

Reimagine the Ikoro Wooden Slit Drum of Umunze: A Sculpture Installation, Tourist Attraction, A Pride of The Nigerian Nation

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Abstract

The study focused on the Ikoro Obibie-Aku wooden drum of Umunze, Igbo, West Africa, Nigeria. The Ikoro wooden drums are found throughout the Igbo region and is notable because when its sound is heard, people gather at the village square. It is assumed that one of the following has occurred: a person has been murdered, land has been defiled, there is an outbreak of war, or a calamity has befallen the community, among others. However, the emphasis was placed on dilapidation and decay, with advocates arguing that the Ikoro piece should be housed in a museum for posterity, showcasing its forms and functions within the context of Igbo cultural philosophy. There is also evidence that overzealous fanatics have destroyed some of the ikoro pieces. Data was gathered through an exploratory conceptual study (a document-based qualitative study approach), relevant primary and secondary sources, electronic media, and other sources. The paper suggests

that the Ikoro wooden drum, if properly preserved in a museum as a community-side attraction and a tourist center, can generate revenue for the community and the country at large.

Keywords: Ikoro, Sculpture, Wooden Drum, Umunze, Tourist Attraction, Revenue Generation

Introduction

People come together to agree on certain ideologies and principles, believing that these ideologies and principles hold and bind them together. This guides them in whatever they are engaged in within the existing environment, as observed in their daily activities. As a guiding rule, this group of people, whose shared beliefs and practices identify the place and class to which they belong through this enlightenment and sophistication, which is the tangible art form they have acquired through encounter, education, and experience of that existing tangible unifying form of culture, evident in the Ikoro wooden slit-sculpture drum. The Ikoro is as old as the Igbo in West Africa, Nigeria. History has it that the giant ikoro wooden sculpture drum of Umunze was made from a single Oji (Iroko) tree and is beaten by males with sticks or by hand for music or to send messages. An Ikoro is a musical instrument created and used by the Igbo people of Nigeria, from where it traces its origin. It is a slit drum beaten with a stick or sticks and, in some parts of Igbo land, used for communication, similar to a talking drum. ikoro in Igbo land is not beaten by everybody. It is so special that whenever its sound is heard, people gather at the village square. It is occasionally played with great effort using fists. Architecture, music, dancing, theater, sculpture, painting, politics, war, religion, and nature are all part of the Ikoro experience. The deity selects the tree, which is then chopped down and carved. The Ikoro is played during festivals, wars, and other significant occasions, including emergencies. It spreads messages throughout the communities. As soon as it sounds, people assume that any of the following has happened: murder, the land has been defiled, there is an outbreak of war, or a calamity has befallen the community, etc. The inevitable thing that happens whenever the ikoro sound is heard is that people must gather at the village square to hear the latest development. Ikoro also brings a sense of urgency. Ikoro is enormous in size, cannot be carried by one person, and is never carried from place to place. Ikoro is kept in a fixed place, usually at the village square. The only difference between Ikoro and Ekwe is the size. Ekwe is small in size and portable. Ekwe is an ordinary musical instrument and is used to play many types of traditional music (Basden, 1921; Onuora, 2016; and Onyeakagbu, 2018). The Ikoro wooden drum of Umunze cannot be carried by one person and is always mounted at a given spot, meaning it is site-specific because of its monumental size. This research advocates, to further preserve the ikoro, that it would be possible to house the ikoro Obibie-Aku in a museum, mounted at Nkwo Umunze, Ndipka village.

