

Environmental Preservation: The Igbo approach.

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ABSTRACT

This study Environmental Preservation: The Igbo approach looks on Igbo people's approach in preserving their environment. The Igbo as a people has great respect for their environment. This is evidenced in its place amongst its gods. In Igbo cosmology, "Ala" one of the deities known as the earth goddess is highly revered and wields so much influence in the well being and success of the people. As an agrarian people, they never fail to protect it from both human and natural harm. Several measures are put in place to protect it from being abused. This is made manifest in the way and manner the preservation is structured: from the immediate family, kindred level and finally community level. Anything short of this is frowned at and at the same time attracts certain penalty on the side of the perpetrator. This work firstly gives brief history of Igbo people vis a viz their location. It further deals with some basic methods and ways the Igbo of south East Nigeria put in place in preserving their environment for healthy and body of its citizenry, their gains and the present environmental challenges as well as the unforeseen disaster ahead of human race. The work concludes by highlighting the success of Igbo of old in protecting their environment, the laws put in place to strengthen them, the organs used in its enforcing these laws and finally a call on the relevant authorities for the maintenance and consolidating on the ideals of the Igbo of the old as Key well as advancing on them.

Keywords: Ndi Igbo, Ala (Earth goddess), Family, Age grade, Masquerade.

INTRODUCTION

The Oxford English Dictionaries describes environment as the surroundings or conditions in which a person, animal, or plant lives or operate. Environment in its explicit definition is the totality of mans geographical surroundings made up of both land and territorial waters including the atmosphere. All over the world today there is a serious concern over harms against the environment and its attendant effects. Man's unkindness through its daily activities and natural factors has affected the environment

negatively. The attendant effects of this unwholesome attitude are already starring everyone on the face as it gives birth to what is today known as "climate change". Movement for its restoration has become hysterical with different terminologies: ozone layer depredation, global warming, green house emission, etc.

The urban economic industrialization and the movement of people in search of greener pastures coupled with man socio economic activities has

accelerated environmental hazard. Every part of the world has peculiar environmental challenge confronting it. The western world has hurricane, landslide, flooding and earthquake to contain with while Africans precisely Nigerians are ravaged with flood, coastal and river bank erosion, rivers and stream pollution, oil spills gas flaring, stream/river recession, deforestation, desert encroachment, poor sanitation/waste management. [1], predicts that: "it has been observed that global climate change will have a strong impact on Nigeria-particularly in areas of agriculture, land use, energy, bio diversify, health and water resources". While desert encroachment is being experienced in the Northern part of Nigeria as their environment is swiftly blown away by wind, the Southern region which is sub divided into South south and South East have their peculiarity in the environmental challenges.

Among the South south (Niger Delta Region), it is completely of a different scenario. Being an oil rich region, its area suffers oil spill, river pollution, gas flaring, and flooding. Cole states its implications; "...the flaring contains toxins, which affect the health of the local communities, thus causing premature deaths, respiratory illness and cancer". Aside health effect of gas flaring, it equally has environmental problem of acid rain. As [2], states that; "acid rain acidifies lakes and streams and damages vegetation. In addition, acid rain accelerates the decay of building materials and paints". The South East zone where the Igbo inhabit which also has some of its states classified among the oil producing states in the country is confronted with erosion, oil pollution, oil spill, river pollution, solid waste proliferation

occasioned by poor waste management and stream/river recession.

Statement of the problem:

Civilization with its attendant effect of technological advancement no doubt improves mans way of life. These social realities have potentialities for good and bad especially in the bond which holds the people together for the advancement of their course. Like [3] observes; "...this causes him to develop so-called 'business' attitude that seem mechanical, soulless and less human". The people of Igbo south east Nigeria has been until the late fifties a predominantly agricultural, rural and pre-industrial society. The Igbo graduated from semi-urbanized society into a modern urbanized with accompanying population explosion. The Igbo within a twinkle of an eye is confronted with the reality of towns growth in absence of major re-organization as [3], spells out; "There comes a time when congestion becomes intolerable, shanty towns out of control, and health services hopelessly overburdened. At this point, major road expenditure, major housing, drainage and environmental services become essential, and the costs are enormous".

The management of the environment becomes intractable as it becomes difficult for it to measure up with the new status it attained. Human activities coupled with nature began to present a litany of woe to the mankind. [3],portrays; "many cities in developing countries cannot keep pace with urbanization, pollution and the increasing concomitant generation of garbage due to changing life styles and consumption patterns".

Aside the global warming which is a universal phenomenon, Ndigbo south east Nigeria has disproportionate

environmental challenges that is tearing its environment apart. This includes erosion, flood, waste management and water recession. This boils down to man's inhumanity to nature. People are rendered homeless as these disaster claims their lands and farm lands, homes and lives are lost, their means of livelihood threatened. These alarm bells are tolling every day as the earth cringe in protest over mans environmental waywardness. Movement for its restoration has become hysterical with different terminologies: ozone layer depredation, global warming, green house emission,

Hitherto Igbo people have measures put in place for the preservation of their environment which is embedded in their religion, culture and socio-political life. With the emergence of colonial masters, the Igbo adjusted to a system of order based on formal controls, rules and regulations that crumbled the bond and the communal spirit through which they maintain social order.

