

## **A CASE FOR TOURISM DEVELOPMENT AND ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT IN BAYELSA STATE, NIGERIA**

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### **ABSTRACT**

The paper analyzed textual representations of Ijaw heritage and cultural festivals on the website of the Bayelsa State Tourism Development Board. It outlines the role of this compendium of heritage sites and cultural festivals as a symbolic resource for constructing a tourist-oriented state to boost its tourism identity and sustainability. Analyzing how heritage sites and cultural festivals focused tourism-oriented discourses can reveal certain economic, socio-cultural practices, and ideological belief of the Ijaw people within the Nigerian nation towards attaining the agendas of the United Nation SDGs. The study re-evaluated how tourism brings positive socio-economic change to the people. Results show that prudent utilization of these sites lead to improved livelihood of the inhabitants of these communities. We identified improved cultural and heritage sites as the major sources of attracting local and international patronage. The study recommends government encouragement of banks to provide loans to startups in the tourism sector.

**Keywords:** Sustainability, Heritage Sites, Tourism, Cultural Festivals, Empowerment, Environment.

## **INTRODUCTION**

The Niger Delta region of Nigeria contributes about 90% of the gross domestic product of Nigeria but the area is generally characterized with abject poverty, lack of infrastructure, and job opportunities (Bribena, 2017). The traditional occupations of fishing, farming, and canoe carving have been destroyed because of the activities of the multinational oil and gas prospecting companies. Consequently, the teeming youth population, being the worst victims, has turned the area to a theatre of crime and criminality. However, before the advent of oil exploration and exploitation activities in the Niger Delta, with reference to Bayelsa state, the Ijaw people have used the rich cultural festivals and heritage sites with farming, fishing, and canoe carving as economic activities with visitors coming to these sites as local and international tourists to provide and guarantee socio-economic sustainability.

The importance of tourism in providing economic empowerment and sustainability in developing countries cannot be overemphasized. Tourism business contributes to three high-priority goals of developing countries: the generation of income, employment, and foreign-exchange earning (Salawu, 2020; Adeola et al. 2020; Backman, &Klaesson, 2021). Hence, countries, particularly, developing countries with comparative advantage of attractive tourist sites do not hesitate to utilize them (Purnomo et al.2020; Gohori, &Van Der Merwe, 2021; Karim, 2020; Uduji et al. 2020). Consequently, countries like Costa Rica, followed by Ecuador, Tanzania, Kenya, and Nepal have tailored their tourism industries towards the above three goals (Joo et al., 2020; Sarr et al. 2020). The desire of tourists according to (Haiying, 2020; Yasa, 2020; Putri et al.2020) is to discover new attractive tourism destinations to have a different or more satisfying tourism experience.

Tourism destinations are many in Bayelsa state: the bronze head museum in Opume, Oligi museum, oil and gas museum in Oloibiri, mangrove museum in Sangana beaches: Polaku, Koluama, Odi, Famgbe, Sagbama, and Agge Palm Beach to mention a few. Other tourism attractions are; the Whiteman Grave yard and the British Consulate Building in Town Brass, Akassa Light House, and Akassa slave transit camp all in Brass Local Government Area (LGA), Major Isaac Jasper Adaka-Boro Monument in Kaima, the Oxbow Lake in Swali in Yenagoa, Oki cultural dance and Iyantoru cultural dance in Okoroba in Ogbia LGA, the Asi cultural dance in Ekeremor, the Amasinghan cultural dance in Aleibiri, the Egbelegbele cultural dance in Amassoma, Abayasa Forest Reserve in Ngoro in Ekeremor LGA, Edumanon Forest Reserve in Ogbia LGA. Kafura, (2013) and Ogechukwu (2012) in their separate writings opined that, if the several tourism sites and cultural festivals are adequately invested by both the private and public sectors, the state would achieve sustained growth and imbibe the idea of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) towards achieving them.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

This study provides a comparative review of tourism and the provision of sustainable development in Bayelsa state of Nigeria. It draws a nexus between cultural and tradition festivals with tourism potentials. The study provides a detailed review of heritage and cultural festival tourism within the state and evaluates how it could reposition the

state from its oil and gas mono-economic status to one that would provide economic sustainability to its citizenry. Bayelsa State was originally part of the Eastern Region of Nigeria in the three regional structures of 1954. It later became part of Rivers by the 1969 creation of states and eventually assumed a state status in 1996 when it was excised from the parent Rivers state, all by edicts from different military regimes (Ingiabuna, 2020). The state has a total area of 21,110km<sup>2</sup>(8,150sq.ml) and has a total area population of 1,704,515 as of 2006 census (Bayelsa State Ministry of Lands, Survey Urban Planning, 2013). It has an average population density of 95/km<sup>2</sup> (250/sq.ml) and a total GDP of \$2,484 per capita (Bayelsa State Ministry of Budget, 2014 mid-year Report).

About three quarters of its total area is surrounded by water. The people are predominantly rural dwellers, and the local population engages mainly on fishing for subsistence and commercial levels due to its peculiar terrain. The only sector of the population that has sustainable source of income is the civil service (Uduji et al.2020). There are no industries owned by government or private individuals though a few have started springing up like the Azikiel Refinery. The main employer is the government: hence, the state is referred to as a civil servants' state (Bribena, 2017). The oil and gas companies are owned and controlled by the multinational oil and gas companies which pay royalty to the Federal Government of Nigeria, thereby contributing little towards the economic empowerment of the people in the various communities (Lenshie, 2018; Inibehe et al. 2018).

