IMO ECONOMY DIGEST
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REVITALIZING IMO RURAL ECONOMY

Through One Kindred One Business Initiative (OKOBI)

INSIDE

UMUNNANOMICS: A Bold and Inclusive Economic Development Model Championed by Imo State in Nigeria

Making Rural Economies Work for Shared Prosperity

The Place of Creative Arts in Rural Economic Development





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Governor's Message

One of the key mantras of my administration is "Shared Prosperity". Shared prosperity is anchored on our belief that a society stands the greatest chance of achieving sustainable development in an atmosphere of social equality and economic equity. On that account, since inception in January 2020, we have made conscious efforts to significantly rejuvenate the rural economy of Imo State.

Our policies and programmes in this direction have prioritized access to healthcare, good road networks, rural market development, improvement in agriculture, extension of grants and micro-credit schemes to rural inhabitants and access to electricity, amongst others.

Health is an important index of economic development; a healthy populace is an indispensable driver of increased productivity. With this in mind, we embarked on the infrastructural rehabilitation of ward - level health centres in Imo State. Altogether, about 305 health centres in the State have been rehabilitated. In addition, over 66,000 Imolites, are now covered by the free health insurance scheme. Many of these beneficiaries are either staff of local government authorities or persons living in rural areas.



Another critical factor in the growth and expansion of the rural economy is a good road network. Reducing the distance between people, markets, and services and generally getting people connected is a great component of economic growth. Thus, a good and reliable transport network remains vital. In this regard, we are not only constructing good quality road networks in urban centres, but rural roads are also receiving urgent attention.

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The effective execution of the World Bank - funded Rural Access Mobility Projects (RAMP) has supported our efforts in meeting the infrastructural needs of rural dwellers. The first phase of the project (RAMP-1) focused on improving access to transportation services for the rural population of Imo State. In 2022 alone, about 26 river-crossing projects were completed. The second phase (RAMP-2) aimed at improving and enhancing accessibility and mobility in the rural areas for easy movement of their agricultural inputs and outputs (produce). The unavailability and or the poor condition of the roads, culverts and bridges mean that the commercial aspects of their agriculture are hampered or minimized. This invariably diminishes their economic empowerment and socio-cultural well-being. We are now in the Phase 3 of RAMP, which focuses on agricultural and market development projects in rural communities.

Trade is an engine of growth that addresses food insecurity, creates jobs, reduces poverty, and expands economic opportunities. This makes rural market development an important objective of my

government. In the last couple of years we have reconstructed many major rural markets such as: Avu Auto Spare Parts Market, Owerri West LGA: Industrial Cluster Market, Nekede, Owerri West LGA, and Eke Atta Market, Ikeduru LGA. Others are; Egbeada Market, Mbaitoli LGA; Timber Market Naze, Owerri North LGA; Nkwo Orji Market, Owerri North LGA; Afor Umuaka Market, Njaba LGA; Afor Urualla Market, Ideato North LGA; Artisan Market, Orlu LGA; Eke Awarra Market, Ohaji Egbema LGA; Eke Okigwe Market, Okigwe LGA; Industrial Timber Market (Malaysian Market); and Orie Amaraku Market in Isiala Mbano LGA.

In May 2022, the Imo Entrepreneurs and Artisan Product Exhibition was held by the Imo State Ministry of Labour and Productivity. The exhibition, which was designed to expose artisans in the State to a wider market both locally and internationally, saw the State Ministry of Labour and Productivity reaching out to all the Chambers of Commerce in the South-East zone of Nigeria for an all-inclusive environment to synergize ideas with entrepreneurs and reputable financial and marketing institutions to revitalize their trade. Product buyers and off-takers equally participated in the session.

We have also supported rural dwellers financially. Over 200 cooperative societies have been organized into micro businesses for sustainable capital formation and growth with institutions like the Bank of Agriculture, Bank of Industry and a number of Micro Finance Banks providing various forms of financial assistance.

To boost agricultural productivity and profitability, the government has on different occasions distributed various agricultural inputs, such as seeds, seedlings of cocoa, sprouted oil palm, vines of orange, sweet potatoes and one node cuttings of yam to smallholder farmers. To be specific, the Ministry of Agriculture has now distributed 20,000 cocoa seedlings, over 5,000 oil palm sprouted nuts and 1,500 cashew seeds to farmers in Imo State. In addition, yam farmers, have been supported through their national association and other cooperative groups, with 20,000 node vine cuttings and 10,000 foundation seeds of yam, as well as 200 litres of pathway organic growth enhancer. Potato farmers were also supported with 1,500 bundles of orange - fleshed sweet potatoes, while yam farmers received 200 litres of pathway organic solution, not to mention the annual procurement and distribution of truckloads of fertilizers to rural farmers.

Access to electricity will enhance businesses and usher in economic growth in rural areas. In our determination to provide a reliable electricity supply, I established a new Ministry of Power and Rural Electrification which is charged with the responsibility

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of providing electricity to rural communities. Presently, the new Ministry is conducting a power need audit in the rural areas in preparation to deepen electricity supply in all communities in the state. Besides, they have embarked on cluster delineation to enable the government to engage investors in the pursuit of this laudable project.

I am confident that my Shared Prosperity Agenda has engendered inclusive economic growth, and is attempting to close the economic and social gaps between the urban and rural inhabitants of Imo State. It is further augmented by the Umannanomics philosophy, which is extensively explored in this edition of Imo Economy Digest.

I strongly recommend this edition to you and look forward to working with you to translate some of the ideas to practice and reality.

Senator Hope Uzodimma
Executive Governor, Imo State

EDITOR'S NOTE

Making Our Rural **Economies Work**

Most development efforts in emerging markets are often concentrated in urban areas. As such, it is very easy to use urban development as a measure of progress. In this edition of the Imo Economy Digest, we buck the trend and focus on the rural economy in Imo State instead. The idea is to constructively highlight and engage with some of the investments of the current Imo State Government led by Senator Hope Uzodimma in rural areas of the State. That way, we draw attention to the rural economy for many reasons.

Firstly, because most people in Imo State live in rural and semi-rural settings, it is important to understand what matters to them, how they are socially organized, and their sources of livelihood for better economic planning and investments.

Secondly, beyond the current economic activities in the rural parts of Imo State, we also draw attention to the wealth of untapped potential and unexplored options. For instance, which economic models hold the greatest potential to unlock wealth and job creation in the State? In his original contribution titled "Umunnanomics", Kenneth Amaeshi, the Chief Economic Adviser to the Imo State Government, proposes One Kindred One Business Idea (OKOBI), as a unique economic idea where businesses are owned and managed by the 'umunna' to create wealth and jobs based on comparative advantage. The article offers some useful suggestions on how to create and run cooperative or communal enterprises, and particularly offers some solutions to some of the predictable and intractable challenges confronting cooperative endeavours in Igboland.



OKOBI is vigorously pursued and promoted by the Office of the Chief Economic Adviser, as a way to directly empower people, address the challenges of unemployment, and contribute to vibrant rural economies. Interested communities or kindreds who intend to maximize this novel initiative are strongly encouraged to contact the Office for further information and or support.

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Thirdly, this edition also contains articles that offer valuable and actionable insights to communities that wish to engage in collective business and suggestions about the kind of businesses that might work for groups and the mindset and attitudes that would make it work. Ike Onyishi's piece on "Making Rural Economies Work for Shared Prosperity" is a good example. In a similar vein, Ikechukwu Dozie's article on Kingsley Mbadiwe University showcases how one investment can transform a community or a locality by stimulating economic activities that trickled down directly or indirectly to members of the host community. On his part, Ese Owie writes on how digital technology can assist in efficient and effective rural health service delivery.

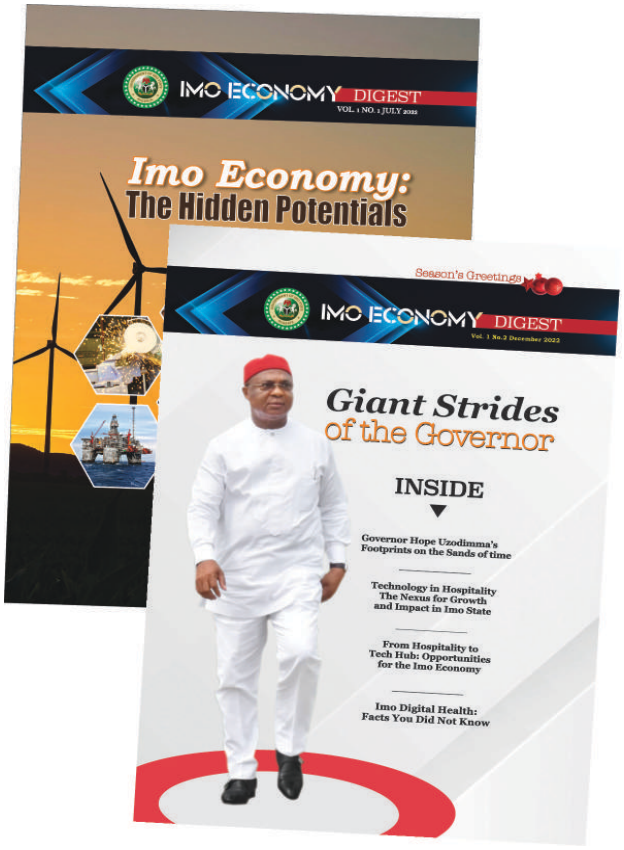
As usual, we highlight some of the recent economic development activities and efforts of the Imo State Government under the leadership of Senator Hope Uzodimma – in this case, in relation to rural development – to foster the Shared Prosperity agenda of his administration. These activities include the

construction of rural roads, and the rehabilitation of rural health centres, markets, and schools. In some instances, the government has assisted rural dwellers with improved seeds for agriculture and direct money transfers as palliatives.

For your reading pleasure and to inspire entrepreneurship we have included in this edition the stories of successful entrepreneurs from Imo State, one in the established category and two in the emerging category. For the established one we bring you the story of Anthony Ezenna, the CEO of Orange Drugs. From a lowly background as the son of a small business chemist, he has erected one of the biggest and most successful pharmaceutical companies in Nigeria and beyond. His story is inspiring. What our two emerging entrepreneurs have in common is the fact that they both lived abroad at some point in their careers before deciding to return to Imo State and set up their ventures to contribute ideas and quality service to the local economy.

Under the able leadership of its MD Mrs. Adaraugo Ibe, Solomento Auto Centre is headquartered in Owerri Imo State, but offering car repairs and maintenance services in South East, Portharcout, Lagos, and beyond. The business currently employs over 70 people committed to the maintenance of vehicles and allied autos. Named after herself, Pearlville School, Avu is reputed to be one of the best schools in Imo State and South East founded and managed by Dr. Mrs Pearl Ihuoma Onukwugha. Not only is the school offering top quality education to the teeming population of Imo children, it is also providing jobs and self-improvement opportunities to many in Imo State. Pearlville School is an excellent example of social entrepreneurship.

This edition also contains important updates on the activities of the Office of the Chief Economic Adviser to the Imo State Government – the publisher of this Digest – since the last edition. The Office has continued to focus on activities aimed at fostering job creation and promoting economic development in Imo State. One way the Office is advancing this critical agenda is by working with fellow Imolites to uncover the wealth of untapped economic opportunities that abound in Imo State. We do this through our meticulously crafted bi-weekly webinars aired to thousands of listeners simultaneously on radio and social media platforms, where they are currently available for replay. Webinars held since the last edition of the Digest include



opportunities in the following areas: elections, agri-produce, livestock, and cooperatives. Please visit the YouTube channel of the Office for more.

The Office of the Chief Economic Adviser has also facilitated capacity building sessions for the private and public sectors in Imo State on the State's Industrial Policy and the Shared Prosperity agenda of the government. Within this period, it launched the One Kindred One Business Idea (OKOBI) as a way to directly empower local communities in the State. It has continued to facilitate the cooperation between civil society organizations and the private sector through the Corporate Imo Impact Partnership (CIIP). One of the early outcomes of CIIP is the $1m grant from The Coca-Cola Foundation to Imo based NGOs for youth digital skill training and safe water projects.

