

PREPARING RIVERS WEST FOR THE YULETIDE ECONOMY

TOURISM, HERITAGE, INVESTMENT & LEGISLATION

Activity Report from the Two-Day Knowledge Sharing
Session for Key Stakeholders from Rivers West Senatorial District

December 2025



The Office of the
Senator
Representing Rivers West



Activity Overview

Type of Activity:

Two-Day Knowledge Sharing Session

Organisers:

Christmas in Rivers (Netopps)

Technical Partner:

UNESCO

Institutional Partner:

Rivers State Tourism Development Agency (RSTDA)

Support:

Office of the Senator Representing
Rivers West Senatorial District

Date: 18th - 19th December 2025

Time: 4:00pm - 6:00pm daily

Location / Mode: Virtual / Zoom

Reporting Organization:

Christmas in Rivers / Netopps

Contact Information:

partnership@christmasinrivers.com

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Executive Summary

Christmas in Rivers is a strategic tourism and hospitality initiative designed to position Rivers State as a premier yuletide destination in Nigeria. The initiative seeks to stimulate inclusive economic activity during the festive season by attracting domestic and international visitors through curated cultural, recreational, and hospitality experiences that emphasize authenticity, community connection, and heritage value. At the core of the initiative is a dedicated digital platform www.christmasinrivers.com which curates event listings, destination highlights, and verified offers from hotels, restaurants, tour operators, and other hospitality service providers.

Through the aggregation of these offerings into a single, accessible hub, the platform simplifies travel planning, enhances visitor experience, and creates structured visibility for local enterprises operating within the tourism value chain. As part of its pilot implementation phase, Rivers West Senatorial District was selected as a priority heritage tourism cluster for focused intervention. Foundational activities commenced with a structured two-day knowledge-sharing session designed to introduce key stakeholders to the initiative's vision and strategic framework, while advancing a coordinated approach to the identification, documentation, preservation, and development of tangible and intangible heritage assets.

The session emphasized aligning local cultural resources including heritage sites, traditional institutions, festivals, performing arts, craftsmanship, oral histories, and community narratives with tourism value-chain development and investment-readiness standards. Discussions explored policy and legislative considerations, infrastructure readiness, private-sector participation, and pathways for improving asset presentation, market access, and platform integration.

Participants included youth, entrepreneurs, creatives, hospitality operators, investors, community leaders, media practitioners, and institutional actors, fostering multi-stakeholder collaboration and shared ownership of the district's tourism growth agenda. Key outcomes include strengthened cross-sector coordination; preliminary mapping and documentation of heritage and hospitality assets; improved stakeholder readiness for digital integration; increased awareness of Rivers West's cultural and investment potential; and the formal positioning of the district as a pilot heritage-led festive tourism cluster within the broader Christmas in Rivers framework.

This report documents the objectives, implementation process, stakeholder engagements, key insights, and strategic recommendations emerging from the pilot intervention, providing a foundation for scale-up across other senatorial districts in Rivers State. The intervention establishes a replicable model for leveraging cultural heritage as a structured economic asset, advancing sustainable tourism development, community engagement, and inclusive growth across Rivers State.

Background and Context

Tourism and culture are increasingly recognized as critical drivers of inclusive and sustainable economic growth, particularly when anchored in heritage preservation, community participation, and enabling policy frameworks. In Rivers State, the yuletide season represents a largely untapped opportunity to activate cultural, creative, and tourism assets, while enhancing the overall visitor experience through well-curated attractions, engaging activities, and high-quality hospitality services.

The Christmas in Rivers initiative was conceived in response to this opportunity. It is a tourism and hospitality program by Netopps designed to position Rivers State as Africa's leading destination for yuletide tourism. The initiative strategically leverages the festive economy to generate measurable impact across the creative economy, heritage sectors, and tourism industry, while catalyzing private sector investment and fostering public-private-community collaboration.

Through its digital platform, www.christmasinrivers.com, the initiative showcases festive events, cultural experiences, and recreational opportunities, making it easier for visitors to discover, access, and enjoy Rivers State's heritage and tourism offerings. Highlighting not only the destinations themselves but also the quality of local hospitality, amenities, and services, the platform contributes to a memorable and affordable visitor experience, while supporting sustainable local economic growth. Designed as an annual cycle running from December 1st to January 31st, Christmas in Rivers provides a sustainable framework for long-term cultural, social, and economic development.