Bayelsa State is controlled by the oil and gas economy. It is among the highest oil and gas producing states in the Niger Delta region of Nigeria (Babatunde, 2020; Uduji, 2020). Oil was first discovered and produced in a commercial quantity in Oloibiri town in Bayelsa State in 1956 (Mbalisi, & Okorie, 2020). Since then, oil and gas have been the economic mainstay of Nigeria; contributing about 90% to the country's gross domestic product (GDP)(Elum, et al. 2016). However, according to (Nwosu, 2016; Bribena, 2017) the people in the area have not benefitted from the proceeds of oil and gas resources despite the great damage the oil and gas exploration and production activities have done to the environment.

The main occupation of the people is agriculture. However, this has been adversely affected due to the activities of oil and gas exploration and production (Bribena, 2017). Ironically, the oil and gas sector that has taken up the livelihood of the people has not been able bring to provide sustainable development. Consistent degradation and pollution of the forest, farmlands, waters, and fish ponds by the oil and gas prospecting companies have eventually made agriculture unproductive, thereby, making the active but unemployed population to look for alternative sources of employment such as terrorism, armed robbery, vandalizing of oil and gas production pipelines and equipment, hostage taking for ransom, piracy, political thuggery, banditry, harlotry, and others (Lenshie, 2018; Inibehe et al. 2018; Ugboego, & Chinenyenwa, 2020).The oil and gas bearing communities in this area according to (Nwosu, 2016; Bribena, 2017) is one of the poorest in sub-Sahara Africa.

Culturally, Bayelsa State is richly endowed. One sector that has the potentials to economically empower the people and provide sustainability is the tourism sector. Tourist attractions abound in the length and breadth of the state (Ogechukwu, 2012). It has the longest, uninterrupted, and cleanest beach in Nigeria. Bayelsa State also has the

highest mangrove forest in tropical Africa (2014, BSTDA Handbook). Other tourist attractions include the various annual periodic festivals, the aquatic monk war, and cultural displays that are peculiar to the Ijaw people (Kafura, 2013; Ogechukwu, 2012; BSTD Handbook, 2014). Among others, the following cultural festivals if properly harnessed could attract tourists within and internationally: The African Movie Academy Awards (AMAA), the Ogori-Ba-Uge (Killing of a Buffalo Festival), the Major Isaac Jasper Boro Memorial Festival, the Bayelsa State Arts and Culture Festival, Lake Effi Fishing Festival, and the Amassinghan (Love Boat) Festival.

Development of these resources would enhance socio-economic sustainability in these communities. In specific, a call for tourism development and economic empowerment aligns with Agendas 8, 11, and 13 of the SDGs. Agenda 8 which talks about decent work and economic growth. Tourism development leads to a sustained and inclusive economic growth to drive progress, create decent jobs for all and improve living standards. Agendas 11 and 13 are making cities inclusive, safe, resilient, sustainable, and taking urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts. Tourism development is a call for climate action as it takes cognizance of the environment and the need to act on climate change. Because climate change is affecting every nation and disrupting economies thereby affecting livelihood including tourism site and the tourism industry. The corona virus impacted the tourism industry as travels were restricted; this has made stakeholders to lean toward technology to enhance the tourism business through virtual tourism. This has reduced physical access and reduced the use of energy through flights and other means of transportation which pollute the environment.

#### *The African Movie Academy Awards (AMAA)*

The African Movie Academy Awards, popularly known as The AMA Awards was originated by Peace Anyanwu-Osigwe Febresima. The first AMA Awards ceremony was held in Yenagoa, Bayelsa State in Nigeria on May 30, 2005, and subsequent editions were held at the same venue, the Gabriel Okara Memorial Ultra-Modern Cultural Centre. The date of the ceremony is subject to review. However, for security reasons, the venue for the 2008 edition was moved to Abuja. The awards are presented annually to recognize excellence of professionals in the film industry and uniting the African continent through arts and culture.

The ceremony was originally billed for one day but subsequently, through the instrumentality of Prof. Barclays Ayakoroma and Ballard Bekewuru Benedict, who were then the Executive Director and Head of Performing Division at the Bayelsa State Council for Arts and Culture respectively, introduced cultural content into it. The festival which now lasts for two days begins with a carnival train from Port Harcourt International Airport in Rivers State to terminate at the Dr. Gabriel Okara Multipurpose Cultural Centre, Yenagoa.

The activities for the first day include presentation of colloquium, cultural dances, traditional wrestling, and canoe regatta at the Oxbow Lake Amphitheatre. On the second day, there is a guided tour of tourists to tourist attractions in the state in the morning and the award ceremony takes place in the night. The award presentation which is the main event of the festival lasts till the morning of the following day. The event is attended by numerous media

representatives, celebrities, politicians, captains of industries, actors, and actresses throughout the world. The AMAA Awards are widely considered to be Africa's most important film event and the most prestigious film award in Africa (Handbook BSTDA, 2014).

