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**Cultural Solidarity among the Igbo of South-eastern Nigeria: A tool for rural development**

**by**

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## THE ABSTRACT

The pillars on which this study is based (stands) could be compared with the observations of Ejiofor (1981: 4), who says the modern-and-African political models have not been sufficiently discovered, developed, and operated in African states. One thinks that the social and political behaviour of African people are in conflict with the present day political structures and institutions. Political and economic actors fail to harness the knowledge, attitudes, and responses with the indigenous values. Own to these reasons the present political dispensations in Africa are misconceived and ill-adapted to their reality. Hence, the call for detailed study of home-grown African values as a means to redress these imbalances has become inevitable. This study is based on Igbo cultural solidarity as a means to address and achieve rural development in Africa.

Meanwhile, this study attempts to re-ignite and re-echo ‘people-based’ and understood ‘home-based’ models of achieving rural development as focused on Okigwe-Owerri-Orlu political divisions among the Igbo of South-eastern Nigeria.

### Key Terms:

Cultural solidarity; Rural development; Common development; Community centred; Good governance; Common good; Home-based model; Traditional culture; Progressive Union; Living reality!

## Dedication

This work is fully and entirely dedicated to my late mother **Mrs. Alice Egwim-Anyanele** (a true Igbo hard worked woman who made me a true Igbo man) who joined our ancestors on the 14<sup>th</sup> February, 2010. May your passing on Mama sprout new life and thinking in us the living! Rest in the perfect peace of God!

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## CHAPTER 1

### **INTRODUCTION AND STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM**

#### **1.1 INTRODUCTION**

The Igbo<sup>1</sup> cultural solidarity as a value is a traditional practice focused on the common good (development) of all who live in the Igbo Land of South-Eastern Nigeria. The study aims at making an important connection between Igbo cultural solidarity and the general growth of Igbo culture, economy, education, governance (politics), laws etc... and the Igbo general worldview. This is a complex study, but my main focus is the importance and the vital role that

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<sup>1</sup> The alternative forms 'Igbo' and 'Ibo' need explanation. The word Igbo presents a problem in pronunciation for many foreigners, and Ibo has been in use as a ready solution. Many Igbo words with double consonants gave foreigners the same problem and therefore got a wrong spelling like: e.g., *Agbo* town became *Abo*, *Akwukwo* "books", became *Abubo*, and *Gbamgbam* corrugated iron became *Bambam*, etc. Modern Igbo writers insist on the use of the correct and authentic spelling *Igbo*. In this study I will insist on the use of the *Igbo* form but in quotations I will use "Ibo" to keep the past authors usage in books that may be consulted.

Igbo land is the home of millions of Igbo people and it covers most of Southeast Nigerian area. This area is divided by River Niger into two unequal fragments – the Eastern region (which is the largest) and the Midwestern region. The West of Igbo land area is bounded by the Urhobo people and the Benin, while the Igalas, Idomas, and Tiv are found on the Northern borders. The Efik and Ibibio people occupy the Eastern boundaries of Igbo land. Igbo land is surrounded with the River Benue in the North, the River Niger in the West, the Cross River in the East and Atlantic Ocean in the South. The word "Igbo" is used in three different senses, to describe the Igbo territory, domestic speakers of the language and the language spoken by the people (Afigbo, 1981: 10 and Shaw, 1970: 268). The population of the Igbo people is estimated to be about 40-45 million in the present day Nigeria. They also occupy about 25, 280 square kilometres in which is found 8 states (Anambra, Abia, Enugu, Imo, Rivers, Delta, Ebonyi and River states in the present day political divisions in Nigeria) among the 36 current existing states in Nigeria (Ukpokolo 2009: 4). Until the mid twentieth century, most Igbo people were farmers, cultivating Yam, Coco-Yam, Palm-Tress and engaging in other agricultural activities as their major occupation.

Traditionally, the Igbo people lived in villages or village-groups surrounded by their farm lands. The village-group is the primary unit of socio-political activity as we will later see in the main body of this study. There was no sustained model or system of centralised states within the Igbo society. Rather, there were strong ties of the village community, the extended family system, age-group/grade associations and various religious or social groups that maintained law and order in the Igbo communities. All these will be treated in the main body of this study. It should also be noted that the Igbo were highly influenced by the foreign contact with the Christian missionaries who arrived in the early 1900 century (in 1884 both the Anglican and Catholic missionaries respectively arrived in Onitsha town along the River Niger to commence their missionary tasks) [Ekechi 1971: 72]. More detailed historical facts will be discussed in chapter 2 of this study where I will trace the origin of the Igbo people.

cultural solidarity plays in the Igbo social development. As a case study, this work shall focus on cultural solidarity as a tool for rural development among the Igbo and Africans in general.

In this first chapter I will consider the research problem in which I will explain the background of the research topic. I will also see to the research objective in which I will express the main aims expected to be achieved in this study. Next I will discuss the limitations and scope of this study, which is mainly focused on the Igbo of South-Eastern Nigeria. I will also point out the difference as point of departure where this study will benefit the field of development in the traditional setting experience. The importance of this study and the research methodology shall be other areas of consideration. Finally I will end with a brief conclusion to the chapter under consideration.

The Igbo people have been affected and influenced by both internal and external forces, which have defined their way of life. The first external factor involved colonialism, slavery and the post-colonial state rule. The second factor of foreign religions, Islam and Christianity, have equally influenced and defined the Igbo peoples. The internal factors that have defined the Igbo nation since the pre-colonial era include common legends of origin, kinship networks, features of local religion, politics and of course, a certain degree of territoriality (Harneit-Sievers, 1997: 2).

The Igbo ethnic solidarity as a 'living value' has stood all time and test amidst the internal and external factors. Solidarity, seen as a traditional value has its features transmitted or handed down from one generation to the other among the Igbo. The Igbo people express cultural solidarity as something that belongs to them naturally. It therefore affects social development while embracing changes that are imminent.

## **1.2 STATEMENT OF THE RESEARCH PROBLEM**

The African continent is part of the global world and its capitalist economy. It is in co-operation with the states and governments that made up the membership of the United Nations

and the scientific and technological world. Almost the entire world has been affected by the globalisation process. The world today is rightly referred to as the “global village”. Interpersonal communication is now possible, at the click of one’s fingers, despite the distance. This was impossible some decades ago among the ordinary peoples of the world. This shared economic, cultural and scientific technology has benefited both rich and poor nations alike, black and white people, Africans and Asians, Europeans, Americans and Australians. By virtue of being a member of the global world, Africa has been affected by the consequential growth of the global village. The rich get richer and the poor get poorer. Observation would suggest that Sub-Saharan Africa is the region that has benefited least in this globalisation process since poverty and hunger, conflict and war, disease and untimely death remain rampant.

