

## CULTURAL HERITAGE RESOURCES IN EZIANI: AN INSIGHT FROM ETHNOGRAPHIC FIELD ANALYSIS

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### Abstract

*Previous studies on cultural heritage resources have consistently highlighted their significant role in shaping and expressing the identity of rural communities. However, these studies have often overlooked the specific investigation of cultural heritage resources within the context of the "Blessed Land" Eziani autonomous community in Nsukka, Nigeria. Therefore, a comprehensive examination of cultural heritage resources in this unique community was carried out to gain a deeper understanding of their cultural significance, impact, and contribution to the local community. The research utilized on-site field investigations and ethnographic case study approach, employing a structured interview guide and photography to gather data directly from the inhabitants of Eziani. The study revealed that the community of Eziani treasures a range of cultural heritage resources, including the Adaoka stream and shrine, gravel stone mining, the Omabe festival, fertile land and agricultural traditions, indigenous food processing methods, traditional dances, taboos, and various other beliefs and practices. These elements collectively contribute to the rich cultural heritage of Eziani people. Therefore, promoting the active preservation and safeguarding of cultural heritage resources by rural communities is of utmost importance to ensure their continuity for future generations.*

**Keywords:** Cultural heritage, Ethnography, Reconnaissance, Rural development, Eziani.

### Introduction

Cultural heritage resources are widely acknowledged as tangible and intangible treasures passed down from previous generations and maintained in the present. They hold immense significance in comprehending and safeguarding a country's identity, history, and traditions, while also providing substantial benefits for future generations. It comes as no surprise that the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) and developing nations like Nigeria are actively engaged in the preservation and conservation of these valuable heritages, ensuring their enduring relevance and usefulness for present and future societies. Nigeria, a nation recognized for its rich cultural diversity, is abundantly blessed with unique and distinctive cultural heritage resources that serve as the foundation of its identity and pride (Ezenagu, 2020). Nigeria's cultural heritage resources encompass a wide array of treasures, ranging from historic sites and towns to traditional practices, religious beliefs, cultural artifacts, indigenous knowledge, wildlife, waterfalls, rivers, ocean beaches, expansive natural vegetation, and diverse climatic landscapes. These diverse elements contribute to the richness and uniqueness of Nigeria's cultural heritage. Over the course of time, cultural heritage resources in Nigeria have continued to play a crucial role in the preservation of cultural and religious values,

as well as in promoting national identity and fostering unity among its diverse population. These resources not only contribute to the generation of employment opportunities but also serve as a vital source of education and inspiration for future generations. Numerous studies carried out in Nigeria, beginning in the late 1990s and continuing into the 21st century have consistently emphasized the profound influence of heritage resources on shaping and projecting the identity of rural communities (Afigbo, 1990; Falola, 1996; Nzewi, 2003; Ogundiran, 2005; Akintonde, 2013). These scholarly works have shed light on the pivotal role played by heritage resources in rural areas, underlining their significance in defining the cultural fabric and distinctiveness of these communities. In addition, heritage resources also assume a prominent role in shaping perceptions within rural areas, leading to the identification of many rural communities based on their unique heritage resource foundation (Nwankwo, Agboeze & Nwobi., 2018). These resources serve as defining markers that differentiate and distinguish one rural community from another, contributing to their individuality and cultural significance.

The ongoing exploration of cultural heritage resources has played a crucial role in promoting community development in Africa, particularly in Nigeria. It has facilitated economic growth, fostered social cohesion, advanced education, encouraged sustainable practices, revitalized cultural traditions, raised environmental awareness, and promoted effective governance. As such, cultural heritage resources hold immense value as precious assets for both current and future generations, contributing to the holistic development and well-being of societies. Several ethnographic studies conducted in Nigeria have provided compelling evidence of rural communities steadfastly preserving their cultural values (Okpoko and Okpoko, 2016; Onyima, 2016; Nwankwo, 2018). However, more recent ethnographic research focused on the Nsukka area in southeast Nigeria has specifically delved into the significance of indigenous trees (Ijeomah & Ugwu, 2016; Okpoko and Emeafor, 2018; Nwankwo and Ekoli, 2021). These studies shed light on the deep-rooted connection between rural communities and their local environment, highlighting the integral role of indigenous trees in their cultural practices and traditions.

While some studies have examined the utilization of cultural heritage resources in crisis management, the challenges and intangible cultural heritage, and in tourism development (Nwankwo et al., 2018; Obieluem and Itanyi, 2019; Anunobi, 2020; Ezenagu, 2020), none have specifically endeavored to identify and re-evaluate the significance and utilization of cultural heritage resources within the Eziani community area of Nsukka, Nigeria. Therefore, there is a research gap regarding the investigation of cultural heritage resources in the context of Eziani community, necessitating further investigation to better understand their state, usage and document the resources within this particular locality.

Hence in April 2023, a cultural ethnographic study was conducted by a group of second-year students from the Department of Archaeology and Tourism. The primary objective of this study was to gain a comprehensive understanding of the cultural heritage resources present in the Eziani community, also known as the “Blessed Land,” located in the Nsukka Local Government Area of Enugu State, Nigeria. This study aimed to document and preserve the rich cultural heritage resources of Eziani community for future reference and appreciation.

Additionally, this cultural ethnographic study is expected to cultivate a profound sense of identity and belonging among community members. It will empower and engage communities,

enabling them to take an active role in the preservation of their cultural heritage. More so, the study will serve as a valuable educational resource, offering opportunities for learning and raising awareness about cultural heritage.

