

IBEKU ECONOMIC INSTITUTIONS, 1960-1999

By

Igbolekwu Chijioke and Dr. Emmanuel Ikechukwu Uvere

Abia State University Uturu, Nigeria.

Email: chijiks2015@gmail.com and ikechuwuvere@gmail.com.

+2349126163408 and +2348063240375

Abstract

This paper appraised Ibeku post-colonial economic institutions from 1960-1999, with special preference on agriculture, land tenure system, trade and marketing. Others included: transport and communication, manufacturing, institutions for capital formation, urbanization and migration. This paper employed eclectic method, explicitly historical method and ethnography. It also revealed that a thorough work has not been documented on Ibeku post-colonial economic institutions with reference to agriculture, land tenure system, trade and marketing, transportation and communication, institutions for capital formation, urbanization and migration. The study concluded that in 1960-1999 Ibeku economy experienced unprecedented growth in different ways. It collapsed in some areas, in some it was modernized while in some it witnessed transformations, growth and development.

Keywords: History, Economic, Institutions

Introduction

Ibeku is one of the five clans that make up Umuahia in Abia State in Nigeria. Ibeku was an aborigine 'Okpu' who settled at Isieke. However, the people of Ibeku trace their origin to a common ancestor: Ibeku 'Ibekunwa-Onyeozo'. The clan was a big autonomous entity made up of seven mini-clans of forty-six patrilineal villages. The seven mini-clans which today stand as seven autonomous communities were referred to as 'Egwu Asa'. The Egwu was seen and described as the primordial mode of life in Ibeku. The Egwu in Ibeku symbolized and still symbolizes unity. The Egwu in the words of an elder is synonymous with the ancestors, 'Ndi-lchie'. It represents autonomy, and it is the beginning and end of an autonomous village group: Egwu Asa. Examples of the Egwu hegemony are Egwu Afarata, Egwu Ndume, Egwu Afaraukwu, among others. The Egwu signifies oneness in origin and culture. Ifeukwu the father of Onyerubi of Abam, Uduma-Ezenma of Ohafia and Ogurube of Ibeku-Ukwu, migrated from Ogwashi-Ukwu and had a stop-over at Opi Nsukka and finally settled at Isieke Ibeku Ogurube.

The post-colonial economic institutions of Ibeku witnessed tremendous changes. There were changes in manufacturing, agriculture, trade and marketing, transport and communication, institutions for capital formation, land tenure system and urbanization. Ibeku post-colonial economic institutions in 1960-1999 experienced *remarkable* changes. In some areas, the *economic* institutions of Ibeku *experienced* depression, in some; it was modified, while in some, it witnessed transformation, growth and development. In 1962 Dr M. I. Okpara established umuahia Modern Ceramics and Golden Guinea Breweries to revitalize Ibeku economy in particular and Eastern Region in general. Agriculture was and still is one of the mainstays of Ibeku post-colonial economy with the production of cash crops and its

subsidiaries. Such crops include: palm, cassava, yam, cocoyam, raffia palm and livestock among others. The establishment of Abia State Urban and Regional Planning Board and Planning Authority in 1999 affected land tenure system in Ibeku. This even made some Ibeku farmers to abandon their occupation in search for white collar job. This study is divided into eight different subheadings, namely: manufacturing, agriculture, trade and marketing, transport and communication, institutions for capital formation, land tenure system and urbanization.

Manufacturing

There was no single manufacturing industry established by the British colonial government in Ibeku except traditional handicraft industries which was established by the people of Ibeku. Based on this account, Modern Ceramics Industry Umuahia was established in Isiama-Afaraukwu Ibeku by the Government of the Eastern Region under the Premiership of Late Dr. Micheal Okpara in 1963. It was distressed during the civil war and reactivated in 1972.¹ This industry produced tiles, kitchen utensils, ornaments, jars, drinking cups, among others, and also employed nearly four thousand (4000) workers. This contributed immensely to providing adequate employment to the people of Eastern Region, and gave rise to the influx of people from various parts of Eastern region. The Modern Ceramics Industries Umuahia, turned Ibeku into a business hub in West Africa. People from various part of West Africa travelled from their place to Umuahia-Ibeku in order to make purchase of the finished goods produced by the Modern Ceramics Industry.² The construction and the running of Modern Ceramics Industries in umuahia attracted large numbers of migrants both from the neighbouring villages and distant regions. This influx led to the building of houses to accommodate these migrants. The establishment of Modern Ceramics Industries in umuahia brought employment opportunities in umuahia. It employed both Ibeku indigenes and non-Ibeku indigenes to function optimally. It also increased the population of Ibeku people. The growth rate of urban population in Umuahia in 1964 was estimated to be close to seven percent per year. This industry has gone into extinction as a result of bad governance.

