

## THE PLACE OF INDIGENOUS EFFORTS TOWARDS THE POLITICAL AND SOCIO-ECONOMIC GROWTH OF OGBARU, 1970-2018

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### **Abstract**

*Political and socio-economic growth of any community could be attributed to the ability or inability of the indigenous people to initiate policies and programmes that would encourage growth in their communities. Communities often rely on the government for whatever growth that is needed in their domain without making any effort of their own first, before calling on the government for assistance. Indigenous efforts refers to the various contributions of the local people or inhabitants of a community or town towards the growth of their domain. Indigenous people are the owners of the community and are in the best position to know what constitutes growth in their communities by putting in their best towards achieving their objectives. The study adopted the historical inquiry cum historical analysis methodology while data was collected from both primary and secondary sources. The study revealed that communities who employed indigenous efforts as a way of promoting political and socio-economic growth in their communities achieved sustainable growth than communities who rely or wait for the government for their political and socio-economic growth. The study therefore encouraged the indigenous people to always put up their own efforts towards their political and socio-economic growth which will then attract government attention for assistance.*

**Keywords:** Indigenous efforts, Growth, Ogbaru, Socio-economic, Anambra State.

### **Introduction**

Indigenous efforts refers to the various contributions of the local people or inhabitants of a community or town towards the growth of their domain. Indigenous people are the owners of the community and they are responsible for initiating various plans for their growth. The extent of growth in every community

is determined by the efforts of the indigenous people who knows the type of development they wanted what could trigger such growth before expecting any help from outside because what constitute growth in one community may be different from what is likely to spur growth in another.

For instance one community may favour massive construction of roads and markets as the most important driver of economic growth in their community while others may prefer electricity and education. Be that as it may, it is the level of indigenous efforts at ensuring growth that will attract government assistance. This study examines the various efforts made by the Ogbaru communities towards the political and socio-economic growth of Ogbaru local government in order to encourage good standard of living for its inhabitants and contribute to the overall good of Anambra State in particular and Nigeria in general. The various efforts could be summarized under this subheadings; road construction, establishment of schools, youth empowerment, provision of security and employment generation. No doubt, the place of indigenous people in road construction, security and youth empowerment cannot be overemphasized because charity it is said begins at home. It is when a community initiates a process that will encourage growth that government will be forced to render assistance for further growth.

### **Ogbaru Indigenous Efforts towards Political and Socio-economic Growth, 1970-2018**

**Road construction:** Indigenous communities have fallen victims of underdevelopment arising from the remote nature of their environment coupled with public/private concentration on the urban areas for meaningful infrastructural and super-structural development. This situation has deprived most of these indigenous communities in Nigeria of unleashing their potentials and maximum utilization of their human and non-human resources for socio-economic development in their environment. Owing to the concentration of government and in most cases affluent individuals in cities and urban areas in the provision of social infrastructure like road, pipe borne water, electricity and hospitals, the indigenous communities are left to suffer much neglect and thus remained in a state of squalor and anguish. Indigenous efforts are the activities of the inhabitants of an area to improve their living condition with or without government assistance. It simply implies what the community people do to improve their standard of living and contributed to the growth of that community both politically, socially and economically. Road infrastructure is a very important public asset. A society relies on a good road system as the basis to access jobs, health care, education and social connections. It is a crucial element in the growth

of a community on a localised level and a country's economic growth nationally and globally<sup>1</sup>.

Communities in Ogbaru has suffered neglect by successive government administrations both Military and Civilian to the point that is alarmingly clear that it is only a well-articulated indigenous efforts can bring the type of political and socio-economic growth expected in the area despite its abundant human and natural resources. The only road constructed by the government in Ogbaru is the road that passed through Odekpe and terminated at Ossomala<sup>2</sup> and the one that linked Ogbaru to Ozubulu through Atani. That road was constructed during Military Administration under the then East Central State led by Ukpabi Asika in 1978. Since then, no new road has been constructed and the one constructed by the government has dilapidated with little renovation attempt by the state government. The rest was carried out by individuals and community efforts towards ameliorating the suffering of the people as a result of the sorry state of the roads<sup>3</sup>. The Ogbaru people resigned to their fate and resorted to using the community or individual efforts to create, construct and maintain roads in the area.

