

## **TOURISM POTENTIAL OF ONICHA IGBOEZE COMMUNITY NEW YAM FESTIVAL, EBONYI STATE, NIGERIA**

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**ABSTRACT:** *The study was carried out to assess tourism potential of Onicha Igboeze community New Yam Festival. Six (6) villages, 12 key informants and 60 ordinary residents were selected for the study through multi-stage stratified random sampling technique. Primary data were collected through the use of semi-structured questionnaire, interview schedules and Focus Group Discussions. Secondary information was sourced from historic records and documentaries on the subject matter. Data were analyzed using mean scores from 4-point Likert-Type scale and Explanatory Factor Analysis. Historical and other descriptive information were presented in documentary form. Results showed that the interplay of the rural ambience of Oniticha Igboeze community, the recreational content and structure of her New Yam Festival, and the community's positive socio-cultural values provide adequate response to recreational needs of a modern urbanized society. It was recommended that community leadership in conjunction with the State ministry of tourism should work to promote the festival as a premium tourism product.*

**KEYWORD:** Rural tourism, Tourism potential, New Yam Festival, Oniticha Igboeze Community, Ebonyi State, Nigeria

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### **INTRODUCTION**

In Nigeria, communities organize and celebrate different types of festivals- events that are based on a group communion and manifest the communal behavioral patterns (Nnamani, 2014). Festivals are occasions during which members of a society demonstrate ingenuities in their cultural heritage such as dancing, singing and artistic designs (Nnamani, 2014). It involves all forms of sports, cultural rites, wrestling contest and musical concerts.

In Africa and Nigeria in particular, festivals are organized around major events such as episodes from the history of an ethnic group, agricultural yields, coronation of the natural rulers, natural phenomena such as the rivers, forests, reptiles and other officially recognized deities (Nnamani, 2014; ). Across Igboland, Nigeria, which comprises of the states of Anambra, Abia, Ebonyi, Enugu, Imo and some parts of Delta and Rivers, and among the Igbo in the Diaspora, celebration of the new yam is a highly esteemed cultural festival (Nzubechi, 2013; Ogunwusi, 2014). A yam (*Dioscorea spp*) is a tuber that is cultivated annually on a loamy, clay or humus soil. In the Eastern part of Nigeria, its cultivation is between mid January and late March, and it is harvested usually between mid August and late December, depending on the farmer's preference. In Igboland, New Yam Festival is tribally called "*Emume iri ji ohuru*", "*Iwa ji*", "*Ife ji oku*" etc., and this nomenclature varies in its spelling and speech sound, when compared and contrasted from one kingdom to another.

New Yam Festival is as old as tradition in Igboland. This festival's unique purpose is to thank God Almighty, other deities, and the ancestors for preserving the community through another farming (yam cultivation) season to harvest time and also for blessing their labors (Nzubechi, 2013). New Yam festival in Igboland or among the Igbo and their friends in the Diaspora is always marked with pomp and pageantry. The occasion of the new-yam eating festival is a cultural feast with a deep significance (Ogunwusi, 2014). Individual agrarian communities or subsistence agricultural population groups set aside a day for this august occasion during which a range of festivities mark the eating of the new yam. To the Igbo, therefore, the day is symbolic of enjoyment after the cultivation season.

## LITERATURE

Tourism is one of the largest and fastest growing industries in the world (WTTC, 2012; Onyeabor and Alimba, 2015a; UNWTO, 2015). In both developed and developing countries, tourism is frequently seen as a viable means of raising the economy of regions (Barry, 2012; Doohyun et al., 2014; UNWTO, 2015). The development of a tourism industry has been noted to promote the destination's image enabling the region to achieve other objectives such as business recruitment and retention (Madzara, 2011; Ezeuduji, 2013a, 2013b, 2014).

According to World Tourism Organization (UNWTO, cited in Aref and Gill, 2009), rural tourism is tourism that gives to visitors a personalized contact, a taste of physical and human environment of countryside and as far as possible, allow them to participate in the activities, traditions and lifestyles of local people.

