



## A Study of Impact of Westernization on Annang Fattening Room Culture of Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria

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**Abstract.** Fattening room which means "*Mbobo*" in the Annang culture of Akwa Ibom State of Nigeria is a period of transition from adolescence to womanhood prior to marriage and childbirth. The process involves the seclusion of female adolescents for a period of three months. During this period of confinement, the female adolescent is taught how to be of good conduct and maintain good behavior with her husband and the in-law family. The fattening room was used as a beauty salon for young ladies to be educated on subjects that cover cosmetology, makeup, and fashion design. This important culture of the Annang people has been influence by westernization and has not been given adequate scholarly attention in Annang studies. This paper, therefore, is to fill these obvious gaps in Annang literature by using both primary and secondary data, such as IDI, as the source of data collection to examine the fattening room culture as an African beauty salon for the Annang girls. The study reveals that the Annang fattening room tradition is declining due to western influences like urbanization and globalization, causing youth to view it as outdated culture. The study recommends integrating the fattening room practice into western schools' system, engaging youth in cultural events, and organizing festivals that blend traditional culture and elements to enhance youth participation in fattening room.

**Keywords:** Annang, Culture, Fattening room, Westernization

### 1. Introduction

Fattening room (*mbobo*) in Annang is seen as an epitome of beauty that involves a process where fattened maidens are confined to a room, fed with traditional cuisines, and take care of their bodies. The idea behind it is to prepare the maiden and make her look as good, healthy, and beautiful as possible before

her marriage ceremony. During this period of seclusion, the young women are taught how to improve their overall domestic and interpersonal skills, which include cloth weaving, dressing, and applying makeup to ensure their beauty and attractiveness. The fattening room is therefore a beauty salon of sorts where young women are educated on subjects that cover home management, cosmetology, fashion design, and make-up (Ekong, 2001; Effiong 2013; Akpan.2024). Prior to marriage, female adolescents that were enrolled in this salon were expected to be virgins.

The elderly women in the community who were the instructors tested them for their virginity once the suitor came and she was ready for the marriage. If the young woman failed the virginity test, she was subjected to public ridicule and became a disgrace to her family. On the other hand, if she passes the virginity test, she undergoes a fattening process by spending three to six months in a fattening room. During these periods, she was given special attention and special food to make her grow big and plump; a special cream was applied to her body, which was primarily made of palm oil, turmeric, and a few other regional herbs. The purpose of this lotion was to make her skin shiny, silky, and smooth. Her only responsibility was to eat, sleep, rest, and move around the enclosure until she appeared sufficiently chubby and healthy. Until she gains enough weight to be shown to the public, she remains in that fattening room. The last day of fattening room activities was a huge celebration of different cultural activities that bring people from far and wide to witness the celebration.

To demonstrate to the world how attractive and healthy they were after the fattening period, they

showcase their jewelry, beads, and clothing. Their hair was groomed in a unique way, which is the *mbobo* style, primarily with artwork that resembled long-standing caps. They parade themselves in exquisite traditional attire, while others follow, but only ladies who have proudly gone through the process line up to escort them around. Ekong (2001) asserts that *Mbobo* usually took place in the month of September and the ceremony was performed in the market square on Fiongaran day.

In the Annang society, fattening was so important that some parents named their daughters "*Mbobo*," which translates to "beauty." Regretfully, only the wealthy and the monarch could afford this costly practice. However, because it was a display of riches, power, and nobility, especially for the maiden's father, everyone could not afford it. Before you were respected in public, you had to have your first daughter, even if you could not do it for all of your female children. Presently, Annang elders still express their admiration for a healthy, attractive, and beautiful woman by calling her *Mbobo* (Akpan, 2024). While the young women have abandoned the cultural values, the fattening room.

