

AN ANALYSIS OF THE ROLE OF ANJIDA DAY FESTIVAL (ADF) IN PROMOTING UNITY AND DEVELOPMENT IN NASARAWA STATE

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ARTICLE INFO

Article No.: 0352

Accepted Date: 07/04/2026

Published Date: 30/05/2026

Type: Research

ABSTRACT

The Anjida Day Festival (ADF) is a grassroots cultural institution of the Mada people in Anjida, Nasarawa State, yet remains underexplored in literature on festivals and rural development. Adopting a qualitative interpretivist approach (Creswell & Poth, 2018), this study draws on in-depth interviews with 20 stakeholders; elders, women, youth, vendors, okada riders, and visitors to examine how ADF is experienced as a medium for unity and community development. Thematic analysis reveals three key processes which include. First, ADF sustains intergenerational and inter-community bonds through shared rituals, with the masquerade dance identified as the primary driver of repeat attendance and cultural loyalty. Second, participants described ADF as a period of intensified economic activity where livelihoods visibly improve, framing the festival as seasonal support for household welfare. Third, while participants could not recall specific individual disputes, they constantly credited the town hall “Palace Meeting” with preventive conflict mediation, describing it as a collective process that restores harmony. The research concludes that ADF functions as a living institution that generates bonding, bridging, and linking social capital, offering a self-sustaining model for cultural preservation, economic resilience, and inclusive governance. By centering participants’ voices, the paper shows how community-owned festivals can force development without external intervention.(Agbese2018; P18; P15; P9; P11; P12; P20; Putnam 2000).

Keywords

Anjida Day Festival, Cultural Festival, Social Capital, Mada People, Community Development, Nasarawa State, and Inclusive Participation

Introduction

The Anjida Day Festival is more than a colourful, annual celebration; it is a home-based engine for unity and development. It began as a gathering of elders under the “Palace Meeting” (Miti re Takpa) in 1958, where community members discussed welfare, made financial contributions, and shared loans. Over time, this meeting transformed into a full-grown cultural festival, now organized by the Mada Development Association, Anjida Branch.

Today, the festival brings together elders, women, youth, and members of the Diaspora from Anjida and its neighboring settlements, including Anjida Gida, Nintabi, Ntaki, Shon, and Koto. It serves as a platform for cultural expression, conflict resolution, and collective planning, all while strengthening social bonds and stimulating local advancement.

Intellectual attention to Nigerian festivals has largely centered on large, state-sponsored events such as the Argungu Fishing Festival (Eze-Uzomaka, 2014) and Calabar Carnival (Ogundele, 2015), which are often framed as tourist attractions or heritage displays. However, grassroots, community-owned festivals like the Anjida Day Festival remain underexplored in academic literature. As a result, little is known about how such localized cultural practices function as living institutions for social cohesion, conflict mediation, and livelihood support in rural settings. This is a significant gap because rural communities in Nasarawa State continue to struggle with fragile social trust, exclusion of women and youth from decision-making, and over-reliance on external aid for development initiatives yet ADF has persisted for over six decades as a self-organized platform addressing these same issues.

The problem this study addresses is the absence of documented, interpretive accounts of how ADF operates as a community development mechanism from the perspective of its participants. Without such understanding, development practitioners risk overlooking culturally embedded solutions that already exist within communities. To explore this, the study is guided by the following research questions: (1) How do participants experience and interpret ADF as a platform for unity and social capital formation among the Mada people of Anjida? (2) How do community members describe the ways ADF shapes economic activities and local livelihoods during the festival period? (3) How is conflict resolution and inclusive participation enacted and understood by stakeholders within ADF?

In line with these questions, the objectives of this study are: (a) to explore participants’ meanings and experiences of unity, bonding, and bridging through ADF; (b) to document how vendors, transport operators, and traders describe changes in their economic activities during ADF; and (c) to examine how elders, women, and youth interpret the festival’s role in mediating disputes and fostering inclusive decision-making. By privileging the voices and lived experiences of Anjida people, this paper seeks to understand ADF not as a spectacle, but as a social process that sustains cultural identity and community welfare.

Cultural festivals have long been recognized as essential components of community development, promoting social cohesion, cultural exchange, and economic expansion. The Anjida Day Festival showcases the rich cultural heritage of the Mada people and serves as an instrument for community development, preserving traditions while creating opportunities for empowerment and growth.

