

## Igwebuike: Oboro Development Union and Community Development in Southeastern Nigeria

Chiedozie Ifeanyichukwu Atuonwu<sup>[a],\*</sup>

<sup>[a]</sup>History Unit, School of General Studies, Michael Okpara University of Agriculture Umudike, Umudike, Abia, Nigeria.

\*Corresponding author.

Received 17 October 2021; accepted 3 November 2021

Published online 26 December 2021

### Abstract

Town unions are associations formed by a group of persons from the same area and can also be seen as an agency of community through which innovations and development purposes are achieved. Society and cultures are dynamic therefore, social institutions grow with the society. The organization has continued to grow with the Igbo society and has acquired new names like central unions, group unions, progressive association, development union and town Union. Thus, in developing Igbo society the Town Union has assumed the status of civil society organization with improved administrative structures. Apart from undertaking several developmental and infrastructural projects, it has continued to serve as the organ for local administration in Igbo land. The study used historical research method. Secondary and tertiary sources such as archival materials, journals, published and unpublished texts, were used as means of data collection for the historical construction of the study.

**Key words:** Igwebuike; Town unions; Community; Development; Igboland; Self-help

Atuonwu, C. I. (2021). Igwebuike: Oboro Development Union and Community Development in Southeastern Nigeria. *Canadian Social Science*, 17(6), 104-113. Available from: <http://www.cscanada.net/index.php/css/article/view/12369>  
DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.3968/12369>

### INTRODUCTION

There is an increasing concern among scholars and policy formulator on understanding rural development

as remedy to overall socio-economic development of the Third World countries. To galvanize national economy through rural development implies a bottom/top approach to national development. This thought is paradigm shift from the events of the 1960s and 1970s when economic theorists and development actors centre on growth resulting from national economic development plans and multiplier effects on massive capital investment. The logic then that once the national economy was made to flourish the development of rural community follows suit. This thought equally influenced and dominated the research and numerous publications highlighted on rural development as a solution to most Third World Countries. The paradigm shift was a result of the failure of the national plans in addressing the needs of rural dwellers causing urban migration in most communities.

Community development which is a strand of development studied in international studies has been acknowledged as significant for local historic, social, economic, cultural, environmental and political development by international organizations such as the United Nations World Bank, World Health Organization, European Union, and African Union among others. Different postulations have been adduced on community development as a process where members come together to take collective action and generate solution to common problems. The foundation of community development is the interaction between member of a community in their collective action - collective agency – in pursuance of a common development goal with the purpose of raising the quality of the lives.

Craig (1995) further argues that community development involves enabling and empowering members of a community in order to enhance their capacity to play a meaningful role in crafting and shaping the life of the community of which they are part. Worthy of note in Craig argument is the concept of empowering members of the community to shape lives in their communities. York

(1984) further collaborated by opining that it is, in essence about mobilizing and organizing community development resources, developing local competencies and mobilizing political action for collective problem solving, self-help and empowerment. In this study, community development refers to self-help efforts of a group of individuals to improve their community without much assistance from the government or development agency.

From 1980s to the late 1990s, town unions assumed a centre stage as critical keys in rural development. Undeniably, poor performances of government development programmes in meeting the socio-economic needs of the people was the major reason behind the proliferation of the town unions in Nigeria within these periods. Wahab (2002) observed that people in the developing countries have until recently solely rely on their government to meet their basic socio-economic demand. Truthfully, governments in Africa have evolved top down and bottom- up approaches to achieve sustainable development of their people. These include the establishment of lead industries at key centres so as to create job opportunities, provide basic infrastructure and utilize regional natural and man-made resources to stimulate growth and economic development that would spread to lagging regions. Besides, Agbola (2002) noted that successive Nigerian government have responded to both rural and urban problems by evolving poverty alleviation programmes to help stir development simultaneously at the grass roots. These programmes include the community Banks, Directorate of Food and Rural Roads Infrastructure (DFRRI), Better Life for Rural Women, National Poverty Alleviation Programme (NAPEP), recently introduced school feeding among others. Institutions such as the National Directorate of Employment (NDE) were established in 1986, promotion of rural employment is one of the core programmes of the department of the Directorate.

