

**COMMUNICATION FUNCTIONS OF TRADITIONAL MUSICAL  
INSTRUMENTS OF SELECT CULTURAL FESTIVALS IN IKOT EKPENE  
SENATORIAL DISTRICT: THE MUSICAL AND EXTRA-MUSICAL  
FUNCTIONS**

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**ABSTRACT**

*The study sought to find out the musical and extra-musical functions of traditional musical instruments of select cultural festivals in Ikot Ekpene senatorial district. Two specific objective and two research questions were created to guide the study. The technique used for the study is the public opinion survey method. The population size is 21 respondents which covers the selected adults from the various traditional institutions covering the select seven clans of Ikot Ekpene Senatorial District. The research instrument used for this study was personal interview. Reliability was achieved by testing the instrument on subjects who were not part of the sample of the study. The study was able to ascertain the musical and extra-musical functions of traditional musical instruments of select cultural festivals in Ikot ekpene senatorial district. It was concluded from the study that traditional musical instruments are seen as the vehicle the common people employ for the delivery of their messages. One of the recommendations made in the study include that Local craftsmen, scientist and technologists should show enough creativity and inventiveness to develop better ways of utilizing traditional musical instruments that could be indigenous to Africa.*

**KEYWORD: Traditional Musical Instrument, Cultural Festival.**

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## INTRODUCTION

From the foregoing, it could be said that communication is life. One needs it to find his way through an uncertain society replete with chaos. Hence, the role of communication in any society cannot be overemphasized. It is the most important single feature of the environment within the individual conducts his life.

Monaghan and Saul, (1987), confirms this when he says: "if we had no communication of information to us, our lives will be static, there would be no growth, no transformation. We would not be enlightened; we would live in total ignorance..." The social functions of communication in the society include; information, socialization, education, entertainment, integration, cultural promotion, debate and discussion, mobilization and motivation. However, communication is as old as man. There exists no culture without its own traditional and cultural means of communication. Okunna (2002) says: "Before the introduction of mass media in Africa, there existed other channels of communication that enabled our forefathers to interact and maintain a stable system of living. Information from traditional leaders were passed freely to the members of the community".

In support to Okunna's view, Udo (2012), in an unpublished seminar paper that:

*Even before the advent of modern media, there existed modes of sharing meanings traditionally by our ancestors, which put the society on a stable and orderly form with checks against bad doings. However, today, in most of our rural societies, information and ideas are still shared traditionally even with the presence of the modern media.*

In consideration of the above assertions, one could certainly opine that, traditional musical instruments are culturally selective depending on which instruments are pleasing to a culture. With salient exchange of meanings derivable from the different instrumental modes of communication.

It is recognition of the musical and extra-musical (special) communication functions of traditional musical instruments of select cultural festivals in Ikot Ekpene Senatorial District that our forbearers developed various cultural musical instruments to serve different functions and for meaningful development and progress in the society. These communication functions could as well take forms of abstraction and applied. By abstraction, the functions are abridged and calls for concentration and note-taking since dancers during cultural festivals usually make rhythmic movements as a form of social interaction as these instruments are struck, beaten, shaken, pricked, or plucked by hands or by the use of sticks. While in applied, the functions are specific, based on the mood of sound of these instruments since the sound or messages committed could be understood simultaneously by the performers and dancers.

## **STATEMENT OF PROBLEM**

Traditional musical instruments used in various cultural festival abound in Ikot Ekpene Senatorial District. These instruments which serve as the bond for involvement and link for interaction among the rural dwellers have various functions and are commonly displayed or used at such cultural festivals with relish. However, the functions they perform during such cultural festivals have been hardly investigated. Thus, the question motivating this study is: which musical and extra-musical (special) functions have these instruments perform in the various cultural festivals which abound in Ikot Ekpene Senatorial District.

## **OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY**

- To ascertain the traditional musical instruments used in select cultural festivals in Ikot Ekpene Senatorial District.
- To ascertain the musical and extra-musical (special) functions derived from the use of these instrument in select cultural festivals in Ikot Ekpene Senatorial District.

## **RESEARCH QUESTIONS**

- What are the traditional musical instruments used in select cultural festivals in Ikot Ekpene Senatorial District?
- What are the musical and extra-musical (special) functions derived from the use of these instrument in select cultural festivals in Ikot Ekpene senatorial district?