The acceptance of foreign culture by Annang girls in the place of their cultural values has become worrisome and detrimental to their own traditional pattern of life. For example, fattening culture, where the female adolescent was taught the womanly arts of good conduct or how to maintain proper behavior with her husband and his family, is undermined by the people. The focus of this study is to explore and bring to clear understanding the importance of fattening culture in the life of Annang women and how Western culture and ways of life have gradually replaced the cultural values of the fattening room of the Annang people of Akwa-Ibom State. It represents a remarkable departure in the study of cultural values in Nigeria, as it focuses on the changes and adaptations by the people to the Western influence on their culture.

### 1.1 Research Questions

The following research question will guide the study:

What are the impacts of westernization on the Annang fattening-room practice?

What can the Annang people do to protect their fattening room culture in the face of modernization?

### 1.2 Objectives of the Study

The following are the specific objectives of the study:

determine the impact of modernization on Annang fattening room culture.

discuss how Annang people can protect their fattening room culture in the face of modernization.

## 2. Related literature

Fattening room culture, which is called "*Mbobo*" in the Annang language in Akwa Ibom State in Nigeria, is a period of transition from adolescence to womanhood prior to marriage and childbirth. The process involves the seclusion of female adolescents for a period of three months. During this period of confinement, she is taught the womanly arts of pleasing her husband and other feminine requirements, such as how to be of good conduct or to maintain proper behavior with her husband and, above all, how to prepare good meals.

The idea behind fattening culture in Annang is to prepare the maiden and make her look as good, healthy, and beautiful as possible for her husband, which is usually done before marriage and after childbirth (Idang, 2015). It is associated with beauty and fertility, and it continued after childbirth. During this period of seclusion, the young women are taught how to improve their overall domestic and interpersonal skills, which include trading, cooking, decorating the home, cloth weaving, dressing, and applying makeup to ensure their attractiveness and, above all, instructions on how to achieve sexual fulfillment. They also receive training on the moral values, customs, mores, and taboos of their community (Effiong, 2013). The fattening room is therefore a salon of sorts where young women are educated on subjects that cover biology, psychology, sociology, culture, home management, cosmetology, fashion design, and other skills enhancement (Effiong, 2013). Enang (2009) sees the fattening room as a rich cultural heritage, value, and custom, which is a rite of passage from adolescence to womanhood. This is a place where a young woman prior to marriage receives instruction on the traditional role of wife and mother. Adienbo, Hart, Oyeyemi (2012) describe the fattening room as a period of confinement for women during the postpartum period or a period of two to three months during which they are fed with high-caloric meals regularly in order to make them fat and are also restricted from domestic activities.

In addition, Idem (1979), describes the fattening room for the Efik from the old Calabar Province which Annang was a part of as being limited to the people wealthy enough to bear the expenses, as free born girls go twice and sometimes three times to the fattening room before the marriage ceremony is performed. The first time is called *mbobo*, the coming of the small

breast. Here the seclusion lasts for three months, during which time the girl undergoes circumcision. The second time varies according to the wealth of the family and can last anywhere from a few weeks to two years. In the period of seclusion, the girl is spoiled to the top with food, and the third time they are kept in one room where they do not work and are fed up. As the purpose of the fattening room was to gain weight and learn customs in a special room.

### **2.1 Rite of passage**

Socio-cultural and religious teachings, such as those pertaining to gender, relationships, and sexuality, are transmitted through rites of passage, which are highly valued by the societies that observe them (Mutale, 2017; Skinner et al., 2013; Kangwa, 2011). Almost every culture in Africa values and observes adolescent rites of passage (Pemba, 2011; Markstrom, 2011; Siweya, Sodi, & Douglas, 2018; Skinner et al., 2013; Kangwa, 2011). By providing a ceremony, ritual, or other experience meant to either prepare young people for the roles and responsibilities of adulthood or simply declare that the young person is now an adult, these rites, which again frequently vary from community to community or country to country, are meant to formally mark a transition from childhood to adulthood (Ekine, Samati, and Walker, 2013; van Rooyen & Hartell, 2010). The purpose of the rites in Annang is to formally introduce the girls to adult life and to teach them about reproduction. Lessons are given on how to behave well around parents, neighbors, and senior citizens as well as how to avoid copying bad role models. The teachings were presented through dance, songs, and marriage emphases. Kangwa (2011).