It is vital to note that early external forces like slavery, which culminated into the colonisation of Africa, did not help African growth. As Uzukwu (1996: 31) rightly noted, colonialism led Africans into becoming ever infants, not developing in manufacturing or producing communities. Local food productions or cultivation of crops such as millet, rice, and tubers were instead imported from the master colonisers countries for local consumption in disregard for the upgrading of traditional mechanism of food production. Hence he wrote thus:

...These products had to be imported through the medium of the colonial masters. Africans forgot the art of gold, tin, iron, and copper mining and smelting and the working of related products. Consequently, the African peoples lost control of the politics and economy (culture, art invention, philosophy, music, religion etc...) <sup>2</sup> of their continent to the predators. They were no longer originators of their own designs, nor were they the projectors of their own schemes or the creators of the events that led to their destiny. ...Finally Africa became primitive, savages, infants, lazy, at all levels. This is how Africa was invented; the famous anthropological impoverishment of Africa took place (Uzukwu, 1996: 31).

Moreover, while the major productive technologies are located in the Western countries (Europe/America), Africa is at the consuming/receiving end. Though Africa remains impoverished, it is the highest exporter of raw materials (both human and commodities) to all the mentioned continents of the world. Africa is rich with natural resources for the

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<sup>2</sup>Words in bracket are my further expansion of the case at hand.

development of the populace, but internal forces, not least the plundering by African leaders of different states and governments, the wealth and leaving Africa disadvantaged and impoverished by exploitation. This is neo-colonialism which I see as “Self-enslavement and neglect”; it raises huge concerns and worries regarding progress for the African continent.

Nevertheless, with less or no basic life amenities in place in most Sub-Saharan Africa, good roads, electricity, pipe-borne water, transport and housing have become luxuries only for the rich and our “so-called” leaders and politicians. These have locked themselves in the comfortable secure state houses and government properties; at the expense of the poor masses who are burdened with crime, hunger and joblessness. Poor Africans are often told time and again to wait and be patient while the elite, the ruling class are in comfort and lack nothing.

Militating also against African development is the recent upsurge of migration of the African professionals to the affluent and developed Western countries in search of job opportunities and a better life. This of course has led to the highest brain drain era Africa has ever witnessed since the end of slavery, which took the cream able-bodied men and women out of motherland Africa. This is a self-inflicted problem though, since the African leaders themselves have plundered the national economies for their own individual gain for decades. Year after year we read about African heads of state and governments who instead of investing in the natural and human resources of their countries, have rather plundered state funds and deposited them into their own private foreign accounts.

Of course we cannot forget or deny attempts made by different African governments to develop different aspects of life in the continent such as the economy, agriculture, education, health, politics and the general social infrastructure. In certain areas success has been achieved and yet, in others, huge challenges remain. In fact, the “desire to get things right” (develop proper infrastructure) has not been well articulated by different states and governments in Africa. There is no proper groundwork to institute or produce a home-based, well-understood, grounded and functional developmental model for Africa. Sub-Saharan Africa in particular is yet to articulate this challenge. The “rush” or “dash” for new economic policies, I mean the not well-reflected policies and owned by African communities, the not well considered policies for

our African situation and environment; and the “borrowing” of economic and political models from the West to support or augment our situation have not helped much either. The Sub-Saharan Africa needs a “home-based” model to advance its real situation for its proper and sustainable growth and development.

A strong possibility of self-reliant effect is to re-evaluate the economic growth that took place in South Africa during the evil regime of apartheid. I believe South Africa in the past adopted homemade ideas to develop its economy and otherwise, and was able to sustain the local population with little or no support from the outside world since it had isolated itself because of the apartheid regime. South Africa under apartheid was able to develop a high-level of standard growth in medicine, agriculture, good road network, energy and other important infrastructure. It was indeed the first country in the world to produce petrol from coal. Hence, Africa still stands a chance to do much better if there is a strong political will and commitment to achieve a better life for all.

There is a need therefore, for Africa to rethink and reshape her understanding about achieving development. In what he expressed as the “machines and structures that manufacture the poor”, Njoku (2004: 83-93) rightly pinpoints the nature of the African model of development that has retarded any desired improvement in education, agriculture, public health, politics, religion and the entire sphere of life.

Looking at development within Africa’s needs, I am motivated to suggest a traditional strategy for development that has worked among the Igbo people of South-Eastern Nigeria for many years, namely the Igbo cultural solidarity. By this I mean the union and fellowship arising from common responsibilities and interest among the Igbo. The Igbo people have shared interest as a group, class or a people towards achieving a common goal of development. Cultural solidarity therefore serves as the uniting force of the Igbo people as a community that shares in a common interest, feelings and purpose of common good. Therefore, cultural solidarity is an expression of unity among the Igbo people with the common interest to develop. This will be unpacked as this study progresses.

For the purpose of this study, cultural solidarity as enshrined in the Igbo life shall be considered as an attempt to address the African self-understanding and enhancement of life. The amount/extent of poverty that characterise the streets of African cities and rural areas pose an enormous challenge for the legitimate heads of state and governments to rise up to the occasion. These are situations of food crisis, lack of housing, high crime rate, and joblessness among the African youth; who, have rather become wasted human resources, talents and abilities.

As the question of how best to address this issue arises however, unity (solidarity) remains a major factor to grapple with. African societies, Uzuoku (1996: 38) noted, are not inexperienced in federating nations, as the history of African kingdoms shows. Solidarity, he says, within ethnic groups is not built on a lie but on truth and is linked to control by spiritual forces. Slavery and colonialism, he continues, gave birth to the “lie” called African states with artificial boundaries, created by the colonizers. Fortunately enough, nationalists like Kwame Nkrumah of Ghana, saw through the lie and called for a political unity of African societies to address this pressing issue of development. A union centred on African solidarity would build a long lasting and self-sustaining Africa’s future development. Upon realizing the need to reinterpret the African situation Uzuoku (1996: 38) wrote thus:

...The challenge of re-examining the meaning of solidarity in modern Africa must be courageously faced. Indeed, a new, viable, and dynamic model for building relationships beyond the limits of ethnicity has become imperative. In order to achieve this, it is my view that the interests and objectives of the ethnic groups, nationalities, and communities, which make up Africa, must be creatively received and reinterpreted as constitutive elements for the reconstruction of Africa. These interests and objectives will, in turn, be creatively harmonized with the reality of modern Western patterns, adopted since independence, which have become part and parcel of the African heritage, so that viable nations, regions, and a united Africa will emerge.