Ndigbo (Igbo people):

The Igbo people of Nigeria called in Igbo parlance "Ndigbo" is one of the largest ethnic tribe in Nigeria West Africa. Nigeria being a multi lingua country with over four hundred tribes, but for convenient sake officially recognises three tribes: Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba. Ndigbo are found in the south eastern part of Nigeria. [4] in his description says Igbo land "...lies within the recognised negro belt". The word Igbo serves as their language, geographical spread as well as a people. They occupy five out of the thirty six states that made up of Nigeria. Aside the five states, the Igbo also constitute more than twenty five percent of the population in two of their neighbouring states Delta and Rivers states. Nigerian census of 2006 put their population at

sixteen million, it is noteworthy that the Igbo are cosmopolitan/itinerant people a reason [5], adduce to the fact that "the Igbo are simply very republic in nature and would easily uproot themselves and their families to search for greener pastures". Their republican nature saw about 80% of the Igbo live outside the traditional enclave of the South east. It is generally believed that outside their traditional enclave, the Igbo constitute the second largest population in other states.

The occupation of the Igbo is subsistent farming while those living along coastal areas (riverine communities) engage in fishery. Being cosmopolitan in nature, a lot of Igbo descent migrated to other parts of Nigeria and beyond in search of greener pasture. This attribute of the Igbo gave birth to the saying; "if you go to any place and did not find Igbo person, better leave the place because is not a land of the living". They are predominantly Christians with traces of people who still practice traditional African religion. They are blessed with very good weather that translates to a fertile land. [6] x-rays:

Igboland has a tropical climate. The average annual temperature is about 80f with an annual temperature of between 5 and 10. There are two marked season dry and rainy seasons. The former starts in October and ends in April. The later commences in April and ends in October with a break in August.

The Igbo love, cherish and preserve their environment knowing their wealth and success comes from it. They have stipulated code of conduct guiding their relationship with their environment to

ensure harmony. [6] cites Unokas lamentation; “every year”, he said sadly, “before I put any crop in the earth, I sacrifice a cock to Ani, the owner of the land. It is the law of our fathers”.

Igbo people are predominantly farmers. Their staple crop is yam and its harvest time is highly celebrated with fanfare in a festival called (iri ji ohuu) new yam festival. They cultivate and grow yams in large numbers because it is a yard stick to measure wealth and social status in Igbo land. In their agricultural life there is very clear distinction and division of labour between men and women. Certain crops are tagged men’s crop like yam the king of crops while vegetables are grown by their women and it’s called female crops. The land (ani/ala) which is the mother earth is not only loved and cherished by the Igbo it’s also revered and worshiped. [7], while confirming the agricultural based culture of the Igbo posits that; “because of the critical importance of agriculture in Igboland, the land (ala/ani) is deified. Ala/ani was the most important deity in Igboland”. In Igbo world view, (ala/ani) the earth has its place as one of the deities “lesser gods”. It wields much power as it is seen as an abode of the human being and source of their wealth. Ala also known as the earth goddess being a woman is goddess of fertility and has power to kill evil people. The Igbo use it as weapon to curse their transgressor by invoking the wrath of the earth goddess to terminate the enemy’s life (ala/ani kugbukwaa gi).

Ala is also used as an instrument to prove ones innocence. An accused person in a bid to prove his or her innocence beyond reasonable doubt will stand on the earth (ala/ani) barefooted to recant what he is being accused of and prove his innocence. Once this is done the case is permanently laid to rest seeing that (ala/ani) will search the truth

and vindicate the person. Because the Igbo believe that (ala/ani) the earth goddess wields much power and can kill evil person that swears falsely with her name. Any sin or abuse against the land is viewed as an abomination (aru). It takes certain rituals to cleanse the land and to appease the goddess. If anyone dies and is believed to have been killed by the earth goddess, such individual is not buried in a normal way, the person is thrown into the evil forest called “ajo ofia” to be eaten by vulture and carrion birds.

Amongst the Igbo ala the earth is viewed beyond the earth surface as it entails the totality of the environment hence its place and importance in their day to day activity. [8] summarises its import:

“In Igbo religious world view, key areas, such as land, river, hills, forests, caves, are believed to be controlled by female deities. Such sites are also connected with agriculture, fertility, morality, mores, beauty, and blessings”. Desecration of Ala could spell doom to the people by causing famine in the land and diseases.

Aim and objectives of the study

In the face of the enormous and multifaceted environmental challenges currently devastating the Igbo land particularly and Nigeria in general,, this work is aimed at bringing to fore the current environmental status of people of south east Nigeria (Ndigbo). To draw the attention of the international community especially the World Health Organisation (WHO) and the United Nations International Children Education Fund (UNICEF) to the looming imminent dangers and death and other attendant effects of poor sanitation, flooding, erosion and water recession.

