

## The *Nzeh Mada* Festival and its Socio-Economic Impact on *Mada* Nation

**Bala Musa Babao**

Department of History and Diplomacy Study, Nasarawa State University, Keffi, Nasarawa State, Nigeria.

[balamusababao@gmail.com](mailto:balamusababao@gmail.com)

**Dogo Japheth Shawulu**

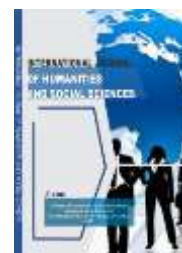
Department of History and Diplomacy Study, Nasarawa State University, Keffi, Nasarawa State, Nigeria.

[japhetshawulu@gmail.com](mailto:japhetshawulu@gmail.com)

**Muhammad Maishanu Aliyu PhD**

Department of Islam and Development Studies, Nasarawa State University, Keffi, Nigeria.

[ammaishanu@nsuk.edu.ng/abumubarak42@gmail.com](mailto:ammaishanu@nsuk.edu.ng/abumubarak42@gmail.com)



### Abstract

The *Nzeh Mada* festival played a vital role to the political, economic and social life of the people of the *Mada* nation and not only to the *Mada* people but the remaining ethnic groups at large. The unity that the festival brought, the awareness and the opportunity for the business people to sell their products. Development started in 2014 as a result of coming of the present *Chun-Mada* clans of the various villages that we disintegrated as a result of the chieftaincy crisis. The festival also serves as a political forum between politicians of the various political parties in the state and the politicians of the various political parties amongst the *Mada* people. Even the crisis that was going on between the Muslim *Madas* and the Christian *Madas* is able to be managed as a result of organizing this festival. The crises and conflict which used to exist has come to an end as a result of this festival. This research is significant because it would address the issue of disunity among the *Mada* nation. The method adopted was qualitative where historical and descriptive research was used. The findings revealed that the festivity serve as an avenue for strengthening unity among the people and also boost economy of the individuals and the locality. Therefore, the research concludes that this kind of activities should be promoted and the recommendation is that traditional institutions should encourage people to attend festivities and contribute immensely towards their sustainability.

**Keywords:** *Nzeh Mada*, Festival, Socio-Economic, *Mada* Nation.

### I. Introduction

In the history of the *Mada* people, there are historical documents concerning their cultural and political organization, but little is known on the *Nzeh Mada* festival. Although the challenges of unavailability of written documents concerning the topic would not hinder the purpose of the study. The researchers will deploy the use of primary source that were partakers or direct participant of the event and also some available literature about the *Mada* people.

### The Meaning of the *Nzeh*

The word *Nzeh* is a term in *Mada* language which means “Beauty or pride” from the historical antecedent of the colonial conquest of the *Mada* land in 1917. Historians mean to know that they were among the last ethnic groups to be subjected to British colonial rule in Northern Nigerian. However, there were evidence of the Jihadist movement that brought about the change in their culture (the way of life of the *Mada* people) which introduced Islamic Religion that substituted the Trado-African Religion of the *Mada* people and also the presence of the activities of the colonial conquest of the Akwanga Division which came as a result of the coming of the SUM (Sudan United Mission) who also introduced the Christian religion. The presence of these two religions dislocated the Trado-African religion of the *Mada* people. Therefore, the development brought and influences a lot in their culture. The *Nzeh* as the name implies beauty, is to explore the beauty of its culture and pride and also to serve as a platform to bring unity among the different clans of the *Mada* people as we could see that the activities of the two religions paved way for religious crisis and question for power among the

Muslim *Madas* as and the non-Muslim *Madas*.

### **The Origin of the Nzeh Mada Festival**

The democratization of the *Chun Mada* stool was a struggle that claims the lives and properties at the time, there emerged rivalry among the different clans. With the election of Eliya Areni as the first *Chun Mada*, haven been in the struggle saw the need to unite the *Mada* nation all together for immense development. With this, he introduced the annual festival where people would come with the dishes and there will be cultural dance all through the celebration. It usually occurs on 31<sup>st</sup> of December.