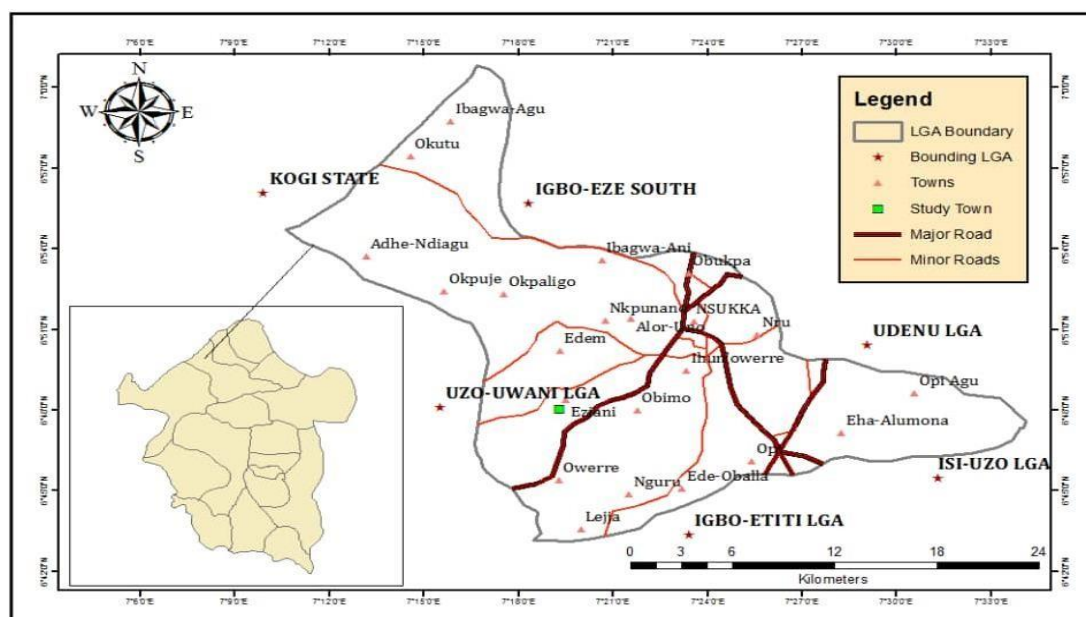
This paper offers an extensive examination of the cultural heritage resources in Eziani, Nsukka, situated in the southeastern region of Nigeria, providing a comprehensive understanding of its cultural richness and significance. It provides a well-rounded understanding of the background, research methods, results, and significance of these resources, ultimately contributing to the broader discourse on cultural heritage preservation and community development.

### **Background**

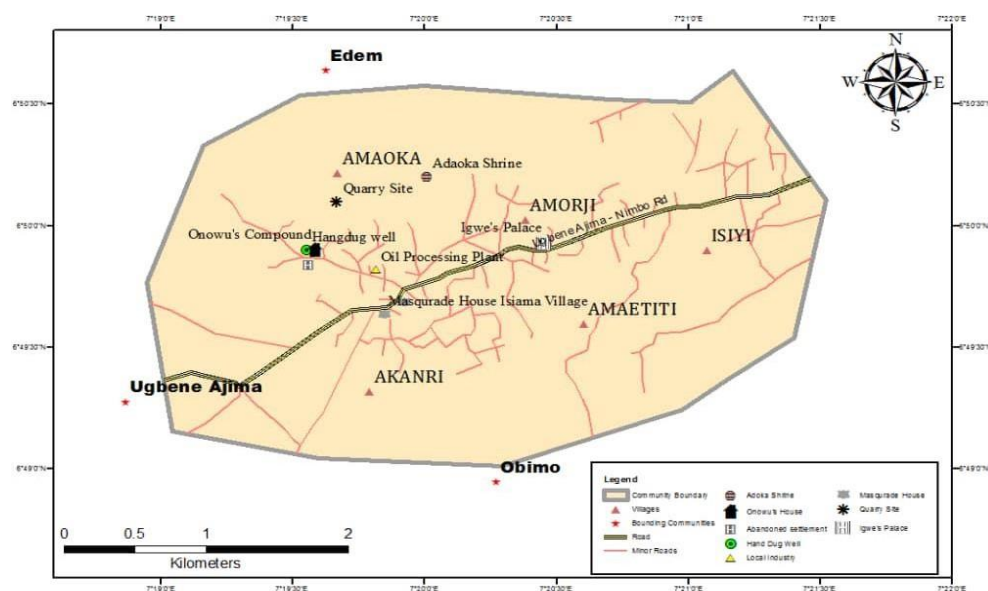
Eziani is an autonomous community in Nsukka town, Nsukka LGA, Enugu State, Nigeria. Its geographical point location is 6°49'30<sup>11</sup>, 6°50'30<sup>11</sup> North and 7°19'30<sup>11</sup>, 7°21'30<sup>11</sup> East. The community is situated on a plateau and is bounded on the North by Ozzi-Edem, on the East by Umuakash and Nsukka town which is 1½kms away, on the South by Obimo and on the West by Ugbene-Ajima. The community comprises six villages which include: Amaoka, Amaoji, Amaetiti, Amaeze, Akanri and Isi-Iyi. This study purposively focused on Amaoka, Amaoji, Amaetiti and Akanri.

