factors further led to labour flight, leaving the area with those that have little or no interest in the enterprises. This circumstance remained difficult to control since there was no favourable environment to excel in the industries. It is therefore, evident that numerous artists, musicians, performers and entrepreneurs of Ebonyi origin chose to invest outside Ebonyi State. Those that engaged in them within the state still battled with glaring challenges.

The moderate pace of growth in especially the hospitality industry was as result of general growth and development in other areas of life, such as infrastructure, thereby making Ebonyi State more attractive for investments in different sectors of the economy. This increasing level of development in the areas of market, school and hospital development, road transport and communication infrastructures, among others, facilitated further investments in construction of hospitality and entertainment facilities, such as hotels and suites, recreational and tourist centres by both government, groups and individuals. Yet, these critical stakeholders are expected to demonstrate more commitments and supports to the industries of entertainment and hospitality to ensure that the sectors and their potential actors are effectively and sufficiently harnessed and tapped.

### **Endnotes**

<sup>1</sup>Chris Rojek, *The Labour of Leisure: The Culture of Free Time*, (London: Sage Publication, 2010), pp. 12-15.

<sup>2</sup>John Storey, *Cultural Theory and Popular Culture: An Introduction*, (New York: Routledge Publisher, 2015), pp. 234-237.

<sup>3</sup>Raymond Williams, *Culture*, (London: Fontana Paperbacks, 1981), pp. 110-112.

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<sup>5</sup>Herbert Gans, *Popular Culture and High Culture: An Analysis and Evaluation of Taste*, (New York, 1974), pp. 63-66.

<sup>6</sup>David Novitz, The Concept of Entertainment, *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, Vol. 52, No. 2, 1993, pp. 151-161.

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<sup>8</sup>Alan Albarran, The Entertainment Industry, *Journal of Media Business Studies*, Vol. 14, No. 2, 2017, pp. 1-12.

<sup>9</sup>Immanuel Kant, *Metaphysics of Morals*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), pp. 58-60.

<sup>10</sup>Jean Boudrillard, *The Consumer Society*, (London: Sage Publication, 1998), pp. 78-80.

<sup>11</sup>Zygmunt Bauman, *Liquid Love*, (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2003), pp. 103-105.

<sup>12</sup>Conrad Lashley, *A Social Lens*, (Oxford: Elsevier Publisher, 2008), pp.1-5.

<sup>13</sup>Uchenna Okorie, 68, Teacher, Community Secondary School, Eka-Awoke, Ikwo, interviewed, 23<sup>rd</sup> September, 2024.

<sup>14</sup>Elias Eze, 66, Teacher, Ezete Ugbala Memorial Secondary School, Amudo, interviewed, 10<sup>th</sup> October, 2024.

<sup>15</sup>Anambra United FC, , <https://www.national.football-teams.com>> Accessed on 19<sup>th</sup> October, 2024.

<sup>16</sup>Pius Ofoma, 57, Civil Servant, Ebonyi State Civil Service Commission, interviewed, 10<sup>th</sup> October, 2024.

<sup>17</sup>... Nigerian Celebrities of Ebonyi State Origin, Accessed, 16<sup>th</sup> October, 2024. , ... Accessed, 16<sup>th</sup> October, 2024.

<sup>18</sup>Pius Ofoma, 57, Civil Servant, Ebonyi State Civil Service Commission, interviewed, 10<sup>th</sup> October, 2024.

<sup>19</sup>Anambra United FC, , <https://www.national.football-teams.com>>..., Accessed on 18<sup>th</sup> October, 2024.

<sup>20</sup>James Ogbonnaya, 59, Businessman, Margaret Umahi Int'l Market, Abakaliki, interviewed on 17<sup>th</sup> October, 2024.

<sup>21</sup>..... 59, Businessman, Margaret Umahi Int'l Market, Abakaliki, interviewed on 17<sup>th</sup> October, 2024.