These and more have been brought to you for your reading pleasure. We hope you enjoy this edition and contribute to making our rural economies work for all.



Professor Kenneth Amaeshi
University of Edinburgh/European University Institute, Chief Economic Adviser to the Imo State Government

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Umunnanomics:

A Bold and Inclusive Economic Development Model Championed by Imo State in Nigeria

By Kenneth Amaeshi, PhD

Unemployment is a big problem in Africa. It is estimated that youths account for 60% of all of Africa's jobless. Massive unemployment portends a lot of dangers.

First, youths are restive and vulnerable to crimes. Their chances of resorting to crimes and other social vices are higher when they are unemployed. Second, high unemployment is naturally a recipe for poverty. The combination of poverty and unemployment is arguably at the root of inequality amongst the people, and inequality in turn breeds social conflicts, class struggles, distrust, and disharmony.

In many instances, the government is not spared of this dark cloud of social anxieties because they come with enormous financial and political strains. Unfortunately, the government does not have all it takes to satisfy the ever-growing needs of the people. Not only that, many economic policy interventions also seem to be top-down in approach and often patterned along the governance and political structures of colonial imagination. These dissonant interventions, which have persisted unchallenged overtime, often ignore indigenous social and governance structures.

Indeed, the downgrading of and indifference to indigenous social structures in both policy and practice have continued to haunt many initiatives in Africa, consequently leading to failures and frustrations. But is there a way out of this quagmire? Pointing to the fertile possibility of what I call Umunnanomics amongst the Igbos of Nigeria, I argue in this piece that we need to bring back the indigenous imagination of economic development in Africa. And I will tell you why, but more importantly how.

The Kindred Economy

Imagine an economic development agenda that is not fully dependent on the government – a situation where the smallest units of the society can effectively collaborate for collective economic empowerment. In the South-East of Nigeria, the Igboland, beyond the nuclear family, the next unit of social organization is the extended family, which is also known as kindred – the Umunna system. In this socio-cultural setting, kindreds perform very unique functions in the social lives of their members. Amongst others, they offer spaces for communal projects, the administration of social welfare, resolution of interpersonal conflicts, and enactment of justice.

A collection of these kindreds makes up a community and a collection of communities makes up a village. Towns are made up of villages, and local government areas (akin to local councils in the United Kingdom system) are made up of towns. Apart from the local government areas, which are remnants and extensions of colonial legacies, the rest constitute the social and governance structures of the traditional Igbo society.

In Nigeria today, the local government is about the closest form of government to the people. But, in reality, the local government is recognised more as an organ of government than a system for bringing the government closer to the people. This invariably and inadvertently creates both mental and physical distances between the people and the government. One way to address this gap is to reinvigorate kindreds and stimulate them to act as productive economic units. I call this the Kindred Economic Empowerment Paradigm (KEEP) – or Umunnanomics, an economic and socio-cultural ideology that celebrates community and brotherhood, empowering kindred members to embrace one another as their brethren-economic-keepers.

Given its valorisation of kinship and the common good, KEEP holds the potential to foster an inclusive economy at the kindred level. This paradigm is at the heart of the One Kindred One Business Idea (OKOBI), where kindreds create their own communal businesses. These businesses, which can take any form (such as cooperatives, social enterprise, et cetera), reflect the interests, passion, capabilities, and resources of the kindreds. The primary element of this arrangement is that the business is kindred-owned, led, and controlled. Possible areas of business include farming, livestock, services, manufacturing, et cetera. This approach, which is in line with the original social structure of the Igbo people through the "Umunna" and "Umuada", has a significant potential of addressing the issues of unemployment and poverty from the grassroot level upwards.



Another way this model can work is through co-investment. Here, a kindred could decide to invest in an already existing business owned by members

of their kindred. That way, the kindred members become shareholders whilst recognising the individual agency and corporate governance, which might be at the danger of being suppressed in communal ventures, especially when not carefully managed.

Beyond filial relationships, OKOBI can also be a function of "kindred spirit" shared by a group of people – e.g., friends, members of social clubs, co-workers, et cetera. In this case, what matters most is the ability to collaborate in the pursuit of a collective goal effectively and efficiently, whilst leaving no one behind. In short, this version of OKOBI is founded on the principle of nwanne di na mba (literally meaning that brotherhood is not solely defined by filial relationships but by shared interests, values, and worldviews).

The Role of the Imo State Government

OKOBI, which is being pioneered in Imo State of Nigeria under the leadership of Senator Hope Uzodimma, is already eliciting hitherto untapped financial resources and significant interests amongst local people. Some



OKOBI is being pioneered in Imo State of Nigeria under the leadership of Senator Hope Uzodimma

kindreds have started businesses in farming, livestock, services, manufacturing, et cetera. While some of these emerging kindred businesses target local markets, others seek to explore opportunities in foreign markets through the large and growing Nigerian diaspora



community, as well as the global value chains of big firms operating in Nigeria.

In addition to its potential to transform lives in local communities, OKOBI offers the government an opportunity to formalise grassroot business ventures, grow the economy, and expand its revenue generation capability. These benefits are currently missed opportunities, which OKOBI can help reverse.

Expectedly, KEEP is not hassle-free. There are also possible challenges that may stand in the way of starting and or sustaining the One Kindred One Business Idea, for instance. One of such challenges is distrust and disunity amongst kindred members. Some of these challenges are induced by economic inequality, one of the cardinal issues which KEEP aims to address. In addition, looking at the bright side of things the pursuit of kindred and communal initiatives has the potential to revive the dominant values and worldviews of the Igbos in general – particularly the values of industry and harmonious communal existence.

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The Kindred Economy and Igbo Philosophy

I am confident that KEEP will work, based on my understanding of the character and resolve of the Igbo people. True, Igbo people, like many other people in Nigeria and across Africa, are widely celebrated for their ingenuity and hard work. Irrespective of where they find themselves, they always strive to rise above limitations, make the best out of their circumstances and realise themselves. The industry of the Igbos is expressed in their tenacious commitment to excel; their resilience and ability to weather the most difficult challenges.

In addition, most Igbos take pride in connecting with their communities. Although they apply themselves to work for personal self-realisation, the sense of community and the connectedness it brings is strong. For an Igbo, being alone is good but being together is better. Therefore, the Igbos understand that they can reach their highest goal and meaning through communal efforts. Many community development projects in Igboland – e.g., schools, hospitals, rural roads, electrification, and other infrastructure – have benefited from this mindset. The people contribute to a common purse so that the money can be used to









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execute projects and drive initiatives that ultimately benefit every member of the community In this regards the "Igwebuike" (power in collective action) concept of Ndigbo comes to play.

The Kindred Economy Beyond Igboland

It is instructive to note that KEEP is not limited to the Igbos of the South-East of Nigeria alone. It is also a practical and pragmatic public policy tool that can be used to address the issues of unemployment and poverty while improving rural development from the grass-root – as shown through OKOBI, a variant of KEEP. It helps to unlock hidden opportunities and resources in kindreds that complement existing government interventions.

Nonetheless, it is important to note that this idea is not completely new. It has been practised in different parts of the world under varying thematic articulations. For instance, Kibbutz is practised by the Israelis. The Kenyans call it Chama. The focus is not in its articulation, but what it can achieve in helping communities unlock development in a way that aligns with their values and cultural essence. Nonetheless, the name, Kindred Economic Empowerment Paradigm (KEEP) is unique and speaks to the challenge at hand in Africa. It does not mean that the idea cannot be adopted and adapted for a different context.

In all, it is hoped that the One Kindred One Business Idea, informed by the Kindred Economic Empowerment paradigm, will help revitalize the spirit of self-help and communal living in many developing societies – especially in Africa – for economic development. It will also contribute to the further refinement of Africapitalism – private sector's contribution to development – as a new economic philosophy for Africa. There is no better time to embrace such locally relevant economic model than now.



(Kenneth Amaeshi is a public philosopher, professor of sustainable finance and governance at the European University Institute, Italy, professor of business and sustainable development, University of Edinburgh, United Kingdom and visiting professor of leadership and financial markets in Africa at the London School of Economics, United Kingdom. He is currently the Chief Economic Adviser to the Imo State Government, where he is piloting the One Kindred One Business Idea. He tweets @kenamaeshi).

A shorter version of this article has been published by the London School of Economics and can be accessed via this link: ***https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/africaatlse/2023/03/02/local-communities-can-be-the-source-of-inclusive-economic-development-in-africa/***



Making Rural Economies Work for Shared Prosperity

Ike Onyishi, PhD

In many developing countries, such as Nigeria, most businesses are predominantly established in urban cities with a very limited number in rural communities. In addition, businesses in rural communities are usually informal and overburdened by challenges, such as poor government support and access to finance.

Nonetheless, rural economies can work for shared prosperity – i.e., benefiting many members of society, not just a select few. In other words, rural economies need to be empowering and inclusive. When people feel a sense of agency and control over their lives, they are more likely to be motivated to act and pursue opportunities. When individuals and communities feel included and valued in economic development efforts, they are more likely to participate, contribute to the process and benefit from such activities. This can be particularly important in rural areas, where residents may feel isolated or disconnected from larger economic systems; so, they need to create their own world.





One way to promote shared prosperity in rural economies is through economic cooperation amongst members. This can be in form of community businesses and or shared ownership of economic assets. This way, members can leverage their skills in a complementary fashion to achieve more individual and collective benefits. This can lead to greater success and sustainability, as well as social and economic benefits for all members of society. In turn, it can also help to address issues of inequality and exclusion, promoting greater social cohesion and stability. Despite these positive attributes, community businesses come with some challenges.



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Possible Challenges of Community Businesses

There are possible challenges to community businesses targeted at improving rural economies. Just like what is inherent in any business that involves partners, businesses established by a community may not be entirely insulated from myriads of problems, as outlined below.

Conflicts: One common observation in many rural communities is incessant conflicts that could be attributed to the struggle for resources among members. Land disputes, struggle over ownership of cash crops, inheritance crises, and leadership tussles are very common. The root of these problems is selfishness, observed inequality in access and use of resources, and the desire by different family groups to become more prosperous than others even when the resources available within the community are enough for everyone and can be further harnessed and developed for greater collective prosperity.

Low Level of Trust: Trust is essential in the formation and management of community businesses. Generally, trust is important in every group and has been linked to better team processes, team cohesion, and superior levels of performance. Where there is high level of trust within an organisation, every member of the team tends to be motivated to go above and beyond the call of duty with no notable reward to ensure team success. Where trust is low, key team dynamics like collaboration, productivity and communication, which inevitably hamper progress.

Freeriding (i.e., Loafing): The question that often arises in relation to community businesses is, will all members of the business put commensurable efforts to ensure the success of the business? Empirical evidence shows that individuals steep in individualism often do not put in the same level of effort when working in communal projects as they would when working alone. This can be a problem in such communal businesses as it can lead to unequal contributions and a lack of accountability.

Cultural and Institutional Barriers: Men and women often bring complementary competences to business organisations. However, cultural practices may hinder the cooperation between genders. For example,

traditional gender roles may limit the participation of women or men in collaborative efforts. Addressing these cultural barriers may require a combination of education and advocacy to promote more inclusive and equitable participation. Political and legal barriers may also hinder establishment and managing communal businesses. For example, policies and regulations can make it difficult to establish and operate communal cooperatives and businesses.

What Can Be Done? Possible solutions to the identified challenges

It is instructive to note that as much as the challenges are internally generated, the solutions can also be internally generated. According to Holderlin, a German poet, "…where danger lies, also lies the saving power". And here are some suggestions:

Adopt formal cooperative frameworks: Building cooperation among community members is essential for rural economies to thrive. In a cooperative society, individuals work together to achieve a common goal, sharing resources, knowledge, and skills. This kind of collaboration leads to increased productivity, access to resources, and improved social capital. In rural communities, where resources can be limited and opportunities for growth are often restricted, cooperation can be a powerful tool for shared prosperity. By working together, individuals can pool their resources to start businesses, access loans, and develop infrastructure that benefit the whole community. Moreover, cooperation can lead to the creation of new jobs and industries, which can drive economic growth and improve the standard of living for member of the community. For example, a group of farmers working together to cultivate crops can improve their yields and sell their products at a higher price than they would have been able to do individually.

