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Igbo Etiti: *Preserving Culture and Agricultural Prosperity in the Heart of Enugu State*

By Chukwunwike Ossai

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IGBO ETITI

Igbo Etiti: Preserving Culture and Agricultural Prosperity in the Heart of Enugu State

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Igbo Etiti is a local government area (LGA) in Enugu State, rich in Igbo culture, fertile farming land, and a strong history. It is located in the northern part of Enugu and is an area where numerous Igbo communities come together, showcasing unity, pride, and a strong work ethic. Their history comes from stories, old findings, colonial records, and scholars who research their story. This article will show you Igbo Etiti, from where they started, how they participate in politics, the economy, and culture, and what they are like in Nigeria currently.

Igbo Etiti's history is rooted in how Igbo people came around to settle in southeastern Nigeria. The name "Igbo Etiti" means "Central Igbo," indicating that they are located in the centre of Igbo land, both in terms of geography and culture. Stories that the elders tell are that people from the Nri kingdom or nearby areas founded communities like Ogbede, Aku, Ukehe, and Ozalla around the 10th century. They settled in because the land is good for farming and trade.

They saw old pots, iron tools, and grave sites in Igbo Etiti, but the site had not been excavated as thoroughly as it had in Igbo-Ukwu. The stories passed down from generation to generation talk about the ancestors, how people moved in, and how gods like Ala (the earth goddess) and Ifejioku (the yam god) protect the land.

Before the arrival of the white people, igbo Etiti was like a small-small villages where they rule themselves. Elders, priests, and title men were in charge. Because they are in a middle location, they trade

well with people like the Igala, Idoma, and Nsukka. They sell things like food and iron tools. The Nri people had a significant influence on their culture. They don't really like fighting; they prefer peace and ritual power.

When the British people arrived in the late 1800s, they joined the Igbo Etiti into the Southern Nigeria Protectorate. Missionaries from CMS and the Catholic Church brought schools and churches, and this one changed many things. The palm oil and other food helped the colonial business.

During the Biafra War (1967-1970), Igbo Etiti was the strong base for the Biafran people. Despite the war scattering things, they still rose again after the war and became strong culturally and economically in Enugu.

Igbo Etiti follows the Igbo way of leadership, which does not have one boss. Each of the two communities has its traditional ruler (igwe or Eze) and chiefs (Ndichie), who help them settle issues and maintain their traditions.

On the government side, the elected chairman is leading the LGA in Enugu State. They are trying to build a road, a school, and help people. Igbo Etiti has produced big men and women that is leading in Enugu and Nigeria.

Age-grade system works properly, their group fix roads, security, and organize Festivals. Women's groups like Umuada and Inyom Igbo Etiti help solve problems, empower women, and keep the community strong.

When the British arrived, they brought warrant chiefs who disrupted the traditional way of life. The women got angry and joined the Aba women's Riot in 1929 to protest taxes and colonial issues. Now, the rulers work with the government to promote school, health, and culture.

Igbo Etiti's main work is farming. The land is fertile, so they plant a variety of crops, including yams, cassava, maize, rice, and palm trees. Yam has great cultural importance, and they celebrate the Yam festival (Iri Ji or Onwa Asaa) to thank Ifejioku. Places like Aku and Ogbede grow plenty of rice, which makes them popular.

The market aspect is still strong; markets like Eze Ozalla and Orie Aku are busy. People from Nsukka, Udi, and Igbo Eze come to buy and sell food, crafts, and other goods. During colonial times, palm oil and kernels from the Igbo Etiti region helped support the colonial trade.

Schools are already growing, and plenty of primary and secondary schools and technical colleges are available. The fact that they were close to the University of Nigeria, Nsukka, also helped students and teachers boost the economy. Health centres and clinics are also available, but for big hospitals, people still go to Nsukka or Enugu.

They create handicrafts such as pottery, weaving, and blacksmithing. Ukehe people are popularly known for pot making. Although modern life has reduced the need for crafts, people still create cultural items. Small businesses, such as soap making and food processing, help people survive.

But they still have issues, bad roads, no work, and young people move to town. Electricity problems affect the business too. State governments are trying to build roads and support farmers. The rice factories in Aku are a good example of the movement.

Igbo Etiti culture is a big part of their life. From festivals to music to old stories, they keep the Igbo tradition alive, although Christianity and modern life have had an impact on most aspects.

Yam festival (Onwa Asaa) is the biggest celebration. They thank their ancestors and Ifejioku for a fruitful harvest. There are rituals, then food and dance follow suit. The Omba festival still takes place in some areas, and masquerades perform, allowing people to celebrate both spirit and fun.

They have a strong music and dance culture, like Igba (drum music), Ogene (gong music), and Atilogwu (acrobat dance). Masquerades like Omba and Ijele carry spiritual meaning and entertainment.

Stories, proverbs, and songs from elders are the way they communicate history. Elders would speak about how people migrated, traded, and connected with the land. Scholars like A. E. Afigbo have written about this to help us understand Igbo beliefs and values.

They worship gods like Ala and Ifejioku. The dibia (traditional priest) performs rituals for blessings and peace on the farm. Although a lot of people are christians now, many still mix old beliefs with church, like Ikpu Ali (cleansing taboo) is still happening.

Pottery, weaving, and woodwork are among Igbo Etiti's talents. Mbari art, which uses clay and wood, was used in the past. But modernisation has reduced it. People are trying to bring it back through schools and cultural groups.

Igbo Etiti in the colonial and postcolonial Eras

The Colonial times changed so many things. The British centralised power and joined the Igbo Etiti to the southern protectorate. School and church trained people who later joined the fight for independence. Palm oil made them important in trading.

The Biafra War hit them hard, with hunger and displacement. But after the war, they rebuilt farms and culture through hard work and support.

In 1991, when Enugu State started, Igbo Etiti had more recognition. State projects, such as schools, clinics, and farming, helped. Although the infrastructure still needs work.

Igbo Etiti Today: challenges and opportunities

Today, Igbo Etiti is still rich in culture, yet it is also struggling. No

good road, no steady light, and work is not really available. Many youth are hasting to leave for Enugu and Lagos. Some traditional things, like Mbari, are fading gradually due to the influence of the church and global life.

But there is still hope. The farming land is fertile, and food like rice and yams is still growing. Marketers and schools can help drive economic growth. If they promote festivals like Ones Asaa and Omba very well, tourists can come in and bring money.

Schools and technical training help people learn a job. Although the university is still far, Nsukka is not too far. Health centres are available, and there are plans to upgrade them. Community groups, such as the Igbo Etití Development Union, are working to build roads, promote culture, and support youth with help from people outside the country.

People have started recording history, thanks to Igbopedia and local scholars. If Nigerian and international researchers join them, it would shed more light on the Igbo Etití story.

Igbo Etití is a strong example of how Igbo culture, farming, and unity can come together. From old times to now, their culture, festivals, and yam farming show that they have deep roots. Despite war and colonialism trying to shake them, they still stand their ground.

If they preserve their culture and use their land and people well, Igbo Etití could thrive. Agriculture, schools, and tourism can help build the place. As the Igbo proverbs say, “A person who has a strong root wouldn’t fall when breeze blow.” Igbo Etití has that kind of root, and it would still stand and shine in Nigeria’s future.

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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An enthusiast in tech with deep passion for studying and showcasing the vibrant cultural heritage of southern Nigeria . Combining my skill with my obsession towards African history and traditions to create contributions that impacts the digital space.



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