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A GLO CULTURAL LEGACY BEYOND BORDERS

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FOREWORD

BY HIS MAJESTY
IGWE NNAEMEKA ALFRED
UGOCHUKWU ACHEBE, (CFR, mni)
OBI OF ONITSHA



Obi of Onitsha

OFALA IS A LIVING HERITAGE.

For over five hundred years, since the founding of Onitsha Ado N'Idu on the banks of the River Niger, Ofala has remained the highpoint of our ceremonial cycle and the most profound expression of who we are. It is at once sacred and celebratory, ancient and ever-renewing.

Ofala marks the annual emergence of the monarch from Inye Ukwu na Nlo – the period of spiritual seclusion during which he communes with our ancestors and negotiates the fortunes of the kingdom. The seclusion is a process of atonement for our communal failures and misdeeds and supplication to God for a rewarding year ahead for the community. It provides the sacred moment for the reaffirmation of loyalty by our Ndichie and the homage of our people – our age grades, titled men and women, families, and sons and daughters from near and far. What began as a deeply sacred royal obligation has, under our collective custodianship, grown into a festival of national and global significance, without losing its spiritual core. The rituals remain sacrosanct. What has evolved is its power to speak to contemporary Nigeria as a heritage asset – for identity, unity, tourism, youth enterprise, and community wellbeing.

That is the thrust of the evolving themes of recent years' celebrations, of which this year's is **"Igba Mbo, Iga N'Iru" – Strive and Advance**. After more than five centuries of existence, Onitsha must continue to strive, to adapt, and to advance. This theme is a call to industry, to excellence, to self-improvement and to collective progress. It reflects the spirit of our forebears who built a kingdom on the Niger, and it speaks to our youth who must carry that heritage forward with enterprise and purpose.

This transformation from a palace ritual to a world-renowned cultural festival owes a great deal to purposeful partnership. Since 2011, Globacom has stood with us as

our principal partner – now fifteen consecutive years of unwavering commitment. In good times and challenging times, Globacom has helped us preserve the authenticity of Ofala while enhancing its presentation, documentation, broadcast and global reach. They have helped take a living heritage to the global stage.

This coffee table book **OFALA – A LIVING HERITAGE**, captures that journey. In these pages you will see the thrill and glamour of Iru Ofala and Azu Ofala – the regalia, the royal dance to the war drums, the colour of the age-grade parades – but you will also see the deeper story: a 500-year-old kingdom, its people, its continuity, and its determination to strive and advance.

I thank Globacom and its Chairman, Otunba (Dr) Mike Adenuga, Jr., GCON, a true man of culture, for his vision and belief that culture is not a luxury but a foundation for unity, prosperity and nation-building.

May this volume stand as both archive and invitation – to understand Ofala, to cherish it, and to ensure that this living heritage endures and advances for generations to come.

NNAEMEKA ALFRED ACHEBE, CFR, mni
OBI OF ONITSHA







GOODWILL MESSAGE FROM THE CHAIRMAN

GLOBACOM LIMITED
DR. MIKE ADENUGA, Jr



HIS MAJESTY
IGWE NNAEMEKA ALFRED
UGOCHUKWU ACHEBE, CFR, MNI
The Obi of Onitsha
Onitsha, Anambra State.

It is with immense pleasure and a deep sense of personal warmth that I extend to Your Majesty, the Royal Family and the good people of Onitsha my heartiest congratulations and very best wishes on the auspicious occasion of the 2026 Ofala Festival.

Over the years, the Ofala Festival has remained a magnificent celebration of the rich history, traditions and cultural heritage of the Onitsha people. Beyond its splendour and pageantry, however, it is an enduring affirmation of the values of unity, dignity, continuity and communal pride which have distinguished the ancient Onitsha Kingdom through generations.