Africa is one of the continents where local community leadership is highly esteemed and plays a key role in all community activities. Almost each and every community has local leaders or influential people such as traditional rulers, chiefs, and union presidents. African elders/ leaders are repositories of history and they are regarded as problem solvers and peacemakers. The Igbo of Eastern Nigeria were originally part of a centralized system of government. The colonial master created warrants chiefs to facilitate governances some part of the region with the ordinance of 1916 while some areas like Arochukwu, Ontisha and Oguta already had kings. At independence, the warrant chiefs became outdated, the military government in 1978 created autonomous communities with the traditional rulers and town unions to create a democratic village republic.

As a rural community, majority of Ikwuano people are subsistent farmers and petty traders with GDP per capita lower than national average, poverty level is high with

no government presence, social amenities like pipe borne water, electricity and roads are inadequate where they exist. Indeed, one of the biggest difficulties in Ikwuano is access to road. The condition of the major ring road in Ikwuano ranging from Umudike, Amaoba, Olokoro to Isiala has remained in a horrible condition. Almost all the state regimes have campaigned with the construction of the roads. This has remained a major challenge to the people as they are majorly farmers and to evacuate farm produce through their horrible roads have remained a nightmare to them. These lack of infrastructure and basic amenities compelled the people through their town unions to tackle these daunting challenges which include lack of assessable road, health facilities, pipe borne water, civic centres, lack of good schools etc.

Though in Ikwuano, there is no well-known town union which embraces the entire Ikwuano community but the creation of autonomous communities in 1978 by the military government saw clans in Ikwuano coming up with their various town union which include Oboro Clan Welfare Association and Ibere Development Union. Through these town unions, the people were able to come together, mobilize resources to tackle some of the challenges facing them. Their various participation and activities saw to the building of schools, health centres, maintenance of community road, building of civic centres, pipe borne water etc. The role of the town unions cannot be overemphasized, it has brought the people stronger together through a native and a traditional way of conflict resolution (ADR) which has been a major advantage because it is only in peaceful atmosphere that development can strive.

The failure of government's top-down approach and lack of involvement of the people at the grassroots in the bottom-up strategy have weakened the confidence of the public in the central authorities. Communities therefore seek solace in the indigenous institutions which pressurize government for attention to development problems in their communities and/or undertake development programmes and projects that they observe that are very needful in their immediate communities. The indigenous organizations are associated with self-help (Ogundipe, 2003). They constitute the media for resources mobilization to confront local challenges. These include the finance and execution of projects, lobbying and nomination of representatives to government offices to air the views and press the needs and developing human resources against future developmental needs of their immediate communities. Thus, their impacts have been felt in their areas of economic development, policy matters, health and infrastructure, environment and physical development among others. (Agbola, 1998, Akintola, 2000; Akinbola, 1974; Onibokun and Faniran, 1995).

Following the acknowledged accomplished achievements of the community based organizations (town union) in the late 1990s, there have been expectation that

democratic governance that was ushered in 1999 would invigorate and spur more participation of community based organizations in the rural development drive. There is a general consensus among development scholars that democratic governance holds key to popular participation of local government activities such as town unions to development communities (Kiyaga – Nsubugs, 2015). This study evaluates the role of town union as an agent of development having Ikwuano as a case in study.

## THE IMPORTANCE OF TOWN UNION IGBO SOCIETY

Different Igbo communities have over the years engaged in economic activities which go a long way to shaping their socio-economic and political lives. The provision of social amenities to rural communities is in most cases hindered by scarcity of resources for such purposes. Victor C. Uchendu's *The Igbo of Southeastern Nigeria* provides a significant study of the Igbo people as well as the roles of women in Igbo Society. Uchendu (1965) was the first indigenous scholar to carry out a holistic study on Igbo people. He briefly discussed the status of the Igbo woman and the roles they play in the society as agent of development right until the colonial period. The work indicates how members of a community developed interest towards developing their community even without the existences of an umbrella body known as town union today.

Edmund O. Egbo's (1987) community development efforts in Igbo land gives a historical account of the origin and growth of community development unions in Igbo land and how these communities uses the union to foster social and economic development throughout Igbo land. He also focused attention on Nigeria and the need to develop a national spirit which could make every Nigeria have regard for whatever they do so that they can develop their communities.

