

The Norwegian Church Mission and Promotion of Agriculture in Ikwo, 1962-1982

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Abstract

The pacification of Ikwo territory in 1905-1906 resulted in the coming of various Christian Missionary groups. In 1936, the Scottish Presbyterian Missionaries arrived Ikwo and subsequently, established the Norwegian Church Agricultural Project (NORCAP), in cooperation with the Norwegian Church Missionaries, in 1962. Prior to that effect, subsistence farming system has dominated Ikwo clan up to the middle 1900, when the influx of the Norwegian Church Agriculturists introduced a new farming system that replaced the old subsistence farming system. This marked the beginning of mechanization and agricultural industries in Ikwo. It led to the introduction of fertilizer chemical, crop trial and seed/plant multiplication, community group farms, cooperatives, training and re-training of farmers, expatriate's services, animal husbandry, nutritional services, social services and recreational services. Hence, this work is an attempt to explore the activities and impacts of NORCAP to the development of Ikwo economy, in a historical perspective. The scope of this study covers a period of twenty years, from 1962-1982. The reason for this scope is that the Norwegian Church Agricultural Project (NORCAP), was officially established in 1962, by the Presbyterian Missionaries, in alliance with the Norwegian Missionaries, which marked the transition from subsistence to commercial farming in Ikwo, through a mechanized system. In 1982, the Anambra State government, in agreement with the Presbyterian Church, took over NORCAP and subsequently converted the NORCAP headquarters to Anambra State College of Agriculture and Ikwo Local Government Headquarters. The method adopted in the study combines both descriptive and historical narrative. Qualitative research methodology is used in the interpretation and analysis of verifiable information collected *from both primary, secondary and tertiary sources*.

Key Words: Ikwo, Pacification, Norwegian, Missionaries

Introduction

As early as March 1905, the British explorers advanced into the regional territory of Ikwo. This was masterminded by Major Crawford Cockburn, who was the District Officer of the Obubra Hill District in the Calabar Province. His emissaries advanced to Ikwo land through Cross River, to link Akataka Inyimegu. However, after several protests and attack on the emissaries and Christian missionaries who tried to establish Church in Ikwo since 1905, the Scottish Presbyterians finally established their mission in 1936. As clarified by Ovuoba, he states that:

The first Church to arrive in Ikwo land is the Presbyterian Church in the year 1936. The Church owned its rise from Scotland. Although, when the Church arrived in Nigeria, it was first established in Calabar, from Calabar to Unwana in Afikpo before it finally arrived in Ezeke, in Ikwo land...¹

The successful establishment of the Church of Scotland-Presbyterian Church, paved way for the influx of other missions into the area. The Norwegian Church Aid, from Norway, in partnership with the already established Presbyterian Church, extended her tentacles to Ikwo. The outcome of this partnership is the establishment of the Norwegian Church Agricultural Project (NORCAP) in Ikwo, fully funded by the Norwegian Church Relief. NORCAP was established for the spiritual, moral, socio-economic and rural development of the area.

However, it is on record that before the advent of the Christian Missionaries, Ikwo economy relied on agriculture, trade and local industries. Ikwo economy originally revolved around agriculture, both men and women joined mutual aid group for farming work. An Ikwo man or woman who does not engage in farming is termed a lazy man or woman and not regarded as a true Ikwo person. This perception is

corroborated in the popular adage that eka ejaeja ebuta je onu manumanu (soily hands, leads to oily mouth)

The land mass of Ikwo is very plain, and enhance the cultivation of crops in two different seasons that existed in the area. However, this is because the area witnessed heavy down pour with relative low flooding during the rainy season and humidity in the dry season when people cultivate upland rice, cassava and yam. Thus, the weather and climate in Ikwo encourages good agricultural production to which Ikwo economy has blossomed. Therefore, the topography and vegetation of Ikwo have made a great significance to their economic prosperity, but this did not come to fore until 1900. However, Ikwo economy was based on subsistence agricultural production up till the middle of 20th century, but the influx of the Christian Missionaries/Norwegian Agriculturalist which is central to the 20th century economic development of Ikwo, exposed her economy to commercial farming system.²

They are several establishments of various missionary organizations, through which they were able to influence the socio-economic status quo of Ikwo people. Presently, the economic stay of Ikwo is basically agriculture. Hence, mechanized system of agriculture initiated by the Norwegian Missionaries. Some of these establishments are, but not limited to schools, hospitals and agro-based institution. The Rural Improvement Mission Hospital (RIMH), established by the Presbyterian Church of Scotland, in Ndiagu Echara, hitherto remains the most outstanding, functional and effective hospital in Ikwo LGA. Folk Technical College, now Folk Polytechnic, established by the Church of Netherland, is affirmed one of the biggest colleges that has notured a lot of personalities of high pedigree in Ikwo. It also served as an extension of NORCAP. All these establishments are linked to the era of missionary activities in Ikwo.