In 1975, the Ogwuaniocha community in bid to have access road to neighbouring communities of Ihiala, Okija and Uli towns, single handedly and without government assistance constructed the *Abanze* river bridge making it motor-able for them to transport themselves and their goods to the urban areas through Ihiala. The road until today has not received any government attention for construction and maintenance except community efforts and those of local council representatives who out of pity uses grader to grade the roads to enable the community people use it during festive periods such as Christmas. Other roads constructed by the Ogwuaniocha community are those within the community and the only road that linked Ogwuaniocha to Ogbaru communities of Mputu, Umunankwo, Ossomala, Ogbakuba to Odekpe and then to Onitsha. The essence of the community efforts according to Nwanasor Onyedi is to give the people a sense of belonging without waiting for the government<sup>4</sup>.

Other communities in Ogbaru also constructed their internal roads by their community and individual efforts so as to mitigate the suffering of the people occasioned by bad roads. Atani, Odekpe, Obeagwe, Ogbakuba through their community initiative programmes constructed different roads in their communities which today helps them to convey their agricultural products from their farms to the major roads that will take them to the urban centres for sales. It should be understood here that road construction encompasses the use of cement

and stone to build a motorable road, it simply means various efforts of creating a passable road by human either by foot or by canoe. Ogbaru people uses their cutlasses and axes to create roads and uses bamboo and timbers to construct local bridges that enables them have access to their farms and fishing destinations<sup>5</sup>.

We often think that roads are a mere part of our transportation infrastructure but they are actually one of our country's biggest infrastructures. They are used to transfer resources and services from one place to another. Thus any community without good road network is at the brink of being isolated from the rest of other communities hence the desire of the indigenous communities of Ogbaru to ensure they have access roads to their farms and other places for easy communications. Thus road infrastructure development is important for the economic growth<sup>6</sup> of any community hence the efforts of indigenes at road construction.

**Establishment of Schools:** Schools are also very vital too for political and socio-economic growth of any community. The number of schools both primary and secondary schools in an area determines the level of their growth. Education is regarded as the hope of the poor in the society because through education the poorest can rise to the topmost echelon in the society. A community without a school will definitely experience stunted growth and that informed the reason for the indigenous people of Ogbaru to invest in the school infrastructure as a yardstick for their future growth<sup>7</sup>. Beyond the educational benefits, building and investing in schools can also contribute to the creation of more prosperous, vibrant, and inclusive neighborhoods in several key ways which will in turn yield important economic outcomes for both individuals and communities<sup>8</sup>. Schools equally helped to drive economic growth as massive inflow of students to a particular community increases its population and makes business to thrive. For instance Ogbaru Boys Secondary School, Ogbakuba and Ideke Girls' Secondary School Iyiowa Odekpke established in Ogbaru in 1987 and 1988 respectively became centres of academic excellence in Ogbaru that people from all the fifteen communities send their wards for studies, thus enriching the population of those communities, enhanced trade and generated revenue for landlords who rented their houses to students who came from far places but chose to reside within the vicinity.

The growth of our community is significantly influenced by the school system. Students get the chance to learn about their community through school and how to get involved in issues faced by the communities to make a difference. There is no question that schools support the growth of the society we live in since they develop the leaders of the future. Positive transformations could be sparked through the intervention of schools in different ways<sup>9</sup>. It was this assumption that

influenced the position of Ogbaru communities into building schools for future growth of their region. In Ogbaru communities, indigenous efforts were noticeable in the roles they played in the establishment of both primary and secondary schools. In several communities like Ogwuaniocha, Ogwuikpele, Akili-Ozizor, Obeagwe, Umunankwo, and Amiyi, Ochucho, it was the communities that built some of their schools before government intervened and took over such schools<sup>10</sup>.