For the traditional Igbo, life is one and not divided. Life is not cut into pieces or partitioned and no one lives in isolation of the other. All live in the community as one people with a common purpose of interest. No individual lives for him/herself; rather life is lived in consideration of the other kinsman or woman. In general terms life is interlinked. Thus if an Igbo offends an individual, it is the entire community that is offended, hence, attracting a communal requirement for reconciliation. Solidarity as the value in practise in this instance has

made such practice a cultural meaningful event among the Igbo. This is a high value required of all who live in a given Igbo community.

Another practical way the Igbo developed a cultural solidarity which developed a known ethnic or group relational affairs, is marriage. Uzukwu (1996: 38) pointed out, that warring communities would adopt patterns for creating channels of solidarity to protect their economic and political interests. Marriage was the commonest way of binding feuding communities together in order to limit violence, thereby achieving peace. Solidarity among the Igbo of South-Eastern Nigeria seeks to enhance the life of every individual who lives in the community. Our focus therefore is to expose the aspects or basis of Igbo Solidarity. I hope that as we exhaust the values surrounding these aspects of Igbo solidarity (the family, religion, socio-economic and social dimensions etc.), we will have addressed or suggested some local values to be tapped to respond to the challenges facing or impeding the rural development in Nigeria in particular and Africa in general.

### **1.3 RESEARCH OBJECTIVE**

The question here is what I want to achieve with this work. Though it is impossible to state at this juncture the results of our study, it may be fitting to indicate now some possible ideas that will finally emerge from it. Or at least point to the goal aimed at even if this is not fully attained.

This study aims at addressing the challenges facing African rural development in a world where development has become the talk of the day. Yet, the method and model of development is not so much considered by many societies thereby compromising values and models of indigenous development. The “Western” or rather “modern” method of social development is the central focus of almost all societies including the present day Igbo people of South-Eastern Nigeria and Africa in general. My focus therefore is to explore the practice of the Igbo people’s cultural solidarity as a means to achieve common good for all in the rural African setting. My goal therefore, having exposed this practice among the Igbo, is to provide an

alternative model, method and cultural style to redress the lack of development in the rural African setting. The discovery of the role that cultural-solidarity model has played among the Igbo people, will aid this study to develop a “home-based” model to addressing the challenges facing rural African development.

This understanding will further define the Igbo cultural solidarity as a community based and centred model for rural development. Having defined cultural solidarity among the Igbo people as a common interest that has arisen from a shared responsibility to achieving a common good, rural African communities will be challenged to redress their situations thus. This aim to realize the primary purpose of autonomy and self-reliance in most African rural settings is indeed the central focus point for this study. Thus, this work aims to achieve further the following objectives:

1. A clear perception of the various faces, roles and activities of the family and a better understanding of the relations among these bodies to achieving cultural solidarity for the common good of all in the Igbo land.
2. This study will seek to suggest a new way to understand the Nigerian reality with the focus on Igbo cultural solidarity. It will hence challenge the African scholars, politicians, and intellectuals to develop a “home-based” (indigenized) cultural model to addressing the challenges facing rural African development.
3. This will also focus on a clearer perception of the African traditional values between Africans and the Western countries as to how best to improve the life of rural African dwellers.
4. Redefining the relation between African rural setting and the Western style and focus on development, I will define the Igbo institutions or agents of rural development as a clearer way and tool for achieving rural development at least among the Igbo of South-Eastern Nigeria.
5. Finally, I will seek to use this traditional cultural solidarity value among the Igbo to develop a people based model of achieving common good. Surely, a people centred development will ultimately express the famous saying of former American president Mr. J. F. Kennedy “...Do not ask what your country can do for you, but ask what you can do for your country”.

6. Meanwhile, I intend to re-ignite or revive people-supported and understood models of achieving common good.

The Igbo people of South-Eastern Nigeria as our case study are eager for a clear vision to be able to give sustainable hope for all who live in the land. The Igbo form about 35% of the entire Nigerian population of over one hundred and forty million people. This population is a huge responsibility. Hence, it is important to note further that this study will be focused on the Igbo communities that have made up the former Okigwe-Owerri-Orlu<sup>3</sup> divisions known to be the Igbo-heart-lands in the present day Nigeria. Hence, I shall note how cultural solidarity as a principle has sustained such huge population among the Igbo people and has enhanced development in the area as true agent of development.

Finally, as the values surrounding this principle of cultural solidarity are identified, they will serve the purpose of value recovery in which models of political, educational and agricultural systems can be based in a rural African setting. Hence, the question may be raised about the kind of community we hope for; to enjoy humane living in order to generate a humane culture that encourages common good. This study will hence serve as a contribution to the pool of ongoing debate to advance cultural-based relevant political and social theories, addressing the challenge of rural African development. This study will present the Igbo cultural solidarity as a credible agent of social transformation.

#### **1.4 LIMITATIONS TO AND SCOPE OF THE STUDY**

This study, as the title suggests will focus on the Igbo of South-Eastern Nigeria who are geographically located across the River Niger. This study is both sociological and developmental, and leading us to the interaction between the Igbo social culture and development projects focused on achieving a common good for all people in the land. Hence, this study will show the states of interaction among the Igbo people and the effects of foreign

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<sup>3</sup> These areas among the Igbo communities formed part of the East-Central States as was known in the early demarcations of Nigeria shortly after independence on October 1<sup>st</sup>, 1960.

Western religious, politics, education and economic practice etc., cultures that have influenced and moulded some Igbo aspects of cultural reality. The target is not to study culture, in terms of beliefs, arts, morals, laws, customs or religion as inclusive of Tylor's (1971: 1) definition of culture. Rather, my focus will be on Igbo cultural-solidarity aspect and its role as an agent or driving force of rural development among the Igbo people. By so doing I will note the demand of the people for unity, personal identity and social life security which all culminate in the full practice of cultural solidarity with a view to a common good.

However it is vital to note that among the Igbo, as Ejiofor (1981: 7) noted:

...communities<sup>4</sup> constitute one major ethnic and linguistic group; nevertheless they differ by modifications in culture, social orientation and thinking. This diversity may be minor but it is still strong enough to affect the political life of the people. A survey of the Igbo people puts them into a number of sub-cultures and sub-groups. In society ...people tend to stop and call themselves one, whether that oneness arises out of a common origin or whether it is a result of practical and integrated co-existence ...those people have enjoyed for a long period.

Igbo land is not an identical entity but would be characterized by different sub-cultures with significant differences among them. It is on this fact that Onwejegwu (1981: 8-11) noted the following five cultural sub-groups of the Igbo people. These include:

1. Northern or Onitsha Igbo which includes towns like Akwa, Udi, Enugu, Enugu Ukwu, Nsukka, Aro Ndizeogu, Onitsha, Agukwu Nri, Igboukwu, Nanka, and Ihiala.
2. Southern or Owerri Igbo, which includes towns like Aba, Umuahia, Owerri, Ahoada, Okigwe, and Orlu;
3. Western Igbo, which is the part of Igbo land in Delta State and includes towns like Asaba, Agbor, Kwalle, Ilah and Aboh;
4. Eastern or Cross River Igbo, which includes towns like Abam, Ohafia, Afikpo, Arochukwu, and Abriba.
5. North-Eastern Igbo, which includes towns like Ezza, Uburu, Okposi, and Abakkaliki.