#### *The Ogori Ba Uge Festival*

It is a buffalo killing festival celebrated by the people of ancient Odi town in Kolokuma/Opukuma LGA of Bayelsa State. The date of the festival is not fixed but it is mostly scheduled in the month of June. It is a celebration to commemorate the historical killing of a mysterious wild Buffalo. The story had it that this mystery Buffalo appear without warning to launch selected attacks on the people of Odi. The tragic element of each attack which usually resulted in the loss of life continued for many years and every effort to kill the ferocious beast was abortive. However, it was not until appropriate traditional appeasements and rituals were conjured that it was finally killed. Consequently, the killing of the illusive Buffalo did not only usher in peace to the community but also made possible the return of those who had left the community because of the presence of the life-threatening animal.

Today, the festival has grown to be one of the biggest festivals in Bayelsa State. It is celebrated for a period of seven (7) days, involving elaborate carnival and cultural performances: parades, cultural dances, ceremonial boat regatta, canoe race, epic drama presentation of the killing of the buffalo, wrestling, football matches among quarters in the community, beauty contest, palm wine drinking completion, eating competition, traditional modern live band displays, and a host of other activities. The festival is a form of homecoming for all Odi people all over the globe. Additionally, it attracts tourists from many parts of the world to the community.

#### *The Major Isaac Jasper Adaka-Boro Memorial Festival*

The festival is symbolic of the homecoming of an illustrious son. Major Isaac Jasper Adaka-Boro Memorial Festival is associated with the late Niger Delta environmentalist and civil rights activist who died during the Nigerian civil war in 1971 while fighting on the side of Nigeria to keep the country united. Major Isaac Jasper Adaka-Boro Memorial festival was first organized independently at his own town Kaiama on July 16<sup>th</sup> annually by youths and civil rights activists to commemorate his death. The festival is fixed universally on July 16 to mark his death.

In the late 90s, the festival attracted international attention and was jointly organized annually in London by the Ijaw People Association (IPA) of the Kingdom and Ireland Chapters. Subsequently, when government saw both the international recognition and economic viability of the festival, initiated a bill to the State House Assembly to pass into law to domesticate the festival in the state capital, Yenagoa. Major Isaac Jasper Adaka-Boro Memorial festival is activity filled: wrestling, dance procession, cultural dances, boat regatta, and colloquium are among them (BYSTD handbook, 2014).

### *Bayelsa State Festival of Arts and Culture*

Bayelsa State Festival of Arts and Culture (BYSFAC) started in 2012. It was styled after the National Festival of Arts and Culture (NAFEST) where the 36 states and the Federal Capital Territory, Abuja come together annually to showcase the rich culture of Nigeria. Unlike the one of the National of Arts and Culture that rotates hosting rights from one state to the other, Bayelsa State Festival of Arts and Culture takes place permanently in Yenagoa, the state capital. BYSFAC is a prelude to NAFEST and Abuja Carnival whereby troupes are selected to represent the state at the national festival.

This brings together all the different cultural groups to compete in diverse areas, such as traditional wrestling, cultural dances, boat regatta, canoe race, arts and craft exhibition, traditional culinary, building of a traditional apartment, and several other exciting side attractions; carnival parade, live presentation of traditional and modern musical shows for the three days. During the festival, all the secondary schools in the state capital are vacated to accommodate the troupes from the various local government areas and visiting troupes from other states. Troupes from other states are invited to participate. BYSFAC is considered as the biggest and most colorful modern festivals in the whole of the Niger Delta region. The festival is not only a homecoming for Bayelsans living in the Diaspora but, it is also a symbol of the Ijaw identity and solidarity which is Bayelsa is both spiritually and physically the epicenter. The attendance cuts across the entire society from captains of industries, film producers, politicians, entertainers, food, clothes, and arts and crafts vendors from far and (BSYTD handbook, 2014).

### *Lake Effi Fishing Festival*

Lake Effi is a huge natural lake located at Sabageria, in Kolokuma/Opokuma LGA of Bayelsa State where the popular fishing festival takes place. Mystically, the lake is believed to be self-purifying. Despite the thick forest surrounding its approximately 2km square area, the lake clears every fallen piece of debris inside, it always leaving its entire surface pristine. Also, according to local folklore, the lake is said to periodically provide fish in great quantities for food for the locals. When this occurs, it is done in agog celebration as people effortlessly collect the huge fishes lying around. Even more astonishing is the fact that the lake is brimming with crocodiles that do not harm humans during the festival.

The festival is a homecoming for the sons and daughters of the town who use the occasion as a means of giving thanks to the river goddess for a bountiful fish harvest. Lake Effi festival which was celebrated every seven years but subject to the pronouncement of the Chief Priest is now celebrated annually with the advent of His Royal Highness, Kala the 10<sup>th</sup>, the King of Sabageria. The feast comes up in June every year subject to ratification by the king in council. The ceremony involves several performances such as canoe rides, a boat regatta, cultural dances, and fishing context. Fishermen and women come from far and near to participate in the fishing contests and various prizes are made available for the winners for different categories.

### *Amassinghan (Love Boat) Festival*

Aleibiri is a community in (Oyakiri clan) in Ekeremor LGA in Bayelsa State. The community is about 20 kilometers (through water routes) to Ekeremor (headquarters of Ekeremor Local Government Area) and about four hours' drive from Yenagoa, the capital of Bayelsa State. Aleibiri is located along the River Facardos, a tributary of River Niger. It shares boundaries with Toumo in the North, Esampou in the West, Ayamassa in the East, and a cluster of communities along Lalagbegbene creek in the south. The present estimated population of Aleibiri obtained from community sources is about 70,000 persons (Zakumor, 2014; Simon, 2014).