The maiden cycle (2025/2026) lays the foundation for what is envisioned to become one of Nigeria's most anticipated festive tourism programs. As part of this framework, the webinar *Preparing Rivers West for the Yuletide Economy - Tourism, Heritage, Investment & Legislation* was implemented as a targeted knowledge-sharing intervention. Its focus was to boost quality representation from Rivers West, strengthen local capacity, align heritage and tourism assets with UNESCO and international standards, and ensure full participation in the yuletide economy. Fostering strategies to enhance the appeal and accessibility of Rivers West's cultural and heritage offerings, the session aimed to position the district as a vibrant and competitive heritage tourism cluster.

Implementing and Partner Organizations

Christmas in Rivers (Netopps)

Lead implementing organization

Office of the Senator Representing Rivers West Senatorial District:

Strategic support,
mobilization, political backing

UNESCO

Technical guidance on
heritage, culture, and
international standards

Rivers State Tourism Development Agency (RSTDA):

Sector coordination and
policy alignment

The program was intentionally designed to operate through collaboration among government, private sector, media, transport operators, and community stakeholders to ensure inclusiveness, sustainability, and long-term impact.

Activity Description

Dates 18th - 19th December 2025

Time 4:00pm - 6:00pm daily

Mode Virtual knowledge-sharing session

The webinar served as a strategic platform to:

- Examine how culture and heritage can drive tourism-led growth during the yuletide season

- Identify investment, entrepreneurship, transport, and logistics opportunities in the festive economy

- Explore policy, legislative, and institutional frameworks for sustainable tourism

- Strengthen stakeholder readiness in Rivers West to participate in annual Christmas in Rivers programming

- Boost listings from Rivers West across events, hospitality, attractions, transport, and services

Objectives

- Identify eligible events, hospitality offerings, heritage sites, recreational assets, and transport services across all LGAs in Rivers West for listing on ChristmasinRivers.com

- Increase understanding of tangible and intangible cultural heritage as drivers of economic growth

- Support development of heritage assets in Rivers West to UNESCO-aligned standards

- Identify investment and entrepreneurial opportunities within the yuletide economy

- Promote dialogue on policy, legislation, transport access, and public-private partnerships

- Position Rivers West as a leading heritage tourism cluster

Why Rivers West (Pilot District)

Rivers West was selected as a pilot district due to:

- Rich tangible heritage assets including waterways, landmarks, and historical sites

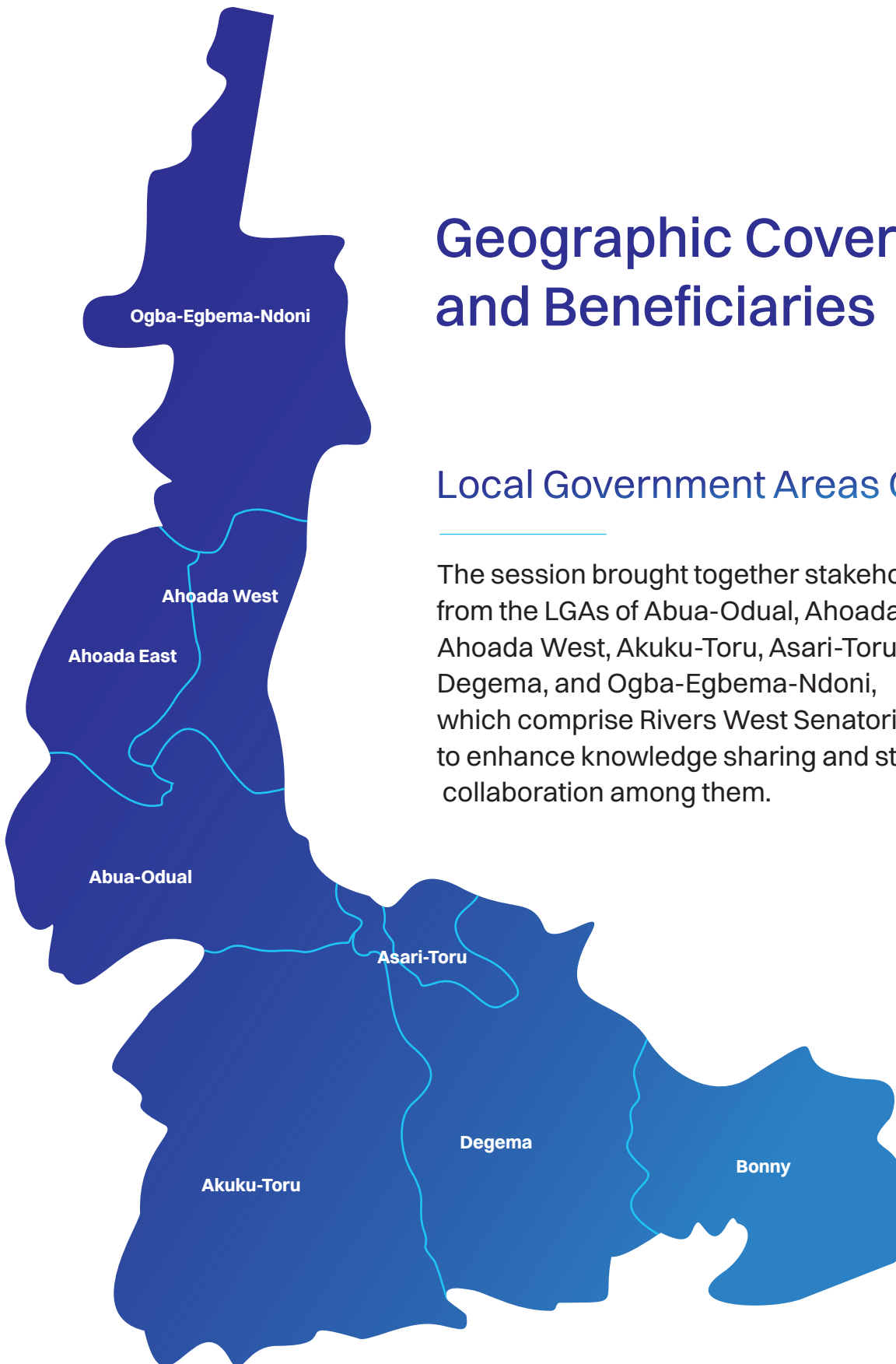
- Vibrant intangible heritage such as festivals, folklore, cuisine, and creative expression

