



# Mbopo Music and Trends in Contemporary Times

\*Isaac O. Ibude & \*\*Aniekere S. Inyang

\*\*Department of Music, Faculty of Humanities, University of Port Harcourt, Rivers State, Nigeria.

\*[isaac.ibude@uniport.edu.ng](mailto:isaac.ibude@uniport.edu.ng) \*\*[aniekere.inyang@gmail.com](mailto:aniekere.inyang@gmail.com)

## Abstract

African music has evolved due to social, environmental and political changes with these influences shaping rhythms, instruments and lyrical themes. Mbopo is a traditional institution for Ibibio maidens practiced in both old and contemporary times. Its music has undergone significant shift as new influences such as socio-cultural, global and contemporary changes has affected the social practice. This study aims at exploring how Mbopo music has evolved in the context of modern times. The objectives are to document the musical practices and performances associated with Mbopo rites, to identify ways in which instrumentation, song composition and performance of Mbopo music has evolved over time, to investigate how influences such as globalization, urbanization, religious and technology has transformed the social practice, To evaluate which aspect of Mbopo music have been maintained, adapted or lost to modern influences and to explore how modern influences contribute to gender roles and societal expectations of the Ibibios. The research uses qualitative ethnographic research design such as interview, observation, participation and key informant technique as the primary method of data collection. While, the secondary method of data collection was gotten from journals, internet, libraries and books. Mbopo music has adapted to reflect modern influences and changes has occurred in rhythm and harmonies. This study provides insight into how indigenous music can adapt and still maintain its cultural identity. The researcher recommends the enhancement of cultural festivals that features Mbopo music and encourages the use of digital technology to create immersive experience of Mbopo music.

**Keywords:** Trends, Mbopo, Music, Evolution, Indigenous Practice, Change, Modern Times.

## INTRODUCTION

Technological advancement has greatly affected African music leading to shifts in melody, rhythm, harmony and musical forms. The music has witnessed a fusion with European musical tradition leading to the creation of new genres. These variations over the years are brought about by multiple interactions due to westernization, urbanization and global influences. Mcdermott and Hauser (2005) state that music is apparently universal being found in every known human culture, past and present. Mbopo music is specific to the Ibibio people of Akwa-Ibom State, Nigeria, and plays a significant role in the traditional rite of passage known as Mbopo. Music is used in the ritual to reflect diverse elements such as cultural expression, experiences of the initiates and societal norms, and it serves as a vehicle for education, bonding and deep symbolic meanings. Nana and Umanah (2023) explained that Mbopo culture was found to be practiced in every family as every young maiden initiated to this cultural institution was regarded in the Ibibio society. This rite marks the transition of young women from girlhood to womanhood. This process involves a seclusion period where they are taught about beautification, home-keeping, communal values and family responsibilities. Akpakpan and Akpakpan (2018) assert that music functions powerfully as important social, religious and creational activities within the seclusion allowing singing and teaching of indigenous music to the maidens. The indigenous music incorporates instruments, songs and dance which have undergone significant changes due to social, cultural, global, contemporary and religious influences. These papers seek to explore the changes in Mbopo musical practices in contemporary times.

## METHODOLOGY

These study adopted ethnographic research design such as Interview, Key Informant, Focused Group Discussion, Observation and Participant Observation.

### **The Theory of Cultural Change**

The theory of cultural change as propounded by Philip Bohlman (1988). States that the act of reviving, restoring and reimagining cultural phenomenon across eras is a desire for transformation. In his book the study of folk music in the modern world attempted to restore ancient music from antiquity by adding that cultural systems should be allowed to bring necessary change as inspired by the past, borrowed or invented cultures to create a satisfying culture.

He stated that the richness of folk music in the twentieth century is a contribution of expressive intrinsically part of modern world. Therefore, cultural change highlights that culture is not static as it evolves and transforms over time, often blending elements of tradition with innovation. He emphasizes how modern societies reinterpret ancient musical traditions by inventing new forms inspired by the past. He further highlighted that cultural system including music should be allowed to change and adapt to create relevant and satisfying element for the present generation. These reflect cultural continuity and encourage culture as a living as well as dynamic evolving part of modern identity.