In 1995, Ogwuaniocha community built one community primary school called Unity Primary School to augment the one established by the mission during colonial era. The school built by Ogwuaniocha community was later taken over by the government as they assumed responsibility of paying the teachers and maintaining the facilities. In 1997, because there was no secondary school in Ogwuaniocha and the fact that the two primary schools produces pupils that will enroll into secondary school, they again began the process of building a secondary school which they completed in 1998. The school became operational in 1998 and in 1999, Anambra state government took over the school which is the only secondary school in the community till date. Community secondary school Ogwuaniocha as it is called had contributed greatly to the increased educational standard and awareness of the community people. Its establishment truly brought education nearer to the people of the community and encouraged people who would have dropped after primary school to enroll into secondary school which today makes them one of the greatest asset of Ogwuaniocha.

The same was the case in Ossomala, Obeagwe, Mputu, Umunankwo, Amiyi and some other communities who took it upon themselves to finance the school project instead of waiting for the government. Today their actions has metamorphosed into giant institutions that have shaped the character and attitude of people in these communities and helped to reduce the mass exodus of Ogbaru children to Onitsha, Asaba, Ihiala, Uli and other neighboring communities for their secondary education. The importance of schools in community's political and socio-economic growth cannot be overemphasized because school encourages education and education reduces poverty<sup>11</sup>. When children receive education, they are able to access jobs with higher incomes that benefits their whole families and can end cycles of generational poverty. According to UNESCO policy paper, around 60 million people could escape poverty if all adults got just two extra years of schooling. If all adults finished secondary education, it would lift 420 million people out of poverty<sup>12</sup>. This means that if a community or country wants to reduce poverty, it needs to invest in schools infrastructure.

Apart from community efforts in building schools in Ogbaru, there are plethora of private primary and secondary schools built by individuals. This schools has contributed to reducing the number of out of school children in the area. Ogbaru

people are known for farming and fishing and this has affected greatly their desires to go to school. They prefer their farming and fishing to going to school, thus constituting nuisance to the community at the long run. Their inability to access education made to be mothers and fathers at young ages therefore increasing the rate of illiterate children in the area. These experiences has contributed to the political and socio-economic growth of the area until recently when massive establishment of schools began to save the situation.

**Youth Empowerment:** The youths could be likened to a vehicle through which a vibrant society gets to their destination and that is why it is often said that the youths are the leaders of tomorrow. As leaders of tomorrow, the youths must be prepared to take up the challenge of leadership by having the prerequisite educational knowledge and skills that will help them become self-reliant and responsible people in the society before they would be qualified to take up the leadership position in the society. Thus, empowering the youths to get the necessary qualifications is paramount and is a task that must be undertaking by relevant stakeholders in the society.

Youth Empowerment is the process of making the young people gain the ability, authority and the energy to make decisions and implement changes in their own lives and that of other people<sup>13</sup>. It deals with the provision of enabling environment which will enable the young people to make important and vital decision of life by themselves through the acquisition of vital skills, knowledge and education. Empowering the youths is very important as it will help them to develop their potentials and reduce the level of ignorance which lures them into crime and other social vices like prostitution, armed robbery, drug abuse and cultism. It equally helps them to reduce the problem of low self-esteem and prepares them for leadership positions by making them to take responsibility of their own affairs.

In Ogbaru, different forms of youth empowerment has been offered to the youths by the communities, individuals and group just to give them a sense of belonging, taking them out of poverty and crime and prepared them for future leadership roles in the area. In December 2015, Ogwuaniocha community empowered 20 youths with 40 acres of palm tree land to encourage them to be self-reliant<sup>14</sup>. The analysis showed that each youth got 2 acres of the land and will approximately make a profit of 2.5 million annually from harvesting the palm nuts. The gesture by the community had since made some of the youths landlords and business owners from the proceeds of the farms while employing over 50 people as workers in their various farms. However, they are to manage the land for 10 years after

which they will begin to pay rent on them<sup>15</sup>. In the year 2000, Ossomala, community empowered their youths and women with lock up shops, grinding machines and some cash gifts of fifty thousand naira each for take-off, all in a bid to encourage them to work hard and become useful members of their communities. The essence of the empowerment is to reduce the rate of criminality, drug abuse and cultism by youths as a result of depression occasioned by continued unemployment in the country and cushion the effects of hunger on them<sup>16</sup>.