I have always held Your Majesty in the highest esteem, and I continue to admire the wisdom, dignity and exemplary leadership with which you have presided over the affairs of your people. Your remarkable ability to preserve the cherished traditions of the past while embracing the aspirations and opportunities of the modern age has continued to enhance the prestige of the Onitsha Kingdom and earn it deserved recognition far beyond its borders.

For us at Globacom, our association with the Ofala Festival since 2011 has been much more than a corporate partnership. It has been a relationship which we cherish deeply and regard as a privilege. We remain profoundly



appreciative of Your Majesty's longstanding benevolence, wise counsel and gracious disposition towards Globacom, which have been a source of encouragement and inspiration to us over the years.

We are particularly proud that, through our association with the Ofala Festival, we have been privileged to contribute in our own modest way to the preservation, celebration and wider projection of this priceless cultural heritage. It gives us great satisfaction to join Your Majesty and the people of Onitsha each year in showcasing to Nigeria, Africa and the wider world the beauty, dignity and enduring values represented by Ofala.

As Your Majesty presides over this year's celebrations, I pray that the Almighty will continue to endow you with abundant wisdom, strength and excellent health, and grant you many more fulfilling years of distinguished service to your people and our dear country.

May the 2026 Ofala Festival be an outstanding and memorable celebration, and may peace, progress and prosperity continue to flourish throughout the Onitsha Kingdom under Your Majesty's revered leadership.

Please accept, Your Majesty and beloved Igwe, the assurances of my highest esteem, warmest personal regards and very best wishes always.

DR. MIKE ADENUGA, JR.
(GCON, CSG, CdrLH)



OFALA
A Living Heritage

Few traditional festivals in Nigeria bring together royalty, spirituality, history, music, dance, colour, community and continuity with the majesty of Ofala Onitsha. For centuries, Ofala has provided the defining public meeting point between the Obi of Onitsha and his people. Its most compelling moment is also its most elemental: the king emerges before Ndi Onicha.

Ofala is the high point of the Onitsha ceremonial cycle. It follows the Obi's period of seclusion, Inye Ukwu na Nlo Eze, understood in the official tradition as a period of communion with the ancestors and intercession for the wellbeing of the kingdom. The festival also recalls the renewal of the throne and the historic joy associated with the discovery that yam was non-toxic and could serve as a vital source of food.

In earlier times, when the Obi was rarely seen publicly, Ofala was the exceptional occasion on which Ndi Onicha beheld their monarch. That essential purpose remains. The festival is therefore not merely a spectacle. It is a living institution through which kingship is renewed, community is gathered and cultural memory is passed from one generation to the next.

Ofala is also homecoming. Ndi Onicha return from across Nigeria and the diaspora to reconnect with family, village, age grade, traditional institutions and the ancestral homeland. In this annual return, the physical kingdom on the Niger and the wider global Onitsha community meet again.

The 2026 theme, Igba Mbo, Iga N'Iru — Strive and Advance, speaks naturally to this history. Ofala has endured because Onitsha has continually drawn strength from its inheritance while moving forward. The festival carries memory, but it also expresses aspiration.

Globacom, principal corporate partner of Ofala since 2011, renewed its partnership in 2025. The detail of that relationship belongs elsewhere in the wider coffee-table book; here, it is enough to note that the festival's contemporary projection has benefited from sustained partnership without altering the sacred and communal foundations on which Ofala rests.

Ofala is a living institution through which kingship is renewed, community is gathered and cultural memory is passed from one generation to the next.




Lambrusco
MOSCATO

ONITSHA
The City, Its People And Its History — The River, Kingdom And Civilization

The River, Kingdom, and Civilization

Any understanding of Ofala must begin with Onitsha itself. Situated on the eastern bank of the River Niger in present-day Anambra State, Onitsha is at once an ancient kingdom and one of Nigeria's great commercial cities.

The Niger shaped its history. The river opened routes of movement, trade and encounter and gave Onitsha strategic importance long before the modern bridges and highways that now connect the city with the rest of Nigeria. Today, Onitsha Main Market, one of West Africa's largest markets, symbolises the city's extraordinary entrepreneurial energy.