Shift Mindset: To promote cooperation, it is essential to change the mindset of community members and emphasize the benefits of working together. This can be done by highlighting the collective benefits of cooperation, such as increased income, improved access to resources, and greater economic opportunities. By emphasizing these benefits, individuals can see that cooperation is in their best interest and is the most effective way to achieve their personal goals.

Build Trust: A strategy for overcoming individualism is building trust among community members. Trust can be built through open communication,



shared decision-making, and celebrating collective achievements. Building trust takes time, but it is an essential component of effective collaboration. This can be done by creating a transparent system of decision-making, where everyone has equal say and no one feels left out. As Stephen Covey, the American educator, author, and businessman puts it: "when the trust is high, communication is easy, instant, and effective." It is also important to create a sense of shared responsibility and accountability, so that everyone involved in the community business puts in their best and in so doing enjoy corresponding benefits for their investments and efforts.

Create cohesive social identity: It is important to encourage a sense of social cohesion among community members. This can be done through social events, volunteering, and other activities that foster a sense of community and shared values. When people feel connected to each other, they are more likely to work together for the greater good. Social identity is a very powerful tool that can help communities overcome the challenges of thinking of only individual gains. Proponents of the social identity model posit that individuals tend to bolster their self-image by identifying with groups, including the communities



they belong to or organizations they work for. People desire to maintain a positive image of themselves, especially through their relationships with successful groups and individuals. In Igboland, for example, that is the "Umunna Sprit" – where members of a kindred do not only identify with their kindred but work together to support and protect the kindred.

Communicate effectively: This is essential for promoting cooperation that may result in establishing and managing communal businesses in a rural community. When community members are not communicating effectively, it can lead to misunderstandings, disagreements, and ultimately hinder efforts to work together for shared prosperity. In Igboland, for example, the well-established "Umunna" meeting where community members periodically (most often, at least once a moth) come together to discuss issues and share ideas can be leveraged to form a formal forum for discussing progress and strategies for effective management of the communal businesses. These meetings can provide an opportunity for everyone to have a voice, and can help to build trust, and improve a sense of shared responsibility and accountability by community members.

Foster open dialogue: This is essential for effective communication. Community members should feel comfortable expressing their opinions and sharing their experiences without fear of retribution. Creating a safe space for open dialogue such as during regular village meetings can help to foster trust and build relationships among community members. By involving everyone in the decision-making process, community members can feel that they have invested in the outcomes and have a sense of ownership over the cooperative efforts. It is important to use clear



Another strategy for building capacity for rural dwellers is to promote education and information sharing. By providing access to information about markets, financing, and other resources, individuals can make informed decisions and take advantage of opportunities for growth.



and effective communication channels to ensure that information is disseminated effectively throughout the community. This can include newsletters, social media, and other forms of communication that are accessible to all members of the community.

Educate and inform: Another strategy for building capacity for rural dwellers is to promote education and information sharing. By providing access to information about markets, financing, and other resources, individuals can make informed decisions and take advantage of opportunities for growth. It is very important to recognize and celebrate the successes of cooperative efforts. By highlighting the positive impact of working together, community members can feel motivated and inspired to continue their collaborative efforts.

Conclusion

Community businesses must be sustainable. Sustainability is an important consideration in cooperative efforts as businesses that focus solely on short-term gains may likely not succeed in the long run. To promote sustainability, it is important to consider the long-term impacts of such cooperative efforts, both on the environment and on the community as a whole. This may involve investing in sustainable practices and technologies, as well as promoting social and economic development that benefits all members of the community with minimal negative impact on the community environment.

(Ike Onyishi is a Professor of Organisational Psychology and the Dean, Faculty of the Social Sciences, University of Nigeria, Nsukka)



How Kingsley Ozumba (K.O.) Mbadiwe University Is Stimulating Economic Growth of Her Host Communities

By Professor Ikechukwu N.S. Dozie

Universities are instruments of socialisation and a force for change. The purpose for their establishment finds practical expression in their impact on host communities. This article attempts to appraise how Kingsley Ozumba (K.O.) Mbadiwe University is impacting the local economy of her host communities.

Relationship between Town and Gown – A Brief Overview

Communities that have tertiary institutions situated in their domain are considered fortunate because these institutions serve as an inducement to attract people and economic activities towards them (O, Flaherty, 2005). These communities, often known as "the town," are presented with tremendous opportunities due to the influx of students each semester in these institutions, which are commonly referred to as "the gown."

The relationship between "town" and "gown" is symbiotic. The host communities provide land for building the institutions in exchange for agreed compensation. They also provide accommodation for business, residential and religious purposes as well as security and manpower. In return, the institutions provide a conducive environment that make for the socioeconomic development of the host communities.



From a layman's perspective, human capital it simply means investment in knowledge, skills, health for self-reliance/self-actualization for the task of nation building.

Establishment of K.O. Mbadiwe University Ideato

The Kingsley Ozumba (K.O.) Mbadiwe University (KOMU) is a public institution created by the Imo State of Nigeria Law No. 1 of 2021 to replace the former Eastern Palm University, which was established in 2016 and recognized by the National Universities Commission (NUC) as the 42nd State University and 143rd in the Nigerian University System.

The vision of KOMU is to be a globally competitive institution renowned for innovative research and scholarship, world-class education and human resource development to address current and future needs of society. Its mission is to produce talented and highly skilled men and women with a passion for leveraging knowledge and technology to address national and global problems.

The overriding objective of the establishment of KOMU is to expand access to quality and uninterrupted university education that will continue to stimulate sustainable development of Imo State, Nigeria and, by extension, the global community. The dream of the University management is to build a first-class institution and a first-choice destination within the first 10 years of its establishment [2016-2026].

Impact of K.O. Mbadiwe University on the growth of the Host Communities and Imo State

Deriving from the overriding objective of her establishment, KOMU is beginning to impact positively the host communities within seven (7) years of its existence. A few of the positive impacts are discussed below:

- **Human Capital Development**

From a layman's perspective, human capital it simply means investment in knowledge, skills, health for self-reliance/self-actualization for the task of nation building. Part of the mission of KOMU is to develop the human capital of the host communities through the provision of access to quality education. The proximity of host communities to the university is a major advantage as the students pay less for services such as transportation, accommodation,



feeding, healthcare, amongst others. Sustained sensitization by the Management is yielding fruits following a significant growth in the enrolment by members of the host communities. Furthermore, the Management has made exceptions for indigenes in her policy of compulsory residency for all freshmen in the University.

The Management also gives concessionary slots to indigenes of host communities to participate in institutional workshops, especially those centred on skill acquisition. For instance, during a workshop held in May 2022 by Digital Bridge Institute on Advanced Digital Appreciation Programme for Tertiary Institutions (ADAPTI), the Management gave the host communities 20 concessionary slots for the training which lasted for five days. This training has contributed to improving the digital skills and literacy of the participants.

- **Economic benefits**

Unarguably, universities are drivers of economic activities within the host communities. The establishment of KOMU has stimulated the local economy, heralding the proliferation of economic activities in the community. The influx of students, workers and their families are exerting positive pressures on the local economy in terms of establishment of new businesses such as restaurants, hair salons, beauty shops, photocopy shops, which has inadvertently created employment opportunities for the locals. What is even interesting is that most indigenes can now combine their traditional modes of subsistence agriculture with retail and wholesale businesses. As expected, these businesses suffer a sharp downturn when the students are on normal or forced holidays.

- **Socio-cultural benefits**

From a social perspective, the establishment of universities in a particular locale leads to an emergence of new values, attitudes, and cultural shift among residents. The establishment of KOMU is influencing the attitude of indigenes who have become more receptive to visitors and strangers. It is injecting new values, dreams and aspirations amongst the youths who now have a broader worldview by co-existing with staff and students drawn from across diverse cultural and social backgrounds. Those who did not like



education, for instance, are now embracing it because of these rich cultural exchanges... Furthermore, our diversity in the mix of staff and students from other cultural areas is rubbing off on the host communities.

- **Sports**

Sports development, including talent hunt as a major enterprise, is impacting our host communities positively. Currently, the indigenes use the University ultra-modern stadium and other state-of-the-art sports facilities for training, football matches and other competitions. For enhanced cordial and mutual coexistence, the University football team, KOMU ALL STARS, participate in some of the local football competitions such as the New Yam Festival competition, Yuletide Games and The Governor's Cup.

- **Transportation Activities**

A fundamental variable that plays an essential role in the economic development of a community is the existence of a reliable, dependable and well-organized transport system. The increase in the population of students and staff occasioned by the establishment of KOMU has stimulated transportation activities in the area. New means of livelihood are being created for residents, including the use of motorcycles called "Okada" and tricycle known as "Keke-Napep" as means of transportation. Similarly, new transportation routes have been opened and the existing ones are becoming more attractive due to a significant growth in commuters. For instance, the Owerri-Ideato and the Anambra-Ideato routes have seen an uptick in passenger numbers, who are mostly students, staff members and visitors to the University.

- **Infrastructural Development**

Infrastructural development is a central feature of urbanization and the presence of a university in a given locale will wittingly or unwittingly result in infrastructure growth. Basic infrastructure such as roads, electricity, potable water and quality housing become common features of communities where universities are located. The presence of KOMU is transforming the host communities from hitherto rural communities to urban enclaves dotted with modern infrastructure. The cost of landed properties and accommodation in the adjoining villages and settlements have also seen marked appreciation in value. The indigenes are direct beneficiaries of these developments. In what appears to be an icing on the KOMU cake, His Excellency, Senator Hope Uzodimma, the Governor of Imo State recently commissioned the reconstruction of the Orlu-



Basic infrastructure such as roads, electricity, potable water and quality housing become common features of communities where universities are located.





Mgbee-Urualla-Akokwa Road, an initiative that would ensure easier access to the University.

• **Emerging Commercial Ventures**

Many commercial ventures are being conceived by Management to enhance University internally generated revenue (IGR) and to create job opportunities for indigenes and residents alike. These include; KOMU Consult, KOMU Microfinance Bank, KOMU Farms, KOMU Centre for Leadership and Human Resource Development, amongst others. These initiatives, when fully operational, would support the growth of commerce in these communities and support the economic development…

• **Advocacy, Visibility and Community Engagement**

Aside their primary role as fountain of knowledge and learning, universities could also serve as platforms for advancing meaningful advocacy efforts. In so doing, they collaborate with social enterprises, non-governmental organisations, development institutions and governments to draw attention to critical issues in the society, including challenges faced by their host communities. Through these engagements, the Management had drawn the attention of the State government to the deplorable conditions of the major roads leading to the institution. Such roads include the Orlu-Mgbee-Urualla-Akokwa Road, the Amaraku-Nkwerre-Orlu Road and the Okwelle-Arondiuzuogu-Urualla Road. The purpose of this engagement was to influence the State Government to reconstruct the aforementioned roads to facilitate access to the University and drive economic activities around the hist communities. . Such advocacy campaigns create visibility and attract rewardable value to the host communities the same way the products of research endeavours (publications/patents) and other strategic partnerships make an institution the cynosure of all eyes, particularly at the global stage.

Furthermore, the University Management, on a regular basis, engages the leadership of the host communities. The results are mutual respect, peaceful co-existence, mutual support in the form of donations by indigenes. Such stakeholder engagement also create opportunity for the University to extend its corporate social responsibility (CSR) to the host communities. In December 2022, the Management sought and received several off-the-counter drugs and food supplements from an NGO, Ugo's Touch of Life Foundation (U-TOLF), which were distributed to pregnant women and children in the host communities. Recently, the University commemorated the 2023 World's Neglected Tropical Diseases (NTD) Day with an awareness march around the host communities.