Furthermore, in reference to Eme, Eluwa and Ukah (2012), the idea of having a town union to look after the welfare of their members far from home was not new as could be deduced from Igbo axiom "Nwanne Di Na Mba" which denotes the significance of town unionism especially in foreign land. In the spirit of the above stated axiom many Igbo immigrant carried the various forms of social relations in their traditional society into new area in which they move to. They also had attachment to their homes and felt that they will come back to it. In addition they pointed out that various social amenities and services these unions enjoyed in the city; they would want to have and enjoy in their home town. This nostalgic feeling may be regarded as the magic wand that rural and community development have utilized in making town union a veritable tool of self-help approach in community development in Nigeria since inception. In many African

communities in general and Nigeria in particular, especially among the Igbo in the southeast part of the country, town unions through their age grade associations have performed various task depending on the felt need of the people and what assign to them by the town union. Today in many Igbo societies like Ohafia, Abriba etc., these age grades have accomplished important task and are still accomplishing various strides in community development. In Okagwe Ohafia the Okpatemba Age Grade built ultra-modern two storey building school hall for Isiamia Secondary School situated in their community.

Worthy of mention is the Association Southeast Town Union (ASETU) which is the umbrella body of all President Generals (PG) of town unions in Igbo land. In Imo State, Southeastern Nigerian, the government in 2012 established the 4th tier of government through the community council government law of 2012. The essence of this arrangement is to bring development and community governance in rural areas or communities. Originally, the Nigerian constitution created this local government to take development to rural areas, however, this arrangement seems to have failed to realize its mandate due to lack of autonomy – communities through their town unions are given the opportunity to prioritize project according to their needs and necessarily what the state government want for them. Similarly, in nearby Anambra State, the government is in partnership with town union associations. Town unions enjoy government through the unified body of town unions in the state. The Anambra State Association of Town Unions (ASATU) has been instrumental to rural development with a peer review system amongst its member unions. Through the '20million naira communities choose their project initiative', town unions due engage in lofty projects that promotes developments in their locality as government have concluded the first and second phase while gearing for the third phase (Omunki 2018). In Abia State, the Abia State Town Union Association (ASTUA) consist of 739 town unions as members although ASTUA is struggling to receive support like their Imo and Anambra counterpart, significance progress had been recorded in their activities.

## ESTABLISHMENT OF OBORO CLAN WELFARE ASSOCIATION (OCWA)

According to Kenneth Dike, the Igbos was the originators of welfare unions in Nigeria. A publication in 1964 by the Igbo state union had shown that during the 1920s, the Igbo resident outside their home land originally formed family unions which later widen into village, town and district unions. This later developed into an organization known as Igbo Federated Union (IFU). The aim for forming these unions was to serve as a tool for social development of rural communities. One may therefore infer that these organizations were erected to solve the social and

economic problems of all the people who immigrated to the urban central. Although mutual aid was the primary functions of the unions, there was also wider interest. In addition to assisting their own members financially, many associations set out to improve their home towns and villages. The Ikwuano people were not left out of this wave of welfare unions sweeping across Nigeria in the third quarter of the 20th century though this study is having consideration on Oboro and Ibere Clan which are the major town union participants in Ikwuano.

Consequently, in 1980 the Oboro Clan Welfare Association (OCWA) was formed by some concerned indigenes of Oboro with branches in Lagos, Umuahia, Enugu, Aba, Portharcourt and other urban cities. Thereafter 1983, The Ibere Development Union was formed. Most of the pioneers members and organizers were urban – based civil servants and businessmen who deemed it necessary to rally their people together for meaningful development of their various areas. The both unions was thus founded to foster peace and to enable them tackle problems in their areas, to promote and uphold the customs and traditions of the people, and above all to foster the progress and development of the area. It is noteworthy that the emergence of both Oboro Clan Welfare Association (OCWA) and Ibere Development Union (IDU) was necessitated by the prevailing needs to solve the developmental problems facing the people. The people were therefore forced to identify the limitations of the government in providing the resource which are needed for their development. They embark on self-help development programmes and decided to find collective solutions to their development problems. Active campaign and sensitization problems were pursued in making the people believe their advancement and development strategy lies very much in what they can do to improve their living standard. As a result of this the unions launched the district self-help with emphasis on educational development, provision of pipe borne water, health care, rural electrification, promotion of peace and unity, sanitation as well as building and grading new roads and feeder roads.

In the formation of Oboro Clan Welfare Association, there are people who played important roles which include: Late Chief Ekpemiro, HRM, Eze Johnson Okiyi, Late Chief Jacob Nkume, Engr. Emeka Ebilah among other. 1981 some elites of Oboro drafted the constitution of the union. This is significant because it serves as the year the union was formerly inaugurated. Membership of the union is open to all eligible indigenes of Oboro, every member had to enroll with a nominal enrollment fees stipulated by the town council ward, and membership into the union is by birth, marriage, parental origin or by adoption. Those who have resided in Oboro for 10years or above and who have adopted Oboro as their home town and accepted its cultural heritage are also eligible for

membership admission shall be through introduction by existing member.