An excursion to all the communities that make up Ikwo, reveals the presence of dams, forest reserved areas, and farm settlements of similar structures and arrangements, said to have been put in place by different missionary organization that unilaterally operated under the Christian Missionary Society (CMS). Presently, Ikwo is the highest rice producing local government in Ebonyi State and South-Eastern part of Nigeria. Most of the renowned scholars and expertise from this area are agro-based, and have distinguished themselves in this field of study.

However, the crux of this study is the activities of the Norwegian Church Missionaries and the establishment of the Norwegian Church Agricultural Project (NORCAP) in Ikwo, by Christian Missionaries from Norway, in alliance with the Presbyterian Church (Church of Scotland). Though their major purpose was to introduce Christianity to the people of Ikwo who were traditionalists. This purpose was widely achieved, but turned out to be more beneficial to the agricultural development and socio-economic life of Ikwo people. Most of the successful people in Ikwo presesntly, are products and trainees of NORCAP. They are mainly into farming, forestry, fishery, piggery, poultry and various kinds of plantations, in large quantities. All these people credit their successes to NORCAP, in appraisal of their impacts in Ikwo.

Location and Geography of Ikwo

The geography of Ikwo Noyo is not much separated from that of Ebonyi state in general. In that, it is the largest local government area among the thirteen (13) Federal Local Government Areas in the state.³ The headquarters of Ikwo Local Government Area is Onuebonyi Echara. But at present, Ikwo Local Government Area has been subdivided into six (6) major Development Centers, which include: Ikwo South, Ikwo Central, Ndufu Ikwo, Ikwo East, Ikwo South-East, and Ikwo Development Centre. Ikwo is a gregarious society that is geographically found in the East of Abakaliki. The weather and temperature are very humid that strangers often find non adaptive. The people are very hospitable and accommodative who are often ready to maintain inter-group relationship with their neighbours.⁴ According to Ovuoba, cited in Egbe opines that: Ikwo lies between Longitude 8.05⁰ East and Latitude 6.0⁰ North and has an Altitude of 91.44m above sea level. He further stated that Ikwo Noyo has an average rainfall of 195⁰mm per annum, with a daily temperature of 35⁰c maximum and 25⁰c minimum.⁵ Ikwo has a common boundary with the people of Izzi in the North and Osopo in the North-East. Across

the South and South-East lies the Cross-River which forms a natural boundary between Ebonyi and Cross-River State of Nigeria.

They are bound to the Western side by the people of Ezza, to the East by the Nsobo of the lower Cross-River and to the North and South by the Izzi. Ikwo is said to be one of the people that fiercely resisted the British imperialism for sixteen years before they were eventually subdued in 1918, which marked the last colonial war and the last Igbo group to be conquered.⁶ Ikwo land is geographically and naturally divided into two (2) parts by the Ebonyi River making each to refer to the other as “Ndu Azu Ebonyi” meaning People of the other side of Ebonyi. By virtue of naming, the division should be referred to as Eastern Ikwo and Western Ikwo. While the East is enriched with agricultural production with little or no flood, the West suffers a high rate of flood with little agricultural products. Despite this natural disaster, Ikwo land is fertile and very arable for all kinds of agricultural products. Thus, farming is the major occupation of the people of Ikwo Local Government Area, mostly known for the cultivation of variety of crops, such as rice, yam, cassava, sweet potatoes, groundnuts, maize, vegetables and palms oil in commercial quantities. The area is also endowed with a number of mineral resources such as limestone, lead, salt, laterite and sharp white sand. Other economic enterprises undertaken by residents of Ikwo include mining, trade, and palm wine tapping. Little wonder the Ebonyi State Government mapped out industrial clusters in Ikwo Local Government.

Ikwo area has so much water during the rainy season due to its lowness. This water drains and dries up in the dry season beginning from December every year, leaving only stagnant water dam and holes dug in the bigger streams.⁷ Ikwo is culturally rich, they respect and worship their ancestors and gods. This is periodically done beginning from August to March every year in order to show appreciation to those deities who they believe have come to bless them and their farm products. In other words, reverence to ancestors is done to show interaction and keeping a close contact with their ancestors. Within this period, people come together for merriment and cultural display. Therefore, it is a Feast that attracts well-wishes from far and near.

