

## HISTORY, ADMINISTRATION AND CHALLENGES OF THE DELTA STATE COUNCIL FOR ARTS AND CULTURE, NIGERIA.

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**ABSTRACT :** Delta State can comfortably stand in for the Nation as a State with Multi-ethnic nationality. And the Delta State Council for Arts and Culture both in recruitment and execution of her day to day activities has these factors considered as the different tribes are deliberately captured. Its role is to promote, propagate, present and preserve the rich cultural heritage of the people of Delta State. The objective of this study is therefore to investigate the basic edict/law setting up the Council as well as the mandate, vision, goals, aims and challenges of the establishment as well as the contributions of the Directors of the Delta State Council for Arts and Culture since inception. This study will be limited to the administration of the Delta Arts Council through reviewing relevant literatures and interviews through the qualitative research methodology to arrive at a robust findings. The study brings to the fore the activities of the council, the organizational structure and the challenges bedeviling the council to enrich the existing literature around the discourse.

**KEYWORDS:** *Delta State, Arts Council, Historical Development, Directors, Challenges, Administration*

### I. INTRODUCTION

Joseph Umukoro in "Cultural Administration and Arts Management in Nigeria" (14), notes that during the early period of independence, there were many arts and cultural agencies, involved in cultural matters in the country. These were institutions neither directly under the federal nor state governments. Rather, they were autonomous agencies, established by private bodies or individuals and foreigners to promote Nigerian arts. One of such organisations, mentioned earlier on was the Nigerian Arts Council (established in 1956), whose responsibilities included mounting exhibitions of Nigerian arts and crafts and organising annual national festivals. The other organisations involved in cultural promotion then were the Yoruba Travelling Theatre Troupes, the 1960 Masks, the Orisun Theatre (formed in 1964, as a foster child of the 1960 Masks), Unibadan Masques (established in the mid-1970s), Artistes' Societies, and many more smaller cultural groups that existed in the towns and villages that were involved in the promotion of culture in their ethnic fashions (IAH, 3:231).

The Second World Black and African Festival of Arts and Culture (FESTAC '77) was held in Nigeria from January 15 to February 12, 1977 (Edosamwan 82) and this global event served as a launching pad for the Delta State Council for Art and Culture, then known as the Bendel Art Council in its desire to attain prominence as an enterprising cultural institution in the country. The Council represented the State creditably in the festival where it promoted the dance and cultural arts of the then Bendel State and won many prizes. It is on record that apart from the presentation of such dance forms as the *Igbabonelimhim* of the Esan people, through the effort of its employee, Joseph Alufa Igbinovia Obayagbona, a fine replica of the ivory mask of Queen Idia was produced to commemorate the continental festival. The original ivory mask had been looted by the British and encased in the British Museum in London (Edosamwan 82). Culture is eminently a national industry, and more generally an urban phenomenon (van der Borg and Russo 20). Cultural exchange therefore gives us the chance to appreciate points of commonality and, where there are differences, to understand the motivations and humanity that underlines them. As identity, politics exert an increasing influence on domestic and international exchanges, these attributes make culture critical forum for negotiation and a medium of exchange in finding shared solutions. Cultural contact provides a forum for unofficial political relationship-building: it keeps open negotiating channels with countries where political connections are in jeopardy, and helps to recalibrate relationships for changing times with emerging powers such as India and China. In the future, alliances are just as likely to be forged along lines of cultural understanding as they are on economic or geographic ones. Obafemi & Ayakoroma (2011:106).

## II. HISTORICAL ANTECEDENTS OF THE DELTA STATE COUNCIL FOR ARTS AND CULTURE

The Delta State Council for Arts and Culture started as the Midwest State Arts Council which was provisionally established in April, 1972 and remained in that capacity until it was reconstituted by Edict No. I of 1973. The Edict was entitled "Midwest Arts Council Edict". The council used to operate under a provisional capacity until it was officially constituted. Members of this Council then designated as the Midwest Arts Council were appointed officially through letters of appointment. The council was renamed the Bendel Arts Council with the creation of more states. The council was initially broken into two divisions – The Administrative Division and the Cultural Division. The Cultural Division took care of festival and artistic activities in the state while the Administrative Division superintended all administrative and managerial activities of the Council. For the Cultural Division to be made standard, professional artistes were employed.

The council's objectives included:

- 1) To organize festivals and take charge of the State's participation in arts festivals.
- 2) To function as the cultural centre of the State.
- 3) To help train and develop amateur artists.
- 4) To provide job opportunities for artists.
- 5) To manage the State's arts theatre and arts gallery.
- 6) To enrich the literature on the culture of the State.
- 7) To work hand in hand with other bodies engaged with the promotion of the culture and customs of the country.