Organizational Structure of Oboro Clan Welfare Association (OCWA) National Executive Officers of the Union. According to part III, section IV of Oboro Clan Welfare Association (OCWA) written constitution of 2004, the general congress of the union shall be administered by a National Executive Council (NEC), which shall be made up of the following officers [President General, Vice President General, Secretary General, Assistant Secretary General, Financial Secretary, Treasurer, Auditor, Publicity Secretary, Provost I & II, Welfare Officer & Chairmen of all Union Branches].

The National executive meets twice a year, ordinary meetings could be summoned when necessary. The executive is to be summoned by the President General (PG), in the meeting of the national executives, two third of the members shall form a quorum and all decisions of the committee shall be valid, provided that three quarter of those present are in favour of the decision.

The executive officers of the union are elected by an opened ballot by raising of hands. The tenure of an officer shall expire after every four years. However, an officer's tenure in office may elapse before the four year term if he/she dies or is incapacitated. He could also be removed from office if found guilty of inefficiency or gross misconduct.

The president general presides over the executive and general meetings and such other meetings as may be called by the secretary and public relation officer as directed by the president of the union. It is the duty of the president general to direct and conduct the affairs of the meetings and to maintain discipline. The duty of the vice president is to assist the president in the discharge of his duties as the president may direct. The vice president also assumes the duties of the president if the president is absent and presides over the meetings of the executive committee of the union.

The secretary general is the principle administrative officer of the union's secretariat. He is responsible to the executive committee. He records the proceedings of the meetings and submits his annual reports to the executives of the union, after the approval of the executive committee. The assistant secretary help the secretary general in recording proceedings at meetings and his duty is to read minutes at meetings. He performs other duties as directed by the president general.

The treasurer is responsible for the safe keeping of the union's money. He keeps an accurate record of the union's finance. He is obligated to release money when demanded by the general congress on the endorsement of the president and financial secretary. The financial secretary is responsible for keeping records of the financial reports. He receives money for the union by which he issues official stamped receipts, and transmitted such money to the treasurer, before expenses within 24

hours from the time the receipt of such money was issued. He also prepared the payment voucher and make periodic statements of account to the general congress.

There is also an auditor who is responsible for checking all cash books of the officers connected with finances of the union and bring to book any officer who fails to submit his/her cash booklet to the auditor for inspection. The duties of the auditor include giving financial report of union's funds at the annual convention or at any other time directed by the executive committee.

The publicity secretary is responsible for issuing press release, bulletins and making public announcement on all aspect of the union activities. The provost as the chief whip of the union maintains discipline in all the deliberations of the union on the direction of the president and is to call to order any disorderly person if so directed by the president. He collects approved fines from offenders and hands the proceeds over to the financial secretary. The chairmen of all branches communicates with those, both at home and abroad and gathers information and activities of the respective branches, he submits his report to the general congress. The nation executives study the report to know how each branch is faring for the efficiency running of the union, there is an annual general meeting which is the supreme authority of the union. The general congress is usually held on the 1st of January annually, commencing from 12:00 noon, at Oboro Secondary School. At this point, different branches of the union present reports on how they are faring. Each branch is represented by a specified number of delegates and voting is by rising of hands as the convention decides.

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## **BRANCHES OF THE UNION**

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The constitution stipulates that there shall be branches of Oboro Clan Welfare Association branches at home, cities in Nigeria and in Diaspora where Oboro citizens are domiciled. A branch of the union can be formed in an area where there are ten or more indigenes of Oboro and notify the various executive accordingly, each branch has to apply to the national executive made of the chairman, vice chairman, secretary, assistant secretary etc. branches have the sole authority and responsibility to organize elections to choose their representatives' candidate. The aims and objectives shall be the same with that of the general congress of Oboro Clan Welfare Association (OCWA). The union's branches participate in the formation of policies, tendering of proposals and reports for the attention of the general congress. Programmes of central executives presented to them during the general congress may be rejected or ratified. Their meeting is held annually on the 1st of January. The aims and objective of the branches shall be:

- To foster brotherhood among member of the branch.
- To provide like with the mother union for the

purpose of knowing what is going on at home and in other branches.

- To collect the revenue from members and transmit it to the union as and when necessary.
- To carry out any other instruction from the mother union.
- To increase membership and promote overall development.