History of Umunze

According to oral tradition recorded by Maduagwu (2013), Umunze is the largest community among all others in the old Aguata Local Government Area, comprising Aguata, Orumba North, and Orumba South Local Government Areas. This is also corroborated by the 1963 census figure. It is situated at the southernmost part of the old Aguata Local Government Headquarters, and, except for Ihite town, could have formed the boundary town with Arondizogu and Ibinta, both in Imo State. Umunze is also surrounded by a network of the Aghomiri, Unyo, and Imo rivers. There are also other rivulets like Ozii and Ohia mmiri. Around 300 A.D., a man called Nze and some of his brothers, Iwhube, Duru, Amuro, Awa, Ezekwele, and Uga, left their father's abode at Agulu-Awka with the principal objective of finding an independent dwelling for them and their descendants. Before then, their father had migrated to Agulu-Awka from Nri and discovered that Agulu had a very strongly consolidated settlement there, having been helped by providence through the ancestral spirit of his forefathers. It happened that the founder of Agulu town was said to be a close brother of the father of the Nze at Nri, from where the father of Agulu came. Because of his close affinity with the founder of Agulu, Nze and his brothers sojourned there for some years without having any issue. Nze's first sojourn was to Uduma-Ohahia in Abia State, where he married his second wife, Lolo. He and his wife and other relations, including Inyimogu, left Ohahia to live near Umuahia. They were about fifteen in number. From Umuahia, they sojourned with their brother, Iwhube, near Okigwe. This was about 1330 AD. About 1332 AD, Nze and his team left Iwhube near Okigwe to cross the Imo River to live with Umuduru, their relation. At Umuduru, they established an earthenware vessel called 'Oku Umunne', a fraternal vessel manifesting the cordial relationship of the Umunne-Assa (seven brothers) at Abo-Ohia- Umu-Duru at Obi Elemanya. From Umuduru, they moved to the northeastern side to reach the present site of Mbara-Izo near a giant Akpu tree called 'Akpu mgbatiri okpa', where the present Eke Izo at Umuizo is located in Umumze. Since the place was fertile ground and there were plenty of animals for game, there was no need for him to continue journeying in search of green pasture.

Nwachukwu (2024) is of different opinion. According to him, "there is an erroneous belief that Nze came from Ohahia because it was said that he had spent a little time at Ndi-Uduma, Ohahia, Abia State". This is not true; the fact is that Nze is a native of Nri in Anambra State, situated in Nigeria.

Nze gave birth to seven children, hence Umu Nze, meaning the children of Nze. This is also why Umunze is referred to as Umunze Asa, Amalasa. Umulasa. The most senior among the children of Nze is: 1. Nsogwu, also known as Omogor, 2. Ugwu (Ugwulano), also known as Ojingba, 3. Lomu, also known as Uroagu, 4. Ubaha, also known as Ishingwu, 5. Ururo, also known as Chekeigbo, 6. Ozara, also known as Okpontu, 7. Amuda, also known as Diala. Also, for the record, it was said that Nze married more wives, one of the wives (the first wife) gave birth to a male child called Dara, and he became the first child of Nze. After the death of Nze, Dara had to chart his own course because he was oppressed and outnumbered by his other half-brothers. He is the present

Eziagu town. At his early settling, he was protected by Logu town, which offered him a place of abode within their territory.

It is a culture for one who is wealthy to have servants around him or her to help out in taking care of some responsibilities in the house. Nze employed servants to help out in taking care of his home chores. According to history, Nze had other servants that served him in his palace; they were called Umu Izo, meaning children of Izo. Izo is the father of Nze; he named the stream after his father, Mmiri Izo. Their responsibility was to help look after the Mmiri Izo shrine. There is a market named after Izo, which is called Ekeizo. Maduagwu (2013:141) recounts, “Nze decided to deify his father Izo in mud sculpture (clay), he created a massive statue in crude art and sought his guidance and protection every morning. Kneeling before the statue...he besought the beloved father to protect him against all sorts of misfortune in his expeditions”. This act could also be seen as sympathetic magic. Nze later passed on and was buried beside his father’s statue at Umuizo, see fig. I, statue of Nze, wives and servants. It was also recorded that there are other deities found within the Umunze community, like; Iyele, Ahoudo, and Obibiaku, which have Nkwo Obibi-Aku attached to the market where the biggest ikoro is situated. Ohadu, Ogbudibia, Ighionwu Ozara, Ajalaegbo, Udu of Ubaha, and Ogbuokwe of Amuda village.