Theoretical Framework

This study draws on Social Capital Theory (Putnam, 2000), which posits that social networks, norms of reciprocity, and trust are critical for the civic development. Putnam (2000) distinguishes three forms of social capital relevant to ADF. First, bonding social capital refers to ties in homogenous groups, evident in ADF through intergenerational bonding where elders

transmit Glo and Vrengba dances to youth, reinforcing shared identity/uniqueness (Putnam, 2000, p. 22). Second, bridging social capital connects heterogeneous or diverse groups, seen when visitors from Nintabi, Ntaki, and Koto attend ADF, creating inter-community trust. Third, linking social capital has to do with vertical ties to institutions, which ADF activates when festival committees engage local government and NGOs for health outreach and infrastructure funding. This framework allows us to analyze ADF not merely as entertainment, but as a means for generating conviction and collective action (Putnam, 2000; Foley & Edwards, 1999)

Methodology

This study employed a qualitative research design within an interpretivist paradigm (Creswell & Poth, 2018) to explore how participants make sense of the Anjida Day Festival as a mechanism for unity and development. Data were collected in April 2025 through in-depth interviews with 20 key stakeholders purposively selected to reflect ADF's diverse constituencies. The sample included elders, women leaders, youth representatives, food vendors, okada riders, traders, artisans, and visitors from Anjida, Nintabi, Ntaki, Shon, and Koto. Selection criteria were direct involvement in ADF and ability to provide well-off, experiential accounts of its cultural, social, and economic dimensions.

Interviews were conducted face-to-face in English, Hausa and Mada, lasted 15–20 minutes each, and followed a semi-structured guide covering themes of intergenerational bonding, economic activity, conflict mediation, and inclusive participation. Thematic analysis was used: transcripts were coded inductively to identify recurring patterns in participants' narratives, with particular attention to their own words, metaphors, and silences. No quantitative or statistical analysis was undertaken, as the study prioritized depth of meaning over measurement. Ethical clearance was obtained. Informed consent was secured, and participants are anonymized using codes (P1–P20) to ensure confidentiality.

The meaning of Anjida day festival

Cultural festivals are defined by UNESCO (2009) as periodic or seasonal celebrations that reinforce community identity via shared rituals. In the Nigerian context, festivals serve as platforms for social cohesion and economic activity (Adegbija, 2017; Ogundele, 2015). Within this tradition, Garba, Akogwu & Barde (2025:292) describe ADF as, "Celebration of cultural heritage, a time for community bonding and unity as well as a platform for showcasing traditional practices and customs and as a platform for socialization and entertainment".

Anjida Day Festival (ADF) is a cultural program which helps in bringing the sons and daughters of Anjida back home annually to meet with one another in unity to discuss matter that will enable the community to develop so as to meet the modern standard.

In the words of participant 1:

Anjida Day Festival to the best of my understanding is a period where sons and daughters of the land come together in unity as they embrace each other and to discuss way forward for the purpose of progress, promotion of the festival and the community as a whole. Again there are importance attach to Anjida Day Festivals, which are: it helps in shaping our culture, bringing people to air out their views, letting people know the need and important of staying together, checking by going back to the past so as to iron out our differences and embrace each other in unity under one umbrella (P1, April 2025).

As an opening for community relationship, the Anjida Day Festival gives a rare chance for people to come together, share experiences and strengthen social bonds. It ambience is alive with laughter, music and dance, creating a sense of belonging among the participants via traditional

performances and communal activities, the festival offers myriad ways for individuals to connect with each other and celebrate their shared tradition.

In an interview with Participant 4, a visitor on what is ADF and she said: 'ADF is a festival whereby Mada people of Anjida community show their talents and display their culture through dance performance and other activities in cultural way' (P4). From this we can say that ADF provides platform for cultural performance by the host and other participants in the festival as they show their talents.

While Participant 6, view ADF 'as cultural feast observed or celebrated by Anjida people which helps in bringing people together' (P6). Participant 14, an elderly woman said: 'ADF is a seasonal community celebration by sons and daughters of our land Anjida which comprises of different traditional dance, music, storytelling and the like' (P14).