Each branch is to register with the mother union with particulars which includes:

- Registration fee determined by the executive committee.
- List of members and contacts, address of their secretariat union branch.
- The names of executives of each branch which must be up-dated at least every two years. The formation of the union branch is mandatory in any city where there are ten or more citizens living and working.
- They are to make by-laws, rules and regulations guiding them while at the national level, there should be a written constitutions which prevails over any other one made by the union branches. Each branch is to make annual payment to the national body, and the amount to be paid is based on the strength of the members of the branch assessed by the national body.

The union branches participate in the formulation of policies by submitting proposals and reports for agenda of the general meeting and ratifying or rejecting the programmes of the general executives presented by them at the general congress meeting, which is held annually on the first of January. Thus, there is an effective means of its communication and proper flow of information as the president general tours from various branches nationwide on yearly basis while those abroad toured on special agreement usually in two years.

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## **AIMS AND OBJECTIVES OF OBORO CLAN WELFARE ASSOCIATION (OCWA)**

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According to Prof. Obiora Onuba, the aims and objectives of town unions are the development of their respective rural areas, they also aim at modernizing their home communities, elevate their status and foster self-respect.

The aims and objectives of the union have detracted significantly from its early motive which initially brought it into existence. More significantly is the fact that Oboro Clan Welfare Association (OCWA) is more of a welfare union than a socio-culturally oriented organization. The desire to improve the living standard of the people necessitated the formation of the Union. As at that time, the Oboro community was socially and economically backward, a far cry from their traditional heritage. The unity that was the bedrock of the people began to give way, attributed largely to the influence of western

civilization. Others have also blamed it on our failure to learn from the lesson of history. Inter and intra-group rivalry have often constitute the bane of co-operation and unity among the people. It was the ugly situation that the Oboro Clan Welfare Association (OCWA) endeavoured to end with the desire of establishing a more peaceful, acceptable platform on which the people could unite.

Arthur Dunham in his Journal Article titled "Community Development Journal" outlined the aims and objectives of community's development viz;

- To improve the quality of individual, family, and community life in areas with level of social action related to local needs, resource and aspirations.

- To increase the range of social and economic opportunities available to the people living in the community.

- To increase the individual community capacity, to create or to take opportunities and make effective use of them.

- To increase the capacity of individual and community to exercise self- determination of their own lives and control over the condition and use of environment.

- To develop indigenous leadership. Community development as could be deduced from the above is the progress by which citizens of a community combine their human material resources to improve and progress the quality of development and span of life of the people in the community.

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## **SOURCES OF FUND**

It is a global believe and understanding that no organization can operate effectively without sufficient funds for its activities. This raises the question of Oboro Clan Welfare Association sources of fund. The union obtains its funds from various sources. The union's sources of fund are generated from enrollment fees, registration fees, annual contributions, levies, donations, fines and other funds raising activities. The traditional means of raising fund is by levies which the union members impose upon themselves in the earlier years of the union, no allowance was made for a person's ability to pay. Flat rate levy was a general practice. However, as time went on, a graded levy system was adopted. Under this arrangement, an individual's ability to pay levies was taken into consideration and the members were taxed accordingly.

The levy system of raising funds has no element of compulsion to it. Consequently, it was not always that members greatly co-operated to pay their levies promptly, when a member failed to pay his/her levy as expected, the officials of the union would go to his/her residence to persuade him/her to pay up. An appropriate levy structure was to be agreed upon by a simple majority of the union, members at the general meeting shall agree on the terms of payment.

Another source of raising funds is by donation from member. Although this method has been in use, it is regarded as a major source of revenue because a member is under obligation to make donations and if he is magnanimous enough to do so, any amount donated is accepted and applauded. However, in the 21st century, the donation system was organized and popularized as a very effective means of raising funds. The Oboro Clan Welfare Association (OCWA) did this by launching civic centres, Almanac and other development projects costing several hundreds of thousands of naira, and challenging the members especially the wealthier ones to show their love for their towns and villages by donation generously to ensure the success of the development project at hand owing to its competitive character, the launching method of getting revenue had proven to be a very effective means of fundraising considering sum of money for the union. This is so because it created an easier means of making members of the union contribute large sum of money in cash or kind per head. The money an individual paid through this means were not levies and therefore involves no element of compulsion, members made their donation voluntarily.