With the appointment of Mr. Aig Imoru, the Council was re-constructed into five major sections: Research and Publications Division, Administrative Division, Performing Arts Division, Field Organization Division, Field and Festival Organization Division. It is to be noted that though the Bendel Arts Council had many parts or divisions, the Performing Arts Division was very important and was indeed the most relevant to the motivations for establishing the Council. The organizational structure of the Performing Arts Division was as follows:

There was the Head of Division who manned the affairs of the Division and directly under him were a number of troupes, bands and units:

The Drama Unit, Cultural Band, Dance Troupe, Choral Troupe, Technical unit, Design Unit.

Under these groups were dancers, singers and actors. The Performing Arts Division was not complete without the musicians, singers, drummers and dancers. There also existed the costume and make-up head that was in charge of the actors' and actresses' costumes and make-up. The lighting operator and set designer were also in the Division.

The other divisions of the Council were supervised by the Board of Directors. The Board set the policies of the Council. The heads of divisions supervised their subordinates directly but were guided by the Board which served as a liaison between them and the State Government.

Today, the name Bendel Arts Council has metamorphosed into Delta State Council for Arts and Culture following the division of former Bendel State into Edo and Delta states. The change of the Council's name from Bendel to Delta also affected its objectives. The Delta State Council for Arts and Culture is presently housed in Asaba the state capital.

### Objectives of the Council

The Edict establishing the Delta State Council for Arts and Culture spelt out its cardinal functions as follows: to promote, propagate, preserve and present rich cultural heritage of Delta State (DSCAC Bill 2008, C81-88)

In order to achieve these, the council is statutorily vested with the following responsibilities;

- Organizing festival of arts and Culture at local, zonal and state levels.
- Ensure that Delta State participates in national and international festival of arts and Culture.
- Publish and sponsor the publication of journals of Arts and Culture of the state.
- Establish Art galleries in the state.
- Manage the state cultural centre
- Erect historical/ cultural monuments.
- Collaborate and associate with other organizations engaged in the promotion of Arts and Culture
- Groom and supervise cultural groups in the state
- Manage a performing troupe for cultural entertainment at both government and private occasions.
- Organize Art exhibitions and encourages craftsmen of Delta State origin to aspire higher (Operational Bill of the Council 2008).

### Administrative Structure of the Council

For the purpose of good and effective administration, the functions are shared amongst the following divisions namely:

- a. Research, Documentation and Publication.
- b. Administration and Finance
- c. Performing Arts
- d. Visual Arts
- e. Field and Festivals Organization

Arising from the need to create a resident performing troupe in the council (in the Bendel state dispensation), management, in 1976 decided to expand and reorganize the Performing Arts Division. This development was an imaginative strategy to reach out to the numerous art-loving people of the Bendel State and beyond. The troupe was also set up to serve as a model to non-established or alternative cultural groups in the State. Its mandate includes:

- i. Exploring and developing the artistic and creative potentials in drama, dance and music;
- ii. Developing the literature in the areas of the performing arts;
- iii. Arranging training for performing artistes; and
- iv. Awakening interest in the performing arts.

### The Directors of the Council from Inception and their achievements

#### a. Chief Dr. M.D Asoro (1991-1998)



After the creation of the state on the 27th of August 1991, Chief Dr M.D Asoro became the Director of Culture. Chief Asoro had a fine Arts/ Sculptural background. He established a formidable dance troupe in addition to the initial Five (5) dancers/artistes from the defunct Bendel State. He established the various divisions in the council. He led the troupe to Pan-African festival of Arts in Ghana in 1997, where the troupe performed in the University of Ghana, Accra. He also influenced the acquiring of an Isuzu Bus from the state government, for the performing arts division for easy tours and travels. He also employed more staff using the quota system, to accommodate candidates from the geo-political regions of the state. He also influenced the acquiring of an Isuzu Bus from the state government, for the performing arts division and their tours within and outside the state.

**b. Mr. Steve Moeteke (1998-2008)**

Mr. Steve Moeteke Studied English from the University of Nigeria, Nsukka but had a flare for the arts. During his tenure, he built a mini pavilion within the council's rented premises for arts exhibitions, Theatre productions, and social functions.

The council participated in a lot of events, both at the state and national levels.