Ebonyi River joining with Cross-River waters, settles at Ikwo land greatly. This made Ikwo the most fertile land within Abakaliki and throughout the Northern Igbo region. The evidence is the high standard of living and affluence displayed by the people when they turn out annual rice sales and smile to the banks in the process.⁸ The above statement is meant to tell you how abundant agricultural produce is in the area called Ikwo. It is also trying to tell us that the cause of its fertility depended upon the joining of the two great rivers which are said to have surrounded them. Furthermore, Ikwo belongs to the general vegetation of the North-Eastern Igbo region, which is characterized by forest belt and swampy land. The forest which is thickest in the swampy river banks stretched along the main streams of the rivers of the Cross River, Itigidi River, Ebonyi River, etc; which slightly demarcates them from their Izzi brothers. Hence, Ikwo Noyo is a very large area covering about 5,900 square kilometers, with a population of 214,969 (excluding ages 0 to 9) as per the 2006 National Population Census and twenty federal electoral wards. It is traditionally divided into five (5) autonomous principal communities, which according to seniority includes Unweka, Alike, Mgbabu, Echara and Okpuitumo. These communities have further metamorphosed into twelve (12) sub-communities. Each autonomous community is independent of the other, whereas common issues are collectively settled. Ikwo is said to be one of the Igbo that fiercely resisted the British imperialism for sixteen years (1902-1918) before they were eventually subdued.

The Establishment/Birth of NORCAP

The Norwegian Church Agricultural Project (NORCAP), was an agricultural institution established at Onuebonyi Echara, in Ikwo Local Government Area, in the then East Central State of Nigeria, in 1962, in cooperation with the then Governor of Eastern Nigeria, Dr. Akanu Ibiam. It was formulated by the Norwegian Church Aid, in cooperation with the Nigerian government and the Presbyterian Church of Nigeria (PCN); and registered under the United Nations Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO), as a “Freedom from Hunger” Campaign Project. NORCAP was an agricultural development project, sponsored and financed by the Norwegian Church Relief, with Norway annual input worth one hundred and sixty thousand naira as at November 6, 1977.⁹

Tracing the origin of NORCAP in Ikwo, F.O. Nweke affirms that on the arrival of the Norwegian Church Missionaries in Ikwo, they sought to meet individuals, families and groups in a bid to preach the gospel and possibly convert them to Christianity. The first attempted place of contact with the people was always in the market premises. On the contrary, they could not establish a strong ground of communication with the people within the market premises. The people were more focused on buying and selling and could not pay attention to the missionaries. This made it difficult to build a homogenous trait with the people.¹⁰ Hence, could not flow effectively with them.

However, the Norwegian Missionaries observed that the people were always in their various farms and resolved to meet them, both individuals, communal groups and Age Grades in their various farms, where either cultivation, weeding or harvesting were taking place, depending on the season. They began to suggest to them better methods of farming for huge harvest. The people were captivated, developed interest and paid maximum attention to them.¹¹

...the missionaries were always coming to our farms to teach our parents a better method of farming and even joined hands in the farming process. They became good friends with our parents and this made it possible for our parents to let us out in a meeting with them. They gathered us under trees as children, every evening and thought us the Bible. That was how some of us became Christians and members of the Presbyterian Church at a very tender age. The good relationship between the Norwegian Church Missionaries and our people started in our farms.¹²

Similarly, According to Aloh Jonathan Ejike,

The activities of the Norwegian Church Agricultural Project (NORCAP) in Ikwo land were what prompted the attention of many Ikwo elites and farmers into Christianity, who were moved by the urge to develop actively in the modern system of farming hence, its growth in Ikwo society.¹³

Surprisingly, the Norwegian Church Missionaries began to enjoy an unexpected attention and audience from the people. That gave them the impression that they were on the right track. They shared themselves in groups to facilitate their missions in that area. Each group headed to their catchment areas as allotted to them, to meet farmers in their various farms. This continued as it yielded positive results to their missionary activities and the indigenous people found it beneficial too.¹⁴

Subsequently, their constant engagements in farming activities with our people availed them the opportunity to understudy and explore the nature and potentials of the soil. In subsequent years, the output of their farming method began to manifest to the chagrin of the indigenous people. Many people who did not pay attention or subscribed to their own system of farming, began to draw nearer to them, just to learn more about their farming skills.¹⁵

However, around 1950s, the missionaries began to organize an agricultural class for our people, called Agricultural Group. In this class, they groomed both the young and old farmers on how to modernize their farming system. Though, this does not officially mark the establishment of Norwegian Church Agricultural Project (NORCAP), but can be said to be the root. These groups (Agricultural Class) formed the bases on which NORCAP was officially established in 1962, with its headquarters at Onuebonyi Echara.¹⁶

However, haven settled and spent quality time in Ikwo, the Norwegian Missionaries understood the commitment of Ikwo people to agricultural dispositions and the potentiality of their agricultural prowess. Thus, the Missionaries decided to blend in effectively, by innovating their agricultural system and structures in line with the modern method of farming. Their interest was to capture the attention of Ikwo people, and subsequently draw them closer.¹⁷ This they were able to achieve by taking decisive steps, most importantly, going into agreement with the people of Ikwo.