Yet behind the markets, warehouses and commercial streets is Onicha Ado N'Idu: an ancestral community with a distinctive monarchy, villages, families, age grades, title institutions and a historical memory that continues to organise communal life.

Origins, Migration, and the Kingdom

Onitsha historical traditions associate the origins of the kingdom with migrations linked ultimately with the Benin cultural area and with Ezechima, who occupies a foundational place in Onitsha royal memory. As with many ancient migration traditions, aspects belong to transmitted communal history and should be understood alongside documentary and archaeological scholarship.
Over generations, a sophisticated social and political order developed around the Obi, the Ndichie, villages, families, age grades and other traditional institutions. The throne became the principal symbol of collective identity, carrying ceremonial, spiritual and communal responsibilities that survived the profound political changes of the colonial and post-colonial eras.

The Niger and the Opening of Onitsha

During the nineteenth century, Onitsha's position on the Niger brought expanding contact with European commerce, Christian missions and colonial authority. Trade widened, Western education developed and the city later became known for literacy, publishing and an energetic urban culture.

These encounters transformed Onitsha but did not erase Onicha Ado N'Idu. Old and new institutions developed side by side, creating the layered city that exists today.

Resilience in Onitsha is not an abstract slogan. It is part of the lived history of a community that has repeatedly rebuilt, adapted and moved forward.

War, Reconstruction and Igba Mbo, Iga N'Iru

The Nigerian Civil War of 1967–1970 devastated Onitsha. Its strategic location near the Niger crossing exposed the city to intense conflict and destruction. Yet the post-war story was one of reconstruction. Markets returned, commerce revived and the city recovered its place as a major entrepreneurial centre.

That experience gives particular resonance to Igba Mbo, Iga N'Iru — Strive and Advance. Resilience in Onitsha is not an abstract slogan. It is part of the lived history of a community that has repeatedly rebuilt, adapted and moved forward.

Two Onitshas in One

Modern Onitsha exists simultaneously as a metropolis and an ancestral kingdom. There is the commercial city known across Africa, and there is Onicha Ado N'Idu, whose traditional institutions preserve an older communal identity.

Ofala is one of the moments when these two dimensions become most visible. Professionals return home. Business people rejoin their age grades. Umu Ada reconnect with their families and community. Ndi Onicha in the diaspora return to the ancestral homeland. Guests from Nigeria and abroad enter an arena still ordered around an ancient throne.

For a few remarkable days, the rhythms of the metropolis reorganise themselves around the rhythms of the kingdom. Ofala reminds Onitsha that beyond commerce lies community, and beyond modernity lies memory.





OFALA ONITSHA
A Living Heritage

Meaning, Spirituality, Tradition and Continuity

Ofala is best understood as a living institution of kingship. Its meaning lies in the relationship between the Obi, the throne and Ndi Onicha. Before the public ceremonies, the monarch undergoes Inye Ukwu na Nlo Eze — a period of communion with the ancestors and intercession for the wellbeing of the kingdom. Beyond this formulation, the inner ritual sequence properly belongs to the custodians of the tradition.

The Obi's emergence marks renewal and continuity. The king returns to his people; the Ndichie assemble; inherited protocols are enacted; homage is offered; and a new generation witnesses a tradition received from those before it.

The official Ofala tradition also associates the festival with the historic joy over the discovery that yam was non-toxic and could serve as food. In this memory, kingship, sustenance and communal wellbeing are brought together.

Iru Ofala: The King's Day

The principal public celebration unfolds over two days. The first is Iru Ofala, the day of the Obi. Ime Obi becomes the centre of attention as Ndi Onicha and visitors gather in anticipation.



The official Ofala tradition also associates the festival with the historic joy over the discovery that yam was non-toxic and could serve as food.