Conclusion

The establishment of universities significantly impacts the local economy of host communities. Some of the benefits summarized above underscore the evolving positive impacts of K.O. Mbadiwe University on her host communities. These benefits should serve as a steady assurance to indigenes that the sustained growth and development of the University will in turn contribute to the growth of the local economy and overall improvement of the wellbeing of the host communities.

(Professor Ikechukwu N.S. Dozie,
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How **Digital Technology** can Transform Rural Healthcare **Services in Imo State**

By Ese Owie, DPhil (Oxon)

How can a government know with certainty the actual segment of a population with specific healthcare challenges? How can the health policy of a government be shaped by this knowledge? These are pressing questions effective digital technology infrastructure can help a government to address.

Essential health care, community participation, equity, intersectoral collaboration, and use of appropriate technology are the driving forces behind the efficiency of Primary Health Care, which remains the hope of achieving universal health coverage. Nigeria spends about 3.88% of her GDP on health and currently, the bulk of health expenditures are paid out-of-pocket, putting a heavy financial burden on individuals and households, especially the poor.

The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted—and exacerbated—the gaps in healthcare provision and systems in lower- and middle-income countries, especially Sub-National Governments in these countries. Prior to the pandemic, almost a third of the population in the countries under reference lived more than two hours away from essential healthcare services, and the ratio of healthcare workers to population was typically well below the minimum recommended by the World Health Organization (WHO). The negative externalities occasioned by the pandemic have, indeed, worsened the impact of these issues in many developing economies – especially in the rural areas.



Given current efforts at revamping rural infrastructure in Imo State and investments in digitalization, it is necessary to assess the suite of digital tools for primary healthcare (prioritizing those used during the COVID-19 pandemic), with a view to understanding how to harness these to transform primary healthcare systems and achieve a step-change in rural healthcare infrastructure.

However, a silver lining of the pandemic has been the growth in digital tools, with firms reporting an acceleration in the adoption of digital technology by several years. Digital technologies have tremendous potential not only to improve National and Sub-National responses to infectious-disease threats but also to strengthen primary healthcare delivery and optimize rural health infrastructure.

Given current efforts at revamping rural infrastructure in Imo State and investments in digitalization, it is necessary to assess the suite of digital tools for primary healthcare (prioritizing those used during the COVID-19 pandemic), with a view to understanding how to harness these to transform primary healthcare systems and achieve a step-change in rural healthcare infrastructure.

Achieving such improvements will, however, not be easy. To realize the promise of digital healthcare at scale, strong government-led partnerships and enabling environments will be required in most instances—



and the effort will need to focus on known, adaptable technologies, and user-centered design. Along those critical success factors, the Imo State Government (IMSG), Nigeria, for example, will focus on effective capability building, sustainable business/delivery models, and rigorous monitoring and evaluation.

If the IMSG maximises these success factors, it could strengthen and broaden the use of digital tools across multiple use cases in primary healthcare. The IMSG and her partners could then advance their goals of shaping the State's healthcare ecosystems that connect multiple healthcare journeys and aggregating data for seamless user experiences, thereby emerging a national reference point.

The analysis presented in this piece, thus, delves into the success factors that can drive effective, widescale implementation of digital tools across healthcare systems in Imo State, drawing from emerging African public health praxis and expert digital solution trends. It then offers a vision of the digital healthcare landscape for primary healthcare in Imo State and proposes potential pathways to drive the implementation of digital healthcare to realize that vision.

What is a digital technology healthcare infrastructure?

Current pain points in rural healthcare delivery include effective prevention, screening, early intervention, effective non-communicable disease (NCD) surveillance, long waiting times in Primary Healthcare Centres (PHCs) for NCD and Ante Natal Care (ANC) patients, insufficient manpower, human error, and continuum of care. These require credible and up-to-date data to be properly addressed.

Digital technology healthcare infrastructure gives an entity the capability to perform real time remote monitoring, data analytics and mobile patient data collection. The automated real-time data obtained can be used to study disease patterns and thus early intervention can be made possible leading to better treatment outcomes.

It significantly reduces the screening time per person and also minimizes error when keying in the data after taking vital signs. It enables instant communication and coordination between medical officers and decisionmakers, removes friction, and makes the workflow more efficient. Personalized clinical pathways enable early detection and intervention. High-risk individuals can be monitored at higher frequencies leading to early intervention, reduced risks, and complications leading to improved clinical outcomes.

Some of the key features of digital technology healthcare infrastructure include sophisticated risk analytics and alerts (e.g., in cases of hypertension/hypotension risk, diabetic, obesity, cardiac and respiratory risk), real-time health surveillance, live actionable data dashboards, hierarchical views to health screening statistics in real-time, the individual trends dashboard enables early detection and clinical management of lifestyle diseases.

In sum, digital technology healthcare infrastructure is usually compact and cost-effective, thus making the delivery of care affordable, especially in rural areas. This makes universal health care a reality.

Successful Implementation of Digital Tools: Lessons for Imo State

Six success factors have been identified to contribute to the ability of digital solutions to scale and achieve impact: strong, government-led partnerships; known and adaptable technologies; user-centered design; sustainable business models; capability building; and

The foundation of a successful digital tool is in defining the value of the solution—both the problem it seeks to address and for whom it is intended— up front. Developers may seek to design a human-centered solution that is aligned to user priorities and market research and is supported by an initial proof of concept. A necessary consideration in Imo State is whether there is an enabling environment for the envisaged solution (such as whether the proposed design is appropriate for the digital skills and connectivity of the public health practitioners).

monitoring and evaluation. The first three factors are the most critical for quickly implementing a tool at scale, and most of the successful, post-COVID digital health solutions consistently applied them. The last three factors have also led to improved outcomes and are important to ensure longer-term success.

1. Strong Partnerships

Digital solution providers and governments often have interlocking relationships when deploying large-scale solutions. In settings in which governments and non-governmental organizations are ill equipped to build and deploy solutions on their own, technology innovators have a critical role to play. Solution providers can evaluate how to integrate with government systems and may depend on strong, top-level government leaders to champion system change and drive user adoption.

For Imo State, it is important to establish relationships and credibility with other trusted and already-established stakeholders at an early stage. Partnering with established organizations, service providers, or government agencies is often vital to reaching scale. In Kenya, for example, foundational in-country partnerships established M-TBA prior to the COVID-19 pandemic leveraged the partners' deep market understanding and consumer experience. To date, M-TIBA, a financial-technology platform, has connected more than four million users and 1,200 healthcare providers in Kenya. This can be replicated in Imo.

2. Adaptable Technologies

To achieve scale and impact, it is essential to develop a stable, reliable product that can improve and adapt over time. Rather than developing brand-new solutions, many interventions on the continent have used existing technologies, which, in some cases, were digital public goods. For example, Praekelt was able to build on existing ongoing work with the South African National Department of Health to support maternal



health with MomConnect, which uses mobile-phone-based technologies. This enabled it to develop the COVID-19 Connect South Africa platform and roll it out within weeks. Seven weeks after launch, more than 6.2 million users had joined the platform, with approximately 750,000 people using it daily.

For Imo, a major success factor, in addition to established partnerships and effective collaboration, will be the authority of Local Government Areas' Primary Healthcare Centres' (PHCs) to make decisions, which can drastically reduce product development timelines and engender improved outcomes. Similarly, working with interoperable models or ecosystems supported by agile teams can make it easier to adapt solutions to meet local requirements in the rural communities.

3. User-Centered Design

The foundation of a successful digital tool is in defining the value of the solution—both the problem it seeks to address and for whom it is intended— up front. Developers may seek to design a human-centered solution that is aligned to user priorities and market research and is supported by an initial proof of concept. A necessary consideration in Imo State is whether there is an enabling environment for the envisaged solution (such as whether the proposed design is appropriate for the digital skills and connectivity of the public health practitioners). When the not-for-profit Living Goods partnered with Medic to design the SmartHealth app, for example, Medic developers spent several weeks in communities in Uganda to understand the workflows related to healthcare workers connecting with patients. Their study included potential pain points, communication channels, and the infrastructure that may be required to support a digital platform. This would also be required in Imo for optimal rural healthcare infrastructure reform.

4. Sustainable Business Models

Related to a clear value proposition, the development of a business model that demonstrates value to user groups, especially skeptical rural patients in Imo, can help a digital solution go beyond donor investment/government co-financing and ensure its sustainability. While this has been a pain point for many digital solutions, and all have some way to go, a few have offered promise in this regard.





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Successful solutions can also realize predictable value by digitizing and standardizing processes. In Imo State, for example, automating and standardizing task and decision-support lists for community healthcare workers, shifting their workflows from reactive to proactive or predictive outreach could save costs over time.

5. Capability Building

The capacity to use tools and change management are key enablers of helping scale digital solutions for rural healthcare transformation. Consequently, working with the Government, the developer can facilitate knowledge transfer, so that local PHC leaders can manage solutions independently.

Again, building in change management up front is crucial for scaling, and it as critical for securing longer-term, enduring solutions.

6. Monitoring and Evaluation

Rapid evaluation and reformulating of services to suit local contexts and requirements in line with government priorities allows digital health developers to build long-term relationships and trust with users and governments. In addition to sustainable business models, strong monitoring and evaluation processes must be embedded in any digital-solution for optimizing rural healthcare infrastructure in Imo. Rigorous and outcome-driven evaluation is also important with the implementation of any new or existing tool.

The capacity to use tools and change management are key enablers of helping scale digital solutions for rural healthcare transformation. Consequently, working with the Government, the developer can facilitate knowledge transfer, so that local PHC leaders can manage solutions independently.

Towards An Effective Digital-Healthcare Ecosystem for Imo State

The current digital-primary-healthcare landscapes of most Sub-National Governments in Nigeria are characterized by fragmented solutions, with some examples of excellence along a single healthcare journey. Depending on their current levels, Sub-Nationals such as the IMSG could, on the back of the foregoing analysis, aspire toward one of three "end-states" in digital primary healthcare:





- Interoperability among multiple healthcare journeys at national level
- A State-wide healthcare ecosystem that connects all healthcare journeys and patient data
- LGA-wide interoperability and integration on key use cases, such as intra-state and inter-state public health surveillance.

While these three "end-states" would contribute to improved quality and user experience, building a reputable, State-owned healthcare ecosystem would have the greatest impact. Forward looking governments such as Imo State could then support South-Eastern regional interoperability on use cases that could benefit from cross-country coordination, such as disease surveillance and contact tracing during pandemics.

Prioritizing a State-wide digital healthcare ecosystem in Imo State can, thus, enable data flow and foster collaboration among key stakeholders to achieve the following improvements:

— **Expansion of healthcare coverage:** This could allow broader reach of healthcare delivery through technological solutions.

— **Enhanced quality of services:** Better-quality services could support improved coordination of care through data sharing and provide a convenient and seamless user experience. Services could also enhance the quality of professionals, providing data and analytics for evidence-based guidelines.

— **Resource optimization:** this could enable earlier detection of risks through predictive analytics and enable long-term cost management. In the near term, it could also have a significant impact on management efficiency by allowing increased division of labor and overall utilization through centralized, coordinated, real-time management.

Rural Healthcare Implementation Pathways for Imo State

The Imo State Government can consider creating an enabling environment across the six dimensions discussed above to advance its digital-healthcare programs toward a State-wide healthcare ecosystem. It can follow a three-step process to identify and start the journey along the optimal implementation pathway for their context. First, it can assess its current baseline



against six enablers -leadership and governance, digital readiness, multisector engagement, strategy and investment, legislation, policy and compliance, and technology - to determine what is needed. Second, it can align on the key strategic choices that are available to them. Finally, it can define and execute an implementation pathway based on its baseline findings and strategic direction.

However, while all Sub-Nationals can aim to build a State-wide ecosystem in the long term, the priority areas for implementation may vary, depending on their current state. Factoringin local peculiarities should, thus, be paramount for the Imo State Government.