Agreement for NORCAP

The Norwegian Church Agricultural Project (NORCAP), actually came into existence with an agreement of the representatives of Arumgbala, Amankpu and Nduche Families of Echara-Ikwo, as follows: Chukwu Agashi, Nwesuzo Ukwuoru, Nte Oru, Nwakpu Eze, Chief Eche Onele Ekoyo Amiara and Usan Iso (The lawful Attorneys of Church of Scotland Trust, on behalf of Norwegian Church Agricultural Mission), and N. Eme, (Minister of Religion, Afikpo). In the presence of J. W. Leach (Justice of Peace). Signed and forwarded by M. O. Nkang for Divisional Officer for Abakaliki, signed, sealed and delivered by Alexander George Smervilie on 10th January, 1962.¹⁸ Hence, the official establishment of Norwegian Church Agricultural Project, at Onuebonyi Echara, in Ikwo Local Government Area of the present day Ebonyi State, on 10th January, 1962. The land lease agreement reads thus:

We the undersigned names have unanimously agreed to lease ninety four (94) acres of land to the Church of Scotland Trust, unbehalf of the Norwegian Church Agricultural Project, at the cost of five pounds annually. In the project, the boys and girls in Ikwo will be given practical training by offering them employment.¹⁹

One of the notable agreements, as contained therein, is that the boys and girls in Ikwo, will be given practical training, by offering them employments. NORCAP did not only engage in the main areas for which it was established and the agreement therein, but went extra-mile, engaging in other activities for which the Ikwo people, the neighbouring local government areas and states enjoyed are still enjoying up till date. Its major activities cut across many aspects of life, including Christian religion, agriculture, economy, socio-cultural activities.²⁰

NORCAP as an agro-rural development project, was sponsored financially by Norwegian church relief. According to E. O. Nwanchor, the Norwegians in preparation for its final exit from Nigeria, as it is a humanitarian organization; could not go commercial, but completely handed over the ownership and management of NORCAP to the Presbyterian Church in 1977, being her closest allied with the same vision for the people.²¹

By 1982, the then Anambra state government entered an agreement with the Presbyterian Church to take over the ownership of NORCAP on the 5th day of March 1982.²² This agreement became necessary, as the Presbyterian Church desired to hand over the Project to Anambra State Government. The terms and conditions of the hand over are well captured in the agreement between the Trustees of the Presbyterian Church of Nigeria and Anambra State Government. Since then, it has continued to grow into stages of higher institutions of learning. Sequence to the agreement, the Anambra State Government went ahead to enact a law to establish the Anambra State College of Agriculture, Echara Ikwo, to replace the defunct NORCAP, in the year, 1982.²³

The Activities and Impacts of NORCAP in Ikwo

The establishment and contribution of the Norwegian Church Agricultural Project (NORCAP) to the development of Ikwo, right from the time of its inception in 1962, till 1982, cannot be over emphasized. The advent of NORCAP was a catalyst to the economic development of Ikwo, mostly on agricultural bases. Some scholars attributed the economic development of Ikwo to the coming of NORCAP, such scholars like S.A Amiara and H.U Jacob maintains that:

by the mid-1990, the contacts with the Norwegian Church Agriculturalists had skyrocketed their (Ikwo) economy from subsistence agriculture to commercial production of based crops like: rice, maize, cassava, beans and many others. The influx of these agriculturists introduced modern irrigation system that is used to sustain crop growth during the dry season and also opened a new horizon of mechanized agriculture, based on extension services. This pattern of agricultural system formed the bedrock to which Ikwo economy flourished and became the food hub of Ebonyi State and the entire South East region.²⁴

However, as the name suggests, central to the impact and activities of NORCAP was Christian Evangelism, with Presbyterian Church as the Missionary in charge of the Chapel. In addition to that, as an Agricultural Project, NORCAP was divided into eight (8) sections, as follows: Administrative, Health, Plant, Home Economics, Gardening, Animal, Technical and Extension. Each section specialized in its areas as named, for effective outputs.²⁵ Moreover, other areas which NORCAP activities impacted to the agricultural development of Ikwo include; crop and seedling/plant multiplication, mechanization and Agricultural industry, Extension services, Infrastructural and Social Services, Training and Research, Christianity and so on.

