

## HISTORICISING THE POLITICAL AND SOCIO-ECONOMIC GROWTH OF OGBARU LOCAL GOVERNMENT, 1970-2000

Festus Chimezie Ajeli,  
Department of History and International Studies,  
Nwafor Orizu College of Education Nsugbe, Anambra State  
[actionblack28@gmail.com](mailto:actionblack28@gmail.com)/[f.ajeli@nocen.edu.ng](mailto:f.ajeli@nocen.edu.ng)

&

Prof. A.U Igwe,  
Department of History and International Studies,  
Nnamdi Azikiwe University Awka, Anambra State  
[au.igwe@unizik.edu.ng](mailto:au.igwe@unizik.edu.ng)/[drsky2002@gmail.com](mailto:drsky2002@gmail.com)

### Abstract

Ogbaru is one of the Local Government Areas that made up the Anambra State Local Government system of Nigeria. Before the creation of Ogbaru into a Local Government in 1989, the different communities that comprised what is today known as Ogbaru Local Government conducted their political activities/affairs under the nomenclature of Ogbaru District which was placed under Onitsha Local Government Area. Fifteen communities made up today's Ogbaru Local Government and it is these fifteen communities that formed the five electoral wards that represented Ogbaru District at Onitsha Local Government Area until 1989 when Ogbaru Local Government was carved out from Onitsha Local Government and made an independent Local Government with full constitutional powers as other Local Government Areas in Nigeria. Since then Ogbaru has enjoyed both gains and pains associated with the Local Government System in Nigeria owing to the inability of its politicians to wield the needed political will that would stimulate speedy political and socio-economic growth of the area. Why was Ogbaru carved out from Onitsha local government? What have the people of Ogbaru gained from its independent status as a Local Government? What are the challenges faced by Ogbaru as a Local Government of its own and what should be done to mitigate these challenges and put Ogbaru in a proper political perspective to speed up political and socio-economic growth of the Ogbaru people of Anambra State? The study employed chronological and thematic method of discourse while data were collected from both primary and secondary sources. The study revealed that the problems of political and socio-economic growth of Ogbaru was the inability of government and individuals to provide the necessary infrastructure that will stimulate political and socio-economic growth coupled with seasonal natural disaster of floods and coastal erosion that constantly ravage the entire Ogbaru communities. The paper therefore suggested that for Ogbaru to achieve the needed political and socio-economic growth, her politicians must pinch their tent with the ruling political party in the state in order to attract government presence in the area which is the only surest way to stimulate unprecedented political and socio-economic growth in the area.

**Keywords:** Anambra State, Ogbaru, Socio-economic growth, Development, Governance.

### Introduction

The aim of every institution or community is to make progress and attract positive growth and development to its people. To attract growth and development, communities or institutions must work in harmony with its citizens in order to secure conducive atmosphere needed to achieve its objectives. Political and socio-economic growth of any nation depend to a large extent the political

institutions set up to steer the affairs of the nations, hence growth is determined by those who have the political will to control both political and economic paraphernalia of the nation. Many definitions have been proffered by scholars with regard to the meaning of politics. According to Harold Lasswell, Politics is simply 'Who gets what, When and How'<sup>1</sup> and this definition of politics has encapsulated political behaviour around the world, with politicians being driven by political positions, resource distribution and out-competing their competitors. Who in this definition can refer to any member of a society that includes actors such as individuals, groups, corporations, unions and politicians? What, might refer to government programs, societal resources, access to rights and privileges, or something as banal as tax breaks. While when, is related to the time a particular thing takes place. How refers to the process through which one gets something in a polity, whether it be democratic or undemocratic, open or closed, fair or unfair or which institutional arrangements are involved, such as constitutions, regulations, and laws or which practices are employed, such as voting, lobbying, demonstrating, and decision making. Thus, politics determines how far political and socio-economic growth of a nation will be achieved because political power controls economic power.