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## **CONTRIBUTIONS OF OBORO CLAN WELFARE ASSOCIATION**

This section assess the contributions of Oboro Clan Welfare Association (OCWA) to the development of Oboro community through self – mechanisms, in this study, community development refers to self – help effort of a group of individuals to improve their community without more assistance of government or any development agency. This is not to say that the efforts and contributions of governments and development partners are not needed. Infact, paucity of funds available to town unions, they should partner with government and donor agencies for the actualization of their mandate: - which is community development.

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## **MAINTENANCE OF ROADS**

The usefulness of a good road network in the rural areas cannot be overemphasized or neglected to the background. It is very crucial and occupies important position in the socio-economic lives of the people particularly where the people are predominantly farmers and traders as in the case of Oboro. Owuandam (1981) shared this view when argued from the economic point of view that roads links food producing areas with places or towns where adequate market would be found for them. From administrative point of view, they make the enforcement of law and order easier, but without roads linking villages in the local government, taxes and rates cannot be collected from the people, neither will crime and violence be easily checked.

Often times, we have fire fighters complain of lack of good roads to disaster areas.

In the same vein, Ikene (1990), writing on the challenges of agriculture in Nigeria development, posits that farming villages are often located in remote areas that are hardly accessible because of lack of motor able roads. Enormous difficulties are therefore encountered in evacuating agricultural produce and great loses occurs on transit. Farmers resort to selling their product in the farm at cheaper rate. Provision of motorable road network will help in timely evacuation of produce and consequently in the reduction of transit loses. An efficient distribution system which result from a good transport network will ensure a fairer price to the farmers and at the same time ensure that farm produce is made timely in areas of concentrated population where they are needed. The town union in Oboro is fully aware of this aforementioned facts when they embarked on grading of roads and rehabilitation in various areas. The roads across Oboro has always been in terrible shapes and have appeared in most budgets made by the State Government since 1999 – and some even before 1999. Indeed the roads from Umuahia to Ikot-Ekpene has remain a nightmare to communities and other road users. The road has seen past administrations capturing it in different federal government budget without adequate attention given to it and it remains the frontline road in Oboro and Ikwuano at large. However, during the Obasanjo's regime, the road was awarded to Headland Construction Company for repairs and up till date, it has been in terrible shape.

In the midst of all these failed promises from government, the Oboro people have suffered untold hardship on the roads. However, the people decided to take the bull by the horn and resorted to self-help. The people were able to open up roads ranging from Nnono to Ngoro, Ntalakwu to Ngoro, Amaoba road and other community rings roads to enable their people have a breath of life. The Iberer women development union federated through their collaborative efforts, built a barricade at Ugwu Ukwa while descending to Iyalu, Iberenta and Elemaga. The dungeon which has claimed so many lives of the people have existed for more than 50years before the genuine effort of the women in that area that brought the ugly menace to a stop. Lately the road leading to Aro – Ajatakiri from Ngoro was awarded and reconstructed by the NDDC through the effort of Hon. Emeka Atuma who was then a House of Representatives Member representing Ikuwnao/Umuahia Federal Constituency.

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## EDUCATION

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From time immemorial, education has maintained to be the bedrock of every society. Any society that wishes to develop must create a conducive environment for academic activities and researches. Basic education is

the greatest industry in the local government according to the Universal Basic Education (UBEC) at 2004, basic education is the responsibility of local government in Nigeria. At this juncture, it is imperative to restate that the theory adopted by this work, community action theory, was propounded by a Brazilian educationist who advocates that communities can develop when they are enlightened. According to Fierre, awakening of people's conscience to have self- confidence assists them to attain desired goal collectively. In other words, enlightenment of mind through popular mobilization empowers the poor to collectively strive towards common goals and confront the oppressing challenges of the community. Having explored the role of education in the country, one can conclude that it is not easy for government to implement this roles effectively single handedly. To this effect, Oboro Clan Welfare Association has contributed in renovation of schools, building new blocks and upgrading educational facilities. The main focus of the union has been to enhance community infrastructure through improved education.

It can be said without mincing words, that the people of Oboro have an insatiable quest for educational excellence. This can be attested to the life and times of many indigenes of Oboro who have excellently excelled in different fields of endeavours. Oboro Clan Welfare Association had in the past awarded scholarship and encourage prominent sons and daughters of Oboro to key into the programme, donating funds to the scheme. These scholarship scheme are of different categories. Scholarship given to orphans and vulnerable children who do not have any means of assessing formal education and scholarship to the very exceptional and scholarship given to the intelligent ones who do have any one to sponsor their education. Quite a number of individual were thus sponsored from primary school to the university level. Recipients of this scholarships received free textbooks and other writing materials, school uniforms and free tuition.