To date, Mbara Izo is a place where the seven children of Nze (seven villages) gather for general meetings, and important functions are also held to celebrate occasions and commemorate events for the Umunze communities. Ibezimako descended from Ugwu (Ugwulano), the second son of Nze. Ugwu village is the most densely populated village of the town in Umunze. She is estimated to be about one-half of the total population of the entire Umunze. This is because the ancestor, Ugwu, was offered a location closest to the home habitat of Agba and Logu. She was very eager to raise a huge population very loyal to her to counter future problems from the enemy. It was said that Ugwu married into almost all the major kindred families of Agba and Logu, as well as Ezira, the neighboring community; she also married from Ohahia, the home of Nze's second wife. All these were in order to add to her population and form allies in times of war. Within a short period, her population grew, which could compete with any other community. Her number could be compared with Agba and Logu put together. She was also very receptive to strangers who were so freely granted living places in her midst. (This explains the interrelationship with the hyena), She was all the time desirous to own exclusively, the rich alluvial soil of Aputu from Agba and Logu. In the long run, Aputu and other environs became hers.

The kindred families are as follows: -

1. Ochenchieoma, which stood for Obibie-Aku, claimed the position of father in the village. She was from the beginning honoured with Nhu in all shares in the village. This is where the famous biggest Ikoro is housed.
2. Umuezeanakwere, which stood for the shrine of Okparanozie, was the first son and took the first share.

3. Ndikpa and Ndiabo, two brothers of one family, took the next share for the Ohadu shrine, which they represented.

4. Ugwuagbada represented the Ezewulite shrine

5. Ugwuikpa represented Ajalla Nwururu, while

6. Amabo also represented the shrine of Ibemedo

The village directly and indirectly succeeded in winning the rich Aputu as the sole property of Obibie-Aku. This is partly due to the combined efforts of Agba and Logu.



Plate. I. Sculpture representation of Nze, flanked by his wives and servants

Artist: Unknown

Dimension: Unknown

Medium: Concrete, metal and oil paint finish

Location of the Ikoro wooden drums in Umunze

The Nkwo market in Umunze, Orumba North Local Government Area of Anambra State, stands as what remains of the biggest wooden slit drum in Igbo land, or perhaps, in the world, also known as the Ikoro Obibie-Aku. It measures about 9feet in diameter and 8feet long and requires the use of a ladder to get to its top to play on it. In this ancient, carved, site-specific ritual and ceremonial tourist attraction, there is also some history, art, and power. The ikoro is one of the many such drums standing in the seven villages in Umunze. Others are ikoro Lomu in Lomu village, ikoro Izo, ikoro Ngele Ojii, ikoro Ogbudu, and ikoro Ahudo. Ikoro Nsogwu, ikoro Amabe, Ikoro Ugwu Ikpa, ikoro Ugwu Agbada, ikoro Amuda, and ikoro Orié Ohadu. The ikoro was the focal point of the public, commercial, social, and political center with its relatively big shelter and large adjoining

performance space. Over the years however, due to neglect resulting from lack of use and maintenance, this once monumental symbol of the village unity has progressively degenerated so much so that the large performance spaces around it have been overrun by commercial activities while the carved decorations on the body have almost been obliterated by over a century of weather and termite attacks (Onuora, 2016 and Uzor, 2025). These features depicting the history of a people would eventually disappear if nothing is done to salvage the situation.

Physical characteristics of the Ikoro drum

The simplest form of an ikoro drum is a big slit drum from a cylindrical tree trunk. Except for its huge size and the monumental importance attached to it, there is little or no difference between it and other slit drum types in Igboland. Some areas around Umuahia (like Ohuhu) have examples of such Ikoro drums lacking extra projections or relieved designs on their bodies. This type, however, does not really help us much in understanding the Ikoro because it is in the minority. The Ikoro drums with extra projections and body decorations, in their simplest forms, represent visual imagery of a male figure lying on his back. The abstract cylindrical mass of the drum forms the main body. It is on this cylindrical mass that a cavity is opened to produce the Ikoro sound. The mouth of this cavity is in the form of two rectangular shapes joined by a narrow slit. See plate VII, images of