Ogbaru was principally carved out of Onitsha Local Government in order to give the various communities that made up Ogbaru the opportunity to participate in the political affairs of their locality, bring government nearer to the people and help induce the needed political and socio-economic growth. The community members knew what problems their people are suffering from and would be able to find lasting solution to those problems. How far they have achieved the aim of this creation is yet another topic for debate. This is because growth and development is measured in terms of quality of life and property, good standard of living, availability and accessibility of the needed infrastructure that enhance healthy living and these things are grossly lacking. This was attributed to lack of government assistance to the Local Government, corruption and selfish interest of those elected to represent the area and other social and economic problem by man and by nature such as illiteracy, poverty, corruption and natural disasters like flood and erosion.

Socio-economic growth refers to an improvement in the social and economic life of people in terms of quality of life, availability and accessibility of quality social amenities and an improvement on the economic status and wellbeing of the people in terms of available human resources for improved standard of living. It is this available resources that management would leverage upon to bring the needed growth and development for the betterment of the society. Thus when the available resources are not properly harnessed, it affects the entire society leading to serious economic hardships for the citizens. Political and socio-economic growth of Ogbaru have been marred by serious administrative lapses as a result of lack of political will to do so.

The appointment of transition committee chairmen in the Local Government has greatly affected the political and socio-economic growth of Ogbaru Local Government since its inception as an independent Local Government. Again, those appointed have no will power to attract any developmental projects in Ogbaru because they do not have access to the Local Government funds meant for these projects. Thus, the political and socio-economic growth of Ogbaru Local Government Area are under serious threat as Ogbaru may remain politically neglected and socio-economically underdeveloped if her politicians continue to remain in the shadow of party members without strong portfolio that will drive all aspects of growth in the area. Hence this paper seeks to interrogate Ogbaru's political and socio-economic growth from 1970 to 2000 so as make both the government and the indigenous people aware that Ogbaru deserved the best.

### **History of Political Growth of Ogbaru up to 2000**

This section x-rays the political journey of Ogbaru communities into an independent political status of a Local Government Area in Anambra State. Political growth of Ogbaru local government is

traced to the colonial period when the different communities that made up Ogbaru was constituted into a Native Court System in 1901 to replace the customary law practice of the people. A Native Court Area was established for Onitsha with headquarters at Onitsha. The jurisdiction of the court covered the whole of Ogbaru communities among other areas. The Obi of Onitsha was its Chairman while Ogbaru towns sent one representative each. In 1906, Ossomala, Native Court was opened. The jurisdiction covered Ossomala, Akili-Ogidi, Mputu, Obeagwe, Ochuche-Umuodu, Ogbakuba, Umunankwo, Ogwu-Ikpele, Ogwu-Aniocha and Amiyi. Ossomala had three members as their representatives, Umunankwo had two and other towns had one representative each. There was no permanent chairman/president. The post was filled by each member in turn. The

Court sat on Mondays and Tuesdays each week. Summons and warrants for sittings were signed by the president of the court<sup>2</sup>. The other towns of Atani, Akili-Ozizo, Odekpe, Ohita, and Umuzu, continued to attend the Onitsha Native Court.

The introduction of Native Courts necessitated the appointment of persons whom the colonial masters presumed to be traditional leaders. Each of these men was given a certificate or a warrant so as to legalize the power he exercised over his towns' men. They came to be known as 'Warrant Chiefs, because all the powers and authorities they enjoyed were derived from their possession of the warrants<sup>3</sup>. These Warrant Chiefs were responsible to the British colonial officers and not to the people. The Warrant Chiefs were constituted into an all-purpose body which was at once a court, as well as an executive and legislative body for the area under the jurisdiction. The British colonial administration in its desire to govern the people through their traditional institutions ended up in imposing on them a governmental system alien in character. The Warrant Chiefs became oppressive, corrupt and notorious for sale of justice and demand for forced labour.