### **What is Mbopo?**

Mbopo is a traditional rite of passage focusing on the transition of young women into adulthood and identified with the south-eastern dwellers of Nigeria. Mbopo which literally translates beautiful maiden in Ibibio language of the Akwa-Ibom State, Nigeria, has its own indigenous curriculum, philosophy and festival. The practice expresses cultural knowledge through songs and is mainly used to teach women, the act of beautification, homemaking and home keeping. A case study was carried out by the researcher on Ibiaku-Itu Udo community in Ibiono Ibom local government area of Akwa-Ibom State a geographical area found in South-eastern part of Nigeria. The Mbopo rite as practiced by the people of Ibiaku Itu Udo community in Ibibio ethnicity proves that the music is an effective tool for the social institution. According to the village Head Eteidung Emma Inyang and few past initiates in the community, the rite of passage is a cultural practice observed by both the married and unmarried women within the community. According to them, the rite was carried out on one maiden at a time for the married and for the unmarried in their puberty, the institution accepted as many as were willing to pass through the rite in their numbers. The institution focused on rite of passage for the singles and act of beautification for the married.

Mbopo practice had several names in the various surrounding states such as Monin-Nkim in central Cross-Rivers State a traditional dance of the Ejagham maidens. According to Ozah, (2015), nkim or moninkim ritual marks the passage of a young girl to womanhood. And Iria in Okirika local government area as well as Ndoki in Isi-Mgbede both in Rivers State. The institution involved secluding the young women from the society for a period of time to receive lessons on morality, domestic skills, etiquette and responsibilities in the society. Mbopo involves a series of rituals for the young maidens transitioning in the seclusion. The rituals encompass music, dance and festivals (graduation) at various stages. There is a period of diet and physical care, education and training, symbolic rites and public presentation. The initiation begins with the seclusion of the girl into the fattening room (ufok Mbopo), it is the beginning of a journey into womanhood and marital settlement. The period of seclusion last from six months to three years during this period the maiden is kept away from public view. This gives her time to rest and receive special care. According to Essien (2005), the seclusion ensures she gains weight, which is culturally associated with beauty and fertility in Ibibio society. Another aspect of Mbopo ritual is the diet as the maiden is fed with rich, nutritious food such as yams, plantains, rice and soups to enhance her physical appearances and health. Nana and Umanah (2023) adds that these list of food stuffs were to be brought to the seclusion, items such as five yam tubers, ten liters of kerosene, ten liters of palm oil, eto iyak kiet (one stick of fish), water yams (ebere), ikpod (local dye), bars of soap, one crate of coke and malt, crayfish (obu), pepper (ntokon), one bag of salt, one bunch of plantain, one piece of wrapper, cash of

ten thousand naira and half bag of rice. The emphasis is on gaining weight which is aligned with traditional beauty and symbol of prosperity and readiness for marriage.

According to Udo (1983) as cited in Akpan and Ekong (2017) during the seclusion the girl undergoes intensive education about their future roles and responsibilities by the elderly women. The maidens in the seclusion, who are under-going the rites of passage, sing as a way to build relationship and reinforce their understanding of cultural values. Through singing, imitation and observation, these women engage in a dynamic process of learning that connects them to their heritage. Music is therefore both a psychological and cultural tool used to instill knowledge and positive identity within the social group. One of the primary teaching methods within Mbopo is imitation which involves copying another person's performance and, occasionally, introducing slight variations that keep the traditional practice afresh. This method is especially important in Mbopo musical performance fostering a direct transfer of cultural knowledge from one generation to another. The older women who are respected leaders in Mbopo institution often pass their wisdom and experience. They model not only music itself but also the right cultural attitude and discipline necessary for retention. This slow repetitive teaching methods allows for careful understanding and preservation of the practice. As the maidens are encouraged to observe, learn and gradually master the music.

