THE IGBO IN TODAY’S NIGERIA: OHANEZE-AMERICA MEETING

MAY 11-14, 2017

A PARTICIPANT-OBSERVER REPORT

BY

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On May 11-14, 2017, Ohaneze Ndigbo, popularly known as Ohaneze and interchangeably used as such in this report, met with Igbos in North America for a soul-searching conversation on the social, cultural, economic, political, and human condition of Igbos at home especially. The meeting was facilitated by the One Hundred Igbos Organization (OHIO/ 100 Igbos Org.), an organization of Igbo professionals in the United States and Canada and the Americas Diaspora Igbo Organizing Committee (ADI). Delegates from Igbo associations and organizations in U.S. and Canada participated. Current President General of Ohaneze, Chief John Nnia Nwodo, led the delegation from Nigeria. He was accompanied by Dr. Sylvanus Ebigwei, Vice President General of Ohaneze and Dr. Peter Chukwu, President of Ohaneze for Imo State. Dominican University, River Forest, Illinois, USA provided the venue for the three-day event. Without going into its history, suffice it to say that since inception in 1976 Ohaneze Ndigbo has acted as the mouthpiece of the Igbo, exposing anti-Igbo activities by non-Igbo entities, especially acts by the federal government of Nigeria and/or non-Igbo groups.

Opinions on the efficacy and usefulness of Ohaneze vary among Igbos. Many, including this writer, explicitly or tacitly believe that it is a tepid organization, often unsure of its role in the political and economic development of Igbo people. It is popularly, indeed universally, dubbed a socio-cultural group (Wikipedia), a nomenclature that dilutes its capacity to work as a political force on behalf of Igbo people. A news item published by News Agency of Nigeria in 2017 described Ohaneze as the “apex sociocultural organization of Igbo speaking states” whereas the brochure and program of the event discussed in this report described it as a “the apex sociopolitical association” of the Igbo.

I make this observation believing that there is something in a name. A sociopolitical organization has more teeth, biting power, and mobilization force than the mere expressive character of a sociocultural entity. Given the long and lingering suppression of the Igbo essence in Nigeria, it is proper for Ohaneze Ndigbo to transform from a sociocultural status to a sociopolitical instrument of the Igbo. To achieve the latter, however, Ohaneze must possess sustainable financial independence that enables it to speak truth to power at federal, state and local government levels, hire and retain quality manpower for efficient management of its policies and activities, and even invest in economic activities capable of producing positive spillovers to the lives of Igbo people. My general extrapolation from the meeting is that this is the major reason Ohaneze made the strident effort to meet with the Diaspora Igbo in America. A justifiable reason, deliberations at the meeting did justice to this subject with passion, empathy, and sympathy for the human condition in Igbo land. Before I elaborate on this, let me
first untangle the context which suffocates the essence of Igbo humanity in Nigeria and strengthens the case for a global reach for which Ohaneze Ndigbo aspires.

**ON THE SUPPRESSION OF THE IGBO:** I wanted to start this report with the erudite opening remarks of the President General Chief Nnia Nwodo. But included in the brochure prepared for the meeting was a speech by Nnamdi Azikiwe (Zik), father of Nigerian independence and an architect of the Igbo Union that flourished and eventuated in the formation and consolidation of a formidable pan-Igbo identity during the independence movement in Nigeria. In that 1949 speech titled, “Address to Igbo People”, Nnamdi Azikiwe outlined, albeit lamented, the various acts of discrimination against the Igbo including the colonial government using contributions from Igbo taxes to develop other regions, the vilification of the Igbo by the British and the Nigerian press, the non-representation of the Igbo on the executive council; and that no other secondary school outside of Government College Umuahia was run by the British Government in Igbo land.

Further more, there were no girls secondary school run by the British Government in Igbo land whereas the contrary was the case in the Northern and Western provinces; fire protection was not provided in any Igbo town outside of Port Harcourt; tarred roads were less in Igbo land than in other parts of the country; and other parts of the country had more postal, telephone, and telegraph services, and water and electricity undertakings. Yet the Igbo paid taxes but remained ‘victims of studied official victimization’ Zik said. Further still, the electoral-college system aided in the complete disenfranchisement of Igbo people in the House of Assembly and the Legislative Council. In spite of its natural advantages and potential wealth, the Igbo Nation, Zik added, was among the least developed in Nigeria, were socially ostracized, and extraneous in the political institutions of Nigeria.

Reading that speech, I was surprised that Zik used the phrase ‘Ibo Nation’ four times. I was surprised because the picture I had from freelance conversations and commentaries on Zik was that he cared for nothing else other than a Nigeria of detribalized individuals and groups. To use the phrase, Ibo Nation, to address an Igbo audience in 1949 means that he believed that the Igbo were ontologically different from the rest of Nigeria, just as the Hausa-Fulani, Yoruba, Ibibio, Edo, Ijaw, Tiv, Kanuri, etc. each were and still are, different from the rest of Nigeria. Ontological here means that the corporate group known as the ‘Ibo Nation’ is different in attitude, culture, thinking, wisdom, aesthetics, ideology, worldview, values, and beliefs.