Aleibiri community is known all over for its social life and hospitality towards visitors. Another thing the community is most associated with and popular for is its Amasinghan oge (festival) which is celebrated in December. Among the laws binding the indigenes of this community in respect of this festival are: No human corpse from outside can enter the community for burial activities while the festival lasts. Further, anybody who fights during this period gets severely punished by paying a heavy sum of money. The offender would be locked up either in the sun or rain in a tight iron cage until the penalty is paid. Another rule is that nobody can demand anybody to redeem any debt till the end of the festival. Furthermore, no woman is under obligation to report to her husband whatever compromising relationship she has with another man.

There are several accounts to the origin of this festival. One account is traced to the town's water deity who appeared to a maiden in a dream and instructed her to tell the people in the community how to celebrate this festival (Abraze, 2014). A more reliable account is from the palace historian, Chief Benedict Zakumor (Chiko) (2019) and corroborated by the high chief of the town, His Royal Highness, Ebebi Simon (2019). According to these sources, the origin of Amasingha Love festival is over hundred years. The above sources traced the origin to an indigene of Aleibiri community who attended a traditional night burial (wake-keep) at Oboro, a neighboring community. The account continued that; the man was suspected to have been engaged in an illicit sexual relationship with another person's wife in her matrimonial home. While the accusers were perfecting strategies to arrest the intruder, they saw an apparition like figure wrapped all over in white coming out of the house. As the assailants ran helter-skelter for their lives, the intruder also escaped. Subsequently, when the woman was interrogated later, she put the fears of her kinsmen to rest that her water spirit husband visited her.

On getting back to his own town, Aleibiri, the lover man narrated his ordeal. The story became the talk of the town, and the story was so exciting that a group of men and women started re-enacting it every year which later metamorphosed to be the biggest ceremonial love boat festivals in the Niger Delta region. The festival is celebrated for a period of seven (7) days with different events, kick starting and culminating with the famous Amasinghan love boat. What is most spectacular about this festival is that, throughout the celebrations, there is literally no-holds-barred sexual relationship. Like the Ancient Greek Dionysian festival, Amasinghan ogei is known in neighboring villages as a festival of procreation. There is no-gaining-saying-the fact that, this festival has attracted tourists from

far and wide. Additionally, because of its high artistic quality and excitement, governments at several levels have used the Amasinghan love boat regatta to entertain important national and foreign visiting personalities.

S/No	Local Government	Annual Festival	Periodic Festival	Total No. of Festivals	Local Visitors Annual	Local Visitors Periodic	Int’nal Visitors Annual	Int’nal Visitors Periodic
1	Brass	1	2	3	6,000	1,023,000	2,000	107
2	Ekeremor	11	1	12	149,000	800,000		140
3	Kolokuma/Opokuma	4	1	5	1,860,000	1,000,000	3,050	20,500
4	Nembe	0	2	2	0	1,000,000	0	90
5	Ogbia	14	1	15	222,000	57,000	110	40
6	Sagbama	17	0	17	896,000	0	100	
7	Southern Ijaw	5	0	5	896,000	0	200	
8	Yenegoa	7	1	8	1,112,000	400,000	0	330

Table 1. Festivals in Bayelsa, Local Government Outlook, 2010-2019(Source BYSTDB HANDBOOK, 2020)

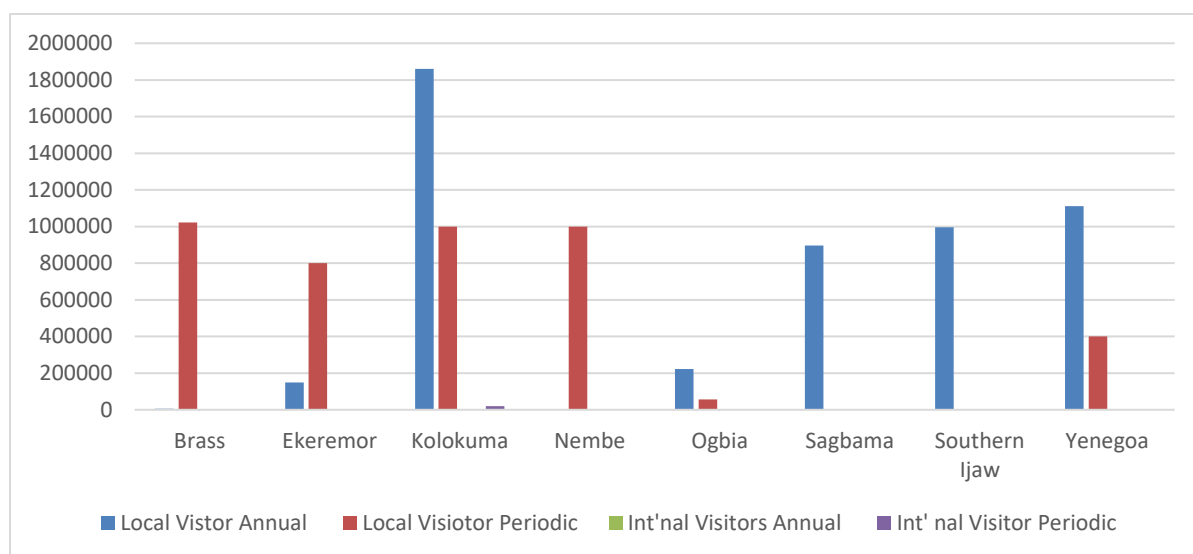


Figure 1: Festivals in Bayelsa (Local Government Outlook) Visitors local and International