The problems and protest that characterized the warrant system led to the introduction of the Native Administration System between 1930 and 1938. A cardinal feature of Native Administration was that local bodies had the responsibility of collecting and handling their own revenue. The new change to Native Administration recognised no chiefs so the selection of court and council members was left to the people themselves. In 1950, the Native Administration was replaced by District County and Local Council system. Ogbaru was initially placed under Nnewi Divisional Council as Ogbaru County Council. There was a caretaker committee headed by Chief Azaka who later became the first Chairman of Ogbaru County Council Caretaker Committee<sup>4</sup>. Later Ogbaru became an autonomous County Council with its headquarters at Ogbakuba. The Ogbaru County Council was divided into two main wards – north and south. The north comprised Odekpe, Ohita, Atani, Akili-Ozizo, Amiyi and Umuzu while the south consisted of Ochuche-umuodu, Ogbakuba, Umunankwo, Ossomala, Obeagwe, Ogwu-Ikpele, and Ogwuaniocha.

The first elected Chairman of Ogbaru County Council was S.O. Akubueze while G.O. Anyaoku and Chief E.M.C. Ogbulie were Treasurer and Clerk respectively<sup>5</sup>. The County Council was divided into five committees namely; health, works, finance, general purpose and education. Each of the committees was headed by an elected councillor representative. The chairman was the overseer of all committees. Each of the Committee met regularly for deliberations and resolutions. Members were paid an allowance of ten shillings each, per sitting. The Chief Clerk recorded all the proceedings during these meetings. He was also the revenue officer. The Secretary of the County Council reported directly to the Assistant Divisional Officer, Mr. C. N Essien at Onitsha who also oversaw the activities of other County Councils under his zone.

In 1959, an election was held for various posts in the County Council ahead of 1960 independence. At independence in 1960, Dennis John Oduah, Igwe of Akili-Ozizo and a member of the Eastern House of Chiefs took the salute at Atani Church Missionary Society (C.M.S) Central School as the

only recognised Chief of Ogbaru<sup>6</sup>. At independence, the County Council was replaced with the Eastern Nigeria House of Chiefs which was responsible for making, interpreting and implementing laws and policies in the area. At independence, Ogbaru, became a District in 1960 with its headquarters still in Ogbakuba and Chief Christopher Ebonwu of Ogwuaniocha was elected the first chairman of Ogbaru District Council to represent Ogbaru District in the Onitsha Province.

Later in 1962, the Ogbaru District Council headquarter was moved to Akili-Ozizo and Chief Dennis John Oduah, Igwe of Akili was elected the second chairman of the District Council and he represented Ogbaru District at the Onitsha Province<sup>7</sup>. Chief Dennis Oduah continued to preside over the affairs of Ogbaru in the Eastern Nigeria House of Chiefs until 1966 when he handed over to Chief Uzundu Egwuatu who was elected under the Second Executive Council in 1966 during the era of Non-party System. Chief Egwuatu represented Ogbaru from 1966 to 1967 when the Nigeria-Biafra war broke out<sup>8</sup>. In 1967, the East Central State was created by Major General Yakubu Gowon from parts of the Eastern region. The former East Central State now comprises the five states, Anambra, Imo, Enugu, Ebonyi and Abia. During the war 1967 to 1970, Ogbaru was constituted into Community Council by the Biafra Government. The chairmen of the Community Councils were the Igwes of the different communities that made up Ogbaru and government sent administrators as government representatives in the Community Council until 1970 when the war ended and Ogbaru was re-constituted into Ogbaru District Council still under Onitsha province<sup>9</sup>.

In 1989, Ogbaru Local Government was carved out from Onitsha Local Government during the Military Administration of General Ibrahim Babangida as independent Local Government. As at the time, Ogbaru District had five council wards and each ward elected councillors that represented them at Onitsha Local Government. The five councillors were led by Chief D.N.C Uwadiogwu from Ogwuaniocha who was appointed Supervisor for Works at the Onitsha Local Government in 1983<sup>10</sup>. When Ogbaru Local Government was created in 1989 with its headquarters at Atani, the five councillors conducted an internal election within themselves and elected Chief J.C Adingi as the Chairman of the new Local Government in 1989 thereby enlarging the political tentacles of Ogbaru in the political landscape of Anambra state.