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<sup>4</sup> Community as used here means a group of Igbo citizens who occupy a particular geographical location. These people share in similar language, King/ruler, market, hospital, community school etc. and are defined in the Nigerian political term as an autonomous (independent) community; meaning being politically represented by a local King, known as Eze.

However as Ukpokolo (2009: 5) rightly pointed out, the differences noticeable among the Igbo are as a result of various influences ranging from historical contacts with their neighbours to migration issues. It is against this background that this work must be understood. This is to identify therefore a clear geographical location of our study. On this note, I intend to focus on the former Igbo land division namely the Okigwe-Owerri-Orlu divisions, the heartland of the Igbo society. This therefore means the Southern or Owerri Igbo cultural sub-groups. These former divisions are in the present day Imo State of Nigeria. The former Okigwe-Owerri-Orlu divisions of Igbo society will serve as a focal point of reference by which this study will achieve its aim.

Cultural solidarity as an aspect of Igbo life expression will be reviewed. In essence the basis and the nature of cultural solidarity in the Igbo community will be my major focus. Such an investigation aims to discover new grounds and home-grown ideas to reconsider the African state governments approach towards development. The Igbo understanding of development through the practice of cultural solidarity gives a new value to approach development differently. It is important to point this out since there is already this “seed” of developmental aspect of Igbo traditional living before the advent of colonialism and present day political systems from the Western countries. In this respect, it would be crucial to address the basic question of modern day politics in Igbo land: How can the modern day politics address the value of cultural solidarity among the Igbo based on their culture, religion, philosophy, proverbs and wisdom as already practised in the traditional set up?

My opinion will reflect on Ejiofor’s (1981: 6) response as he wrote thus:

A study of an Igbo political system (or political aspect, as in solidarity)<sup>5</sup> has some value beyond the confines of Nigeria. Comparative politics is a current subject, which aims at studying and understanding the different political systems in their own idiom and thought; ...the first (political system) to be studied (written or instituted) is not necessarily the ideal type. The political ideas of the developing countries contain in themselves ideas and practices, which are universally potential and intelligible. All political systems share certain properties in common. They are all members of the same universe. ...Similar characteristics obtain among all political systems... So no one system would claim superiority over the other.

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<sup>5</sup> Words in brackets indicate my own emphasis.

Moreover, the modern day politics need to dialogue or interact with the Igbo understanding and practice of solidarity so as to be able to address the issue of common good. To pursue a foreign political idea that has not been well understood and integrated in the life of the African person has caused us a great deal of confusion and misdirection. Hence the need for a “home-grown or home based” political practices to give a situational response to the Igbo case in particular and Africa in general.

### **1.5 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

The focus of this research is on the Igbo cultural solidarity through which it expresses its value, behaviour and belief systems. It is appropriate therefore to utilise a qualitative approach in the research methodology of this study. As David and Sutton (2004: 35; 77) rightly noted:

...qualitative research refers to the collection of materials in a linguistic form, a form that has not been translated into a location on a numerical scale. ...It also expresses words, information about feelings, values and attitudes. ...qualitative method also employ standards and techniques based on theoretical and methodological principles of symbolic interactions. ...and it emphasizes observations that are not recorded in any standardized coding format as opposed to quantitative (numerical) method of study.

This study will apply the qualitative research approach since it demonstrates the Igbo context of cultural expressions and this approach is chosen because it embodies the historical method on which this study is based. In addition, qualitative research not only tells the story but it also analyzes or scrutinizes it, it also explains the why of an event and not just the what. This explanatory study according to Welman (2005:188), “is an umbrella phrase covering a collection (pleasing order) of interpretive techniques which seek to describe, decode, translate, and otherwise come to terms with the meaning of naturally occurring phenomena in the social world ...the qualitative approach is also fundamentally a descriptive form of research.”

Qualitative research method furthermore, is ‘naturalistic inquiry’ by nature. According to McMillan and Schumacher (1993: 372-373), qualitative research uses a non-interfering (non-foreign or situational based) data collection strategy to discover the natural flow of events and

processes and how participants interpret them. This research therefore describes and analyzes people's individual and collective social actions, beliefs, thoughts, and perceptions. More so, it collects data by interacting with selected persons in a given setting and by obtaining relevant documents.

According to Babbie and Mouton (2005: 270; 646), the major aim of qualitative research is in-depth description and understanding of actions and events among people who are real social actors. Concluding, they agree that qualitative research, study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of or to interpret phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them. Hence, my focus while applying the qualitative method in this study will emphasise the Igbo natural settings and its interpretation by the use of cultural solidarity in achieving rural development. By enumerating the Igbo actions and events, I will demonstrate further how all this support common good among Igbo communities of South-Eastern Nigeria.

In a rather historical nature, this study will present the cultural solidarity events that had occurred and mostly still in existence in the traditional Igbo ways of life. Interacting with these events, I will describe, analyze and interpret these events to answer the question or challenge presented by the title. In the effort to analyze the Igbo cultural solidarity I will apply certain words, proverbs, Igbo common names and customs will be scrutinized to show how all these help the Igbo people to express and experience cultural solidarity within a given Igbo community. Hopefully, with this application I will be able to provide or suggest some answers and make a contribution towards the understanding and practice of rural development in Africa.

## **1.6 RESEARCH TECHNIQUES**

With regard to data collection and gathering, both primary and secondary sources will be sought. According to McMillan and Schumacher (1993: 116), a primary source refers to the original research studies or writings by a theorist or researcher. Primary literature as will be

used in this study will contain the full text of other research reports or theories that may be more detailed and relevant book topics relating to my research topic on cultural solidarity. In further clarification, David and Sutton (2004: 82; 192-193) note that primary sources also include diaries, letters and newspapers that are not produced for the purpose of research. Different from primary sources they noted secondary sources, that is, texts or data generated by previous researchers will equally serve a great deal in this study.

A primary source is therefore a written or oral testimony of an eyewitness, a participant, or a record made by some mechanical device present at the event and occasion such as a tape recorder, a transcript, or a photograph. In this sense the primary source becomes the original since it contains firsthand eyewitness accounts of the event or occasion that is being written or orally reported. The secondary source hence becomes a record or testimony of anyone not an eyewitness to the event or occasion being reported and written (McMillan and Schumacher 1993: 453).