The above outline of isolation of the Igbo by the British Colonial Government is exactly similar to what many postcolonial and present-day observers of the Nigerian political economy call the marginalization of the Igbo. The opening remarks by Nnia Nwodo very well captured the general belief that Igbos have been victims of political and economic marginalization by both the colonial and postcolonial governments. Put another way, whatever achievements Igbos have made in Nigeria are primarily the result of their personal and in-group struggles, odds against them notwithstanding.

**On the Intractable of Igbo Marginalization:** The word ‘intractable’ has several synonyms including stubborn, obstinate, obdurate, unbending, etc. An intractable means a phenomenon or entity that is unchanging. Therefore, the marginalization of the Igbo evidenced in the political and economic isolation of the group by every political dispensation in Nigeria is impervious to change. This observation is relevant to Zik’s exposition of many cases of the marginalization of the Igbo as far back as 1949. Nnia Nwodo exposed a similar situation in 2017,
nearly 70 years after. Hence the odds against the Igbo in Nigeria are indeed stubborn and unbending

In a goodwill message titled, *Ndigbo in Today’s Nigeria*, Nwodo chronicled a long list of cases of discrimination against, and victimization of, the Igbo by the current government of the All Peoples Congress (APC) led by President Muhammadu Buhari. The list so long that all of it cannot be included in this essay for the sake of time and space is summarized in bullet points as follows:

- No arm of the federal government (Executive, Legislative, or the Judiciary) is headed by an Igbo.
- No section of the armed forces or paramilitary organization is headed by an Igbo.
- Political appointments in this government defies the principle of federal character enshrined in the Nigerian Constitution
- Ongoing plans for new railway lines across regions of the country initially excluded Igbo states until Igbo leaders protested. If Igbos were treated fairly in Nigeria, why should they protest before being included in a project that incorporated every major part of the country?
- Fulani herdsmen armed with AK-47s kill, maim, and rape Igbos in their own lands, yet they are not arrested or prosecuted for their heinous crimes.
- The Enugu/Port Harcourt and Enugu/Onitsha expressways that are the responsibilities of the Federal Government are ignored to rot.
- Returnee members of Boko Haram are absolved of their mass casualty killings while soldiers mercilessly kill members of the Movement for the Actualization of the Sovereign State of Biafra (MASSOB) and the Indigenous Peoples of Biafra (IPOB) who express their rights to self-determination and freedom of speech and association peacefully and unarmed.
- Igbos in Lagos are in a precarious situation if the Obi of Lagos could threaten to throw them in the lagoon if they did not vote for the candidate of his choice.

Nwodo concluded his remarks with an unflinching confidence in the ingenuity, resourcefulness, entrepreneurship, intelligence, and the ability of the Igbo to survive and thrive in the face of challenges.

Nwodo enjoined Diaspora Igbo in America to extend a helping hand to a *New Ohaneze* ready to serve and enable Igbo land to achieve its highest potential.

Is there any difference between Zik 1949 and Nwodo 2017? I’d say there is no difference when both are compared on their chronicles of the Igbo experience in Nigeria. But Nwodo extended his speech beyond the odds against the Igbo and outlined the problems and plans of Ohaneze namely:

- The most important problem is that Igbos do not speak with one voice.
- The United States and Canada are home to the highest concentration of Igbos of any foreign country.
- It will be counterproductive for Igbo groups in these countries to work at cross purposes or stand in conflict with one another.
- Ohaneze Ndigbo lacks funds with which to pay its staff.
• The organization does not have a dependable office space.
• The current constitution of Ohaneze recognizes town unions and there are plans to require every Igbo person, whether at home or in diaspora, to pay one hundred naira (N100) annually to raise funds with which to run the organization and enable it to achieve its goals. Town unions will help to facilitate this fundraising plan.
• Because intellect, not arrogance rules the world, Igbo Diaspora in America can build secondary schools of international standard in Igbo land thereby provide Igbo youth with the highest quality of education.
• It is paramount to change the Igbo psyche from our propensity for heavy investments primarily in real estate to setting up industries and factories in Igbo land for wealth and job creation.
• America-Igbo Diaspora can partner with Ohaneze Ndigbo to invest in economic ventures in America and/or Nigeria.
• Plans are underway for an Ohaneze Hall of Fame for recognizing those who contribute to the association’s goals and objectives.

Nwodo’s inspiring opening remarks provided the framework for deliberations in group and plenary sessions.

