

IGBO PEOPLE AND THE NIGERIA ECONOMY-A WAY FORWARD

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Abstract

This paper examined Igbo people and the Nigeria economy; a way forward. Igbo people because of Brian war have suffered in Nigeria more than any other ethnic groups. They were exposed to severe infrastructural damages, lack of jobs, loss of life-time savings, poverty, wounded, handicapped and discrimination. This situation, made Igbo people seek survival through trade and entrepreneurship. This study employed survey research design to study a population of 850 participants in five states in South Eastern Nigeria. Random sampling technique was used to select 17 respondents from each of the five states given a total sample of 85 respondents. Structured questionnaire was used as the instrument for data collection. The data collected was analyzed with tables and mean statistics. This study found that the spirit of entrepreneurship made Igbo people see themselves as a collective group who work together on the basis of their common ancestry, history, language and religion. The study concluded that the Igbo people entrepreneurial activities have facilitated an improved standard of living among them and by extension to the whole nation. Thus, this study recommended among others that Igbo people should return to their former identity and values that distinguished them from other ethnic groups in Nigeria by upholding communal living and love for themselves. They should have one mind to legally constrain all anti- forces and agents against them in Nigeria by exposing them and their machinations to the international laws that govern civilized humanity. They should be united and seek for independence of their own nation as despite their contributions to the development of Nigeria through trade, entrepreneurship, job and wealth creation, they are still marginalized in the umbrella of Nigeria.

Keywords: Igbo, people, Nigeria, economy.

Introduction

Igbo is one of the three major ethnic groups in Nigeria. The Igbo people live at the South-Eastern part of Nigeria with a population of approximately 40 million which is estimated to 23.5% of the total population of people in Nigeria (The World Factbook, 2020). Right from time, there has been speculations about the origin of the Igbo people and how exactly the group came to form (www.faculty.ucr.edu, 2019). History shows that Igbo ethnic group emerged recently as a result of decolonization and the Nigerian Civil War. According to www.faculty.ucr.edu (2016), the Igbo homeland is divided into two unequal sections by the Niger River – an Eastern (which is the larger of the two) and a Western section. The various Igbo-speaking communities were historically fragmented and decentralized. In the opinion of Nigerian novelist Chinua Achebe, Igbo identity should be placed somewhere between a "tribe" and a "nation"(Achebe & Chinua, 2000). The home Igbo subgroups, such as the Ikwerre started dissociating themselves from the larger Igbo population after the war and as a result, most people of Eastern Nigeria began to changed the names of both people and places to non-Igbo-sounding words e.g the town of Igbuzo was anglicized to Ibusa and because of discrimination, many Igbo had trouble finding employment, and during the early 1970s, the Igbo became one of the poorest ethnic groups in Nigeria (Ihemere & Kelechukwu, 2007).

The after-effects of the Biafra war severely damaged most of the infrastructures in the Igbo land and rendered this ethnic group the poorest among the three major ethnic groups; hence, life in this part of Nigeria was marked by poor infrastructure, lack of jobs coupled with the loss of life-time savings of the Igbo and discrimination by other ethnic groups (Falola & Afolabi, 2008). The Igbo people in Nigeria were threatened, wounded, handicapped and dissatisfied race within Nigeria today. For instance, the Igbo have been technically depopulated. The recent census shows that Igbo land was systematically undercounted and the population deliberately suppressed. Afraid of exposing their bogus figures and claims of numerical superiority in ethnicity and religion, the ruling Hausa-Fulani oligarchy expunged both ethnic and religious data from the census questionnaire. Ironically, the Igbo Christians insisted on determining an accurate population of the various groups in Nigeria as well as knowing exactly which religion has the most adherents in the country. It was not surprising that the anti-Igbo federal government, afraid of what it might discover, vehemently refused to allow the data during the last census to expose the true figures on ethnicity and religion. The government continued to make bogus and unsubstantiated claims in these regards. The central government of Nigeria has been chasing its tail and afraid of its own facts because a lot falsehood has been hoisted on the country to justify the marginalization of what is obviously a dominant ethnic group. As stated earlier, when the civil war ended, a vindictive federal government, in a concerted effort to massively impoverish the Igbo, confiscated all their bank deposits, leaving depositors a paltry 20 Nigerian pounds each, irrespective of what they had in their accounts. Igbo are religiously targeted and routinely butchered by Muslims across Northern Nigeria. The fact is that Igbo land is infra-structurally denied, and the Igbo people are economically excluded in Nigeria since after Biafra war.