Akpakpan and Akpakpan (2018) also write that Mbopo is the greatest ceremony in a girl's life, whereby a girl is taught home management, as well as how to behave in her new home. The rituals also involve specific ceremonies where the girl performs traditional dance, ritual bath, oiling, and purification. In the traditional context, Mbopo music serves as more than just entertainment; it is a method of teaching, bonding and identifying the Ibibio culture. The elderly women who are past initiates played a significant role in teaching the maidens these lessons that are incorporated with music in the learning processes. The musical themes incorporated are childbirth, lullabies, marriage, work, relationships, family values and pantomime. The songs are used to preserve traditional continuity of native musical styles, values and norms through socio-cultural group practices. The text of Mbopo music is highly focused on values, beliefs and indigenous philosophies aimed at building the ethical character of an ideal woman in the community. The text of the songs was mostly to instruct, groom, mold and prepare the maidens for marriage life and womanhood Mbopo marks physical, psychological and spiritual transiting of the maidens as according to the women of Ibiaku-Itu Udo, where the researcher underwent an ethnographic fieldwork, there were special rituals that were carried out on any Mbopo who was having a bad omen (ill luck in marriage) in her life. A cleaning ritual and appeasing of the spirit husband had to be carried out, when she was not allowed to have marital union with all the good suitors that have approached her. In most cases, it was reported that even after she was married, the spirit husband could also prevent her from giving birth to off springs. However, at graduation, Mbopo is given a task to show case her worthiness to graduate and the test was only known through observation from the older women training them. This event is a significant celebration featuring feasting, dancing and communal joy. As stated by Ubong, (2010) the women are adorned in their finest attire and jewelry and are presented as transformed individuals ready for marriage and adult responsibilities. The dance movements were derived from fluid flow of oceanic movement which shows a connection of the Ibibios as riverine dwellers. And were performed during the graduation ceremony showing expression of readiness, seduction and femininity

### **The Origin of Mbopo**

The evolution of Mbopo is closely linked to the changing practices of Mbopo rite itself, as seen in the transformation of its phase and societal roles over time. Each phase has retained its function and evolved in expression due to external influences such as colonialism, introduction of western education and modernization. Mbopo rite has passed through several phases such as Mbopoifet, Mbopooboikpa and Nkuho causing also its musical adaptation with distinct rituals. According to Nana and Umanah (2023) Mbopo institution may be as old as the Ibibio society.

In the first stage called Mbopoifet (naked maiden) had music and chants performed during the seclusion emphasizing themes of purity, respect and the rite's spiritual aspects. Through singing, chanting and drumming maidens absorbed lessons on cultural expectation, values and traditions specific to women within the Ibibio society. The musical practices had spiritual significance and were often accompanied by ritualistic activities such as clitoridectomy. These were during the pre-colonial period and were later abandoned as the society shifted away from such practices. Ekong (2001) asserts that mbopoifet was carried out before pre-colonial arrival and rituals such as circumcision rite, consultation of deities, confinement and spiritual cleaning were carried out before public presentation of the maidens. Hence, with the abandonment or modification of rituals, songs and chants have also adapted. These led to songs losing their original context or becoming more ceremonial rather than functional. Mbopo music was not used for entertainment alone but for education and cultural transmission.

During Mbopoobikpa (a grown maiden) the social institution adapted in practice as maidens who engaged in the practice during this era was seen as those that wanted to stand out in the society hence, the name the grown maiden. Unlike, the maidens in Mbopoifet, the colonial influenced during this time, made the Ibibio girl to reach puberty before becoming eligible for marriage. Although customs differed regionally, for instance, as stated by Wood (1999) in Gabra, Kenya, girls could be engaged before they could even walk. In Ibibio tradition, a girl had to mature and demonstrate moral integrity before joining Mbopo and being prepared for marriage in this era. These maidens would sing and perform during their graduation from the seclusion to semi-public gatherings such as market (urau Mbopo). Bassey (1996) states that during the maiden's presentation at the square or Mbopo market she was dressed semi-naked and was opened to interested suitors. At these places they were introduced to potential suitors who were members of the community. This stage incorporated music as part of the maiden's public presentation, highlighting her readiness for marriage. Over time, however, with changing social norms around marriage and female autonomy, this part of Mbopo has declined and the songs linked to these gatherings have lost their prominence, shifting to more celebratory or entertainment purposes in modern times.

Nkuho which is the present stage of Mbopo focused on postpartum care and domestic training, where music emphasizing nurture was mostly used. Udo (2006) writes that this stage occurred when the maiden had given birth, as she was confined for a period of two to three months at home and fed for physical transformation. Lullabies and soothing songs were sung by the women to help calm babies. These songs were soft, repetitive, and melodious with gentle rhythms designed to create relaxation for the mother and baby. The songs reflected the unique nurturing nature of the Ibibio and their cultural values. Songs were used to express social teachings and educate the new mothers. However, as the role of women has evolved with more focus on individual choice and less emphasis on traditional domestic role, the nkuho music has also transformed. The teaching once expressed through song is less prominent, as modern influences have redefined family structures and expectations.