The area is predominantly inhabited by the Igbo ethnic group with rich cultural heritage resources and a strong sense of community. Cultural heritage resources in Eziani may have been influenced by historical significance, local traditions and practices, natural environment, community identity and values, local initiatives and external influences which made available abundant resources for heritage preservation and interpretation of the rural area. The area experiences a mean annual rainfall of 208mm, primarily concentrated during the eight months of rainy seasons spanning from March to October. According to Itanyi (2013), the timing of various feasts, festivals, and significant life events such as births, and marriages in many communities is closely tied to the seasons. Additionally, seasons also play a crucial role in regulating the operations of different occupations. For example, individuals may engage in migrant farming during one season and switch to trading in another. Some individuals may specialize in trading perishable food items during the farming season and then transition to casual labour when agricultural activities subside. These seasonal dynamics shape the social and economic activities within these communities (Itanyi, 2013).

The topography of the region is characterized by sloppy and hilly terrain, while the vegetation type falls within the derived savanna belt. The soil composition consists of fine sand mixed with builders' choice gravels, which facilitates artisanal stone mining activities (Amujiri et al., 2022). The depositional environment has a similar environment with the Manu formation. It is comprised of alternations of sandstones, silt stones, mud stones, coal seams, and rare shales, and is found around the villages in Eziani which showcase the valued heritage resources of the people.



**Fig.1: Map of Nsukka Local Government Area showing Eziani**  
 Source: Adapted and modified from Diva GIS Nigeria Shape file (2023).



**Fig.2: Map of Eziani showing the Villages and Study Sites**  
 Source: Modified Google Map from Ethnographic Fieldwork 2023.

## Research Methods

This study was conducted using reconnaissance, focus group discussion, in-depth interview guide, personal observation and photography. The method adopted entails navigating Eziani community through reconnaissance survey which allowed the researchers to identify, and record all finds and features visible on the landscape. The researchers here embarked on surface survey with the aim of observing, mapping, and acquisition (heritage resources) of data for the purpose of analyzing and drawing inferences from the data. This enabled the researchers to carefully traverse the community thereby observing through the aid of



personal observation and photographing with the aid of digital camera. Purposive and convenient sampling technique were used to identify the informants. Thematic analysis was employed to analyze the data using descriptive analysis.

## Results

### Reconnaissance

A survey of the area was done to note and record surface materials, buildings and topographical characteristics. Many heritage resources (cultural, natural and material resources), were located and the features identified include a signpost referring Eziani as the “Blessed Land” (Fig3).



As previously mentioned, it is worth noting that any malicious charm intended for an individual from Eziani loses its effect the moment that person crosses the community's signpost. The serene setting of the environment with different vegetation, several trees which include; Palm Tree ( *Elaeis Guineensis*), Soursop ( *Ammonia Microcars*), Oil Bean ( *Pentaclethra Macrophylla*), BushMango ( *Irinvigia Gabonensis*), Ogbolo Tree ( *Irvingia Gabonensis*), Pawpaw ( *Carica Papaya*). Another observed tree is “*Ogilishi*”, which is used for land boundary or demarcation. It also gives shield to the yam when grown. The yam barn helps in storing of tuber crops but some are being brought out to eat and also for sale.



*Fig.4: Vegetation of Eziani*

Others features include Igwe's palace gate (Fig. 5), inside the palace and the cabinet Chiefs with their regalia. The Igwe's palace, where a lot of activities take place is a stunning structure with a large gate that featured an elephant calving along with the Igwe's title name, 'NtuMagbuluEnyi'.



**Fig.5: Entrance gate to Igwe's Palace**

The researchers also observed the soil color and texture along the roads in Amaoka through to the site of study at Onowu's compound and then the natural features of Adaoka stream. However, the valued heritage resources identified during the reconnaissance were Igwe's palace, gravel sites, Adaoka stream and shrine, Onowu's barn, crop farmsites, poultry farm, food processing indigenous technology factory site and Omabe house sites.

### **History of Eziani**

Over time, Eziani has witnessed a transformation in its nomenclature, reflecting the evolving nature of the town. Initially, the earliest settlers referred to it as Ezi-Agu Obimo. However, as time progressed, the name underwent a modification, and it became known as Enugu Obimo. This alteration in nomenclature signifies the changing dynamics and development that have taken place within the community. With the arrival of the missionaries, they encountered challenges in pronouncing the original name of the town and simplified it to "Obimo," allowing for better communication and recognition among the inhabitants and visitors alike.

Migration has been a constant feature in the history of many towns. According to oral history, Abraham UgwuIdu the founding ancestor of Eziani migrated from Obimo and chose to settle in the area, fostering a sense of communal living. Over time, others like Idu Nwaogerewu, UgwuObute, UgwuOkpeOloke, Joseph Nwa-Eyeka, OkoroIdu, and many others joined. These individuals carried with them the traditions and customs of Obimo which contributed to the rich cultural heritage of Eziani. The customs and traditions of Obimo were upheld such as Ozotitle-taking ceremony. Some of the people that secured the recognition and preservation of this title late Ozo Ugwualoke Ugwuanyi, late Ozougwuoke Ogbuisi, late Ozo Ugwuoke Idu NwaOnuoha, and late Ozo Giginawgu. However, the drive to gain autonomy continued despite the demise of Ugwuobayi. A valiant leader in the person of Anthony Ezeme (Ntumagburuenyi I), pushed hard and on 21<sup>st</sup> May, 1999, autonomy was granted to Eziani by the military Governor of Enugu State Lt. Akonobi (Ref No. PLC/GHE/GM/5573/S.T/88).