Crop Trial and Seed/Plant Multiplication

Forty hectares of land within NORCAP, was mapped out for crop trials and seed/plant multiplication. Field crops with annual distribution of 250-300 bags of seed rice, was also embarked upon. Crop trials were also conducted on rice and cowpeas, for which NORCAP served as cooperators. Gardening and tree crops for which a nursery was established, was also in place. For instance, an orchard where citrus such as sweet orange, tangerine tangelo, lemon, lime, grape fruits, kings orange, mangosteen, shaddock star pear, guava, local star apple, cashew, Carissa, petanga cherry, mulberry, pomegranate, sour sop, carrot trees, Datepalm, sugar cane, bread fruits, etc, were grown. Other fruits grown were plantain, banana, pineapple, pawpaw etc. There were vegetable trees as Uturukpa, Oko, Nka, Uchakuru, Oboko, Agbo, Ubocha, Akpuruta, Akputo, and bitter leaves. They planted palm trees, tick, eucalyptus, etc. Flowers of many colours and ornamental trees were grown as well, for ornamental and economic purposes.²⁶

In the garden, vegetables such as fluted pumpkin, pumpkin, water melon, marrows, tomatoes, cabbage, cucumber, okra, onions, green, bitter leave, ginger, pepper such as long cayenne, chili pepper, sweet pepper, garden egg, carrot, etc were also grown. NORCAP trainees were exposed to all these crops and they learnt not only how to plant, maintain, harvest and market these crops, but also how to breed them. With the big dam constructed, water was reticulated for both irrigation and domestic use.²⁷

Yams of various varieties were grown and multiplied. Cassava was grown in large quantities, with new varieties multiplied and distributed to farmers as well. Sweet potatoes were also grown. Irish potatoes were equally grown in a small quantity. There were such other crops as cowpeas of different varieties, cotton and wheat which were experimented on, to test their viability in the place, etc. NORCAP in many occasions, supplied seed materials, both to Federal and State Governments, Relief Organizations, different projects, individuals' etc. Different fruit-trees, palms, shade trees, and ornamentals could also be sourced at NORCAP.²⁸ Almost all these crops mentioned above were first introduced in Ikwo by NORCAP.

Extension Services

Extension Service unit was also established as one of the NORCAP's main objectives, to raise the standard of living of the local farmers. These services were mostly in the areas of advice, loans and credit, Supply of seeds and other farm implements, Supply of fertilizer, Storing and Marketing. NORCAP's extension services were given to group farms, cooperatives and individual farmers as follows:

- a. **Group Farms:** The first two under NORCAP scheme, which was established in 1966, were EKCO Farm and ABC Farm. As at 1977, there were about 236 settlers on 24 group farms (6 farms established under the Rural Improvement Mission Inclusive). The farmland about 8 to 10 acres was given to the settlers free of charge by the villagers. The farmland was usually shifted between the settlers, so that each of them had his own portion. Water supplies store was in common for the whole settlers. There were also in addition to the above, schemes for individual farmers. A total revolving loan of fifty thousand naira (₦50,000) was invested then by NORCAP.
- b. **Cooperative:** NORCAP also played a great role in the formation of cooperative societies in Ikwo. Such cooperative societies were also supported, in form of extension services. Between 1966-1967, three cooperatives of rice farmers were started through the efforts of NORCAP. Within 1967, all of them had their own store buildings, partly financed by grant from NORCAP. It was these cooperatives that eventually with others, formed the then Ezzikwo Divisional Cooperative

Development Union and became more self-reliant that depended no more on assistance from NORCAP. As at 1/1/1974, there was an outstanding Net loan of three thousand nine hundred naira (#3,900).

- c. **Individual Farmers:** A scheme was also established for the purpose of providing extension services to individual farmers. These included especially ex-trainees of NORCAP and other interested farmers who had not gotten the opportunity to join group farms. Although it was not easy to attend to the individual farmers as it was to the group farmers, due to the scattered nature of their farms, they received as much attention as possible.²⁹

Training and Research

NORCAP established a training school where, Ikwo, Ezza and later Anambra, Imo and Cross River States young people were trained in general agriculture. Every year, not less than twenty Ikwo trainees were admitted into NORCAP Training School, where they were taught the following: Science, English Language, Plant Management, Farm Management, Bible Knowledge, Mathematics, Horticulture, Animal Science, Agricultural Mechanization, Geography, Hygiene and Nutrition. About one-third of a week was spent in theoretical training in the classroom, while the remaining period was for practical training in plant, gardening and animal sections. This lasted for one year and a graded NORCAP Diploma was awarded. Those who were intelligent and interested were offered additional one year training as Ex-trainees.³⁰