The Igbo people were left to suffer and seek for survival through trade and entrepreneurship. Thus, there are hardly any part of Nigeria where an Igbo man cannot be found engaged in one commercial activities or the other for survival. Olanrewaju (1999) opined that Igbo people are courageous and live to succeed despite hard economy and situations. Agozino and Anyanike (2007) noted that the universal belief of the Igbo people is that money makes life better and because of that, they are confident, ambitious and competitive about wealth. Because of these belief system of Igbo people, bad governance, discrimination, and fuel scarcity among others which they were exposed to after Biafra war could not hinder them. They are still being determined, highly achieve minded, hardworking, honest, optimistic, copying and doing better in Nigeria than other any other ethnic groups and tribes in Nigeria.

However, there is no tribe in this country that has 80 per cent of its investment outside his tribe other than the Igbo man. There is no town you go to, from ward level to Local Government to State that you will not see an Igbo man doing his business. An Igbo man is an itinerant man, who loves other people, He goes to solve other peoples' problems and makes money out of it. He builds houses everywhere. When there is problem in anywhere in this country, an Igbo man will be involved, Igbo man will be killed, Igbo man's business will be disrupted even if he is not killed, the market will be closed down for two to three weeks and his source of livelihood will be affected. Igbo tribe suffer more than any other tribes in Nigeria. But there is nowhere you will not see an Igbo man doing his menial business.

Economic Situation in Nigeria

Nigeria, the Africa's leading economy has a population of over 200 million people (World Development Indicator, 2018). Globally, it is the 30th largest economy in the world, by Gross Domestic Product (GDP) volume. However, Nigeria's economy is on fragile oil dependence since the oil boom era, and this is very uncertain and leads to fluctuations in crude oil prices and production at the locally and international level. In 2019, according to (IMF) Nigeria recorded a growth of 2.2% and it is projected that by 2021, it will improve up to 2.4%, still consequential to the post pandemic universal economic status and recovery conditions. Poverty remains widespread. The poverty rate in over half Nigeria's 36 states is above the national average of 69%. High poverty reflects rising unemployment, estimated at 23.1% in 2018, up from 14.2% in 2016 (CBN, 2016). Low skills limit opportunities for employment in the formal economy. Government social programs—N-Power and other youth empowerment schemes—are meant to address

unemployment, however, repositioning the apprenticeship programme in our view would also make positive contributions and change the landscape of developments in these areas.

Despite Nigeria's numerous blessings and richness, the challenge still remain the risk of exploding population. UN projects that the population of Nigeria, mostly likely to reach 730 million people in 2100, from its current 200 million population estimation. Concern regarding this potential boom is exacerbated by the fact that currently half of the inhabitants live below the poverty line; COVID-19 pandemics are raging, insecurity and threats of disintegration increases with tension and uncertainty, food security issues is high and the country is confronted with two destructive threats. The high level of unemployment and insecurity across the country and the Sub Saharan regions. High unemployment could create social tensions. Rising public debt and associated funding costs could pose fiscal risks if proposed adjustments are not implemented. The effort to lower inflation to the 6%–9% range faced structural and macroeconomic constraints, including rising food prices and arrears payments, resulting in a rate estimated at 11.3% for 2019. This contribution seeks to present, and maintain the Igbo apprenticeship programme as a tool to bring the youths aspirations of entrepreneurship and skills development into reality through the e while addressing the negative outcomes of unemployment, poverty and insecurity in the country. It is apposite that we have to first, establish the methodology that guided this contribution and also seek conceptual clarity.