Agriculture

Ibeku post-colonial economy has not changed. It still depends mostly on agriculture, with the planting of certain staples such as yams and cassava. These crops could be produced, for their commercial purposes. Though yam still remained the king of all crops, the plantation of cassava is now emphasized. Consequently, many yam farmers have changed to cassava production since, its products, especially *garri* and *fufu*, form the main staple of every household.³ Cassava farming has some advantages over yams cultivation, for instance, the storage of cassava does not pose the type of challenge posed by yam. Cassava is not as labour and capital intensive as yam cultivation. It can be left in the ground for two or four years. Shifting cultivation continued to be the tradition in Ibeku. Some Ibeku farmers argued that the people of Ibeku were not quite comfortable with modern innovations and were not in a hurry to adopt modern farming methods to produce staple food. On the contrary, others were of the opinion that the Ibeku did not use mechanized system of agriculture simply because acquiring those machines was capital-intensive, and coupled with the fact that the level of education then had not reached to the level of using such sophisticated equipments.

Trade and Marketing

Ibeku post-colonial economic institutions adopted short and long-distance trade. Short distance trade was conducted in Ibeku local markets. The markets existed at the clan and village levels. Some of the prominent markets included: *Ahia Oriugba*, *Ahiaeke*, *Ahia-Orie-Ogwu* and *Ahiankune*.⁴ *Ahia-Oriugba* was located at Ugba Afarata Ibeku, which was conducted on *Orie* market days. *Ahiaeke* was a central market because it was situated at the boundary between

Isieke and Ndume community. It was conducted on *Eke-Ukwu* market days, while *Ahia Oriogwu* was located at Afaraukwu Ibeku. Long-distance trade linked the people of Ibeku with their neighbours namely: Uzuakoli, Ngoro, Oboro, Bende, Old Umuahia, and Ubakala. The main items of trade were pottery products which were largely worked in Akpoko Okwuta and Emezi Ukome Isieke Ibeku. Ibeku adopted the use of foreign currency introduced by Europeans. It replaced barter system which was a monotonous affair. Foreign currency was less inconvenient than barter system. However, the postcolonial currency was the British pound sterling. Since 1973, Naira became the major currency in Ibekuland.⁵The commodities of trade in post-colonial period still remains agricultural products and manufactured goods such as: Beverages, clothes, tobacco, food stuffs, cattle cow, sugar, gin and beer. Ogwumabiri Ibeku which was a dominant market in both pre-colonial and colonial times was modernized in post-colonial periods.

Transport and communication

Since 1960s and 1980s, Dr. Micheal I, Okpara the then premier of Eastern Nigeria, military administrators and Barrister Onulaka Mbakwe embarked on a massive construction and expansion of roads in umuahia. Such roads includes: Aba Road, Ossah Road, Azikiwe Road, School Road, Ikot-Ekpene, Bende Road Marculy Street, Abiriba Street, Kaduna Street, among others. On the other hand, between 1958 and 1990s Telecommunication Company was introduced in Nigeria which later had its branch in umuahia.⁶ Though it was an elite luxury facility and as such very expensive for a common man in umuahia to afford, thereby making town criers and other informal method to be used by majority of the people. Postal services were also introduced in umuahia, though it was not widespread in coverage but was limited to Umuahia Township.