In 1990 election into Ogbaru Council Area was conducted which saw the emergence of Mr. T.C Uwolo as chairman, and in 1991 the elected Council members were inaugurated. In 1992 Mr. Uwolo was removed from office through court judgement and replaced by Chief Obi Ogene<sup>11</sup>. Shortly after Chief Ogene assumed office, he was impeached by his councillors over allegation of fraud and gross misconduct. He was replaced with his deputy Hon. Charles Ezeala in 1993 who completed their tenure in 1994<sup>12</sup>. Thus Ogbaru became a full-fledged Local Government with constitutional powers to initiate political and economic development for the benefits of its people. These developments helped to bring government nearer to the doorsteps of the Ogbaru people thus promoting the political and economic growth of the natives through effective representation which were hitherto done by non-Ogbaru indigenes.

In 1996, election into the Local Government was conducted under the Non-partisan System and Mr. John Egwuatu was elected chairman of the council. He assumed office in 1996 and at the expiration of his one year term, another election was conducted in 1997 which saw Mr. Chukwuma Nwudukwe as the third executive chairman. He was removed from office by Mrs. Calista Nwachukwu through court judgment and she became the fourth executive chairman of the council. The following ten (10) wards made up Ogbaru II constituency; Odekpe, Ohita and Iyiowa ward, Atani ward I, Atani ward II. Ogwuaniocha ward, Ogwuikpele ward, Umunamkwo-Mputu ward, Ossomala ward, Akili-Ozizo ward, Akili-Ogidi-Obeagwe ward and Ochuche, Ogbakuba, Amiyi, Umuzu ward constituted the Ogbaru II constituency while the six wards in Okpoko constituted the Ogbaru I constituency in the Anambra state House of Assembly<sup>13</sup>. In 1999 following the return of



democracy in Nigeria, Mrs. Calista Nwachukwu was elected the fifth executive chairman of Ogbaru Local Government Area with Hon. OdogwuOsita, Mr Nzowu, etc as councillors. At the state House of Assembly level, Hon. Bucknor Uzor and Hon. Sunday Nwafili represented Ogbaru represented Ogbaru I and II state constituencies respectively while at the Federal House of Representatives, Ogbaru was represented by Hon. Okwudili C. Uzoka from 1999 to 2003<sup>14</sup>.

### **Socio-Economic Growth of Ogbaru, 1970-2018**

Socio-economic growth of Ogbaru entails an improvement in the social and economic life of Ogbaru people in terms of quality of life, availability and accessibility of quality social amenities and an improvement on the economic status and wellbeing of the people in terms of available human resources for improved standard of living. Under social growth the provision of schools, electricity, hospitals and churches helped to improve the social welfare of the people as the people made use of these facilities to improve their lives. In 1961, Atani Central School Atani, was established to augment the Mission schools established by the Missionaries in 1933 and 1935 respectively in Atani and Ossomala<sup>15</sup>.

Community Primary School was established in Odekpe, Ogbakuba, Ogwuaniocha and Obeagwe between 1971 and 1973 to encourage the people to go to school because the three available schools were far away from those in other communities who were interested in going to school. Enrolments into these schools were very poor as people were afraid of leaving their homes for school because of the war experiences and because of distant location of the available schools<sup>16</sup>. Before this period, the CMS Central School Atani and Roman Catholic Mission School Ossomala were the only schools that had pupils up to primary six class while schools in other towns had pupils only up to either primary three or four. Notwithstanding, the poor enrolment and facilities, the schools trained many young men and women of Ogbaru and was instrumental to political and socio-economic growth of Ogbaru.

The provision of other social amenities was gradual because of the topography of Ogbaru environment. There were no new health facilities like clinics or health centres established throughout Ogbaru from 1960 to 1970<sup>17</sup> except the drug dispensary units built by the Missionaries in 1944 at Ossomala and 1949 at Atani, Odekpe, Ohita, Akili-Ogidi and Umuzu<sup>18</sup>. But the government upgraded them into Primary Health Centres in 1965 and equipped them to cater for the health needs of the people. These Primary Health Centres helped a great deal in curbing most of the deadly ailments and diseases like the Small Pox, Chicken Pox, Malaria, and other water borne diseases that were rampant at the time through inoculation. The provision of these amenities helped to improve the health condition of the people tremendously as it reduced maternal mortality rate at child birth, improved maternal health and increased the life span of the natives.

