

Migrant Artisans-Host Community Relations in Agulu, Anaocha Local Government Area of Anambra State, 1970-2020

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Abstract

This study investigates the intricate nature and multifaceted dimensions characterizing the relationships between migrant artisans and the host community in Agulu, Anambra State, within the specified timeframe. The research illuminates the organizational structure and distinctive attributes of migrant unions prevalent in Agulu during the studied period. Frequently, the interaction between migrants and the host community manifests as contentious and strained, primarily rooted in the apprehension of the host populace regarding the perceived depletion of their limited resources due to competitive pressures posed by the migrants. Such adversarial interactions often impede the socio-economic vibrancy within the host community. Employing a historical analytical approach and drawing insights from a spectrum of primary and secondary information sources, this study discerns fluctuating relations between migrant artisans and the host community in Agulu, oscillating between harmonious coexistence and discordant encounters. Furthermore, an analysis of the reciprocal benefits accrued indicates a symbiotic nature of the relationship. However, the socioeconomic activities initiated by migrant artisans predominantly bolstered the host community's prosperity. The paper concludes that strategic initiatives aimed at enhancing relations between migrants and host communities can significantly catalyze socio-economic advancement. Additionally, it underscores the imperative nature of fostering migrant unions within host communities. Ultimately, the study refutes the apprehensions of host communities, contending that an amicable rapport with migrants yields greater benefits than adversarial relations.

Keywords: Migrant, Artisan, Host Community, Relations, Agulu, Socio-economic Growth

Introduction

Migration is an enduring aspect of human civilization, intrinsically linked to the fundamental need for survival and the pursuit of improved living conditions. In scholarly discourse, migration stands as a pivotal human activity shaped by the inexorable quest for enhanced livelihoods amidst adversities. Certain academics contend that the pattern of migration driven by economic factors within Nigeria, particularly among the Igbo community, began during the onset of colonial administration, evolved over the colonial era, and persists to the present day.¹ Over the annals of history, humanity has incessantly traversed geographical boundaries driven by multifaceted determinants. Migration, inherently planned yet often propelled by conflicts, wars, and natural calamities, encapsulates the essence of human adaptability and resilience in the face of adversity.

Migration, which is the movement of people from one place to another to settle, either permanently or temporarily at a new location² is a global phenomenon, it stands as a pervasive global phenomenon encompassing diverse scales - from solitary journeys to mass movements spanning extensive distances. It involves a substantive shift from one geographic or societal context to another, entailing either a transient or enduring alteration in residency.³ Therefore, migration isn't an abstract abstraction; it materializes in response to a myriad of factors, whether advantageous or adverse. Economic aspirations, environmental exigencies, political instability, and socio-cultural imperatives emerge as potent catalysts compelling human mobility. Political turbulence and violence may coerce individuals into exile while deteriorating land fertility and agricultural yields might necessitate environmental adaptations elsewhere.

Religious convictions, alongside adverse natural conditions such as droughts, floods, earthquakes, erosions, landslides, and apprehensions of perceived or real persecution, significantly contribute to the

impetus for relocation. Such migration may assume a transient or permanent character, denoting a settled tenure of more than a decade at a specific locale with the intent to establish lifelong residence. Statistical insights from 2019 estimated approximately 272 million international migrants globally,⁴ constituting roughly 3.5% of the global populace, with a nearly equal distribution between genders. Correspondingly, a UN report from 2009 indicated approximately 740 million internal migrants, where over 21 million Africans had resettled within the continent.⁵ The motivations for internal migration predominantly revolve around employment, education, and familial affiliations, while factors like conflicts, disasters, or persecution compel certain displacements, such as those experienced by refugees and internally displaced persons. Some types of natural disasters that elicit migration include but are not limited to adverse physical conditions such as floods, landslides, drought, and fear of being persecuted aid migration.⁶

“Migrant artisans” which is part of migrant laborers, “a term that denotes workers whose permanent homes are in their ethnic communities, and who will return there at frequent intervals throughout their working lives”,⁷ despite their longstanding presence in Agulu, comprehensive research delineating their contributions to the local economy remains scant. These artisans encompass a spectrum of skilled laborers - from decorators, tillers, and hairdressers to bricklayers, auto mechanics, and phone repairers - embodying individuals whose craftsmanship hinges on traditional skills and resources. Proficiency in these crafts demands prolonged periods of learning, often spanning months or years.