Furthermore, the union was instrumental to the building and equipping of Ikwuan central library situated in Ngoro through the collaboration of Oboro Women and the partial contribution of Ikwuano Local Government. There have also been other outstanding contributions of the union towards education which includes the building of schools namely Aro-Ayama Ngoro Migrant School, Obunta Migrant School and the Ntalakwu Community Secondary School.

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## PROVISIONS OF PORTABLE WATER

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“Water is life” is a popular saying in Nigeria. Good drinking water supply is a problem which confronts many parts in Nigeria. The standard of rural water scheme in the southern part of the country has been relatively impressive. One of the target of goal 7C in the Millennium Development Goals is to increase the proportion of

population with suitable access to an improve water source for both rural and urban areas with emphasis on rural communities like Oboro. Nigerians report after 15years of MDGS preceding the sustainable development goals (SDGS) indicates that most rural community in the country are without portable water for households.

Oboro is blessed with some rivers and streams including enough rain falls which enrich the underground water making other sources of water such as well and borne hole sustainable. In a study carried out by some sons of Oboro geologists led by Augustus Ebilah in 2009 was aimed at appraising the quality of ground water in Ikwuano area, detailed study of the physical and chemical quality of several ground waters of bore holes was carried out in an attempt to assess the portability of ground water in the town and its surrounding areas. The water did not have objectional colour, odour or test and were not turbid. The ground water in the area is generally accepted and set for households, industries and agriculture.

When accessed critically, the Iyi-bom that runs through some villages which border the neighbouring state:Ndoro/Okwe Iyibom are just one single river. It has several routes, from Ndoro/Okwe and continues from Awomukwu, Ekpiri and connect to Akwa-Ibom River. Over the years, rivers and streams have remained dependable source of water supply, sea Tods and recreation to the people. However, just like most things in Oboro, the streams have suffered great neglect misuse and mismanagement as a result of pollution, inundation of sludge on the river bed, lack of dredging or removal of fallen trees leading to blockage and inhabitation of smooth flow of the water at various points. As a result, where the hitherto wide, deep and fresh, it has now narrowed greatly become shallow populated and in some case stagnant.

During the course of this research, it was realize that they Ohii Mmiri which passes through Nnono, a stream that served many households in the past had become a thick bush and dry due to lack of maintenance and unsafe practices thereby rendering residents of the area without good water. They now trek distances to neighbouring villages to access water. There came an respite when the Oboro Union mobilized their well-meaning sons and daughters and sink boreholes in some villages including Ndoro, Isiala, Umudike etc. Due to inadequate finance they mobilize their representatives in government and friends of Oboro embark on water project for the community.

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## HEALTHCARE

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The evident display of Nigeria's underdevelopment condition is the rural areas and that deplorable condition of the Nigerian rural health sector is emphatic. Very curious and most worrisome is that the rural health development policies and programmes initiated and implemented by governments at all levels over the years

have not yielded the desired results. The rural dwellers in Nigeria is lack access to basic health facilities, water, sanitation, hospitals and good laboratories despite all effort made by government non-government organization to improve the system.

Ikwuano as a whole has never had a government general hospital until in 2007 when T.A Orji (then governor) built and commissioned one at Olori, expect for health centers in some community including Ndoro, Umugbalu, Amawom etc. The first major project carried out by OCWA is the building and equipping of Oboro Maternity in 1971. The union has continued to contribute immensely towards the improvement of health care delivering in Oboro since its inception. The health centre at Ndoro and Ahia Ori were built by women of Oboro and their respective. The health centre at Ndoro was initially meant to serve as a maternity home but was later upgraded to a health centre due to high demand of medicine in the villages. The construction of Iberenta health centre which was built by Ibere union was completed and handed over the Ikwuano Local Government 2006.

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## ALTERNATIVE DISPUTE RESOLUTION MECHANISM

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Peace is a panacea for development as no meaningful development can take place in a conflictual environment. Almost all town unions in Nigeria incorporated peace and development in their motto, this signifies that the two goes like hand in glove. Ebisi (2016) connected the nexus between the town union and conflict resolution pointed out that town unions handle issues, problems and concern of the entire village particularly that of adjudication and peace building initiatives as they play an important role in the maintenance of peace security in the committee.

