

Involvement of the Moya diaspora in Douala in the festive celebrations of their region of origin

DOKEP KOUAGUE Anny Flor*

University of Dschang in Cameroon.

*Corresponding Author

DOKEP KOUAGUE Anny Flor

Article History

Received: 14.05.2026

Accepted: 07.07.2026

Published: 28.07.2026

Summary: This article examines the involvement of the Moya diaspora in Douala in the festive celebrations of their country of origin. Through a socio-anthropological study, we examine how this study examines the diaspora's participation in the festivals of its region of origin and how these festivals influence social cohesion and local development. It shows that festive events constitute privileged spaces for identity reconstruction and community building. Using a qualitative approach that includes observation and documentary analysis, it appears that Moya natives living in Douala participate in their village's festivals as an expression of their attachment to ancestral values, thereby promoting visibility and demonstrating their commitment to its development. Thus, the article highlights the identity transformations linked to urban life, generational issues, and gender.

Keywords: Diaspora, cultural festivals, Douala, identity.

Cite this article:

Anny Flor, D. K., (2026). Involvement of the Moya diaspora in Douala in the festive celebrations of their region of origin. *ISAR Journal of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences*, 4(7), 19-23.

Introduction

Internal and international migration have profoundly transformed contemporary African societies. In Cameroon, urban growth, particularly in Douala, attracts populations from various regions of the country, giving rise to internal diaspora communities strongly organized around ties of origin, village associations, and solidarity networks. Douala, a cosmopolitan port city marked by strong cultural diversity, is also a space for the celebration of traditional festivals, such as the Ngondo, which strengthens the identity of the Sawa people and the cohesion between local and non-native communities. (Agbada, A. 2019).

It is in this context that the people of Moya, a community located in the Haut-Kam region, are reorganizing their community life in Douala while maintaining a link with their homeland. These festive events, which include traditional ceremonies, annual celebrations, and cultural gatherings, become strategic spaces where belonging to the Moya community, family and

village solidarity, and commitment to local development are reaffirmed.

The observations made on the ground raise the following question: how does the Moya diaspora in Douala participate in the festive events of their region of origin? This article focuses on the concrete forms of involvement of Moya residents in Douala in the festive celebrations of their homeland and on understanding how these festive events contribute to the implementation of community development projects. The article draws on the literature on diasporas as a vector of national and transnational solidarity and co-development initiatives. It also examines research on festivals and their role in promoting cultural heritage and strengthening social cohesion. (Tchoumbou, W. 2023).

1. Definition of key concepts

1.1. Diaspora

The concept of diaspora today is no longer limited to the dispersal of a people outside their national territory. It refers to a group of dispersed populations linked by a shared

history, a sense of cultural belonging, and practices of solidarity, often organized into networks and associations. In Cameroon, a distinction is made between international diasporas and internal diasporas. The latter are composed of people originating from the same village or region, who have settled in another region of the country.

African diasporas are characterized by a strong relational dimension: they combine a host territory and a territory of origin, mobilizing symbolic and material resources in favor of the latter. Through cuisine, language, dance, religious and festive practices, the diaspora maintains and reinvents a shared identity, while integrating itself into urban and globalized systems. (Tettey, WJ 2013).

1.2. Cultural festivals

Traditional festivals and celebrations are pivotal moments in social life. In Cameroon, events such as the Ngondo in Douala, the Ngouon in Foumban, the Mbog Liaa among the Bassa people, the Grassfields and Far North festivals, and the MOBEU festival among the Kwa of Moya provide spaces for heritage appreciation, intergenerational encounters, identity affirmation, and economic development (Diallo, I. 2016). These festivals fulfill several functions, including strengthening the sense of belonging to a community; showcasing and transmitting cultural knowledge, values, and practices; creating economic opportunities through fairs, cultural tourism, crafts, and food services (Oyono, R. 2024); and serving as a platform for discussions on local development, peace, cohesion, and solidarity.

From this perspective, the involvement of the Moya diaspora in the festive events of its country of origin can be analyzed both as a symbolic act and as a concrete lever for co-development.

1.3. Douala, economic metropolis and crossroads of cultures

Douala is the main economic center of Cameroon. Located on the banks of the Wouri River, it is a port city open to the Gulf of Guinea and to regional trade in Central Africa. It is home to a diverse population of Cameroonians and foreigners. Douala's cultural diversity is remarkable, with the presence of multiple ethnic and linguistic groups, in a context of high mobility and religious pluralism (Mwangi, OG 2007). The municipal authorities have made the promotion of culture and social cohesion a major focus of their community development policy. This includes "putting culture at the heart of life and the city," supporting artists, associations, and festive initiatives, and using major events as a lever for cohesion and attractiveness (Mwangi, OG (2007)).