Hence, texts and other vast researched information topics of respected Igbo scholars and intellectuals both published and non-published of Igbo literatures will firmly feature in the bibliography. In his distinction, primary sources as pointed out by Wolman (2005: 189) must be given preferential choice, and the reason being that with each transfer of information from one source to another the information may be accidentally or deliberately distorted. Hence, other primary collections and sources like Igbo proverbial and wise sayings and folklore (stories) both in oral form and literature will all be of help in this study on cultural solidarity among the Igbo people. All this will be combined with secondary sources like articles in journals, dictionaries, internet sources, encyclopaedias, and books to validate or widen our horizon.

This study has utilized primary sources (books) from the University's library (UNISA) and from the Walter Sisulu University (WSU) in Mthatha in the Eastern Cape. Some personal collections have been utilized too and other primary sources like oral traditions in form of stories (folklores), proverbs, wise sayings and common knowledge will be employed too. The

Internet sources were accessible from the Universities Research Resource Centres in Mthatha and private lines too have been utilised.

### **1.7 IMPORTANCE OF THE STUDY**

With respect to scholars and intellectuals who have written extensively on aspects of Igbo social life, one feels very privileged to contribute towards the historical enterprise on the Igbo traditional (cultural) solidarity on which this work is focused. Following his evaluation of modern or contemporary African state, Ejiofor (1981: 4) writes:

It is our contention that modern-and-African political models have not been sufficiently discovered, developed, and operated in African states. Hence the social and political attitudes of the people are at variance with their political structures and institutions. Political actors fail to harmonize their knowledge, attitudes, and responses with their political institutions. Some basic concepts of politics are misapprehended and perceived as foreign by the citizens they are supposed to motivate.

This observation could be interpreted as an invitation and a call for African states to rise above quick-fix-borrowing of foreign political and economic models that have not brought desired solutions to our real situation. It is a call to build on home-based (grown) values to advance Africa's own political agenda. Such a target would be a basic task of government to convince citizens to come along in search for the common good. This is the basic meaning of Igbo cultural solidarity that is together working for common good. While seeking for a solution to this challenge, Ejiofor (1981: 4) made two valuable admissions that should be considered:

1. The present political systems of many African States are misconceived and ill-adapted to the people;
2. A detailed study of the indigenous social and political attitudes of African peoples, as a prelude to the solution of the imbalance, has become necessary.

It is within these two vital, basic premises that I would place the importance of this study. Solidarity as a known cultural value among the Igbo people will serve this purpose to develop a cultural based value system to advance rural development in Africa. It is true the Igbo are just like a drop in the ocean of the bigger African family. Yet, without this drop, the ocean is

incomplete. The economic and political instability of most African states in recent times calls Africans to advance a home-grown value-system that cannot be over emphasized or ignored.

Additionally, in every crisis and conflict witnessed in African states, we have come to understand that local citizens or indigenous populations have complained over the mismanagement of state funds and the economy. This needs to be revisited so that measures can be taken to put an end to the practice of mismanagement and impunity. A clear example of a home-based model can be found in the effort to manage conflicts in Africa. The “Truth and Reconciliation Commission”, organised in the post apartheid era in South Africa to address the injustices of the past imbalances, has proved to be a world-class/acclaimed process of conflict resolution and management. This home-grown South African initiative achieved enormous world recognition that has itself been adopted in many conflict zones in Africa and elsewhere as a method of self “telling and listening”, creating a meeting point for victim and oppressor, targeted for resolving conflict and its management. Also the Rwanda post genocide process and progress in economy and governance is another highly noted example to be recommended in the African experience.

In essence, the importance of this study is to focus on the vital roles that cultural values could play in the present day search for rural development in Africa. As an edifying and enriching instrument or tool to achieving rural development, cultural solidarity will be fully explored in the Igbo setting to reach the goal of common good (development). The aim is to ensure that African cultural based values are integrated into Africa’s social, religious, political and economic development models in the present day state rule systems. The importance of this study will also be to task our African scholars and intellectuals to begin a search for solutions from our African cultural values to advance development rather than depend on foreign models. As we focus on cultural solidarity as a major Igbo value principle, I intend to steer a debate on how best to approach challenges facing rural development in Africa.

## 1.8 CONCLUSION

Cultural solidarity among the Igbo therefore expresses social interaction of a giving human environment or society. This implies or notes that cultural solidarity is the daily Igbo way of meeting, interacting and assurance of all who live in the land. In this meeting, exchange of interest and opinion takes place. All individuals or groups of people in this interaction, all become vulnerable, so to speak, to the reception of the other. It is somewhat seen as self-emptying to the other in order to advance unity or shared interest and responsibility that remains the focus. Cultural solidarity in all we have seen above functions as the mover of every Igbo person's activity in search of unity and assurance of common good.

In this chapter we have considered cultural solidarity as a significant tool to respond to the challenges facing rural African development. This is mainly considered from a point of view that "home-based" economic, educational, agricultural and political etc..., models could provide a better response to our African rural settings in addressing development or the common good. The lack of sustainable development provides the opportunity for all people in a given society to oblige themselves and become responsible to the shared social interest. This scenario implies that all people in a given social setting are to resume a common ownership and work in unity for the common good. Having noted the objective and importance of this study, we will explore different Igbo social aspects namely history, bases of cultural solidarity and Igbo institutions to expose the values therein in search of a rural common good.

Finally, as an academic activity (discipline), this study attempts to validate cultural solidarity among the Igbo and considers the role it can play in the development of contemporary rural African communities. As an attempt in searching for a "home-based" solution to challenges facing rural development, the documentation shown herewith, shows the effort of Igbo scholars and intellectuals in applying different aspects of Igbo social life and engagement as a solution outlook. My attempt to use Igbo cultural solidarity as a means and agent of rural development among the Igbo will modify, qualify, and amplify aspects of social life that will support a comprehensible consideration for the rural African setting.

## **CHAPTER 2**

### **LITERATURE REVIEW AND DEFINITION OF KEY CONCEPTS**

#### **2.1 INTRODUCTION**

In this chapter we will show by way of reference the existing texts that have been written towards the topic of our study. The Igbo social life has in the recent times generated a great deal of interest, warranting many Igbo scholars who have benefited from Western education to write about their culture. I will show in this chapter the relevant texts that will support our argument to show that the Igbo cultural solidarity is an authentic agent for rural development among the Igbo people. More so, we will define key concepts that will frequently appear in this study. Such terms like Solidarity, Development, Rural Village, Community and Traditional Culture will go a long way to define the extent of this study. Finally, to situate our study in its geographical location in Africa, I will briefly map out and identify the Igbo people with regards to the Igbo historical origin.