This study concentrates on migrants residing in Agulu, specifically engaged in skilled occupations and reliant on these skills for their daily sustenance. It endeavors to ascertain the intricacies of their interactions with the local populace, delineating the impact of these relations on both migrants and indigenous inhabitants. The dynamics between migrants and locals encompass a spectrum, ranging from collaborative endeavors to competitive coexistence and potential conflicts. The harmonious integration of migrants within their host community mitigates strained relations, thereby facilitating the realization of their initial motives for relocation. Ultimately, successful assimilation and adaptation within the adopted community serve as prerequisites for migrants to conduct their business or fulfill the purposes underpinning their relocation. Then in order to stay connected to their source areas, they formed migrant unions in Agulu, we shall take a look at some of them.

At this juncture, it is worthy to stress that the end of Nigeria-Biafra war in 1970(the take-off date of this essay) saw the in-flow and out-flow of migrants all in search of better economic opportunities as a result of the damages caused by the war. The study terminates in 2020, because the year was the height of the Covid-19 pandemic that saw to the near cessation of movements all over the world in order to contain the spread of the disease.

The rest of the paper is divided into four sections. The first section traces the history of the coming of migrant artisans to Agulu, the host community. The second section focuses on the nature of migrant-artisans-host community relations during the period of study. The third analyzes the impact or outcome of the relations the fourth is on the various migrant unions in Agulu and the last part is the conclusion.

Genesis of Migrant Artisans in Agulu

The migration of artisans to Agulu represents a culmination of sequential events rather than an abrupt occurrence. The initial wave of migrants, comprising both individuals and families, gravitated towards Agulu driven by diverse factors, including economic prospects, educational pursuits, and civil service transfers. In 1970, a lot of indigenes migrated out of Agulu immediately after the Nigeria-Biafra war while a lot of migrants came into the town. Subsequently, with the coming of President Shehu Shagari in 1980 to commission the Ronasco water drainage at Agulu erosion site, the number of migrant artisans spiked due to the construction activities going on during this period.

There was reduced in-flow of migrants during the Agulu crises (1992-2004) which was as a result of power tussle. It brought disunity, disharmony and created bad blood among blood relations. It also led to a split in the umbrella union of the town which is Agulu Peoples Union (APU). A new faction emerged-Agulu Development Union (ADU). The crises later on deepened along religious divide

especially between Catholics and Anglicans. This stalled growth in the town and no development achieved during this period.

However, more migrant artisans both local and international trooped into the town with the flag-off of Agulu Lake Hotel and Resort by Mr Peter Obi, the then governor of Anambra State and a worthy son of the soil in 2013. The project was handled by a Chinese company-Soy Groan Company Nigeria Limited. They employed a lot of skilled workers that saw to the completion of the project.

A second generation of migrants emerged, born to the initial migrants within Agulu, often assimilating to the extent of being indistinguishable from indigenous residents due to their profound understanding of Agulu's intricacies. They blended well with the locals and often times indistinguishable.

Nature of Migrant Artisan-Host Community Relations

A substantial portion of migrants actively integrate into the social and cultural fabric of Agulu, partaking in communal events. Notably, during the annual homecoming football competitions and customary festivities like New Year, Easter, New Yam, and Christmas celebrations, migrants, particularly youths, engage enthusiastically in the town's masquerade activities, symbolizing their alignment with local traditions.