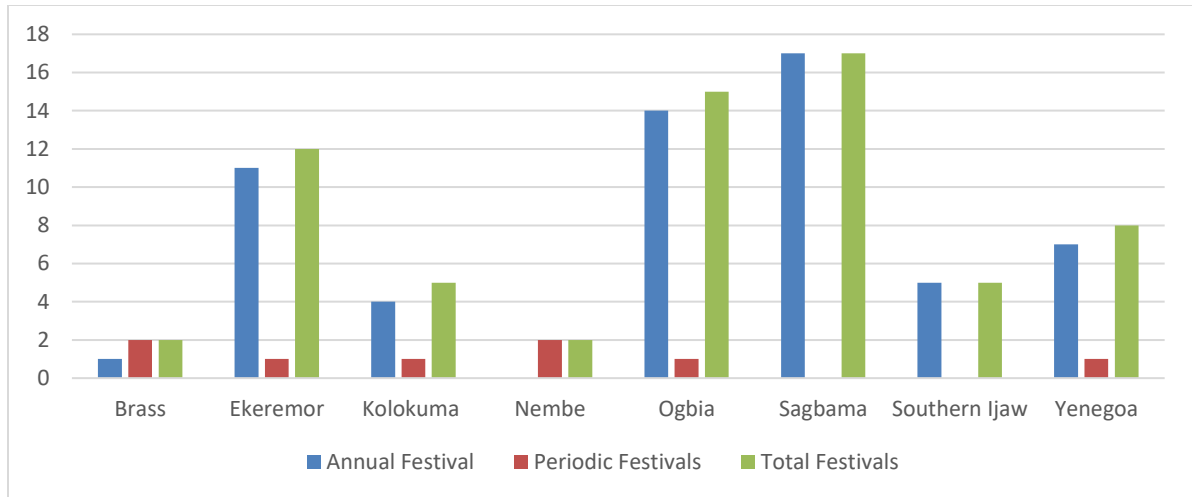


Figure 2: Festivals in Bayelsa (Local Government Outlook, 2010-2019) Number of Festival Annual and Periodic (Source BYSTDB HANDBOOK, 2020)

As shown in Appendix 1 and Table 1, local tourist attendance ranges from I million visitors as show for Lake Effi fishing festival, to as low as two thousand visitors for Izu festival three thousand visitors for Foundation-Day community festival in Ekeremor and six thousand for Eyal-Obeyin festival and Peremabiri annual festival, respectively. The numbers for the international visitors are more worrisome as the example cited for the local visitor cannot boast of any international tourists to these sites except for the Ancient War Canoe festival of the Nembe people which attracts about 50 international visitors and the Onde-Fiya festival with the highest attendance of fifteen thousand visitors. The case of Foundation Day community festival in Ekeremor is understandable due to the logistics to going to Ekeremor town which does not have a link road to the community except by speed boat making transport cost high, the other three sites are accessible by motorable roads which begs the question of lack of use of these sites. Results obtained from table 1 indicates that, there are more annual festivals than periodic festivals from the state and the annual festivals attract more visitors than the periodic festivals due to the predictability of the time and tourists could also include it in their respective annual vacation calendars. International visitors visited cultural festival Kolokuma/OpokumaLGA than the other seven local governments combined annual by over 700% within the period under review. Also, the Kolokuma/Opokuma, Brass, and Yenegoa LGAs accounted for more than 50% of local visitors to the festival.

Museum Sites in Bayelsa State 2010 -2019					
S/No	Name	Town	LGA	Estimated Visitors / Annum	
				Local	Int'nal
1	Oloibiri Oil Museum	Oloibiri	Ogbia	40,000	1,000
2.	Ogiribiri Light House	Akassa	Brass	60,000	10
3	Okpoama Beach	Okpoama	Brass	20,000	100
4	Whiteman's Graveyard	Twon Brass	Brass	20,000	20
5	Whiteman's Graveyard	Ogbobiri	Brass	6,000	10
6	Late Major Isaac Jasper Boro Monument	Kaiama	Kolokuma/Opokuma	500,000	1,000
7.	Agge Palm Beach	Agge	Ekeremor	200,000	600
8.	Ox-Bow Lake Resort	Swali-Yenegoa	Yenegoa	1,000,000	50,000
9	A Slave Holding House	Bekekiri-Akassa	Brass	200,000	70

Table 2. Museum Sites in Bayelsa State 2010-2019(Source BYSTDB Handbook, 2020)

S/No	Local Government	Total No. of Museum	Local Visitors Annual	International Visitors Annual
1	Brass	5	306,000	210
2	Ekeremor	1	200,000	600
3	Kolokuma/Opokuma	1	500,000	1,000
4	Nembe	0	0	0
5	Ogbia	1	40,000	1,000
6	Sagbama	0	0	0
7	Southern Ijaw	0	0	0
8	Yenegoa	1	1,000,000	50,000

Table 3. Museum Sites in Bayelsa (Local Government Outlook, 2010-2019) (Source BYSTDB Handbook, 2020)