The literature on the Igbo of South-eastern Nigeria had been scanty until mid 20th century. This was not the case in regard to the other tribes of Hausa and Yoruba or Edo cultural histories (Afigbo, 1981:1-2). Much of this is due to the fact that the English colonizers had paid much more attention in terms of written history to other tribes rather than the Igbo.

Of late though, one must confess that literature about the Igbo has escalated due to Igbo scholars and intellectuals who decided to write about their own history and relevant aspects of Igbo life and culture. Some of the recent volumes have dealt with the Igbo folklore, novels, religion, culture and art, history and Igbo ways of life (Ejiofor, 1981:14). It is to this pool that this fraction will be added and hopefully at the end of this work I would have provided a step further towards using Igbo cultural solidarity as a tool for advancing rural development in Nigeria and beyond. In defining literature review on which this chapter will be based, David and Sutton (2004: 7) wrote thus:

...it is the selection of all available documents (both published and unpublished) on the topic, which contain information, ideas, data and evidence written from a particular standpoint to fulfil certain aims or express certain views on the nature of the topic and how it is to be investigated, and the effective evaluation of these documents in relation to the research being proposed.

It is based on this definition and research review that all the necessary documents gathered and consulted is intended to serve as my point of reference and departure.

## **2.2 LITRATURE REVIEW**

One title very close to this study is the work done by Mozia (1987) in which he did an in depth study on the Church and Igbo solidarity. In this title Mozia employed the Church (Christian religion) understanding of solidarity as a measure or yard stick by which the Igbo cultural solidarity must be evaluated and authenticated. Doing an analytical and comparative study on this topic, Mozia positively identifies some similar terms and expressions by which these two different cultures and practices could be understood and yet differentiated.

In his own expression, this analytical work would "...help to show how the people express and experience solidarity within their community" (Mozia, 1987:34). On the other hand, in the comparative aspect, he vastly intended to give priority and highly favoured the Church approach of solidarity to the Igbo understanding and practice. In so doing he expressed the Igbo solidarity to be "non-liberating", "imperfect" and "manipulative" while the Church's practice of solidarity is the total opposite of these negative effects of Igbo solidarity (1987: 21).

In his general approach to this topic, Mozia tries to "authenticate" the Igbo solidarity insofar as it is understood in the light of Church solidarity. Igbo solidarity is "valid" insofar as it is interpreted and practiced as in the Church. He convincingly expressed that:

...in response to this invitation to participate in the pastoral and evangelical mission of the Church, we have chosen to study the "Solidarity in the Church and Solidarity among the Igbos of Nigeria." It is our intention to examine the already existing... solidarity among the Igbos in the light of the ecclesial solidarity. Such an attempt – it is

hoped – will lead us to discover the ways and means of liberating this people from the imperfect and manipulative solidarity so as to establish an authentic ecclesial solidarity... Efforts will be made here also to utilize the positive elements of their cultural solidarity in achieving this goal.” (1987:21).

Firstly, in Mozia’s rather cloudy picture as noted above, that the Church solidarity has authenticity over the Igbo cultural-solidarity, I would contend that the ‘Igbo cultural solidarity’ practice needs not the Church understanding or practice to authenticate its value. The Igbo solidarity practice has already survived ages of expression and consciousness among the people. This practice on its own is a living value that needs no Christian cultural practice to give its value or meaning. I therefore content that, the Igbo solidarity can stand on its own without any foreign validity or authenticity of meaning.

No human cultural value, meaning or morality should depend on another cultural experience to be meaningful to its community of expression. No matter how eloquent and attractive, any effort made in this regard would undermine or down play the natural intelligence and common sense that is inherent in the expression of every human situation. Of course, no particular cultural value is independent of other values in other cultures. Values can be exchanged to enrich and complement others; but they cannot depend on the latter to be meaningful to the society of expression and experience.

Secondly, I will also argue that looking at the above quote of Mozia<sup>6</sup> in his participation in pastoral and evangelical mission of the Church, one easily notices a contradiction in terms of expression. A practice (solidarity) that is declared “non-liberating” and “manipulative” cannot be constructive at the same time. Hence, Mozia’s effort to identify ‘some positive’ elements in the Igbo practice of solidarity is pile in the sky to build on his effort to “purify” and “re-baptize” the Igbo cultural value to suite his thinking.

Moreover, Onuoha (1965), in his work makes a rather generalized analysis and description of Igbo communities while evaluating the roles of different Igbo age groups. In this sense, community life (or shared community activities) Ejiofor says while evaluating this work, is

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<sup>6</sup> See Mozia’s 1987: 21 quote above on pages 19-20.

used to describe the social orientation of the Igbo who see all people as essentially in community with their fellow men and who subject all their actions to this realization (Ejiofor, 1981:16). This realization is the general interest to seek the common good for all who live in the Igbo society/nation.

Evaluating Onuoha's study, Ejiofor (1981) noted that his attempt, description and classification of the chief, the elders and priests and the people as natural leaders of the community (to realize solidarity)<sup>7</sup> is simply too generalized. His reason was simply that the role individual groups played were not fully documented and therefore cannot be validated without a written source. Nevertheless, it has served as a source of information of the nature of Igbo life. The individual and community aspects were noted and classified.

Harneit-Sievers (1997), while writing as an outsider, that is non-Igbo writer did some meaningful work on Igbo community histories. He emphasized the internal and external factors or forces that defined the Igbo communities as they are found today. These forces, he noted, could not be overlooked while determining the life of the Igbo in his/her community. This study is very short and brief and yet has contributed immensely to the knowledge and understanding we have today about the Igbo people of South-Eastern Nigeria. There is no doubt that external factors like Western education and Christianity most importantly, have influenced the Igbo, yet it is the task of this study to show that cultural values remain vital to Igbo rural development. The Igbo cultural solidarity remains a force and factor to identify Igbo rural growth and progress.

Uchendu (1965) was one of the first Igbo indigenes to work on the general anthropological history of the Igbo people. As one of the earliest Igbo scholars, he did a grounded and well-expanded study on the Igbo social life where special attention was paid to family, community and institutions as bases for Igbo cultural solidarity. Written by an Igbo about his people, this case study penetrates the heart of the Igbo culture and social life (Uchendu 1965: vii).

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<sup>7</sup> The words in bracket are my own emphasis.

By this work the world of the Igbo people was exposed to the outside world. This Igbo anthropological work was mainly exposing the Igbo world view about the lifestyle, governance and the Igbo association and response to the outside influence. Igbo religion and agriculture, how family is founded, the network of the kinship function and many other dimensions of Igbo world were all of interest for Uchendu. More references will be made to this work in the main body of this study since it presented in detail the major areas of Igbo life and social interest.