Scope of study

The scope and area of study will be limited to the five south eastern states of Nigeria: Anambra, Imo, Abia, Ebonyi and Enugu. This is because these states share the same history, speak same language, practise same culture, share same aspiration and are faced and suffer the same environmental challenges. Emphasis will be on environmental problems associated with flood, erosion and solid waste.

Igbo people and preservation of their environment:

The Igbo see the earth goddess as the owner of the earth (landlord) and all that is therein, while they believe that they are mere tenants who must be of good morals behaviour to avoid being ejected by the land owner the (Ala/ani) the mother earth. The Igbo man's level of obedience /submission to the spiritual and physical superiority of the mother earth determines the returns he gets from agricultural produce and the overall harmony he enjoys in his habitat including supply of other natural resources like water. Every Igbo child is brought up to know all the rudiments of protection of his or her environment from the earliest stage of life. This trickles down from the family, to the kindred, village and down to community level. Environmental preservation by this effort becomes a way of life to an average Igbo man and woman.

Family level

The family here depicts the immediate family that consist the father, mother and their children. In a typical Igbo family children grow up under the tutelage of their parents and the extended family tree. They learn through observations and instructions and whatever they learn during this period guides them throughout their life

time. One of such practice is the respect for (ala/ani) the earth goddess. [9] relays the punishment meted on a man (Okonkwo) who broke the peace of the holy week the earth goddess is celebrated by beating one of his wives:

The evil you have done can ruin the whole clan. The earth goddess whom you have insulted may refuse to give us her increase, and we shall perish...you will bring to the shrine of Ani tomorrow one she-goat, one hen, a length of clothe and a hundred cowries.

This belief is passed on from generation to generation and through parents to their children. By this practice the reverence and worship of Ala the earth goddess is perpetuated within the clan because of their strong belief that their wellbeing comes from her and abuse of its tenets could spell doom not just on the offender but on the whole community.

Within their immediate family setting, the children are taught to keep the environment clean by sweeping the compound and clearing it of grass and other filth. The cleaning is regimented in a way that the boys are expected to concentrate on certain areas as well as the girls. While the boys are charged with the outside of the compound the girls always focus on the inside with the supervision of the mother. The refuse generated in the course of the cleaning are never disposed anyhow. They are sorted into perishable and non perishable garbage. The perishable rubbish is taken to the the farms as compost manure after decay. Such is mostly deposited as manure for such plants as plantain. The girls after sweeping the house toe the same hygienic method but most importantly; the ashes generated from the kitchens are collected and used as pesticide to ward off ants and flies while the corn

stick and its rafter are recycled to generate fire to cook. The ashes are carefully sprayed in the toilet to protect it from cockroach and fly infestation. Aside the toilet the ashes are equally used on ant prone areas especially trees from being invaded by soldier ants.

The management of the cleaning of both the house and the compound during the dry season differs from the raining season. Cleaning of the house during dry season requires spraying water on the floor of the house to suspend the eruption of dust which can have adverse effect on the health of the people and the environment. Before sweeping the floor of the house, reasonable quantity of water is spewed out sparingly to make the environment friendly for all and sundry. This is equally done on the outside (ama) to dispel dust eruption during the sweeping of the compound.

Among the Igbo of the south east Nigeria, non-degradable items like pieces of broken clay pots and plates, broken bottles, metal cans and other out used kitchen utensils including house hold equipment are usually thrown inside a burrow pit specifically dig for such purpose. This is done in order to reduce to its barest minimum all items that will constitute environmental nuisance within the compound and the farms because these objects cannot decay. Although certain non-degradable wares were not too much of environmental challenge during the time under review, but little that were generated were properly disposed. Such preservation techniques help archaeologists in their finding as they constitute part of the artefacts they unearthed in the cause of their research. This articulated management of generated filth within the family level boils down to the serenity the Igbo of old celebrated.

Kindred (Umunna) level

In Igbo setting the kindred (umunna) is made up of families of the same blood with all the extended connections. It consists of paternal cousins at first and second levels. No member of same (umunna) is allowed to marry each other. [10], gives its elaborate definition as:

The term umunna suggests two notions. The first is the extended family described above as the micro umunna social unit while the second could be said to be a group of extended families at the macro-umunna social level designated as kindred. This is a larger social unit with members or households that belong to a set of remote blood brothers and sisters. They claim and can in fact trace their common ancestry to a common ancestor.

Under the kindred level the Igbo social life knitted them together. As [11], exhumes; "one is expected to identify with his umunna while the umunna stands and identifies with him in good and in bad, thus individualism is never encouraged among the Igbo". The coming together of different families though of same blood necessitated the establishment of social order to foist mutual understanding and to check breakdown of law and order as well as preservation of assets jointly owned by the kindred (umunna). Such collective assets of the kindred including village square where all kindred social activities takes place which [12] describes as "...the melting place for political discussions, communal sports and

games. The community deity is often located there so it is also the centre for religious activities and even trade”.

