



The Sahara Centre



World Egungun Festival

2025 Symposium Proceedings



IAS - University of Ibadan



Table of Contents

03	About
04	Acknowledgements
05	Cultural Stewardship and Public Commitment
06	Scholarship and Academia's Tribute to Living Tradition
07	Cultural Stewardship and Strategic Intelligence
08	Strategic Imperatives for Cultural Tourism Development
11	Strategic Overview
25	Introduction
31	Symposium Proceedings
44	Key Outcomes
48	Priority Recommendations
52	Conclusion
54	Annexes

About

This report has been prepared by The Sahara Centre on behalf of the organizing body for the 2025 World Egúngún Festival Symposium Proceedings, held on 14 May 2025 at the Local Government Staff Training School, Oyo State Secretariat, Agodi, Ibadan.

The Symposium was delivered through a collaborative partnership between the Institute of African Studies (University of Ibadan), the Ministry of Culture and Tourism (Oyo State), The Sahara Centre, Red Clay, and the Adayeba Culture Tourism Foundation.

This multi-stakeholder alliance reflects a shared commitment to cultural preservation, community engagement, and the sustainable development of heritage-based tourism in Oyo State and beyond.

The Sahara Centre's mission is to promote 'African Solutions for African Societies', even as we empower others to spend the time to understand, reflect on and identify possible solutions to the myriad challenges we face.

Through our research, critical and design thinking workshops, advocacy initiatives and activities, we strive to fulfill this mission.

Copyright Information

The Sahara Centre

www.saharacentre.org

This report was written by Anugwolu Emeka Smart and Omobolanle Senbanjo.

Citation Information

Anugwolu, E.S. and Senbanjo, O. (2025) The World Egungun Festival 2025 Symposium Proceedings, The Sahara Centre

Acknowledgements

We thank His Excellency, Engineer Seyi Makinde, the Executive Governor of Oyo State, for his visionary leadership, and his unfailing commitment to the advancement of arts, culture, and tourism in The State, and for fostering an environment in which cultural heritage is recognized as a vital pillar of sustainable development.

We also thank Dr. Wasiu Olatunbosun, the Honorable Commissioner for Culture and Tourism, Oyo State, for his strategic direction, advocacy, and hands-on support throughout the planning and execution of the Symposium. His dedication continues to strengthen the institutional framework for culture-led growth in The State.

We thank our partners: the Institute of African Studies at the University of Ibadan, the Ministry of Culture and Tourism of Oyo State, Red Clay, and the Adayeba Culture Tourism Foundation. Their collaboration, shared expertise, and mutual commitment to cultural preservation were essential to the Symposium's planning, implementation, impact and reach. We also thank Papa Omotayo and Bobo Omotayo for their valuable contributions during the ideation phase of the festival.

To our esteemed traditional and cultural leaders who graciously attended the event, we are grateful for your insights, as well as the custodianship of our indigenous knowledge, values and wisdom. We thank all invited delegates, scholars, artists, community representatives, and attendees whose thoughtful contributions and enthusiastic engagement enriched the dialogue and affirmed the living relevance of our intangible heritage.



Strategic Overview

The 2025 World Egúngún Festival Symposium convened on 14 May 2025 at the Local Government Staff Training School, Oyo State Secretariat, Agodi, Ibadan, establishing a strategic platform for examining how masquerade traditions can inform contemporary approaches to cultural sustainability, heritage-based economic development, and community governance.

Organized through a collaborative partnership between the Institute of African Studies (University of Ibadan), the Ministry of Culture and Tourism (Oyo State), The Sahara Centre, Red Clay, and the Adayeba Culture Tourism Foundation, the symposium brought together traditional custodians, cultural scholars, government representatives, tourism practitioners, and community leaders under the theme "Sustainability and Cultural Preservation: Balancing Modern Adaptations with the Preservation of Tradition."

The symposium was designed to address a critical challenge: how to maintain the spiritual integrity and indigenous craft authenticity of Egúngún tradition while developing its potential as a cultural tourism asset and economic driver within Oyo State's Omituntun 2.0 Development Roadmap. Rather than treating these objectives as competing priorities, the convening explored how indigenous governance systems embedded within Egúngún practice might offer frameworks for sustainable cultural development.

The convening posed essential questions with implications beyond festival management: How does tradition maintain integrity while adapting to changing contexts? How do communities govern knowledge that operates at the intersection of sacred practice and public performance? How can cultural heritage generate economic opportunity without compromising the systems of meaning and authority that give it value?

Programme Structure

Moderated by Professor Sola Olorunyomi, with documentation led by Mr. Michael Awoyemi, the symposium created space for rigorous dialogue across multiple stakeholder perspectives. Proceedings included scholarly presentations, goodwill messages from cultural institutions and tourism development bodies, traditional performances demonstrating Egúngún practice, and strategic discussions addressing policy frameworks, community engagement models, and commercialization pathways.