## CONCEPT OF TRADITIONAL MUSICAL INSTRUMENTS

Traditional musical instruments as traditional media are endogenous multi-channel communication developed, employed or used by traditional societies for interaction with one another or used by local people for information, education, mobilization and entertainment (Anaeto 2010). These instruments are made from local raw materials such as wood of local trees, hides and skins, gut, gourds, bamboo, bush ropes, animal's horns, clay and stone, iron, etc. they comprise a wide range of wind, string and percussion instruments played by performers and dancers during cultural festivals (Okafor 2005).

Traditional musical instruments are seen as the vehicle the common people employ for the delivery of their messages. They serve as credible and reliable channels of news and information gathering, processing and disseminating in many rural communities. They often address local interest and concern through music, signals, song and dance, and use cultural contexts which the community members can easily understand and identify with.

Traditional music according to Okafor (2005), has it that, "Traditional music is the most widely used medium of expression of all manners and occasions and at all times and periods of life". Therefore, traditional societies manipulate it to give voice and sounds to the collective thoughts, actions and even spiritually. In this way, while the people make use of the music, the music makes use of them for it places on them that imprint on character, mien, thoughts and carriage, which are commonly summarized as identity.

Although performers may not be consciously aware of it, traditional music is a medium for the carriage of many aspects of the local environment-social pilgrimage, mystic wandering, works worship and recreation, daily movement habits and patterns of cultural expressions. These instruments are in daily use for rituals, chances, recreate and ceremonial dances and for social and vocational accompaniment.

In traditional societies, with its emphasis on community experience and involvement, music has remained an essential media for sharing and communicating social norms, goals, values, aspirations and behavior.

## CLASSIFICATION OF TRADITIONAL MUSICAL INSTRUMENTS

The meaning intended in a musical performance constitutes one of the bases for understanding the concept of music in traditional societies. It also underscores the communication functions of traditional musical instruments. Thus, the organization and selection of traditional musical instruments to convey or communicate the intended messages and meaning becomes very essential of select cultural festivals in Ikot Ekpene Senatorial District as not all these instruments available communicate messages during cultural festivals in the area.

Select and Horbostel (1933) as cited by Okafor (2005), classified African musical instruments into four depending mainly on the cause of sound generation. Those, which generate sound because of the agitation or vibration of a column of air in them, are known as aerophones. Some musical instruments do not generate through compression or rarefaction of air but themselves vibrate to produce sound of activation, these are known as idiophones. A third classification produces sound from the vibration of agitated chords or strings and is referred to as chordophones, while musical instruments which produce sounds because of vibration or agitation of skin or membranes fall into the fourth group called membranophones. These four classifications are presented severally or in combination, but some other important considerations like context or manner of execution play in giving meaningful, local classification.

- **Idiophones:** These are instrument whose bodies vibrate in order to produce sound. They depend on the agitation of their bodies to sound when beaten, pricked, struck, shaken or plucked by hand or by the use of sticks. They produce sound without the use of an intermediary medium and the sound emanates from their surface. They include instruments such as large metal gong (nkwong), twin gong (akangang), log xylophone (ikon eto), basket rattle (ekpoud), bead rattle (nsak), small woodblock (nkrok), clay pot (abang), wooden slit drum (abodom), big wooden drum (aworong), small wooden drum (akporok), ankle rattle (nsak itong ukod), waist let (mbaji), and bell (nkanika).
- **Aerophones:** These are instruments which produce sound as a result of the vibration of a column of air in them to sound. The sounds produced may be messages as well as signals. These include instruments of the flute family, made from materials with a natural bore, such as bamboo or the tip of a horn or gourd. Alternatively, they may be carved out of wood. Flutes may be open-ended or stopped, and may be designed for playing in vertical or transverse position. There are horns and trumpets, which are made of animal horns and elephant tusks. Some trumpets are also made of gourd or bamboo. Therefore, acrophonies instruments are elephant tusk or ivory horn Cultural festivals are common to all human societies and

culture. They are the only means apart from worship therein man has sought from time immemorial to express his awareness of transcendent being himself. Traditional communities with reference to the instrumental modes of communication formed, and still form a significant part of existence of the people of Ikot Ekpene Senatorial District, and they are proud and appreciative of the various traditional musical instruments used in select cultural festivals in the area. Any person from Ikot Ekpene Senatorial District who could not produce or at least participate in traditional music during select cultural festivals is seen and described as a social misfit.