Oboro Clan Welfare Association initiated some peace missions which resolved crisis in some communities like Amaoba, Umugbalu, Ndoro, Umigu and Ekebedi. Of special mention was the crises which was Ndoro/Agwabumba crisis which divided the community into two major groups over ten years. The union through its mechanism was able to wield in and it was resolved. Another was the inter-boundary dispute between Amaoba and Ndoro which could have escalated into full blown violent conflict was also resolved by Ebo Iri la Abu as mandated by OCWA.

During the creation of autonomous communities in Abia State the Orji Uzor Kalu administration, so many villages clamoured for autonomy went into turmoil as a result of the quest for who will be the Eze of the new created autonomous community. There came great tensions in so many communities, leaders began to talk tough and the atmosphere became tensed, it took the invention of OCWA peace committee to douse down the tension and bring everything to normalcy.



## PROMOTION OF CULTURE AND TOURISM

The role of culture and tourism in the community development cannot be over-emphasized and they have important roles in building local economics. Tourism enhance the social standard of any given community. The Iri ji festival has been one of the oldest festival in Igbo land. The Iri ji festival is a unique opportunity for the people to celebrate bountiful harvest and thanksgiving to the gods. It is used in Oboro land to celebrate the rich Oboro culture in its pure and original form. Another major and interesting festival in Oboro land is the Ekpe festival which comes up every January of the year. It is an avenue to drive up tourism and many Oboro sons and Daughter in abroad and diasporas and non-indigenes visit Oboro. The Oboro union has been at vanguard of protecting age long festival from various forms of attacks of religious institutions. In most of its occurrence, though the event is celebrated from village to village, it has always been rebranded with new innovation been given to it which has attracted sponsorship from reputable organizations. In 2014, the Youth of Ngoro Community under the auspices of Oru Youth Movement organized a Carnival in Ngoro Community. Of particular interest to this research is the theme of the carnival; Our Cultural Heritage and Embodiment of our Existence. This also goes a long way to educate us that the culture of a people determines their way of life. The Ekpe la Okonko cultural group is another cultural heritage which has remained very prominent. The Elemaga people who are the custodian of this culture have lived up to expectation by uphold its principles.

The Ekpe la Okonko has remained an age-long culture in Ikwuano generally that has played a lot of roles in uniting the people. Most dispute adjudications are been handled by this group especially land dispute. The major interest of their of handling dispute is that no party is expected to say anything other than the truth as Ofo Akan is always available as a symbol of truth and justices. In any ease where there is complications and maybe there is doubt on where the verdict will be favoured the Ofo Akan is invoked; this leads to some certain peculiar or unique signs that leads to the determination of the truth.

## CONCLUSION

Town unions in Nigeria have led to increased contribution to rural development and provision of social amenities in Ikwuano. This was made possible through increased collaboration between the town unions and members of the communities in initiation, planning, funding, execution and maintenance of rural development project and programmes. The people oriented nature of democratic governance has brought the town union executive closer to the people than ever as such increased the synergy between the people and members of the town unions in many rural communities in execution of developmental

project. Following this positive development, the number of projects and programmes executed under the town unions increased remarkably. This is evident in the area of infrastructural development especially in the maintenance of rural roads, provision of pipe borne water etc. the people in rural community are now seen as partners of progress in the provision of rural development project in many rural communities of Ikwuano. However, town union executives failed to operate with committees on education, works and health which run counter to the guide lives or constitutions of various town unions thereby affecting the town union's capacity to maximally be accountable to the people. More so, town unions have failed to improve development in Ikwuano due to the prevalence of partisan interest, clientele patronage, beneficiary interest, political difference and political intolerance among town union executives in running the affairs of the rural communities.

Despite this modest effort by the town unions in rural development in Ikwuano, they are still constrained by some factors such as lack of funds due to high prevalence of poverty in many rural communities, illiteracy pervades the ranks and file of town unions. Worse still, lack of regular training and retraining of town union's executives have put limitations on the town unions capacity to function effectively in line with global practices. The study argues these challenges could be overcome if the government provides submissions to town unions to find rural development project and complement the local resources in the execution of rural development project and programmes while empowerment and poverty reduction programme should be channeled through town unions.

Again, there should be regular seminar, workshops and symposia to increase the skills and knowledge required for effective and efficient smooth operation of town unions. Beside there should be legislation mandating town executives to possess a minimum academic qualification of SSCE and there should be re-orientation of the rural people and their leaders to imbibe the culture of placing community interest above party interest in order to accelerate the contribution of town unions to the development of rural community in Ikwuano.

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