Rural tourism include a wide range of activities like: climbing, riding, adventure tourism, educational travel, sport and health tourism, arts and heritage tourism (Sharpley and Sharpley, 1997; Onyeabor and Alimba, 2006). It also include activities regarding vacations in the midst of nature, trips to rural areas, as well as residential tourism, in which services include, apart from accommodation, also social events, festivities, outdoor recreation, production and sale of manufactured and agricultural products, transportation, marketing and information systems (Sharpley and Sharpley, 1997; Roberts and Hall, 2001; Irrshad, 2010).

Rural tourism is described in a variety of terms including farm tourism, agritourism, soft tourism and even ecotourism (Beeton, 2006). It is said to be a type of tourism that takes place in the countryside and agricultural landscapes, and is characterized by enjoyment of a tamed nature or highly modified landscape (Aref and Gill, 2009). The authors further noted that rural tourism centers on the land uses and human cultures that the interaction between humans and the land have created. Hence, agriculture and farms are the main foundations upon which rural attraction is built (Aref and Gill, 2009). Any form of tourism that showcases the rural life, art, culture and heritage at rural locations, thereby benefiting the local community economically and socially as well as enabling interaction between the tourists and the locals for a more enriching tourism experience can be termed as rural tourism (Aref and Gill, 2009). It is multi-faceted and may entail farm/agricultural tourism, cultural tourism, nature tourism, adventure tourism, and ecotourism.

As against conventional tourism, rural tourism has certain typical characteristics like; it is experience- oriented, the locations are sparsely populated, it is predominantly in the natural environment, it meshes with seasonality and local events and is based on preservation of

culture, heritage and traditions. Rural tourism has many potential benefits for rural areas (Frederick, 1992). Rural tourism can be an important source of jobs for local communities and an important force for the overall development of disadvantaged rural areas (UNWTO, 2015; Onyeabor and Nwahia, 2015).

The inherent potential of rural tourism to enhance economic growth can be harnessed as a strategy for rural development. The development of a strong platform around the concept of rural tourism will definitely prove useful for a country like Nigeria where almost eighty percent of the population resides in the rural areas (FGN, 2006). Globally, the trends of industrialization and development have shown clear urban-bias (Todaro and Smith, 2003), which has led to falling income levels and lesser job opportunities in the rural areas leading to an urbanization syndrome in the rural areas (Todaro and Smith, 2003). Interestingly, the stresses of urban lifestyles have in turn led to a growing interest in the rural areas (Onyeabor and Alimba, 2006). Rural tourism is one of the few activities which can provide a solution to these problems. Besides, there are other factors which are shifting the trend towards rural tourism like increasing levels of awareness, growing interest in heritage and culture, improved accessibility and environmental consciousness (Drumm and Moore, 2005; Onyeabor and Alimba, 2006; Onyeabor, Nwahia and Okereke, 2015). In the developed countries, this has resulted in a new style of tourism of visiting village settings to experience and live a relaxed and healthy lifestyle especially during cultural festivals (Department of Agriculture and Environmental sciences of the University of Georgia, Canada, 2001). This concept has taken the shape of a formal kind of rural tourism, which is yet to be fully exploited in most developing countries like Nigeria.

## **METHODOLOGY**

### **Study Area**

The study was carried out in the Igbo-speaking rural community of Onicha Igboeze in Onicha Local Government Area of Ebonyi State in the South Eastern region of Nigeria. The community falls between latitude 7°S and 18°N (EBADEP Report, 2003) and has an estimated land area of 156 km<sup>2</sup> and a projected population of 112,961 by 2015 (NPC, 2006). Oniticha Igboeze community is comprised of 13 villages organized into 2 autonomous communities namely; Onicha Igboeze and Igboeze Onicha, and administered as 2 Development Centers namely, Ezeukwu and Onicha West Development Centers. Oniticha Igboeze community is bounded in the North and East by Isu and Oshiri communities in the same LGA, and in the South and West by Uburu and Ugwulangwu communities both in Ohaozara LGA of Ebonyi State. Majority of residents of the community is engaged in agricultural activities such as food and cash crops production, and rearing of animals in both intensive and extensive system. Other occupations of the people include palm wine tapping, petty trading, civil service, teaching, fishing and hunting. Staple foods produced by the people include yam, cassava, rice and maize. Others are local beans, groundnut, potatoes, banana and plantain. Cash crops grown by the people include oil palm, cashew, and citrus. Yam in Onicha Igboeze, like most other Igbo society, is accorded a special place, culminating in the setting aside of a day in the month of August each year for the feast of yam, known as "*Iri Ji Ofu*" in local parlance or New Yam festival.