Igbo People and Indigenous Entrepreneurship

The uniqueness presence of the Igbo people in Nigeria accounts for their leading role in the formation of Nigeria. The prominent role played by the Igbo in Nigeria's liberation struggle was manifest in the fact that many of them were incarcerated for their activism during the struggle for independence. According to Achebe, "the British had thrown more of them into jail for sedition than any others during the two decades or so of pre-independence agitation and troublemaking" (Guardian, 2010). With a population of over 50 million, the Igbo rank among the five largest nationalities in Africa and perhaps among the top ten in the world. The history of Nigeria shows that they have proven to be the sui generis among the Black race, as exemplified by the likes of *Equiano, Blyden, Azikiwe, Ibiam, Okpara, Ikoku, Ojike, Mbanefo, Ironsi, Orizu, Ojukwu, Dike, Uchendu, Emeka Ojukwu, Achebe, Ekwensi, Okigbo, Afigbo, Nwapa, Oputa, Obi, Arinze, Okere, Ukegbu, Anyaoku, Nwabueze, Okonjo-Iweala, Emeagwali, Adichie, Nnaji*, and hundreds more who recorded their firsts in Nigeria and among the Black race.

Thus, Igbo people being a people exposed to hardworking, suffering, humiliation and hardship in Nigeria both in the past and present, they embraced indigenous entrepreneurship to overcome. According to Dana (1995) indigenous entrepreneurship is a self-employment based on indigenous knowledge. Indigenous Igbo entrepreneurs are communal and possess almost similar characteristics and motivation in terms of business. Igbo people are ambitious, achievement-minded, reliable, responsible, hardworking, competent, optimistic, innovative, aggressive, honest, creative, and they enjoy social recognition and growth (Kotey & Meredith, 1997).

The Igbo are the Nigerian industrialists, they believed to be the backbone of businesses in Nigeria and Africa; as a result, today they are referred to as the Japanese and Chinese of Africa. The practice of the right business strategy is the secret of business successfulness among Igbo entrepreneurs. These practices are embedded in the communal culture of Igbo. The Igbo entrepreneurial activities have facilitated an improved standard of living among the people in both rural and urban settings. Maliga (2013) and Udegbe (2013) revealed in their separate studies that the assets of the Igbo in Lagos state of Nigeria alone is about 74% of the total investments in Lagos, which is nothing less than N300 trillion, and twice as much is to be found in the Federal Capital territory of Abuja: about N600 trillion, while in Kano and Kaduna, in the northern part of Nigeria, Igbo investments run up to N10 trillion, respectively.

Today Igbo people are all over the globe doing remarkable things and operating at the cutting edge in every area of human endeavours. The profile of the Igbo in Nigeria, the largest Black country on earth, suggests

a unique group almost tailor made to play a leading role in the emancipation of the Black race. The Igbo are bold and adventurous, enterprising, ingenious and highly adaptable. Nigerians have always been conscious of the unique character of the Igbo, shown by how quickly they dominated commerce, and the media all over the country, as well as how they took over the pro-independence groups and movements in the country. Thus, Agazie (2012) comments on the developmental capabilities of the Igbo entrepreneurs, and adds that “Governor Gabriel Suswan of Benue State of Nigeria notes, therefore, that any State government that ignores the Igbo does so at the risk of its economy”. In support of this, Olanrewaju (1999) argues that one of the reasons for the lack of development which he called “development hiccups” African countries and in Nigeria in particular “is that the Igbo entrepreneurs have not been given enough chance to participate in the development process”.

Attitude of Igbo People towards Wealth in Nigeria

The Igbo world is not a bed of roses. It is a world of struggles that begins from birth, noticeable in the cry of a little child as soon as it is born. Circumscribed to the world, the human person is faced by difficulties and frustrations. Diseases like small pox, aids, leprosy, malaria, etc., are present vying for a central place in the human person. This makes survival in a tolerable way a major concern for the Igbo people to the extent it determines their attitude to wealth (Oguejiofor, 2010). Igbo race places high value for wealth and have high quest to survive wherever they find themselves in. The Igbo people are outstanding in pursuing opportunities to become active economic individuals despite the meager resources within their control. All these are in an attempt to satisfy their deep rooted needs, interests and become great in life. And to be truly Igbo is to belong by birth and action; to participate in Igbo beliefs, ceremonies, activities and to feel at home in this universe (Ogugua, 2003). They are aspired to develop communities where they found themselves. So economic gesture is what Igbo people prizes and belief that wealth reaches home.