- Strong potential for tourism-led economic diversification

- Identify investment and entrepreneurial opportunities within the yuletide economy

- Strategic water and land transport corridors

- Alignment with national tourism, creative economy, and blue economy policies



Geographic Coverage and Beneficiaries

Local Government Areas Covered

The session brought together stakeholders from the LGAs of Abua-Odual, Ahoada East, Ahoada West, Akuku-Toru, Asari-Toru, Bonny, Degema, and Ogba-Egbema-Ndoni, which comprise Rivers West Senatorial District, to enhance knowledge sharing and strengthen collaboration among them.

Primary Beneficiaries

- Event organizers

- Hospitality operators

- Transport and logistics providers

- Heritage custodians

- Youth, creatives, entrepreneurs

- Local communities

Secondary Beneficiaries

- Private sector investors and brands

- Development partners

- Tourists (domestic and international)

Summary of Sessions and Key Discussions

Day One – Heritage and Tourism Development

- **Special Remarks:** Senator Dr. Ipalibo Harry Banigo
-

UNESCO Sessions:

- Developing Tangible Heritage Sites
- Celebrating Intangible Heritage
- Interactive Q&A focused on Rivers West context

Day Two – Entrepreneurship, Investment, and Policy

- Opportunities for Entrepreneurs in Heritage Tourism
 - Yibo Koko (RSTDA)

- Investment Opportunities and Policies in the Yuletide Economy
 - Emeka Ile

- Moderation: Teingo Inko-Tariah (Accord Legal Practice)

Key Highlights

- Engagement of traditional institutions and LGAs for culturally aligned tourism planning

- Establishment of Rivers West as a pilot heritage tourism cluster

- Emphasis on quality onboarding and representation on ChristmasinRivers.com

- Integration of transport, mobility, and logistics into tourism planning

- Alignment with UNESCO standards and national policies

- Active private sector interest in investment, CSR, and brand visibility

Stakeholder Matrix

Stakeholder	Role/Initiative	Responsibility	Level
Christmas in Rivers	Lead Organizer	Program design, coordination, platform management	High
United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO)	International Technical Partner	Heritage standards, sustainable development alignment, global best practices	High
Federal Ministry of Art, Culture, Tourism and the Creative Economy	Federal Supervisory Authority	National cultural policy alignment, federal coordination, sector oversight	High
Federal Ministry of Marine and Blue Economy	Federal Policy Partner	Blue economy integration, waterways policy, coastal tourism alignment	High
National Council for Arts and Culture	National Cultural Promotion Agency	Cultural programming, festivals, creative sector coordination	High
National Commission for Museums and Monuments	Federal Heritage Regulatory Authority	Monument protection, heritage documentation, site validation, preservation standards	High
Rivers State Ministry of Culture and Tourism	State Policy Authority	State-level cultural policy alignment and implementation	High
Rivers State Tourism Development Agency (RSTDA)	State Tourism Implementation Agency	Tourism development strategy, destination coordination	High