Institutions for Capital Formation

Institutions for capital formation is an autonomous and voluntary association of people that come together to pool their resources together for business, economic, social and cultural welfare improvement. They include: *Onukwuru-Orie (Isusu)*, *Utuonyemaechi*, age grade, family, village assembly, the association of *Umuada*, and Association of married women. The colonial authorities detraditionalized capital formation in Umuahia through the establishment of cooperative society's ordinance No.39 of 1935. This ordinance was enacted to promote savings among low-income government workers, the cooperative thrift and credit societies. It was no longer an age grade or kindred affair/Moreso, civil servants, teachers, traders and artisans in Umuahia also established, cooperatives to raise capital for the major economic undertakings of their members, such as: marriage, burial, acquisition of land, purchase of household goods, building of houses, payment of debts, education of children and supplying of trade capital. They have such unions like, Nigerian Labour Congress, Nigerian Union of Teachers, the association of Mechanic Worship, the association of Timber Dealers, the association of Petty-Drug Dealers, among others. This section will examine the following sub-headings: *Uloaku*(banks), family, *Onukwuruerie(Isusu)*, *Utuomaechi* and village assembly.

***Uloaku* (Banks)**

Umuchukwu Micro-Finance Bank is another capital formation institution that was established by Saint Finbars Catholic Church Bende Road Umuahia in the late 1990s to serve both Catholic and non- Catholic members in raising capital for both trading and other uses. It is a member of an international network of micro-finance banks providing world class banking services to micro, small and medium enterprises and private individuals in umuahia. Another powerful institution that served an all-inclusive institutions for capital formation was the Cooperative

and Commerce Bank (C.C.B).⁸ Although this institution was nationally spread, its inception in Umuahia contributed immensely in raising capital for traders and farmers in Umuahia. This bank was established around late 1970s. It was formed to improve banking habits among rural dwellers and ensuring the development of an integrated natural financial system.

Family

With the advent of banks in Umuahia many family heads opened bank accounts for their children. It also developed the culture of savings as most people who hitherto kept money at the comfort of their house started saving money in the bank.⁹

Onukwuru Ori (Isusu)

The modernization and expansion of Ogwumabiri Ibeku made this institution not to serve as exclusively Ibeku affair. This is because Ibeku traders and non-Ibeku traders were fully involved in this scheme. In this kind of capital formation, saving and loan schemes were established (*Akawo*). It has to do with daily deposit collection at doorsteps or market stalls,¹⁰

Utuonyemaechi

Christian missionaries in Ibeku supported this type of capital formation to pool their resources together for business, economic, social and cultural welfare improvement of their members, thereby introducing their own capital formation in Umuahia, they include: Methodist Women Fellowship, Methodist Men Fellowship, Catholic Women Organization, Catholic Men Organization, Association of Catholic Saints, among others.¹¹

Village Assembly

Village assembly was an autonomous but voluntary association with goals like the *promotion of unity and the improvement of the living standard of their members*. They were mostly from the men folk. It was made up of community town union, village heads and age grades. Through its levies and contribution raised funds that needy members or others borrowed as soft loans. It also assisted in building houses for the indigent members.

Land Tenure System

Post-colonial land tenure system in Ibeku was usually comprised of communal, lineal and individual. In 1978 government appropriated lands in Ibeku that were not in use through certain established laws¹². Some people donated their lands to the government to encourage infrastructural developments in Ibeku. The growth of autonomous communities in Ibeku in 1990s, affected land tenure system in the land and also led to boundary dispute which had detrimental effects on its land tenure system. Moreover, some rich men who could purchase lands no longer wait for their ancestral lands. People whose parents lost their lands moved to urban centers to buy land. Non-Ibeku indigenes who migrated from various villages and distant regions and settled in Umuahia-Ibeku also bought lands in Umuahia. These migrants were mostly traders, artisans, public servants and academicians. On the other hand some even acquired lands from the government through Ministry of Lands and Project Implementation Unit. (P.I.U). New system of land ownership in Umuahia led to individual and governmental development. Moreover, the establishment of the Town Planning Authorities in 1999, affected land tenure system in Ibeku. It has far-reaching effects on Ibeku land tenure system. Ibeku lost their lands, which could be useful for agriculture, to the Town Planning Authorities. These Town Planning Authorities were empowered by the Nigerian Urban and Regional Planning law No. 88 to produce a master plan for the urbanization of major cities in Abia State like Umuahia, Aba, among others. The provision of Nigerian Urban and Regional planning law No. 88 meant that every state of the federation was expected to frame their state laws in consonance with prevailing state physical planning operations, but in line with the general framework of the sections of law No. 88 dealing with state and local governments¹³.