Ikoro design symbols

Ikoro drums usually have intricate carvings, since they are made from big wood. They represent cultural identity and are more than just musical instruments. As highlighted by Onuora (2016), Nwokiki (2024), and Uzor (2025), fertility and continuity are symbolized by the carvings, which depict a lady and child on one end of the drum. To represent duality and balance in the community, some drums feature both masculine and female figures. A picture of a man lying on his back is displayed, with his head protruding from one end of the drum and jutting out at the other. Ikoro projections in a number of Igbo communities depict human heads on either side of the drum. These skulls span from absolute abstraction to almost naturalism. One can observe from the figures' hairstyles that these projections frequently feature both masculine and female individuals. A significant proportion of them hold both hands behind their heads. The figures on Ikoro Obibie-Aku in Umunze, which have three male heads at one end of the drum and three female heads at the other, are an example of this. They have very expressive faces. The carver is portrayed as a genius and master of his era by the accuracy with which the lines illustrating these expressions were drawn. Additionally, careful detailing was applied to the hands behind their heads. In Ururo Village, Umunze, Ikoro Ogbudu seems more abstract. The carver depicted the "hands behind the head" as a head on a rectangular wooden block on either end of the drum. Another example in Umunze depicts projections in the shape of a man clutching a victim's head as a prize. While it appears on one side of the drum on ikoro Izo and Ikoro Ngele Ojii at Umunze, it occurs on both sides of Ikoro Udo in Ubaha Village, Umunze, facing different directions. In Ikoro Ngele Ojii, the man stands on a protruding pedestal with his back fixed to the drum end. He carries a head with

some ichi marks on it and wears a scarified face (ichi). This image is similar to the Igbo Ukwu pendant, and there are scarifications on the face of the small pendant.

It is uncommon to find animal motifs projected at the ends of drums. Only at one end of Ikoro Ngele Oji does it appear in Umunze, where it takes the shape of a painted animal head with a smaller mammal, likely a cat, at the top of it. But there are a lot of animal designs on the body of Ikoro drums. The sacred python, goat, ram, crocodile (or lizard), tortoise, scorpion, and bird are among the various animal motifs that are utilized in addition to human representations. The python is the most often used animal, particularly in Aguata. It can be spotted consuming an animal on the Ikoro Ngele Ojii and ikoro Udo. On the bodies of Ikoro Umuehu, Ikoro Ezira, and Ikoro Ajala (in Eziagu, Orumba North Local Government Area), it is also displayed with various themes. It frequently coexists with the tortoise and crocodile motifs. The little one at Owerre Ezukala is an excellent example of this type of ikoro. The drum's body features some aggressively etched lines, along with a seated figure at one end. The influence of the Ikoro drum is not limited to music. It is essential to communication, cultural identity, and social cohesiveness. Its sound could provide communal connectivity by transmitting messages across long distances. Social hierarchies were also validated by the drum. Giving the Ikoro a trophy head was a sign of achievement and courage. The Ikoro's communal nature promoted harmony; the music of the Ikoro brought people together during festivals, encouraging cultural engagement and social cohesiveness. Presently, it is sad that what is left of some of these Ikoro's are eye-saws, they have been eroded with termites, and left unkempt as seen in Plates: II, III, IV, V, and VI.

Maintenance culture

Maintenance culture is the shared values, beliefs, and practices within a society or organization that prioritize the upkeep and preservation of infrastructure, resources, and assets. It's a mindset that recognizes the importance of regular maintenance to ensure functionality, safety, and longevity, ultimately leading to cost savings and improved efficiency. Maintenance culture defines the values, way of thinking, behaviour, perception, and the underlying assumptions of any person or group or society that considers maintenance as a matter that is important (priority) and practices it in their life. Preserving and keeping in good order as near as possible in their organized state. Infrastructure is a generic term for basic structures and facilities that are essential for development and subsequently for economic growth. Preserving Ikoro drums is vital for understanding Igbo heritage. These artifacts offer insights into traditional practices, artistic expressions, and social structures. Documenting and studying these cultural treasures is crucial to maintaining the legacy and cultural identity of the Igbo people. Chukwubueze (2024) emphasised that the survival of the ikoro in any community is a testament to the resilience of indigenous knowledge and cultural pride. If your community still possesses an Ikoro, it is worth celebrating and preserving as part of our collective Igbo heritage.