In the festival, they take locally brewed wine called mean and play drums and vri-ngbe (panpipes) which they used to make music and dance together. All these were to create unity amongst the different clans. Eliya Areni reigns from 1980 to 1990. His demised was the beginning of another struggle amongst the *Mada* people as the people of *Nunku* stood firmly that the position was theirs because they thought it should be hereditary. With the available knowledge, the researchers come to understand that the rebranding of the *Nzeh* festival also was to bring unity of the people as we could see that the demised of the democratically elected *Chun Mada* brought another struggle. The researchers were made to understand that the documents that established the Royal stool was not sign by the Governor but his secretary. As a result, the *Mada* people conducted election and Gamu Yaren became the *Chun Mada* but he was not recognized by the then Government. As a matter of facts, the *Nunku* even sued a case to the High court and they won. Subsequently, they later filed for appeal and the decision of the Supreme Court was at the favour of the democratic elected *Chun*.

During this period of court case, the *Mada* royal stool was not recognized by the then Government to the extent that the *Chun Mada* could not attend official meeting. The Local Government chairman was assigned to represent him in any official meetings. This was another harsh experience for the people of *Mada* not until the Supreme Court ruled the case in their favour. Following this second struggles, there were need to also initiate an event that would enhance peace and unity among the *Mada* people. Thus, the need for re-branding the festival came up in 2014, under the leadership of Dandaura and the *Mada* Development Association president Dickson Sambari and other members.

### **Organization of the Nzeh Mada Festival**

The festival is headed by the chairman planning committee who is saddle with the responsibility to ensure smooth running of the programme. The *Nzeh* festival was initially a one-day programme or two days and is a place where people come and dance and share dishes. However, with the re-branding in 2014, the festival became a place for tourism where people could come with their families, their children to catch fun. They provided things for different segment of the programme. They created the children fanfare so that children could disturb their parents to attend the festival. They came up with a special programme for the intellect called colloquium where they could present speeches and papers. They also create tourism for families especially food fare where they can buy *Mada* dishes for the younger ones. *Nzeh* festival has gala and award night where people can have fun also during the award they have the beauty pageantry, where the winner became the Miss *Nzeh Mada*. Another important event is the Novelty football match, prayers on Friday and Sunday, traditional carnival, *Mada* greetings to the *Chun* palace. To sum it up, there are nine events in the *Nzeh* festival that are taking place annually.

*Nzeh Mada* festival is a platform for exploring different tourism in the area. In the course of the festival, participants are permitted to go round the village especially tourist attractive areas in the Akwanga town. For instance, the dance in group to the *Chun* palace is an opportunity to the strangers and other *Mada* people who are staying outside Akwanga to have knowledge of their culture. It is also an opportunity for them to meet with the King (*Chun Mada*) especially for those who came from distance to witness the event. More so, there are hotels that are owned by *Mada* sons during the festival. The hotels accommodation provides services that will attract and entertain customers during the festivity. The tourism did not just expose the beauty and nature of Akwanga area but create Job opportunities to the indigenes. Another important event in the organization of the *Nzeh* festival is the gala and award night. This phase of the event is featured with series of entertainments such as contemporary music, beauty pageantry and presentation of award to persons participated in one

contest or the other and also award merit. For a person who is contesting for Miss Nzeh must have an identity of being a *Mada* person and also be able to speak *Mada* and their cultural dance as parts of the criteria for the contest. The winner of the festival is emerged through public voting. The winner of the last contest was rewarded with a car. The novelty football is also an event feature in the festival and it's strictly for prominent stakeholders and politicians. They come together from various works of life and play football including the *Chun Mada*. It has been recorded that in the previous series, those that were divided by politician and the political parties, this football served as an avenue for them to be united on themselves!

### **Declaration of Programmes during the Festival**

The programme is declared by the *Chun Mada*, and the first event in the series is prayer for the *Mada Nation*. This is a clear testimony that the people have high recognition for religion and they saw the need to solicit for peace through prayers. Furthermore, the next step for the declaration of the programme is the novelty football which is on Saturdays and the match is used to demonstrate unity. Politically, the football match has enhances peace and unity amongst the *Mada* politicians despite their political differences they come together as brothers in this platform.