Abia State Urban and Regional planning Board and Planning Authority law CAP 38 Vol. 1999 - 2000 was signed into law on 28th of May, 1999. Abia State was among the first three states that achieved this feat. The law outlined the responsibilities of the State and local Governments. It also specified the composition of the Board and Authority and their respective functions. It has its branches at local government level for example: Umuahia have: Umuahia Capital Development Authority (U.C.D.A).¹⁴ They are charged with the responsibility of carving out a master plan for the urbanization of Umuahia. The master plan will help to checkmate the excessive roads traffic. This planning Authority is a subsidiary of ministry of lands. It is vested with the power to plan the Umuahia urban region to an enviable height. Some Ibeku indigenes felt that U.C.D.A was instituted to destroy Ibeku land tenure system in the name of urbanization. On the other hand, most Ibeku political elites supported and worked with them, just to urbanize Ibeku, the seat of the town of Umuahia and the capital of Abia state.

Urbanization

Ibeku post-colonial economic and social institutions expanded the scope of Ibeku through urbanization. Many factors contributed immensely for this development, such factors include: the establishment of local industry in Ibeku. For example, the Golden Guinea Brewerie Umuahia was built to urbanize Ibeku.

The Golden Guinea Breweries Limited

This was another popular industry in Ibeku which was located at Afaraukwu Ibeku. It occupied a total land area of 5, 787 hectares of land in Isiama Afaraukwu Ibeku. The Golden Guinea Brewery Company was built by the Eastern Nigeria construction and furniture company (ENCFC) in 1962.¹ The brewery house and ancillary facilities which have the capacity of producing 50,000 hectoliters of beer annually was completed on 26 September 1963. In November 1963 was when the Golden Guinea lager beer was launched into the Nigerian market.¹⁶ An informant said that the company also introduced a second product known as Eagle stout in 1967. It had a very big set back from 1967-1970.¹⁷ The war plummeted the company's fortunes. The general insecurity and dislocation engendered by the war led to staff shortages as many of the workers joined in the general flight away from the town. Moreso, the intense shelling and bombardment of the town led to considerable damage to the company's plant and machinery. After the war, the prospect of the Golden Guinea Breweries was very bleak. The shortage of funds and materials and the extensive damage compounded the problem. Consequently, the East Central State Government granted the company a refundable interest free loan of N 160,000. The federal military Government also contributed a refundable loan of half a million naira (N500,000). It was quarantined by the government of the East Central State Share loans and the overdraft facility granted by the first Bank of Nigeria to reactivate the company's operations.¹⁸

In May 1971, the name of the company was changed from "Independent Breweries limited to Golden Guinea Breweries Limited. The Ownership of the brewery was also changed. This adjustment led to the establishment of the Eastern States Interim Assets and Liabilities Agency. By this arrangement, the ownership of the GGBL was

given to the East central State government. Production hit 150,000 hectoliters per annum from 50,000 hectoliters. This expansion experienced fierce competition.¹⁵ It was planned that the new brewery should be sited away from Umuahia. The government decided that Onitsha suited this purpose. In March 1976, the East central state was divided into two states; Imo and Anambra, and the new brewery stood on the other side of the divide. Since the ownership of

the brewery was passed over to the Imo State government, a necessary effort was put in place to completely turn around the fortunes of Golden Guinea Brewery Limited (GGBL). It was no longer necessary to relocate it to Onitsha.²⁰ Golden Guinea Brewery Umuahia provided employment opportunities to both Ibeku indigenes and Non-Ibeku indigenes. It led to the establishment of beer parlor, buckers, guest houses, and hotels. These subsidiary outlets created additional employment opportunities, thereby expanding the scope. It also provided free water for young men which aided car wash business and that as well provided employment. These employment opportunities attracted people from neighboring villages and distant regions to Umuahia.