### **2.2 Benefits of Fattening Room**

The fattening room served as a formal educational setting for young girls, providing instruction on topics such as sexual hygiene, marriage responsibilities, childbirth, child care, and cooking. This process aimed to ensure that after the fattening period, the girls would be plump, beautiful, and desirable. The mbobo was instrumental in shaping the lives of youths, particularly young girls of marriageable age, by promoting moral standards and good manners, thus enabling male suitors to marry well-cultured wives Akpan, (2016). Socially, mbobo ceremony used to be a unifying force that binds the Annang people together.

### **2.3 Impact of Modernization on Annang Fattening Room Culture**

The family made sure that young men married very young and females prepared specifically for marriage when it was due in order to keep the younger generation chaste and moral. In Annang traditional society, the practice of fattening girls in preparation for marriage was highly significant. However, the fattening room is now optional and obsolete due to the attitudes brought about by modernity and Western education (Akpan, 2016). The fattening room is a traditional rite of passage for young maidens among the Annang people. Historically, young girls were confirmed and also secluded in a special room for periods between six months and years; the essence of the seclusion was to feed them to gain weight, teach them domestic skills, etiquette, sexuality, and cultural values, and prepare them for marriage and motherhood (Brink, 1989; Effiong, 2013; Etuk, 2024). Fattening room practice is significant as it represents prosperity, fertility, beauty, and family status, as plumpness was culturally associated with health, wealth, and attractiveness in pre-modern Annang society (Brink, 1995; Effiong, 2013; Obot, 2017). You know, Modernization has really changed the way people think about beauty. Western education and Christianity have made their way into urban areas like Annang, and that led to some major changes. folks are moving to the city more, and more people they see the more they realize being skinny all the rage. (Akpan, 2024).

### **2.4 Shifting Beauty Ideals and Body Image**

Global media does not help, constantly showing us these super thin models and celebrities. It's like, their idea of beauty now is the complete opposite of what the Annang people used to think was beautiful they used to love being curvy and full. Presently, young Annang maidens increasingly refuse seclusion, confinement, and forced weight gain, viewing it as incompatible with modern aspirations for fitness and good appearance (Etuk, 2024). This has led to the virtual abandonment of the practice among educated urban Annang women.

### **2.5 Education and Time Constraint**

Education and career choice have rendered confinement and seclusion to the fattening room culture to be impossible. This is because the young Annang maiden preferred education over months in a fattening room that would interrupt their studies or delay their entry into the workforce (Effiong, 2013; Obot, 2017; Akpan, 2024).

## 2.6 Health and Human Rights Concerns

Presently, there is an awareness of obesity-related risks (e.g., diabetes) and practices associated with overfeeding or unhealthy practices like the fattening room culture, which is seen as unhealthy by younger generations in Annang (Enang, 2009).

## 2.7 Implications for the future

The fattening room culture is constantly under threat from Western influences and modernization. Indeed, the custom of fattening room culture in Annang is becoming less and less common as more and more urban dwellers choose not to participate in this practice. Ironically, though, a large number of urban women whose health might benefit from the elimination of fattening rooms are at higher risk for obesity-related illnesses as a result of their unhealthy “modern” lifestyle, which makes a sedentary life and a diet high in processed foods high in fat and salt the norm.