ADF is a rich cultural festival usually organized by Mada Development Association, Anjida Branch and celebrated by all and sundry to promote and sustain their culture even in midst of western influence. Another participant said, ADF is a living gallery of tradition where dance, music, ritual, attire, and taste converge to celebrate identity and unity of people (P10). The prominence of dance and music reflects a dynamic, expressive culture, while the inclusion of rituals and traditional wear speaks to a reverence for heritage.

Historical Background

The origin of Anjida Day Festival lies in the Palace Meeting (Miti re Takpa), a 1958 initiative that brought elders together in unity to discuss unity and progress of the land. Members of union contributed funds into a collective pool, which was later shared as interest-bearing loans, an early form of micro-finance. In 1985, the association was renamed Anjida Progressive and Cultural Association (APCA) to meet bank requirements for account opening.

In 1987, it became Mada Development Association (MDA), Anjida Branch, aligning with a broader unifying order for all Mada cultural groups. Over time, cultural dances, music, and communal activities were integrated, eventually evolving into the modern Anjida Day Festival.

As noted by Jonathan Galadima and late Hon. Benjamin S. Waziri, the festival grew from a small elders' meeting into a community-wide celebration that now includes women and youth as key participants in Anjida Day Festival (ADF). In the words of participant 2:

To the best of my knowledge Anjida Day Festival started with Palace Meeting (miti re takpa) and is dated back to 1958 where only the elders or house owner were the eligible members and the mostly met at the chief palace (takpa chon) discuss as a people, do financial contribution and share among themselves as loan and they redeem it during their next annual meeting and so it continues. The name was change in 1985 to Anjida Progressive and Cultural Association (APCA) to meet up bank requirement for account opening, when they come for this annual meeting , the perform cultural dances etcetera. Again it was changed to Mada Development Association (MDA) Anjida Branch in 1987 when the mother association gave an order that all associations should adopt a unifying name as Mada Development Association and that is why that of Anjida has now become MDA Anjida Branch. Series of meeting has taken place and is mostly accompany with music and dance as well as other cultural activities well organized and staged (P2).

The association called Palace Meeting was productively initiated which brought the elders of the Anjida community to discuss matters of unity and progress. As a communal, they sought to advance a sense of community and cooperation, laying the groundwork for the active festival

that exists today. The association's annual meetings served as a platform for members to share ideas, address challenges, offer solution and work towards the betterment of the host community. In agreement with the above, participant 3 said, “this Anjida Day Festival started with the name “miti re takpa” in Anjida sarki where Anjida gida, Nintabi, Ntaki, Shon,Koto and other Anjida settlements in other places turn up for meeting, and it developed to what we have today” (P3). Cultural activities which festival has as performative ingredients such as dance, music, song and other live performances done during ADF has turned or transform it into what is obtainable as Anjida Day Festival today.

The Contribution of Anjida Day Festival to the Community’s Heritage

Festivals play a vital role in preserving and celebrating community heritage. One of the significant contributions of festivals is the preservation of traditional practices and customs. By keeping cultural traditions alive, festivals ensure that these customs are passed down to future generations, allowing them to learn from and appreciate their cultural roots. This preservation of cultural heritage helps to maintain a sense of identity and continuity within the community.

In in-depth interview with participant 7 he said:

In order to contribute to developing Anjida community, youth should be engaged in decision making so as to learn from the elders of the land, if the youth who are back-bone of the community are not taken along what then happens when the elders are no more? I think inclusion of the youth will help in preserving the culture. Again, to preserve our cultural heritage the elderly women should continue to perform some specific cultural dance that is unique to mada people so as for younger women and daughters of Anjida to learn and sustain for future generation, and while they dance they should use the appropriate make-up like pasting of sesame seed and sesame seed on their skin, props such as axe, calabash, etc (P7).

From the above, it very clear that women inclusion is very important and necessary for the sustainability of the cultural heritage for generation to come. In support of the above, participant 5 said:

Women should be elected into Mada Development Association, Anjida Branch offices, once they involved, and engaged they will definitely know what is going on and will contribute their quarter to building Anjida. Also this festival we are talking about, I meant Anjida Day Festival should be a continuous event that our people should embrace and keep doing and observing, all the different dance steps be maintain for younger generation to know and learn how to do it and other cultural activities (P5).