A SUMMARY OF THE REPORT OF GROUP/BREAKOUT MEETINGS:
Three panels discussed the following topics in relation to the future of Ohaneze Ndigbo and the potential for Igbo Diaspora collaboration with the organization. The panels were:

1. Strategic Reorganization of Ohaneze Ndigbo
2. Funding Mechanisms
3. Foundational Aims

Strategic Reorganization centered on mechanisms for building a stronger and more stable Ohaneze Ndigbo. Suggestions to achieving this included:
• Need to form chapters of Ohaneze worldwide with the goal of a global Ohaneze;
• The need to form Ohaneze chapters in the United States;
• Ohaneze USA to have representative(s) on the board of Ohaneze Central in Nigeria;
• Ohaneze to help resolve conflicts within and between Igbo organizations both in diaspora and in the homeland;
• Attraction and involvement of young Igbos at home and abroad to its fold; establishment of exchange programs for young Igbos to and from diaspora and the homeland;
• Have and maintain financial independence;
• Be development-oriented;
• Put more effort in uniting Igbo land by getting Igbo governors to work together in the service of Igbo people.
**Foundational Aims** consist of the role and status of Ohaneze as the canopy for the political, cultural, and economic outreach and protection of the Igbo in Nigeria and beyond. These include

- The promotion of the Igbo cause,
- Opposition to mistreatment of Igbos;
- Direction of Igbo development agenda;
- Take the stance of the former Igbo Union which worked as an effective instrument for the mobilization of a pan-Igbo identity;
- Remain a source of political outreach to and political alliances with other groups;
- Establish sanctions for those who betray Igbo interests,
- Attain financial independence.

Nwodo noted that these suggestions were part of the roles Ohaneze presently plays.

The report on **Funding Mechanism** attracted the collective attention and sympathy of delegates. There was an unequivocal consensus that Ohaneze must have financial independence and sustainability. Financial independence will strengthen its voice to tell truth to power to Igbo governors, state legislators, local government councilors, and political appointees who have betrayed the Igbo through their extreme corruption and nonchalance about the plight of Igbo land and those they govern. In fact the mood of the meeting, as I saw it, was that the governments of Igbo states should be ignored in the whole conversation because they have run Igbo land into the abyss and so cannot be trusted in any plan for meaningful development. Therefore, it was not a question of whether Ohaneze should be financially independent. Rather, it was about what can be done for that financial independence to occur on a sustainable basis.

The panel on funding mechanisms suggested the following:

- An endorsement of the one-hundred naira (N100) monthly fee payable by every Igbo adult in the homeland and the diaspora as proposed by Ohaneze
- One hundred dollar ($100) annual contribution by every Igbo organization in diaspora
- Igbo diaspora groups to register with an umbrella Ohaneze group and pay their $100 per year through that group
- Legislation for governments of Igbo states to give subventions to Ohaneze
- Ohaneze to continue efforts to work with governors of Rivers and Delta States to help fund the association.
- Establishment of an Ohaneze Foundation where donors can get tax exemptions for their donations.
- Establish an Ohaneze Endowment

**What will Ohaneze do with the money if so raised?**

- Funding from Igbo Diaspora USA will be contingent on the submission of annual reports by Ohaneze Central
- Igbo Diaspora USA must have representation on the board of Ohaneze Central
- Ohaneze Central must be a driver of socioeconomic development for Igbo people. This means that it will, either independently or in partnership with state governments or
private investors, invest in economic activities that create employment for Igbo youth especially in Igbo land.

- Invite the younger generation of Igbos to be part of the development plans and other activities and include them in committees.

It must be noted that all the above were recommendations that the President General and his team would present to Ohaneze Central in Nigeria. Specific decisions about the role of Igbo Diaspora – U.S.A will depend on the approvals and choices made by Ohaneze Central, after which the logistics, roles and responsibilities of linking the two groups will begin.

**Open Speeches by Delegates:** Some delegates made comments as representatives of specific organizations/associations or on subjects of concern to them as individuals. A delegate representing Igbo speaking communities of Niger Delta in America expressed concern that the five Igbo states often ignored the Igbos of Niger Delta to the point of marginalizing them. But President General Nwodo traced how Ohaneze has historically incorporated Igbos of Delta State and their counterpart in Rivers State.

Individuals from these states, Nwodo stated, had held, and presently hold, positions on the executive committee of Ohaneze through elections including serving at the apex position of Secretary General, equivalent to the present position of President General. However, a delegate called attention to the fact that some Igbo speaking communities in Delta State do not identify as Igbo. Such people justify their claims by tracing their origins to Yoruba and/or Bini antiquity. Something must therefore be done to deal with this problem, including the development of the 5 Igbo states which effects can spillover to Igbo-speaking communities in other states.