In order to be part of this reality, Igbo people everywhere struggle to transform economic resources within their control from an area of lower to an area of higher productivity and greater yield deriving strength from Igbo philosophy of life reflecting in the expression *Onye ruo, O rie* (He who works must enjoy the *aku*). In all circumstances therefore, Igbo people give meaning to prevalent socio-economic reality, achieving performance by harmonizing their existence with the difficulties and contradictions prevalent in the environment. It is with this nature in them, Igbo people excelled more than their counterparts in any environment.

The Igbo people are bold and adventurous, enterprising, ingenious and highly adaptable. People outside Igbo land have always been conscious of the unique character of the Igbo people, shown by how quickly they dominated commerce, and the media all over the country, as well as how this wealth such as land, houses, businesses and among others scattered all over the world.

In fact, the Igbo people view wealth as a means of gaining social prestige and acquiring social befitting rank. This stems from Igbo cosmological view of human existence encapsulated in their proverb *Nwata kwochaa aka, o soro Okenye rie nri* (A child that washes his hands dines with elders). As a result, the Igbo man give high quest for money to the extent that most them seen money as life. Blackpanda (2015), observed that Igbo belief that no money no friendship, no money no business. He also discovered that the problem is not only domestic but also international. A number of prominent Igbo men have brought the name Igbo to disrepute for money. Recall the money game between Victor Umeh and Chekwes Okorie both of APGA? Ever wondered why over 50 candidates in the PDP signified interest in being governor of Anambra state in the 2007 elections? Is that possible in the North or West? Surely, “I before others” notice the massive graft and general looting among Igbo governors and local administrators in all Igbo states? The provocative statistics is there to show of Igbo youth who drop out of school in quest for money. In fact Prince Morocco Maduka’s hit “Ego- Money Palava” captures the whole essence of the existence of a typical Igbo man. Money is his beauty, his house is fine it is money, his wife is beautiful it is money, his

car is big it is money”, Therefore he must strive hard to acquire money by whichever means possible if he is not be labeled a weakling or coward among his peers.

The Way Forward

Firstly, the Igbo must extricate themselves from the current debilitating Nigerian polity or take control of their destiny within that environment. With their collective creativity and ambition, their large population and ubiquity, and their pedigree, they must focus on the goal of restoring their dignity because *Onye ulo yana ere oke anaghi achu oke*. They must also make the development of their homeland a priority, which is the key to their survival in Nigeria and their relevance in the world.

Secondly, at home, the five Igbo governors must be at the forefront of those demanding for a Sovereign National Conference in Nigeria to deal with the plethora of inhumanity the Igbo are made to endure in Nigeria. As leaders, should they not be encouraging their people to relocate their vital businesses to Igbo land as they provide the critical infrastructure and security for such investments? If Nigerians can go to China, Taiwan and Japan and other places to import products, surely they can come to Igbo land for those same products. The governors should also explain why they really hate Igbo land.

Thirdly, another necessary step the Igbo must take towards their renaissance is to debunk the philosophy of nonchalant individualism. By this I mean the current non-reference to the collective welfare in the pursuit of individualism. In the past, the Igbo pursued individualism only within the context of communal aesthetics, which was only fully expressed in overall unity of purpose and progress. Aloneness in Igbo was never a positive thing, which was why ostracism was a stringent punishment among the Igbo. Similarly, the exclusive solitary political and economic attitudes now prevalent among the Igbo can never lead to the full realization of their potential.

Fourthly, the people must demand accountability from Igbo leaders like Governor Ohakim and other Custodians of public resources in Igbo land. As Ojukwu rightly charged the Igbo must “march forward without fear, but with a commitment to assert ourselves fully in the building of a nation that works for all and not for some of its citizens.”