Individuals also take turns to empower the youths of their community as well as the entire Ogbaru communities. Senator Stella Oduah Foundation Akili-Ozisor, Hope Foundation Odekpe and Hon. Chukwuka Onyema, Celestine Udemmadu, Arinze Awogu and Princess Chinwe Nwaebili empowered many Ogbaru youths both at home and abroad and<sup>17</sup> in 2010, 2014 and 2015, Senator Stella Oduah through her Stella Oduah foundation (SOF) established in 2007 empowered Ogbaru youths with soft loans of 200,000 without interest to enable them start up their own business. She also trained some youths in basic skills such as welding, tailoring, solar installation and maintenance, brick laying and sundry skills which has enabled them to become employers of labour as at today. Dr. Mrs Elizabeth Obiora Udeze through her Hope Foundation founded 2018 gave succour to the people of Ogbaru by empowering young people in Ogbaru with soft loans and organized skill acquisition training for the youths on computer related skills as well as rendered free medical services to people residing within the Ogbaru territory as from 2018 and beyond<sup>18</sup>. Thus contributing to the political and socio-economic growth of Ogbaru.

Hon. Chukwuka Onyema in 2012, 2015 and 2017 supported the youths of Ogbaru Local Government with 5 tricycles known as Keke, 20 motorcycles for transportation and gave scholarships to 20 Ogwuikpele students from JSS1 to SS3 to enable them discover their potentials and add value to themselves. This empowerment programmes helped tremendously in reducing the number of unemployed and uneducated people in the Ogbaru region of Anambra state and contributed to the reduction of crime as a result of poverty and unemployment. In 2016, Celestine Udemmadu from Ogwuaniocha gave scholarship to 20 Ogwuaniocha students to enable them offset their education bills<sup>19</sup> thereby giving them the opportunity to better their lives and contribute to the growth of their community. Princess Chinwe Nwaebili on her part empowered many Ogbaru people through a number of skill acquisition programmes. In 2012, she trained 50 youths in Ogbaru in various vocations such as catering, tailoring, computer repair, poultry and snail farming.

**Provision of Security:** Security is the life wire of every prosperous society because security promotes peace and peace promotes political and socio-economic growth. Thus, when man felt insecure in an environment, he began to build shelter and started to live in bands and when nations felt insecure, they began to form armies<sup>20</sup>. Security is protection from, or resilience against, potential harm caused by others, by restraining the freedom of others to act. The concept of security is of great concern to all human societies as it concerns survival of man and resources. Essentially, one of the reasons why men live in groups is the need for security.

Security is so essential that individuals and states cannot make meaningful progress without it. In this sense, security connotes freedom from, or elimination of threat not only to physical existence of the state but also to the ability for self-protection and the enhancement of the general wellbeing of all the people<sup>21</sup>. The primary objectives of national security in Nigeria should imply the containment of instability, control of crime, advancement of genuine process of growth and the improvement of the welfare and well-being of every citizen, hence in Ogbaru, security of life and property of the people is paramount.

The different communities in Ogbaru realizing the importance of security to the political and socio-economic growth of the area began investing in security by forming their separate community security outfits. Each of the 15 communities that made up Ogbaru formed their own vigilante groups to curb internal crimes and maintain peaceful co-existence<sup>22</sup>. The community vigilante groups were formed to augment the state securities such as the Police and the Nigeria Navy stationed in Atani and Odekpe respectively. The synergy between these security outfits contributed to the peaceful atmosphere enjoyed by the people up to 2018. Good security encourages socio-economic growth and socio-economic growth increases state capacity in the supply of public goods. When economies grow, states can tax that revenue and gain the capacity and resources needed to provide the public goods and services that their citizens need, like healthcare, education, social protection and basic public services. Thus, security entails a whole lot in the stability, protection and promotion of political and socio-economic growth of any nation.