Mbopo music is increasingly performed in present times outside the traditional settings, often as a cultural exhibit rather than a functional part of a rite of passage. The music has adapted to represent the Ibibio heritage in festivals, stage performances and modern Ibibio recordings. The change signifies a shift from music as an active part of life's milestones to music as a symbol of identity without the original function. The traditional music which is inseparable from the cultural rite has undergone a significant change due to external factors. In modern times, the songs are not constrained to the seclusion period alone but generally used during various economic, social and domestic obligations of the women in the communities. According to Bairoch and Goertz (1986), changes occur in the norms, traditional beliefs and musical rendition of traditional practices. These few variations in the music take place in the process of composition, musical styles, rhythms, value of the music as well as cultural materials. They may also be moderations in the music due to the songs being orally preserved and some unique aspects have been lost as certain knowledge may not

be effectively passed on. Traditional Mbopo had women as custodians of the songs, dance steps and instrumental styles as many instructions were passed through this medium. The women excelled in this circle as vocalists and instrumentalists however, in modern times gender roles has shifted as young men are part of the ceremonial instrumental ensemble. They make use of gong, sticks, drums and whistle to accompany the singing. The songs performed by the maiden were not always transcribed or recorded but appropriate in the text, rhythm and changing themes.

### **The Distinctive Features of Mbopo Music**

Mbopo music served as a cultural medium for social learning among women. Udoh (2021) emphasizes that Mbopo songs convey community wisdom, cultural practices, and values, especially in guiding young women's moral and family responsibilities. These songs serve as powerful mediums for teaching and reinforcing cultural norms, effectively molding young women for social roles. The different features of Mbopo rites are music texts, vocal styles, dance, costume, rhythm and instrumentation which facilitated the aesthetics of the group practice. Mbopo musical texts play a significant role as a powerful medium to express ideas, beliefs and deep emotional meanings in the social institution. As further explained by McIntire (2020), in musical performances, song text is recognized as a rich source of data, as the negotiation between text and music enables the words and melody. The vocal styles incorporate characteristics such as timber, tone colour which is majorly identified with the voice. The voice uses ornamentation techniques, vocal idioms and Ibibio indigenous language in the training of the maidens. The rhythm of the music is characterized by poly-rhythm as a key element and involves layering different rhythmic patterns on top of each other, thereby creating complex interlocking sounds. Obialor, (2024) asserts that polyrhythm can be used as a counter meter where a secondary rhythm is played against the main meter, creating tension and relief within a musical work. Polyrhythm adds depth to Mbopo music by creating a rich sonic layered experience through the singing and various combinations of indigenous instrumentations.

The choice of instrumentation used in Mbopo music contributes to the distinctive sound of the social group. The musical ensemble is classified as membranophone, aerophone and idiophone with instruments like gong, clappers, bell, rattle, drums, whistle etc. The instruments are used to accompany songs and dance. Dance in Mbopo music allows for emotional bonding, expression, experience and aesthetic amongst the initiates and communal audience. It provides a way of the maidens connecting with the rhythm and interpreting the sounds in their various dance steps. Mbopo dance is a form of storytelling that explains femininity, beauty and seduction. Mbopo costume are symbolic and used to represent as well as communicate femininity and characters in the social group. They are usually outward, visible and express the culture as well as the distinct group. Lindholm (2021) explains that costumes assist in the establishment of character, ideologies, societal theme and enables the audience to distinguish the character by age, social status, personality, roles, profession, religion and culture. Mbopo costume is used to adorn the maiden during their graduation from the seclusion. The different parts of the maidens' body were the costume are worn are head (iwuod), idet (idet), forehead (eko iso), eyes (anyen), cheek (mfuk), mouth (inua), neck (iton), wrist (ubok), navel (okop), waist (isin), ankle (iton ukok), leg (ukot), and foot (ikpat). According to Oni and Ododo (2011) when a performer finally wears the costume he brings together time, place, action and the overall theatrical production. The Mbopo costume is worn during the Mbopo ceremony, which is a rite of passage for young women. Motley (2007) states that costumes are not isolated pieces but part of the whole mood, style and design. Costume puts the audience in the mood for the musical action of the cultural arts. Mbopo is adorned with beads on her hair as head wear and the bead are locally called Nkwa. The top that covers the breast is made from a colourful Silk Fabric. While, the skirt is usually a short bright coloured material often embroidered or a patterned fabric. It is worn with waist beads locally called nkwa isn. They are necklaces which are known as nkwa iton and bracelets also known as nkwa ubok. The anklets (nkwa ukut) and the leg is worn with irons called awak while the maiden walks barefooted. Erosomsele



(2020) explains that costume is important elements that promote cultural heritage and identity about a people.