One may be right to say no society can develop without women therefore women inclusion is important to nation building most especially in area of sustaining the tradition of a people. In addition to preserving traditions, festivals also promote cultural exchange and understanding. By bringing people together from diverse backgrounds, festivals foster cross-cultural understanding and appreciation. This exchange of ideas and experiences helps to break down cultural barriers, promoting tolerance and unity among community members. As people from different cultures come together to celebrate, they learn from each other and develop a deeper appreciation for the richness of cultural diversity.

Festivals also provide a platform for local artists to showcase their talents, promoting cultural expression and creativity. Through music, dance, and art, festivals celebrate the unique cultural heritage of the community. Local artists are given the opportunity to share their work, inspiring others and contributing to the vibrant cultural landscape of the community. This

showcase of local talent not only promotes cultural expression but also helps to preserve traditional art forms and encourage innovation.

Moreover, festivals offer a space for community members to share their stories, traditions, and experiences. By providing a platform for community members to come together and share their experiences, festivals strengthen community bonds and foster a sense of belonging. This sharing of experiences helps to build relationships and promote a sense of unity among community members, creating a stronger, more cohesive community. Overall, festivals are an essential part of community heritage, celebrating cultural traditions, promoting cross-cultural understanding, showcasing local talent, and strengthening community bonds. By preserving and celebrating cultural heritage, festivals help to create a sense of identity and continuity within the community, while also promoting unity and cultural diversity.

How Anjida Day Festival Fosters Unity

The festival helps people feel connected and united. Everyone comes together, enjoys the music and has a good time, which shows how powerful the festival is in bringing people together. In support of this participant 2 said, “festival brings unity, and the people see themselves as one, you see them playing with each other, singing and dancing together and when you observe with keen interest you will know that it really unite the people” (P2). Anjida Day Festival (ADF) fosters unity amongst people like any other festival through the following deliberate social mechanisms.

Conflict Resolution

Anjida Day Festival (ADF)’s emphasis on peace building encourages communities to resolve disputes harmoniously. The "Palace Meeting" provides an unbiased, culturally respected space for airing grievances, promoting reconciliation and reinforcing the significance of peaceful coexistence. Interview data confirmed that participants view this as a core function of ADF, though specific cases remain undocumented. Visitors and community members consistently referenced the town hall session as impactful. As participant 15, a visitor noted, “I enjoy every bit of the festival, especially the town hall meeting section where conflict resolutions are being made. It helps us settle issues and move forward together” (P15). While youth, women, and elders affirmed that ADF “has settled a lot of disputes among different people,” none could provide individual-to-individual case examples during interviews. Instead, participants described the process in collective terms, “we have settled a lot of cases where unity should thrive for progress purposes... not on individual cases, but on how the community can forge ahead” (P20). This suggests ADF functions as preventive and communal conflict mediation rather than formal arbitration. The absence of specific cases indicates disputes are likely resolved informally during the “Palace Meeting” and not recorded as legal precedents, yet participants still credit the festival with maintaining social harmony necessary for development (Duru, 2021).

Intergenerational Bonding

The festival encourages elders to pass down traditions to youth, strengthening family ties and preserving cultural heritage. This intergenerational bonding creates a sense of stability and shared identity, bridging the gap between old and young. For instance, traditional dances like Glo, Vrengba, and Bwan are choreographed for mixed-age groups, allowing elders to dance alongside children and teenagers, promoting mutual respect and shared memory.

Community Services

Charity work during Anjida Day Festival promotes a sense of shared responsibility and collective ownership. This collaborative effort brings residents together, encouraging them to work towards a common goal, and fostering a sense of unity and cooperation.

Cultural Exchange

Visitors from other towns participate in the festival, fostering inter-community relationships and understanding. This exchange promotes tolerance, appreciation, and celebration of diversity, breaking down cultural barriers and building bridges between communities.

Inclusive Participation

One of the most transformative aspects of the ADF is its deliberate move toward inclusive participation. In the past, community decision-making was dominated by male elders, leaving women and youth on the margins. In recent years, the ADF planning committee through Mada Development Association (MDA) Anjida Branch has been restructured to reserve seats for women representatives, ensuring that their perspectives on family wellbeing, market access, and cultural programming shape the agenda from the outset. At the same time, youth are recruited as volunteers and sub-committee leaders, taking charge of logistics, sanitation, digital promotion, and onsite security such as Vigilante Group of Nigeria (VGN). This intergenerational collaboration creates a dynamic dialogue: elders share wisdom and historical context, while young people inject fresh ideas, technology skills, and energy. The result is a governance model that mirrors democratic principles at the grassroots level, fostering ownership and reducing the risk of elite capture. By institutionalizing women's and youth's roles, the ADF not only widens its base of support but also cultivates future community leaders who are already familiar with collective decision-making.