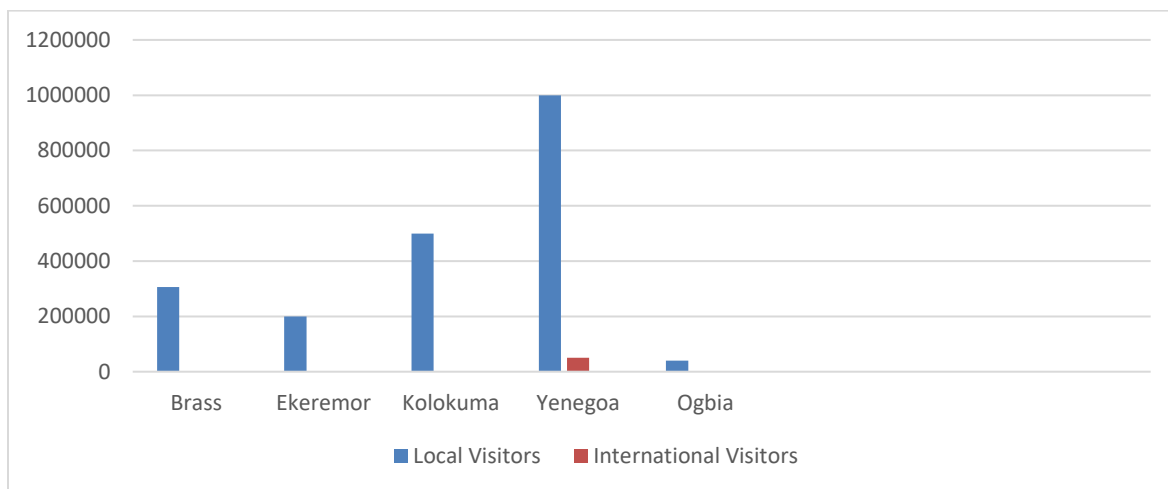


Figure 3: Bayelsa State Museums by Local Government

Table 2 shows the museum sites in Bayelsa state: The same attendance apathy of visitor plaguing the cultural festivals also affects the museums. There are few museum sites when compared with the cultural festivals scattered in various communities in the state. Most of the museums are located on coastal communities of the Atlantic Ocean because these are the communities that welcomed the European during their expedition of the West African coastlines. Various wars were also fought on these communities like the Akassa raid, Konou-Adagbabri attack. Except for the Ox-Bow Lake Resort and the Oloibiri Oil Museum, the other sites have much longer hotshot dating back to the slave trade era. The Oloibiri Oil Museum is unique to the history of the oil and gas industry in Nigeria as this was the site that oil was struck in commercial quantities in Nigeria and this location signaled the first oil well in Nigeria. As observable for the cultural festivals of table 1, the museum sites had a peak of 1 million visitors for the Ox-Bow Lake to a decline of six thousand visitors to the Whiteman's Graveyard of Ogbobiri for local tourists while the international tourists record fifty thousand for the Ox-Bow Lake and less than 20 visitors for the Ogiribiri Light House of Akassa and the Whiteman's Graveyard of Ogbobiri respectively. International tourists visited museums in Yenegoa LGA than the other seven local governments combined annual by over 1000% within the period under review. Also, the Yenegoa LGA accounted for about 45% of local visitors to the museums in the state.

## **FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

A cursory look at both the cultural festivals and the tourist sites statistics provided by the Bayelsa State Tourism Development Board (BYSTDB) leaves no one in doubt that the state is replete with abundant cultural festivals and heritage sites. The number of cultural festivals in the state could be twice or more than some tourism conscious countries like the United Kingdom, Israel, Spain, and others.

However, there is one thing to have cultural festivals and heritage sites and another thing to prudently invest on such resources so that they would attract massive local, national, and international patronage. Analyzing from the data provided in the above tables, there is no gain-saying-the-fact that, both local and international tourist patronage is still incredibly low. The low patronage may be due to many factors: Tourism business cannot thrive in an unstable environment; the low turn up of international tourists, particularly, could be attributed to the high level of criminality; youth restiveness, hostage-taking, armed banditry, and sea piracy.

Our findings show that, most of the festivals are not meticulously organized and channeled towards economic empowerment but rather they are used solely for entertainment. From the festival calendar, it is observed that, more than two to three festivals come up at the same period. This conflict of time could make it difficult for tourists to attend more than one festival during the period, thereby, making respective festivals to lose revenue, necessitating the need for the tourism board to align date of the festivals with the organizers to allow for one seamless organization of the festivals without conflict.

Tourism business needs a high level of infrastructural development. Basic infrastructure, such as good; network of roads, communication network, hotels, transportation system, shopping malls, and others are lacking in the state to

enhance a sustainable tourism industry. From the statistics, it is observed that more tourists, particularly, international tourists visited the few urban centers, specifically, Yenagoa, where there is availability of these amenities to make them comfortable.

As a way of improving tourist apathy to the various tourist sites in Bayelsa state, we are making the following recommendations. The government should coordinate all the festivals in the state by forming a state festival calendar, this would properly inform and guide visitors to place, time, and duration of respective festivals. The government should encourage private sector participation in tourism development by providing an enabling environment: through the provision of physical and social infrastructure. The government should encourage banks operating in the area to provide entrepreneurs in the tourism and hospitality sector with soft loans to grow their business.