Based on the government's directives, prompt selection and presentation of Igwe Charles Idu was officially done by Chief Benson Ugwuoke, the president general of Eziani town, on September 26, 2006. Today history is proud to have HRH Igwe Charles Chukwuma Idu (Ola Obuluzo 1 of Eziani) as the 1<sup>st</sup> traditional ruler of Eziani.

## Historic Sites–

### **Igwe's Palace and traditional institutions in Eziani**

Chief Benson Ugwoke (Onowu of Eziani) and other cabinet chiefs explained that since the selection of king is done rotationally, every king is to have a palace on his own land and in his village. The king's palace is where most cultural activities take place and the palace building visited is owned by the present traditional ruler Igwe Ntuma Magbulu Enyi. In this palace were beautiful paintings and carvings on the walls of the building both inside and outside.



*Fig.6: Igwe Ntuma Magbulu Enyi's Palace Hall.*

H.R.H. Igwe Charles Chukwuma Idu (Ola Obuluzo 1 of Eziani) council leadership consists of a traditional prime minister and village leaders. Among his subjects, the Igwe commands the greatest reverence and awe. He wields considerable power over the formulation, control, and implementation of governmental policies that impact the people of Eziani. Variety of responsibilities is being carried out by the Igwe which includes; maintaining peace and order among the citizens, improves inter-group interactions among the community's natives and the broader public with their neighbors, and bestowing of chieftaincy titles on the community's notable sons. More so, he also ensures that his subjects' *modus operandi* conforms to the established rules of the country as keepers of the tradition. Any law that is broken usually has a penalty that is declared by the traditional monarch.





**Fig 7: Field Lecturers and Students with Igwe Cabinet Chiefs at Igwe's Palace**

They further pointed out that traditional king, traditional prime minister, palace secretary, president general, and village leaders make up the traditional council in Eziani. The Igwe is the traditional leader of each community, and the traditional prime minister is the traditional king's second in command. The palace secretary is in charge of clerical and administrative duties at the palace; the president general is in charge of the town union affairs; and the village heads are the traditional council's representatives for each village. The village chiefs, on the other hand, act as their individual villages' traditional rulers. They are in duty of informing the villages about the decisions achieved at the council meeting. The village heads like the king, guarantee that peace exists among the residents of their respective villages. When a problem gets too tough to solve, the traditional ruler's assistance becomes imperative. Except in extra ordinary and urgent circumstances, the village head does not have the authority to impose fines on violators of the law of the land; he may only do so with the approval of the traditional ruler.

The Umunna are the kingdom's elders as some of them represent the community's traditional council. They are noted as the community's pillars, made up of the heads of each household. They ensure that the land's rules are not tainted as keepers of customs and traditions. This is accomplished by punishing offenders, which serves as a deterrent to others. The organization is also in charge of keeping the peace among families that are going through a difficult time.

The Umuada in Eziani are said to be women who are indigenes of Eziani but maybe married into or outside the town. This is a vital organization since one of its main responsibilities is to restore harmony in homes and between husbands and wives. "The Umuada group is also made up equally of unmarried community females who have reached or passed the age of marriage." They are also known for instilling discipline in any woman who has a history of rebellious behavior, such as adultery. Other noted people in Eziani are "NdiIyom Di", also referred to as Umunwanyi Alurualu. They are made up of women from various communities who have married into Eziani. This group, like the Umuada, is significant because they are peacemakers. They are found in every type of community and fulfill the majority of the Umuada's tasks. Also, the Umuokorobia refers to the dedicated group of young individuals within the villages who bear the responsibility of safeguarding the boundaries of their land. They actively engage in various community-oriented tasks such as clearing, constructing pathways, and upkeeping of communal establishments like schools and churches through their manual labor. Their primary role revolves around protecting the customs and traditions associated with the land, and they take it upon themselves to



apprehend those who violate or disrespect these cherished practices.

Eziani's religion is divided into two categories. Traditionalists (adherents to African traditional religion) and Christians both exist. In Eziani, Christianity spawned several factions and congregations. As a result, the Roman Catholic Mission, Church Missionary Society (CMS), Jehovah's Witness, Sabbath Missions, and Pentecostal Churches exist.

## Objects

Based on the belief of the people, the males in Eziani do not take off their caps while praying. They concurred that the head belongs to the body as well, thus taking off their cap would be disrespectful because it would expose their head to the realm of the supernatural. However, because of the impact of western culture and Christianity, the males now take their caps off when they pray. “*Arua*” and “*Oho*” are two revered figures that have great importance as the staffs of justice and authority, respectively. The item serves as an embodiment of the community's traditional ideas and values by serving as a symbol of authority, legitimacy, and order. When a conflict arises, the disputants are handed the “*Oho*” to swear on the oath of truthfulness. The “*Oho*” is a possession of justice constructed out of animal bone ornamented with symbolic designs, used by community elders to settle disputes and promote social harmony. The “*Oho*” asks the people to take responsibility for protecting justice and fairness as they stand for the impartiality of the legal system. These symbolic items are highly valued in the Eziani community because the sacred things serve as a reminder of the people's cultural richness and provide them a sense of community, identity, and continuity. It can be a source of pride and respect for established leadership. Other artifacts include “*Nze-anyinya*” – The “*Onyishi*” of each community owns the “*Nze-anyinya*”, which is a well-known cultural artifact. It is used to chase away flies, clean heat, and discipline disobedient children and children who fail to perform their duties, particularly those related to farming.