## Sampling Procedure

Six (6) villages, 12 key informants (opinion leaders/custodians of culture) and 60 ordinary residents were selected through a multi-stage stratified random sampling technique. Also Focus Group Discussions were conducted with groups of 9 (including men, women, the elderly and youths) in each of the 6 villages. Primary and secondary data were used for the study. Primary data were collected through the use of semi-structured questionnaire administered to sampled respondents. Interview schedules and Focus Group Discussions (FDG) were also used to elicit information regarding the subject matter from stakeholders of the community. Secondary data were sourced from historic records and documentaries on the subject matter from the Ezeogo's palace and the Local Government Headquarters located in Isu.

## Data Analysis

Historical and other information about the New Yam Festival were presented in documentary form. Data were analyzed using mean scores from Likert-Type scale and Explanatory Factor Analysis.

## Model Specification

### Mean score (Likert-type Scale)

$$X_s = \frac{\sum fn}{Nr}$$

Where,

$X_s$	=	Mean score
$\sum$	=	Summation
$F$	=	Frequency of each (4,3,2,1) option
$n$	=	Likert numerical values (responses of the respondents)
$Nr$	=	Number of respondents to each response category (total number of respondents).

Decision Rule: responses with a value of 2.5 and above were considered as accepted, while those responses with value of less 2.5 were considered as rejected.

## Explanatory Factor Analysis (EFA) Model

Explanatory Factor Analysis (EFA) based on the Common Factor Model was used to assess the influence of community characteristics on ecotourism development in the communities. As a method commonly used to explore the structure of data (DeCoaster, 1998; Alimba and Akubuilu, 2000), the use of Factor Analysis here was aimed at accounting for covariance of observed variables in terms of smaller number of unobservable variables (theoretical concepts) known as factors.

If  $n$  are observations on each of the variable  $X_1, X_2, X_3, \dots, X_p$ , and we suppose that 'm' is the underlying factors  $F_1, F_2, \dots, F_m$ , where  $m < p$ , then factor analysis assumes that each  $X_j$  ( $j=1, 2, \dots, JP$ ), can be written as a linear combination of the factors and a residual variable. In effect, for each  $X_j$  we have a multiple linear regression model where  $X_j$  takes the role of dependent variable and  $F_1, F_2, \dots, F_m$  are like explanatory variables.

For example, in terms of observations, if  $X_{ij}$  is the observation on variable  $X_j$  for the  $i$ th sample member then:  $X_{ij} = \lambda_{i1}F_{i1} + \lambda_{j2}F_{i2} + \lambda_{jm}F_{ik} + e_{ij}$  ( $i=1, 2, \dots, p$ ), ----- 1

where  $F_{ik}$  = the score on factor  $F_k$  ( $k = 1, 2, \dots, m$ ) and  $e_{ij}$  = the value on the residual variable  $E_j$  for the  $i$ th sample member.  $F_1, F_2, \dots, F_m$  are known as common factors (since every  $X_{ij}$  is written in terms for all of them) and  $E_j$  is known as a specific factor since it corresponds to  $X_j$ . All of the  $F_{ik}$  and  $e_{ij}$  are observable. The weight  $\lambda_{ji}, \dots, \lambda_{jm}$  are usually called the factor loadings (Jolliffe 1986).

