

# IJAW

## LANGUAGE & CULTURE

Ijaw are best known for their extensive production and alteration of cloth. Dress is used to signify the status throughout society. Ijaw are well known for their exotic clothing. Both men and women wear beautifully designed wrappers which are accompanied with accessories such as coral beads, beaded caps, hats and walking sticks.

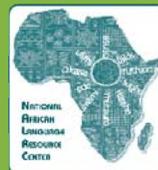
Like many ethnic groups in Nigeria, the Ijaws have many local foods that are not widespread in Nigeria. Many of these foods involve fish and other sea foods such as clams, oysters and periwinkles; yams and plantains. Like Fish pepper soup, unripe plantain porridge (kekefi yan), opopo onunu (ripe plantain often pounded with yam and eaten with pepper soup), native soup (made with lots of fish and seafoods).

The Ijaw people live by fishing supplemented by farming paddy-rice, plantains, yams, cocoyams, bananas and other vegetables as well as tropical fruits such as guava, mangoes, pineapples; Smoke-dried fish, timber, palm oil and palm kernels are processed for export.

They uphold a number of practices that keep their customs alive. Traditional religious practices center around "Water spirits" in the Niger river, and they give tribute to ancestors

## STUDYING IJAW IN THE UNITED STATES

Please contact the National African Language Resource Center, or check the NALRC web site at <http://www.nalrc.indiana.edu/>



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AN IJAW WOMAN

NATIONAL AFRICAN LANGUAGE  
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## WHO SPEAKS IJAW?

The Ijaw languages are mainly spoken within the Niger Delta region of Nigeria, specifically in Bayelsa, Delta and Rivers States. Outside of the Niger Delta region, the Arogbo-Ijaw can be found in the riverine area of Ondo State, Nigeria. Many are found as migrant fishermen in camps as far west as Sierra Leone and as far east as Gabon along the Western Africa coastline.

The Ijaw ethnic group consists of 50 loosely affiliated tribes and the people are expected to be an estimated 15 million. They have long lived in locations near many sea trade routes and they were well-connected to other areas by trade as early as the 15th century.

The Ijaw speak nine closely related Niger–Congo languages, all of which belong to the Ijoid branch of the Niger–Congo tree. The primary division between Ijaw languages is between Eastern Ijo and Western Ijo, the most important of the latter being Izon, which is spoken by about four million people.



*Ibani of Bonny and Opobo Iria attire*

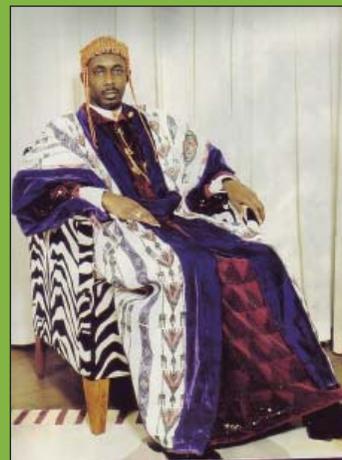
## WHY STUDY IJAW?

It is the fourth largest ethnic group in Nigeria surpassed only by Hausa, Yoruba and Igbo, the three major tribes in the country.

The settlement of the Ijaw in the delta region was from the earliest of times. The geographic conditions of the Niger Delta region have resulted in the Ijaw being located astride trade routes throughout the region.

The Ijaw were one of the first of Nigeria's people to have contact with Westerners, and were active as go-betweens in the slave trade between visiting Europeans and the peoples.

The other main occupation common among the Ijaw has traditionally been fishing and farming. Being a maritime people, many Ijaws were employed in the merchant shipping sector in the early and mid-20th century. With the advent of oil and gas exploration in their territory, some are employed in that sector.



*Traditional Eastern Ijaw Attire*



*The Ijaws have a love for fashion*



*A Cross section of wakirike Ijaw women*



*An Ijaw wedding is exciting*