Accompanied by the Ndichie and resplendent in royal regalia, Agbogidi makes three appearances before the people. The precise order and ritual meaning of these appearances remain subject to Palace vetting. Their public power, however, is unmistakable: the royal dance, the Egedege and Ogene war drums, the movement of the Ndichie and the response of the assembled community transform Ime Obi into a living theatre of kingship.

Homage groups come before the throne. The gathering includes Ndi Onicha, traditional institutions and invited guests, but the ceremony remains centred on the relationship between the Obi and his people.

Azu Ofala: The People's Day

Azu Ofala broadens the visual focus from the monarch to the community. Age grades appear in coordinated uniforms and process before the throne. The Ndichie, Olinzele, Umu Ada and other recognised homage groups contribute to the ordered display of Onitsha society.







Ofala is also a season of return. Ndi Onicha come home from across Nigeria and the diaspora, renewing family relationships and reconnecting with village, age grade and community. The homecoming dimension gives the festival an emotional force that extends beyond the palace arena.

Music, dance, dress and procession give Azu Ofala its colour. Coral beads, textiles, caps, hand fans and ceremonial accessories communicate identity, dignity, age, status and belonging. Iru Ofala and Azu Ofala therefore express one relationship from two directions: the Obi appears before his people, and the people come before their Obi.

Homecoming and the Community Pillars

Ofala is also a season of return. Ndi Onicha come home from across Nigeria and the diaspora, renewing family relationships and reconnecting with village, age grade and community. The homecoming dimension gives the festival an emotional force that extends beyond the palace arena.

Around the principal royal ceremonies, distinct community pillars have developed. The Oreze International Art Exhibition provides a platform for visual art and cultural interpretation. The Ofala Youth Carnival creates space for younger generations to participate in the season.

The Medical, Health and Wellbeing Community Outreach translates communal responsibility into practical service.

These programmes should be understood as complementary platforms around Ofala, not as substitutes for its ritual core. The post-Ofala Royal Banquet, supported by Globacom, similarly belongs to the wider programme without redefining the sacred ceremonies themselves.

Heritage, Tourism and the Economy

Ofala also sustains a heritage economy. Visitors use hotels, restaurants and transport services. Tailors, designers, photographers, videographers, printers, musicians, artists and event professionals find opportunities. Local businesses benefit from increased activity and the city gains national and international visibility.

The economic value of the festival, however, rests on authenticity. Ofala is not a generic carnival. Its meaning comes from Onitsha history, kingship, custom and communal acceptance. Tourism and partnership are most valuable when they help document, present and sustain the heritage without overwhelming it.

This balance reflects Igba Mbo, Iga N'Iru: to advance without severing the line of continuity.


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THE AGBOGIDI
The Obi And The Development Of Onitsha

The Throne, Institution and Custodianship of Culture

At the centre of contemporary Ofala is His Majesty Nnaemeka Alfred Ugochukwu Achebe, CFR, mni, Agbogidi, Obi of Onitsha. Born on May 14, 1941, he studied Chemistry at Stanford University and earned an MBA from Columbia University before building a distinguished corporate career that included senior responsibilities within the Royal Dutch/Shell Group. He ascended the throne in 2002.

These biographical details are important principally because they help explain the perspective brought to the throne: deep Onitsha identity combined with corporate, educational and international experience.

The Throne Beyond the Individual

The Obi is more than the personality of the incumbent. The throne is an institution carrying historical, spiritual and communal authority. Around it are the Ndichie and other structures of traditional Onitsha society, each with defined roles in preserving continuity.

Custodianship therefore means maintaining institutions, protocols and cultural meaning in a society that is constantly changing. The enduring strength of the throne lies not simply in personality but in the structures that allow tradition to outlive any one generation.

Modernising Tradition Without Losing Its Soul

A defining philosophy of the Achebe era has been the effort to make traditional institutions responsive to contemporary realities without stripping them of their essence. Tradition is not treated as a museum object, nor is change pursued for its own sake.