Further recommendations include creating the awareness of tourism, its economic importance, and potentials in primary schools to increase the enthusiasm of young people in tourism. The establishment of the Bayelsa State International Institute for Hospitality, Tourism, Event, and Leisure Management is a right step in the right direction. Furthermore, the state government should give scholarships to encourage people to study various courses in the above institute, to guarantee sustained human resources availability in the tourism industry. Technology should be utilized to reinforce strong security network to safeguard both tourism investments and tourists because Bayelsa state has a history of agitation and youth restiveness. The state government should through the State House of Assembly pass laws to safeguard the various tourism destinations as heritage sites and prevent them from destruction by the activities of both the oil and gas companies and other individuals in the communities.

## **CONCLUSION**

One of the problems in Bayelsa state is the lack of economic sustainability. Agriculture which had been the economic mainstay of the people has been destroyed due to the oil and gas production activities (Backman & Klaesson, 2021). Oil and gas contribute about 90% to the GDP of Nigeria and Bayelsa state produces 50% of the total oil produce (Inibehe et al. 2018). Consequently, total reliance on this single source of income (Lenshie, 2018; Inibehe et al. 2018; Ugboego, & Chinenyenwa, 2020) puts excessive economic pressure on the federal government to demand more revenue from the oil and gas sector to meet up its diverse internal and external financial obligations. To expand these activities in the oil and gas exploitation, the environment continues to suffer from unmitigated degradation and pollution due to vandalism. Various attempts by environmental activists from within and outside the country to persuade the government and multinational companies to limit the oil and gas production activities and clean the polluted environment sites to enable the inhabitants to go back to the land has proved abortive (Lenshie, 2018; Inibehe et al. 2018). Furthermore, the consolation according to (Karim, 2020; Uduji et al. 2020) is that oil and gas is finite and non-renewable but, the cultural festivals and the heritage sites will remain. Unlike oil and gas, tourism is not a depleting industry; therefore, it is a panacea for the attainment of the United Nation SDGs for these communities. Overall, if the vast and diverse tapped and untapped tourism resources in this state are properly and

efficiently harnessed and managed, the people would have a viable and sustainable livelihood that could literally pool them out of the present abysmally poor economic situation.

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Appendix 1. Table 1. Annual Average festival in Bayelsa from 2010 -2019

Annual Average of Bayelsa State Festivals and Data from 2010 – 2019							
S/N	Festival	Community	LGA	Date	Annual/Periodic	Attendance/Annum	
						Local	Int’nal
1	Ere Mutoru Festival	Peretoru	Ekeremor	25 <sup>TH</sup> Dec - 1 <sup>ST</sup> Jan.	Annual	12,000	None
2	EyalObeyin Festival	Ayakoro	Ogbia	12 <sup>TH</sup> Jan.	Annual	6,000	None
3	Oburumadi Annual Festival	Emayal	Ogbia	11-15Feb.	Annual	8,000	None
4	Oguberi Festival	Ndoro	Ekeremor	1 <sup>ST</sup> March	Annual	10,000	None
5	Akara Festival	Eyalllobiri	Ogbia	14 <sup>TH</sup> March	Annual	7,000	None
6	KolobiriOweiAwouBenimoi	Orua	Sagbama	14 <sup>TH</sup> March	Annual	8,000	None
7.	Ogboinbiri Oil Festival	Ogboinbiri	Southern Ijaw	15 <sup>TH</sup> March	Annual	20,000	None
8	AyalOdudulafa Aki	Odudu	Ogbia	18 <sup>TH</sup> March	Annual	0	NOne
9.	Opuadunu Lake Fishing Festival	Akede	Sagbama	18 <sup>TH</sup> March	Annual	50,000	None
10.	Ayakoro Annual Festival	Ayakoro	Ogbia	28 <sup>TH</sup> March	Annual	12,000	None
11.	OndeFiya	Opokuma	Kolokuma/Opokuma	30 <sup>TH</sup> March	Annual	40,000	15,000
12.	AfourusaOge Festival	Kabeama	Sagbama	18 <sup>TH</sup> April	Annual	20,000	None
13.	Opu-Okumbiri Fishing Festival	Akassa Kingdom	Brass	18 <sup>TH</sup> April	Annual	60,000	2,000
14.	Abobulu Fishing Festival	Angalabiri	Sagbama	27 <sup>TH</sup> April	Annual	30,000	None
15.	KaboweiSeigben	Adagbabiri	Sagbama	27 <sup>TH</sup> April	Annual	40,000	30
16.	Opume Annual Festival	Opume	Ogbia	29 <sup>TH</sup> April	Annual	50,000	50
17.	Lake Adigbe& Feasting Festival	Ossiama	Sagbama	1 <sup>ST</sup> May	Annual	70,000	None
18.	Levites Cultural Festival	Sabegreia	Sagbama	2 <sup>ND</sup> May	Annual	30,000	None
19.	Major Isaac Jasper Adaka-Boro Day	Kaiama	Kolokuma/Opokuma	16 <sup>TH</sup> May	Annual	600,000	5,000
20.	Seigben Fishing Festival	Odoni	Sagbama	23 <sup>RD</sup> to 29 <sup>TH</sup> May	Annual	30,000	100