Those who were good in teaching area were given three years training and are either employed by the institution, other establishments or self-employed. Some whose parents or relations could afford it and those granted scholarship by NORCAP and some philanthropic individuals within and outside NORCAP, proceeded to post-primary schools for further studies. Accommodations were provided, books were free and allowances, ranging from three naira to four naira were paid monthly to assist the trainees.³¹

In the areas of scholarship, NORCAP awarded on scholarship programmes, in which Ikwo indigenes today benefited from. As at 1973, NORCAP was already sponsoring three students in the University of Nigeria, Nsukka and at the then Federal School of Agriculture, Umudike. Such personalities of Ikwo as Engr. Ede Igboke, Chief Nweke Anyingor, Elder Nwidagu Ayama were the first to benefit from the University education scholarship of NORCAP. Dr. Hyacinth Nworie, Late Valentine Iteshi, their Agric Assistant training at college of Agriculture, Umudike and others. In addition to that, many were being supported in secondary school and trade schools.³²

There were also Research works, which were carried out according to plans, from and in cooperation with research institutions in Nigeria (Ibadan, University of Nigeria Nsukka, Agricultural Development Agency (ADA), Ministry of Natural Resources and Agricultural Extension, Federal Ministry of Agriculture and School of Agric, Umudike) Breakthrough were recorded in rice-cultivation. Emphasis was put upon swamp rice, but in 1973/1974 season, upland rice was introduced. In the same year, trials on cowpea were introduced in the programme. Sixteen (16) varieties were tried. Altogether, about thirty (30) varieties were being tried within varieties of fruits and vegetables.³³

Infrastructural and Social Services

NORCAP did not limit her activities to agriculture, but extended to both infrastructural and social services. To enhance effective and efficient delivery of their services, the well-being of the people, NORCAP was able to put up infrastructural facilities. As at 1978, the following structures were developed at NORCAP headquarters:

- a. **Agricultural Unit:** This comprised technical/mechanizing section, plant section, Animal section, Gardening section, extension/Nutritional section. All the above mentioned sections had infrastructures and land allocated to them, including buildings, office and mechanical equipment.
- b. **Residential Quarters:** as at 1978, the institution could boast of the following residential quarters: five senior staff buildings, including one Presbyterian Ministers/Chaplain's residence, over eight intermediate/junior staff quarters, trainees (students) quarters, trainees' dormitory.

There were also guest houses, one administrative building, one assembly hall/auditorium, classroom blocks, book stores, chapels, electricity, water supply and so on. All were built for effective delivery of NORCAP services and for the good of Ikwo people.³⁴

NORCAP played a very great role in the maintenance and construction of roads, bridges and culverts in Ikwo. The project had earth machines, such as Bulldozer, grader, pay loader and compressing machines, with which so many roads were opened and maintained. Notable among such roads is the road from Ndufu Echara junction to Enyigba and Ugbodo Omege road. The Onuebonyi to Onigboji-Agubia road was also being maintained. Both the group farm internal roads and the roads leading to them were also constructed and maintained with the help of NORCAP.³⁵

Water supply was a very great problem in Ikwo, especially during the dry seasons, but for the intervention of NORCAP in provision of water. NORCAP embarked on digging of wells and dams in various communities and schools. With their Bulldozer machine, NORCAP embarked on construction of water dams in various villages/communities, with minimal contribution by the people. This solved water problem in many parts of Ikwo more than was the case with other local government areas within Abakaliki Zone. Such dams can be found at Ohatekwe Amegu, Ndegu Ezeke, Ndufu Echara, Omege Echara, Ekpeli, Ndufu Umota, Igweledohia, Amangvuru, etc. The people were also taught how to channel water to areas of more needs and dry season farming (irrigation) using available water. The Norwegian engineer was not only engaged on a full year for the construction and training of operators, but NORCAP provided other services as well. As part of its health projects, these dams were being disinfected against waterborne diseases such as guinea worm and epidemics.³⁶

NORCAP engaged in many social services. They carried out children relief programmes and aid to the handicapped. Children with deceased parents were often assisted to feed, access medicare and have at least primary education. The handicapped such as the lame, the dumb, deaf and the blind were assisted by sending them to craft schools and rehabilitation centers, such as Uturu, Obudu, and Oji-River Rehabilitation Centers. They also provided for the cripples, wheel chairs to aid their movements. Through this, many handicapped and children who have lost their parents were rehabilitated and were either employed by government or self-employed.³⁷