## Cultural Landscapes

### Adaoka Stream

Eziani has several streams coming out from stones with cultural significance, namely; Adaoka, Odo, Ajola and Enyigu stream. One of the informant during the focus group discussion noted that the Adaoka stream (see Fig 8) is a natural spring of water that runs through the neighborhood and emerges from two distinct rocks, each of which is supported by a pipe for fetching water. This water is pure and good for drinking. It has served Eziani people and the neighboring communities in the past and at present. According to one of the key informants, the stream is always warm in the morning, but naturally cools down in the afternoon or during hot weather. The water is pure and orderly and has variety of uses. It is attached to the goddess of the land called “*Adaoka*” which protects the land and the people of Eziani. Many believe that the water is medicinal and has healing properties. The creek is surrounded by dense flora, including various plants and trees. It also has a mountainous pathway that is too narrow to accommodate many people at once.

### Adaoka Shrine

The goddess “*Adaoka*” is a water spirit in which its origin and source has remained a mystery in Eziani. She is revered by the residents and has been around ever since the area's first settlers arrived. The “*Adaoka*” deity has a river attached to it known as “*Adaoka*” stream (Fig. 8). It has the primary responsibility of protecting her subjects from evil. According to the Onowu, the deity also has the ability to make and withhold back rainfalls when presented with the necessary sacrifices. The eldest man in the community “*Onyishi*” serves as the chief

priest and performs several sacrifices and rituals for the people. Some years back, rumors had it that the deity mysteriously took some cows as they got disappeared when they came into the village with the Fulani people.

Adaoka Shrine (Fig. 8) is bordered by Obimo village by just a small body of water, and it has very dense flora and a mountainous, occasionally slick, pathway. There were numerous animal heads and ropes used for sacrifice to the deity seen around the site, including skulls of goats, cows, and other animals.

Additionally, live white hens, cutlasses, knives, clay pots, dry gin, cloths of different colors (white, red and black), were seen there.



*Fig.8: Adaoka Stream and Shrine*

One of the key informants pointed out that once you demand for anything from Adaoka, you have to promise something huge in return. The informant noted that the primary issue with the Adaoka deity is that recently, the people now have lack of interest in believing or worshiping her. However, some boys later changed their mind to start serving and working for the Adaoka goddess.

### **Gravel Stone Quarry Site**

The gravel stone deposits at “New Heaven” and “Ogunayama” are part of the historical landscapes in Eziani. These gravel sites are virgin thick vegetation, this implies that the trees found at the area have not been touched before. They contribute to the understanding of past human activities and development of Eziani. One of the respondents during the focus group discussion noted that God richly blessed Eziani with the stone gravel which is very great source of income for the people (Fig 9 & 10).



*Fig.9: Three-quarter & Hard-core Gravel Stone*



*Fig.10a & b: <sup>a</sup>Gravel Stones & <sup>b</sup>Tipper loading at Ogunayama Quarry Site*

Another informant stated that Eziani community is blessed with a good environment that even after a heavy rain fall the ground is not all muddy due to the presence of large amount of stones on the ground. These stones are been extracted by the people, and sold to make a living. The gravel extraction and processing activities, provides insights into past industrial practices, technological advancements and major source of local economy of Eziani people. The stones are used by neighboring towns for diverse purposes such as construction of historical buildings and roads in Eziani and neighboring communities.

### **Agricultural Resources in Eziani**

The fertile land as the name implies “Eziani” serves as a foundation for agricultural activities, providing sustenance and livelihoods for the community members. According to an informant, the land in Eziani is exceptionally fertile, to the extent that abundant harvests can be achieved even without the use of manure. This inherent fertility of the land has resulted in the community's strong involvement in agriculture. Agriculture is an important economic activity in Eziani community in Nsukka, Nigeria, and it is seen as the major means of survival for the people. The community has a favorable climate and fertile soil, which enables them to cultivate a variety of crops. Some of the major crops grown in Eziani community include tomatoes (*Solanum Lycopersicum*) such as Derica and Yollings, pepper (*Capsicum Annuum*) including yellow, red and shombo pepper, garden egg (*Solanum Aethiopicum*), cassava (*Manihot Esculenta*), maize (*Manihot Esculenta*) and yam (*Dioscorea Spp*) such as “Okeji”, water yam (Abala), Bitter Yam, Triforate Yam (Una) and cocoyam (Ede).



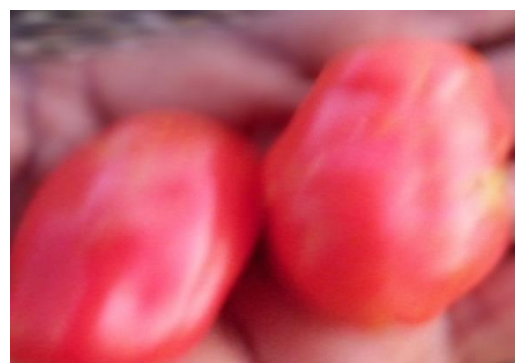


***Fig.11: Farmsites showing garden egg, pepper, corn and fertile soil.***

These crops are grown throughout the year; they grow fast and provide a source of food and income for the people especially tomatoes. According to an informant, the shape of tomatoes yollings is different from derica which rises more when cooked than yollings, but yollings is more tasty when cooked.