However, tensions occasionally surface, particularly when migrants experience economic prosperity beyond the host community's expectations, triggering sentiments of envy and hostility.⁸ Instances of friction, such as the unfortunate incident during a Christmas celebration when a masquerade altercation led to a fatality, resulted in the prohibition of masquerades from participating in town occasions. Such occurrences have prompted contemplation within the Igwe's council (made up of the king and his cabinet members) to potentially restrict non-indigenous individuals from engaging in the masquerade cult, aiming to salvage its sanctity. Chizoba Nwachukwu concurs that envy and jealousy do occur, she stated that people normally like making hair at her place and a lot of customers wait for their turns at her shop while her neighbor, an indigene usually has fewer customers and this has led to hostility between them.⁹

Economically and otherwise, migrants encounter disadvantages within the host community due to restricted access to communal resources. This limitation engenders struggles between migrants and indigenous inhabitants, particularly in areas concerning economic trees like breadfruit and cashew, integral to locals' livelihoods. As Thomas Ibekwe said, "migrants struggle with the host community for these scarce resources of the community in which they use to fend for themselves and families."¹⁰ Ibekwe went further to state another reason for tension between host communities and migrants, he said it is in the area of economic trees that fruits such as breadfruit and cashew which are a source of income for the locals but those that migrated to Agulu are now fighting with the locals for the scarce resources. Agulu allows migrants and indigenes to go to the forest and pick ripe cashews to eat and sell. This stems from the fact that our forefathers knew that they were those without lands and so for all to eat of the fruits of the land, allowance was made for the poor and strangers to have a share. It should be noted that this is not the case in the neighbouring town of Obeledu where fruits are left for the owner to pick no matter how long it fell. You can only pluck the ripe cashew and breadfruit when it falls outside a compound in Agulu, and can be carried by anybody to use as they deem fit. He said that a lot of indigenes have called for the migrants to be banned from touching the fruits but the majority has resisted it. This resource competition perpetuates tension, compounded by indigenous workers feeling displaced by skilled artisans from neighboring countries dominating the construction industry in Agulu.

The preference for these artisans stems from perceived shortcomings among local craftsmen, including corner-cutting practices, hastened workmanship, and an apparent reluctance towards skills enhancement. "The influx of skilled, hard-working artisans into host communities is often widely resented by the indigenous workers who felt threatened".¹¹ Because, in the construction industries in Agulu, artisans from other countries are displacing the local indigenes in the workforce. The locals are used for simple work such as bricklaying, masonry, and carpentry but when it comes to elaborate artistic work such as POP and tiling, outsiders are preferred. Artisans from four neighboring countries in West

Africa namely Benin, Togo, Ghana, and Niger are preferred by construction professionals for crafts work on building sites.

Unlike observations in other regions like Ghana, where professionals complement their professions with specialized craftsmanship, Nigerian societal norms tend to delineate certain tasks as beneath certain professions, hindering multifaceted skill sets among professionals. Aryteety in the course of research stated that each professional in Ghana has a handiwork he specializes in and practices. He stated that during the burial of his mum, with the expertise inherent in his family they were able to cut costs. Each of his siblings contributed little money but more work. One of his brothers, a lawyer and also a carpenter did the coffin, his sister was into decorations and catering, and the other one was a painter and that was how each contributed and lessened the whole cost of their mother's burial.¹²

The reverse is the case here in Nigeria, where a lawyer is not expected to soil his hands in doing carpentry jobs, such jobs are deemed not fit for him but for the poverty-stricken members of the populace. The preference for migrant craftsmen would result in an adequate supply of artisans in the industry and consequently loss of jobs for local artisans.

The multifaceted nature of interactions between migrants and locals underscores a nuanced and intricate relationship that spans from cooperation to conflict. While instances of tension arise from perceived competition for scarce resources, the migrant artisan community contributes positively to the local economy, generating employment opportunities, investing in businesses, and introducing novel skills and ideas.