**President General’s Closing Remarks:** The closing remarks contained some of the contents of the opening remarks summarized above. To avoid repetition, I itemize below only the contents not conspicuously captured in my summary of the opening remarks. According to Nwodo,

- Absence of unity is the greatest problem of the Igbo;
- The present Nigerian constitution and state structure are meant to contain the Igbo
- Federal revenue is lopsidedly distributed
- The old constitution (of the pre-civil war era) guaranteed regional fiscal independence and most of the revenue went to states
- We (Igbos) are like people owned by others
- Igbos cannot be saved by the Federal Government
- Federal Government is reneging on the clause of political restructuring agreed upon at the 2014 National Conference
- Invite Igbo industry, versatility, and tenacity to help develop methods to combat a system that keeps our people (Igbos) down
- Ohaneze sought this meeting in the United States in order to form a locomotive for a new direction in Igbo affairs
- Igbos invest their wealth externally in Abuja and Lagos, we must give our people incentives to bring their wealth to Igbo land.

Nwodo concluded by asking the delegates to pray for Igbo unity.
Ohaneze Meets Americas Diaspora Igbo: Personal Thoughts On the Path to Positive Change in Igbo land

As stated earlier, President General Nwodo made an outstanding and inspiring speech grounded in his formal and tacit knowledge of the position of the Igbo in the Nigerian geoethnopolity. That position is not good presently, and has not been good historically if we recall the lamentations of Nnamdi Azikiwe on the same subject as far back as 1949. Recall the saying, “If wishes were horses, beggars would ride”. If speeches were progress, Nwodo’s speech would have handed progress to Igbo people in general and the masses suffering in Igbo land in particular. Yes, the Federal Government discriminates against the Igbo. Let me add, and without equivocation, that the Igbo suffer more from the negative governance of their respective states by fellow Igbos in state governments. That does not mean that the marginalization of Igbo interests by the Federal Government or other external groups should be ignored.

Nwodo and some delegates at the meeting called for the renewal of the Igbo identity similar to that which prevailed in the era of the Igbo Union prior to the Nigeria-Biafra war. That identity has been in jeopardy since the end of the war. Dissolution of the regional structure climaxed in the 36-state structure created disparate identities in a way no other geopolitical structure has ever done in Nigeria. There are now five identities in the five Igbo states. They are Abia, Anambra, Ebonyi, Enugu, and Imo identities all interacting and counteracting among themselves within a value system that is auxiliary to a pan-Igbo identity.

The counteracting effects of these sub-Igbo identities find expression in a dysfunctional political climate mired in wrangles and distractions from the immediate problems of the masses. In Abia State, attention is focused on whether Ngwa or Umuahia zone would produce the governor, vice-chancellor, Speaker of the House of Assembly, or other strategic positions. The counteracting encounter is between the Riverine and the mainland in Anambra State. Imo State is in tacit but deep political battle between Owerri and Orlu zones with an implicit skirmish between Owerri and Mbaise at the mini level. Enugu State grapples with sub-ethnic claims between competing zones. I’d be surprised if such a manufactured inter-zonal conflict does not exist in Ebonyi State.

The lead actors and players in these encounters draw the attention, support, and loyalty of their various factions. Group identity is focused inward thereby constrains tendency for identification with symbols and matters external to in-state issues. Hence Igbo identity becomes peripheral to in-state identity. Granted that movements for self-determination such as MASSOB and IPOB are significantly Igbo, the fact that they have not been able to mobilize all or the majority makes them segmented entities rather than rallying points for the revitalization of a pan-Igbo identity.

The effect of social identity on group cohesiveness and its effect on group endeavors is evident in social science literature. On a general note, the more the social distance between sub-groups, the more the antagonistic conflict between them, and the less the positive outcomes in their interactions. Yuki observed that dominance of subnational identities over national identity in a society lies behind the negative
outcomes in civil conflicts and economic development.\(^1\) By extension, divisions within an ethnic group such as the Igbo has the capacity to generate and sustain a social identity chasm and social distance among a people who in the past perceived themselves, and were perceived by outsiders, as one people united by language, culture, vision and aspiration.

The 36 state-structure has created a social situation where subethnic identities take the center stage while Igbo identity is on the periphery. Leaders of governments of Igbo states exacerbate the problem. Oblivious of the Igboness of each state, each acts as if the other governments do not exist and as if they are sovereign countries separated by international borders. That will not augur well for each individual state, nor will it enhance the development prospect of the Igbo nation.

According to Basu, a group’s ability to do well often depends on the ability of its members to hold in abeyance some of their self-interest in order to contribute to the cause of the group.\(^2\) If group identity gives hints and suggestions for people trying to cooperate to oppress others not belonging to their group, so does it provide insights on how oppressed people can cooperate among themselves to escape oppression.\(^3\)

A recent pronouncement by Northern leaders corroborates the thrust of this idea and provides the path to an effective Igbo response. The Northern Delegates Forum (NDF), the umbrella body of all delegates who attended the 2014 National Conference (Confab) from the northern part of Nigeria recently met; rejected the report of that conference; and dissociated itself from any attempt by any group to compel the Federal Government to use the report to restructure Nigeria. The group identified the need for the North to organize a conference of all its diverse groups to discuss issues around the “unique northern identity” with a view to evolving strategies for a harmonious living among them.\(^4\) But why would Northern leaders want to explore the strengths of their unique northern identity yet oppose the restructuring of a Nigerian political structure that suffocates the humanity and maximum agency of all groups in the country?

