

Perspective of Oferekpe People, Customs, Traditions, Economic Growth and Peaceful Co-Existence in Ikwo Local Government Area Ebonyi State of Nigeria

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Abstract

Over the years Oferekpe people have made frantic efforts to put together a documentary evidence of its people, culture and traditions and developmental strides based on self help. This opportunity came as a request from the Committee set by the Ebonyi state government on the customary law formulation and documentation of Ikwo people, in Ebonyi Central Senatorial Zone. This paper is a compendium of the entire historical development of Oferekpe, its culture and traditions and self help efforts that have sustained them to date. Its peaceful nature and as a people who have proven that any government project sited or located in their domain is as safe and secured as possible. Oferekpe is a people who go extra mile to maintain peace, brotherly love and co-existence with all her neighbours in not only in Inyimagu, in Ikwo Local Government Area of Ebonyi but also across the river in Cross River state. .

Keywords: Tradition, Customs, Economic Growth, Peace.

INTRODUCTION

Oferekpe is one of the villages in Ikwo local government area of Ebonyi state. It is located in the present Ikwo South East Development Centre. It lies along the border, alongside other riverine communities of Ochukwu, Ndegu Amagu all in Ikwo; Oziza, Ndibe, Unwana all in Afikpo North local government area in Ebonyi state not to talk of Osumutong, Igonigoni, Itigidi, Itu all in the Cross River state. It has a population of about 2,532 persons both those living in Oferekpe and in Diaspora. Oferekpe is a people whose preoccupation is subsistence land farming and fishery agriculture.

Oferekpe is one of the communities in Ebonyi state without common linguistic or dialectical tendencies and peculiarities in some customs and traditions. These communities include: Okpoto and Ntezi in Ishielu local government, Amuda in Ezza North local government area and Effium in Ohaukwu local government area. Even Orongha in Amegu in Ikwo local government area has such a history.

Concept of Tradition

A *tradition* is a belief or behavior (folk *custom*) passed down within a group or society with symbolic *meaning* or special significance with ...(Green 1997). A tradition is a belief or behavior (folk custom) passed down within a group or society with symbolic meaning or special significance with origins in the past. ... Tradition is used to indicate the quality of a piece of

information being discussed. (Savil 2009). Oferekpe people have artifacts, relics etc that are passed from one generation to another

Concept of Custom

Custom is a usage or practice common to many or a particular place or group of people. Tradition is **the transmission of customs or beliefs from generation to generation** or the fact of being passed on in this way (Wikipedia 2015)

Concept of Entrepreneurship Development

Entrepreneurship Development is defined as a process of enhancing the skill-set and knowledge of entrepreneurs regarding the development, management and organization of a business venture while keeping in mind the risks associated with it. This is carried out through training programs and sessions which are aimed at accentuating entrepreneurial acumen. Pursuing this field as a career, you will be working towards facilitating skill development amongst budding entrepreneurs and assisting them tackle their struggles with building their businesses.

Concept of Economic Growth

Economic Growth can be defined as the increase or improvement in the inflation-adjusted market value of the goods and services produced by an economy over time. Statisticians conventionally measure such growth

as the percent rate of increase in the real gross domestic product, or real GDP.^[1]

Growth is usually calculated in real terms – i.e., inflation-adjusted terms – to eliminate the distorting effect of inflation on the prices of goods produced. Measurement of economic growth uses national income accounting.^[2] Since economic growth is measured as the annual percent change of gross domestic product (GDP), it has all the advantages and drawbacks of that measure. The economic growth-rates of countries are commonly compared using the ratio of the GDP to population (per-capita income).^[3]

The "rate of economic growth" refers to the geometric annual rate of growth in GDP between the first and the last year over a period of time. This growth rate represents the trend in the average level of GDP over the period, and ignores any fluctuations in the GDP around this trend.

Economists refer to an increase in economic growth caused by more efficient use of inputs (increased productivity of labor, of physical capital, of energy or of materials) as intensive growth. In contrast, GDP growth caused only by increases in the amount of inputs available for use (increased population, for example, or new territory) counts as extensive growth.^[4]

Self-Help

Self –help is the act of providing for or helping or the ability to provide for or help oneself without assistance

from others. It is also referred to as the acquiring of information or the solving of one's problems, especially those of a psychological nature, without the direct supervision of professionals or experts, as by independent reading or by joining or forming lay groups that are devoted to one's interests or goals(Dictionary .com 2021).

METHODOLOGY

The methodology adopted for this paper is survey based on oral interviews conducted in and around the Oferekpe community as well as reviewed related literature.