The assumption to be made here about the model, in order to estimate it are: that the common factors,  $F_1, F_2, \dots, F_m$  are independent of one another, and the specific factors  $E_1, E_2, \dots, E_p$  are independent of one another and of the common factors. The suitable number of factors is selected subjectively and the factors produced are rotated with the hope of finding a readily interpretable set of factors (Darlington, 1994; DeCoaster, 1998; Alimba and Akubuilu, 2000).

The variables assessed in the study include:

- V<sub>01</sub>= Attitude to visitors
- V<sub>02</sub>= Entrepreneurial spirit
- V<sub>03</sub>= Business ethics
- V<sub>04</sub>= Openness to development
- V<sub>05</sub>= Mainstreaming women
- V<sub>06</sub>= Orientation of youths
- V<sub>07</sub>= Income level (average annual income )
- V<sub>08</sub>= Tourism awareness
- V<sub>09</sub>= State of roads
- V<sub>10</sub>= Electricity supply
- V<sub>11</sub>= Pipe-borne water supply
- V<sub>12</sub>= Telephone service
- V<sub>13</sub>= Educational level (average years of formal education)
- V<sub>14</sub>= Other touristic attractions
- V<sub>15</sub>= Healthcare services
- V<sub>16</sub>= Financial services
- V<sub>17</sub>= Hospitality services
- V<sub>18</sub>= Security of lives/properties

## RESULTS

### Origin, historical development and significance of New Yam Festival in Onicha Igboeze community

New Yam Festival in Onicha Igboeze was reported to be as old as the community itself. Most of the respondents noted that they grew up to meet the tradition and that it was handed-down from generation to generation. According to a respondent,

Before the advent of Christianity, New Yam Festival was the most important and most colorful festival in this community. It marked the end of the traditional year and the beginning of a new one. The festival was (and is still) used to appreciate the gods for the gift of life, protection, bountiful harvest and for bringing celebrants into a new

traditional year. Over the years, with the coming of Christianity, Christian festivals such as Christmas, New Year and Easter have gained dominance but not displacing or diminishing the cultural significance of the New Yam Festival.

Findings show that the significance of New Yam Festival is based on its embodiment of the cherished values of the community. The status of yam as the king of all crops in the community, like in every other Ibo community means that the crop and its festival occupy a special place in the way of life of the people. The festival provides much needed holiday and opportunity to strengthen relationships through visits between in-laws, family members and friends; and exchange of gifts. It is used as occasion to reconcile differences and promote brotherliness, friendship and peaceful coexistence in the community. Friends and acquaintances from neighboring communities are usually invited to feasts during the New Yam Festival which strengthen bonds of friendship and promote peaceful coexistence. Furthermore, the *Orie Oku Afor* market day which is the high point of every New Yam Festival celebration in the community, provides opportunity for exhibition of new harvests of yam by farmers and this promotes the spirit of healthy competition, hard work, excellence and positive pride.

### **Proceedings of New Yam Festival in Onicha Igboeze Community**

New Yam Festival (*Iri ji ofu*) in Onicha Igboeze community begins in the ancestral villages of Ndiuumeze and Ufuakuma in Ntiabor with the rebuilding of the yam-house (*iwu ulo ji*) in Ufuakuma. The elders of these villages are traditionally charged with the responsibility of determining the appropriate date for observing New Yam Festival, usually in the month of August, which coincide with the period of harvest. The rebuilding of the yam-house signifies that new yam is due for harvest. The date is scheduled ahead of eight market days (one month), which is then conveyed to the Ezeogo who is the traditional ruler of the community, and his ruling council. It is the Ezeogo that announces this date to the entire community.

Events of the festival take-off properly on Afor market day. It is on this day that members of the community make purchases of the essential things for celebration of New Yam. On the second day, which is usually Nkwo market called *Nkwo Oshiji* in the people's language, members of the community embarked on cutting of sticks that are traditionally used for harvesting new yam. However, traditional title-holders are free to harvest their yams on this day. The third day, being Eke market day, is the feast of new yam. It is marked with the harvest of new yam, breaking of the yam and thanksgiving. Sacrifices are made and the people pray for renewed life as they eat the new yam.

