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Ede-Aro Festival: *Celebrating the Cocoyam Harvest in Abagana*

By Chuka Odike

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FEATURE
IMAGE

Ede-Aro Festival: Celebrating the Cocoyam Harvest in Abagana - Photogrid by Author

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EDE-ARO FESTIVAL

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(@official_milasommy). original sound - Official_milasommy. Ede Aro Abagana In Anambra State.

The Ede-Aro festival is a vibrant annual cultural event celebrated by the people of Abagana in Njikoka Local Government Area of Anambra State, Nigeria. This unique festival, held during the cocoyam harvest season, honours the significance of cocoyam in the lives of the women of Abagana and underscores the community's rich cultural heritage. Traditionally held on the last Afor market day of December at the Afor market square, the festival is a colorful display of gratitude, unity, and spirituality.

01

The Cultural Significance of Cocoyam

In the Igbo society, farming is a deeply gendered activity. While the cultivation and celebration of yam are primarily reserved for men, the cultivation and harvesting of cocoyam are regarded as a woman's domain. This distinction has given rise to the Ede-Aro festival, where the women of Abagana honor the cocoyam as their agricultural symbol. The festival provides an opportunity for women to express gratitude to the Aroh deity for protection and guidance during the farming season. They bring their harvested cocoyams to the deity as an offering of thanks and celebration.



Ede-Aro Abagana 2015.

02

Rituals and Preparations

Preparations for the Ede-Aro festival begin with the chief priest of the Aroh deity, who performs sacrifices to ensure the protection of the community and his own ability to fulfill his spiritual duties. A notable prelude to the festival involves dangerous masquerades visiting the chief priest between midnight and 3:00 a.m. to seek divine permission for the festival to proceed.

During the two-day festival, the masquerades representing ancestral spirits perform both at the Aroh shrine and the Afor market square. These performances include a unique flogging contest, known locally as *Ipia Agba* “flog me, I flog you,” where masquerades engage in ceremonial whip fights. This contest attracts crowds from neighboring

towns and showcases the resilience, strength, and entertainment that mark the festival.



2020, Ede-Aro Abagana Festival

03

The Celebration

The Ede-Aro festival is not just a celebration of the cocoyam harvest but also a communal event that strengthens social bonds. Women take center stage, bringing their harvested crops to the deity as an expression of their happiness and gratitude. Alongside the offerings, the festival features vibrant cultural displays, music, dance, and masquerade performances that reflect the deep spiritual and cultural identity of the Abagana people.

The colourful nature of the festival and its emphasis on community participation make it a spectacle that draws attention beyond Abagana, with people from neighboring regions joining in the festivities.



Masquerade Festival: Ede - Aro

04

Ede-Aro: A Festival of Identity and Gratitude

The Ede-Aro festival is a testament to the Abagana people's commitment to preserving their cultural heritage. By celebrating the cocoyam, the women assert their role in agriculture and spirituality, balancing the gendered narratives of farming in Igbo tradition. The festival, rooted in communal appreciation and spiritual reverence, ensures that the legacy of Abagana's traditions is passed down through generations.

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Chuka Odiike

I'm a dedicated civil engineer with a passion for infrastructure development and community empowerment. With a strong background in engineering, my work focuses on creating sustainable solutions for urban and rural development projects. Outside of my professional career, I'm deeply interested in Igbo history and culture. I actively explores ways to impact society by using historical lessons to inspire and educate others about the rich cultural heritage of the Igbo people, aiming to bridge tradition and modern development.



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