The approach is visible in institution-building at Ime Obi, where committees and organised structures support planning and implementation; in engagement with young people; in dialogue with Ndi Onicha at home and abroad; and in the effort to connect culture with education, development and responsible modern communication.

This institutional approach matters because continuity must extend beyond personality. A living traditional system requires processes through which knowledge, responsibility and participation can be transmitted.

Youth, Diaspora and Community

Youth engagement is central to cultural continuity. Younger Ndi Onicha must not encounter Ofala merely as spectators; they must understand the institutions, values and responsibilities that give the festival meaning.

The diaspora is equally important. Onitsha today extends far beyond the banks of the Niger. Families, professionals and associations across Nigeria and overseas remain connected to the ancestral community. Ofala provides a recurring point of return and reconnection.
Umu Ada, age grades and other communal formations reinforce this continuity by carrying identity through family, generation and social responsibility.







The task of custodianship is therefore not to turn Ofala into something else, but to ensure that what is inherited remains intelligible, dignified and sustainable. In that sense, the festival embodies Igba Mbo, Iga N'Iru — striving forward from a secure cultural foundation.

Ofala as an Expression of Development

Ofala has become one of the clearest expressions of this philosophy of continuity with purposeful adaptation. Its sacred centre remains intact, while carefully separated platforms for art, youth participation, health outreach, media and tourism broaden its social relevance.

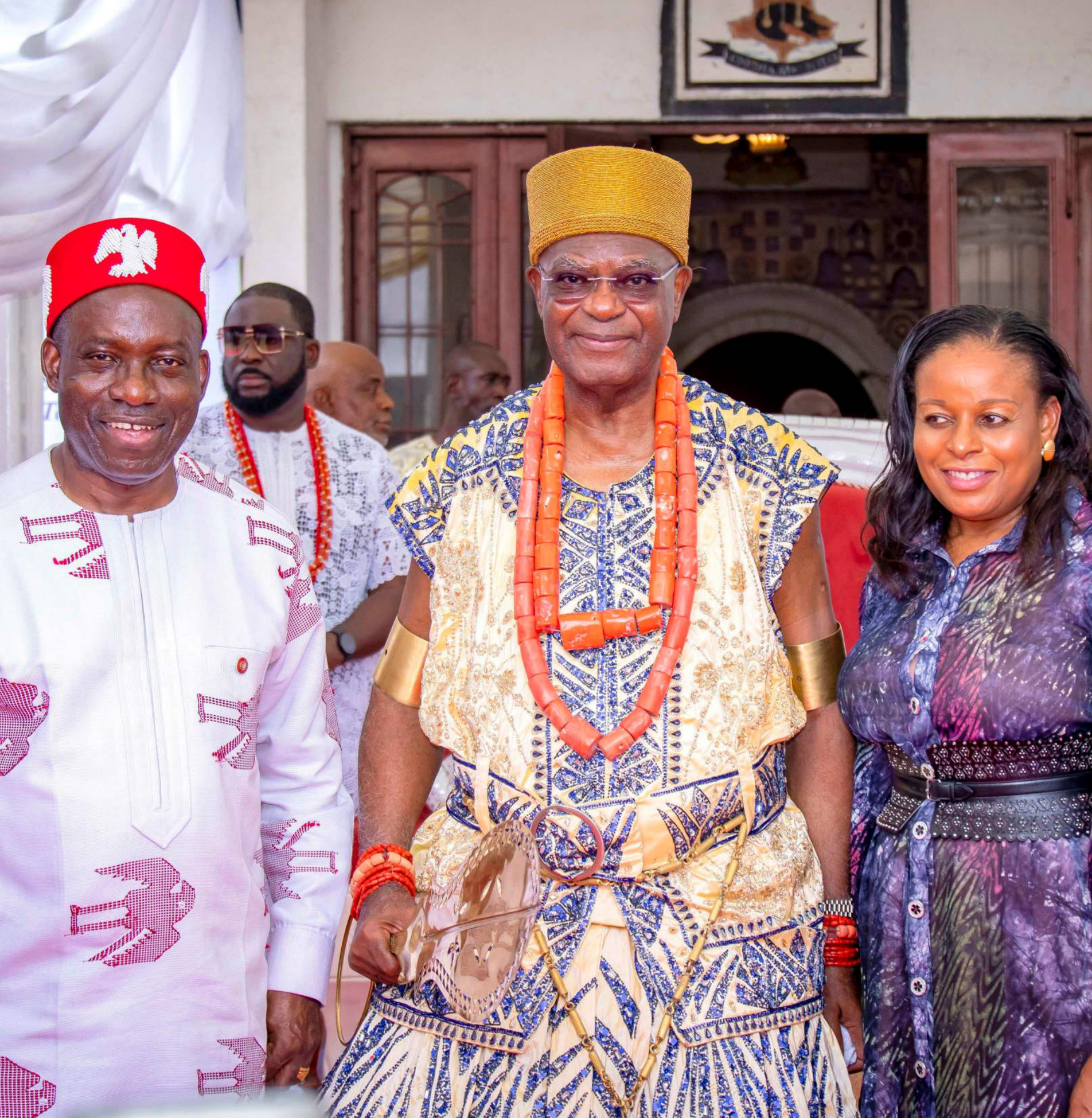
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GLOBACOM AND OFALA Taking A Living Heritage To The Global Stage — A Journey Of Cultural Partnership And Transformation