***Fig.12: Derica Tomatoes***



***Fig.13: Yollings Tomatoes***

Tomatoes are one of the most important crops grown in Eziani community, and they are planted twice a year. This is because tomatoes are perishable crop, and they have a short shelf life after being harvested. Planting tomatoes twice a year ensures a steady supply of fresh tomatoes throughout the year. Tomatoes are planted during the dry season and transition months to ensure optimal growth and yield, because they require a lot of sunlight and warm temperatures to grow. The dry season in Eziani community usually starts in November and lasts until March. This period is ideal for planting tomatoes because there is less rainfall, which reduces the risk of diseases and pests that can affect the crop. Tomatoes are also planted in months like March, April, May, August, September and October, which are the transition months between the dry and rainy seasons. During these months, there is enough rainfall to support the growth of the crop, but not so much that it can cause damage to the plants. This ensures that the tomatoes have enough water to grow and mature, but not too much that it becomes waterlogged.

Most of the respondents stated that the average crop cultivation for the past ten years has been on the increase. Crop farming was the primary occupation as indicated- almost all respondents said they were engaged in the farming of one crop or the other. The community also employs various methods to preserve their food, including drying, frying, and storing them in containers like gallons. Some women engage in food processing and agro-processing for income.



The people of Eziani also engage in the sale of firewood due to the abundance of tall trees in the forest (Fig. 14). There exists a significant correlation between the crops cultivated and the staple foods consumed by the community. The community practices a self-sustaining approach by growing the crops that they consume, taking into account the soil properties, micro-climatic conditions, and prevailing economic trends within the community. Given the favorable climatic conditions, the respondents in Eziani prioritize yam cultivation as a prominent agricultural activity.



**Fig. 14: Firewood**

Yams are an important source of food and income for many people in Eziani community. They are considered as the king of crops, widely believed to symbolize wealth, good fortune, and abundance. The people of Eziani community offer thanks for the harvest of yam by organizing ceremonies and feasts that last for days. The new yam festival (*Onwa Ato*) is being celebrated annually by the Eziani community as a means of thanksgiving to God Almighty for a bountiful season and to plead for the season ahead. This “Emumeirijiofuru” is significant cultural heritage value for the Eziani community in Nsukka. The annual celebration signifies the commencement of the harvest season and serves as a tribute to their ancestors, as well as the deities associated with abundance and fertility. Beyond its agricultural significance, the festival embodies renewal, gratitude, communal harmony, and the preservation of cultural customs.



**Fig.15: Cultivated Yam**

One of the highlights of the New Yam festival celebration is the harvest of yam, which is an essential crop to the people of Eziani community. In different homesteads, the occasion symbolizes the start of the first harvest and consumption of fresh yams, which includes; wateryam (*Dioscorea alata*) natively known as Jinkiti, yellow yam (*Dioscorea cayenensis*), and white yam (*Dioscorea rotundata*) locally known

as JiAgah. It emphasizes the Eziani community's relationship with the soil goddess from generation to generation. It serves as a vehicle for the earth goddess to be recognized for the land's fertility. During this time, prayers are made to the gods to continue to provide good health to the community's indigenes and to protect them from illnesses and infertility of the land, people, and domestic animals. The celebration culminates in the preparation and consumption of "*Jimmiriawa*," or boiling yams with chicken pepper soup. The women prepare the dinner, while the men clean the path through the town. There are several drinking and dining venues. The event also serves as a gathering place for family reunions.

The people of Eziani community perform traditional dances, songs, and other cultural displays, while all dress in traditional Igbo attire during the event. There are also masquerades and traditional wrestling competitions in which participants showcase their physical prowess in a friendly, non-violent competition. The activities performed in this new yam festival have made it become a powerful manifestation of the Eziani community's cultural identity and heritage. As such, it now serves as a poignant reminder of their roots and historical legacy, fostering a sense of unity, solidarity, and cultural continuity among the community members.

More so, the informants mentioned that food security is one of their top priorities with regards to yam barn. The yam barn ("*Oba ji*") helps in food security and storing of tuber crops but some are being brought out to be eaten and also for sale. A yam barn (Fig. 16) is a type of root vegetable structure used for storing yams, which are commonly grown in tropical regions depending on the specific cultural and environmental context of the region. Generally, a yam barn is constructed using locally available materials such as bamboo, wood or thatch. The structure must be well-ventilated and designed to protect the yams from pests, moisture, and sunlight. The process of storing yams in a yam barn involves selecting healthy yams and curing them for several weeks in a warm and humid environment. After curing, the yams are arranged in the yam barn, where they can be stored for several months. Proper storage conditions are important to prevent spoilage and ensure that the yams retain their nutritional value.



**Fig.16: Yam Barn**

Yam barns are important not only for storing yams but also for preserving traditional knowledge and cultural practices associated with yam cultivation and use. The yam barns have become focal points of celebration in Eziani, signifying the importance of yams in the community's traditions and serving as a testament to their agricultural prowess and ancestral connections. The people usually construct irrigation well (Fig.17) to supply water to the farms especially during dry season.



*Fig.17:IrrigationControl Well*

## Traditional Knowledge and Practices

### Omabe Festival

The Omabe festival holds a prominent position as a cultural heritage resource within the Eziani community in Nsukka. Omabe is a masquerade festival of the people popularly known for entertainment. It is performed once in three years and spans over a period of six months. It is a



*Fig. 18:OmabeHouse*

communal festival used to ease tension and comes up after the farming season. It serves as an integral part of their identity and historical legacy, encompassing a range of customs, rituals, and festivities that are deeply rooted in the community's traditions and beliefs. The Omabe festival serves as a time for reflection, celebration, and the reaffirmation of cultural values. It brings the community together, fostering a sense of unity and pride in their shared heritage. The festival serves as a reminder of their ancestral roots, connecting present generations with their past and preserving their cultural identity for future generations to cherish and embrace.