Mechanization and Agricultural Industries

NORCAP carried out mechanization of agricultural activities. A tractors hiring unit which was serving both group farms and others, was established through a grant from Norwegian Government. Two rice-mills and oil-press were established for processing some of the farm products of the area. There was also production of fruit juice in form of squash and supplies made to the urban areas such as Abakaliki and Enugu, for sale.³⁸

There was also a Technical Training Section (TTS) which gave knowledge on how to use different tools, metal-works, maintenance and repairs of different vehicles, engines and agricultural equipments, carpentry, plumbing, electrical electronics, fabrications and other activities. It helped individuals in establishing Tractor Units, with agricultural equipment and for transport purpose, rice-mills and oil press.³⁹

Provision of Fertilizer/Chemicals to Ikwo Farmers

Fertilizer was not only made available to Ikwo farmers through NORCAP, but they were also taught how to apply them. In the same vein, agricultural chemicals such as insecticides and herbicides were made available to farmers. All these went a long way in not only increasing the farm yields of the farmers, but in improving their general economic wellbeing. This accounts also for the high production community in the present Ebonyi state and beyond. Below are the types of education that were provided on fertilizer applications to Ikwo people, which was imbibed and still useful to the dominant farmers of Ikwo today.

- a. Nitrogen, for polishing crops and giving crops their natural green colour. It gives crops its vegetative growth, photosynthesis and yield. The sources of nitrogen include; Sulphate of Ammonia

(NH₄)₂ SO₄ which contains 20.6% of Nitrogen; Urea, containing 47% and above; Ammonia nitrate containing 35% and other sources of Nitrogen.

- b. Phosphorus, which is useful for plant germination, early growth, fruit formation and seed product. The sources of phosphorus are: Super phosphate, containing 14-18% phosphorus; double and triple super-phosphate, containing 32-48% of phosphorus; Rock phosphate containing 26-36% phosphorus. There are also other sources.
- c. Potash, which are useful for lowering fruit formation, formation of starches and formation of sugar. It is good for the growth of oil palm and coconut. The sources of potash are: Murriate of potash, containing 50-60% of potassium, sulphate of potash, containing 48% of potassium. Other sources of potash are burnt bunches of oil palm, etc.

The people were educated on formula of these elements as may be composed in any fertilizer and either the positive or negative effect on their crops. They were also taught the application methods and the type of crop for it, such as:

- a. Broadcasting method: this involves casting of fertilizer, before seeding, tilling the swamp or rice field.
- b. Placement method: Placement made on shallow ring opening made around the crop stand e.g. yam on either side or both sides e.g. maize inter-planted with yam.
- c. Drilling method: Applied in-between shallow groves between the plant rolls.
- d. Foliar method: Fertilizer is dissolved in water and applied directly to leaves of the crop and best used for vegetation.
- e. Single dose/split application: Single dose is for one application and is good for yam, cassava, potato and some other root crops. Split application is on two or more installments and may be more preferable for more yields.⁴⁰

Provision of Nutritional and Health Services

NORCAP played a great role in the sector of nutrition. The Home Economics Department specialized in this area. As a major among the subjects, a trainee was expected to be exposed to nutrition which was of a very great importance. The trainees were taught all aspects of nutrition that bothered on the wellbeing of human being. Nutrition was linked together with both agriculture and health work.⁴¹ It was aimed at getting the trainees imbibe the importance of nutrition for their health, families and the immediate communities.

Both for the trainees and in their extension services, NORCAP imparted this knowledge through simple lessons on nutrition and food-demonstrations. In their extension services, they sent message to villages who gathered in their village squares and the nutrition team visited to educate them. They were taught how to prepare balanced meals out of available materials within their localities. Since the people's staple food was dominated by yam, cassava and rice, emphasis were placed on how to vary them with food with more protein and vitamins. They were advised to eat beans, much vegetables, meat, fish and crayfish. Various types of vegetables were shown to them. They were taught how to use cassava leaves in cooking soup, after thorough squeezing and washing.⁴² The people were also taught the importance of starting some little family gardens for home consumption and for sales.

They also carried their services to schools where both the teachers and pupils were encouraged to establish school gardens, with a special school garden scheme to assist them. Pupils were taught nutrition, hygiene and introduced to tree crops and vegetable. Some seeds/seedlings were also supplied free of charge to schools both for economic and to check erosions and act as windbreaks.