In other words, all spheres of human endeavours be they political, social, economic, religious, moral, private and public aspects of human life and traditional music is used for pleasure, direction, stimulation, instruction, confirmation, approval and rejection of purpose (Ammor and Udoh 2008). Wilson (1997) states thus:

*Traditional forms of communication have some practical Problems, which may require time to overcome, some of these Problems include their technological deficiencies, some of these hard wares are transient and are not easily preserved. Secondly, the fast pace of modern communication development makes it imperative that the system move faster than before.*

Perhaps, it is because of the foregoing that most people believe that the traditional media should be replaced totally by modern media, which include the press, radio, television, cinema and others. Yet, the belief cannot be maintained. For Escarp-it (1968) in an unpublished research work contend; no newly introduced mode of communication or combination of new modes can wholly replace or supplant the traditional ones. The fact remains that they supplement the old ones or replace them or some of their functions, but never all of their functions.

In the light of this understanding therefore, one can however believe that the traditional system or mode of communication has lofty and very viable prospect irrespective of the threatening and irresistible challenges or encouragement of modern media in attempting to devalue the indigenous treasure of these traditions and culture.

Even though the traditional communication system sometimes come into relative conflicts with intruding or perhaps Western socio-economic, cultural and political system, which in most cases require the use of Western oriented media, the traditional communicative systems still service the communication requirements and needs of the people especially during select cultural festivals in Ikot Ekpene senatorial District. Despite the influence of Western culture, traditional musical instrument had, has and will still have its positive influence on the people of Ikot Ekpene Senatorial District during select cultural festivals for the betterment of their lives and significant part of their existence.

## CULTURAL FESTIVALS IN IKOT EKPENE SENATORIAL DISTRICT

Cultural festivals are event or communal of unique aspects of a community and traditional transition. Cultural festival helps to determine the well-being of African traditional societies socially and morally because of the people's strong adherence to the lives of other people.

The people of ikot Ekpene Senatorial District are very ceremonial in their way of life. Cultural festivals in this area include; new yam festival (usoro usuuk edia) new water yam festival (usoro ussuk abi-de), new melon festival (usoro ukpeke ikom), new corn festival (ekoon ndad akpakpa) abi-de dance, ekpo masquerades.

At these festivals, many sons and daughters of Ikot Ekpene Senatorial District are dressed in traditional outfit and gather at various market squares with different types of cultural musical instruments, cultural dances and songs.

According to a traditionalist, Atuekong (Akuku) Michael Willie Essien of Uruk Uso Village in Ikot Ekpene L.G.A., the Akada II of Ikpaisong Annang; he said that these festivals are celebrated first in Annang land by the people of Essien Udim LGA with Ikpe Annang clan leading in the new melon festival and new corn festival and Ukana clan leading in the new yam festival and Afaha Obong Clan in Abak Local Government Area leading in new wateryam festival.

These food crops cultural festivals commence between the months of July to November with the chief priest putting everything in proper place before the festival starts. The Chief Priest of Annang land who monitors and organizes everything to be done during these festivals is Akuku Ekarika, Obong Ikpaisong Annang and hails from Ukana Clan, Essien Udim Local Government Area.

These cultural festivals begin with what is call "efud ndobo" in Annang land. By this, Akuku Ekarika tours round the entire village squares pouring libation "edouk ibodo", uttering some prayers to the gods of harvest for the bountiful harvest of that year. A woman who is a member of "iban ikpaisong" carries on her head a carved wooden idol constructed having the resemblance of a baby with a large head. People who are not members of "ekong ikpa isong" and akuku's do not see "ndobo", only their members see it because they know its significance.

The main location for these festivals is "Obo Annang market". The ceremony normally kicks off at noon and it is Akuku Akpan Ekarika that presides over the occasion. The highlights of rituals of these festivals are the roasting of yam and killing of local breed hens like "nsidisa unen" and "ata afia unen" at the market square. Then the eating of the roasted "eteme" yam, roasted hens by all the Akuku and Abieowo present at the festival after pouring of libation "edouk ibodo".

All the Akuku and Abie owo do not eat the newly harvested yams, wateryam, corn and melon. After the pouring of libation by the presiding Akuku, chanting of incantation before consulting the spirit gods in shrines during sacrifice and prayers offered by him with other Akuku's



and Abie owo to the departed fathers (ancestors) for them, their successor to be in best state of health to witness the coming year of these festivals. A week later, the newly harvested yam, wateryam, corn and melon are brought to the market for buying and selling.

