



Ozi Ikòrò

AFRICAN HISTORY · CULTURE · INDIGENOUS KNOWLEDGE

CULTURAL HERITAGE

The Traditional Salt-Making Heritage of Ebonyi State: *Celebrating the Women of Uburu and Okposi*

By Chukwunwike Ossai

Ozikoro.com · Cultural Heritage · 4 min read

FEATURE
IMAGE

NO FEATURED IMAGE IN THE RECORD

The article carries no featured image, so this panel is left as an honest empty space rather than filled with one.

Ozi Ikòrò

THE TRADITIONAL SALT-MAKING HERITAGE OF EBONYI STATE

The Traditional Salt-Making Heritage of Ebonyi State: Celebrating the Women of Uburu and Okposi

By Chukwunwike Ossai · Cultural Heritage · Ozikoro.com

Ebonyi State is proud to be the “salt of the Nation,” and they deserve it well. The state has the largest salt deposit, located in Uburu and Okposi. The salt lake was discovered before white men introduced machine salt production. The Ebonyi people, especially women, already knew how to turn saltwater into pure salt crystals using a traditional method passed down from generation to generation.



Mahiezi Salt Lake located at Okposi Ukwu

Before the salt factory came to Nigeria, Ebonyi women had been cooking salt. The traditional method involved boiling salty water in a large pot for six to ten hours, until it became concentrated and had a salty taste. After waiting, the salt will turn a little brown. It is then dried on a mat for about 2 to 4 hours before it's ready to eat.

Even though the work is tedious and the salt is scarce, it still helps many communities survive and become strong over time. In Ebonyi, salt work is not any ordinary business; it is sacred. Before they start every season, they have to perform ritual sacrifices to salt gods like Ezi Ngele, Mmahi Uburu, and Mmahi Okposi. After the ritual, the young men's elders choose to go and clear the lake, removing rainwater that had reduced the salt.

It is not every woman who can join the salt makers. Only married women who married an indigene can join, and they must first undergo initiation rites. The rite includes a special haircut (ogo nweri) and a

traditional dance to the salt lake. Women are not allowed to enter the lake during their menstrual period. The Uburu women have the correct traditional science for salt Production.

The women first have to secure their salt plot (onuebe), level the plot well, and then arrange large clay pots (ofufu) that are supported by stones and clay. There is always one bigger pot (onini) at the back to serve as extra salt water.

They will use a flat iron called an atakpe to scoop salty soil from the lake bed and fill the pot. They will leave it overnight to allow the soil and water to mix well. In the morning, they will open a small hole at the bottom of the pot (irofu eja) so that the salty water will drip into a small clay dish (nja ugbani).

They will gather plenty of salty water, take it home, and boil it in a big pot (eju). Today, they use a metal drum instead of the clay pot. As the water is boiling, the salt will begin to form and shape itself as it likes. They are the ones who produce better salt with the local method.

During the Nigerian Civil War (1967-1970), the Ebonyi salt lake served the people of Biafra. Since Biafra was blocked from buying anything outside, it was the salt from Ebonyi that helped them survive. Biafra scientists discovered that Okposi salt lake has the highest salt concentration of all Eastern Nigeria. They built a small salt factory near the lake and taught women a better method of making clean salt. That wartime made people see the importance of Ebonyi salt.

Ebonyi State is not just an ordinary state. They believe that it has medicinal power. Traditional healers use it to treat aches, goiter, and even help women during childbirth. During the Biafra war, they claimed that the salt helped cure Kwashiorkor (malnutrition) in children.

In the 19th and early 20th centuries, the Uburu salt market was booming. Travellers from different places came to buy salt. Salt business brought money, new friends, and even marriages into the

community.

Women sold salt, food, and drinks. Children will fetch water for visitors and help traders carry their goods, and they are paid a small amount of money. This exposure made the Uburu people know money and business faster than many surrounding villages. The interaction with traders brings friendship, marriage, and business that benefits everyone.

Uburu shows that intelligence and hard work are not just for men. The technology they built with their hands shows serious wisdom. It is their hustle that made Ebonyi State proud today as salt of the Nation.

- Onwuka, N. J., & Nwokocha, A. C. (2015). Traditional Salt Production and Economic Activities in Okposi and Uburu Communities of Ebonyi State, Nigeria. *Journal of African Studies and Development*, 7(8), 192-199.
- Eze, C. O. (2018). Cultural Practices and Economic Empowerment in Ebonyi State: The Case of Salt Production in Uburu. *African Journal of Cultural Studies*, 12(3), 45-60.
- Achebe, C., & Iroegbu, P. (2000). The Biafran War and the Igbo Economic Survival: Indigenous Technologies and Resource Mobilization. In *The Nigerian Civil War and Its Aftermath* (pp. 123-140). Enugu: Fourth Dimension Publishers.
- Okeke, E. C., & Uzokwe, N. (2012). Traditional Medicine and Healing Practices in South-Eastern Nigeria. *Journal of Ethnomedicine*, 8(2), 77-85.
- Ugwu, C. O. (1999). Pre-Colonial Trade and Markets in Igboland: The Case of Uburu Salt Market. *Nigerian Historical Review*, 5(1), 34-50.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Chukwunwike Ossai

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.



Ozi Ikòrò

History worth reading.

African history · culture · indigenous knowledge