Churches earlier established by the missionaries received great boost as new converts made efforts to renovate existing church buildings or erect new ones. In 1904, Chief Henry Odunze invited the Church Missionary Society (CMS) at Onitsha to Atani because the earlier contact made by the CMS Missions with Ogbaru community did not materialize to any meaningful evangelization as the CMS Mission abandoned their missions at Ogbaru and concentrated in Onitsha<sup>19</sup>. After independence, the Churches were left in the hands of the natives who through Catechists and Church teachers nurtured the faith of the members until the outbreak of the civil war in 1967<sup>20</sup>. The activities of the churches attracted members who received new teachings that changed their orientations and helped them to send their children and wards to the Mission schools and other nearby schools for a brighter future and is responsible for the presence of many branches of the churches and thousands of worshipers up till today.

Under economic growth, the presence of such big markets as Nkwo Ogbakuba, Afor Atani and Eke Ogwuaniocha witnessed the influx of people from neighbouring communities/towns such as *Ozubulu, Akwukwu, Utchi, Ndoni, Onitsha, Ase, Aboh* and *Oguta* for the purpose of buying and selling. Ogbaru was rich in agricultural products such as yam, cassava, cocoyam, palm oil, maize, vegetables as well as plenty of meats and fish<sup>21</sup>. The major means of transportation to these markets was through human portorage as there were no vehicles as well as motor-able roads and so traders carry their wares on their heads. Later small vehicular transportation were introduced to facilitate fast and easy movement of goods and services to the markets. As this trade relations went on, the people of Ogbaru also visit neighbouring towns to patronise their own products which were not produced in Ogbaru such as simple farm tools like hoes, shovels, diggers, cutlasses and so on which they got from Onitsha and Awka traders<sup>22</sup>.

Other markets that were available in Ogbaru includes OrieOgwuikpele, Eke Amusu Odekpe, Afor Ossomala and Eke Ochuche. The establishment of these markets led to the exchange of goods and services such that traders coming from other towns carry other products which Ogbaru people needed for their survival such as beans, clothing articles and foot wears. This exchange of goods and services improved revenue generation in Ogbaru which helped in the expansion of the markets and introduction of other commodities as hoes, shovels, pans and cutlasses by Awka people who visited the markets to sale their wares. The presence of these three big markets gradually attracted people from neighbouring towns and communities who sought accommodations within Ogbaru towns close to the markets to ease the problem of transportation to the market and to reduce security risks therefore making Ogbaru a bubbling area for business.

### **Challenges to the Socio-economic Growth of Ogbaru, 1970-2000**

Generally, there were series of problems that hindered the Ogbaru people from achieving meaningful socio-economic growth at the time. Firstly, the people of the area are significantly illiterates because of the type of environment they inhabit and were not open to new ideas that will improve their lives. They held tenaciously to their traditional beliefs of traditional form of education which affected their attitude to embrace change and better their lives. For instance, they find it difficult to send their children to school to learn the new ways of doing things. The boys were taught how to farm and fish while the daughters were trained by their mothers on how to become good house wives to their husbands thereby lacking the requisite knowledge to command new socio-economic growth<sup>23</sup>.

Again, the problem of social amenities like good roads, hospitals, schools and good water affected their mental health as they heavily relied on traditional medicines, trekked distances and do hard works which affected their health. Social amenities particularly the absence of good roads and schools affected political and social economic growth of Ogbaru tremendously. For instance, lack of motor-able roads hampered effective transportation of agricultural products from point of production to the point of sale especially in the rainy seasons as no vehicle can assess the roads to the farms where those produced are located, thus leading to the damage of those products in the farms. Disruption of school activities also affected the people of the area. From September through December, the whole schools in the area are submerged by flood which forced the students out of school until January. As a result, some students never returned while those who returned started all over again thus making them to grow retrogressively.