The climax of the festival is the fourth day which is *Orie* market day. The day is called *Orie Oku Afor* and the market holds in *Ukwu Odida* market arena. It is an annual market that is only open for transactions on this day. On the day, community members, neighboring communities and friends of the community converge at the *Ukwu Odidia* Market Arena in their best traditional attires. Traders, tourists and other visitors from far and near also attend. Dancers and other entertainers attend also. It is a day that business is mixed with pleasure in the spirit of community. Assortments of farm produce, household goods, gift items as well as foods and drinks are sold and bought. The day is considered critical to the entire events and activities that characterize New Yam festival in Onicha Igboeze because traditionally, the market provides avenue for distant relatives, family friends, old friends, well-wishers and associates to meet and share pleasantries, gifts and experiences. They also wine and dine together while the market lasts.

**Onitcha Igboeze Community characteristics as opportunity for tourism development**

Data on socio-cultural and economic characteristics of the community were generated through a five-point Likert-type scale. Principal Component Factor Analysis was then used to explore the structure of these variables as they influence tourism development in the study area. The interpretation boils down to identifying variables that load high in each component matrix which was used in naming the factors. According to Kaiser's (1958) rule of thumb cited in Nwibo and Okorie (2013), variables with a coefficient of 0.40 or more have high loading and may be used in naming a factor. This rule has been generally applied (Alimba and Akubuilu, 2002; Nwibo and Okorie, 2013; Ezeh, 2013; Onyeabor and Alimba, 2015b). Hence, only variables with factor loading of 0.40 and having 10% overlapping variance were used in naming the factors in this analysis. The summary of the analysis is presented in Table 1.

**Table 1: Varimax Rotated Component Matrix of Onitcha Igboeze community characteristics as opportunity for tourism development**

Items	Component I Socio-economic	Component II Socio-cultural
Attitude to visitors	0.132	0.733
Entrepreneurial spirit	0.029	0.652
Business ethics	-0.205	0.665
Openness to development	0.167	0.058
Mainstreaming women	0.045	0.580
Orientation of youths	-0.197	0.471
Income level (average annual income)	0.886	-0.013
Tourism awareness	-0.188	0.528
State of roads	0.136	-0.590
Electricity supply	0.766	0.147
Pipe-borne water supply	0.511	0.032
Telephone services	0.469	-0.008
Educational level (average years of formal education)	0.883	-0.250
Other touristic attractions	0.874	-0.138
Healthcare services	0.917	-0.189
Financial services	0.879	-0.065
Hospitality services	0.843	-0.096
Security of lives/properties	0.622	0.049

Source: SPSS Analysed Field Data, 2015

Table 1 shows that two (2) major factors of Onitcha Igboeze community characteristics were influential in tourism development. These were: socio-economic factor (Component I) and socio-cultural factor (Component II). Each factor was given a denomination that best described the set of variables contained in it that loaded high. Component I was named socio-economic factor because of variables that loaded high under it. Those included: income level of the community (average annual income, 0.886), electricity supply (0.766), pipe-borne water supply (0.511), telephone services (0.469), educational level (average years of formal education, 0.883), other tourism sites (0.874), healthcare services (0.917), financial services (0.879), hospitality services (0.843) and security of lives and properties (0.622). Component II was named socio-cultural factor due to the variables which loaded high under it which

included: attitude to visitors (0.733), entrepreneurial spirit (0.652), business ethics (0.665), mainstreaming women (0.580), orientation of youths (0.471) and Tourism awareness (0.528).

### **Perceived socio-cultural, economic, environmental benefits and costs of developing New Yam Festival Tourism in Onicha Igboeze Community**

Mean scores from a four-point Likert-type scale was used to measure respondents' perceptions of expected socio-cultural, economic and environmental benefits and costs of developing New Yam Festival tourism in Onicha Igboeze Community. The decision rule was 2.5. Variables that score 2.5 and above were adjudged to be generally accepted by respondents as benefits or costs according to the category.