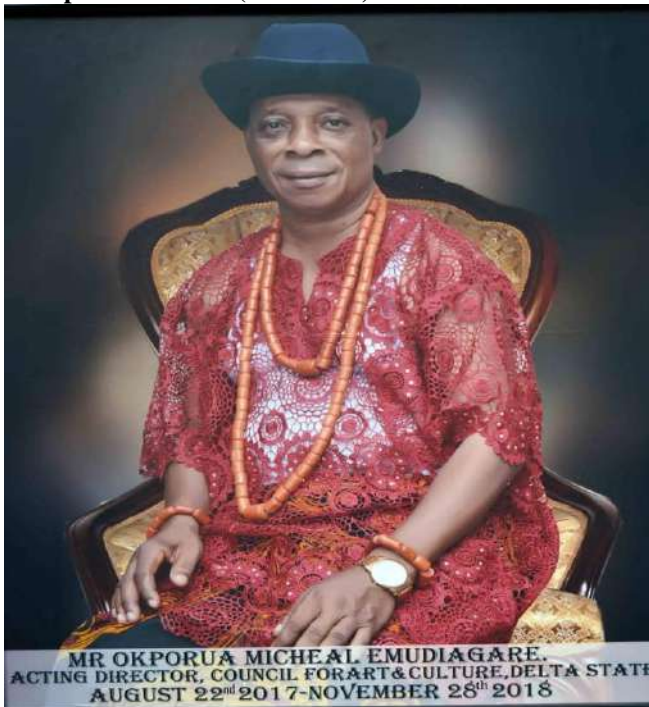
He established the arts gallery and the craft shop within the council premises.

**c. Mr Napoleon Akpobechea (2008-2017)**

Mr Akpobechea of sociology disposition, grew through the ranks in the council to become the director of culture. The highpoint of his tenure was leading the troupe to Tokyo, Japan for a performance in celebration of Nigeria's independence in October 2010.

He also got a waiver to employ forty (40) new staff of different ethnic groups of Delta origin into the council.

He influenced the acquiring of a 32 seater coaster bus for the state troupe and two (2) kia vehicles for the Director and the secretary as official vehicles.

**d. Okporua Michael (2017-2018)**

Mr Okporua was a field officer for the better part of his employment years until he became a deputy director and was called back to the head office. During his tenure, he assisted the council in his capacity as the director in acquiring a Marcopolo Bus for the troupe

He led the council to Port Harcourt and Kaduna for the National festival for arts and culture

He led the troupe to Ibadan for an award ceremony of the Ibadan alumni in honour of the state governor Sen. Dr. Ifeanyi Okowa.

**e. Mr Patrick Clark (2018 –date)**

Mr Patrick Clark a graduate of theatre arts, has been a part and parcel of the council since inception. He took over in 2018 and had led the council to National festival for arts and culture three consecutive years, 2019, 2020 and 2021 in Benin and Jos and Ekiti respectively.

**Heads of Performing Arts Division from Inception**

1. Mr Sheddy Agbagbara ----- 1991- 1992
2. Mr. Francis Ebewaribo 1992 - 1995
3. Ms. Josephine Anyameluhor 1995 - 1997
4. Mrs Patani Esiri 1997 - 2000
5. Ms. Rapu Patricia 2000 - 2001
6. Mr. Oluka Chuks 2001 - 2003
7. Mrs Patani Esiri 2003 - 2019
8. Mrs Lugard Timiebiere 2019 – Date

- **The Arts Council Administrative Policy**

Much had equally been achieved by the Council since its transmutation to Delta State Council for Arts and Culture in 1991. It is instructive to point out however that in the early years of the Council in the Delta State dispensation, there was a significant lull in its activities. The remote cause of this development could be traced to the obnoxious self-sustenance policy introduced in the State in 1996 by the military administration. The policy required the Council to source for funds for its activities, which was a tall order against the backdrop of the poor economic state of the nation at both the micro and macro levels at the time. The self-sustenance policy affected in no small way the plans and programmes of the Council. The policy required the Council, including selected parastatals in the state to fend for themselves from their internally generated revenue. Government no longer gave subvention to the Council for overhead costs for the prosecution of its programmes. This was a rash decision as it did not take into account the social aspect of the objectives of the Council. Besides, government did not give adequate prior notice before implementing the policy and no take-off grant was given to the Council. Most of the vehicles in the Council were grounded for many years due to neglect by government. The policy was no doubt a violation of the provisions of section 15, 1(a) of the Edict which states that: the funds and resources of the Council shall consist of such sums as may be provided by the State. Section 15, 1(c) of the same Edict also states that: the Council's resources shall consist of all sums collected or received by the Council in the execution of this Edict.

In spite of the above provisions, a subsisting government policy required the Council to remit all internally generated revenue into the coffers of the State government. This decision was carried out in expectation that funds would be released for the running of the Council. It is to be noted, however, that the advent of the democratic system of government in 1999 has done much to redress this precarious situation in the State's Council for Arts and Culture. One major improvement noticeable after the removal of the self-sustenance policy by the James Ibori administration in 1999 was the guarantee of regular payment of salaries and allowances. These setbacks notwithstanding, the Council continues to discharge its duties creditably, promoting and developing the various dances and cultural performance forms of the different ethnic nationalities in Delta State on various national and trans-national forums and cultural festivals.