The upkeep of the village square like clearing of grass is the social responsibility of the younger male of the kindred (umunna) while the women wives of the kindred men are tasked with the decoration of the mud house that housed the deity. Explaining the levels of structural differentiation, [13] quoting Smith says “all the Igbo communities ensure differences in the distribution of differentiated rules among their adult men, and women on the other hand and between them and the children on the other hand”.

In Igbo land at the (umunna) level, there are not many activities to celebrate because its guiding principle is not far from that of the family even worship is never done elaborately under the kindred level. [13] gives credence to this when he says that “some elements which characterise the extended family...recognition of common responsibility, allegiance to a common ancestor and worship, joint economic activities on production or consumption or both”. Sacrifices and worships are rather done more under family level than at kindred (umunna) level. The essence of having recreation ground under the kindred (umunna) is basically for meetings and moonlight tales as well as training ground for eventual competition at the village cum community level. The kindred (umunna) are thus made more meaningful when it's subsumed in the village (ogbe) level. This coming together of various kindred bring into being the village (ogbe). [14] sums it thus:

No nuclear family is totally autonomous. Each must necessarily be connected to others so as

to form a complete Igbo family which then is normally large. This model of the family widens further so as to include the kindred-the extended patrilineal family known as Umunna a gathering of kindred in turn constitutes a lineage-ebo. This lineage eventually extends to form a village-ogbe, which is simply a collection of lineages.

Worship at the village level is more elaborate as various kindred are been represented while they share and celebrate same deity. Among the Igbo, no family (ezinulo) and kindred (umunna) can function independent of others as they believe that there is strength in coming together (igwe bu ike).

At the village level (ogbe) institutions communally owned by the village is maintained and sustained collectively. The village square, used for recreational activities is periodically maintained especially few market days to the celebration of any festival. Younger males of the village are saddled with the task of weeding the (ama) of grasses, reconstructing and replacing chairs in preparation for the celebration. The women precisely the women married into the village are given the task of beautifying the mud house housing the village deity. The young girls will also help out by fetching water while the elders of the village assume supervisory role.

In a typical Igbo society, villages own, operate and fetch common streams or water head. Young boys and girls between the ages of 10 to 15 years are responsible for the upkeep of the village

stream. Once you are within the above mentioned age bracket, you will automatically get involved in the maintenance of the village stream which is normally done at least once in a month on a particular market day. If by any reason one will absent himself or herself from participating due to ill health or other circumstances beyond one's control, she must obtain from the age group leadership to be absent.

During the cleaning of the stream, no one is allowed to fetch water pending when the exercise is completed. The cleaning usually takes place as early as six in the morning when the young boys and girls in their numbers match towards the stream. Already their cleaning implements made up of short flat plank, broom and the long broom (akpata) made from palm front are permanently kept and hiding within the stream environs. During the cleaning, overgrown grasses are cut down, while leaves of tree, sludge and other dirt things within the stream are cleared and disposed. Public makeshift bathe room are rehabilitated by changing the weak palm fronds. Ridges made of sand from the stream are formed to streamline demarcations with the support of logs of wood.

This is simply to demarcate areas where one is allowed to wash clothes, and or do other chores at the stream. It must be noted that the clothes are of different category as children's clothes soiled with shit are never allowed to be washed inside the stream rather such a person can draw water with bucket move away from the stream and wash such clothes. Those soiled with urine have areas meant for it. In Igbo land, nobody is allowed to fetch from a community stream with cooking utensils or any such materials used to store oil. People are not allowed to enter into the stream with foot wear. The short flat plank is

used to extend the streams frontier, raise sand and form embankment

After the cleanup exercise roll call is conducted and any child that was absent will be fined. The fines for defaulting members are always in accordance with the rules and regulations. Those present will match to the homes of the defaulters to demand for the fine to be paid and enforce the rules. Failure to pay the fine attracts seizure of any of the property in lieu of the money. The property will only be released after the fine is redeemed.

In Igbo land, the community markets are also cleaned by the women of various villages. There are four market days in Igbo land named as follows which is; Oye, Afor, Nkwo, Eke. The markets are usually given face lift ones in a month. The market is structured in such a way that every village has a part of the market specifically apportioned to it. Aside the monthly cleaning, the women after selling their wares which is mostly agricultural produce sweep and dispose the filth appropriately. Community market activities in Igbo land are mostly women affairs as their men use that day to felicitate by drinking palm wine (nkwo ocha) exchanging banter with their peers. There is always market master (eze ahia) a position that is held by men carefully constituted to maintain law and order in the market including its cleanliness. Any village that falls short of its expectation by not cleaning and disposing its garbage properly after each market day is fined accordingly.

Community level (ora obodo)

The community (obodo) is the last stretch or rather the melting point of the Family (ezinulo), kindred (umunna) and village (ogbe). A conglomeration of

villages forms a community-obodo. This is the wider extent of the Igbo social unit [15]: “all the activities, responsibilities and festivities at the family, kindred and village levels are further replicated at the community levels but on a robust/elaborate manner”. The same manner they share things in common economical and development wise at the village and kindred levels is the way it appears at the community level. The Igbo believe that as a community they have one purpose and common destiny to pursue. [16], quoting Biko affirms “hence in all we do always place man first and hence all our action is usually joint community oriented action rather than the individualism”.