Population

The Oferekpe has a population of 2532 persons living within and outside its environs based on population estimate of 1991. However, for the purpose of answering the research question formulated 20 respondents were used as the population. The population was made up of traditional stool holders in the community.

Data Analysis

The data collected through a structured questionnaire was analyzed using mean statistics.

RESULTS

Research Question 1

What are the things that have brought economic growth peace and inter-communal co-existence between Oferekpe and neighbouring communities?

Table 1: Things meant to bring Peace, economic growth, peace ad inter-communal co-existence

S/NO	Item	SA	A	D	SD	N	Mean Score	Decision
4	Promoting utilization of art-based activities	7	6	4	3	20	4,0	Accepted
5	Development of SMEs	9	5	4	2	20	4,0	Accepted
6	Provision of soft loan	8	8	2	2	20	4,2	Accepted
7	Inter community activities	9	6	3	2	20	4,0	Accepted

All the items were above the mean of 2.5 and therefore were accepted.

The results of this exercise now justify Oferekpe as a people who have a documented culture, customs and traditions that help them achieve rapid economic transformation and peaceful co-existence with her neighbouring communities that will live the test of time.

Chieftaincy Stool

Oferekpe people have a hereditary or monarchical traditional system of administration. The leader is called *Ovar* just as is present practiced in Inyimagu

Ikwo. The cabinet is made up of 5 kindred units' heads. In addition there is a 'Junior and senior' Speaker who is more or less the Prime Minister in the contemporary British system. Other members are also co-opted into the cabinet who must have distinguished themselves in various endeavours in and outside the community. Oferekpe is made of mainly two sections: Akpoha up and Eborra near the bank of the river.

Ikoro Drum

The ikoro drum is also referred to as *ekwa-bin*. When once it is beaten, it signified that every person's attention is required for an urgent message.

Playground

The playground or *ekpesbe-ama* or *ngangbo* is a place where serious community issues are discussed. Decisions taken at such gatherings are most times very irreversible.

Kindred Units

Oferekpe has 5 kindred units. They are headed by five kindred chiefs. These kindred units are as follows:

- i. Okemme
- ii. Eridigi
- iii. Irabon
- iv. Ejim Obep
- v. Ofonagang

Each of the kindred units has its own ancestral stool and antiquities handed over from generation to generation in the kindred. These antiquities are very revered, one of which is *ikpo*.

Land Tenure System

Oferekpe operates a communal land tenure system under the custody of the *Ovar* and his cabinet, the traditional ruler of Oferekpe. For the purpose of agriculture they practice shifting cultivation in their farmland. Some time it takes an interval of two to five years to move and return from one farmland to another. Deforestation has affected this practice immensely as virtually every farmland is monotonously being used without break. Bush burning has become the order of the day at the disadvantage of the serene ecological environment. Youth burn bushes either for wild life or for planting of upland rice by falling down thick forest that naturally protected the serene environment of the people.

Caste System

Oferekpe people also run a caste system just like any other community in Ikwo in particular and Ebonyi state and South East Nigeria in general.

Matrilineal System

Oferekpe people run matrilineal system just like the Ihechiowa, Arochukwu and Ohafia people in Abia state and the present Afikpo or Ehugbo people in Afikpo North local government area of Ebonyi state. Children think they are safer staying with their maternal cousins, aunties, uncles, nephews, etc than the paternal cousins, uncles, etc. The son pays a lot of loyalty and financial obligations to his maternal relations more than to his paternal relations. His paternal relations are regarded as members of his kindred, while his maternal relations are regarded as *ikwu* or *ochi*. On the other hand the paternal relations are known as members of his *efuna*.

Marriage Custom

The groom would court with a young maiden. During the period of courtship he is expected to go and help his

in-laws in their farmland. In the marriage proper, the first thing to do is the initial knocking on the door which requires one ipoti or 2 gallons of palm wine. The next is 6 gallons; the third is also 6 gallons. 1 gallon of oil and a head of tobacco; 4 kola nuts; the 'groundnuts', soap and pomade for the age grade of the bride; etc. some of these items are replicated when the potential in-law goes to ask his bride's kindred unit *efuna* and *ikwu* for the daughter's hand in marriage. The bride price is £1:5 shillings. The 6 gallons is presented 4 times and the 5th is to ask for the bride price. However, the presentation of palm wine of 6 gallons in each case is done 7 times. A big round fish stick is given to the father of the bride. The same big round fish stick is given to the kindred. Thereafter the mother to the bride is given a fat hen. That hen signifies that her daughter will be fruitful as the hen will lay eggs from time to time. To ask for the bride price the groom will drop 2 shillings 10pences or (2½) shillings. After the payment of the dowry the age grade now escort their friend to the husband's place.