Stakeholder	Role/Initiative	Responsibility	Level
Rivers State Ministry of Youth Development	State Youth Policy Stakeholder	Youth engagement, enterprise support, skills development	High
Rivers State Ministry of Transport	State Transport Policy Partner	Mobility planning, access coordination	Medium
National Union of Road Transport Workers (NURTW)	Transport Stakeholder	Ground transport coordination, vehicle operations	Medium
Water Transport Operators	Mobility Stakeholder	Riverine and coastal access	Medium
Local & International Airlines (Aviation Service Providers)	Destination Access Partners	Air connectivity, flight promotions	Medium
Logistics Companies	Logistics Partners	Event and supply chain logistics	Medium
Car Hire / Vehicle Rental Services	Mobility Service Providers	Visitor movement, rentals	Medium
Destination Management Officers (DMOs) & Travel Agents	Implementation & Market Access	Tourism packaging, promotion, bookings	Medium
Private Sector Organizations	Investors & Brands	Investment, sponsorship, CSR partnerships	High
Traditional Institutions	Cultural Stakeholders	Heritage preservation, community custodianship	High
Local Government Councils	Administrative Stakeholders	Community coordination, grassroots engagement	High
Youth, Entrepreneurs, Creatives	Beneficiaries	Participation, enterprise development	High
Media	Promotion Partner	Awareness, storytelling, visibility	High

Logframe & Indicators Table

Objective	Indicator	Means of Verification	Target
Increase heritage knowledge	% of participants reporting increased knowledge of heritage and tourism	Pre/post surveys	80%
UNESCO & NCMM-aligned asset development	Heritage sites mapped, documented, and validated in alignment with UNESCO standards and NCMM protocols	Mapping reports, NCMM validation documentation	16 sites
National monument documentation	Sites reviewed and documented for federal recognition under NCMM	NCMM technical reports	8 sites
Strengthen platform onboarding	Verified heritage, hospitality, and event listings from Rivers West onboarded on ChristmasinRivers.com	Platform analytics	80 listings
Identify investment opportunities	Investment-ready proposals developed for heritage and tourism assets	Investment Readiness Report	32 proposals
Policy & PPP dialogue	Actionable policy recommendations developed	Policy briefs	8
Establish heritage cluster	Functional Rivers West Heritage & Tourism Cluster operational	Cluster documentation	1
Transport & mobility integration	Transport stakeholders formally engaged	Engagement records	6

Objective	Indicator	Means of Verification	Target
Private sector participation	Strategic partnerships and MOUs initiated	Signed MOUs	8
Youth participation	Youth engaged across value chain	Attendance & registration data	35
Capacity building	Stakeholders trained on heritage documentation, preservation, and investment readiness	Training reports	4 workshops
Knowledge documentation	Official publications produced	Published materials	3
Destination advocacy	Champions Program	Program records	160 Champions

Key Outcomes

- Improved understanding of heritage tourism as a viable economic driver within the yuletide economy

- Identification and documentation of UNESCO-aligned heritage assets

- Alignment with federal heritage preservation standards under NCMM guidance

- Enhanced readiness for digital platform onboarding and destination packaging

- Stronger pathways for investment, partnerships, and public-private collaboration

- Institutional strengthening of Rivers West as a structured heritage tourism cluster

Recommendations and Next Steps

- Conduct comprehensive heritage asset mapping across Rivers West in collaboration with NCMM and UNESCO technical frameworks.

- Document and validate eligible sites in accordance with national monument protection standards.

- List all verified events, hospitality assets, heritage sites, and recreational facilities on ChristmasinRivers.com.

- Implement structured capacity-building programs for stakeholders on heritage documentation, preservation, tourism packaging, and investment readiness.

- Facilitate public-private partnerships for site development and tourism infrastructure.

- Develop a comprehensive Investment Readiness Report highlighting validated heritage assets

- Produce official publications documenting the 2025/2026 cycle and heritage mapping outputs.

- Launch a Tourism Champions Program to strengthen destination advocacy.

- Integrate Rivers West fully into annual Christmas in Rivers programming as a structured heritage-tourism corridor.

Strategic Outlook

The knowledge-sharing session successfully advanced the objectives of Christmas in Rivers while aligning with:

- UNESCO's culture and sustainable development mandate

- NCMM's national heritage protection framework

- Federal and state policy objectives in culture, tourism, and youth engagement

This strategic integration ensures:

- Federal-level heritage legitimacy and protection

- Structured preservation and documentation standards

- Clear investment and partnership pathways

- Stronger public-private and community engagement

- Institutional coordination across federal, state, and local levels



Contact Information

Christmas in Rivers
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www.christmasinrivers.com