Furthermore, Ifemesia (2002) worked on the traditional humane life among the Igbo people. Focusing on history, the ability to record and to make known one's aspects of past and present life, Ifemesia (2002: 2-3) argues that the future of any generation will be fully safe with the preservation of events in a giving social setting. While articulating on the importance of the title aspect of his work among the Igbo he wrote thus:

...Humane Living will be seen... as representing a way of life emphatically centred upon human interests and values; a mode of living evidently characterized by empathy, and by consideration and compassion for human beings (Ifemesia 2002: 2).

This work will play a vital role since the historical aspect of the Igbo social existence will be highly referred to in the subsequent pages of this work. The body of this work dealt in detail with the value of Igbo cultural solidarity in respect to the historical value and view point; it will therefore provide us with vital information with respect to the Igbo social and political structures, secret societies, age-groups and the Igbo institutions as this study unfolds.

Meanwhile, in the aspect of nation building, Ifemesia continues to stress that lack of self-knowledge has become the ever-present problem that has impeded African development. This lack of self-knowledge in the cultural value history has stereotyped members of different communities/cultures, ethnic-groups/races and or languages thus blocking all necessary progress. Therefore, focusing on the need of such a study on the cultural history/value of any contemporary African society in search of a home-based remedy, Ifemesia (2002: 11) wrote:

...It is in culture; perhaps more than in anything else, which Africans of today ...can recover their roots and regain their identity. Traditional history, culture history before the European advent and all in its train, certainly instructs us about the norms and values of a more communal and, in some respects, a more humane society than exists at present. Above all, it induces healthful self-discipline ...essential for all human existence that absolute prerequisite for all humane living. But which as is at length

dawning on the world ... that all the religion, the education, the law, the technology, and other constraining agencies of Western life and effort, are fast failing to inspire and maintain.

Agbasiere (2000) focused on the role and place of women in the cultural development of the Igbo people. Agbasiere's study dealt with the issue of identity. Relying on her in-depth knowledge and appreciation of her Igbo environment, she noted clearly the cultural Igbo practices with regard to women. It was on this she wrote thus:

...this study considers the structural significance of woman. ...women can show both an overt and covert influence upon her society, principally by being, rather than by doing; in other words, the idea of a woman as possessing the power to influence the lives of those with whom she comes in contact (Agbasiere 2000: 3).

By this study Agbasiere throws light on and raises issues about Igbo women and how they have influenced their environment, thereby contributing immensely to the rural growth of the Igbo social life. Some of these issues dealt with include the women's political and economic roles in the Igbo perspective. Of course, the women folk are an issue in the Igbo cultural solidarity. Their role therefore in bringing about unity and a clear sense of purpose in the Igbo social life cannot be underestimated. The woman's particular role will be noted in the main body of this work and Agbasiere's work will be fully acknowledged in the pages to come.

Uzukwu (1996) focused on and developed the expectations of the Christian religion to contributing to the autonomy of the African communities as a missionary religion. In this he noted the role or influence of Christian religion in the social development and or under-development of the African continent. Uzukwu (1996: X; 2-3) analysed the African history from the point of view of Africans as victims of the western country's conquest. In both self-governance and religious determination (theology), Africans did not experience self-evolvement; thereby loosing the trail of cultural value preservation. Focusing on some aspects of Igbo social development, he noted the need to recover and develop a home-based African value model that would be able to address our African economic, educational and agricultural realities. Identifying the difficult realities facing the African continent, Uzukwu (1996: 1-3) painted a very bleak picture about the African reality in context, as not fully captured in the African Christian theology; he wrote:

...intellectuals whose role in the development of culture is irreplaceable are driven away from their homeland or flee the shores of Africa for greener pastures abroad (the brain drain). African dictators ...are intolerant of a free press and vocal opposition. Disease plagues those uprooted from their homes... Malaria is still the greatest killer. Infant mortality is very high. The plague of AIDS invades cities and villages. ...But in order to combat our pessimism, our misery and our oppression ...the Church aided by ...theologians, will become a more credible agent of change when Christian life emerges from the realities of the African context and Christian theology responds to questions posed by the context...

By this work, Uzukwu has raised a number of burning issues that addresses the African reality. Firstly, that religion must also concern itself with the living economic realities of Africans. Religion cannot remain at the spiritual level; rather, it must also address itself to the physical needs of its followers. Secondly, the autonomy tone or language in which Uzukwu's work is based, calls for urgent attention and action. The African rural development in which my study is focused will develop this idea further as we focus on the Igbo cultural solidarity. Hence, Uzukwu's areas of concern will be emphasized and attended to.

Onwurah (1982) developed the Igbo people's social and ethical values while basing and making a comparative analytic study on Christian and Igbo marriage life. By this work Onwurah identified the obvious conflict between Igbo cultural values and the Christian traditions. In it he attempted to trace the historical background of the Igbo people and their concept of individual and group life. But more connectedly towards this study, Onwurah shows a more direct issue of the Igbo rural family setting and their daily engagement with one another. Of course the foreign (Christian) influence on the Igbo people is well documented in this study on family marriage system. Christian marriage in Igbo land is also discussed thereby making it almost a comparative analytical study between these two traditions. Peculiar problems Church marriage inherited from the past practices and the trace of the evolution of disciplinary measures was also a concern for Onwurah.

However, the crisis of understanding and practice facing the Christian marriage model among the Igbo people was fully identified. It was therefore to such difficulties Onwurah (1982: iii) wrote thus:

...the conflict between traditional and Christian values makes marriage as taught by the Western Church a serious problem in Africa. But national consciousness coupled with cultural renaissance and revolution demand the indigenization of Christianity in order to make it meaningful in African life and experience. The problem facing the Church today is how to indigenize this social institution it has so effectively westernized.

As noted, Igbo traditional values namely cultural solidarity as the focus of my study remains vital and necessary for the growth and development of the rural Igbo people. No other culture should claim superiority and authenticity over the Igbo value system. Hence, Onwurah's concern to indigenise foreign models in order that meaningful imparts are created in the African settings remains a point of consideration. The conflict of misinterpretation and misgiving will give way to appreciation of cultural practices that have existed before the advent of foreign models in the Igbo communities. I fully concur to the opinion to indigenise foreign models so as to give meaning and reason to African people in their everyday life dealings. This idea is the purpose of this study on the Igbo cultural solidarity as a response to such challenges to improve the life of the rural African.