Divorce

The Oferekpe people view and handle the issue of divorce according to the laid down customs. A man or woman may have cause to divorce his wife or her husband when the contending conflicts or issues are proven to hinge on:

- (i). termination of life,
- (ii). Infidelity,
- (iii). In the case of a woman, when the man did not pay bride price on her head or perform the customary rites pertaining to marriage according to the Oferekpe customs and traditions.
- (iv). More so when a woman stays in her father's house and gives birth to a child or children as the case may be such child or children belongs to paternal family(v). unless in (iv) above if the man who impregnated the girl made the purchases of the '*ekpa*' and pays for all expenses as demanded by the parents of the girl during the weaning of the child or children. (vi). If the above is not done any other man who came to marry the girl fathers the child or children as long as he performs the marriage rites. (vii). When a divorce takes place the pride price is refunded to the former husband by the parents of girl and this is to enable her get remarried. (viii). If the bride price or dowry is not refunded and the lady became pregnant any child or children born within this period belonged to the man who paid her bride price.
- (ix). If the husband who paid dowry on a woman died the woman has the right to re-marry but the refund of the dowry must be made to the family of the late husband before such exit.
- (x). On no account shall a woman be forced to remain in the late husband's compound and bear children for the late husband unless on mutual understanding with the woman.

Pre Farming Custom

Before any one should go to the farm for a planting season between March and April each year the custom is that the traditional cabinet will appease the gods of the land for the commencement of farming activities. After the harvest of crops in September the new yam festival is fixed for the entire community.

Burial Ceremony

The dead is not to bury the dead. In Oferekpe the living buries the dead. During the burial of a Traditional ruler 7 days mourning is declared and no farming activities are carried out. Those that committed atrocities against the land are buried in the evil forest *nkwonachi* (*ikirikpo*). However, well behaved people are buried inside the parlor, room or in front of the building depending on what the deceased or first son and the family decided. However, one of the children is made to perform the burial rites of the late father or mother. If the person belonged to the traditional set up he is given befitting burial rites according to the traditional demands. For a hero at war times a stage is built and fire set underneath the corpse *etini*. The person is dressed with a he goat skin tied on his right arm (*itoni*) and put on a sleeping mat or wooden bed above the heat of the fireplace during the wake keep. Masquerades and gunpowder and cannon shoots are used to herald the exit of the dead to the earth beyond to meet his ancestors.

Inheritance

The Oferekpe custom is very strict on inheritance as it is the person who headed the burial that is said to own the property of the late father or mother. Unless otherwise today it is gradually dying away as a result of western education. However, the first son owns the family house and most properties which he must share with his siblings.

Cultural Festivals

New yam festival is one of the greatest festivals performed by the Oferekpe people. Before new yam harvest there are rituals performed by the traditional stool called *ohafeife* followed by *Oherepoto* (Ika aki in Ezza). This heralds the new yam to the land after which you can go and harvest new yam from your own farm. The festival proper comes up between September and November each year. During which friends are invited all over. It lasts for 5 days. The new yam festival is always very delightful to witness in Oferekpe as visitors come from length and breadth to witness the occasion.

Circumcision

Circumcision in Oferekpe is referred to as *onumkpara* (*ibugwu*) in male and is done after 8 days of birth. However, if a male child is not circumcised after 8 days. He will do that during adolescence when his age

mates will come and stay with him as he is performing what is known as '*okpakoriko*'. The female circumcision (*emankpara*) takes place during adolescence especially during the first pregnancy to enable the girl to be ready to push the child during child birth. If not the gods may not permit safe delivery until they are appeased. It has a long lasting history. The eldest women in the compound perform the surgery of the female genital organ with a razor or sharp knife. Both male and female rob yellow (*edo*)/*ogo* and red (*uswe*)/*iso* cam wood during the circumcision period. During this period also friends, relations cook food for the person who was circumcised.

Masquerade Systems

Masquerades are revered in Oferekpe custom. The *okwa* comes out only when the Traditional ruler dies. Also the *ovarkum* masquerade is displayed only during the death of a traditional ruler. Other masquerades are *eburanbup* and *Owokwoni* which is used to bring about law and order in the community and in the event of any confiscation of property of any defaulter, such confiscation is not challenged beyond the native tradition or customs. *Ibon* comes out during the burial of the traditional ruler too, and so on and so forth. Other masquerades include: *ogbaekoma*, *Ogbandim* of the present day celebrated youth masquerade in Ebonyi and beyond.