There are partnerships that begin with a contract and others that mature into a covenant. The enduring relationship between Globacom and the Ofala Festival belongs to the latter. Since 2011, when Globacom entered into its first three-year sponsorship agreement with the Onitsha Traditional Council, the indigenous telecommunications company has remained woven into the annual renaissance of Onitsha's royal and cultural life. Over fifteen years, sponsorship has evolved into an encounter between enterprise and heritage, technology and tradition. Reports record successive renewals in 2014 and 2017, while the partnership continued through subsequent editions and was renewed again for another three years in 2025.

To understand this journey is to understand Ofala itself. Ofala is not merely a festival in the conventional sense. It is the high point of the Onitsha ceremonial cycle: a sacred rite of renewal, an affirmation of the covenant between the Obi and his people, and the monarch's public re-emergence after spiritual retreat. Its ritual language makes the past a living presence. The procession, drums, dances, regalia, age-grade displays and homage are living grammar through which Onitsha narrates itself.

Yet living traditions survive not by remaining frozen, but by possessing the wisdom to converse with changing times. This is where the Globacom partnership acquires its deeper meaning. From the early years, reporting observed the greater colour, scale and new dimensions brought to the festival.

The 2017 celebrations expanded through youth activities, an international arts exhibition, a music concert, Miss Ofala and a royal banquet. In 2018, more than 100 artists from Nigeria and the diaspora participated in the Oraeze International Arts Exhibition. They did not displace Ofala's sacred core; they created windows through which wider audiences could enter its world.

The transformation is therefore less about spectacle than about translation. Globacom has helped translate an intensely local cultural experience into a national conversation and, increasingly, an international proposition. Its communications reach and digital capabilities have helped bridge the palace courtyard and the wider world.

In an age in which visibility determines whether cultural memory travels or fades, connectivity becomes more than infrastructure: it becomes cultural infrastructure.
This evolution is reflected in the festival's ambitions.
Since 2019, the Ofala organising structure has pursued broader national, West African and international attention, recognition as a major cultural event and greater economic viability. The organisers have articulated the aspiration "to bring the world to Onitsha". Globacom's sustained presence has supported that ambition.


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The partnership has shown that culture can also be an instrument of development. In 2024,
In 2025, the company renewed its sponsorship and reaffirmed its global ambition. The festival has also embraced digital channels, including a 2025 mobile application providing real-time updates, multimedia content and worldwide access.

This is the quiet revolution beneath the pageantry: the marriage of the drumbeat and the digital signal. One carries memory through sound; the other carries memory across distance. One summons the community to the palace; the other summons the world to Onitsha.