Shared Rituals and Performances

Rituals and performances are the heartbeat of the Anjida Day Festival, and they serve as influential social glue. Traditional dances such as Glo, Vrengba, and Bwan are choreographed for mixed-age groups, allowing elders to dance side by side with youngsters. This intermixing breaks down age-based cliques that often exist in everyday village life, encouraging mutual respect and shared memory.

Participant interviews revealed the masquerade dance as a major highlight driving repeat attendance. Multiple interviewees expressed plan to return specifically for this performance “We enjoy the festival especially the masquerade dance and we would like to go back to another subsequent edition of the festival to witness it once more” (P15). Similarly, “The masquerade is what brings me back every year. My children have never seen it before (P18). This repeat-attendance intent indicates ADF's performative elements create emotional attachment and cultural loyalty, key indicators of social capital bonding (Putnam, 2000). The masquerade therefore functions as both entertainment and intergenerational cultural transmission.

Beyond dance, collective singing of folk songs and communal meals, reinforce a sense of “one family” that transcends clan lines. Food preparation itself becomes a joint act, with women, men, and youth each contributing ingredients and labor.

These shared rituals and performances produce what Durkheim termed collective effervescence (Durkheim, 1912/1995), a heightened emotional energy that arises when people engage in synchronized, meaningful activity. Traditional dances, collective singing of folks songs, and communal meals reinforce a sense of “one family” that transcends clan lines. That energy translates into stronger social bonds and reduced inter-clan tension. Additional, mechanisms include community service through charity work, cultural exchange as visitors from other towns participate, and conflict resolution through the “Palace Meeting” which provides an impartial, culturally respected space for airing grievances.

How Anjida Day Festival Drives Development

Anjida Day Festival (ADF) also drives development to the host community through the following points:

Skill Development

Workshops on crafts, music, or entrepreneurship empower attendees with new skills, promoting economic empowerment. These skills can be used or applied to make income, contributing to the growth of local economy and enhancing the community's overall well-being.

Local Business Growth

Increased footfall benefits local businesses like food stalls, accommodation, and transport services (especially the *okada* in the area). Local artisans and craftsmen showcase their products, generating revenue and promoting cultural preservation.

Infrastructure Development

Funds raised during the festival can be directed towards community projects like schools, clinics, and road repairs. These improvements enhance the quality of life for residents, making the community a more attractive place to live and invest in. There's community hall (town hall) though under construction along Nintabi road Anjida, the resources were gotten from the festival which help in raising the structure to the level it is today and that's how the festival drives development.

Cultural Preservation & Education

Cultural preservation at the Anjida Day Festival (ADF) can operate as a living curriculum. Elders/stakeholders can set up informal "master class" stations where they teach traditional dances, songs, and craft techniques (such as calabash carving, beadwork, and weaving) directly to youth participants. These hands on sessions can be recorded on video and later be edited into short educational clips that can be distributed to local primary and secondary schools. By integrating festival footage into classroom lessons, teachers can show students the relevance of their heritage in a modern context, fostering pride and stability. Moreover, oral histories collected during storytelling circles can be transcribed and archived in a community library if there is, creating a repository for future researchers and for Diaspora members seeking to reconnect with their roots. This dual approach, experiential learning on site and documented resources for schools, ensures that cultural knowledge is not lost to modernization, but rather evolves as a dynamic, taught tradition.