Next Steps: Private-Sector-led Digital-Healthcare Efforts in Imo State

With a private sector-led digital healthcare effort and strong digital foundations, the Imo State Government could prioritize State-owned data exchange and interoperability through strategic healthcare partnerships with the private sector. This could include developing digital healthcare governance with effective mechanisms for collaboration and coordination among public- and private-sector stakeholders.

The Imo State Government may also consider digital-healthcare legislation and policies to attract private sector investment and improve business case bankability. For example, India benefits from a flourishing digital healthcare private sector and strong country action to develop a national healthcare ecosystem.

Given its nascent digital readiness, the Imo State Government has the scope to leapfrog steps in the implementation pathway for digital healthcare, with a view to strengthening rural infrastructure delivery. The highest priority on this score is to improve digital readiness by investing in infrastructure and capability building, but it can also build a forward-looking, strategy that demonstrates the government's commitment to promoting digital healthcare. With government incentives, solution providers can also start developing critical use cases—such as digital payments to bypass broken financing mechanisms and electronic health records—to prove the concept and lay the foundation for a data exchange platform.

Going forward, the Imo State Government could borrow a leaf from Ethiopia, which has accelerated its digital journey, thanks to decisive action, co-creation and strong partnerships with donors. The Ethiopian government also prioritized its digital healthcare strategy, adopted best practices in data and IT, fostering a culture of data use at all levels of the healthcare system. It went further to invest in end-user training and created the Digital Health Innovation and Learning Center to foster innovation.

For Imo, adopting a systematic approach to realizing the vision of a State-wide healthcare ecosystem can improve the application of digital-healthcare tools, leading to individual and collective healthcare gains. The Imo State Government could prioritize application of the success factors identified in this piece to leapfrog its digital journey and help a wide range of residents, especially its rural folks, lead healthier lives.

(Dr Owie serves as Executive Chairman of Numelec Africa Holdings, the Continent's largest Healthcare Infrastructure Optimization Group. He can be contacted via eowie@numelecafrica.com)

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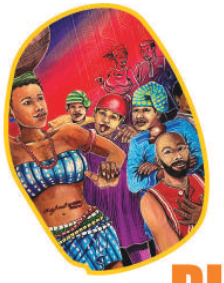

The PLACE OF CREATIVE ARTS IN RURAL ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT



By Okey Anukwuem

> ***...creative arts play significant roles in the lives of the people and in their development, by providing intellectual, emotional, and creative insights to society at large.***

Creative Arts as Ideas and Cultures

It is often said that 'ideas rule the world'. This couldn't be truer than in the creative arts. The creative ingenuity of humans is so sophisticated that it begets expressions in many forms and in different cultures. Many communities have one form of creative art or the other – such as dances, fashions, songs, symbols, foods, designs, masquerades, festivals, cultural displays et cetera – through which they express themselves. These natural endowments and creative activities often add enormously to local economic development.

In rural areas, for instance, creative arts play significant roles in the lives of the people and in their development, by providing intellectual, emotional, and creative insights to society at large. Creative arts often unite cultures, boost economic growth, and make places beautiful to live in. They give confidence, encourage empathy, inspire, inform, and provoke knowledge. They equally help people process and give expressions to their emotions. They embody and express deep community values, which enable people to understand and adapt to their surroundings.

Creative arts are also used as a medium of control and discipline of the society. Several societies use many forms of theatre for development where songs and dances are used to disseminate information, make a caricature of unwanted behaviours as well as a medium for entertainment. It is a veritable means of education and entertainment.

Creative Arts Opportunities for Rural Dwellers

In Imo State, just like everywhere, each community has its values, which creative arts reflect in various lucrative media. Many rural people often think that the money is in the cities, but indeed a lot of money can be made in and from the rural areas. Let me explain a few of them through the opportunities offered by creative arts.

The Nigerian Nollywood industry is classified under the creative arts industry, and it employs about 200,000 people from every sector and gender of the society. The jobs created by the industry cover diverse areas of involvement in the production of films ranging from directors, producers, advertisers to scriptwriters, costume makers, props managers, location managers, caterers, health workers et cetera. Currently, Nigerian films have received global acceptance and are shown in over 50 countries of the world.

Most of these films are shot in villages and community settings with the prevalence of local architecture and nature bringing in foreign investment. They boost the Nigerian economy, and create jobs in and around the communities. Town Unions can proactively charge fees and raise money for the development of the communities for film making companies who use rural environments like forests, bushes or pathways, buildings or natural locations like caves or streams or other significant sites. They can also work hard to improve the quality and output of local dances, fashions, songs and cuisine for use in film productions.

Another integral part of the creative arts is the tourism industry that currently boosts the economy of the world. Tourism is defined as a form of contemporary art produced locally for consumption by outsiders. It is a socio-cultural and economic phenomenon causing the movement of people to countries, communities, and places outside their normal environment for personal or business opportunities. It includes some naturally or artificially created environments worthy of



sightseeing with very memorable impacts. This aspect of creative arts increases cross cultural interactions, while maintaining and keeping local culture, arts, crafts, and traditions. It also empowers host communities and strengthens cultural values. If our streams and caves and sites can be a place for sightseeing, why can't we commercially develop them for communal benefits?

There are also artifacts and museums of creative works dating back to the stone ages worthy of attracting economic gains to our numerous rural communities. These even influence future works of art and solidify the lifestyle and beliefs of a people. To view an old artifact for pleasure or for research will attract economic benefit, especially if it is well preserved or made accessible. If communities can look inwards, they will be surprised at what the creative arts and other natural endowments can return to them if they can invest a bit in it. There are many communities with thriving and vibrant art markets where local art can be sourced. A case in study would be the Benin Art Market where bronze heads are made and sold at site. It is another oil well in our backyard. The Abeokuta Adire market is another example. Imo State has an array of locally produced arts that can be exported to the world. The various masquerade festivals can be coalesced into one major carnival with international appeal. This will not only attract tourists but also stimulate the interest of the film industry in the State.

It is important to note that there are a lot of talented artists in our communities who may not have had formal education but have existed in our communities till this day. These traditional and non-formally trained creative artists produce works in lucrative categories such as painting, sculptures, textiles, graphics, printmaking, carving, furniture, and other forms of creative activities. These activities have huge economic potential. They strengthen our communities, stimulate economic activities for local products, and support economic activities of other local businesses. A conscious effort to harness these talents will result in improved individual and collective economy of the State.

Arts serve as a collective memory of societies where their history is embedded and their lives expressed. Various inventions have been made through the arts in terms of product packaging, services, spectacular works of art and even science. Creativity remains a necessary condition for progress in any society. Arts and their sundry expressions offer us a huge opportunity.

Powerful economic impacts can further be created in our communities through integrated arts conferences and cultural programs. These programs bring people together and expose them to different cultures and beliefs. If local artists are supported through the patronage of their works, a lot can be achieved in the development of our rural communities through creative arts.



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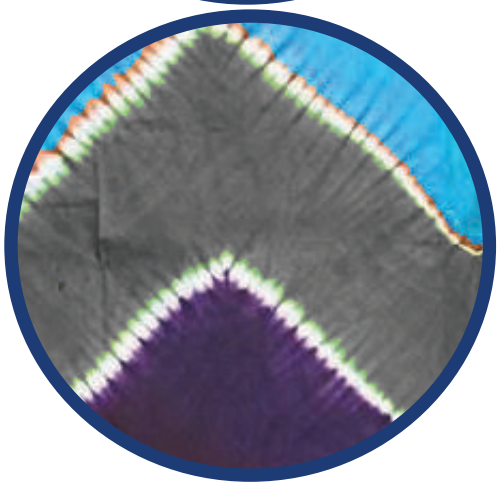
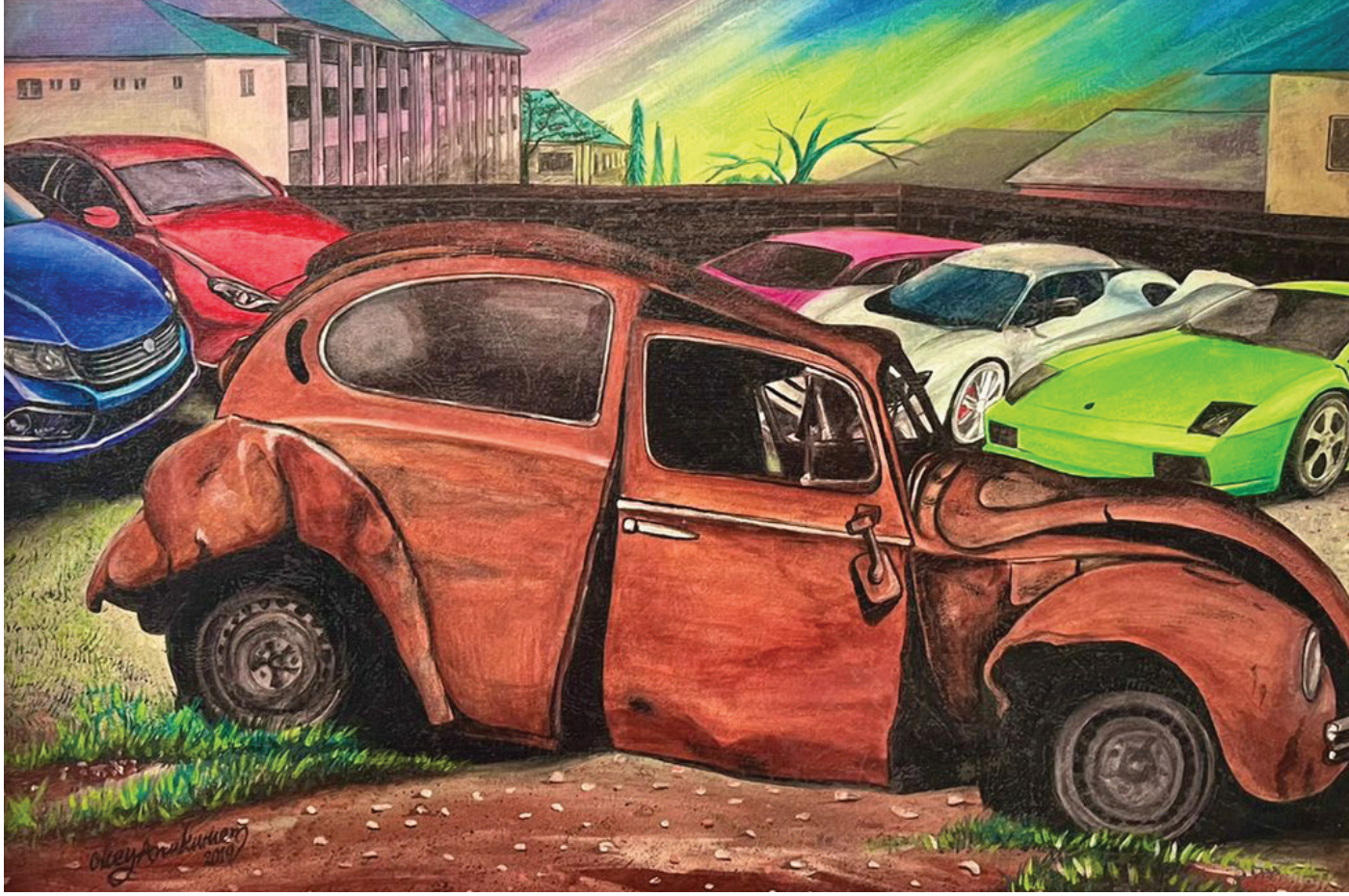
Beyond the Commercial Benefits of Creative Arts

There are other important things to note about creative arts. Arts provide the platform for the improvement of the quality of life in our communities. They are







> ***Arts serve as a collective memory of societies where their history is embedded and their lives expressed. Various inventions have been made through the arts in terms of product packaging, services, spectacular works of art and even science.***

the future of our communities. They broaden our perspectives and help us overcome prejudices. Generally creative arts improve our cognitive ability, elevate our mood, and stimulate our brain. The Global Creativity Index (GCI) shows that in countries and communities where the level of support for arts and culture is high, creativity has been linked to increased economic development and higher levels of equality. Art as a form of entertainment and education has the ability to stimulate productivity as a relaxed mind is a more productive one. The West bears sufficient evidence to this as trips to museums, opera houses and the arts in general form an integral part of their lives. It is therefore imperative that the double benefits of the arts cannot be ignored or overlooked.