The third events is the tourism event, where they have the *Mada* traditional foods and attires in which family and friends, couples could go there and buy some of these materials, and there are also artifacts that portray so many meanings. It is also a place for learning especially for one who had never been to that festival before. The winner of the pageantry for 2014 was given a car as a prize. The fourth event is the colloquium where intellectuals present speeches and papers in the course of the festival on Saturday. These paper presentations are centred on peace and unity. For instance in the 2014 edition, Sambari presented an article in the opening speech on preservation of *Mada* culture. Amin Zaigi Ngharen wrote on a topic Historical perspective of *Mada* people and the concept of unity. Also, non-*Mada* intellectual wrote article entitled: Antidote to security challenges by Labaran Maku and lots others. This is to enlighten the young and the old on the need to foster unity and togetherness in *Mada* community and beyond.

Furthermore, one of the notable events that made the festival attractive to so many people is the dancing to the *Chun Mada* palace, where the entire people dance round the *Akwanga* town and also to the *Chun Mada* palace. The dancing is a strategic one as they dance across the *Mada* areas and also part of the places where there is settlement of the non-*Madas*. One of the importance of the dances is that, the younger generation could identify with their ancestral place of heritage, which means an average child that had been attending this festival could testify if there is any land clashes with the *Mada* people or not. Also, the dance does not only serve for entertainment only but also politically enlighten the younger generation to avoid any land crisis with the non-*Mada* people.

### **The Impact of the Nzeh Mada Festival Economic Impact**

In the pre-colonial period, the *Mada* people have well established economic activities such as agricultural crafts, hunting and gathering etc. their economy boosted by their trade relationship among themselves and their neighbours. The *Nzeh* festival is a good platform advertised and boost these local products such as the traditional artires, Hoes, palm pipe etc. like Terhemba rightly suggested that *Mada* local traders should always learn to take advantage of it attraction of multitudes of population into the area when hosted by engaging a profitable venture.

Corroborating the above idea, he is of the view that the *Nzeh* festival should be a best avenue for local business men to show case their products in the course of the festival, to influence more customers and with evidence of the precious edition which we could see even the people that were not living with *Madas* came and participated in one way or the other. More so, it helps in boosting the micro business as there was evidence of about 5000 people that came for the festival and they recorded a great increase in sales.

Furthermore, with the contemporary development in the technology, the festival is an easier means to disseminate information about your products on social media, radio station, television. Another important aspect of the benefits of the *Nzeh* festival economically is exposition to other neighboring and distance customers.

Thus, it enhances the long-distance trade that has been existence since 19<sup>th</sup> century in this

way, especially their pottery crafts, because some of the neighbour communities like the Eggons and Madas locally made pots.

They produce pots and they used for storage of grains or water, it's called *gyana* (A large clay pots with wide opening) they also have the *kari*, an average size pot used for cooking food, *atses* smaller pot for soup, *mbun* an earthen ware musical instrument with two opening and clay plates of different shapes and sizes. Evidently, one could rightly say that the pottery six of the Mada women is unique in the sense that they could produce for commercial purposes and also for their domestic utensils.