Among the Igbo, one does not live for himself but for the community and all that the community stands for. The community function based on the principles of dialogue and consensus. It's in the light of this that [17] says that; “the community is the custodian of the individual. So one must always get identified with it”. At the community level development projects are executed. These include roads and community town hall markets etc. Road construction and maintenance is taken serious in Igbo land. At a particular period and season in the communities, every able bodied men of the community are mobilised to give access roads to their communities facelifts. Even the physically challenged members are involved in one way or the other. Through their participation either by singing songs and playing on local musical instruments motivates the able bodied men as the work lasts.

It is worthy note that these development initiatives like road maintenance are usually done once in a year within the month of October at the termination of rainy season. Each year

on the month of October, all the major roads in the community will receive serious attention so as to restore its formation washed away during the rainy season. The maintenance will lead the community through the next raining season after which the exercise will be re-enacted. During the maintenance work, embankments and barriers are erected at the erosion prone areas with a flood catchment pit at certain ends. These catchments/burrow pits restrict and reduce the force of the flood and at the same time reduce flood and erosion from washing away of the roads. The road maintenance entails cutting overgrown grasses, using stems of trees like palm tree to form base for the embankment and opening up natural water channels as well as removing obstructions along the water ways. The organ through which major projects are executed in Igbo land is through the age grade.

Age grade system

Among the Igbo people, age grade system is a revered organ of development of their communities. Age grade formation is a celebrated system of governance among the Igbo people of Nigeria. Age grades are formed by people within the community who were born at a particular or certain age brackets. In most communities people within 3 to 4 years age bracket are grouped to form one age grade. Among the Igbo, women do not on their own join age grade rather their husband age grade automatically becomes theirs. One gets initiated into the age grade system at the peak of his productive year when he will have the needed strength and zeal to contribute to the development of his community. Age grade is a call to serve ones community. It is a platform provided for the men in every community in Igbo land to give back to the society.

Each age grade for identification sake has a unique name given it by the elders of the community. Such name is usually derived from the historical events that took place within the period of years of its formation. For example, the age grade that was formed after 1970 Nigerian Biafran(the Igbo) war were named (agha nyere uche) meaning war has taught us a lesson. Those formed after communal war is usually named (udo ga adi) age grade meaning peace must reign. Once any age grade is mentioned, the people normally associate their name to a particular cause or historical event that predicated their formation. The age grades are the development vanguards of their communities as they pursue every task with vigour and enthusiasm. It's through the various age grades that the Igbo execute the construction/maintenance of their roads which is usually done at times that of the year leading to dry season.

When the time approaches, town criers go round every market day announcing the day of the (oru/olu uzo) road rehabilitation. Usually, three age grades that are still in their productive stages are mobilized to participate in this exercise. The age grades involved are clearly stated in the announcement to streamline which and which age grade that will work in that given year. Even at the early stage, the rural urban migration did not in any way affect this as the Igbo sons in Diasporas in their numbers come home to partake in the exercise. It is not permitted that any adult male of the community to be absent. Even the elders though are not mandatorily part of the "olu uzo" road rehabilitation make efforts to be in attendance. The elders' responsibility during the exercise is unique; they supply the able bodied age grade members with (nkwu ocha) palm wine to

appreciate their commitment to the welfare of the community. (Olu/oru uzo) road rehabilitation/maintenance among the Igbo is never a women and children affair.

As the work progresses musical renditions from the weak and the physically challenged amongst them rents the air and props them to do more. The songs are usually songs that recount the historical exploits of the community ancestors and heroes reflecting how their community subdued their enemies, incantatory song eulogising the warriors and the braves in their community and solidarity song all aimed at gingering them to do more. As the music reaches its crescendo, the warriors among them who could no longer hold their feelings will be triggered to exhibit exclusive dance steps depicting manliness of Igbo men folk (izo okika). Some under this influence will climb big trees with bare hands which no ordinary man would be able to achieve. While others will accomplish an hour job in twenty minutes showing how far the songs boosted their energy.

Having cleared the roads of overgrown grasses, the group will carefully study flood prone areas, identify and give special attention to them. Catchment/burrow pits (umi) are dug at the sides of such areas especially sloppy roads to slow down the rush of flood waters. Palm fronds (igu nkwu) and logs of wood are used to construct embankments. These are further strengthened with the support of red sands generated while digging the burrow pits.

It is of interest to note that the (olu/oru uzo) road maintenance is an early morning activity which is terminated at the rise of sun. But that will be after the rubbish generated was properly

disposed at designated areas. The grasses are taken to the farm lands to form manure while uprooted trees are cut into logs, parked at a safer corner to serve as fire wood when they dry. After the work is satisfactorily completed, the group will then converge at the community square (ama obodo) to savor their (nkwu ocha) palm wine. Such occasion affords the community age grades and elders opportunity to share jokes and banters. Some hiding truths are unravelled but that ends within that circle as Igbo men are known to keep secrets especially when it has to do with their mistresses.