Impact of Migrant Artisans on Agulu's Economy

Assessing the impact of migrant artisans on Agulu's economic trajectory necessitates an evaluation of several indices. However, due to a lack of accessible statistical records regarding the migrant population in Agulu during the research period, quantitative data from official sources was unavailable. Hence, inference and informant-based data were utilized.

Firstly, is the impact on wage levels and employment engagement. The earnings of migrant artisans in Agulu significantly hinge on their skill levels and prevailing labor market conditions. Notably, artisans like Ayeetey, equipped with advanced marble technology expertise from Winneba Vocational Training Institute, Ghana, command higher prices for their sought-after skills, illustrating the correlation between skill proficiency and remuneration.

Secondly, employment participation and remittances are also impacted. While exact figures regarding migrant labor force engagement remained elusive, observations suggest high engagement levels, particularly among artisans from Ebonyi state, notably within the construction sector. However, remittances from these migrant artisans to their source areas potentially impact household incomes in Agulu, possibly affecting local capital resources. Bovi and Elia opines that

“a consensus has emerged among scholars and multilateral development agencies that international migration has a positive effect on the economic welfare of the receiving countries”¹³

The above opinion is also true of internal migration because immigrants are custodians of ideas and abilities, and are an important factor input into the process of technology progress.

Thirdly is the impact of youth influx and employment creation. With the influx of migrant artisans into Agulu from other places, the population has increased thereby increasing the labour force in Agulu. The workforce received an increased boost from the youth who are majorly the main migrants from other places. The migratory nature of the youths observes Shaw thus *Persons in their late teens, twenties and early thirties are more migratory than those in other age groups.*¹⁴ Youths are the most active workforce in any economy, and having an influx of them leads to increased productivity in any economy. The youths are in their transitional stage in life between adolescence and adulthood and so are more susceptible to adapting to the demands of a new environment. With the odds in their favour at this stage,

they champion the development of their host communities, giving their all and eventually settling in the local environment.

The influx of youthful migrants into Agulu's artisan workforce has augmented the labor force, reflecting Shaw's assertion that younger demographics exhibit higher migratory tendencies. These youths, in their transitional life stage, actively contribute to the local economy, catalyzing increased productivity and community development.

The fourth impact is on employment generation and socioeconomic impacts. Migrant artisans significantly contribute to job creation, particularly in the informal sector, mitigating unemployment and poverty in Agulu. Engagement in artisan workshops potentially curtails behaviors like drug abuse among the youth. The diversification of the workforce through interactions between locals and migrants fosters enhanced performance owing to the amalgamation of diverse skills and experiences.

Fifth is on the economic contributions and urbanization. Udo's assertion regarding migration stimulating economic growth finds resonance in Agulu,¹⁵ evidenced by migrants' financial contributions to the local treasury through rents, poll taxes, and trade activities, thereby augmenting the town's tax base and GDP percentage. Urbanization in Agulu has been propelled by migrants' proliferation of workshops, attracting settlement and showcasing the town's potential to outsiders.

Migrant artisans in Agulu exert a multifaceted influence on the town's economic landscape. Their contributions span employment generation, urban development, and economic growth, albeit with nuanced socio-economic ramifications. The amalgamation of diverse artisanal skills enriches Agulu's socio-economic fabric, exemplifying the symbiotic relationship between migrant artisans and the town's evolving economic dynamism.

Migrant Unions in Agulu

A migrant union “is an association of artisans, labourers, civil servants, and/or traders of an ethnic group, but who now live and carry on their business in a geographical area or city away from their ancestral homes. It is an association of people bound together by felt ties of kinship or community.”¹⁶

According to Chima Korieh, the emergence of ethnic unions became a bridge between their new locations and original homes. Town unions were very effective concerning development programmes while ethnic unions were more effective in protecting the interests of their members. Chima goes further to define 'home' to an Igbo man as *not just a geographical expression, but a sense of where one is born, where the ancestors are buried or where one can connect with the past.*¹⁷ What Chima writes here is not limited to Igbos in Agulu but is almost same for other migrants. Chima pinpoints the role played by kinship as quoted by Anyanwu