It is pertinent to state that Ikwo people benefited immensely from this scheme within and after the Nigerian/Biafran civil war. This was because there were already many cases of Kwashiorkor in the place. Through this nutritional education and distribution of relief materials, such as milk of magnesia and garri-gabon as was called then, many soles were saved. These relief materials were distributed both at NORCAP, in schools and village when they visited for nutritional education.⁴³

NORCAP performed wonderfully on the area of health. Right from its first years of its existence, it started in small scale health work and expanded as the years went by. During and after the Nigerian civil war, attendance to NORCAP clinic increased. For instance, in 1970 alone, about 25,000 patients

attended the clinic. During the cholera epidemics in 1971, NORCAP, through her health personnel, assisted ministry of health, by vaccinating thirty thousand (30,000) people. A project utility bus was also converted in addition to a designed ambulance, with which those infected by the cholera were taken to General Hospital, Abakaliki, Itigidi and Matta Hospital, Afikpo. Mobile clinic services were also carried out for many years at Ekfunekfuna and Ntsobo Refugee Camps.⁴⁴

Furthermore, in finance and personnel, NORCAP in 1972, through a Norwegian Home Organization gave a special grant of fifty thousand naira (50,000), for the improvement and extension of a government health centre and maternity at Agubia. This was inclusive of the expenses of having a Norwegian doctor for a period of two years. The doctor extended his services to Government Health Center, Onueke, in addition to covering both NORCAP Clinic and Agubia Clinic.⁴⁵

Christianity

This may rather be said to be the major reason for NORCAP, if one should look at it from the other point of view. As the name goes, it was a Norwegian Church Agricultural Project, they combined evangelism with philanthropism, 'the spirit and the flesh'. There could have been no better way of spreading the gospel, than picking man from his stomach. A hungry man may not easily reconcile the goodness of Jesus Christ with his hunger, when being preached to. That man does not leave by bread alone, may not be for a typical African in the tropical region.⁴⁶ You may not blame him because, since he may be responding to the weather condition of the place.

Apart from employing a Rev. Minister as Chaplain of the Project, NORCAP got seriously involved in the evangelical work of the Presbyterian Church in Ikwo. In NORCAP, there were morning devotions for the workers of the project in the chapel, before moving to your place of assignment. Prayers from Monday to Friday in the chapel, was interdenominational. Roasters were drawn for preachers every morning, and attendance was compulsory for all workers, including trainees. Through this method, those who came there to fend for their living, also found themselves becoming Christians, weather they liked it or not. However, those who belonged to other denominations among the workers had the option of attending service in the individual denominations on Sunday.⁴⁸

The chaplain acted as both the spiritual director in the place and also visited the various Presbyterian Churches in Ikwo, to preach on scheduled days. So many Ikwo people got converted into the Church through NORCAP Evangelistic activities. Through their social and philanthropic activities, NORCAP also attracted and preached to many who probably might not have easily become Christians into becoming one. Spiritually, NORCAP could be said to have influenced a great deal, the growth of Christianity in Ikwo.⁴⁹

Conclusion

The coming of the Christian (Norwegian) Missionaries, who introduced the Norwegian Church Agricultural Project (NORCAP), in 1962, actually impacted positively on the agricultural development and economy of Ikwo. NORCAP brought a drastic transformation from subsistence agricultural based economy, to commercial farming system, through the introduction of rice crop seedlings and mechanized farming system. Farmers at this period were grouped and trained into cooperatives, group farms and individual farmers, with the best use of modern farming equipment, agricultural extension and irrigation method.

There was introduction of new species of rice crops such as mass, Gabon, 306, 301, R18, Vero 44, Vero 15 and inter 3 rice. However, the quality and quantity of rice production in Ikwo today, has contributed to the making of Abakaliki a commercial city, hence, its Slogan "Abakaliki Rice". Therefore, it is a fact to say that today, Ebonyi State, particularly Abakaliki axis, is known largely for Ikwo rice and as the food hub of South-East Nigeria. There were also new species of cassava like PMX, Panay, Donwarry. These crops flourished and became the best crops in Ikwo to which Abakaliki became the commercial food producing area hitherto.

However, NORCAP lasted till 1982, when it was handed over to Anambra State Government, by the Presbyterian Church of Nigeria. It was established with the purpose of developing Ikwo agriculturally and facilitating other developmental activities in the area. The impacts of NORCAP is enormous when we consider the level of development attained in Ikwo at that time. Firstly, it lifted Ikwo from subsistence farming to mechanized system. Tractor Units, Rice Mills, Garri-grading; Keeping credit scheme for members and working toward establishment of banking services in the area, through co-operative societies were brought to fore.

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