Restructuring Nigeria is the closest way to design and deploy the unique identities of various groups for regional development.\(^5\) As regions develop, so does the country. Nwodo got it right, restructuring Nigeria is more important than Igbo presidency.\(^6\) An Igbo president will not spread development in Igbo land. Nor will he unshackle the Igbo from the present state of underdevelopment. He/she may site one

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\(^3\) Ibid


or two projects nearest to his own part of Igbo land, as Goodluck Jonathan did with the Federal University of Otuke in Ijaw land. That is not development. That a few co-ethnics benefit from the handouts of a president does not mean that the majority of the ethnic group is better off. How well have the Hausa-Fulani, Tiv, Yoruba, Kanuri, and Ijaw fared? These groups do not have better quality of life than the Igbo even though their own had been president or head of state of Nigeria. A restructured Nigeria will free the regions, including the Igbo region, to mobilize their people to pursue development for the benefit of the many.

Chinua Achebe reminds us, “Eneke the bird says that since men have learned to shoot without missing, he has learned to fly without perching.” If Northern leaders aspire to construct a cohesive entity for a harmonious living among themselves, it will be counterproductive, indeed foolish, for governments of Igbo states to act as disparate entities, each acting individualistically, consciously or unconsciously, intentionally or unintentionally, pulling one another down rather than move forward as a collectivity. As Northern leaders recognize and operate in response to their unique northern identity, Igbo leaders must organize and harness their unique Igbo identity for Igbo self-actualization. **This they must do by coming together to work as one entity de facto, while remaining five states.** Where they fail to cohere, the centripetal forces of northern cohesion, or cohesion by any other group in Nigeria, will continue to neutralize the centrifugal disposition of the governments of Igbo states. Governments of Igbo states working as a cohesive group will position Igbo agency to think and act to transform the economic, cultural, political and physical landscape for better.

The lack of unity among the Igbo and the consequent peripheralization of pan-Igbo identity are often explained in reference to so called Igbo individualism. Some proponents of this viewpoint even attribute entrepreneurial success to this individualistic ‘DNA’ said to be exclusive to the Igbo but absent or less in other ethnic groups in Nigeria. Studies have found high achievement motive among the Igbo. But that does not mean that their high need for achievement stems from a culture of individualism. After all, Japan is a collectivist culture in which the interests of the group supersede those of the individual. But Japanese exhibit unparalleled levels of high need for achievement and have deployed that quality to put their country on the map as a world power. The other developmentally successful countries of Southeast Asia are also collectivist cultures and so are those of them not so successful. Therefore high need for achievement, entrepreneurship, hard work, and predisposition for excellence are not exclusive to individualist cultures.

From my perspective, the Igbo are not products of an individualistic culture. Punitive and repressive justice in traditional Igbo society characterizes societies of mechanical solidarity

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and collective conscience. Expiatory sanctions in Igbo land were, and are, not imposed to settle conflict between deviant and victim only, but also to cleanse the community of an abomination and thereby appease and re-guarantee the protection of the gods and ancestors. Interactions at family, lineage, clan and village levels exhibited the type of social uniformity, homogeneity or group think for which simple societies are known. Some non-movable property was communally owned. Igbos exist in a collectivist-individualistic culture where the person operates to achieve his best within the group. Therefore the notion of Igbo individualism qua individualism is an exaggeration. That notion which has been very widespread since the end of the Nigeria-Biafra war may be a function of behavioral changes consequent on the social and economic problems of the time whereby individuals become oblivious of the collectivity and the resulting group identity.

But renewing Igbo identity towards the pattern of the former Igbo Union cannot be achieved by speeches and preaching about the virtue of embracing the values of Igbo unity and solidarity. Recall the war against indiscipline in Nigeria in the 1980s. The program employed a pulpit strategy, that is, preaching to the public on the nobility of internalizing disciplined behavior in all aspects of life. That many of the problems plaguing Nigeria then are still around and have, in most cases, increased in incidence, intensity, type and frequency shows that the pulpit strategy did not work. Today, the instrument of that program, the National Orientation Agency is less than a shadow of its past.

The Nigerian government invoked the idea of rebranding the nation in the mid 2000s. Driven by the slogan, “Good People, Great Nation“ the campaign was intended to buff the country’s image and bring tourists and foreign investment to Nigeria. Instead of embrace, Nigerians turned it into the subject of constant joke. The exercise did not yield any objective change because it was based on eloquent talks and speeches while the material conditions of the people remained, and continues to remain, deplorable. Hence, I reiterate that preaching does not cause attitudes, values, and behaviors to change without objective changes in the circumstances that brought about them in the first place.