**Table 2: Mean score rating of perceived socio-cultural, economic and environmental benefits of New Yam Festival Tourism Development in Onicha Igboeze Community**

	<b>Variable description</b>	<b>Mean score</b>	<b>Decision rule</b>
Socio-cultural	Promotion of cultural education among younger generation	3.2	Accepted
	Strengthening of family ties	3.5	Accepted
	Preservation of cultural heritage	3.3	Accepted
	Promotion of peaceful coexistence	3.7	Accepted
	Promotion of inter-personal relation	3.2	Accepted
	Promotion of yam as king of crops	3.3	Accepted
	Facilitation of cultural exchange	3.2	Accepted
	Promotion of community image and identity	3.0	Accepted
	Publicity for the community	2.6	Accepted
	Attraction of government attention to the community	2.1	Rejected
Economic	Provision of option for additional income generation	3.6	Accepted
	Provision of employment opportunities	3.6	Accepted
	Driving the expansion of agricultural production	3.0	Accepted
	Encouragement of the development of cottage industries	2.5	Accepted
	Discouragement of rural-urban migration	3.0	Accepted
	Attraction of infrastructural facilities	3.1	Accepted
	Creation of economic opportunity for women	2.7	Accepted
	Creation of economic opportunities for youths	3.0	Accepted
	Creation of opportunity for direct marketing of farm products	2.6	Accepted
Environmental	Creation of more market for farm products through hotels	3.0	Accepted
	Promotion of beautification of environment (aesthetics)	3.0	Accepted
		2.6	Accepted



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Promotion of environmental cleanness  
Promotion of environmental  
consciousness/educated

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*Source: Computed from field survey data, 2015*

From Table 2 the following socio-cultural variables scored above 2.5 and were therefore adjudged as perceived benefits of developing New Yam Festival tourism in the community: promotion of cultural education among the younger generation (3.2), strengthening of family ties (3.5) and preservation of cultural heritage (3.3). Other variables that scored above 2.5 were: Promotion of peaceful co-existence (3.7), Promotion of inter-personal relationship (3.2) and Promotion of community image and identity (3.0). More variables that scored above the decision rule include: Facilitation of cultural exchange (3.2), Publicity to the community (2.6) and Promotion of yam as king of crops (3.3). In terms of perceived economic benefits, the following variables met the decision rule: Provision of employment opportunities (3.6), Provision of options for additional income generation (3.6) and Driving expansion of agricultural production (3.0). In addition to these, other economic variables that met the decision rule were: Encouragement of development of cottage industries (2.5), Discouragement of rural-urban migration (3.0), and Attraction of infrastructural facilities (3.1). Other accepted economic variables include: Creation of economic opportunity for women (2.7) and youths (3.0); Creation of opportunity for direct marketing of agricultural products to tourists by farmers (2.8) and indirect marketing through hotels and restaurants (2.6). On environmental benefits, the following variables met the decision rule: Promotion of environmental consciousness and education (2.6); Promotion of environmental cleanliness (2.7) and Promotion of environmental aesthetics (2.9).

**Table 3: Mean score rating of perceived socio-cultural, economic and environmental costs of New Yam Festival Tourism Development in Onicha Igboeze Community**

<b>Variable description</b>	<b>Mean score</b>	<b>Decision rule</b>
Overstretching of infrastructure	2.1	Rejected
Congestion of the community	1.8	Rejected
Increase in crime and social vices	1.4	Rejected
Prostitution (Sex tourism)	2.8	Accepted
Rise in prices	2.6	Accepted
Erosion of culture due to modernization	3.1	Accepted
Loss of farmland to construction activities	2.2	Rejected
Increased financial expenditures on social events	2.0	Rejected
Commoditization of culture	2.1	Rejected
Desecration of sacred places	2.2	Rejected

*Source: Field Survey 2015.*

From Table 3, variables that met the decision rule, which were accepted as perceived costs or demerits of New Yam Festival tourism development in the community include Prostitution or sex tourism (2.8), Erosion/modernization of culture (3.1), and Rise in prices (2.6).