Today, the ikoro drum continues to inspire artists; sculptors, painters, graphic artists, textile designers and cultural practitioners. The legacy of the ikoro lives on in music, dance, and visual

arts. Contemporary Igbo and Ibibio artists draw on ikoro imagery and themes to explore identity, heritage, and social change. The various methods, such as chemical treatment, seasoning, and proper storage, are employed to protect timber from decay, insect infestation, and weathering conditions. According to Onuora (2016), *“In this ancient, carved, site-specific ritual and ceremonial tourist attraction, there is also some history, art, and power”*. The need for preservation cannot be over emphasized. Paint pigment opacify wood, and mask the natural grain of the wood. An effective way of preserving wood is to add paint to it, especially for exterior use, as it forms a protective barrier against moisture, UV rays, and weather damage, this increase its life use. This also adds decorative touch to the outdoor wood. It allows gas exchanges between the wood and its external environment. The wood can evacuate the natural humidity it possesses. In fig. VII is a suggested image of the ikoro housed in a museum. In other words, preserving the ikoro, especially the one called ikoro Obibie-Aku, located at Nkwo market, which measures about 9feet in diameter and 8feet long, and requires.



Plate. II. Ikoro Obibie-Aku

Dimension: 275 cm diameter X 244 cm high

Medium: Oji, Iroko tree (*Chlorophera Excela*)

Year: 2025

Source: Austine Uzor and Ephraim Ugochukwu



Plate. III. Ikoru Obibie-Aku
Dimension: 275 cm diameter X 244 cm high
Medium: Oji, Iroko tree (Chlorophera Excela)



Plate IV.: Ikoru Obibie-Aku
Dimension: 275 cm diameter X 244 cm high
Medium: Oji, Iroko tree (Chlorophera Excela)
Year: 2025
Source: Austine Uzor and Ephraim Ugochukwu



Plate. V: Dilapidation and termite invasion (Ikoro Obibie-Aku)
Dimension: 275 cm diameter X 244 cm high
Medium: Oji, Iroko tree (*Chlorophera Excela*)
Year: 2025
Source: Austine Uzor and Ephraim Ugochukwu



Plate VI: Dilapidation and termite invasion (Ikoro Obibie-Aku)
Dimension: 275 cm diameter X 244 cm high
Medium: Oji, Iroko tree (*Chlorophera Excela*)
Year: 2025
Source: Austine Uzor and Ephraim Ugochukwu

Proposed image of the Ikoro housed in a museum

Plate VII: Proposed, AI-generated and reconstructed image of the Ikoro Obibie-Aku housed in a museum

Dimension: 275 cm diameter X 244 cm high

Medium: Oji, Iroko tree (*Chlorophera Excelsa*)

Year: 2025

Source: Ephraim Ugochukwu

Burning of the Ikoro by Christian missionaries

Christians in Nigeria comprise an estimated 49.3% of the population. Christians are dominant in the southern (south-east/south-south/South west and central region) in Nigeria. Nigeria has the largest Christian population of any country in Africa, with more than 80 million people in Nigeria belonging to the church with various denominations. Christian activity started in 1515 with the primary objective of converting the 'heathen' or the benighted African to Christianity via education. The Christian missionary school in Nigeria was, without any doubt, an adjunct of the Church. It was a replica of a similar development in Britain during the Dark Ages. The missionaries were generally strong disciplinarians, and they had abiding faith in manual labour and the rod as the cure to all ills: idleness, laziness, slow learning, truancy, disobedience, and irregularity of attendance. They were unable to convert the kings and traditional rulers, as these leaders were only interested in the guns and mirrors the Europeans offered them (school software, 2022). Most of the artworks produced in the earliest period served religious and cult purposes. The artist had a sacred duty to create art objects that represent the various deities venerated in their communal and private worship. Utilitarian objects were reserved for the use of the royal courts and for daily usage by individuals in the community. The colonization of Nigeria by Britain created vacancies in the colonial offices that required the natives to fill. These vacancies required cheap, semi-skilled labor to fill as the colonial business