### ➤ **MUSICAL AND EXTRA-MUSICAL (SPECIAL) FUNCTIONS OF TRADITIONAL MUSICAL INSTRUMENTS**

#### • **Musical Functions of Traditional Musical Instruments:**

Traditional musical instruments feature in dances, instruments ensembles and in spirit manifest displays. They also play accompaniments to some vocal music. Some instruments play a double role depending on the social context. However, the four major functions of traditional musical instruments according to Okafor (2005) are:

- ❖ **Melodic instruments:** slit drums, flutes, horns, log, xylophones and musical bow. The flautist praises people and excites spirit-manifests and dancers.
- ❖ **Timing instruments:** some instruments keep time and play ostinato during performances. Examples clay pot (Abang).
- ❖ **Melo-rhythmic instruments:** there are also instruments that are melody-borne and play rhythms. Examples are log xylophones; sit drums, horns and flutes as well as talking drums. They play melodic and improvisatory roles. The clapper less bell play rhythm of dances gives cues and warns dancers to stop. The vertical flute gives directives to dancers. The drummers also dictate the rhythm of dance. Skin drums enhance balance in sound during performances.
- ❖ **Rhythm instruments:** A great variety of traditional musical instruments are rhythmic, that is, they play accompaniments. Examples are wooden clappers, clapper less bell, beaded, gourd (uta), and tortoise shell (mkpok ikud).



➤ **EXTRA-MUSICAL (SPECIAL) FUNCTIONS OF TRADITIONAL MUSICAL INSTRUMENTS**

It is not always that traditional musical instruments produce its sounds as music. As material objects, they perform extra-musical (special) communication functions.

Okarfor (2005) and Udoh (2009) wrote on the extra-musical (special) functions of some traditional musical instrument according to their classification as follows:

• **Idiophones**

- ❖ **Metal gong:** The metals are of three types, namely: large metal gong (Nkwong) and twin gong (Akangkang) and ritual gong (Ekere). They have original magical powers or divine properties. They are supposed to aid seers communicate with the spirit world.
- ❖ **Woodblock (Nkrok):** it is used to pass on message to people. The sound does not necessarily serve as the message itself, but it alerts the people of the information to be passed on to them. This is basically done by special personnel called "Akpoko Nkrok" (town crier) who goes round the entire community especially very early in morning and also by evenings.
- ❖ **Giant Wooden Slit Drum (Eka Obodom):** It is basically used by village authority to give the people first-hand information when used as a communication instrument. Its tones also depend on the note which goes with significance. It is a symbol of the community. It is mainly used for tonal telegraphy and imitations of local speech patterns, which encode and transmit information across forests, hills, waters and vast distances, and sometimes termed. "Talking drums". It is half musical instrument and half a religious object. It equally has some designs and carvings on it which tell some history.
- ❖ **Bell and Rattles (Nkanika Nde Ekpoud):** They serve as warning instruments especially when used by the ekpo cult and in appeasing the fods of their forefathers (ancestors). In community gathering, it serves purposes like controlling of noise. Rattles (ekpuod) is used by "abieowo", "ekong ikpaisong" group members to communicate with both the living and the dead in their remembrance. It communicates certain ideas to their newly initiates. Some types of rattles (nsak) hung on maize are blown by the wind" to scare bird



that eat maize. Some are hung on the necks of hunting dogs to scare animals out or flush them from cover during hunts. Some other rattles are used to stimulate babies and encourage them to walk and used their right hand by tying the rattles on their right hands.

- ❖ **Small Wooden Slit Drum (Etok Abodom):** it is used in summoning people to a meeting, calling out villagers for communal work or announcing an emergency for impending danger, and for proclaiming various announcements. Drums are traditionally used for sending signals or messages in traditional societies. A "signal" is a pre-arranged code of drum beats, but a "message" is a complicated series of beats played on drums which imitate the tone of the local language.

- **Aerophones**

- ❖ **Flutes (Aduk):** it is always used in assemblies of men, especially when a big piece of work is in progress. The tones are shrill and piercing. It is supposed to instill energy into the laborers and help them forget the burden of their task and they therefore, work much better when inspired by its sound. Its sound is dependent upon the force which denotes messages known only by the members. It is used to alert the people of celebration especially new yam, new water-yam, new corn and new melon festivals in Ikot Ekpene Senatorial District.]
- ❖ **Tortoise shell (Mpok Ikud):** Due to the place of tortoise in African folklore, the tortoise shell has become part of the paraphernalia for divination and music of diviners and healers. It is regarded as having magical powers or divine properties. It is supposed to aid seers communicate with the spirit world.
- ❖ **Horns (aduk) or Elephant tusk (aduk-enin):** It is regarded affectionately as the royal trumpet, and is a major feature at royal events. Examples, cultural festivals or end of the year feast. "Itai Afe Annang" Ekwede or "Akada" Annang in Annang land, "Oku Ibom Ibibio" in Ibibio, Emir, Oba or Igwe in the North, West and East respectively, also dictating the actions of masquerades during public ceremonies.