Economic Stimulus

ADF acts as a powerful economic engine for the entire community. In the weeks leading up to the event, food vendors, transport operators like Okada (motorcycle taxis), and craft sellers set up stalls, generating immediate cash flow. Findings from interviews indicate that participants experience ADF as a period of intensified economic activity distinct from normal business days. Food vendors, transport operators, and traders consistently described festival periods using phrases such as "above the usual," "from morning till night," and "people are plenty, everybody is buying" to convey the shift in commercial tempo. One akara seller contrasted her normal routine with festival days, "On a normal day I used to fry small. But during Anjida Day, I can fry from morning till night" (P9). Another vendor echoed this experience, "Some of us even get almost ₦80,000 to ₦90,000 in a day during the festival" (P11). Okada riders linked their work intensity to population movement, "Because of the people coming from Nintabi, Ntaki, Koto etc. we are carrying passengers' non-stop from morning till night" (P12). Shop owners similarly attributed changes to the crowd, "We have more income during Anjida Day Festival due to the population that floods the community. Even things that don't sell

for one month, they finish in two days” (P13). Across accounts, participants framed ADF as seasonal livelihood support, with proceeds reinvested into school fees, shop restocking, and family welfare. The emphasis in all narratives was on the experience of economic uplift rather than numerical measurement (P9; P11; P12).

Infrastructure & Services

Revenue generated from membership registration, annual dues, sponsorships, and donations be deliberately invested and reinvested into community infrastructure. Recent festivals have funded the building of community town hall though under construction. The festival can collaborate with local government and health NGOs, the festival can also sets up temporary health outreach booths offering free blood pressure checks, malaria testing, and vaccination drives. Sanitation facilities (clean water points, portable toilets) are erected onsite and left for community use after the event. These tangible improvements have not only raised the quality of life for residents but also create a lasting legacy that outlasts the festival itself, reinforcing the idea that cultural celebration and development are inseparable.

Tourism & External Investment

Media coverage and social media promotion can turn Anjida Day Festival into a regional tourist attraction. Visitors from neighboring towns and from the Anjida Diasporas can travel to experience the dances, cuisine, and crafts, injecting fresh cash into local businesses. This influx of tourists can catch the attention of NGOs and development agencies, some of whom may want to sponsor youth skill training workshops in areas such as digital marketing, tailoring, and soap making. Such external investment may not only diversify the local economy but also brings new knowledge and networks that can be leveraged for future projects. By positioning itself as a cultural tourism destination, the festival can create virtuous cycle: increased visibility attracts more visitors, which in turn may generate more revenue and interest from external partners (Smith 2020).

Leadership & Capacity Building (Cooperative societies)

Beyond temporary jobs, the festival serves as a launch pad for long term community enterprises. Women leaders, empowered by their visible role on the planning committee, can form cooperative societies that operate year round. The cooperative should be handled or governed by democratic principles mirrored from the festival’s own inclusive structure, ensuring transparency and shared responsibility. The skills gained, financial record keeping, marketing, group decision making, strengthen household incomes and build a cadre of local entrepreneurs who can drive development independent of external aid. In this way, the festival’s impact extends far beyond a single celebration, seeding sustainable, community owned enterprises that reinforce both unity and economic resilience.

ADF has driven lots of development however there are challenges facing the success of ADF still. In a chat with participant 8, an elder in the host community and he said:

One of the challenges faced is finance, for there is no development without finance, for finance can facilitate development easily, and it is a major challenge that if it is overcome we will have a very good festival that would help in bringing development (p8, April 2025).

More need to be done to overcome this challenge to take ADF to promise land

Results and Discussion

The narratives from 20 participants indicate that ADF’s most reflective role lies in reproducing social capital through ritualized interaction, consistent with Putnam’s (2000) framework. Intergenerational bonding emerged as the basis of ADF’s social function. Elders

emphasized the purposeful inclusion of children and teenagers in Glo, Vrengba, and Bwan dances as “teaching without a classroom,” a strategy for transmitting cultural knowledge and reinforcing shared identity. Youth and visitor accounts corroborated this, with the masquerade dance repeatedly cited as the emotional anchor of the festival. Participants explained that “the masquerade is what brings me back every year. My children have never seen anything like it”, while others stated, “We enjoy the festival especially the masquerade dance and we would like to go back to another subsequent edition to witness it again”. This blueprint of repeat attendance signals that ADF creates affective ties to place and heritage, producing the kind of bonding social capital that sustains group cohesion beyond the festival period (P7; P18; P15).