concerns continued to grow. The Christian missions that came along with colonialism needed interpreters and junior teachers to help in the spreading of the gospel to the natives. This led to the establishment of schools by the Christian missions in Nigeria. This missionary was more of a utilitarian one, geared towards serving the purpose of evangelism with a focus on reading, writing, and arithmetic. The schools were mainly attended by converts and stubborn children whose parents would like to be disciplined by the teachers. The encouragement and teaching of the new converts who had been indoctrinated into branding their native art objects as idols, which were destroyed in a bonfire by the missionaries. Art and aesthetic sensibility were crucial signifiers of the civilized, which constituted the gap between savagery and culture (Blaise *et al*, 2015).

The activity of the early Christian missionaries in Nigeria would not be forgotten in a hurry. Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* narrates the Christian activity as a disruptive force that dismantles traditional Igbo social and political structures, introducing a clash between indigenous beliefs and Western religious and cultural norms. His novels portray Christianity as both a source of conflict, creating internal divisions and undermining established customs, and as a transformative element that compels characters to navigate the complexities of modernity while confronting the power and ideology of the colonizers. The first time we learn of the Christians is at the end of Okonkwo's exile. The new religion is considered "foolish," and its followers are seen as a harmless flock of *efulefu*, useless people who are not really attached to much importance. The arrival of the white man in the late nineteenth century was gradual, and one of the techniques employed to destroy Igbo society was the infiltration of Christian missionaries who introduced new ideas and undermined the local system of beliefs. The final surrender of Umuofia, symbolized by the suicide of its great warrior, Okonkwo, was preceded by an increasingly aggressive challenge to its local religion and sacredness ... Those who join the Christian Church do not do so on any intellectual ground, but because of some direct experience of its power. Thus, there is no substantial change in the minds of the Igbos; they are just changing the names of their sources of divine power: the basic system of beliefs remains unaltered. The Church grows in numbers. Some Igbos turn Christian, and the Church turns more Igbo. As the number of converts rises, some of them try to overstep the bounds and challenge the clan and its beliefs (Galvan & Galvan, 2008). This explains why some of the ikoro wooden drum found in Umunze was destroyed by the so-called naive early Christians. Furthermore, the novel revealed many attitudes of the Christian new faith. The people of Mbanta were told about a brotherhood that is not based on bloodlines. This new concept, which allows white and black men to be brothers, opposes the main brotherhood of the Igbos: the clan. Next, the speech belittles the local religion as well; they told them that they worshipped false gods, gods of wood and stone, and subsequently threatened those who follow it. Evil men and all the heathen who, in their blindness, bowed to wood and stone (sculptures) were thrown into a fire that burned like palm oil. Despite the local metaphor used to explain the Christian hell to the Igbos, there is a lack of understanding and a direct rejection of the local religion. This prejudiced view came from the Europeans' claim to be messengers of a god who is the only true one. Thus, the first

approach of the missionaries is fundamentally aggressive, because it is not based on acceptance or understanding but is single-mindedly oriented to imposing a worldview and erasing another. A further interesting detail is that the white man promised to bring some iron-horses and condescendingly smiles about it. The Christian Church offers as gifts objects that have never been seen before, as Galvan (2008) describes it as “playing with the fascination that they can generate among the locals”. The bicycle, regarded as an iron horse by the Igbos, is the first example. In this way, the white man attempts to transform African bewilderment before new objects into a halo that presents the whites as superior, and even supernatural, in the eyes of the blacks. For Maduagwu (2013; 212), the Christian Church came to Umunze in 1910. Many of Umunze's sons and daughters imbibed in the doctrines of the new faith, which was: love of one's neighbour, no matter his or her colour, tribe, or origin; forgiveness of others' trespasses and the love and service of the true God, the maker of Heaven and Earth. If these are perfectly observed by anyone, he/ she will, at the time of death will be placed in a beautiful garden, where there will be no suffering or desire for anything. This was the technique adopted to woo the sons and daughters of Umunze. Over the years, the Ikoro has faced significant threats, primarily from external influences and misinformation.