Migration

Urbanization in Ibeku gave rise to the emergence of rural-urban migration during and after colonial rule in Ibekuland. People from various clans, communities and villages like: Ohafia, Bende, among others, moved to Umuahia the capital of Abia state in search for greener pastures. These rural migrants were mostly young males made up of individuals with different levels of skill. Consequently, Ibeku experienced significant growth in rural-urban migration. Thus, when Abia state was created in 1991, the seat of power was placed in Ibeku which led to the influx of public servants and other migrants.²¹ About 95 percent of the state's ministries, departments and agencies was and is still located in Ibeku. Its population was estimated to be around eighty eight thousand (88,000). Rural-urban migration had significant impacts on ceku; they included: poverty, social and ecological problems. However, many migrants coming from a particular rural community to live in Ibeku usually form rural community associations. These community associations include: Ukwa development -nion, Ihechiowa development union, Abam development union, among others. These community associations in Ibeku, articulate, from time to time, the development of their rural communities of origin and contribute resources to execute projects.

Conclusion

Ibeku post-colonial economic institutions in 1960-1999 experienced extraordinary changes. In some areas, the economic institutions of Ibeku experienced huge decline, in some, it was modified, while in some, it witnessed innovations, growth and development. Trade and marketing in Ibeku post-colonial economy was subsidiary to agriculture and manufacturing. Telecommunication was also introduced Ibeku in 1994. However, institutions for capital formation were modified making it not to be an Ibeku affair. This paper recommended that Ibeku manufacturing industries should be reconstructed and revived to create employment opportunities. Government in power should also provide financial aids to Ibeku farmers to enable them practice mechanized farming.

ENDNOTES

1. O. Egbara, (71 years), Farmers, Okwuta, Interviewed 12/4/2018.
2. S. Ohia, (78years), Farmer, Umuanna, Interviewed, 14/4/2018
3. Emole, (66years), Farmer, Okwuta, Interviewed On 21/4/2018.
4. O. Charlse, *The Abam of the Cross River Igbo: A Historical Study to 1960*, Masters Dissertation, University of Nigeria Nsukka, (August, 1986), 102-104.
5. J. C. Ogonnaya, (82Years), Provost School of Medicine, Gregory University, No.8 Okpara Avenue Umuahia, Interviewed 20/6/2018.
6. O. Chidiebere, (40years), Historian, 14 Faith Lane-Umueze, Interviewed 7/12/2018.

- 7 E. Onwukamuche (67years), Politician, Okwuta, Interviewed On 5/5/2018.
8 O. Chibuzor, (44years), Transporter, Okwuta, Interviewed On 20/10/2018.
9 A. Ukagwu, (65years), Civil Servant, Okwuta, Interviewed 19/10/2018.
10 A. U, Kanu, (76Years), Lawyer, Ohokobe, Interviewed 29/7/2018.
11 O. Agbara, (67years), Trader, Okwuta, Interviewed On 27/7/2018.
12 S. Famoriyo, *Land Tenure and agricultural development in Nigeria* (Ibadan: University
Press, 1979), 25-29.
13 The Nigerian Urban and Regional Planning law: Town Planners Registration Council
of Nigeria Decree No. 88 (Lagos: Government Printer, 1992), 30-38.
14 The Abia State Reform and Review Commission, Abia State Urban and Regional
Planning Board and Planing Authorities Law (AP 38 (2) 1999-2000 * (Umuahia:
Government Printer, 2000), 25-30.
15 U. Okwuegbulem, (64years), Trader, Okwuta, Interviewed, 16/4/2018
16 I. Obaji, (75years), Farmer, Ebem-Ohafia, Interviewed, 18, 4/2018
17 Golden Guinea Brewery Limited, "Annual Reports and Accounts, (Umuahia: Account
Dept, 1985), 5.
18 Golden Guinea Brewery Limited "23 Years After", (Goldbrew W, 1985), 2-4.
19 Golden Guinea Brewery Limited, 23 "Years After", (Goldbrew W, 1985), 6.
20 L. Gbaruko, (65years), Civil Servant (Retired), Ndagbo Afaraukwu, Interviewed,
15/4/2018.
21 I. Nwachukwu, (67years) Surveyor, Ehimiri Housing Estate, Interviewed on 1 /2/2018.