The inability to preserve their agricultural product and other properties due to bad roads and incessant flooding equally affected their socio-economic growth. Some products like yams are kept in the ban which helped to preserve it for some period of about six months or more. However, when floods arrived, it covered the entire environment including where the yams were kept for preservation, thus damaging the whole ban and everything on it. Products like cassava only lasts for

five days whenever it is covered by flood. At this time, those cassava products which are yet to mature will ferment and become useless. Those which are matured are harvested for preservation but the lack of preservation equipment always makes them prone to infestation of maggots which most often reduced their market price and values. Again, people are forced to sell their cassava products as quickly as possible to avoid losing them to maggots and this also affected them because they dispose everything they had and face hunger thereafter.

Moreover, markets as at the time were poorly built and organized that it does not have the capacity to stimulate the needed economic growth in the area. Traders were poor and people were poor too which affected their ability of engaging in a large scale business. Transportation was also a critical factor as traders cannot carry many goods at a time because there were no vehicles to convey large number of goods to the markets. This also affected their purchasing and selling powers and led to poor socio-economic growth. Because of bad roads agricultural products are sold at give-away prices in the hinterland to those traders who against all odds managed to penetrate into the hinterland for purchases. This give-away prices enriched the traders and impoverished the farmers who have no option than to sell or risk the damage of their products.

Floods are also responsible for poor political and socio-economic growth of Ogbaru as its annual invasion brought damages to properties, and interrupts people's social-economic, religions, cultural and educational activities. Another natural disaster that has affected and impeded socio-economic growth in Ogbaru is Coastal Erosion. It is a hazard, affecting the entire Nigerian coastline and are caused mainly by low lying coastal topography, intense wave and tidal regime, vulnerable soil characteristics, nature of shelf width, topography, and the occurrence of offshore canyons<sup>24</sup>. Coastal erosion was responsible for the destruction of roads and buildings in Ogbaru which have perpetually kept the people in the state on despair every year as continued to wreck its havoc.



**Fig. 1:** Flood in residential buildings in Ossomala.

**Source:** Researcher's field trip.





**Fig. 2:**Coastal Erosion that destroyed buildings in Ogwu Ikpele

**Source:** Researcher's field trip.

### Conclusion

So far, we have ruminated on the political and socio-economic journey of Ogbaru from 1970 to 2000 and we have noted that it was not a smooth and easy one. Ogbaru is strategically and divinely located with full human and material resources that have the capacity to stimulate both political and socio-economic growth of the area. Available human resources include educated elites, politicians, industrialist and technocrats while material resources may include, oil and gas, agriculture and vast lands and oceans. The presence and availability of the above mentioned are capable of driving the economy of Ogbaru to an unprecedented height if selfish and personal interest over collective good did not permeate into the lives of Ogbaru elites that made them forget that the greatest achievement of a community is the general wellbeing of its members as a whole and not that of few rich individuals.

Ogbaru was created to bring government of Anambra state to the doorsteps of the people and for them to take their destiny into their hands by finding out the problems of their people and finding solutions to them. Ogbaru have produced Ministers, Senators, Speakers, commissioners, notable politicians and technocrats as well as business moguls who would have attracted massive development to Ogbaru and make to be at par with other Local Government, but personal interest and egocentric nature of human have made want to be known as the richest or greatest man without recourse to the community he came from. They are expected to attract government presence, train and empower their youths and help in the harnessing of the resources for general good and not for their gains.

The paper finds out that lack of adequate political and socio-economic growth and development in Ogbaru is the inability of the Ogbaru people to rise up to the occasion and harness her God given resources and use it for their growth and development since government alone cannot give them the kind of political and socio-economic growth they are yearning for. Also the political class of



Ogbaru should come together and speak in one voice on how to attract political and socio-economic growth in Ogbaru Local Government Area.

Finally, the paper suggests that the challenges to political and socio-economic growth of Ogbaru could be remedied if her elites come together to a round table and assess the journey so far and see how well and how challenging it has been. Only then will they strategize and be able to bring the needed political and socio-economic growth that is expected in Ogbaru as evidence for the abundance human and material resources in the area through collaboration with the state government. Creation of jobs, building of industries and companies, empowerment of women and youths as well as floating of scholarship schemes will not only speed up political and socio-economic growth, but will place Ogbaru in both political and socio-economic map of Nigeria in particular and the world at large.

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