Traditionally, Mbopo performances were exclusive to sacred spaces like the seclusion chambers (ufok Mbopo) and restricted to Ibibio cultural participants. In recent years, however, performances have expanded beyond these boundaries, showcasing Mbopo in public places, cultural festival and even in academic or artistic contexts. This shift has broadened the audience, introduced multimedia elements and allowed for creative choreography that was previously reserved solely for Mbopo rite. Traditional songs have shifted in themes, from being strictly ritualistic to incorporating modern issues relevant to the communal people. Mbopo songs have historically utilized the Ibibio language, acting as both a musical and linguistic marker of identity. Overtime, these songs have incorporated a blend of indigenous and contemporary elements, allowing for adaptation in melody and rhythm that appeals to a wider audience. Mbopo's indigenous instrumentation has evolved in the materials and tools used for crafting musical instruments. Traditionally, local tools like chisels and local hammers were employed in long hours to products these instruments, but today modern equipment such as electric kilns and panel saws has simplified the production process, allowing for more refined and durable instruments. Additionally, while certain instruments like the slit wooden drum (obodom), retain their traditional construction methods, improvement in acoustics and material sourcing have enabled variations that cater to diverse performance settings. The public performance now celebrates cultural heritage and encourage appreciation across different communities, thus fostering appreciation across a wider cultural understanding. These have enabled Mbopo music to remain relevant and meaningful across generational practices.

Some of the Mbopo music used by the maidens in the seclusion and their English transliteration.

**Nso Eyen Iyaya Ntem**

Efik/Ibibio Folk Song  
Transcribed by: V.U Ogbonna

♩ = 90

Voice

N - so eyen i - ya - ya n - te - m n - di - duk N - so eyen i - ya - ya n - te - m n -

Voice

di - duk A - ya - ya akan e - ka ndi - duk a - ya - ya akan e - ka n - di - duk

#### No. 1 Nso Eyen Iyaya Ntem

Vernacular	English transliteration
Nso eyen iyaya ntem	what kind of child is this beautiful
Ndiduk	wonderfully made
Nso eyen iyaya ntem	what kind of child is this beautiful
Ndiduk	wonderfully made
Ayaya akan Eka	she is finer than her mother
Ndiduk	wonderfully made
Ayaya akan Ette	she is finer than her father
Ndiduk	wonderfully made

This idea "ndiduk" which is used for a non-living thing is being used to quantify how much the maiden beauty shines even more than her parents.

## Nkemdem Mbangsang

Efik/Ibibio Folk Song  
Transcribed by: V.U Ogbonna

$\text{♩} = 170$

Voice

N - kem-dem mband-sa-ng no ufan mband sang e - do ibiok ima ono ufan N-

6

Voice

kem-dem mband-sa-ng no ufan mband -sang e - do ibiok ima ono ufan a - ye

11

Voice

aye mband - sang edo ibiok ima ono fan a -

14

Voice

ye aye mband-sang edo ibiok ima ono fan

### No.2 Nkemdem Mbangsang

Vernacular

Nkemdem mbandsang no ufan

Mbandsang edo ibiok ima

no ufan

Nkemdem mbandsang no ufan

Mbandsang edo ibiok ima

no ufan

aye aye

mbangsang edo ibiok ima

no ufan

English transliteration

I bought groundnut and gave my friend

Groundnut bond our love

As friends

I bought groundnut and gave my friend

Groundnut bonds our love

As friends

Exclamation!

Groundnut bonds our love

As friends.

## Mbopo Sin Tido

Efik/Ibibio Folk Song  
Transcribed by: V.U Ogbonna

$\text{♩} = 80$

Call

M-bo-po sin ti-do sin ti-do u-kut i-so lip-stick

Response

E-bo E - bo E-bo E - bo

### No.18 Mbopo sin tido

Vernacular

Mbopo sin tido

Ebo!

English transliteration

Beautiful maiden dress up by making up

Exclamation!

Mbopo sin tido	Beautiful maiden dress up by making up
Ebo!	Exclamation!
Ukut iso	mirror
Ebo!	Exclamation!
Lipstick	Lipstick
Ebo!	Exclamation!
Eyen oh	my child oh
Ebo!	Exclamation!
Inua imam imam eyen	my smiling child
Ebo!	Exclamation!
Ayaya oboho oh	you are so beautiful
Ebo! Ebo! Ebo!	Exclamation! exclamation! exclamation!