**Challenges of the Council**

The council is faced with myriads of challenges in carrying out her primary assignment. In an interview with some principal and administrative officers, these were revealed :

**A Permanent Office Structure** : The Delta State council for arts and culture according to the incumbent director of culture, Mr. Patrick Clark, has been occupying a rented apartment since 2008 that it was given an official seal to serve as a cultural centre. No conducive place for artistes and staff, No convenient conveniences, No privacy for dress changes, No office equipments, No archive for old works, less professionals and versatile artistes.

**Funding for the Council** : On the issue of funding for the Council, the Head of Accounts Division, Mr. Onome Egalase, during the interview (23<sup>rd</sup> July, 2021),s admitted that the Council is seriously challenged. According to him, the council is a government establishment and funding comes directly from the government, the council has a one line vote in terms of capital budget / annual budget. No fund set aside for different projects. They also have a recurrent vote which takes care of the overhead expenses for running the day to day activities of the council. There is also a non recurrent vote where festivals are funded from, they also generate income for the government under the revenue item, through the rentals of the Pavillion (open air theatre), the booking of the troupe where some percentage is also paid into the government coffers. The Council is only one out of the many government agencies, all competing for scarce available funds. Consequently, grants from government continues to shrink exponentially and this means that the Council must look elsewhere to raise the shortfall in the funds it requires to successfully execute its programmes. Fortunately, he admits, the management of the Council has tried within the limits of the law to generate funds from both its activities (performances and rentals) and from sponsors. But there is always a late release of funds, which affects the proper preparation of the council's competitive and national events thereby leading to very poor outing with little or no materials to

aid artistes in their interpretation of their entries. This late release of funds also leads to travelling late and most times, travelling into the night which portends danger as a lot of things are experienced on the highway- from armed robbery attacks, to breakdown of vehicles and so on.

Due to the national financial crisis and the reduction of public funding, finding additional sources of funding for cultural institutions seems to be more necessary than ever before, and the main task of the Council's managers is to secure the financial welfare of their art organisation. Fortunately, the Council is gradually weathering the storm due to the marketing strategies evolved by the Council's management which has led to collaborations and partnerships with various corporate business organisations such as MTN network, Coca-Cola, Nigerian Breweries, among others.

**Artistes Welfare:** The welfare of the artistes who generates funds for the council needs to be given serious attention. There is lack of platform for training and retraining of artistes to place them side by side with the artistes of other states arts councils. From day to day running of the council, the artistes are not favoured. The artistes come to the office every day, rehearse intensively every day and also attend day to day paid performances. If this continues, some of the artistes may break down. Another very troubling issue is the treatment meted on the troupe during the festivals for arts and culture, where the artistes are camped in very dirty environments. Mostly vacated schools, dilapidated NYSC orientation camps and other facilities poorly prepared for the artistes to stay in throughout the period of the festival. They are usually robbed of their personal effects due to lack of adequate security in the camps, most times, there is little or no water for the state contingents to use and this gets everywhere messed up. The mobile toilets are usually not adequately provided for and this leads to artistes defecating around and about the camps. This polluted environment always leaves most artistes sick during and after the festivals. Some states make alternative arrangement but it has never been a case with the Delta arts council and it leaves artistes hospitalized after each trip outside the state. The artistes are also most times short paid which leads to poor and less productive environment due to little or no motivation.

### III. CONCLUSION

The Delta Arts Council is under staffed, and the artistes are not motivated to put in their best in the discharge of their duties. The temporary office building is not enough to accommodate the few staff at the head office. A world class cultural centre is long overdue for a big state like Delta state as that will pose a threat to their dreams of hosting National cultural events. No art and cultural organisation survives and functions effectively without proper funding. Government should therefore take the funding of the Council beyond the peripheral level and ensure there is adequate funding available for the Council to execute its programmes. There should be an urgent programme of rehabilitation of the Council, this includes providing the right leadership with the desired vision, drive and determination to succeed. Efforts should be made to replace the obsolete and unserviceable equipment acquired many years ago. These include lighting and sound equipment, costumes, musical instruments and scenic production tools and other materials. Finally, The Nigeria cultural policy needs to be reviewed to reflect and emphasize both the social and economic significance of state cultural centers, in arts development, preservation and national development. Such emphasis would aid the evolution of an effective framework for the exploration of the vast art forms in the state and Nigeria for optimal benefits.

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