After the “olu uzo”, the next after the entertainment and recreation is compilation of defaulters’ names. Those that have genuine reason to be absent such as on grounds of sickness and bereavement, are not marked for punishment. The role call is done village by village because it’s easier at that stage to verify the defaulters amongst them. A day is set aside when the homes of defaulters will be visited for the recovery of the fines and penalties. This stage is when masquerade comes in an organ through which Ndigbo enforces law and order and recovery community fines and penalties.

Masquerade

Masquerade cult plays important role in the socio-political life of Igbo society. Among the Igbo of south east Nigeria, masquerades embody the spirit and physical realm of existence of man and as such command such recognition in the cosmology and culture of Igbo nation. The mystery surrounding masquerades in Igbo land is strong and encompassing. This is because it is believed that the masquerade is a spirit of their dead ancestors that springs forth from the mother earth. Aside

being used for administrative control, masquerades appear during traditional celebrations such as title taking, marriage ceremonies and royal outing ceremonies known as ofala festivals with intent to entertain the audience. Masquerade is purely men affair because women are strictly restricted from its activity. Away from its entertainment aspect, functions of masquerade among the Igbo of old could be likened to the duties and powers vested on today’s police as [18] posits; “the masquerade was successfully used for the maintenance of peace and the enforcement of laws and regulations. It was also used as a means of entertainment”. As a social control, [18], further asserts that:

a married woman who was in the habit of going out in the evening and coming back late, would be unconsciously inviting the masquerade to discipline her...a woman who cooked very late for her husband every night was also disciplined by the masquerade.

Membership to masquerade is exclusively of men folk only. The initiates are admitted into the cult as early as age of 10 or there about. Initiation into masquerade cult is shrouded in utmost secrecy. It is Igbo people’s first step of acknowledging the ability of their male folk to conceal secrets. Igbo strongly believe that men should maintain certain level of secrets especially with some cultural things with their wives. For example an initiated Igbo man in the cult of masquerade is expected not to share the secrets of the cult with any woman not even the wives or mothers. It is a general belief that women talk too much and can hardly keep secrets. As a cult,

its secret is only known to their members. Masquerade is equally called living spirits because it is believed that they conjured up from land of the dead to appear with rituals and invocations.

In Igbo land, there are different types of masquerades for different events and occasions. Certain masquerades are known for their entertainment value while some are known for their ritual values especially those that are needed to perform burial ceremonies. There are even the same masquerades known for their use in enforcing community laws, keeping order and maintaining social control.

The masquerade cult and its position within Igbo spiritual and physical lives are high. Masquerades have powers to invade the privacy of any member of Igbo community especially defaulters house and cart away any valuable even in their absence or place a totem that signify their visit to the house. The offender can only obey and pay the stipulated fine or meet any other conditions the village masquerade cult has stipulated. Masquerade is a spirit conjecture created by the communities to maintain sanctity, peace and order. The use of masquerade to recover fines reduces acrimony between families. A case that would have been in-between humans is being handled by spirits so the offender will not have basis to feel offended by accusing any of the members of spearheading the taskforce that invaded his house. Secondly no one prays to entertain masquerade whose intent is to recover fine. Among the Igbo it's not a good development.

Environmental challenges in Igbo land:

The world all over including Ndigbo is to grappling with the realities of global environmental degradation. The Igbo as a people has unique environmental

challenges arising from erosion menace, flood, landslide, water recession, land and water pollution and refuse management. These challenges have to a greater extent affected their sources of livelihood. Being an agrarian people endowed with arable land Ndigbo is fanatically and culturally attached to their lands. With these environmental challenges, a good percentage of their farmlands are washed away, formed gullies and their water and lands polluted thereby affecting their means of livelihood as well.

Erosion

Erosion is defined as the washing away of the soil surface by natural agents such as water and wind. [19], defines erosion as "one of the surfaces processes that sculpture the earth's landscape and constitutes one of the global environmental problems". There are several factors to gully erosion. It could be as a result of natural factor or that triggered by human unfriendly activities to the earth which [20] lists as; "urbanization, deforestation, overgrazing of cattle, poor agricultural practices industrial agriculture, roads and anthropogenic climate change".

The entire five states of south east geographical zone of Nigeria are being ravaged by erosion menace that is gradually evolving into epidemic magnitude. As [21] observes; "the south east is therefore obviously threatened by a physical environment that seems ever ready to ship into nothingness". Just as the Northern zone of Nigeria has desert encroachment to contain with, the Igbo located at the southern part of Nigeria are confronted with mirage of serious land degradation as a result of soil erosion. [22], in his statistics posits that; "Anambra, Abia, Im o, Enugu and Ebonyi states have over 750,650, 500, 400 and 250 major erosion sites

respectively". He further states that the above gully figure is without smaller and young gullies which shall with time definitely progress to major gullies. [23], in his estimation says; there are about 1000 erosion sites with varying degrees and dimension in Anambra state. Though his figure is in contrast with that of 760 sites quoted by [24], given that [24] in his enumeration excluded smaller and younger gullies his figure is not out of place.