The political functionaries of Igbo states must, as a group, engage in tangible deeds with tangible outcomes in the lives of Igbo people as a precondition for a strong and sustainable pan Igbo orientation. Therefore, Ohaneze cannot succeed in its goal of renewing Igbo identity by recourse to the pulpit strategy. It needs to aspire, plan, act, and contribute to observable and positive change in the economic lives of the people. That is, Ohaneze must be a force for economic development if it garners the enabling resources for such a bold assignment. It will interject itself in the economy not as a replacement for the government but as a private entity of which activities can positively affect the lives of the people. The present state of affairs where the governments of Igbo states work atomistically and centrifugally are neither presently useful nor have they been useful at any time since the proliferation of states in Nigeria.

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One may point to the recent report that governors of the Southeast geopolitical zone, in May 2017, agreed to embark on the economic integration of the region to engender mutual growth and development. That is a plausible, though very belated move. From my perspective, conscious, deliberate, planned, and steady collaboration by the states is the only way economic development can be replanted in Igbo land 50 years after the magic of the M.I. Okpara government. I outline below a brief model of what the economic integration of the South-East geopolitical zone should or could look like.

**A MODEL OF ECONOMIC INTEGRATION FOR IGBO LAND**

1. Draw a comprehensive development plan for Igbo land consisting of the geographic areas covered by the 5 Igbo states. The governments of the latter do not have jurisdiction over Igbo-speaking communities in adjoining states and so cannot incorporate them into the plan. But Igbos in adjoining states can benefit from economic development of the 5 Igbo states because labor follows sustainable capital just as capital follows a friendly business environment.

2. Establish a South-East Infrastructure Development Bank into which each government pays an agreed percentage of its monthly subvention proportional to its share of federal subsidy. The bank should be open to private customers in order to make profits and expand its capital base.

3. Establish a South-East Power Authority for Igbo land to build power plants, generate and supply electricity to all areas in Igbo land. The economic disasters caused by lack of a dependable power supply system and its psychological burden on Igbo entrepreneurs are incalculable. I have studied entrepreneurship in Igbo land since 1991 and have come to the conclusion that Igbo entrepreneurs are super human beings. They operate in the most inimical business environment there may ever be in the entire world, yet they persist in their quest for survival and growth. Policy and dedicated action to make Igbo land self-sufficient in power generation and distribution will unleash to the fullest the entrepreneurial excellence for which the Igbo are known.

Many roads commissioned by governments in Igbo land are not durable. Each state should embark on the stabilization, fortification and expansion of its internal physical infrastructure, especially the rickety roads and bridges that falsely pass for tarred roads. Many roads in Igbo land disintegrate soon after construction because of the collusion between contractors and government officials where, I am told, the latter avoid proper and honest accreditation of completed contracts after taking a percentage of the contract money.

I learned from informal conversations with well-connected political operatives that it costs N54 million naira to build a kilometer of road in states while federal roads cost about N60 million per kilometer. Yet many of the roads do not last more than 6 months before they disintegrate. That was a mind-blowing revelation. I thought that N20 million naira or less could yield a good kilometer of road. The over-pricing, I was told, stems from the practice of factoring into the contract kickbacks to politicians and appointed officials. That means the fleecing of the public by collusion between government functionaries and business people that has been going
on for a long time. Nnaoke Ufere et al clearly captured this menace in their study of the merchants of corruption in Nigeria.  

The federal government, we learned, has a railway expansion plan which now includes Igbo states. Given the well-known prevarications of federal and state governments in planning and completing projects, no one knows when and if at all the rail project will take off and be completed.

4. Nothing prevents the governments of the 5 Igbo states from building a rail line internal to the region after the intended and unintended consequences of such a project have been examined through a feasibility study. Since there is already a rail line along Enugu-Ebonyi-Abia axis to Port Harcourt, the internal rail system could begin from Nsukka-Enugu across Onitsha on the Enugu-Onitsha expressway to the Anambra-Imo border on to Aba through the Onitsha-Owerri Road or towards Port Harcourt through the Owerri-Port Harcourt Road. This rail system can be built with funds from the zonal infrastructure bank mentioned earlier. Imagine the number of jobs that such a project will generate in different sectors to ameliorate the plight of the teeming population of unemployed youth in Igbo land.

The South-East bank of infrastructure can also fund the reconstruction or repairs of the so-called federal roads which the Federal Government hardly remembers to service. Wealthy Igbos will contribute to these projects when they see that their politicians are genuinely dedicated to the development of Igbo land. Levies of the less financially endowed will attract positive response from many if they observe conscientiousness on the part of government. The Sam Mbakwe Airport in Owerri is a good example.