### Mbopo Amatama Ke Window

Efik/Ibibio Folk Song  
Transcribed by: V.U Ogbonna

♩ = 100

Voice

M - bo - po ama - tam ke win - dow atuak a - da ese idem kpom - be -

Voice

bi ku - do i - den i - ba kiet a - ya u - kut o - kpo kiet ayauwot

No. 16 Mbopo amatama ke window

Mbopo amatam ke window	Beautiful maiden jump through the window
Atuak ada ese idem kpombebi	Stop and check out herself
kudo iden iba	Don't marry two men
kiet aya ukut okpo	One will see your wrongs
kiet ayauwot	One will kill you.

### Eya Ewod Kpon Owo

Efik/Ibibio Folk Song  
Transcribed by: V.U Ogbonna

♩ = 90

Voice

E - ya e-wod'i-kpo o - wo, n - t'e-bo-no'e-suk i - nua k'i-son n - t'e-bo-no

Voice

ya e-wod'i-kpo o - wo, n - t'e-bo-no'e-suk i - nua k'i-son n - t'e-bo-no

NO. 20 Eya Ewod Kpon Owo

Vernacular	English transliteration
Eya 'ewod ikon owo	Gossipers will kill a lonely person



Ntebono esuk inua                                wherever they gather  
k'ison nt'ebono                                They bend their head to gossip  
Eya 'ewod ikon owo                                Gossipers will kill a lonely person  
nt'ebono esuk inua k'ison nt'ebono    They bend their head to gossip wherever.

### **The Evolution of Mbopo Music**

Modern influences have reshaped traditional musical practices and its preservation has faced several challenges in today's culturally changing world. The evolution of Mbopo music reflects significant changes in the indigenous practices among the Ibibio, particularly as these practices adapt to the demand and influences of modern times. Urbanization has played a major role in the modifying of Mbopo music and its associated rites. As a catalyst for cultural change, it has influenced communities in ways that reshape traditions and introduce new practices. As people from diverse backgrounds converge in urban centers, mixing with various cultures, traditions and identities. In Ibibio urban areas, Mbopo has undergone transformation to align with new social, economic and environmental changes. Traditionally, Mbopo practice included seclusion that lasted for about two to three years and rite of passage, marking the transition of young women into adulthood. In urban areas, however, these practices have evolved; some aspects such as extended seclusion period are no longer commonly observed. Modern values such as education and women's right have also been incorporated to reshape these rites, moving them from private ethnic ceremonial acts to public inter-ethnic displays. Despite these changes, the Mbopo institution continues to hold cultural significance, maintaining its role in preserving Ibibio identity and heritage. Mbopo music has encountered both internal and external challenges as it encountered reduced interest amongst younger generations. Due to the younger women's exposure to popular media and global genres, the traditional music has become less appealing, and almost creating a cultural gap with the traditional musical knowledge. Also orally passing down the songs, rhythms and dance from one generation to another has become challenging for archiving. The modernization has shifted its cultural meaning and reduced the authenticity of the sacred meanings of the songs.

The evolution has also given birth to cultural revitalization programs which are encouraged at the local, state and federal level in both governmental and non-governmental bodies. To instigate culturally promoting programs that facilitate traditional workshops, festivals, musical practices that aim at re-introducing traditional music to the younger generations. In an effort to revitalize and preserve Mbopo tradition amidst modern influences, urban Ibibio communities have organized cultural festivals that showcase Mbopo music, dance and costume. These festivals serve as awareness campaigns aiming to promote Mbopo practice to younger generation and foster pride in Ibibio heritage. Ukpanah (2014) notes that the Mbopo festival is held annually according to the Ibibio traditional calendar. During the ceremony, the maidens learn, sing songs that are spontaneous and aimed at instruction, encouragement, and entertainment of the audience. Ukpong (2014) explains that the purpose of this music is communal, marked by shared participation and spontaneous creation. The aesthetic qualities of African traditional music, as Nzewi (2006) points out, are holistic, merging music with dance, social drama, symbolism, and costume. Music in African tradition doesn't exist in isolation but connects deeply with social events and is an expressive blend of sound, movement, and attire. Moreover, digital media and technology have become essential tools in the preservation and promotion of Mbopo music. Through social media platforms and websites, the essence of Mbopo is shared with local and international audience, helping to reach a multi-cultural audience and enhancing tourism. These digital efforts not only document Mbopo music but also adapt to it new mediums ensuring its relevance and visibility in a rapidly changing world. The evolution of Mbopo music encapsulates the balance between tradition and modernity, reflecting shifts in cultural practice while preserving a unique Ibibio identity. These shows resilience of Mbopo music and its ability to adapt, survive and continue to serve as a cultural bridge for future generations. Furthermore, educational curriculums have introduced traditional practices like Mbopo into teaching students indigenous knowledge. Thus, efforts have been made by scholars to