Native Court in Ikwo

Eze (2011:501) stated that Ikwo was brought under the jurisdiction of Abakaliki Division of Ogoja Province in January 1914. In the same publication (Eze 2011:501) it was stated that Echem Oke of Oferekpe was appointed as a member of Ikwo Native Court Grade 'C' under the Abakaliki Division as contained in Annual Report of Abakaliki Division in 1922. This was alongside other counterparts thus:

Native court Heads in Ikwo

Chuku	Umuaka
Ufere	Ameka
Ogudu	Okpitimo
Omeliki	Amago
Ede Ale	Inyimegu Akataka
Ozitere	Achara
Aliobu	Igbudu
Nworia	Akpanwudele
Ozini-Ege	Amago
Elem Egele	Echialike
Ezake	Amago Echara
Nweji	Ininmago
Ezaka Otubo	Ndufu Nweta
Opeke	Ndufu Alike
* Echem Oke	Oferekpe
Ongele	Amago

Source: Eze, (2011:501)

Furthermore according to Eze (2011:502) the first Ikwo Clan Court was started in 1921 when on 1st April, a court of Grade ‘C’ was opened at Okpuru Nwajagbo and was upgraded to Grade ‘B’ on the 8th of January 1924. Due to his impeccable character Echem Oke was reappointed a minor judge of the native court by the District Officer, Captain Kelly who flushed others found corrupt. The Head Judge became Permanent President of the court. The full judicial council of the time became as follows:

Judicial Council in Ikwo

1	Obura Ucha Onele	Ekpeli
2	Oke Appam	Ezeke
3	Oshine Amiara	Ameka
4	Aluma Alobu Eze	Alike
5	Ngele Atu Inyima	Amegu
6	Ezaka Utobo	Umota
7	Ike Nike	Inyimegu
8	Aba Anyigor	Ekpanwudele
9	Alo Ogbuagu	Igbudu
10	Imeba Alo Ede	Okpitimo
11	A member (not mentioned)	Echara
12	* Echem Oke (retained as minor judge)	Oferekpe
13	Nwaji	Inyimegu

Source: Eze (2011:502)

Education Culture

To Oferekpe people education is a culture, since it is said that culture is a way of a people. As part their educational exploits the first school of the Episcopal mission of Church of Scotland in old Abakaliki Province was established in Oferekpe in 1936, Source: East Central state Government Press (1972).

Self Help Culture

Oferekpe people have a self help culture. In 1953 they sought approval from the District Administrator in Abakaliki Province for the establishment of Oferekpe Dispensary which was opened in 1955. The blueprint on Ebonyi Development Forum is yet another reference point to the case of Oferekpe dispensary. It is upgraded to a primary health care centre for Inyimagu by Governor Martin Elechi under MDG programme of the state. In another development, in 2009 an idea of constructing a modern civic centre was put in place. The project is nearing completion.

Protecting Government Facilities Culture

The people also have the culture of preserving and guarding government property built in their place. A case in point is the marine quarters which were built in 1957 with the construction and put to use of the popular Abakaliki – Oferekpe road during Chief Nwanchor Oginyi’s reign in Inyimagu Ikwo in the then Abakaliki Province. Chief Nwanchor Oginyi is noted for encouraging village integration among communities and dwellers in Inyimagu Ikwo.

His Excellency Governor Martin Elechi, MFR, CON blessed Oferekpe community with the construction of world class mega water scheme in addition to the electricity turbine within Oferekpe and her neighbours Akahufu. The community is grateful and guarding the facilities in the area as part of their culture.

CONCLUSIONS

Oferekpe people are noted for their love, peace and industry. Oferekpe people also are noted for establishing bridges of unity and co-existence among her neighbours. Without a documentary like this, the culture, customs and traditions of Oferekpe might easily be misunderstood and or misrepresented for what they are not.

Finally, the Oferekpe people cherish and applaud the efforts of the state government at formulating the establishment of the customary law in the state. The people will ever remain grateful to His Excellency Governor Martin Elechi MFR, CON after leaving office in 2015 for higher heights. Glory shall always return to the Almighty for preserving His Excellency’s life. Governor Elechi is indeed the messiah of our times who has brought to an end the endemic perennial guinea worm scourge which Ebonyians had suffered over the decades through provision of the Oferekpe and Ukawu mega water schemes in addition to other dividends of democracy in this political dispensation. We wish him well and the very best in his present and future endeavours.

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