*Solidarity or erinma was the bedrock of the socio-political system. Erinma drew inspiration from the awareness that all members of each unit or segment of the Igbo socio-political structure were kinsmen or kinswomen whose rights and privileges were the concern of all. Every socio-political unit was thus a corporate body that served as instrument for the attainment of individual and group interests. Thus for the Igbo erinma (an abstraction contracted from eriri omumu or umbilical cord) implies familyhood and symbolizes the organic link between people of common ancestry*¹⁸

Chima further contends that the solidarity exhibited among migrants thrives predominantly in diasporic settings. The diaspora fosters a heightened sense of cohesion, cooperation, and identity among the Igbo populace, driven by a shared linguistic and experiential commonality. This sense of unity prevails to the extent that individuals from different Igbo subgroups, when relocated to Agulu, exhibit an unwavering identification and solidarity, transcending tribal differences that might have previously led to conflict.

The proliferation of migrant unions in Agulu reflects a diverse spectrum, some catering to regional, state, or even village-specific demographics, differing in gender composition. The camaraderie and affinity experienced within these unions and associations play a pivotal role in sustaining collective cohesion. As observed by G.T. Basden

*abroad they maintained close contact, cemented and sustained by a strong tribal bond of union whatever the conditions, the Ibo migrants adapt themselves to meet them, and it is not long when before they make their presence felt in the localities where they settled. Through the formation of town unions, the Igbo maintained close contact with brothers, sisters and kinsmen.*¹⁹

It should be noted that most of the unions began at first and functioned like a family meeting. The essence of this meeting was to maintain a close sense of conviviality and unity among members of a certain locality. Chukwu observes thus, *it was natural that when the 'sons' of a certain village had migrated..., they would want to remain in contact with one another through periodic meetings and to discuss about 'home' and other common problems associated with urban life.*²⁰

Below is a list of some associations/unions found in Agulu and their source areas of their members, the number of members they have, the gender involved, and their meeting days.

Table 1: Some migrant Town Unions in Agulu

S/N	Names	State/country	No of persons	Gender	Meeting days
1	Ebonyi State meeting	Ebonyi	115	Both	Every last Sunday of the month
2	Ezza Ezekuna Welfare Association	Ezza people of Ebonyi	35	Male	Every two weeks on Sundays
3	Obinwanne Brotherhood Club	Ebonyi	25	Male	Every two weeks on Sundays
4	Onyahanwenneya Union	Ebonyi	35	Male	Every third Sunday of the month
5	Mgbogo Youths Association	Enugu	25	Male	Every first Sunday of the month
6	Umuada Enugu State	Enugu	20	Female	Every last Sunday of the month
7	Natioanl Association of Ghanaians living in Anambra State	Ghana	107	Male	Bi-weekly
8	Otu Ibu Ndo	Enugu	30	Female	Every 2 nd Sunday of the month
9	Adamawa indigenes in Anambra	Adamawa	48	Both	Every last Sunday
10	Otu Ihunanya Club	Ebonyi	47	female	Every third Sunday of the month

Source: *prepared by the researcher based on the information supplied by different informants*

The Ebonyi State Meeting in Agulu began in 1991 and it is mandatory for all Ebonyi living in Agulu to belong. To be a member of the meeting, you will provide one carton of beer, a one-time registration fee of N10, 000 and you will have to clean the table with N1500 for that day. You will use N1200 to answer present in every meeting, N1500 for an excuse letter, and N3000 for absence in a meeting.²¹ It is for all Ebonyi indigenes in Agulu.