### **Social Impacts**

Socially, it creates a sense of belongings for every Mada man and it also enlighten the present generation on the culture of the Mada people. For example, cultural carnival which involved dancing to the Chun Mada palace and they watch with dance along the Akwanga streets, this also shows a cultural rebirth in the Mada nation. Secondly, the installation of the royal stool was one of the greatest impacts as a result of oneness and unity as we could see that the Chun Mada was recognize as a first- class title holder by Umaru Tanko Al-makura (the then executive Governor of Nasarawa State). Another social impact was the introduction of tourism. People go round exploring their tourist centers. More so, food fair which they prepared during the festivity could be served to visitors who did not know anything about Mada dishes and even for Mada native who could not attend the festivity for one reason or the other. In an interview with a young man which he unveils the truth that the *Nzeh* festival of 2014 was the first occasion he ate his cultural dishes. Furthermore, the children fiesta is a way to create cultural rebirth among the younger children focus on western culture thereby neglecting our African culture. Thus, the *Nzeh* festival was the best platform to correct that notion in order not to destroy our culture. The *Nzeh* festival featuring colloquium as one of the events where intellectuals could speak about cultures had helped to educate those who have no or little knowledge about the Mada culture or history. People like prof. Amin Zaigir Nagharen in the previous wrote on the historical perspective of the *Mada* people and the concept of the unity. Also, the *Nzeh* festival creates unity and security among the Mada as we can see is one of the aims of the festival. The former minister of information who wrote in his article festival as an antidote to the security challenged where he noted that festival is a major avenue through which the much desired Ideal of the unity, peaceful coexistence and community development can be promoted. More so, the *Nzeh* festival had great impact in the society as we can see, following the great number of Mada people attendants in series of social activities that took place. In the course of the festival, avenue for meeting new relationship between individuals which could even lead to marriage is created. Following these series of social activities like gala night, food fair, children fiesta, etc. in an interview granted by some young men and women that were present in the last edition (2014) are waiting anxiously for the next edition of this festival and also for those that have not visited before with this paper they could they could also explore the beauty and impacts of this festival.

### **Political Impacts**

There is no doubt that the *Nzeh* festival has contributed immensely to the political growth and development particularly among the Mada people because the struggles of the traditional stool which led to internal crisis among the Mada people was a necessity to initiate an event that would bring unity, peace and progress among the different clans of the various villages. The *Nzeh* festivals, following the series of events, about 10,000 people were gathered and it recorded about 300 students from different institutions of learning in the state and beyond. In the festival, following season at which the events take place in April (Easter period) close to the general election of 2015, the last edition of the festival was an avenue for the various aspirants to come for campaigns especially for the Mada politicians.

It was recorded that the gubernatorial aspirants in APGA, and Mike Abdul, the senatorial aspirant for PDP, and Silas Ali Agara, the running mate of His Excellency (the then executive Governor, Nasarawa State) and his wife (Mairo Tanko Al-Makura) came for the festival. These politicians that attended the festival made their aspiration known to the general public and they presented their manifesto if chance would be given to them for the leadership. Therefore, the festival provides room for campaign and the attendees also support the festival both in money and kind.

## **II. Summary**

This paper attempt to study the *Nzeh* festival among the Mada people with emphasis on the socio-cultural economic and political impacts of the festival to Mada nation. The word *Nzeh* means “BEAUTY” or “pride” so *Nzeh* festival was primarily to display the beauty of oneness in the Mada nation. It has a popular saying “*Madasei Gyir*” meaning *Mada* is one. The *Nzeh* festival was initiated by the *Chun Mada* (ILIYA RENI) in 1980. Following the political struggles and crisis that almost destroyed the Mada nation. There was need to create peace and unity among the people. The activities in the festival is mostly dancing, eating and drinking among the *Madas* of the various clans.

However, in 2014 it experienced a rebirth in culture and date for the event was changed to every easter period yearly. This is to the convenience of every Mada person. It also featured series of events like the carnival dancing to the Chun Mada palace and to tour the Mada boundaries in Akwanga, Novelty football match among stakeholders, children food fair, gala and award night, prayers for the land all these were ways to maintain peace and unity among the Mada people.

Economically, the festival led to the discovery of the abandon tourist centre that could generate income to the society, increase in profit during the festival. It is a major source of receive donations by political aspirants in cash and kind; it is also an avenue to explore the local industries of the Mada people.

Politically, it witnessed a rebirth in the history of Mada as it is a testimony that they celebrate the recognition n of his Royal Highness Samson Gamu Yaren as a first-class chief. Moreso, the festival was a cultural rebirth indeed, it enlightens the younger generation in different spheres to embrace and appreciate their native culture and discard the western culture. In this way they could take advantage of the modernization and westernization to promote their culture outside.