Symposium Presentations

Part 1 – Innovation and Adaptation in Traditional Practices: Insights from the Egúngún Tradition in Ibadan, Nigeria

Presenter: Abe Fabunmi, Culture Editor and Researcher in Yorùbá Language and African Studies

Abe Fabunmi's presentation offered a rich and reflective exploration of how traditional Yoruba masquerade culture can evolve meaningfully and rapidly in modern contexts. The discussion highlighted the importance of balancing modernization with the preservation of ritual integrity, while identifying opportunities for cultural innovation that sustain community relevance and engagement.

Part 2 – Governance, Community, and Sustainable Futures in Oyo State

Presenter: Dr. Wasiu Olatunbosun, Honourable Commissioner for Culture and Tourism, Oyo State

Dr. Olatunbosun's presentation highlighted Oyo State's strategic approach to cultural and tourism development through the Omituntun roadmap, with a focus on sustainable growth, heritage preservation, and community engagement. He emphasized policies that promote cultural diversity, heritage protection, eco-friendly tourism, and local community empowerment, and reinforced the importance of integrating culture, governance, and sustainable tourism to position Oyo State's festivals and cultural economy for global recognition.

Part 3 – Reimagining Heritage: Egúngún Costume in the 21st Century

Presenter: Akeem Ashiyanbi, Junior Research Fellow, Institute of African Studies, University of Ibadan, Oyo State, Nigeria

Akeem Ashiyanbi's presentation explored the evolving identity of Egúngún costume design and its critical role in preserving Yoruba cultural heritage amid modern pressures and globalization. The presentation underscored the vital link between the local textile industry and the sustainability of the Egúngún festival, noting challenges such as economic instability, cultural homogenization, and intergenerational disconnect, and advocated for strategic support from government and creative stakeholders to ensure the continuity of the tradition without compromising its spiritual and cultural essence.

Part 4 – Egúngún Cult and the Quest for Equilibrium in the Yoruba Space

Presenter: Dr. Olufemi Jegede, Senior Research Fellow, Institute of African Studies, University of Ibadan, Oyo State, Nigeria

Dr. Olufemi Jegede's presentation examined the spiritual foundations of the Egúngún tradition within Yoruba culture, highlighting its resilience and significance in contemporary

society. He critiqued the colonial legacy that sought to suppress Egúngún, and proposed cultural revitalisation and the reclamation of indigenous spiritual systems as means to restore cultural autonomy. He emphasised strategies for sustaining Egúngún’s relevance, including adaptive cultural practices, active community engagement, and educational documentation to preserve and transmit its sacred essence.

Part 5 – Egúngún: Mask Idiom, Multimediality, and Continuities

Presenter: Professor Sola Olorunyomi, Director, Institute of African Studies, University of Ibadan, Oyo State, Nigeria

Professor Sola Olorunyomi’s presentation explored Egúngún as a dynamic ancestral practice and communicative medium that integrates ritual, performance, and cultural memory. Tracing its historical and spiritual origins under Sango, he highlighted how Egúngún functions as both a civic and sacred institution, blending entertainment with societal critique and moral education. Professor Sola underscored the importance of technology, creative literature, and strategic partnerships in enhancing visibility and engagement while preserving the tradition’s cultural and spiritual essence for future generations.

The diverse participant base, spanning academic researchers, traditional priests and lineage custodians, government officials, tourism professionals, and diaspora community members, reflected the multi-dimensional nature of cultural sustainability work and the necessity of knowledge exchange across different domains of expertise.



Rapporteur welcoming speakers and guests

A traditional Egúngún dance performance grounded the symposium in experiential knowledge, demonstrating the artistic complexity and spiritual gravity that academic discourse alone cannot capture. The performance served as both a cultural anchor and a strategic reminder: any framework for heritage development must remain accountable to the living tradition it seeks to sustain.

The symposium achieved its objective of creating structured dialogue across stakeholder groups, including traditional custodians, government agencies, academic researchers, tourism practitioners, and creative industry professionals, establishing foundations for collaborative approaches to cultural sustainability. Proceedings reinforced the Oyo State Government's commitment to heritage-based economic development, articulated through specific targets, including UNESCO Intangible Cultural Heritage inscription within five years and the establishment of public-private partnership (PPP) models that balance commercial viability with cultural integrity.



Egúngún dance display

Critical Findings

Heritage Under Pressure

Despite demonstrated spiritual vitality and economic potential, symposium discussions revealed that the Egúngún tradition is facing immediate material, intergenerational, and governance threats that require urgent strategic intervention.