The Ngondo, a ritual and traditional festival of the Sawa people, is a prime example. Held annually on the banks of the Wouri River, this festival features rituals (water

mass, immersion of a sacred vessel), canoe races, dance competitions, a fair, and a carnival. It brings together not only the Sawa people, but also communities from across Cameroon and abroad. (Etia, LM 2013). This type of event highlights the dual movement at work in Douala: on the one hand, the recognition and celebration of local traditions; on the other hand, the integration of internal (from other regions) and foreign diasporas, who incorporate their own festive practices into the urban landscape.

The people of Moya living in Douala are part of this dynamic, developing their own festivals and participating more broadly in the city's cultural ecosystem. They organize their cultural festival, starting in the city and then moving back to their village. In a festive spirit, they reconnect with their ancestral land while involving the villagers. Their organization is structured around three main phases: in Douala, in Moya, and once again upon their return to Douala.

1.4. Multiple identities: city dweller from Douala and "child of Moya"

The people of Moya living in Douala embody multiple identities: they are both urban dwellers, integrated into urban professional networks, and members of a rural community to which they remain connected through family, land, and shared history. The Moya festivals, celebrated in the village and reenacted in Douala, are precisely the moments when this dual identity manifests itself. Studies on diasporas emphasize the importance of maintaining cultural touchstones by continuing to export certain elements of the original culture, such as cuisine, dance, language, and clothing (Oyono, R. 2024). It is within this framework that the Moya diaspora in Douala incorporates traditional dishes, songs, dances, the use of the local language, and specific rituals into the organization of cultural events from their homeland. During cultural evenings, the Kwa organize themselves around the Migueu dance (customary dance practiced only by natives) and the Koho (traditional dance reserved for non-natives), as well as the Ditcha Missim which is a dance which includes all social classes.

2. Qualitative and ethnographic approach

The study is based on semi-structured interviews with Moya residents in Douala who are, among others, members of village associations, heads of families, young people and women involved in the festivals; observations during preparatory meetings in Douala and, where applicable, during the festivals organized in Moya; the analysis of documents such as the statutes of associations, festival programs, posters, videos, activity reports.

This approach allows us to understand the point of view of the actors, their representations of the festival, their motivations and the concrete modalities of their involvement.

2.1. Village associations and the structuring of the internal diaspora

People from Moya living in Douala often form development associations or associations of people from Moya. These structures, inspired by both customary practices and the opportunities offered by legislation on associations, have several functions: welcoming newcomers, providing mutual support in times of hardship, raising funds for village projects, and organizing festive and ceremonial events. (Oyono, R. 2024).

The MOYA Community Center, located in Deido Grand Moulin, is a popular meeting place where several associations come together throughout the week. The Youth group is led by a Kwa group that meets every Friday, the Women's group meets every Saturday, and the main committee of men and women meets on Sunday evenings. It is within this committee that one finds the representative of the Kwa chief, an emblematic figure of Kwa tradition in Douala. He is the committee president and, as such, oversees all major projects for both the Douala community and events that connect the two communities.

2.2. Preparing the Douala diaspora for festive events in Moya

Most of the Kwa people living in Douala reside in Déido Grand-Moulin, which serves as their social center. Due to their geographical proximity, they know each other and interact daily. This environment facilitates exchanges about the various events that shape their lives, both in the city and in the village.

2.2.1. Participation in the organization and logistics of the festivities

People from Moya living in Douala are often at the heart of the preparations for their village's festivals. Their involvement is manifested by: organizing meetings in Douala to plan the festivals in Moya (dates, logistics, transport, accommodation); raising funds to finance expenses (musicians, dance groups, food, temporary infrastructure); and mobilizing contacts and urban networks (sponsors, authorities, media).

This involvement relates to what several authors describe as diasporic expertise, where members of the diaspora leverage their skills, resources, and networks to support their community of origin. (D'Adesky, A.-C. 2022).

2.2.2. Financial and material contribution

Festivals are also a key time for mobilizing financial resources. Diasporas have often been at the forefront of building basic infrastructure in villages, such as wells, churches, schools, and health centers. These initiatives also exist within the Moya diaspora in Douala, where associations of people from the diaspora participate in equipping and developing their communities of origin. This

is the case with the construction of the Moya health center, the Moya drinking water supply points, the CETIC (Center for Technical and Vocational Training), and the daycare center, all projects led by the Douala diaspora. Indeed, festivals provide an opportunity to organize special fundraising events in Douala, such as fundraising evenings, food sales, and benefit concerts, to mobilize the diaspora and launch community projects.