transcribe Mbopo music for academic studies. Traditional Mbopo music faces challenges due to reduced interest, lack of documentation, cultural shift and thrives to survive as well as adapt in modern times.

### **Modern Adaptation in Mbopo Music**

Modern adaptation helps preserve cultural practice by allowing them to evolve instead of becoming obsolete. It ensures that the modification resonate with both older and younger generations. The Mbopo traditional institution has adapted to modern times by incorporating new gender roles and performance styles that appeal with today's audience. The practice has blended traditional elements with modern influence to make them more accessible to the current generation. The music has reflected certain adaptation as the practice interacts with modern times and highlights significant shift in social, cultural and religious influences. Akpakpan (2018), notes that African music inherently linked to people's way of life and acts as a medium for self-expression and communal bonding within Ibibio ethnicity.

Nana and Umanah (2023) explains that Mbopo has evolved from a scared institution of social order and Chasity to symbolic cultural practice as fewer women undergo the traditional seclusion in modern times. Due to modern adaptation, some rights such as virginity checks, clitoridectomy and half-naked outing of the maidens have been phased out in the societal norms, because of awareness of health issues and the influence of religious perspectives. The focus has shifted towards the ceremonial aspects, with the music now highlighting communal and ethnic values rather than strict traditional rites. The structure of Mbopo music is characterized by rhythmic drumming, call-and-response singing and vibrant dance movement which fosters social cohesion. Nzewi (2017), states that call-and-response, solo and chorus interplays as typical African musical structures that emphasizes community involvement and cultural retention.

Today, modern recordings and performance outside the seclusion allows for broader dissemination of the musical culture. These changes are essential for its survival in a globalized society but alter the exclusivity and sacredness once associated with Mbopo practice. Akpakpan (2018), points out that indigenous Ibibio festival now incorporates Mbopo as part of cultural heritage celebrations, ensuring that even as the rite evolves the core values such as communal identity, respect for women and social harmony are retained. Mbopo music has historically been a medium through which cultural identity is expressed and preserved. Traditionally, Mbopo rite of passage uses music during the seclusion and ceremonial process marking the maiden's graduation from the seclusion and expresses the Ibibio culture. The music encapsulates the values, beliefs and teachings of the communal people. However, as the ethnicity becomes increasingly urbanized, Mbopo music faces the need to adapt to the changing social fabric while retaining its unique identity such as language and feminine essence.

However, in modern times, the spread of urban culture within Ibibio ethnicity and the influence of modernization have introduced significant changes to the ways in which Mbopo music is taught and practiced. As the younger generation becomes increasingly exposed to western education and various musical styles and genres, there is a tendency to incorporate modern elements into the traditional Mbopo songs. This evolution has given rise to hybrid and western notation of Mbopo music that resonates more with the urban and contemporary audience, while still retaining the core elements of the traditional musical styles. The music is also taught in primary, secondary and tertiary choral classes in Ibibio ethnicity rather than being traditionally sung in the seclusion.

### **CONCLUSION**

The evolution of Mbopo in contemporary times exemplifies how indigenous practices can adapt to external pressures and changing social landscapes without entirely losing their essence. While urbanization and westernization has led to shifts in the musical traditional frameworks that support Mbopo, these changes are not simply a departure from tradition; rather they represent an

adaptation that ensures the continuity of Mbopo in a modern context. These modifications serve as a strategy for cultural survival, changes and allows the art form to retain relevance in a world that is evolving. Mbopo music continues to project positive cultural identity while embracing change to keep alive the practice for future generations.