## **III. Conclusion**

This paper is written to explore the hidden beauty of the Mada people culture so that the younger generation could adopt it, and use the opportunity provided by the festival effectively. It also serves as a reminder to every Mada man to embrace each other in peace and unity. The aim this research is also to enlighten the Mada people on how to effectively exploit the natural deposit of the resources in their locality so that to develop their economy.

The festival gives one a sense of belonging irrespective of your family, clan or village. Another important aspect of this festival is the discovery of new relationship that could lead to marriage.

Finally, culture is the best part of Africans that the Europeans could not be taken from the Africans totally. They have influenced it already but it is in a moment of rebirth. Therefore, this paper urges every individual to embrace culture as the only means to express the uniqueness of African and a way to debunk the assertion made by Travors Ropper and other Eurocentric scholars that African have no history whereas by reasons of this research, it is discovered that Mada people in Nigeria have a well-organized culture, socio-economic activities and political structure (organization) not until the subjugation by the Europeans in 1917. That disports this culture.

## **References**

- Emmanuel Samu Dandaura, (April June 2015). “The word Nzeh” Nzeh Mada festival cultural rebirth after Samu Danduara, Dan vintzye Yakibu, Solomon Manzuche, Terhemba Dzomon, eds, Nzeh communication Limited, vol.1 No. 1 p.5.
- Jonathan Mamu Ayuba, (2008). Economy and society in the colonial North central Nigeria, the History of Akwanga Region 1911-1960, Ahmadu Bello University, Press Limited, p29, 126.
- Interviewed HRH Habila Adamu Aboki 64 Years, Title holder, Akwanga West Development Area 05-2022.
- Interviewed Emmanuel Samu Danduara, 58 years, Department of Theater and Cultural Studies Nasarawa State University, Keffi 08-12-2022.
- Interviewed Dan Yakubu, 58 years, Civil Servant, Akwanga.

Interviewed Miss Nzeh student at Akwanga 28 years 09-12-2022.

Labaran Maku (April-June 2015). "Festival as antidote to security challenges" Nzeh Mada festival cultural Rebirth after decades, in Samson Gamu Yaren Emmanuel Samu Dandaura et al, Nzeh Communication limited, Vol.1, p 37.

Interviewed Samuel Nuhu Baba, Department of Languages and Linguistic, Nasarawa State University, Keffi.

Emmanuel Samu Dandaura.

Terhemba Dzomon (April –June 2015). "Boosting the Economy with Nzeh Mada" Nzeh Mada Festival cultural Rebirth After Decades, Vol. 1, NO. 1, P.67.

Terhemba Dzomon (April –June 2015). "Boosting the Economy with Nzeh Mada" Nzeh Mada Festival cultural Rebirth After Decades, Vol. 1, NO. 1, P.67.

Amin Zaigi Ngharen, (2014). Hostory, Colonialism and the underdevelopment of Akwanga Division a study of identity and challenges, Abuja CMP Publishers P30-31.

Terhemba Dzomon (April –June 2015). "Boosting the Economy with Nzeh Mada" Nzeh Mada Festival cultural Rebirth After Decades, Vol. 1, NO. 1, P30-31.

Interviewed Mr. Daniel Kyuni, 50 Years Micro Business Man, Akwanga.

Terhemba Dzomon (April –June 2015). "Boosting the Economy with Nzeh Mada" Nzeh Mada Festival cultural Rebirth After Decades, Vol. 1, NO. 1, P.69-71.

Amin Zaigi Ngharen, Mada Religion and Society P.29.

Amin Zaigi Ngharen, Mada Religion and Society P.30-31.

Interviewed Prof. Emmanuel Samu Dandaura.

Amin Zaigi Ngharen (April June 2015). "Historical Perspectives of the Mada people and the concept of unity" Nzeh Mada festival cultural Rebirth after decades vol.1, NO.1, P.12

Terhemba Dzomon (April – June 2015). "Boosting the Economy with Nzeh Mada" Nzeh Mada Festival cultural Rebirth after Decades, Vol. 1, NO. 1, P.68.