Thus, the festival is both a moment of celebration and a tool for co-development, where the diaspora plays a central role as a strategic agent of investment and solidarity. (Oyono, R. 2024).

2.2.3. Symbolic co-presence: going to the village or "bringing the village to you"

The diaspora's involvement is also manifested in a two-pronged approach: physically traveling to Moya for major celebrations while simultaneously involving the Moya population. The latter is responsible for preparing accommodations, cleaning the village, and welcoming guests with local cuisine. When this isn't possible, the diaspora recreates the festivities in Douala through cultural events, wakes, and artistic performances. This is sometimes the case for funerals held in the city, either due to a lack of financial resources or in accordance with the deceased's wishes.

This approach aligns with that of other Cameroonian festivals, such as the Ngondo, which is celebrated both in Douala (through urban events, carnivals, and competitions) and at symbolic ritual sites along the Wouri River. The people of Moya draw inspiration from these models: they may organize cultural evenings, such as "Moya in Douala," featuring music, dance, food, and projections of images of the village, in order to maintain connections with those unable to travel. (Oyono, R. 2024).

3. Strengthening cultural identity

The festivals of Moya play a structuring role in the reconstruction of the collective identity of Moya natives in Douala. They allow for the transmission of ritual knowledge, particularly to young people born in the city; the teaching of the village language, songs, and dances; and the public affirmation of Moya's existence as a distinct community within a highly diverse metropolis. Research on festivals in Cameroon shows that these events generate "increased interest in cultural practices" (cuisine, clothing, vernacular language, genealogy). Moya natives reinvest in this dynamic to renew their sense of belonging in a context where urban life and globalization can weaken their sense of identity. (Oyono, R. 2024).

3.1. Memory, ancestry and spirituality

Festive events are often linked to spiritual and memorial dimensions: honoring ancestors, giving thanks for the harvest, asking for protection, and marking major life

stages through initiations, weddings, and funerals. Like the "water mass" of the Ngondo, which establishes a symbolic link between the Sawa people and the water spirits (Oyono, R. 2024), Kwa festivals are occasions where the relationship between the living, ancestors, and the land is reenacted. During the MOBEU Festival, the world of the living and the world of spirits are highlighted through the Migueu dance. Consequently, the diaspora's participation in these ceremonies, whether in person or remotely, allows them to reaffirm their connection to their community.

4. Festivals and local development: the diaspora as a lever

The Moya diaspora in Douala is a true compass for the locality of Moya, as it is the main point of attraction for all young people who wish to explore and discover the socio-cultural realities of other localities.

4.1. Economic effects of festive events in the Moya diaspora in Douala

Traditional festivals and celebrations have significant economic benefits, including commercial activities, crafts, catering, accommodation, and transportation. This is the case with the MOBEU Festival in Moya, which attracts people from surrounding villages and towns, creating needs for housing, food, and many other services. Regarding the Moya diaspora in Douala, although on a smaller scale, the logic is similar to that of the NGONDO festival, which clearly illustrates the development of culturally linked economic activities and a festival's ability to attract audiences from diverse backgrounds (Etia, LM 2013). The MOBEU Festival attracts visitors such as residents of neighboring villages, members of the diaspora from other cities, and business operators. It creates demand for goods and services and can attract the attention of local elected officials, NGOs, and economic partners.

The Moya diaspora in Douala, by mobilizing resources and disseminating images and stories of the village, contributes to making the festival more attractive and increasing its local impact. (Fortin, S., & Côté, I. 2014).

4.2. Co-development and structuring projects

Research on diasporas highlights their role in infrastructure development and the implementation of micro-local projects: schools, wells, health centers, etc. These initiatives are part of co-development strategies, where diasporas become partners of public authorities, communities, and local stakeholders (Fortin, S., & Côté, I. 2014). In the case of Moya, the festival can serve as a setting for: the inauguration of projects financed by the diaspora; the presentation of projects (e.g., creation of a cultural center, support for a women's group, support for an agricultural project).

Thus, involvement in festive events is not limited to the symbolic register; it is part of a moral and material economy of solidarity, where the diaspora sees itself as a co-actor in the development of the village. (Fortin, S., & Côté, I. 2014).