Gully erosion being cancerous in nature spreads speedily minute by minute destroying lands natural nutrient. People's homes were buried inside the belly of the gully thereby rendering host of people homeless and turning them into refugees [24] in his fears says:

At the rate and speed gully erosion is advancing and spreading all over the Igboland, one can predict with a high degree of uncertainty that many communities shall be no more in the next ten years when they would have been wiped out with their lands.

The erosion statistics in south east Nigeria is unquantifiable due to its advancement happens intermittently with every rainfall. The presentation of the governors of the 5 south eastern

Igbo states at the Senate retreat in the zone in 2009 speaks volume of their pains and agony. [5] quoting Obi Anambra state governor's presentation says "villages are being washed away while lives are being lost due to the menace of erosion. The entire water system in Onitsha, for example has also been washed away leading to scarcity of water in the area". The Enugu state governor Chime cries and says "our dwindling finances could not match the enormous funds needed to fight the menace...no fewer than 317 erosion sites had been identified in Enugu alone we need urgent and sustainable intervention". That of Imo state Ohakim retorts that "the trend must not be allowed to impoverish our people. While their Abia counterpart Orji says "lives had been lost in all the local governments in the state on account of gully erosion menace.

The complaints are endless as the erosion menace continues to take its toll on the lives and property of people of south east Nigeria. Erosion no doubt is causing horrendous and incalculable havoc in Igboland.

Here is a list of the 5 south eastern states and some of its erosion devastated communities;

S/NO	States	Erosion Prone Communities
1	Anambra	Agulu, Nanka, Oko, Umumnze, Achina, Nnewi, Alor, Oraukwu, Ogidi, Ekwulobia, Nnobi, Uke, Ideani, Ojoto, Obosi, Awka, Abagana, Enugukwu, Ozubulu, Oraifite, Alor, Abatete, Uga and Achina
2	Imo	Okwudor, Okigwe, Orlu, Mbaize, and Osina.
3	Abia	Bende, Ekoli, Ohafia, Uzuakoli, Abiriba and Uturu
4	Enugu	Udi, Ngwoo, Umumba Ndiuno, Oji-River, Achi, Ugwuoba and Nsukka
5	Ebonyi	Uturu and Afikpo

The chart above shows that out of the 5 south eastern states, Anambra has the highest number of erosion sites

followed by Abia state. Aziatika (2013) in his analysis agrees that "although other states in the south east geopolitical zone of Nigeria have some dose of the environmental ogre, none

compares to the intimidating number and sizes of the erosion in Anambra state". This is also in line with [21], assertion:

It is a known fact that Anambra state is one of the most ecological damaged states in Nigeria. Erosion has rendered many homeless and made fertile land useless while still threatening to eat up the 4844km² area of the state.

Flood

Flood is a large volume of water covering an area that could be as a result of heavy rainfall or excessive discharge of waters. This is another big environmental challenge devastating the communities of south east states of Nigeria. It is triggered by the constant human activities and growing population one of the attendant effects of urbanization. Several other factors could cause and aid flooding such as: heavy rainfall, deforestation, soil nature, climate change, poor waste disposal among others. Flood by its activities cannot be separated from erosion as its end product usually results to gully erosion which occurs during rainy season. It is prevalent on coastal communities. Nigeria in 2012 recorded heavy flooding that wreaked a lot of devastation with loss of lives, farm lands, buildings and other valuables. Flood silts spring waters and rivers with transported materials and contaminate them. The contaminated waters become unsafe for consumption and for other domestic use even as the fishes, animals and other eco system are not spared either.

Ndigbo south east Nigeria were greatly affected by the 2012 flooding as almost

all its coastal communities where submerge by the flood leaving its trail of devastation and destruction. [4], recalls that; "in Anambra state, south east Nigeria heavy flooding has submerged several communities and about eight local governments were affected, but the worst hit is Ogbaru Aghamelum, Anam among others". The submerged communities with its people predominantly fishermen and farmers aside being refugees were thrown out of market as a result of the flooding which affected their source of livelihood. Although flood is termed natural disaster, human activities could to a large extent trigger and encourage its emergence. It could be as a result of poor planning, blocking of water channels and building along waterways among others as Oshikoya of federal ministry of environment explains; "flood hazards are most prevalent in the major river flood plains and urban areas with inadequate drainage". Oshikoya further reveals that the environmental degradation in Nigeria south east has let the floods devastating several villages. While in some villages he says graveyards, and ancestral shrines have been washed off.

The flooding lead to physical damage to roads, telecommunication/power generation networks, loss of lives and displacement of large population of people. [23], portrays that; "the flood sacked members of the National Youth Service Corps NYSC posted to Ogbaru local government Area of the state. They woke up only to find their residence under water, with most of their properties destroyed".