In many communities, overzealous pastors have led campaigns against the Ikoro, labeling it as a source of spiritual bondage. These claims often destroy this invaluable cultural artifact, with some communities burning their ikoro in the name of religion (Chukwubueze, 2024). Maduagwu (2013; 445-446) also warned, the activities of our over-zealous Christian religious leaders who move from one shrine (sic) to destroy the relics of our past ancestors and set the ikoro drums on fire, instead of preserving them for the education of posterity, should be brought to a check. They will be told in clear language that such is not ideal. No one could in the near future come across trees big enough to match those used to carve those ikoro's again, and in the future, our children will not know how our ancestors were worshipped before the advent of Christianity. In the Western world, such icons are normally preserved in museums and galleries. These must be preserved for posterity, so that we may have history.

The problem identified by this study is in three folds: 1. Non-cultural preservation, 2. Lack of documentation, 3. Religion and fanaticism, are the major issues that bedeviled the Ikoro Obibie-Aku's existence as cultural heritage. The ikoro is a cultural identity of the people of Umunze, bestowed and handed over to Ugwu-lano as a custodian. Obibie-Aku, meaning in the Igbo language, ‘the spoiler of wealth,’ is believed to be one of the ancestral gods of Umunze that was taken from the shrine of Izo by Ugwu as a protection for his family. It would be out of place for one to spoil wealth, but rather nourishing and prospering it would be the ideal thing. It would be appropriate to also trace the history of how Obibie-Aku became the custodian of the biggest Ikoro wooden drum. A personal communication revealed that indeed Obibie-Aku was believed to be the custodian of the biggest ikoro wooden drum in Umunze, as Maduagwu (2024) and Nwachukwu (2013) narrate: It happened that when Nze founded the land of Umunze, he equally discovered a

similar stream in the present Izo forest. He deified it, as was the case in Ndiuduma Ohafia. This stream, together with the face of his son, Izo junior, convinced him that his beloved father, Uduma Ezema, had come down to live with him in the lonely area at Umunze. He left for Ndiuduma and from there, invited the chief priest of the original god to render his new places sacred. The Priest and his chiefs arrived at Umunze with a shrub from the Uduma shrine, which they planted near the Izo shrine. They also had one of the late patriarch's chairs, his basket, one of his 'Oho', and a walking stick 'Oji' in which was incorporated a fragment from the original one. The relics were handed over to Nze, who, at the time of his death, transferred them to Izo, His first son. It then became the responsibility of Ndiuduma to come to ordain a new priest of Izo at the death of any holder of the post.

This tradition and sacred duty were broken at the rise of the Aros. It was said that there was a period in the history of Igbo land when the Aros became the overlords of the rest of Igboland. They alone could travel to any part of Igboland without any fear of being killed, sold, or molested in any way. It then became impossible for the Ohahias to travel from their place to Nze land to perform any sacred duty, as the life of any adventurer of this kind was in great peril. Ndiuduma Ohahia then entrusted the people of Arochukwu, their neighbouring town, to exercise this duty on their behalf. The Aro's then became increasingly prominent in our history. After many years, a group of Aro's settled near our town. They were known as the people of Aro-Ikpa. These people were introduced to the people of Umunze by Arochukwu as their representatives. We were asked to consult them whenever any sacred duty was to be performed at Izo god. Arochukwu and Aro-Ikpa were one people. Since then, the Aro-Ikpa people have been exercising all the important sacred duties at Izo (B.O. J Maduagwu and A. Nwachukwu personal communication, August 22, 2024). The problem, as was identified, is the inability to preserve, document, and protect the ikoro from destruction. Cultural heritage is a reflection of society, and its preservation is important for maintaining cultural diversity, fostering a sense of belonging, and passing down to future generations. Cultural heritage plays a crucial role in the lives and history of the people and history, influencing the values, beliefs, and sense of belonging. One is expected to contribute positively by participating in cultural events, documenting traditions through storytelling or recording, and advocating for legal and financial support to protect cultural heritage sites. All actions aimed at preserving cultural heritage could also be through the conservation of one's cultural heritage. The elements could be defined as retaining their heritage value and extending their physical life. It is believed that in modern times, cultural preservation could be about honoring the values, identities, and histories, ensuring that they continue to inspire future generations, thus the clamor for the ikoro to be housed in a museum. According to Aniakor (1983) and Onuara (2016), cultural heritage helps define our distinct national and ethnic identities. It brings us together when used as a diplomatic tool to promote peace and conflict resolution.