According to an informant, “*Omabe*” is a spirit and cannot be discussed in front of women. During this festival, the community engages in various cultural activities and rituals that continue for four consecutive days. It is a significant and eagerly anticipated event that brings the community together to share their traditions and values, thereby fostering a sense of unity and cultural pride. The extended duration of the festival allows ample time for the community to fully immerse themselves in

the traditions and festivities associated with Omabe, creating lasting memories and strengthening their collective bond. During the festival, different masquerades parade in the community. These include; “*Echarichamma*” (the highest ranking masquerade), “*Mgbedike*”, “*Ogaranyimma*”, “*Ogbagbuuzo*” (the first masquerade to appear in the morning before others will start coming out by 4pm). The masquerade enters the parade to inform onlookers that the festivities have begun. The people like listening to the masquerade’s wooden gong beats and music.

Another masquerade is “*Otunju*” (it gives a way to “*Echarichamma*”) which does not flog with a stick called “*Nju*”. The “*Omabaogwuamaghinaozo di*” is another masquerade used to celebrate an oldest man’s death and is strictly for the “*omenala*” group. The people involved in this festival are both the native of the villages and the non-indigenes from other neighboring villages. The youths in support of the Igwe and his cabinet chiefs are now driving the event. This festival is an affirmation of their cultural identity in the face of modernization and globalization.

The one of the informants noted that any young man can join Omabe cult, but there is a ritual commitment. The person has to meet up with the requirements for the initiation and go through a process for induction into the association. Non-indigenes that violate the law of the Omabe will be whipped by the youths. More so, women are not allowed to come out in the night during the masquerade parades. Although Christianity and modernity has had its take on the celebration of the Omabe, the call for cultural consciousness and reawakening, the youths are once more putting efforts to revitalize the festival for the joy and cultural identity it gives them and thereby curbing the Christians’ interference. In an effort to promote the culture and community, the Igwe of Eziani mobilized the youths three years ago to make the festival more enjoyable. During the festival, the Igwe welcomed several guests from near and far and there was a good host-guest relationship between indigenes and non-indigenes.

### **Cultural Heritage Belief and Practices in Eziani**

Traditional dances are a means of artistic expression and a means of preserving and showcasing the Igbo people’s traditional history. They frequently use music, rhythms, motions, and costumes to tell stories or deliver messages, and they may also have religious or spiritual overtones. Eziani community has traditional dances which are an integral part of the community’s culture and are performed during the Omabe, the new yam festival and other ceremonies. The dances include; “*Ikorodo*” and “*Akunechenyi*” and “*Mamba*” dance.

The “*Ikorodo*” dance is performed by people of both genders using a wooden gong called an *Ikoro*, which is played by men and has a distinctive shape. Dancers are dressed in traditional Igbo clothing, and their movements of the feet, hips, hands, and heads are timed to the gong. They carry out vigorous and physically demanding acrobatic movements. Everyone participates in the “*Akunechenyi*” dance, which is accompanied by several musical instruments including the gong, flute, and *udu*. The dancers have a festive aspect because of the bright materials and beads they wear during the dance and it is still in existence. The “*Mamba*” dance is one of the highest dances after the war in 1970. The indigenous women of Eziani perform this dance during traditional weddings, naming ceremonies and other festivities. This dance encompasses diverse motion movements like twisting, side-stepping, and spinning.

Another ethnic dance is the “*Okoboyi*”, which is performed when a village elder passes away. It is a tradition that honors the elderly man’s life and contributes to the community values. This dance incorporates drumming, singing, and dancing. People gather for this dance to both mourn and honour the life of the departed.



### **Taboos**

In Igbo land, taboos are cultural practices, customs, or beliefs that are regarded as forbidden, sacrosanct, or illegal by the community. They are typically upheld by social and cultural punishments and are founded on long-held cultural or religious beliefs. In Igbo land, taboos can apply to a variety of areas of daily life, including eating, dressing, acting, relationships in society, and language. The key informants identified some believe and taboos in Eziani community which are as follows;

- 1) Eziani community believes that once someone gets married to an Eziani lady, the marriage is blessed; therefore it is important that marriage procedures are rightly observed. It is unlawful for a married woman to engage in sexual activity with either a married or unmarried male. If she does, either she becomes insane and confesses, or she perishes.
- 2) A married man is not permitted to engage in any sexual activity with a married woman, but is permitted to engage in sexual activity with a single woman only with her consent.
- 3) Killing or murder is highly prohibited in the rural community.
- 4) Fighting with a dangerous weapon will result in penalties, and the offender must provide a goat as payment.
- 5) Stealing is not permitted, whether it is from a person, a barn, or anywhere else.
- 6) Except for the idiot, every variety of meat can be consumed. Previously, the community does not cultivate or eat millets since a man flogged a pregnant lady to death with a millet stick; as a result, they were asked to cease from cultivating and eating it, but currently they eat it.

### **Traditional Food Processing Technologies**

Eziani has traditional food processing technologies being produced by their son Mr. Gigena Charles from Amaoka village. He is the welder who fabricated all the machines and the owner of "Jehovah bu Eze" company which was established in the year 2021. The company is being managed by Mrs. Charles and assisted by Mr. Hillary Odo as manager and operator. According to Mrs. Charles, the business has enabled them to provide for the family needs, buy a car, build a good house, train their children in good schools, establish a piggy farm and also assisted other relations. This business has been able to pay the workers' salaries, support their families, offer employment opportunities to numerous young people and helped in easy processing of food such as corn, pounded cassava, yam, garri, oil and etcetera in Eziani and the neighborhoods. However, lack of government support, cashless policy, high cost of petrol and gas for the machine and high demand for their services, no too much gain, and industrial accidents are challenges confronting the business. "Jehovah bu Eze" company specializes in producing different types of machines that are used in food processing such as cassava peeler machines, garri processing plants, palm-nut grinder, oil presser, cassava presser, milling machine, and sieve or filter machine. Others include drier or frying pan, corn peeler, pounding machines, palm kernel cracker, oil extractor, separator machine, among others.