Creative arts are a good way of promoting identity and culture because their impacts on the development of rural economy cannot be over-emphasized. As already stated, creative arts are undiscovered and untapped 'oil wells' in the sense of their enormous potential to uplift communities and individuals. Imo State can stamp its cultural identity on the nation and the world at large through the active exposure and expression of its art.

To achieve the above, the Office of the Chief Economic Adviser to the Government has proposed the One Kindred One Business Idea (OKOBI), which aims to stimulate economic activities in the rural areas. The OKOBI concept seeks to inspire every community to look within and find the niche that will earn income and recognition. The creative industry is a veritable way of buying into this concept, which kindreds can do by adopting one of the many forms of already existing creative arts and through it advance their own particular and collective interests.



(Chief Dr. Sir Okey C. Anukwuem JP is the Honourable Commissioner for Special Duties Imo State)
okanukokey@gmail.com

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OKOBI: From Politics of Stomach Infrastructure to Politics of Genuine Empowerment



By MacDonald Ebere, PhD



Our partisan politics of acrimony often trumps inclusive development and marginalises the vulnerable in society. This sort of politics can only exacerbate our developmental struggles with poverty, poor education, insecurity and unemployment, amongst others.

The relationship between development and politics or how politics influences development is a critical dimension in understanding the political economy of Nigeria. Our partisan politics of acrimony often trumps inclusive development and marginalises the vulnerable in society. This sort of politics can only exacerbate our developmental struggles with poverty, poor education, insecurity and unemployment, amongst others.

Whilst well-functioning markets are important for economic development, the economy itself reflects people's worldviews and priorities. As such, it is increasingly evident that the economic frameworks borrowed from western economies are sometimes completely detached from the real issues facing our people and communities. That's why they don't often work for us. This has led to calls to rethink the development approach taking into consideration our peculiarities. Response to this call is at the heart of the One Kindred One Business Initiative (OKOBI) currently championed by the Imo State Government under the leadership of Senator Hope Uzodimma.

To advance inclusive business opportunities in local communities in Imo state, the Chief Economic Adviser to the Imo State Government, Professor Kenneth Amaeshi has articulated a unique local economic development programme, which he christened the Kindred Economic Empowerment

Paradigm (KEEP) or Umunnanomics. This programme, which is meant to create and enable businesses, as well as enhance social and economic sustainability, in different communities informs and shapes the OKOBI.

OKOBI is already gaining momentum with significant interests amongst local people and communities in Imo State. Some kindred businesses so far include farming, livestock, services, and manufacturing. These kindreds have also been empowered to explore access to both local and international markets. This is important as it will further enhance their viability. It is expected that the OKOBI agenda will also reduce insecurity as it is seen as a solution to unemployment. These businesses will be able to recruit personnel from their communities as they continue to grow. This will lead to improved employment opportunities in the state.

It is obvious that OKOBI is an innovative approach to unlocking informal financial resources, transforming human capital, and building community businesses at the micro level (local communities). As such, it provides politicians and political leaders the opportunity to rethink their approach to community empowerment, which has hitherto remained largely transactional and created different forms of unsustainable and negative dependencies. Paramount amongst the approaches is the so-called stomach infrastructure strategy, where politicians prey on the vulnerability of voters, especially during elections, by offering them food and money for patronage.

The stomach infrastructure paradigm can be very problematic and unsustainable, as it focuses on the now rather than the future and thus cannot be regarded as actual empowerment. The stomach infrastructure paradigm also does not focus on the communities and how to create long-lasting socioeconomic outcomes and impact for the sustainable socioeconomic development of constituencies and communities. In essence, the stomach infrastructure paradigm is transient. This does not only undermine our democracy, but it also dehumanises our people and undermines their capabilities to function independently.

On the contrary, OKOBI creates a holistic and inclusive socioeconomic development solution for kindred (community) development. So, instead of treating voters as transient transactors, politicians who have the financial resources and social capital can actually help their constituents



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create community businesses that will ensure no one is left behind in the true spirit of the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals. When politicians and political leaders adopt and implement OKOBI as a socioeconomic empowerment initiative, it portrays their good heartedness and genuine commitment to meeting the needs of our people and progressive community development. This approach to building financial and human capacity, which empowers people and communities to grow socioeconomically rather than to be fed, is rooted in the sense of service and spirit of politics that underpins political participation. This is absolutely essential.

However, for OKOBI to succeed, certain things need to be done. First, the implementation should be properly structured to enhance tracking of investments and the performance and progress of the people and businesses supported. This is critical to measuring the impact on the people, constituencies, and communities where the programmes developed have been deployed. Therefore, the starting point with OKOBI is for political leaders to understand the needs of their people and businesses in their communities. The result of the needs assessment will help with the development of strategic sustainable socioeconomic development pathways



and programmes that will help address these needs and spur human capacity and business acumen required to boost development for local communities.

Secondly, for OKOBI to achieve its desired goals in this instance, accountability, transparency, data measurement, and management must be weaved into it. This is because the essence of adopting the OKOBI agenda is to ensure that political leaders are able to ascertain the level of development in their local communities with the intention of addressing the developmental issues.

By supporting informal businesses and local entrepreneurs in their constituencies and communities, politicians will be at the forefront of promoting conscious capitalism – i.e., a socially responsible economic and political philosophy that accounts for all stakeholders, including communities, towards sustainable socioeconomic transformation. In essence, the implementation of OKOBI by politicians will advance the principles of a higher purpose, stakeholder orientation, intentional leadership, and a conscious culture in their communities. These principles, which are fundamental to OKOBI, will, in turn, foster collaboration, partnerships, and community essence as they promote the sustainable growth and development of local entrepreneurs and the concept of sustainable entrepreneurship for community development.

It is instructive to note that OKOBI is not restricted to Imo State or Igboland. It can be replicated across Nigeria and societies where kindred structures exist and matter.

In sum, OKOBI can be adopted as a collective empowerment mechanism by politicians and political leaders for the development of community entrepreneurs, fostering community entrepreneurship, enhancing employment, and advancing broader community development. This will constitute a significant shift away from the negative politics of stomach infrastructure to a positive politics of empowerment, where politicians and political leaders strategically teach their people how to fish instead of giving them fish. This will be a win-win-win for politicians, voters, all citizens and our democracy.



(MacDonald Ebere holds a PhD in Political Philosophy. He is an expert in practical political philosophy and writes from Owerri, Imo State, Nigeria)

PROFOUND GRATITUDE TO HON. MACDONALD EBERE, PHD, THE STATE CHAIRMAN OF ALL PROGRESSIVES CONGRESS (APC) FOR HIS ACHIEVEMENTS AND LEADERSHIP OF APC IN IMO STATE

We, the undersigned stakeholders of All Progressives Congress (APC) in Imo State, having painstakingly reviewed the political sagacity, peculiar intellectual disposition, passionate persistence, intense ingenuity, refined leadership model, and wisdom, brought to bear by our amiable and indefatigable State Chairman, Hon. Macdonald Ebere, PhD, resolve and hereby express our very profound gratitude to our energetic and charismatic State Chairman and the entire leadership of All Progressives Congress (APC) at all levels in Imo State, for leading our great party to total victory during the just concluded general elections.

We acknowledge that Hon. Macdonald Ebere is synonymous with victory. In addition to this just concluded presidential and house of assembly elections, he led our dear party to victory in the past, at different occasions. We have no doubt that the grace of God abounds in him. We are confident that God's grace will continue to see him through.

Mr. Chairman, there is no gainsaying that the aforementioned but rare qualities, as well as the personality you brought to bear in driving the affairs of Imo APC, are substantially contributory to the high quality victory our great party recorded in the just concluded elections.

In the same vein, we also salute our performing Governor and the Leader of our great party in Imo and South East, Most Distinguished Senator Hope Uzodimma (Onwa), for his strategic repositioning and support for the party in different ways thus making our collective victory a resounding reality. We shall not fail to acknowledge even beyond this time that the superlative performance, development oriented programs, and sectoral transformational agenda of His Excellency Senator Hope Uzodimma endeared Ndi Imo to our great party, the APC, and that culminated to our resounding victory.
We are therefore confident that Mr. Chairman shall conclude this round of victory come November when Ndi Imo will democratically renew the mandate of our dear Governor to enable him complete the good works he has started in our dear State.

Thank you for all you do for us, Mr Chairman, Hon MacDonald Ebere, PhD!







Signed:

1) Rt Hon Goodluck Opiah
2) Sen Osita Izunaso
3) Rt Hon Emeka Nduka
4) Rt Hon Amara Iwuanyawu
5) Hon Kanayo Dele Onyemachi
6) Hon Chigozie Nwaneri
7) Hon. Eugene Dibiagwu
8) Hon Canice Moore Nwachukwu
9) Hon. Barr. COC Akaolisa
10) Ralph Nwosu Esq
11) Chief Barr Rex C. Anunobi
12) Comrade Simon Ebegbulem
13) Hon Dr. C.C. Osuala
14) Hon Chief Cosmas Maduba
15) Hon Mrs. Love Ineh
16) Hon Mrs. Nkechi Ugwu
17) Hon Declan Emelumba
18) Hon Mrs. Ruby Emele
19) Hon Noble Atulegwu
20) Chief Charles Orie
21) Hon Mazi Chinasa Nwaneri
22) Hon Wilson Nwafor
23) Dr. Chidi Uzoma
24) Hon Kenneth Okafor
25) Chief Lawson Okafor
26) Chief Uche Obiozor
27) Hon Ernest Ibejiako

Spotlight on The Office of The **Chief Economic Adviser**



Professor Kenneth Amaeshi
University of Edinburgh/European University Institute, Chief Economic Adviser to the Imo State Government

The pulse of a society is oftentimes determined by the state of its economy. For a government to rise to the highest level of curating human progress, economic freedom, and a sustainable future for all, it requires informed and progressive economic advisory. The Office of the Chief Economic Adviser to the Government of Imo State, since inception, has continued to play a significant role in helping the Senator Hope Uzodinma-led administration to articulate its programmes and drive its Shared Prosperity agenda for the people. In the quarter under review, the Office of the Chief Economic Adviser to the Government has taken bold steps to advance the economic growth and development of the Imo economy through a range of initiatives.

The Imo Economy Study (TIES) Network Webinar Series

The TIES Network Webinar, which was identified as one of the most outstanding Initiatives of the Office of The Chief Economic Adviser to the Government of Imo State in the 2nd Edition of the Imo Economy Digest, has continued to make waves by enlightening and educating Imo citizens, the general public, and interested audience from across the world, on the hidden potentials in the Imo Economy and promoting development.

The objective of the series remains to improve the economy of Imo State by empowering people with requisite knowledge and information, attracting investors, and inspiring the youths with new perspectives to job creation.

> ***The objective of the series remains to improve the economy of Imo State by empowering people with requisite knowledge and information, attracting investors, and inspiring the youths with new perspectives to job creation.***







Imo State is richly endowed with massive tourist sites and exciting destinations. This webinar focused on the business potentials in the tourism sector in Imo State. For many participants, the session was an eye-opener, bringing to light the wealth of tourism potentials that abound within the state...

Having successfully held over fifteen webinars since year 2022, which were streamed live on different radio stations and across social platforms with an estimated combined audience of over ten million people, the TIES webinar has continued to make huge impact this year with more engagement and participation across the media space.