## DISCUSSION

The interplay of the rural setting of Onitcha Igboeze community with the procedure of community's New Yam Festival presents a truly fascinating tourism situation. The rustic milieu, natural resources, cultural patrimony, rural houses, village traditions, agricultural products, the music and trademark artifacts illustrative of community identity; well cover consumers' needs in terms of reception, food, recreational activities, entertainment and diverse services. In agreement with Darău *et al.* (2010), the setting and structure of the Festival provide adequate response to the need for recreation in modern society in a 'new city-village social vision'. The New Yam Festival, which covers four days of agro-cultural activities involving yam harvest, ceremonial yam eating, exchange of visits, giving of gifts, reconciliation of differences, shopping, music and dance provides community members and visitors with veritable opportunity for adventure, cultural education, entertainment, social intercourse and cross-cultural communication.

The presence of basic socio-economic and touristic infrastructure such as electricity, water, telecommunication, health facilities, banking facilities, police posts, hotels and amazing ecological sites in and around Onitcha Igboeze community facilitates the provision of basic tourism services for visitor comfort, relaxation, security and diversified exciting experiences. The significant average income level and educational attainment of the community dwellers mean that there is at least, a minimum platform for valuable communication and social exchange with visitors. This necessary communication and exchange and the accruing mutual socio-cultural (and economic) benefits are further facilitated by the community members' positive attitude to visitors, entrepreneurial spirit, ethical conduct of business, inclusion of women, positive youth orientation and awareness about tourism and its developmental benefits.

The community members' positive perception of New Yam Festival tourism and their expectation that it will promote cultural education among their younger generation, strengthen family ties, preserve cultural heritage, promote peaceful co-existence and inter-personal relationship implies a positive psycho-social environment for tourism development. Similarly, community members see New Yam Festival tourism in their community as capable of providing employment opportunities and options for additional income generation, driving the expansion of agricultural production and encouraging the development of cottage industries. In addition to the afore-listed expectations, the hope entertained by the community people that the development of New Yam Festival tourism in the community will help to discourage migration, attract more infrastructural facilities, create economic opportunities for women and youths and for direct marketing agricultural products imply serious motivations for providing visitors with acceptable services. The people also believe that tourism development brings with it environmental consciousness and education which leads to promotion of environmental cleanliness and aesthetics.

In terms of costs of New Yam Festival tourism development in the community, community members believe that influx of tourists would promote prostitution or sex tourism, raise prices of goods and services and encourage attempts at modernizing their culture. However, giving the overwhelming expectation of positive outcomes from wider participation in the Festival, these demerits are not expected to significantly affect the Festival procedure or community's attitude to visitors.

## CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In conclusion, the study showed that the interplay of the rural ambience of Onitcha Igboeze community, the content and structure of her four-day yearly agro-cultural festival namely, New Yam Festival, and the community's warm attitude to visitors provide adequate response to the need for recreation in modern urbanized society. Community people welcome the prospect of wider participation in their festival and look forward to numerous socio-cultural, economic and environmental benefits of social intercourse with visitors. It is recommended that Onitcha Igboeze community leadership in conjunction with the State ministry of culture and tourism should work to promote the community's New Yam Festival within the State, in Nigeria and the outside world, as a premium rural tourism product. Moreover, the Federal Ministry of Tourism and the Nigerian Tourism Development Cooperation should consider the designation of Onitcha Igboeze New Yam Festival (and perhaps, New Yam Festivals in the entire Igboland), as national festival. This will fast track the translation of New Yam Festival in the community (and perhaps, other communities of Igboland) into national/international rural tourism events with attendant benefits in wealth creation, poverty reduction and general socio-political progress.

## FURTHER RESEARCH

Though investigations have been conducted into New Yam Festivals of a few communities in Igboland of South East Nigeria, it might be instructive to conduct a general study of the festivals with intent to comparing and contrasting, and to aligning the New Yam Festivals with the national calendar of cultural festivals. Furthermore, a socio-demographic study of would be visitors, including their preferences and willingness to pay will be necessary for effective marketing of the product.

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