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Umueri:

The Ancestral Homeland Of Eri & The Children of Eri

By Kenechukwu Umeghalu

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FEATURE
IMAGE

**His Royal Majesty Igwe Sir Ben
Izuchukwu Emeka (Okebo ii of
Umueri) Credit:
[Notchnewsonline.com.ng](https://notchnewsonline.com.ng)**

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Chief Okoye Odili (Okoye Chief) of Adegbe Umueri. Photo: Akukoeri.wordpress.com

In the southeastern part of Nigeria lies a historic and culturally rich town called Umueri, also known as Umuleri. With an estimated population of over 1.5 million people, Umueri is home to proud, hardworking, and peaceful people who value their traditions, history, and unity.

01

Where Umueri Is Located

Umueri is situated in the Omambala Valley area of Anambra State. Several well-known towns border it:

NORTH	Anam communities and the Anambra River (Omambala River)
SOUTH	Nteje
EAST	Aguleri and Nando
WEST	Nsugbe

Because of its position near the Anambra River, the town has fertile soil, supporting farming and fishing, two major sources of livelihood for its people.

02

The People Of Umueri

According to oral tradition (stories passed down from generation to generation), the people of Umueri trace their ancestry to a great man named Eri. The name “Umueri” literally means “ Children of Eri.”

It is said that Eri and his descendants migrated to the Omambala Valley around 940 AD. Because of this deep history, Umueri is often referred to as the heart and origin of Igbo civilisation.

03

Development and Progress

Although Umueri is an ancient town, it continues to grow and modernise. A major turning point in recent history was the construction of the Anambra International Cargo Airport in 2021.

The airport has brought new business opportunities, created jobs, and opened the town to national and international trade. The people of Umueri view this project as a sign of progress and a way to connect their rich history with a bright future.

04

Clans and Leadership in Umueri

Traditionally, Umueri is made up of three main clans, each with smaller villages and sub-villages:

- Ezi Umueri – includes Nneyi Village and others
- Ikenga Umueri – includes Ugume, Umudiana, and Umunchezi
- Ivite Umueri – includes Umuatuolu, Ogbu, and Mgbede

In the past, Umueri practised a republican system of government, where decisions were made collectively by elders and leaders rather than a single ruler. Later, influence from the Bini Kingdom introduced a monarchical system, centralising leadership under a king (Eze).

Today, the community is guided by both traditional and modern leadership structures:

- Igwe-in-Council: The king and his cabinet
- Council of Elders (Ndichie): Elderly men who preserve customs and advise the king

- Umuotu: A respected age group that enforces community rules
- Town Union (Umueri General Assembly): The civic group representing all members of the community
- Policing and Sanitation Age Grades: Groups responsible for maintaining peace, law, and cleanliness

Prominent leaders include HRM Igwe Sir Ben Izuchukwu Emeka (Igwe Umueri Okebo II) and Ambassador John Metchie, who serve as symbols of unity and development in the community.

05

Religion and Belief System

Before the arrival of European missionaries, the people of Umueri practised traditional African religion, worshipping deities and ancestral spirits who were believed to protect the land and its people.

With the spread of Christianity in the early 1900s, many people converted. Today, about half of Umueri's population is Christian, primarily Catholics and Anglicans.

One of the oldest churches in the town is St. Immanuel Anglican Church, established in 1904, which continues to serve as a major place of worship and a site of historical significance.

06

Festivals and Cultural Celebrations

Culture is at the heart of Umueri life. Two major festivals are celebrated annually:

- The Ofala Festival – A royal festival performed by the king (Igwe). It is a time for thanksgiving, celebration, and renewal of strength.
- The New Yam Festival (Iri Ji) – This festival marks the beginning of the harvest season. It is led by community leaders such as the Onowu, Ajie, and Igwe and celebrates hard work, gratitude, and the blessings of the land.

During these festivals, the town comes alive with music, dance, colourful attire, and traditional performances, showcasing the beauty of Igbo heritage.



Umueri New Yam Festival 2024. Credit: Iwitness.ng

07

Why Umueri Matters

Umueri is more than just a town; it is a living symbol of Igbo history and identity. It represents the roots of a people who have preserved

their traditions, values, and unity despite modern challenges.

From being the first Igbo settlement in the Omambala Valley to hosting the Anambra International Cargo Airport, Umueri stands as a bridge between the past and the future, where tradition meets progress.

08

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