In the recent past, Ogbaru was adjudged one of the most peaceful and secured environment in Anambra state that many traders in Onitsha chose to make Ogbaru their residential area. People purchased lands and built houses because of the relative security in Ogbaru made possible by good security. The summary is that formidable security promotes good governance and provides safe and secured environment for human capital growth, improved access to social and economic



services and curb violent tendencies, create jobs, reduce poverty, increase government revenue and engender long-term inclusive growth.

**Employment Generation:** Employment is one of the most important social and economic issues in Nigeria. It is seen as relationship between two parties, usually based on a contract between employer and employee. In other words, employment is seen as the total number of people in a community, state or country that are gainfully working. According to Taiga et al, employment refers to the number of people who either work in government establishment or parastatals or private sectors<sup>23</sup>. Some of the causes or factors responsible for the problems of employment in the country have been summarized and they include; poor quality education, lack of skills, poor power supply, corruption and the negligence of the agricultural sector. Creating jobs is a keystone of any economic recovery programme. Many activities can fall under the rubric of job creation, including immediate short-term opportunities that yield quick impact, or the development of more enduring livelihoods in the civil service or private sector<sup>24</sup>.

It is important to distinguish between these different activities, recognizing that sustainability and long-term impact should be duly considered in implementing any employment generation program. Providing jobs is vital on many levels. Politically, employment opportunities give the population a stake in the peace process by providing young men and women with alternatives to violence. Economically, employment provides income to poor families, revives domestic demand for goods and services, and stimulates overall growth and socially, employment can also promote social healing, encourage the return of displaced persons, and improve social welfare in the long run<sup>25</sup>.

Communities in Ogbaru including affluent men and women devised means of generating employment to its citizens to mitigate the suffering of the people amidst rising unemployment in the country. In Ogwuaniocha, there was no particular programme term employment programme but lands were allocated to the youths, men and women who have interest in farming<sup>26</sup>. Individuals equally contributed to employment generation in Ogwuaniocha as Hon. Celestine Udemmadu gave out 10 motorcycles to ten youths for transportation business popularly known as *Okada*. Similar gestures were carried out in Ogbakuba, Ohita, Odekpe, Osomala and Atani where the communities constructed markets and built stalls and handed over to the citizens at low cost interests to enable them take care of their families. Ogbaru is rich in agricultural products such as timbers and palm tree and people engage in felling and selling of timbers as part of their occupation. Before the year 2000, it was non-Ogbaru indigenes that are involved

in palm oil production in Ogbaru because they allocated much of their time in the cultivation of cassava, yam, cocoyam, fishing and hunting while the non Ogbaru people from particularly *Mbano* in Imo state were in charge of their Palm trees with little or no rent.

But as from year 2000, the Ogbaru people realized the enormous potential of oil palm and decided to tap the resources by themselves. According to Onyia Nnaji, Ogbaru people lost the wealth from oil palm product out of ignorance<sup>27</sup>. This implies that before they came that Ogbaru people lacked the knowledge of the huge potentials and gains from oil palm production. For instance, the oil from the palms were in high demand in the market for use in the production of soaps, creams, and other products while its kernels were used for soap production, palm kernel oil, as well as medications. But after the year 2000, Ogbaru people began the production of the oil products by themselves alongside the non-indigenes who they granted some portions of the field to maintain the relationships and keep their jobs.

At the individual level, affluent Ogbaru indigenes like Stella Oduah, (Akili-ozizor) Chief Dubem Obaze, (Obeagwe) Prof Benjamin Nwabueze, (Atani) Oscar Anene (Ogwuaniocha) Chukwuka Onyema, (Ogwuikpele), Chinwe Nwaebili, (Akili) among others provided employment opportunities to Ogbaru citizens<sup>28</sup>. The essence of job creation is to give people sense of belonging to take care of their immediate needs and that of their family members. Therefore job creation reduces unemployment because the more jobs are created, the more people work and the more people work, the more it lowers poverty rate and when people are gainfully employed they will be able to provide for themselves and their families. Oscar Anene constructed a beach at Ogwuaniocha where sands are mined. He provided drilling machines and tippers which conveys the sands to buildings sites of those who needed their services. About ten people were employed in the business which helps them to put foods on their table and make them self-reliant. Hon Chukwuka Onyema and Hon. Arinzechukwu Awogu provided shuttle buses, tricycles and motorcycles to the young ones in Ogbaru for transportation business which helped to curb the problem of scarcity of buses in the area and providing employment to the youths<sup>29</sup>.