## REFERENCES

- Akpan, M. G., & Ekong, B. U. (2017). "Dance Aesthetics and Cultural Implications: A Case Study of Ekombi Dance and Asian Uboikpa Dance." *Journal of Social Science*, 9(1), 171-177.
- Akpakpan, J., & Akpakpan, M. J. (2018). Mbopo institution and music in the cultivation of moral values in Ibibio society, Nigeria. *Open Journal of Social Sciences*, 6(5), 37–52. <https://doi.org/10.4236/jss.2018.65004>
- Basset, E. (1996). *The culture and social organization of the Middle Cross River people*. University Press.
- Bairoch, P., & Goertz, G. (1986). Factors of urbanization in the nineteenth century developed countries: a descriptive and econometric analysis. *Journal of Urban Studies* 23 (4) 285-305.
- Essien, O. E. (2005). *Ibibio names: Their structure and their meanings*. Daystar Press. Ekong, E. E. (2001). *The sociology of the Ibibio: A study of social organization and change*. Modern Business Press.
- Eromosele, O. P. (2020). Costumes as depiction of cultural identity in Pedro Agbonifo-Obaseki's *Idia*. *EJOTMAS: Ekpoma Journal of Theatre and Media Arts*, 7(1-2), 310–320. <https://doi.org/10.4314/ejotmas.v7i1-2.20>
- Lindholm, M. E. (2021). *Behind the seams: An ethnographic study of the performative nature of theatrical costumes*. Gettysburg College. Retrieved from [https://cupola.gettysburg.edu/student\\_scholarship/162](https://cupola.gettysburg.edu/student_scholarship/162).
- McIntire, A. M. (2020). Musical text: An effective instrument in teaching language and culture. *A Journal of Visual Literacy*, 39(2), 185-200.
- Motley, A. (2007). *Designing and making stage costumes*. Museum of Cultural History; Charles Scribner.
- Mcdermott, J., & Hauser, M. (2005). The origin of music innateness, uniqueness and evolution. *Music perspective*. 23 (1) 29-59.
- Nana, A. E., & Umanah, A. E. (2023). Mbopo initiation rite in Ibibio: Ibibio cultural heritage. *Journal of Social Science*, 9(1), 171-177.
- Nzewi, M. (2006). African music creativity and performance: The science of the sound. *Nigerian Music Review*, 6, 1-8. <https://doi.org/10.4314/nmr.v6i1.35370>
- Nzewi, M. (2017). Reinstating the soft science of African indigenous musical arts for humanity-sensed, contemporary education and practices. *Revista da FAEEBA - Educação e Contemporaneidade*, 26(48). <https://doi.org/10.21879/faeeba2358-0194.v26.n48.3578>
- Obialor, S. (2024). A structural analysis and general assessment of Daniel Christian Chikpezie Agu's song of patriotism-Anambra State. *Akwa Journal of Research in music and the Arts (AJRMA)* 223-301.
- Ozah, M. A. (2015). Moninkim: A symbiotic performance of ritual, music, and dance by the Ejagham people of Nigeria and Cameroon. *Ethnomusicology*, 59(3), 421-449. <https://doi.org/10.5406/ethnomusicology.59.3.0421>

- Oni, D., & Ododo, S. E. (2011). Costume: The 4th dimension of the performing arts. Journal for the Centre for Black and African Arts and Culture.a
- Okure, D. U. (2020). Nationalizing intangible cultural heritage in Nigeria for optimized cultural tourism: The Zangbeto model. *An internal journal of Arts and Humanities* 10.4314/ijahv9i7.7
- Udo, E. A. (2006). Who are the Ibibio? Anthropological perspectives. African Fep-Publisher Limited.
- Udoh, E. C. (2001). Ibibio women's musical culture: Past and present (PhD thesis). Department of Music, Nnamdi Azikiwe University.
- Omojola, B. (2012). Yoruba music in the twentieth century: Identity agency and performance practice.
- Ubong, B. (2010). Traditional marriage ceremonies among the Ibibio people of Nigeria: A study in theatrics. *The Belograchik Journal for Local History, Cultural Heritage and Folk Studies*, 1(3), 1-15.
- Ukpanah, I. D. (2014). Acculturation: An instance of Mbopo ceremonial maiden dance in Akwa-Ibom culture. *Nigerian Musicology Journal*, 2(5), 41-56.
- Ukpong, E. A. (2014). Marriage and the family among the Akwa Ibom people: Anthropological perspectives. Uyo: Impact Impression ENT.
- Wood, C. J. (1999). When men are women. The University of Wisconsin Press.
- Williams, I. C. (2024). Evolving to Abstraction – seclusion of Efik and Ibibio women from pre-colonial Era to the present. The University of Mississippi.