Thus, after fifteen years and into a sixteenth year of association, Globacom and Ofala represent more than sponsor and festival. They embody a partnership in which corporate citizenship becomes cultural custodianship, and technology becomes an ally of tradition. The journey demonstrates that heritage need not choose between preservation and progress. It can preserve its soul while enlarging its horizon.

Ofala stands today as a living archive: ancient in origin, contemporary in expression and increasingly global in reach. The partnership has furnished that archive with new platforms, audiences and possibilities. The larger lesson is profound: when a nation connects its memory to its modernity, culture ceases to be merely something inherited. It becomes something continually renewed, shared and carried forward.

In that sense, taking Ofala to the global stage is not taking Onitsha away from itself. It is enabling the world to encounter Onitsha on its own terms — through the majesty of the throne, the vitality of its people, the poetry of its rituals and the enduring intelligence of a culture that knows that the surest way to remain alive is to keep moving forward.

In an age in which visibility determines whether cultural memory travels or fades, connectivity becomes more than infrastructure: it becomes cultural infrastructure.

Globacom has helped translate an intensely local cultural experience into a national conversation and, increasingly, an international proposition. Its communications reach and digital capabilities have helped bridge the palace courtyard and the wider world.


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WHEN THE YOUTH BECOME CUSTODIANS

The Ofala Youth Carnival and the Future of Cultural Heritage

The Youth Carnival has its roots in Igba Ilo Ofala, the traditional youth procession that heralded the Ofala Festival. In 2010, it was restructured into a full-fledged carnival and became a major component of the festival. In 2016, the day preceding Iru Ofala was formally designated Ofala Carnival Day.

So, every year, the young people of Onitsha kingdom take to the streets to bring the Ofala festival alive. With its colour, music, dance, pageantry and unmistakable youthful energy, the carnival transforms the city into a moving theatre of history and identity, with the past speaking through a new generation.

The carnival is more than being a spectacular parade; it is an open-air school where young people learn and practise the customs, symbols, dances and social institutions of Onicha Ado N'Idu. In the process they take on real responsibility for keeping those traditions alive.

One of its most striking features is the way young people embody the grandeur of traditional institutions, appearing in carefully made costumes of prominent traditional rulers, including the Obi of Onitsha, the Oba of Benin and the Ooni



of Ife. Instead of only watching the monarch and chiefs perform their ceremonial roles, the young people step into the story themselves.

Hence, the broader purpose of the Youth Carnival is to encourage the next generation value and continue their heritage. The official Ofala account notes that the carnival draws on the old Igba Ilo procession while linking youthful energy to the future of Igbo identity.

By providing a platform for young people to actively participate in the celebration, Globacom has helped ensure that traditional customs, symbols, costumes and values are not confined to the older generation but are passed on to the youth.

The sustained sponsorship has therefore made cultural preservation a living, participatory experience for the younger generation. Rather than simply observing tradition,

The sustained sponsorship has therefore made cultural preservation a living, participatory experience for the younger generation. Rather than simply observing tradition, youths become active custodians and ambassadors of it.




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youths become active custodians and ambassadors of it, expressing their understanding of Nigerian culture through music, dance, costumes and pageantry. This way, Globacom's long-standing support for the festival has helped strengthen cultural pride, encourage intergenerational transmission of heritage and keep the traditions associated with the Ofala Festival relevant to a new generation.

The carnival enables the youth to encounter traditional authority not as something remote or belonging to the past, but as a living institution whose meanings can be explored, cherished and carried forward. This sits well with the theme of Ofala 2026, Igba Mbo, Iga N'iru ("Strive and Advance"), which links the preservation of Onitsha's heritage directly to youth development, continuity and progress.

Globacom's long-standing support for the festival has helped strengthen cultural pride, encourage intergenerational transmission of heritage and keep the traditions associated with the Ofala Festival relevant to a new generation.




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