## 2.8 Protection Annang culture of fattening room in the face of modernization

Given modernity and civilization, many Annang cultural practices, like the Annang fattening room, run the risk of disappearing. As a result, we believe that it is everyone's societal duty to help the Annang retain their culture for future generations. It is impossible to overstate the beneficial outcomes. Protecting Annang fattening room cultural heritage is crucial for maintaining a sense of identity and belonging among Annang people. These, music, language, food, dress, art, festivals and morality which the heritage stands for not only make future generations relate to the heritage of their people but also bolster self-esteem and mental health. Preserving Annang fattening room heritage is an act of defining Annang identity and developing an Annang community. Just as Schein (1999) emphasize the importance of cultural resilience, arguing that communities can adapt to modern influences while maintaining their core values. This adaptability allows for the integration of beneficial modern practices without compromising cultural integrity. Furthermore, preserving the Annang fattening room culture helps to bring unity among the Annang people through the fattening room ceremony. This ceremony helps to build new friendship between villages adjacent to each other, unite different tribes/people and brings them closer to promote solidarity and togetherness. Preservation of Annang fattening room heritage is also paramount in relation to international world because the people would be able to learn from and improve

themselves from different cultures. Any heritage that remains unpreserved will not only be a loss to Nigeria but the whole world at large because it is part of the world's heritage and it is an act of inclusion. Different culture is an aid to learning of people, bridging gaps and creating a world full of solidarity and love. Preserving the Annang fattening room practices cultural heritage would also assist the economy because it attracts people from various regions to come and visit and also create source of employment for them who are in the cultural industries. Cultural tourism is one of the major activities which promote traditional practices and artifacts thus generate revenue in local communities, hence there is a dire need to preserve Annang's culture and traditions. Indigenous knowledge which are passed down from generations must be protected in order to combat new challenges, it has knowledge that can provide solutions to today's issues, be it in terms of living sustainably, biodiversity, ecosystem management, healing methods, medicinal values, and so on. This can improve our knowledge about the world and provide a platform for building a tolerant, connected and prosperous world and also enable future generations learn more about their way of life that sustain them for centuries.

### 2.8.1 Ways to Protect Annang Fattening Room Practice Culture

Maintaining and protecting the cultural values of the Annang fattening room practice involves educating the young on Annang culture, their indigenous language, history, tradition and practice in such a way that they would be able to relate to their past and engage critically in its reinterpretation, adaptation and revival. This is in line with Fischer, Newig, & Vogt, (2015) highlight the role of education in fostering awareness and appreciation of local cultures This requires the proper documentation of the cultural heritage associated with the Annang fattening room practice as it would not be able to keep up with the challenge posed by the contemporary society. Libraries and museums or cultural archives have the capacity of maintaining oral narratives, music and dance. Also, traditional Annang society possesses an important philosophic tradition the writings and sayings of the early philosophers that had contributed to knowledge. Through documentation and development of such source, proverbs, riddles, stories and names could lead to transformation of human society in positive direction. The Annang language represents a safeguard for the preservation of the Annang tradition and values. The indigenous language embodies all the aspects of Annang cultural traditions, worldviews and beliefs of Annang people. It forms a

part of their indigenous tradition which helps Annang children to acquire their cultural practices, develop the necessary values for the purpose of becoming fully functioning members of Annang society through a positive internalization and identification with their language and cultural heritage and how well or poorly these are passed down and internalized by the children as language should be encouraged in both public schools and as an instrument in local community efforts to promote cultural transmission.

The study uses modernization theory. The main proponent of modernization theory are Lerner (1958), Rostow (1960), Frank (1966) and Sen (1999). Modernization theory posits that, with proper investments in infrastructure, education, technology, countries can evolve from traditional economic systems to modern ones characterized by industrial production and consumption. The theory further proposes that, as societies develop economically and industrially, traditions centered on community living and dependence on the land are gradually replaced by the values that emphasis on individual achievements, enterprise and consumption (Inglehar, 1997; Kollmorgen, R. 2019). Modernization theory focuses on how traditional practices, especially fattening room practices are affected by changes brought by economic development, social transformations, political development and cultural transformation. Due to increased global interaction, migration, and trades, as well as diffusion from global media, there might be adaptation of new ideas among Annang people. Factors like economic advancement, female empowerment, religion, judicial reforms, political participation, etc could be able to affect fattening room practices, whereas awareness campaigns, public education, and international intervention are factors that can counteract such negative practice while the weakening impact of migration to urban areas and multicultural influences also plays a role in affecting these practices.