5. Challenges, tensions and restructuring

Highlighting two or more actors in structuring projects is very often subject to several tensions which are fueled either by the equals of some or by the efficient management of available resources.

5.1. Tensions between tradition and modernity

As in other contexts, the Moya festivals are marked by tensions between maintaining tradition and adapting to contemporary norms. Some rites may be considered "outdated" by younger generations, while elders insist on their importance for cohesion and preserving memory. Furthermore, living in a modern urban environment like Douala exposes the diaspora to different values such as individualism, consumerism, and new forms of entertainment, which can conflict with community expectations.

5.2. Issues of power, gender, and generation

The organization of the festivals also crystallizes power issues illustrated by the competition between village elites and diaspora elites; rivalries between associations or lineages; the question of legitimacy to represent Moya in the public space.

Gender relations are also central to the issues: women play a vital role in the practical preparations (cooking, logistics, fundraising), but are sometimes underrepresented in decision-making bodies. Discussions about greater participation of women and young people may arise during the festive season.

5.3. Formalization, institutionalization and partnerships

The example of other Cameroonian festivals, supported by municipalities or national and international partners, shows that formalization and institutionalization can offer new opportunities (funding, visibility, tourism), but also risks such as loss of autonomy (Keough, LJ 2014). The Moya diaspora in Douala, in seeking to professionalize event organization, faces these dilemmas: how to increase scale without losing the spirit of the festival? How to reconcile the expectations of the village, the diaspora, and external partners?

6. Discussion: Moya, an emblematic case of diasporic dynamics in Cameroon

The case of the Moya nationals in Douala illustrates several trends observed in African diasporas, namely: a diasporic identity conceived as a living link

between territory of origin and territory of life, fueled by cultural, festive and solidarity practices (Oyono, R. 2024); a capacity to constitute themselves as actors in co-development, in particular through the mobilization of financial and social resources; a mediating role between local communities, public authorities and external partners.

In the Cameroonian context, this dynamic is part of a very rich national festive landscape, where festivals contribute both to the promotion of heritage and to the construction of a pluralistic national identity. Moya participates in this mosaic, adding its own unique tone to the symphony of cultures. (Zheng, X. 2016).

Conclusion

The analysis of the involvement of Moya natives in Douala in the festive events of their homeland highlights the importance of these celebrations as spaces for identity reconstruction, solidarity, and co-development. The main conclusions are as follows: Kwa festivals are privileged moments when the Douala diaspora reaffirms its belonging to the village, transmits its values, and strengthens its social ties; the Moya diaspora mobilizes financial, material, and symbolic resources, transforming festive events into levers for local development; these dynamics are marked by tensions related to urban modernity, power relations, and issues of gender and generation; the case of Moya reflects the broader trends among African diasporas, which are increasingly assuming a mediating and co-development role between their places of residence and their places of origin.

Bibliographical References

1. D'Adesky, A.-C. (2022). The role of cultural festivals in strengthening social cohesion. *World Development*, 142, 105-124.

2. Diallo, I. (2016). Traditional festivals and community development in sub-Saharan Africa. *African Journal of Social Sciences*, 12(4), 567-589.
3. Djeki, L., & Sango, G. (2018). Internal migration and identity recomposition: the case of Cameroonian cities. *Cahiers d'Études Africaines*, 230, 401-427.
4. Etia, LM (2013). The transnational migration of a living heritage: the case of the Ngondo festival in Cameroon. *Ethnologies*, 34(1-2), 189-213.
5. Fortin, S., & Côté, I. (2014). Belonging, reciprocal recognition and networks in transnational communities. *Global Networks*, 14(2), 203-220.
6. Keough, L. J. (2014). Transnational families, kinship, and the political economy of migration. *Journal of Refugee Studies*, 27(3), 369-389.
7. Mwangi, O.G. (2007). Diaspora and state reconstruction in the Horn of Africa. *Review of African Political Economy*, 34(113), 429-444
8. Oyono, R. (2024). The politics of the dish: culinary tradition and community cohesion in Cameroon. *Cahiers d'Études Africaines*, 252, 189-212.
9. Tchoumbou, W. (2023). The emergence of the diaspora option in Cameroon: recourse to a magical concept in a context of crisis. *Governance and Development in Africa*, 20(2), 145-168.
10. Tettey, W. J. (2013). Diaspora engagement in national development: The role of Ghanaians abroad. *African and Asian Studies*, 12(2-3), 209-237.
11. Zheng, X. (2016). Diaspora networks and institutional change: Evidence from a natural experiment. *Journal of Development Economics*, 84(1), 1-16.