Solid waste/Refuse

Solid wastes commonly referred to as refuse in Nigeria are substances generated by man in his day to day activities. Solid wastes are consisting of

organic and inorganic materials some are toxic and hazardous especially industrial generated wastes. Sources of waste generation include homes, industries and markets. [24] classifies household solid waste as that "...made up of garbage, a term used for the waste matter that arises from the preparation of food and consists of waste food, vegetable peelings and other organic matters". The uncontrolled expansion of cities occasioned by rural urban migration gives rise to huge generation of solid waste in south east Nigeria. [6] a reason he also attributes to the; "cosmopolitan status of many south east which drives economic activities of the states, having many major markets". Inundated with the challenges of urbanization (population growth) proper refuse management pose greater challenge to the people and the government of south east Nigeria as its generation overwhelms its evacuation.

Mountains of refuse take over streets, markets and roads in urban cities and semi-urban cities in south east Nigeria. Movement along the roads are most time hampered by the presence of refuse heaps as humans and refuse compete for right of road a development [6] adduce to; "poor waste handling practices and inadequate provision of solid waste management facilities in cities of developing countries resulting in indiscriminate disposal and unsanitary environment". Citing the presence of mountains of refuse in one south eastern state, [23] paints the picture of a market in Owerri Imo state south east Nigeria; "...expectedly flies now have field days feeding sumptuously from the refuse that frequently emits offensive odours with maggots as landlord in the area.

Aside its health implication, there is correlation between poor refuse disposal/management and flooding.

Indiscriminate and non coordination of solid waste poses serious challenge to the environment as refuse dump along the roads are washed away by rain and block water channels leading to flooding. According to [8]; "most roads are filled with refuse which leads to flooding especially during the rainy seasons". [15], quoting Ekugo also asserts that; "many urban centres in Nigeria are suffering from the menace of improper waste disposal which has resulted into...flooding in urban centres" south east Nigeria inclusive.

Observation and Recommendation

From the earliest days, Ndigbo has very high sense of responsibility towards their health and environment. Going by their community structure before their encounter with European civilization, Ndigbo could not be described as a people without sense of hygiene. The emergence of civilization and branding of their belief system as primitive and mundane dealt a heavy blow on their system of life. According to the Igbo, going against the gods brings disaster to mankind which could only be averted when certain rituals are performed.

The alternative to the Igbo environmental preservation offered by the government leaves disastrous lacuna that presently threaten their existence as a people. The environmental monster staring Ndigbo in the face could be adduced to negligence on the part of the authorities (government) which cut across every strata of the government from federal, state down to the local government level. Even the monthly environmental exercise enacted by the government and other laws are not productive as government renege in their part of the bargain of evacuating generated refuse to its final dumping site. As a result, the generated refuse stockpile and falls back into drainage

system aiding flooding. Residents are short of primary dumping site a development that forced them to stealthily dump it indiscriminately including water channels and along the roads.

Corruption, negligence and insensitivity on the part of the government is among the major challenges hampering the preservation of the environment as [17] reports; “inspite of sanitary levy being paid by the traders to the officials of Owerri municipal council, the market has been overtaken by refuse”. Government is overwhelmed by the population explosion of its cities due to the absence of master plan which would have projected what the cities would look like in years to come. As [25] points out; “rapid urbanization in developing world if ignored can be a threat to health, the environment and urban productivity”. The water channels are overwhelmed by the domestic and industrial waste being discharged into it due to the retention of small water channel that is not in commensurate with the growing population of the communities. Government embarks on damage control as they fail to tame erosion when it’s on infancy stage.

A way out of the present environmental logjam is for the government to first and foremost produce a master plan of

its communities with projection of about 25 years. Make plan for the Resettlement of those that will inhibit the remodelling exercise; expansion of roads and drainage system as such will not be ruled out. Introduction of environmental studies in its school curriculum and make it mandatory from primary up to secondary school level.

Formulate policy and programme that will encourage recycling and converting waste to wealth through Public Private Partnership (PPP). Embark on house to house collection of refuse at least three times a week and emergency disposal point established at the end of every street. Create public awareness on the dangers of mans violent attack on the environment. Government should liaise with communities for early detection of flood and erosion prone areas so as to apply protective measure in place of the current damage control. Excavation of sands from erosion/flood prone areas should be abolished. Re-awaken the environmental consciousness of Igbo in preserving their environment by erecting embankment, digging catchment pit, proper refuse disposal etc. To discourage indiscriminate erection of houses by making it mandatory for every building to have approval as this will check building along waterways and erosion/flood prone areas.

CONCLUSION

Adaptation and mitigation is the keyword. Climate change is a rebound of man’s unkindness to the earth manifested in flooding and erosion, induced by poor refuse management which increase rapidly. Hence more devastation of houses and property, farm lands, displacement of people and communicable diseases are imminent, an urgent/committed step need to be taken. Since the realities of the impending are imminent and realities on

ground, effective interventionary and long term measures are required to save man and the earth from further devastation. Even nature has gone out of proportion as man now witness serious disruption of climate pattern. Government can only preserve the environment when it pursue its environmental policies with sincerity of purpose and when man sees the earth as his abode and source of livelihood.

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