People are reluctant to contribute to development projects in Igbo land because of the half-hearted, wavering, indecisive, irresolute, sneaky, slow, corrupt and incompetent way ruling governments initiate and implement projects. They see uncompleted projects abandoned by government in every part of Igbo land. What is the incentive to contribute one’s private earnings to projects which completion cannot be guaranteed because of corruption or incompetence or both?

I recall an encounter with a general manager of a paint factory in Aba who, during my study of manufacturing firms in Igbo states, informed me that many paint industries do not survive because Nigerian landlords do not paint their houses more than once in their lifetimes. They paint at construction time only and makers of paint do not have avenues to market their products regularly. I extrapolated from that statement that that was a major reason most houses in all parts of Nigeria in general, and Igbo land in particular, are dirty, dilapidated, squalid and slum-like.

Imagine a bill or an act of law anchored in the philosophy of environmental face-lifting simultaneously enacted in the Houses of Assembly of the 5 Igbo states that all landlords and other home owners, urban or rural, must paint their buildings every 5 years failure of which attracts specified sanctions. The bill has several potentially positive outcomes if properly enforced. Paint factories in Igbo land will blossom and employ more people, many unemployed

people will go into painting jobs, paint-brush makers will increase, producers of raw materials for these products will increase, and traders will sell their goods. Significant numbers of jobs will spring up in each of these sub-sectors and technical spinoffs may occur in the paint industry. This is one example of imaginative policymaking. There are others.

5. Take Over The Dredging of The River Niger and The Construction of The Second Niger Bridge: The Federal Government has vacillated on this project. The anti-development regulation separating federal from state jurisdictions on infrastructure development makes people suffer from federal government’s incompetence or its deliberate actions to deny a people better life and progress.

Remember also that many rivers in Igbo hinterland have dried up and more are bound to dry up due to silt from soil erosion and neglect.

6. Replace the craze for personal boreholes with a bold water supply program because we do not know the geological consequences of the proliferation of boreholes presently taking place in every space of Igbo land. Boreholes may be convenient for those who have access to them today. They may pose a geological disaster in the future.

   a. Take a survey of existing manufacturing firms, the sectors they represent; markets for their goods; factors that facilitate or handicap their success
   b. Outline incentives to unleash and/or increase the spirit of entrepreneurship for which the Igbo are known.
   c. Determine state comparative advantage for establishment of new industries in manufacturing, agriculture, and service.
   d. A bold agricultural plan

8. EDUCATION: States will manage their educational systems. But the important thing is that all agree on high standard at all levels and mechanisms to achieve it.

9. INITIATE AND IMPLEMENT A POLICY OF PERIODIC PROGRESS REPORT PRESENTED TO THE PUBLIC ON DEVELOPMENT PROJECTS

10. OTHER ITEMS GERMAIN TO DEVELOPMENT OF IGBOLAND NOT INCLUDED HERE.

   All these and more are achievable if government functionaries of the states place the interest of Igbo land above their own personal interests. History shows that development-hungry leaders make sacrifices and provide and encourage innovative ideas that unleash development. **Capable manpower abounds in Igbo land. Stop the monstrous volume of corruption and use the people’s money to solve the people’s problems.**

   The template of development of Igbo land stated above is not new. Nnia Nwodo made a true and incontrovertible statement in his speech in Chicago that, “The Federal Government cannot save the Igbo’. It is also a truism that federal governments in other countries of the world cannot singlehandedly save their regions or provinces. It is historically the duty and responsibility of regions to engineer and midwife their own development. A strong region or province keeps the local part of a commercial flow of goods and services going; integrates that flow within a cosmopolitan system of flows governed by a central government, other provinces, or other sovereign states, and builds institutions that arrange such things as residences,
churches, education, retail trade, and other activities that make up life.\(^\text{11}\) By extension, regions unable to develop themselves are weak regions. I unequivocally state that all regions in Nigeria are weak regions because none comes close to a developed status by any indicator of development. Igbo governments have the potential to produce the first strong region in Nigeria if they work with love of the Igbo Nation in mind. A leader cannot achieve development if he does not love his people.

The governments of Igbo land working in sync to improve the fortunes of the Igbo Nation is even more urgent now that a coalition of northern youths backed by some of their elders have declared the Igbo in the North personae non grata.\(^\text{12}\) They stated in the strongest terms possible that they wanted the Igbo to leave the North by October 1, 2017 because of the agitation by some groups of the former for an independent state of Biafra. Zik stated in 1949, “The only worthwhile strand we can make as a nation (Igbo) is to assert our self-determination as a unit of a prospective Federal Commonwealth of Nigeria and the Cameroons, where our rights will be respected and safeguarded.” The Nigeria of today is not a commonwealth as Zik proposed because

a. supreme authority is not vested in the people;

b. it is not an association of self-governing autonomous states loosely associated in a common allegiance to the central government.\(^\text{13}\)

Igbos asserted, and continue to assert their, self-determination rights. But those rights are not, and by default cannot be, respected or safeguarded in the highly centralized Nigerian polity.