Material Culture in Crisis

The indigenous textile infrastructure essential to authentic Egúngún practice is collapsing. The specialized weaving traditions that produce aso-ofi, adire, and other sacred costume materials face extinction due to economic instability, competition from imported fabrics, and the absence of market protection mechanisms.

Master costume makers (Alagbaa) operate without financial support or institutional recognition, while youth apprenticeship in sacred garment construction has virtually ceased. This creates an imminent knowledge gap: within one generation, the craft expertise required to maintain Egúngún's material authenticity may disappear entirely, regardless of festival funding or tourism development.

Sacred Function versus Commercial Adaptation

Traditional custodians emphasized a non-negotiable principle: Egúngún operates as a living spiritual entity and ancestral intermediary, not performance art. Any commercial application requires ritual protocols, traditional authority oversight, and clear boundaries between sacred practice and public spectacle. Current government tourism strategies prioritize festival repackaging for visitor attraction, creating a risk of costume and performance separation from spiritual function, effectively reducing sacred practice to an entertainment product.

Critically, planning structures inadequately incorporate traditional leadership in commercial festival design, positioning custodians as performers rather than governance partners. This structural exclusion threatens both cultural integrity and community ownership of heritage development outcomes.

Intergenerational Knowledge Transfer at Risk

Beyond material culture, the oral knowledge systems, ritual protocols, and lineage-based governance structures that organize Egúngún practice face transmission challenges as social organization shifts and youth engage differently with traditional authority. Without deliberate intervention, the intellectual infrastructure sustaining the tradition may erode.

Strategic Opportunities Identified

Symposium discussions also revealed significant leverage points for heritage-based development that respects cultural integrity:

Demonstrated Political Will

Oyo State Government's restructuring of the Ministry of Culture and Tourism, coupled with active pursuit of international partnerships (UNESCO technical support, Brazil cultural exchange), signals institutional commitment to heritage development as an economic strategy.

Festival Performance Data

Evidence presented demonstrated that major cultural festivals consistently outperform physical tourist sites in visitor attraction and economic impact, validating investment in heritage programming as tourism infrastructure.

Multimodal Content Potential

Egúngún's integration of music, dance, costume arts, and oral performance positions it ideally for digital content creation, global audience engagement, and creative economy development beyond physical festival attendance.

Institutional Precedent

The successful UNESCO inscription of the Sango Festival provides an operational blueprint, stakeholder coordination models, and documentation standards applicable to Egúngún's inscription pathway.

Existing Community Infrastructure

Active lineage houses, functioning ritual calendars, and established custodian networks provide a foundation for community-led heritage management if adequately supported and formally recognized in governance structures.

The challenge articulated through symposium proceedings is clear: **How do we resource traditional knowledge systems, protect material culture, and develop economic opportunity simultaneously without subordinating cultural integrity to commercial imperatives?** The answers will determine whether Egúngún tradition thrives as living practice or survives only as tourist performance.

Symposium Outcomes and Next Steps

The symposium produced immediate deliverables including this strategic report, stakeholder consensus on the four-pillar framework, government commitment to establish the Heritage Governance Council, and agreement on priority interventions. Near-term actions (June–December 2025) include stakeholder validation workshops, budget advocacy, council establishment, and detailed programme design, culminating in quarterly progress reviews beginning January 2026. The long-term vision positions Egúngún tradition for global UNESCO recognition, economic viability through sustainable tourism, and cultural security through thriving craft sectors and intergenerational knowledge transfer by 2030.

Outcomes and Next Steps

Immediate Deliverables from Symposium

- This strategic report documenting proceedings and recommendations
- Stakeholder consensus on four-pillar framework for action
- Commitment from government to establish Heritage Governance Council
- Agreement on priority areas for immediate intervention

Next Steps (June-December 2025)

- **Stakeholder Validation Workshop (July 2025):** Present recommendations to wider stakeholder group for feedback and refinement
- **Budget Advocacy (August-September 2025):** Submit funding proposals for 2026 budget cycle
- **Council Establishment (October 2025):** Legal and administrative setup of Heritage Governance Council
- **Programme Design (October-December 2025):** Detailed design of textile support and apprenticeship programmes
- **Progress Review (January 2026):** First quarterly review of implementation progress

Long-Term Vision (2025-2030)

- By 2030, the Egúngún tradition will be globally recognized through UNESCO inscription, economically viable through sustainable tourism revenue, and culturally secure through thriving indigenous craft sectors and intergenerational knowledge transfer.

The Oyo State model will serve as a blueprint for cultural heritage sustainability across economic, social, and environmental dimensions in Nigeria and Africa, demonstrating that economic development and spiritual integrity can coexist through strategic governance and community-centered approaches.



The Sahara Centre

culture@saharacentre.org

www.saharacentre.org

@thesaharacentre

©2026