Methodology

This study employed survey research design to investigate Igbo people and the Nigeria economy; a way forward. The area of the study covered all the five states in South Eastern Nigeria. They include Anambra, Ebonyi, Enugu, Abia and Imo states. The used questionnaire as the instrument of data collection. The population of the study was 850 participants from various towns in five states that make up South Eastern Nigeria. The participant consisted of civil servants, traders, business men and women. Random sampling method was used to select 17 people from each of the five states in South Eastern Nigeria as sample, thus given the total sample size to be 85 respondents. Questionnaire was used as the instrument for data collection. Strongly agree (SA), Agree (A), disagree (D) and strongly disagree, very high extent (VHE), high extent (HE), low extent (LE) and very low extent (VLE) were used to answer the research questions. The instrument was validated by two experts in the Department of Igbo, African and communication studies, Faculty of Education in Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka. Corrections made by the experts were collected before the questionnaire was administered. A pre-test made was used to test the reliability of the instrument. Five copies of questionnaire was administered to respondents in Asaba Delta State which is not part of the study area. Coach Apha statistics was used to compute the data. The result obtained was 0.76 showing that the instrument was reliable enough to conduct the study. The researcher administered 85 copies of questionnaires to the respondents with the help of one research assistant. The researcher administered the questionnaires to the respondents while the research assistant educated the respondents on how to filled the questionnaire. The exercise took one week and at the end, out of 85 copies questionnaire administered to respondents, 80 copies were filled properly, retrieved used for data analysis. Tables and

mean statistics were used to analyzed the data. The point for accepting the mean response of the respondents was 2.5.

Results and Discussion

Table 1: Mean responses on the experiences of Igbo people in Nigeria.

S/N	Items	SA	A	D	SD	X	Remarks
1	Poverty after civil war.	40	39	1	0	3.5	Agreed
2	Damaged infrastructures.	43	37	0	0	3.5	Agreed
3	Hardship and famine.	36	34	6	4	3.3	Agreed
4	Discrimination.	42	38	0	0	3.5	Agreed
5	Genocide.	39	39	1	1	3.4	Agreed
Grand total						3.4	Agreed

Table 1 above, analyzed data on experienced encountered in Nigeria by the Igbo people. In the opinion of the respondents. Igbo people suffered poverty, damaged infrastructures, hardship, famine, discrimination and genocide in the hand of other ethnic groups in Nigeria. This was in the responses of the respondents that ranked as 3.5, 3.5, 3.5, 3.4 and 3.3 respectively.

Table 2: Mean responses on the extent does entrepreneurial spirit of Igbo people help them survive in the mist of economic hardship in Nigeria.

S/N	Items	SA	A	D	SD	X	Remarks
1	The spirit of entrepreneurship made Igbo people see themselves as a collective group who work together on the basis of their common ancestry, history, language and religion.	37	36	7	0	3.4	VHE
2	It gave them self-employment based on indigenous knowledge.	35	35	5	5	3.3	VHE
3	Communal possession characteristics motivated them in terms of business in the beginning.	38	38	3	1	3.4	VHE
4	Ambitious, achievement-minded, reliable, responsible, hardworking, competent, optimistic, innovative, aggressive, honest and creative spirit helped them outgrow the circumstances of Nigeria economy.	38	37	3	2	3.4	VHE
5	Their entrepreneurial activities have facilitated an improved standard of living among the people in both rural and urban settings.	44	36	0	0	3.6	VHE
Grand total						3.4	VHE

In table 2 above, our data analysis indicated that the grand of the respondents was 3.4 greater than 2.5. This shown that in the opinions of the respondents that the spirit of entrepreneurship made Igbo people see themselves as a collective group who work together on the basis of their common ancestry, history, language and religion at a mean of 3.4, it gave them self-employment based on indigenous knowledge with 3.3 mean, that their communal possession characteristics motivated them in terms of business in the beginning at 3.4 points, Ambitious, achievement-minded, reliable, responsible, hardworking, competent, optimistic, innovative, aggressive, honest and creative spirit helped them outgrow the circumstances of Nigeria economy at 3.4 mean and that their entrepreneurial activities have facilitated an improved standard of living among the people in both rural and urban settings at 3.6 point. So the extent to which entrepreneurial spirit of Igbo people help them survive in the mist of economic hardship in Nigeria is very high as non of the respondent scored less than 3.0.