Bridging social capital was evident in how ADF temporarily dissolves boundaries between Anjida and neighbouring settlements. The influx of people from Nintabi, Ntaki, Shon, and Koto was described by vendors and transport operators using phrases such as “people are plenty,” “everybody is buying,” and “from morning till night”. Participants characterized festival days as qualitatively distinct from normal commerce, noting that goods that “don’t sell for one month... finish in two days”. Importantly, the economic narrative was framed in experiential terms rather than statistics; vendors spoke of being able to meet household needs like school fees, while commercial motorcycle riders popularly known as *okada* riders described “carrying passengers’ non-stop” due to population movement. This suggests ADF functions as a seasonal redistributive mechanism, channeling external money into local households and reinforcing economic interdependence across communities (P11; P12; P13).

The third theme relates to conflict mediation and governance. All participant categories referenced the town hall “Palace Meeting” as central to ADF, with one visitor remarking, “I enjoy every bit of the festival, especially the town hall meeting section where conflict resolutions are being made. It helps us settle issues and move forward together”. Yet when probed, no elder, woman, or youth could provide a concrete individual-to-individual case that was resolved during ADF. Instead, participants spoke collectively; “we have settled a lot of cases where unity should thrive for development purposes, not on individual cases, but on how the community can forge ahead”. This silence on specific cases is analytically significant. It indicates that ADF’s conflict mechanism operates as preventive, norm-setting dialogue rather than formal adjudication, consistent with studies of rural festivals as peacebuilding spaces. The Palace Meeting provides a culturally legitimate space where grievances are aired, values are reaffirmed, and social harmony is restored without legal documentation. Participants directly linked this process to development, implying that the absence of open conflict is a prerequisite for the collective action ADF mobilizes (P15; P20; Duru 2021).

Finally, the data reveal an evolving governance structure within ADF. Women and youth described their recent incorporation into the Mada Development Association planning committee as a shift from elder-male dominance to intergenerational partnership. Women noted that holding office enabled them to shape market access and cultural programming, while youth leaders highlighted their role in logistics, sanitation, and digital promotion. This institutionalization of inclusive participation mirrors democratic principles at the grassroots and was credited with increasing community ownership and reducing elite capture. Taken together, these findings position ADF not as a mere spectacle but as a living institution that regenerates trust, circulates resources, and mediates power. Its strength lies in repeated, informal interactions that produce collective effervescence (Durkheim, 1912/1995) the shared emotional energy participants carry into everyday cooperation long after the festival ends (P5; P7; Okoro 2020).

Conclusion

The Anjida Day Festival stands as an influential vehicle for unity and development. It brings together diverse ages, genders, and clans under shared cultural expression, while spurring economic activity, infrastructure improvements, and leadership growth. By reinforcing inclusive structures, ensuring transparent finance, and expanding its outreach, ADF can evolve from an annual celebration into a sustainable engine of community transformation, embodying the true spirit of “one people, one movement”.

Recommendations

Based on participants’ experiences across 20 interviews, the following actions are recommended to strengthen ADF as a sustainable development institution:

First, the Mada Development Association, Anjida Branch should codify reserved seats for women leaders and youth representatives in its constitution. Participants credited their recent inclusion is planning committees with increasing ownership and reducing elite capture, indicating that formalizing these roles will ensure continuity beyond current leadership (P5; P7).

Second, ADF organizers should establish a community digital archive. Elders stressed that “youth should be engaged to learn from the elders” and that “unique dances should be maintained for younger generation”. Recording master-class stations, oral histories, and masquerade performances annually and sharing them with local schools would formalize the “living curriculum” participants described; ensuring cultural knowledge is not lost to modernization (UNESCO 2009; P7).

Third, a dedicated Festival Development Fund with transparent reporting should be created from membership dues, sponsorships, and vendor levies. Finance was identified as the primary constraint to ADF’s growth, and participants’ emphasis on collective accountability suggests that presenting annual financial reports during the Palace Meeting would reinforce trust (P8).

Fourth, the ADF committee should partner with NGOs to train selected elders, women, and youth in basic mediation skills. While participants value the Palace Meeting’s conflict resolution function, none could cite specific cases. Strengthening these informal mechanisms with skills training would enhance ADF’s preventive peace building capacity without formalizing it into a court system (P15; P20; Duru 2021).

Finally, women and youth leaders should be supported to form year-round cooperative societies for tailoring, beadwork, and agro-processing. Vendors described festival earnings as enabling school fees and shop restocking, yet this benefit remains seasonal. Using ADF as an annual marketing platform for cooperatives would convert seasonal income into sustainable enterprises, extending the economic benefits participants identified (P9; P11; Agbese2018).

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