Methodology

The research methodology was qualitative. Interviews of focused groups, observations, and document analysis. There were personal encounters, those that gave useful information that enabled the researcher to document and analyse the data, the likes of A. Nwachukwu, B. O., Maduagwu, C., Onyebuchi, and A. Uzor (personal communications, July 10th and 14, 2025). They all confirmed that in the past, the people of Umunze's customary laws were not written anywhere; they were disseminated orally from generation to generation. If these laws were codified, they would be easier to amend. The Customary Courts are a temple for the dispensation of customary justice. To be able to achieve this objectives, the royal Fathers of all communities would first sit together to write all the customary laws of the land, followed by a careful study and editing, after which the document should be made available to the customary court authorities of the various areas, as well as the respective town and village bodies handling settlement of disputes to ensure justice. The book published by Maduagwu Benedict Okeke (2013), titled Revised History of Umunze with the Intelligent Report of 1929, alongside other publications and internet materials, was a useful accessed to gather information that helped to put this paper into shape. The researcher gathered data by visiting and taking photographs of the various sites and locations where Ikoro wooden drums could be found in Umunze town. The researcher had the privilege of also meeting various Umunze sons and daughters who shared their views on the Ikoro as a cultural heritage; all these helped to build and shape the idea, and how the town can benefit from the iconic symbol of the Ikoro.

Conclusion

Cultural heritage is central to the protection of our well-being, because it is about protecting and preserving our artifacts and sites. In preserving one's cultural heritage, these include environmental conservation and protection; making sure that there are existence of national parks, urban open spaces. Historic preservation, having cultural parks, open-air museums, ornamental gardens, historic districts, and general regional planning, especially of transportation, land use, recreation, and tourism.

Art can be integrated into community development strategies. Those who should oversee cultural preservation are artists. Societies can balance modernization and cultural preservation, ensuring that progress does not erase identity but rather enriches it. Art has the power to bridge cultural divides, promote cross-cultural understanding, and preserve cultural heritage for future generations. As such, it is essential to recognize the value of art in community development and heritage preservation, and to support initiatives that promote the preservation and promotion of cultural heritage. It is expected that governments should establish robust cultural policies that integrate art into community development strategies and provide legal frameworks for preservation. Grassroots development cannot be overlooked in community development. Communities should be empowered to lead artistic and heritage projects, ensuring inclusivity and

ownership of cultural identity. Also, our educational institutions should integrate heritage education into the curricula, while public campaigns and exhibitions can raise awareness about the importance of preserving cultural traditions. Heritage preservation requires a multilevel approach, involving governments, NGOs, Diaspora communities and private organizations to pool resources and expertise. Support for creative industries such as crafts, music, and festivals can drive economic growth while safeguarding heritage. Funding cultural centers and museums ensures long-term sustainability, considering that the ikoro slit drum, usually associated with the mythical stories behind the establishment of the ikoro, as well as its physical characteristics, points to heroic accomplishments in war and headhunting by community champions. In addition, the ikoro assembles the community to the village square in periods of danger and announces the commencement and end of important festivals as well as the death of a community hero. It is also believed that no one can tell a person's story better than the individual.

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