Since the last publication of the Imo Economy Digest, the TIES Network has explored:

• Election driven business opportunities in Imo State:
The webinar gave insights on the business opportunities and services that can be invested in before, during, and after elections in Imo State. Examples of such businesses as mentioned by the panelists include but not limited to graphics design and printing, copywriting, editing, blogging, community managers, transportation and logistics, music and social media influencers who can also leverage their platforms to monetize branded content and political messaging and earn a decent income. Click on this link to watch the webinar on our YouTube page https://youtu.be/WiDkSCxNa0c

• Tourism Opportunities in Imo State:
Imo State is richly endowed with massive tourist sites and exciting destinations. This webinar focused on the business potentials in the tourism sector in Imo State. For many participants, the session was an eye-opener, bringing to light the wealth of tourism potentials that abound within the state and how they can be maximized to create economic possibilities for the people and raise the bar of inbound tourism to the State. To watch this webinar on our YouTube, click on this link https://youtu.be/QL9U2lZgQIg

• Export Opportunities for Agri-produce from Imo State:
With over five hundred locally manufactured agricultural products in Imo State, it becomes a necessity to discuss the export potential of these locally made products. This session brought to the fore their methods of preservation, while maintaining their quality, form, and taste; how to package them,





CONGRATULATORY MESSAGE

The Office of the Chief Economic Adviser to Imo State Government congratulates His Excellency, Senator Hope Uzodimma, on his resounding victory at the just concluded APC primaries for the November 11, 2023, Imo State governorship election.

Your Excellency, you have made significant strides to reposition Imo State with your 3R agenda, and the results are glaring. You have continued to exhibit extraordinary practical wisdom.

Continue being your focused and result-oriented self. As they say, the reward for hard work is more work.

My sincere wish for you is that in the end, Imolites would look back and recognize you as a great patriot and leader who emptied himself selflessly for the sustainable betterment of his people.

Ride on with abundant grit and grace!



Professor Kenneth Amaeshi
University of Edinburgh, United Kingdom
European University Institute, Italy
Chief Economic Adviser, Imo State Government

connect with buyers across the globe, and build a sustainable business. To watch this webinar on our YouTube page, click on this link https://youtu.be/uRlInpeKwBo

• Export Opportunities for Agri-produce from Imo State Part 2:

This part of the webinar focused on specific items ranging from honey production to pineapple and cassava processing, packaging, and exportation. Our Panelists shared valuable insights and offered mentorship opportunities to aspiring and budding entrepreneurs. Click on this link to watch this webinar on our YouTube page https://youtu.be/Z0XA4N1xFjg

• Opportunities in Livestock sector in Imo State:

Livestock business is fast becoming one of the most lucrative and easy-to-start businesses with huge returns on investment in Nigeria and a sprawling army of consumers who are readily available and willing to pay for the high-quality protein products. This webinar explored the different types of livestock businesses as well as how they are set up, their processes, products, and sales. Click on this link to watch this webinar on our YouTube page https://youtu.be/5xyv_4t2b7c

Corporate Imo Impact Partnership Initiative (CIIP)

The Office of the Chief Economic Adviser started the year on a good note as the Foundation of one of our volunteers – Coca-Cola – approved a significant grant for two major projects.

The first project is a grant to the Centre for Social Awareness, Advocacy and Ethics (CSAAE) to train about two hundred thousand Imo youths (200,000) between the ages of 18-35 on digital skills over the course of two years, starting from January 2023 and thereafter link them to digital jobs. The flag-off of this digital program took place on the 18th of April 2023 and was well attended by relevant stakeholders.

The second project is a grant to the Rural Africa Water Development Project (RAWDP). The objective of the project is to increase water security, clean drinking water and improve sanitation through watershed activities. The estimated number of improved sanitation facilities to be installed by this grant is 225 to serve about 16,000 persons.



One Kindred, One Business Initiative (OKOBI)

The One Kindred, One Business Initiative (OKOBI) is an initiative of the Office of the Chief Economic Adviser to the Imo State Government, which is being championed through the Kindred Economic Empowerment Program (KEEP). This bold economic development model is a community-based Initiative with the aim of economic transformation from grassroots in Imo State. OKOBI is structured in line with the Igbo traditional kindred system where kins, friends, who share common interests and worldviews come together to set up a business venture leveraging on shared social capital and community support to build a thriving, sustainable and profitable business venture.

The possibilities and viability of the OKOBI model formed the subject of a Twitter Space conversation entitled ''Exploring the Potentials of One Kindred, One Business Initiative", held in January 2023. Other group discussions involving prospects, investors, partners, and consultants are on-going. The underpinning philosophy of the OKOBI has been further explored in world leading publications by the London School of Economics and other reputable media platforms.



CORPORATE IMO
IMPACT PARTNERSHIP (CIIP)

...a **voluntary network** of private sector actors, donor agencies, and other organisations designed to focus primarily on **addressing the challenges of unemployment** through job creation and entrepreneurship development.

Please join the train!

Some of the potential organisations include:

Unilever
The Coca-Cola Company
NBC – Nigerian Bottling Company Ltd (A member of Coca-Cola Hellenic Group)
IHS Towers of strength
FirstBank Since 1894
DBN Development Bank of Nigeria
-CSAAE-
UNDP
Kimberly-Clark
FrieslandCampina
WALTERSMITH
GBF Growing Businesses Foundation
IIF Impact Investors Foundation
access
Sterling
International Breweries PLC
Small & Medium Enterprises Development Agency of Nigeria
UBA United Bank for Africa
FMN Flour Mills of Nigeria PLC
Manufacturers Association of Nigeria
PIND
FMDQ
DIAGEO
LAFARGE
OCCIMA
UN Global Compact
NB
LAPO Microfinance Bank
American Business Council – Promoting Nigeria-America Economic Partnership



For a business idea to be qualified as One Kindred, One Business Initiative, the business must:

- Be registered
- Viable/Profitable
- Employment oriented (committed to addressing poverty through meaningful jobs)
- Group owned
- Domiciled in Imo State

OKOBI aims to set up a minimum of five thousand (5000) successful business ventures in the next four years which would have significant employment opportunities for Imolites. The Office of the Chief Economic Adviser provides support to businesses registered under OKOBI through:

- Guidance in cooperative registration
- Capacity building programs
- Consultancy Services
- Mentorship
- Link to financial Institutions for interest loans
- Eligibility to Aids and Grants from companies and Government when available

For enquiries on OKOBI, call/WhatsApp 07034020766 or email officeoftheceaimsg@gmail.com

My Dream Imo State by 2040 ESSAY COMPETITION

The Office of the Chief Economic Adviser recently invited youths between the ages of 18 and 40 to envision the Imo State they want to see in 2040 in 1,500 words. The essays were centered on 15 broad topics grouped under three major thematic areas: Economic Development, Social Development and Good Governance.

The results will be announced in the Summer of 2023. The prizes include a total cash of N7.5Million naira, a certificate and a feature in the next edition of The Imo Economy Digest.

For more information and updates from the Office of the Chief Economic Adviser, follow us on our social media platforms:

https://twitter.com/ceaimsg
https://web.facebook.com/ChiefEconomicAdviserIMSG
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https://www.instagram.com/chiefeconomicadviser_imsg/
https://www.linkedin.com/company/chief-economic-adviser-imsg/



Orange is the Colour & Taste of Good Business

For Tony Ezenna, founder of Orange Drugs Group, growing a business is one good thing, but growing it with integrity and love is even more important, writes Ikem Okuhu.

If he had lived during the liberation theology era, it would have been possible to ascribe education as his anchor philosophy. But even as the Nigerian, and most African societies still struggle with a lot of the basic freedoms, his home-grown liberation theology carries the potential for a freer society on a mass scale.

He understands that the greatest limitation to man's expression of his freedom is the captivity of the mind, and as such, has taken it upon himself to preach freedom where it most mattered – in education and acquisition of knowledge.

"There is nothing better that can be given to the world than good and qualitative education. The best way to curb crime in the society is by making sure that every child has access to good education. The best empowerment is good education."

This was Tony Ezenna, Chairman, Orange Drugs Group, in his characteristic simplicity, summarizing his liberation theology in carefully chosen eternal lines that capture his belief in the relationship between education and universal freedom.

By every standard, Chief Ezenna, the tycoon with the Midas touch, had a privileged upbringing. His father, Mr. Ernest Ezenna Ebilikwe, was a businessman of note. His chemist business, known as the Easter Chemists, provided the foundational experiences that showed the son the disciplines and guideposts to successful entrepreneurship at a very early age.

Eastern Chemists was not a big business, but it provided a training ground for the young Tony to understand the power of consistent investments, the relevance of both formal and informal education and the role disciplined resource allocation plays in any business that has to be worthy of its name. While the hunger for education was still burning in a young Tony, the passion to create wealth was also stirring in him, and it was no wonder he began quite early to show interest in his father's business, staying in the shop as an apprentice, and when sometimes, the business

faced such downturns that keeping him in school was uphill, he willingly took up more steady internship at the shop, soaking up entrepreneurship knowledge and dreaming of a future when his father's modest business was going to become a conglomerate of national and global acclaim.

Early Life

A Catholic priest, Rev Fr George Adimike, in a tribute widely published in Nigeria's national dailies during his 60th birthday, had described Chief Anthony Ezenna, as a man who confronted many challenges in his journey to success and triumphed.

Fr Adimike had written: "He thrives, flourishes, and fructifies with God's grace as his life's spiritual GPS. He lives believing that one with God is never alone and never lost. Yes, because 'nomen est omen' (name is destiny), no nominative determinism intended, he lives his name, Ifeanyi Chukwu (with God all things are possible). This phenomenon is evident in his efforts to be a repository of virtues and qualities of the kingdom, especially through charity. He is simply a good man with a heart of God and a heart of gold, who shows up whenever help is needed and does so freely, readily and happily. The commitment to people's welfare is a clear demonstration of nobility, generosity and godliness."

Such is the life of the Ikenga Akokwa, a man who epitomizes all the virtues of excellence in business and living. Born on April 21, 1957 in Port Harcourt, Rivers State, Nigeria to parents from Akokwa, in Ideato Imo State, Anthony Ifeanyichukwu Ndubuisi Ezenna, was luckier than a number of his peers back in the village, because of his early exposure to city life.

But only him and his parents knew life was not as rosy as it appeared to those back home. It was the vicissitudes of business that abruptly terminated his childhood as a "Port Harcourt Boy" when his parents moved back to the village, then to Onitsha.

It was on their return to Akokwa that Tony enrolled for his primary education at St David's Primary School, Owerre Akokwa. Done with his primary education, he gained admission into the prestigious Christ the King College (CKC), Onitsha for his secondary school education.

Young Antony was brilliant. But then the financial challenges his parents continued to encounter in business affected his education at this level. As a smart young boy with a working appreciation of the challenges his parents were facing at the time, he willingly agreed to terminate his formal education, and devoted the time instead to supporting his father's business.

Tony proved as brilliant in the "shop" as he was in the classroom. He soon became the creative engine of Eastern Chemists, bringing innovation after revolutionary innovation that soon turned the fortunes of the flagging enterprise of his father.

The sweetness of Orange

Successful entrepreneurs all over the world are all restless, and successful serial entrepreneurs are even rarely found at a spot. Having put in his best under his father, Tony at a point felt a compelling need to mutate the soul and spirit of the Eastern Chemists sole proprietorship and transform it into something of larger economic significance.

There was only one way to do this and that was for him to branch out. Putting aside all the years of family emotions and personal sacrifices, Tony decided to create something new and different, even if it remained in the same line of business.

With N15,000 that was borrowed from his father's business, the first step of faith for the birth of Orange Drugs Limited was born. The story of the Group's humble beginnings can be traced back to Owerri, Imo State capital, where Chief Ezenna, with his sweat, shrewd investment decisions visionary management of scarce resources, was able to etch the name of the business on the marbles of local entrepreneurship.

Still in the business of selling drugs, the Akokwa young businessman saw the window of growth, not in local retail and dispensary like his father's, but in the



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OFFICE OF THE CHIEF ECONOMIC ADVISER
GOVERNOR'S OFFICE

ÓKÓBÌ

ONE KINDRED ONE BUSINESS INITIATIVE

...represents economic emancipation of communities!