### 3. Methods and Materials

The study is an ethnographic study and adopted the qualitative method of data collection and data analysis on 30 participants that have experienced and had knowledge of the fattening room practices. The study made use of an in-depth interview guide in eliciting the desired responses from the participants, who were selected using purposive and simple random sampling techniques. Secondary data such as publications and other sources relevant for the study were utilized. Participants were selected based on availability and willingness to give audience to the research team as it adopted all the ethics in social science research.

## 4. Discussion of Findings

### Objective One: Impact of modernization on Annang practices of fattening room

To determine the impact of modernization on Annang practices of fattening room, it shows that modernization has had a negative impact on the cultural practice of fattening room, as the participant summarized it thus:

Every young woman used to look forward to the fattening room since it was a sign of respect and maturity. However, things are now different. It is considered outdated by the younger generation. They now think that spending weeks in isolation is a waste of time due to exposure and education. Many people no longer realize that the fattening room served as a teaching tool for morality and marital preparation in addition to beauty. People seldom have time for these kinds of activities today because modern life moves so quickly (IDI, Elderly Woman).

It is believed that people are now more critical of traditional practices as a result of industrialization. Because of the focus on weight gain, some people view the fattening room as discriminatory or unhealthy. Many of us now believe that cultural customs should be modified to reflect contemporary reality due to education and internet availability. However, I also think that if the practice is updated, certain great parts, like understanding traditional values and practicing self-care, can still be maintained (IDI, Young Educated Woman).

The quantity of time and space available for the fattening room has decreased due to urbanization. These days, most people live in cities, making it difficult to set up such isolation practices in rental flats. Families are also unable to afford to keep a woman away from work or school for weeks due to financial constraints. The fattening room is no longer as useful due to rising living expenses. However, technology could assist us in recording the procedure or imparting the ideals via workshops and media (IDI, Urban Dweller),

People are now ashamed of their cultural identity as a result of modernization. Some people believe that anything traditional is outdated. However, in my opinion, modernizing shouldn't entail giving up on our heritage. We may change the fattening room by reducing its duration, eliminating detrimental activities, and emphasizing cultural pride, empowerment, and health education. If we change it, modernization can really strengthen it rather than weaken it (IDI, Cultural Advocate)

Many of us young people only learn about the fattening room from our elders, to be honest. Because social media and technology have exposed us to a variety of lifestyles, we often compare our culture to Western norms. This has changed how we view these customs; some of us think they are unnecessary, while others are beginning to see them as a way to reconnect with our roots **(IDI, Young woman)**.

These other participants have this to say on the attitudes toward the fattening room changed among younger generations. The participants added thus; Today's youth don't appear to be as engaged as we were. They view it as out of date and sometimes even unnecessary. Instead of spending weeks in isolation, many of them would rather concentrate on their studies, careers, or travels **(IDI, Elderly Woman)**.

To be honest, I think the fattening room is now more symbolic than useful. Although I accept it as a part of our culture, I don't see myself following the custom. It's not possible in modern life. Though not totally negatively, attitudes have altered. Many young people wish to preserve the tradition, but in a more modern manner that prioritizes wellness and empowerment over seclusion **(IDI, Young woman)**.

"It's largely curiosity for me and my friends. Our elders have taught us about it, but we don't think it's necessary. These outdated customs seem less applicable as a result of social media and technology's increased global connectivity **(IDI, Young woman)**.