The Ezza Ezekuna Welfare Association is only for those from Ezza.²² It was formed in Agulu in 2001. The meetings of the associations/town unions were either rotational as members hosted the meeting or they were held in a particular member's house likely that of the president if no volunteer. Each member gets to host the meeting at one point in time. You pay a monthly due of N3000 and another N4000 which will be given to the host of the meeting. Obinwanne Brotherhood club is a social club and it was formed in 1995. You pay a monthly due of N2000 and also give any amount you have for safekeeping which will be returned to you at the last meeting of the year. Onyehanwanne is sort of an investment club, at every meeting, you will deposit N22, 000 which is compiled and given to a single member and repeated on a rotational basis during each meeting.

- In summary, the different town/country unions and associations served the following:
- i. They made members feel as if they were still in their different source areas as it gave the members a sense of belonging and identity in a foreign land.
 - ii. These unions served as a place to lift burdens off their members' shoulders. That is, they served as a forum to discuss issues affecting members and most often provide solutions.
 - iii. Some served as an 'esusu' forum. Esusu is a local way of saving money where members contribute money and at the end of the year, it is given back to the owner. They gave loans sometimes without interest to its members.
 - iv. The unions are most often used as channels of communication between them and their source areas. Through them, information from the state/country governments cascaded to members.
 - v. They looked after their members' welfare especially the elderly ones among them. They sometimes contributed money to transport the corpses of members, especially elderly ones back to Igboland and also advised old ones among them to go back home.
 - vi. They carried out sanitation exercises in the villages where they lived by following the indigenes to clear bushy pathways, cut trees obstructing electric poles, fill potholes on the road, and do other community labour once there was a call for it.

Igwe sums it up thus

*The migrations also promoted intermingling of different groups and facilitated interchange of ideas, inter-penetration of values, inter-marriages, and more significantly, urban migrants became generally exposed. Thus, the exposure at the urban centers made it possible for returnee migrants to champion communal projects in the source area.*²³

Summary and Conclusion

The article "Migrant Artisans-Host Community Relations in Agulu Anaocha L.G.A, Anambra State, 1970 - 2020" scrutinizes the dynamic interplay between migrant artisans and the host community in Agulu, offering insights into their relations over five decades. This study investigates the fluctuating nature of these relations, oscillating between amicable cooperation and conflict, highlighting the societal implications of these interactions.

Employing a historical analysis method utilizing primary and secondary sources, the paper illuminates the multifaceted dimensions characterizing the migrant-host community relationship. While often contentious, this relationship has proven symbiotic, contributing to the socio-economic fabric of Agulu. Despite concerns within host communities about resource scarcity due to migrant presence, the study shows that the migrants' contributions have significantly enhanced the local economy.

The paper emphasizes the imperative of ameliorating relations between migrants and host communities, asserting that strategies fostering a harmonious coexistence would catalyze socio-economic growth. Moreover, it underscores the pivotal role of migrant unions within host communities, serving as vital conduits for solidarity, welfare support, and information dissemination among migrants.

By delving into the genesis of migrant presence in Agulu, the paper illustrates a narrative of migration rooted in economic aspirations, education, civil service transfers, and familial ties. It delineates the nuances of interactions between migrants and locals, from active participation in cultural events to instances of tension arising from economic competition and cultural differences.

The article meticulously unpacks the impacts of migrant artisans on the local economy, elucidating both positive and negative repercussions. It acknowledges their role in job creation, economic diversification, and cultural preservation while scrutinizing challenges such as increased competition for resources, social tensions, and environmental degradation.

Central to the discourse is the exploration of various migrant unions in Agulu, providing a comprehensive inventory of these associations, their functions, and the extent of their engagement.

These unions act as essential bridges between the migrants' places of origin and their adopted community, fostering a sense of belonging, solidarity, and mutual support.

In conclusion, the article advocates for concerted efforts to enhance harmonious relations between migrants and host communities. It highlights the multifaceted impact of migrant artisans on the local economy, emphasizing the need for nuanced strategies that leverage positive contributions while mitigating the challenges posed by their presence. The pivotal role of migrant unions in nurturing social cohesion and providing essential support mechanisms within host communities emerges as a crucial aspect of fostering sustainable coexistence and socio-economic development in Agulu.

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