Other efforts at employment generation came from Senator Stella Oduah who assisted in securing government job to Ogbaru indigenes at the Ministry of Aviation while she was the minister of Aviation between 2011 and 2014<sup>30</sup>. She also through her Stella Oduah foundation provided employment opportunities to many people in and outside Ogbaru and trained and empowered many youths to become self-employed which helped to minimize the rate of criminal activities by the youths of the area. Prince Chinwe Nwaebili

also contributed to the process of employment generation in Ogbaru local government when she was a member of Anambra state house of assembly. She assisted good number of Ogbaru people to secure employment in the state ministries of Health, Education, Commerce and Transport<sup>31</sup>. In collaboration with Chief Nzemeka Olisa, she secured employment opportunities to many Ogbaru people in teaching positions both at primary and secondary schools which they are still enjoying today. Thus, Ogbaru people through concerted efforts created job opportunities to her citizens to better their lives and generate revenue for social and economic growth and development.

### **Impediments to the Political and Socio-economic Growth of Ogbaru**

Many obstacles have over the years stood on the way of Ogbaru's greatness and were responsible for her poor political and socio-economic growth. These obstacles appeared in many forms and shapes and with different degrees of hindrances to her political and socio-economic growth and they includes natural disasters like annual flooding and coastal erosion, political and socio-economic problems as well as indigenous/cultural impediments. Flood is one of the greatest natural disaster that has defiled both indigenous and government efforts in terms of finding a permanent solution to. Since 2012, flood has being an annual disaster that wreaks havoc in all the Ogbaru communities without exception, thus making Ogbaru to experience little or no political and socio-economic advancement.

Another natural disaster was coastal erosion which has constantly washed away roads, buildings and economic trees, thereby affecting her socio-economic growth and development. Other impediments are corruption orchestrated by bad governance; poverty and illiteracy as well as indigenous and cultural factors. Corruption is a cankerworm that has eaten deep into the fabrics of the society as it encourages the diversion of funds meant for projects into private accounts without traces.

Indigenous and cultural factors also have a stake in the poor political and socio-economic growth of Ogbaru as it affects their loyalty and level of involvement in the growth process. For instance, their strong attachment to their shrine (juju) does not allow them to explore alternative ways of problem solving, as was the case when there was epidemic outbreak after the 2012 floods. Instead of seeking medical solution, they believed that the gods whose shrines were destroyed had come for revenge. Some refused to go to hospital instead invited native doctors to cleanse the land which they believed was desecrated.

### **Conclusion**

So far, we have being able to point out some of the areas in which the indigenous people have contributed to the political and socio-economic growth of Ogbaru. These areas are very paramount to achieving robust political and socio-economic growth of the Ogbaru people. Despite the above indigenous efforts towards the political and socio-economic strides in Ogbaru, the place of the Anambra State government in making their efforts work cannot be compromised. The provision of enabling environment for all political and socio-economic activities to thrive is one step towards achieving political and socio-economic growth of any community.

This means that the success of indigenous efforts towards achieving robust political and socio-economic growth of Ogbaru is complemented by the Anambra state government who also provided general security, established schools and hospitals as well as funds for its management and should also be commended. The government should also complement the indigenous efforts by constructing roads, markets, electricity and other relevant social amenities that will enable them to maintain a healthy standard of living as their counterparts in other parts of Anambra state.

The paper therefore recommends that despite the giant strides made by the indigenous people towards political and socio-economic growth of Ogbaru, Government of Anambra State should provide needed support to the indigenous people such as provision of electricity, good road networks, establishment of higher institution/skill acquisition centres that will help the Ogbaru people to locate their talents, receive adequate training that will empower them and give them what it takes to turn their communities around for their future generations.

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