Table 3: Mean responses on the attitudes of Igbo people towards wealth creation in Nigeria.

S/N	Items	SA	A	D	SD	X	Remarks
1	Igbo people place high value for wealth and have high quest to survive wherever they found themselves.	39	39	1	1	3.4	Agreed
2	The Igbo people are outstanding in pursuing opportunities to become active economic individuals despite the meager resources within their control.	42	38	0	0	3.5	Agreed
3	Economic gesture is what Igbo people prizes and belief that wealth reaches home.	38	38	3	1	3.4	Agreed
4	Igbo people perceived wealth as a means of gaining social prestige and acquiring social befitting rank.	38	37	3	2	3.4	Agreed
5	Igbo belief that no money no friendship, no money no business.	36	34	6	4	3.3	Agreed
Grand total						3.4	Agreed

Table 2 above, analyzed data on the attitudes of Igbo people towards wealth creation in Nigeria. From our data analysis, the result indicated that Igbo people place high value for wealth and have high quest to survive wherever they found themselves with a mean point of 3.4, that Igbo people are outstanding in pursuing opportunities to become active economic individuals despite the meager resources within their control 3.5, that economic gesture is what Igbo people prizes and belief that wealth reaches home at 3.4 mean, Igbo people perceived wealth as a means of gaining social prestige and acquiring social befitting rank 3.4 and that they believed that no money no friendship, no money no business with 3.3 point.

Discussion of Findings

The discussion of the findings of this study is based on the result of the data analysis in table 1, 2 and 3. In table 1, it was found that Nigeria economy affected the Igbo people tremendously as the after mate of Biafra war left the people in poverty, massive destruction of their infrastructures, hardship, famine, humiliation, genocide and discrimination. It was found that the spirit of entrepreneurship made Igbo people see themselves as a collective group who work together on the basis of their common ancestry, history, language and religion. Also, it was observed in table 2 that Igbo people are outstanding in pursuing opportunities to become active economic individuals despite the meager resources within their control. Morealso, it was found in table 3 that the Igbo entrepreneurial activities have facilitated an improved standard of living among the people in both rural and urban settings.

Conclusion

Igbo people are known to be industrious. That the economy of Nigeria is booming the greater labour of Igbo people. The Igbo people are strong and determine people to succeed. They desire to live high and this is not without money. As a result, Igbo people held wealth highly and do not joke with wealth and this defined their attitude toward wealth. The past and present situation surrounding Igbo people in Nigeria affected them tremendously. The aftermath of Biafra war left the people in poverty, massive destruction of their infrastructures, hardship, famine, humiliation, genocide and discrimination, but thank God, that Igbo people are people with unique characteristics from nature. They are determined people that never accepted to be defeated by situations. They are enterprising in character and hardworking. They love themselves, their neighbours and develop whichever environment they found themselves. They dared to survive in every environment without odds. Today that spirit of self-determination has promoted Igbo people to be highly achieved in Nigeria and internationally and excelling more that their counterparts. The study concluded that the Igbo people entrepreneurial activities have facilitated an improved standard of living among them and by extension to the whole nation. Thus, for continuation of Igbo people existence and subsequent survival in Nigeria, it is recommended that Igbo people should return to their former identity and values that distinguished them from other ethnic groups in Nigeria by upholding communal living and love for

themselves. They should have one mind to legally constrain all anti- forces and agents against them in Nigeria by exposing them and their machinations to the international laws that govern civilized humanity. They should be united and seek for independence of their own nation as despite their contributions to the development of Nigeria through trade, entrepreneurship, job and wealth creation, they are still marginalized in the umbrella of Nigeria.

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