Telling Igbo to leave the North is an insult to the people of Igbo Nation who have built and continue to build up every part of Nigeria they touch. This insult will stop only and only if the governments of Igbo states act to create the enabling environment for development to occur in Igbo land and Igbo people limit migration to other regions. So long as high populations of Igbos believe that their livelihood is dependent on sojourns to other parts of Nigeria, the Igbo will continue to receive insults, suffer discrimination, and be killed as has been the case since 1945. Violent envy is a well-known response to the prosperity of the Igbo in other regions.

Respect for the Igbo will return when those ethnic groups who scorn and resent them no longer see them in large numbers. The question is, what can be done ka achoo Ndigbo achoo na Nigeria? Translated, what can be done to make the Igbo scarce in other parts of Nigeria? Development of the Igbo states is the answer. If anti-Igbo sentiments and insults expressed in the current quit notices by some geo-ethnic groups eventuate in the disintegration of Nigeria, Igbos should quickly seize the opportunity and chart their own course.

Revelations by colonial operatives indicate that the British deliberately tilted power in favor of the North. With power comes domination of national wealth and perquisites. Where is the bulk of the national wealth located? Fact-checks show that ownership of oil blocks today is dominated by northerners even though the Niger Delta and the Southeast regions house the majority of the oil. What is most troubling, however, is that government functionaries of Igbo states feed fat from the crumbs of the national wealth and leave their masses with nothing but the crumbs of the crumbs. Igbos excelled under a dispensation of free competition in pre-civil

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\(^{13}\) https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/commonwealth
war Nigeria. But have, in many ways, lost under the managed competition of the post civil war era. That notwithstanding, Ndigbo must hold their political functionaries especially governors, members of state houses of assembly, local government councils and all levels of appointed officials accountable for the suffering they experience.

It is evident, from Nwodo’s speeches during the meeting in Chicago, that Ohaneze has been focusing attention to protecting Ndigbo from discriminatory actions of the central government and other groups. But I submit that Ohaneze did that at the expense of looking at the problems closest to it, ‘Ihe di ya na mkpisi ukwu’ as Igbo say. Put somewhat differently, focusing on and chasing only problems emanating from spaces outside its immediate milieu prevented Ohaneze from seeing and responding to problems that plague its immediate political, economic and cultural environment namely the problem of very bad governance of Igbo states that has been taking place since the end of the civil war.

A very distraught, exasperated, indeed ultra-frustrated, participant at the Ohaneze-America-Igbo Diaspora meeting who is well immersed in the situation in Igbo land said to me, “Prof, look, Igbo governors are the single most difficult problem Igbo have. These things we are saying here are the symptoms. The problem is Igbo governors. Impact the minds of those in governance. Igbo in America must do assessment of governance in Igbo land; those doing well and those not doing well. It will have effect.” This unsolicited statement from someone I did not know clearly corroborates my stand: bad governance by Igbo governors and other political functionaries is at the heart of the lack of development in Igbo land.

But an instrument for the assessment of Igbo political functionaries already exists. The Igbo Studies Association (ISA) in 2014 appointed Professors Gloria Chuku, Uchenna Nzewi, and Chikwendu Christian Ukaegbu to construct templates for two awards one of which was The Chukwuemeka Odumegwu Ojukwu Leadership Award. The award guidelines specifically focused on individuals and/or groups in government who play outstanding roles, with measurable outcomes, in the transformation of Igbo land. The ISA and other Diaspora Igbo groups can collaborate to administer awards using that template.

The lesson here is that it is no longer enough for Ohaneze to pontificate about the mistreatment of the Igbo by bodies external to the people. While the latter is important, it is equally important for it to lead Ndigbo to hold their governments accountable for misgovernance. “If you stand up, you no go see Aba. But if you bend down, you see Aba”, my friends told me many years ago in response to my then utopian orientation about human nature. If Ohaneze continues to focus on the problems created by external sources only, it will not achieve its mission of an Igbo land transformed for the betterment of the human condition. Consequently, the New Ohaneze should assume a new mandate to be the eye of Ndigbo both within and outside Igbo land. Call it a dual mandate. To effectively handle this dual mandate, it must have financial independence of which everyone at the Chicago meeting recognized and agreed to as the sine qua non for the effective operation of the organization.

The Ohaneze meeting in Chicago was very productive. Congratulations to its organizers-100 Igbo Organization (OHIO) and the delegates for a well-organized and disciplined gathering on behalf of Ndigbo, and to Chief John Nnia Nwodo and his delegation for a passionate, articulate and persuasive presentation of the problems of Ndigbo in Nigeria and how Ohaneze can contribute to deal with them.

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