- **Membranophones**

- ❖ **Grand Talking Drum (anaam-ekpo or ntin-obon):** It is used by masquerade group (ekpo cult) and they understand the messages they represent. It is normally stationed at the compound of a reputable traditional ruler. At the sounding of "anaam-ekpo" or "ntin-obon" in the community means that everybody must converge instantly, knowing that there was a serious matter or an important event to be addressed by the traditional ruler himself. Nobody dared disobey or delay to respond to the clarion call. Traditional musical instruments are also kept in museums and homes ahistorical records and as part of house furniture respectively. From the foregoing, it could be seen that during select cultural festivals in Ikot Ekpene Senatorial District, traditional musical instruments perform musical and extra-musical (special) communication functions without them, the entire exercise becomes a sham.

## **METHODOLOGY**

The technique used for the study is the public opinion survey method. The population size is 21 respondents which covers the selected adults from the various traditional institutions covering the select seven clans of Ikot Ekpene Senatorial District. The research instrument used for this study was personal interview. Reliability was achieved by testing the instrument on subjects who were not part of the sample of the study.

## **RESEARCH QUESTION 1**

### **What are the traditional musical instruments used in the select cultural festivals in Ikot Ekpene Senatorial District?**

Traditional musical instruments used in communicating messages in select cultural festivals in Ikot Ekpene Senatorial District include: small woodblock(nkrok), wooden slit drum (abodom), clay pot (abang), large metal gong (nkwong), twin gong (akangkang), talking drum (anaam-ekpo or ntin-abon), elephant tusk or ivory horn (aduk-enin), log xylophone (ikon eto),ritual gong (ekere), basket rattle (ekpuod), bead rattle (nsak), big wooden drum(aworong), small wooden drum (akporok), waistlet (mbajo), bell (nkanika), and whistles (ufiom), flute (aduk), and gourd (uta). This was revealed in the interview with (Akuku) Michael Willie Essien of Uruk Uso villiage, Atai Essien Clan and Adede Uko Akpan Ekpo who are custodian of customs and traditions of the people's culture and ine of the cultural groups that perform during these cultural festivals in Ikot Ekpene Senatorial Districts.

## RESEARCH QUESTION 2

### **What are the musical and extra-musical (special) functions derived from the use of these instruments?**

The various musical functions of these traditional musical instruments vary thus; they are melodic instrument. The flautist praises people and excites spirit-manifests and dancers, they are timing instruments and keep time and play ostinato during performance. They are melo-rhythmic instruments, that is, they are melody borne and play rhythms, melodic and improvisatory roles, they play the rhythm of dances, give cues and warn dancers to stop, they equally enhance balance in sound during performances.

The extra-musical (special) functions of these traditional musical instruments are: Each sound of the drums used by the villages authority may either give the people first-hand information and to alert them on information to be passed on, or an emergency meeting or report danger. Gong of different types and rattles have magical powers and divine property. They aid seer communicate between the living and the dead or between the living and the Supernatural or Supreme being in the spirit world though incantation, chant, ritual, prayer, sacrifice, libation, vision, and contemplation. Tuck and flute are used by traditional rulers to communicate important event like culture festivals, heralding chieftaincy trains, dictating the actions of masquerades during public ceremonies as confirmed in the interview segment with the Clan Head of Ikpe (Akuku) Pius Effiong Eside, the "Ita Afe Annang".

These findings corroborate with a study by Akuku, (2008) that traditional system is credible and authoritative and also disseminate development messages to the rural dwellers.

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## CONCLUSION

The study was able to ascertain the musical and extra-musical functions of traditional musical instruments of select cultural festivals in Ikot Ekpene senatorial district. It was concluded from the study that traditional musical instruments are seen as the vehicle the common people employ for the delivery of their messages. They serve as credible and reliable channels of news and information gathering, processing and disseminating in many rural communities. Also noted in the study that traditional musical instruments feature in dances, instruments ensembles and in spirit manifest displays. They also play accompaniments to some vocal music. Some instruments play a double role depending on the social context which is seen as the musical functions of the traditional instrument. Some extra musical (special) function from the study includes the rattle which is a musical instrument used to motivated babies to walk, the metal gong with have a special function of communicating with the spirit world and another which is the giant wooden slit drum (eka Obodom) which has many carvings on it used to tell historical facts of the community.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

- Local craftsmen, scientist and technologists should show enough creativity and inventiveness to develop better ways of utilizing traditional musical instruments that could be indigenous to Africa.
- As the people people's culture and traditional, the skills and knowledge of these instruments should be transmitted from one generation to another as a natural legacy.

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