Other participants spoke on the role of formal education and exposure to other cultures played in shaping people's opinions about the fattening room practice. they summarize it as thus:

Higher educated people frequently question certain components of the tradition. They often wonder why a young woman should spend weeks alone when there are other methods to prepare her for adulthood and marriage **(IDI, Elderly woman)**.

My schooling has made me pay more attention to the fattening room. I respect the cultural values, but I also compare them to what I see in other countries. Some things seem outdated, but I believe they could be updated for modern living. Also, my exposure to numerous cultures at school and online has taught me that traditions like the fattening room are unusual elsewhere. This makes me question whether it is truly necessary, even though I still like the lessons it teaches **(IDI, Young woman)**.

Because of the education people receive and their awareness of lifestyles different from the tradition they receive all elements of it without question, and now

consider ideals more important than ritual (which is positive) **(IDI, Young man)**.

I can understand now how other cultures prepare their daughters to enter adulthood, through learning about other societies in school and on the Internet. The ideal of teaching discipline and respect is still a beautiful concept, though perhaps the fattening room would be shortened and improved **(IDI, Student)**.

Some participants added elements of the traditional fattening room that are being adapted to fit modern lifestyles, the participants added thus:

In the past, the fattening room was very private. The young women learned about respect, womanhood, and household skills during their months-long stay. That type of time is no longer available to people. But I've noticed that some families still hold quick retreats, sometimes lasting a weekend, where older women teach the girls about marriage, hygiene, and etiquette. Therefore, the teachings are still relevant even if the surroundings have changed **(IDI, Woman, Leader)**

Yes, I think the ideas of self-care and being prepared for marriage are still relevant, but they are being updated. Instead of spending weeks indoors, people go to spas or wellness centers to relax and "prepare" themselves. Some of my friends even organize "fattening room" excursions that include a few days of delectable food, pampering, and advice from senior women **(IDI, Woman Advocate)**

Physical fattening is giving way to more comprehensive empowerment. The emphasis of contemporary adaptations is on financial, emotional, and mental preparedness. Workshops that teach women about self-assurance, business, or reproductive health are common; these topics are related to the initial goal of educating women for adulthood, but they are now presented in a modern manner **(IDI, Educationist)**.

Certain symbolic elements, like body ornamentation and dancing, are still performed at festivals and weddings. They participate in the joy of being a lady. But since people are increasingly health-conscious, the focus is on maintaining a healthy body shape rather than promoting weight increase. The idea of readiness and beauty is the same, but it has been modified **(IDI, Community Leader )**.

I believe that people now choose the aspects of culture they find appealing and ignore the rest." Social media influencers may use the wrappers, beads, and traditional décor of the fattening room as inspiration

for their photo sessions, although this is more of a cultural exhibition than the entire traditional procedure **(IDI, Man)**.

**Objective Two:** How Annang people can protect their culture of fattening rooms in the face of modernization

In discussing how Annang people can protect the fattening room practices in the face of modernization the participants responded thus:

I think we should focus on teaching the principles and etiquette in shorter, safer programs. Young women will not engage in painful or drawn-out rituals. We may preserve the essence without following every antiquated rule **(IDI, Elderly woman)**.

Community leaders can organize community projects and workshops that combine traditional music, dances, attire, and moral lessons with modern health and nutrition education. In this way, the culture survives and women's health is preserved. Also, instead of spending a lot of time alone, symbolic ceremonies can be helpful. Families can incorporate dancing, music, and politeness into rituals while adjusting them to fit work or school schedules. The young ones can also learn about the culture in this way **(IDI, Young woman)**.

Documentation is essential. Stories, dances, songs, and rituals should all be recorded. Include youth in the planning of events as well. Social media and other modern techniques can protect the tradition and increase awareness. In addition, cultural days could be hosted annually at community organizations or schools. Songs, dances, traditional attire, and manners lessons could all be included. It maintains the tradition even though the traditional customs are challenging to follow **(IDI, Community Leader)**.