A community-based economic development model that is Practicable, Measurable Achievable and Sustainable



TO QUALIFY AS AN OKOBI, A BUSINESS IDEA MUST BE:

- Registered
- Viable/Profitable (actual or potential)
- Employment oriented (committed to addressing poverty through meaningful jobs)
- Group owned (not a one person business)
- Place specific/ localised (e.g.,domiciled in Imo State)

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importation of essential drugs. Tremendous success was soon recorded in this young enterprise, prompting the restless investor to find new ways to add more value, and one of these ways was through developing local production capacity. In fact, Ezenna himself recalled this compelling next-level necessity in an interview:

"It soon became imperative that for us to achieve our full strategic objectives we would have to grow the local content. That reality became even more compelling when the Federal Government, through NAFDAC, announced its policy on drugs importation. That policy banned the importation of certain categories of soaps and pharmaceutical products."

More than 30 years down the road, Orange Drugs Limited has grown into an indigenous conglomerate now known as the Orange Drugs Group, and which is estimated to be worth more than $450 million. The subsidiaries, manufacturing and marketing pharmaceuticals and personal care products, include:

- Orange Drugs Ltd (ODL)-manufactures soaps, distribution, and marketing of drugs, cosmetics and energy drinks.
- Orange Kalbe Ltd (OKL)-Involved in manufacturing of drugs.
- Orange West Africa Ltd (OWA)-Wholesale franchise partner to represent Osram GmbH, Germany.

Tony's Business of "Giving"

Chief Tony Ezenna believes that society can change only when the privileged give themselves for the good of all. As a child, he demonstrated his belief in sacrificial giving when he gave up his secondary education to help save his father's business. And he hasn't looked back ever since.

In 2006, he established the Tony Ezenna Foundation, as part of his determination to ensure that children of the downtrodden are not denied access of education. Through this Foundation, he has provided financial assistance and scholarships to families that find it hard to send their children and wards to school. The Foundation also provides support to small-scale business owners around Akokwa.

A relentless philanthropist, Ezenna has contributed immeasurably to the development of his hometown, Akokwa. He constructed blocks of classrooms at various schools in his hometown, including, the Akokwa High School; St. Anthony High School, Akokwa and Bishop Shanahan College, Orlu.

Tony Ezenna's philanthropy extends to many other areas, including sports sponsorships, road construction and provision of portable water supply.

Empowering Lives is Our Enduring Passion













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As a responsible Pan-African organization, our strategic decision to invest in Nigeria and Africa presents the opportunity for an economic transformation through industrial and manufacturing revolution in profound ways – Cement production, Transportation, Construction, Coal mining, Oil refinery & Petrochemicals, Steel, Salt refining, Sugar refining, Fertilizer, Telecommunications, Packaging, Automobile Truck assembly, Rice milling and Port operations

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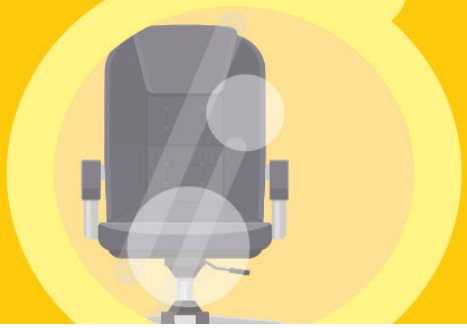

"I am committed to transforming children"
– Dr. Onukwugha

Dr. (Mrs.) Pearl Ihuoma Onukwugha: A Role Model Social Entrepreneur

To some, Dr. (Mrs.) Pearl Ihuoma Onukwugha is a seasoned educationist whose experience has transcended teaching and administration across primary, secondary, and tertiary education in Nigeria and the United States of America (USA). But for most people who have closely followed the career trajectory of the proprietress of Pearlville School in Avu, Owerri West, Dr. Onukwugha is passionate about transforming the destiny of children through the power of education.

Her passion for children led to the opening of Pearlville School. After several years of impacting children in Nigeria and the USA, the decision to set up her school in Owerri is an opportunity to give back to the society and make a difference.

For her, every life-changing dream requires commitment and an unusual sacrifice to see the light of day. Unlike most immigrants who would rather stay glued to their new-found pastures, Dr. Onukwugha resigned her teaching career in the USA and returned to Nigeria to set up what has been described to be a citadel of transformational education.

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Owerri urban – is peaceful and conducive. But beyond the geographical factors that inspired the choice of location for the school, Dr. Onukwugha's decision to build the school in Avu was inspired by her commitment to the development of Imo State.

According to her, most schools of international repute in Nigeria were either situated in Lagos, Abuja, and other big cities, with only a few existing in Imo state. Her dream is to build and nurture an environment that empowers Imo children to thrive and compete with their peers at the global stage. That dream is already in full gear, as students who graduated from the school have gone further to gain admission to leading universities and competing at the global level.

New Curriculum for Sustainable Education

In a world of rapid change and swift evolution in technology, the education that is relevant for the future must keep pace with these radical shifts. Sadly, many institutions, like those visited by Dr. Onukwuhga in the course of her feasibility study, still embraced seemingly outdated models like rote learning, lecture methods, and so on.

Decrying what she described as a blast from the past, she argues that: "the 21st century teaching strategy stipulates that instructions should be practically oriented, very application based". In her opinion, "...our schools need to move with the times and many schools have started adopting these new learning models."



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What is even more interesting is that Dr. Onukwugha is committed to leveraging her experience as a trainer to empower both teachers and school owners to embrace these 21st century learning approaches, which position teachers as guides by the side, instead of sages on the stage. According to her, children do better when they are involved in the learning process.

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Entrepreneurship and Skills for an Emerging Global Economy

Dr. Onukwugha believes the school system could be remodeled to address emerging social needs, while identifying entrepreneurship and skills acquisition as some of the cardinal values to be entrenched in the system. For her, entrepreneurship opens the eyes of students to what opportunity lies in a subject. As they graduate, they are equipped with knowledge as to what they can do from what they have learnt. She also identifies skill acquisition as essential in modern-day teaching and learning, as this offers students job opportunities upon graduation.

Beyond its core role of facilitating learning for a better world, education is a strategic instrument to support the socio-economic development of a society. This is evident in the expansive value chain of the sector, which, according to Dr. Onukwugha, ranges from local furniture providers to vocational education trainers, office stationery suppliers, textile material providers, amongst others.

Pearlville is a thriving school in Imo State, and a true show of social entrepreneurship.

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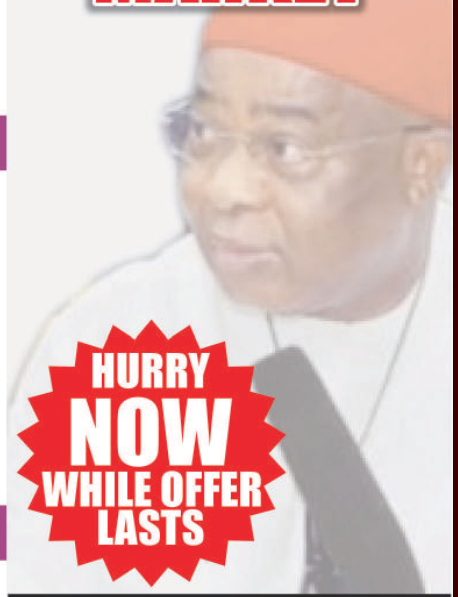

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A Focus on Solomento Auto Centre: A Role Model Business in Imo State

Our editorial team recently interviewed Udaraugo Ibeh, the Managing Director of Solomento Auto Centre, a leading auto dealer based in Owerri Imo State. We present below some extracts from the interview, which showcase Solomento Auto Centre as a role model business in Imo State.

Question: What inspired your journey into auto-maintenance line of business?

Answer: First, I'm a car freak. I love cars. My husband, who is the CEO of Solomento Auto Centre is a panel beater. He left Nigeria for Australia to continue his studies in engineering and later worked there with an auto company, Toyota Australia. After some years, having acquired some experience, he decided to launch his own company, known as Solomento Global in Australia at the time. After a few years, he decided to come home to his own town and open a branch of the Company.

Question: What would you say is your unique approach to car maintenance? How is Solomento different? Can you tell us what makes Solomento Auto Centre unique?

Answer: We are unique because, let me say, in the whole south-east region, especially in Owerri, we are the number one automobile centre. The standard here is just like what is obtained abroad. We invested in a lot of ultra-modern equipment here to enable us to deliver best-in-class services to our customers. We have also carefully assembled a team of competent and experienced technicians to ensure we deliver consistent quality service. We are also special because, unlike most businesses, profit is not our primary focus, but service and customer satisfaction. We believe if we can make our customers truly happy and satisfied with our offerings, that loyalty and retention would eventually pay off. So, we can say that customer satisfaction is one key value that drives our business and differentiates us from our competitors.

Question: What informed your establishment of this auto centre here in Owerri rather than in big cities like Port Harcourt and Lagos where you have bigger markets for your service?

Answer: The main reason is that the CEO is from Owerri. It's about putting your birthplace and community above every other thing. In a sense, launching the business in Owerri was his own way of demonstrating his commitment to his people and community. Charity,

GOODWILL MESSAGE!



The Chief Executive Officer and Founder of SOLOMENTO GLOBAL AUTO SERVICES LTD, Mr Solomon Ibeh and his amiable wife, Mrs Udaraugo Ibeh; the management and entire staff of SOLOMENTO GLOBAL AUTO SERVICES LTD, heartily congratulate our indefatigable Governor, Distinguished Senator Hope Uzodimma and the good People of Imo State on the success recorded at the just concluded House of Assembly Elections in the state.

Your Excellency, the good works you are doing in the State speak well of you as an exemplary servant-leader who came at the right time to liberate Imo State from the shackles of bad leadership.

Congratulations Your Excellency!

We are solidly behind you....

Mr Solomon Ibeh.
Chairman/Founder,
SOLOMENTO GLOBAL AUTO SERVICES LTD.

they say, begins at home. As a matter of fact, there was no auto centre of this standard in Owerri when we started. Like I said earlier, he wanted to contribute to the economic growth of Owerri and Imo State. By virtue of this enterprise, he continues to make valuable contributions to Imo state through employment generation for the people and taxes to the government.

Question: That is to say, he has the development of his state at heart. Is that what you mean?

Answer: Exactly! It is not like he was not aware of the bigger markets in other parts of Nigeria when we started. It was more about putting the welfare of your state and community above the allure of financial gain. In fact, most people from Port-Harcourt, sometimes from Lagos and other parts of South Eastern Nigeria, bring their vehicles to us here in Owerri for maintenance and repair. Other times, they invite us to come over to them and render the services.

Question: You just mentioned employment generation. How would you describe your current staff strength?

Answer: At the moment, we have about 72 full-term employees on our payroll. Now, with our eyes set on our expansion drive, we hope to significantly raise the number of our employees.

Questions: Please can you tell us more about apprenticeship and skills development policy in the company? By this we mean if you have any plans for people coming to learn and thereafter, opening their own workshops after learning?

Answer: We have a number of apprentices that we train, and in the future, they can also open their own workshops, upon completion of their programs. But beyond that, we also envisage that some of them could get international jobs with their certificates and drawing on the rigorous training they receive here. We are a globally minded business and anyone who receives our training can explore work opportunities anywhere else and even abroad.

Question: What's your vision for the future? What's your growth projection in terms of job creation and expansion plan?

Answer: We have very ambitious plans for this business. As I mentioned earlier, my husband launched our



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operations here first because Owerri is his hometown. The initial focus was to strengthen our operations in Owerri and, by extension, contribute meaningfully to the socio-economic wellbeing of the people before expanding to other regions of the country. The next step now is that Solomento Auto Centre would open its branches in Lagos, Abuja, and some other cities in Nigeria. Our dream is to replicate the same service excellence we have come to be known for across these locations.

Question: Invariably, by opening more branches, SOLOMENTO would be creating more employment opportunities while rendering services to society?

Answer: Exactly! Our commitment is to improve livelihoods in communities where we operate. We believe that by consolidating our operations across communities, we are then able to expand job opportunities for our people.

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