***Fig.19:Cassava Peeling Machine***

One of the key features of the company is that all the machines are fabricated in-house. This means that Mr. Charles and his workers, designed, constructed, and assemble the machines themselves. They ensured that the machines are of high quality and meet the standards that are required by their clients.



***Fig.20: Corn Peeling Machine***

In addition, the company also provides self-supports to its clients, which includes maintenance and repair services. The machines produced by Mr. Charles are very important to the people of Eziani, and to the commercial food processing industry as well. For instance, the cassava peeler machines make it easier for businesses to peel cassava in large quantities, which translates to higher productivity and better profitability. The palm-nut grinder is also an important machine as it helps businesses to extract oil from palm kernels, which is an important ingredient in cooking and other food products.



***Fig.21: Palm Fruit Oil Extractor & Jack Machine***

The palm kernel cracker machines and separator machines are important for extracting oil from palm kernels, which is a vital ingredient in the production of various food products.

Similarly, the milling machine is used to grind different types of grains and other materials, which is necessary when making various types of flour and other food products.



***Fig.22: Garri Milling Machine***



***Fig. 23: Garri Jack Machine***



***Fig.24: Garri Filter Pan***



***Fig. 25: Women frying Garri in the Fry Pan***

The sieve or filter machine is used to separate materials of different sizes, which is important when dealing with different types of grains and other food products. In addition, the drier or frying pan serves a crucial purpose in the processing of various food products by drying and frying them. Its significance is particularly notable when it comes to the production of items such as chips, crisps, and other snack foods. Moreover, the corn peeler and pounding machines are important in processing maize, which is a staple food in Nigeria.

### **Discussion of Findings**

The findings of the ethnographic study reveal that Eziani possesses a wealth of cultural heritage resources, encompassing both tangible and intangible aspects. These highly valued resources serve as tangible evidence of the community's profound historical and cultural significance. As highlighted by Ezenagu (2020), these resources hold immense importance not only for individuals, communities, and societies but also for the tourists. The insightful significance of these cultural heritage resources in Eziani stems from the deep-rooted sense of belonging and pride they suggest, symbolizing the community's history, values, beliefs, and traditions. This is in line with what Ezenagu (2020) stated that the resources are the foundation for identity and pride. The abundance of fertile land, which supports the cultivation of crops like tomatoes, pepper, garden egg, yam, and cassava, along with the presence of natural streams, social structures, cultural practices such as taboos and the Ikoro dance, artifacts and objects, cultural landscapes like the Adaoka and gravel sites, and the preservation of traditional knowledge and practices such as the Omabe festival and traditional food processing technologies, all provide invaluable insights into the way of life of the Eziani people. The findings of this research have opened up new avenues for deeper exploration of Eziani's heritage resources. Agricultural activities, the Omabe festival, and the Adaoka shrine have successfully attracted tourists, thereby making significant contributions to the local economy of the community. These findings align with the research conducted by Ezenagu and Iwuagwu (2016), highlighting the role of tourism in serving as a marker of identity and boosting the economic prospects of the host community. The findings of the study also revealed that cultural heritage resources have created avenues for stakeholder engagement and youth participation, fostering cultural exchange and promoting social cohesion between Eziani and neighboring communities. These findings align with the research conducted by Anunobi (2020), which emphasizes the positive impact of stakeholder commitment, involvement, participation, and education on effective heritage site management. However, the reconnaissance information highlights that the predominant agricultural practices of the community revolve around perishable crops, necessitating the establishment of industries for the preservation of these crops for future use. Additionally, the preservation of heritage sites is hindered by challenges related to deficient infrastructural components, such as the absence of a well-developed road network connecting the gravel sites and agricultural areas, as well as the lack of consistent water supply.

### **Conclusion**

Undoubtedly, cultural heritage resources have played a significant role in the rural development of Eziani. Many of these resources have been inherited and have successfully attracted tourists, thus creating ample opportunities for the growth and development of tourism in the area. The findings of this study unequivocally demonstrate that cultural heritage resources in the rural community of Eziani are vital tangible and intangible assets that possess immense cultural, historical, and societal significance. The heritage assets in Eziani are passed down through generations, exist in their natural state, and are environmentally friendly. However, these cherished assets face challenges such as limited financial resources, the pressures of modernization, waning interest in their conservation, and inadequate infrastructure, including water and access roads to the heritage sites. In order to safeguard these resources, it is crucial for the government to extend support to farmers in Eziani through grants and loans, subsidize



fertilizers, offer tractors at affordable rates, establish preservation factories, and empower and educate the youth to actively engage in the conservation of heritage. Recent studies have provided convincing evidence that cultural heritage resources play a vital role in fostering sustainable livelihood and creating economic opportunities within rural communities (Nwankwo, et al., 2018; Ezenagu, 2020, Makwindi, & Ndlovu, 2022). Hence, it is imperative to encourage the people of Eziani to actively preserve and safe guard their cultural heritage resources for future generations.

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