Health and hygiene education may be included in the fattening room. For example, replacing dangerous herbal medicines with good nutrition programs. This ensures that young women respect traditions while remaining secure **(IDI, Health Worker)**.

When asked what traditional leaders, families, or community groups can do to promote the practice in ways that align with modern values. Some participants added thus:

Leaders should support shorter, symbolic ceremonies that focus on teaching ideas, manners, and respect. Families should encourage young women's education

and employment while also taking part in cultural events. This way tradition will not collide with and modern living collide. Also, families can participate by adapting traditions to suit modern schedules. For example, short symbolic rituals at home or community centers could teach cultural values without interfering with work or schooling, unlike long months of seclusion **(IDI, Young woman)**.

The elders of the village should continue to play the role model to help children to respect traditional values as well as modern values like gender equality. And they should also help to conduct cultural competitions and activities to make culture and traditions become an interesting and educative learning tool for children **(IDI, Women Advocate)**.

When they are asked if any components of the fattening room can be re-interpreted or modernized without destroying its cultural context, they replied in the following summary:

The fattening room taught young women to be a good wife, mother and member of society; and to achieve an increased size and weight. I believe it can be modernized by only keeping the lessons on respect, womanhood, and family relations while discontinuing practices that may be perceived as repugnant to modern women. The top two priorities are still education and change **(IDI, Woman Leader)**.

I do not think the practice should be discarded entirely. Perhaps it can transform into some kind of cultural retreat or mentoring program where young women learn not only traditional knowledge, but also on self-esteem, womanhood, and identity along with the modern skills such as business management and health information. In that case, it suits our current way of life yet does not fail our ancestors **(IDI, Community Leader)**.

In the past, the fattening room gave a woman pride and a sense of belonging, serving as a transition rite. What we can re-conceptualize is the element of "fattening" in the fattening room. Instead, we can focus on nurturing women mentally, emotionally, and with their diet. The basic idea of preparing a girl for maturity does not change, only the methodology does. Moreover, the fattening room was also the room where it was both aesthetically beautiful and intellectually challenging. To me, the stories, melodies and the gender and marital messages conveyed are relevant. But in place of isolation, workshop or cultural camp may be more suitable. The key to achieving the

balance is to preserve identity while making it relevant **(IDI, Traditional Rule)**.

Culture's evolve and this is normal. I would say that the fattening room could be considered a metaphor of time, rest and preparation. And the same principle could be modernized by establishing spaces in which the young women can acquire knowledge of their culture and gain knowledge about themselves in a way that is respectful and optional. The trick lies in keeping the symbolic aspect in the tradition strong while removing any painful or outdated aspect. We could change "fattening" into something more related to health-based self-acceptance, body image and nutritional awareness. The goal may shift from physical development to self-worth development and a healthy lifestyle. If done properly, it might even act as a platform for public health awareness that is culturally appropriate **(IDI, Woman Leader)**.

Role do education and cultural awareness programs play in sustaining this tradition

Education is the key to keeping our traditions alive. Today's youth spend most of their time in school, when in the past we learned everything by watching our elders. When schools include our ancient songs and stories in their curricula, children are reminded of their roots. They take great pride in it. Without it, our ways might eventually disappear **(IDI, Elderly Woman)**.

Cultural knowledge promoting programs aid in bridging the age gap. We hold workshops where elders teach young people the meaning of our practices instead of just their actions. Once they understand why, young ones are more committed to safeguarding it. Tradition that seemed old can be something live and current through education **(IDI, Young Graduate)**

With awareness programs they help our community to show not only to other people but also to our own members that our culture is important when the community sees that the tradition is taught in school and promoted everywhere and not that it has to be brought outside. It is easier for us to get help from the government and cultural groups also **(IDI, Community Leader)**

What roles should government institutions, cultural organizations, and media perform to preserve and promote the Annang fattening room tradition in contemporary society?