21.	AmassomaSeigben	Amassoma	Southern Ijaw	30 <sup>TH</sup> May	Annual	800,000	200
22.	Okolode Festival	Ekpetiama	Yenegoa	5 <sup>TH</sup> June	Annual	1,000,000	300
23.	Azama Fishing Festival	Azama	Sagbma	20 <sup>TH</sup> June	Annual	6,000	None
24.	Amatolo Palm Tree Cultural Festival	Amatolo	Southern Ijaw	30 <sup>th</sup> June- 3 <sup>RD</sup> July	Annual	20,000	None
25.	Amaibimo Festival	Okumbiri	Sagbama	1- 7 <sup>th</sup> July	Annual	30,000	None
26.	EyalAsigho Festival	Okoroba	Ogbia	4 <sup>TH</sup> July	Annual	12,000	None
27.	EyalAsigho Festival	Epebu	Ogbia	4 <sup>TH</sup> July	Annual	8,000	None
28.	Opunun Annual Festival	Gbarain Clan	Yenegoa	12- 14 July	Annual	20,000	None
29.	Aya Buru-Fi Uge Festival	Atissa	Yenegoa	15 <sup>TH</sup> July	Annual	12,000	None
30.	UgeAdafia New Yam Festival	Atissa	Yenegoa	18 <sup>TH</sup> July	Annual	8,000	None
31.	Toreye-OgeDoubiri	Temekiri	Ekeremor	20- 23July	Annual	12,000	None
32.	Obuenein of Epie Clan	Epie Clan	Yenegoa	26 <sup>TH</sup> July	Annual	30,000	None
33.	Ogoriba-Uge Festival	Odi	Kolokuma/O pokuma	27 <sup>TH</sup> July	Annual	1,200,000	3,000
34.	Seigbein Fishing Festival	Sagbama	Sagbama	27 <sup>TH</sup> July	Annual	400,000	500
35.	EyalAwana Festival	Awana	Ogbia	10 <sup>TH</sup> Aug.	Annual	8,000	None
36.	Egbedi Liberation Festival	Egbedi	Kolokuma/ Opokuma	18 <sup>TH</sup> Aug	Annual	20,000	50
37.	Onyo Ama Okpuka Community Festival	Okoukpa	Ogbia	18– 21Aug	Annual	10,000	None
38.	Opuindi-bou Fishing and Feasting Festival	Apoi	Southern Ijaw	20 <sup>TH</sup> Aug	Annual	50,000	None
39.	October 1 <sup>st</sup> Festival	Ebedebiri	Sagbama	1 <sup>ST</sup> Oct	Annual	60,000	60
40.	Bau-Ama-Funu Festival	Biseni	Yenegoa	1– 4 <sup>th</sup> Oct	Annual	40,000	None
41.	Odemimom Festival	Otuoke	Ogbia	4 <sup>TH</sup> Oct	Annual	80,000	30
42.	Ogidow Festival	Igbomotoru	Sagbama	4 <sup>TH</sup> Oct	Annual	12,000	None
43.	Seibou-Pere Festival	Ebeni	Sagbama	17 <sup>TH</sup> Oct	Annual	30,000	None
44.	TungboEbe Festival	Tungbo	Sagbama	19 <sup>TH</sup> Oct	Annual	60,000	None
45.	Izu Festival	Agbobiri	Yenegoa	25 <sup>TH</sup> Oct	Annual	2,000	None
46.	Land of God Community Festival	Ekeremor	Ekeremor	15- 18Nov	Annual	50,000	None
47.	Feateidei-Uge Festival	Ayamasa	Ekeremor	18 <sup>TH</sup> Nov	Annual	40,000	None

48	Peremabiri Annual Festival	Peremabiri	Southern Ijaw	18 <sup>TH</sup> Nov	Annual	6,000	None
49	Eyal-Ipo Festival	Otuedu	Ogbia	20 <sup>TH</sup> Nov	Annual	4,000	None
50	Izogua Festival	Otuokpoti	Ogbia	27 <sup>TH</sup> Nov	Annual	12,000	None
51	Temekiri Zion Festival	Temekiri	Ekeremor	28-30 Dec	Annual	20,000	None
52	Amafini-Uge	Amazor	Ekeremor	3 - 9 Dec	Annual	12,000	None
53	Eyal-Okori-Ruru Festival	Elebele	Ogbia	11- 15Dec	Annual	12,000	None
54	Asi-Uge Festival	Ekeremor	Ekeremor	20 <sup>TH</sup> Dec	Annual	40,000	50
55	Ikperiyal-Uge Festival	Aghoro 1	Ekeremor	23 - 25 Dec	Annual	20,000	20
56	Foundation Day Community Festival	Zion 1	Ekeremor	26-30Dec	Annual	3,000	None
57	Amafini-Ugeang	Angalabiri	Sagbama	27 <sup>TH</sup> Dec	Annual	20,000	None
58	Lake Effi Fishing Festival	Sagbagreia	Kolokuma/Opokuma		Periodic	1,000,000	500
59	Ikago Masquarade	Nembe//Bassambiri	Nembe		Periodic	500,000	30
60	Amaseighan Festival	Alaibiri	Ekeremor		Periodic	700,000	70
61	Famgbe Beach carnival	Famgbe	Yenegoa		Periodic	400,000	30
62	Abadiyal Festival	Twon Brass	Brass		Periodic	23,000	37
63	Igboruma War Canoe Festival	Otuokpoti	Ogbia		Periodic	50,000	40
64	Idumangi Olali Festival of Deities	Okpoama	Brass		Periodic	1,000,000	70
65	Ancient War Canoe	Nembe	Nembe		Periodic	500,000	60
66	Awu-Uge Festival	Ayamasa	Ekeremor		Annual	30,000	None