The first role government should play is to accept the fattening room not as an outdated culture, but as an

important cultural trait and give adequate space, resources to be documented appropriately. The cultural organizations should come out and work together with us (guardians) and spread the correct message of the tradition; it stands for womanhood, dignity and getting ready for maturity and not as an importance of beauty. The media should stop portraying our tradition in negative light. The community should understand the principles behind it **(IDI, Traditional Ruler)**

I think it would be possible for the government to support with a curriculum on cultural teachings, in schools and to incorporate aspects of the fattening room practice into school system. Teaching young people, the value of it will increase their appreciation of it. Cultural groups are able to produce modern versions that respect traditional values and take into account contemporary lifestyles. The media can produce movies, podcasts, or social media campaigns that highlight its advantages over its drawbacks **(IDI, Woman Leader)**.

Cultural preservation should be a part of development policies. This means paying community custodians, training culture officers, and setting up historical institutions where traditions like the Annang fattening room are appropriately shown. We also need to work with the media to portray these traditions as national heritage rather than just ethnic practices **(IDI, Community Leader)**.

I understand the significance of the fattening room since I have personally experienced it. It should be legally protected by the government as cultural heritage. The lessons we acquire there respect, patience, cleanliness, and motherhood should be taught to people by cultural institutions. These tales ought to be highlighted by the media in order to change people's perceptions of it from oppression to preparation for responsible living **(IDI, Middle Age Woman)**.

How can policy or cultural festivals help in maintaining the visibility of the fattening room practice

Cultural events, in my opinion, make the tradition more visible and exciting. When it is presented with dances, music, and stories, young people like me have a different perspective on it. Policies that support communities that continue to use the fattening room or incorporate it into school cultural events can be helpful. In this way, it doesn't quietly vanish **(IDI, Young Woman)**.

People can express themselves at cultural festivals. These presentations, performances and storytelling can clarify the purpose of the fattening room. The purpose is preparation of a lady for her womanhood, not seclusion or leisure as some would believe. Policies supporting the financial and logistical aspects of such displays would be key to the widespread recognition and continued sustenance of this tradition **(IDI, Woman Leader)**.

Policies are needed that foster a creative interpretation of our traditions in addition to the simple documentation. Performances in festivals provide a unique 'live museum' in which audience members can observe, inquire and learn. These live performances, using traditional techniques like the fattening room practice (demonstrated through stories and re-enactments), can communicate the symbolic and didactic dimensions to the audience members regardless of their own cultural background **(IDI, Young man)**.

We can integrate the fattening room concept within cultural tourism initiatives. If the state of Akwa Ibom held an annual festival in commemoration of Annang customs, there might be an exhibit, a fashion show, storytelling and the use of traditional learning methods for teaching about this aspect of our culture, which might draw in the tourists, create interest among the youth, and re-actualize popular culture in festival displays **(IDI, Community Leader)**.

We have abundant material that can be broadcast and published during festivals, and it would make outsiders aware that the fattening room is nothing shameful, if these events are widely publicized and broadcast. The state policy should therefore support media coverage of our traditional events by providing producers who document our indigenous traditions with incentives to continue doing so **(IDI, Youth Leader)**.

## 5. Conclusion and Recommendations

The study concludes that the Annang fattening room tradition is at risk of decline due to the negative impact of modernization. Modernization such as urbanization, Westernization through education and globalized cultures has also led Annang youth to see fattening room as old-fashioned and as an activity that isolates ladies in seclusion; an approach that clashes with contemporary focus on education and careers. Though modernization presents an array of threats that puts the practice at risk, it also offers an opportunity to educate Annang community about the importance of tradition and cultural preservation. Hence, the study

recommends that fattening room practice be introduced into Annang schools, Annang leaders should involve youths in cultural events organized by them, and such festivals will be able to combine tradition with contemporary approach in attracting more youth participation.

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