Though each of the works mentioned above have emphasized different aspects of Igbo life (i.e. Christian and Igbo solidarity, the Igbo age group analysis, classification of the chief, elders and priest [title holders], the Igbo community histories, the general anthropological history of the Igbo, the traditional humane life of the Igbo based on history, the place and role of Igbo women, the general expectations on the Christian religion to deliver holistic development and the analysis on Igbo and Christian marriage life), this study will consider Igbo cultural solidarity as an independent value system that is not to be interpreted or understood based on Christian values or teachings of any other foreign culture; be it educational, political or economical. Yet, the Igbo culture has been very receptive to foreign cultures where innovation and enhancement is required. As an Igbo cultural value and practice, cultural solidarity advances a moral view that unites and brings together a people who share cultural understanding, values, history, folklore and philosophy. It will be my interest therefore to expose the dynamics of cultural solidarity as seen or known and practised in the Igbo ways of life with a view to advancing rural development in Africa.

## 2.3 DEFINITION OF TERMS: AN INTRODUCTION

In any academic endeavour, the definition of terms is important and useful hence creating easy reading and understanding. These regular terms form the bases, the meaning, problem and or value of this work on solidarity among the Igbo of South-eastern Nigeria. Terms or wordings are like a torch in the dark. Terms lead or give the way to go in every academic work such as this. As one Igbo proverb would have it, “Concepts” it says “...are like palm oil with which one enjoys a roasted *yam*<sup>8</sup>” (Igbo oral traditional saying). The terms that will appear regularly in this study are Solidarity, Development, Rural Village, Community and Traditional Culture.

## 2.4 SOLIDARITY

The meaning of the term “solidarity”, according to the *English Dictionary of Politics and Government*, is the expression of unity between people with common interests (Collins, 2004:230). According to the dictionary, “solidarity” therefore, means unity, agreement and support resulting from shared interests, feelings, actions and or sympathies (Hornby, 1998:1131). A rather different understanding or meaning of solidarity refers to the origin of the term. Giving an etymological explanation thereto, solidarity comes from the Latin word “*solidus*”. This means union or fellowship arising from common responsibilities and interests as between members of a group and between classes, peoples, a community of interests, feelings and purpose...etc (Barnhart, 1962: 1149). Therefore, “solidarity” is an expression of unity between people with common interest that may be positive or negative.

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<sup>8</sup> Yam is a deep-rooted crop farmed among the Igbo and other parts of Nigeria and or in the tropical areas in Africa. Like sweet potato, it is an edible tuber rooted plant and is held in high esteem among the Igbo. Yam serves a great deal over the sustenance (food) for life, boiled, fried or roasted for eating. As the major staple food among the Igbo, yam is described as the ‘King of all food.’ Hence its massive cultivation provided a vital role in the traditional Igbo promotion of self reliant and feeding of the Igbo populace.

## 2.5 DEVELOPMENT

Development in its root meaning comes from the French verb word, '*veloper*' which means "to wrap". In other words, to develop means to grow gradually, fuller, larger, stronger and better (Njoku, 2004: 3). It is a progression or change towards maturity and better that epitomize the nature of development in question. While noting with interest Rodney's (*How Europe Underdeveloped Africa*, 1992: 9), definition of development, Njoku says development implies an increased skill and capacity, greater freedom, creativity, self-discipline, responsibility and material well-being. In reality therefore the concept of development embodies progress and growth as its goal. Yet, while expanding the understanding further to psychological overtone Njoku (2004:3) wrote thus:

The term "development" means the gradual and orderly unfolding of the characteristics of the successive stages of growth involving the emerging and expanding of capacities of the individual to provide greater facility in functioning. It means essentially progress toward a goal. It involves changes from simplicity to complexity and implies an increasingly progressive maturity of behaviour as well as organization of personality and character.

This would imply the growth of individuals and or groups as with regard to internal and external dynamics or environment in which they live and grow. Human beings in this sense are influenced by their living setting. They actively shape their own environment and respond to the forces affecting them. Development in this integrative aspect includes physical, intellectual, personal and social environment and experience that influence and shape growth itself (Njoku 2004: 4-5). A social group like the Igbo have their way of organizing their life, their world and to that extent; development would mean the capacity to regulate internal and external relationships that had occurred in the Igbo tradition. There are a number of major concerns as development studies articulate in the economic, cultural, political, religious and other aspects of growth and life in a given context. These areas according to Lewis (1968:119), would include the following:

- A survey of current economic conditions, especially national income, productivity and foreign trade
- A survey of the current social situation especially education, health, housing and security among others

Development by this understanding is the effort made or focused on achieving a common good for all human beings in a given society. Its central concern and aim is to improve and achieve this goal of a common good for all. Development therefore becomes a process by which growth is achieved or life is enhanced. By this process, a society is able to meet the needs of the people, hence leading him or her to the fulfilment of every desire and wish. This growth cut across all aspects of life including education, health, housing, religious, culture, social tradition, music and art, and security for all among others (Njoku 2004: 6-7).

To achieve this desired interest for all in a given society, all the populace (groups), government and private/individual business alike must work together. This collaboration to achieve a common good for all who live in a given society remains vital to achieving development at all levels. The role therefore unity or solidarity would play in this instance cannot be over emphasized. It would be a demand that every concerned and patriotic citizen must participate and contribute to its realization. The role played by the Igbo cultural solidarity value to achieve development for the people would be a value to employ in this instance.

## **2.6 “RURAL” and “VILLAGE”**

For the sake of clarity these two terms “rural” and “village” will be used inter-changeably or synonymously to serve the purpose of this study. “Village” is a term used to define a group of people who live in permanent dwellings in a defined territory which includes arable land, sometimes held and used in common communion (Malefijt, 1965:120). Rural area (village) in this sense is opposed to city where larger groups of people from different cultures and languages may be found. “Rural” here means a limited area or parameter of a human living environment in which language/dialect and headman (headwoman, in case of matrilineal cases) is the same.

According to Larson (1968: 580), “rural” is a settlement pattern with human geography and land tenure agricultural economics. In such settlement therefore, agricultural activity is the major sustenance of life. But similarly, “rural” in this understanding may equally be referred to

as the village. According to Geertz (1968: 318), it applies to any permanent small settlement consisting of more than a few scattered dwellings (families) and is usually refers to a consolidated agricultural community. In this sense, he maintains, “village” is distinguished from suburbs and towns.

In the Igbo usage, rural area equals a group of families that are fully independent (politics, rulers, village organizations/gatherings and celebrations) of another group of families but share in the inheritance of ancestral lands and rivers. This is different from other groups of families who had descended from a different ancestry though they may be distantly related. Depending on their distant ancestry, villagers may not marry each other because of their blood relatedness.

## **2.7 COMMUNITY**

The community is the central focus of this study. Hence, other than definition, expression of the community shall rather enhance this study of the Igbo people as a community. Community as a living pattern in which the socio-political, religion, tradition and cultural beliefs find its expression, this aspect of the study brings clarity on the task of this venture. Among the Igbo the term “community” means to be united in purpose and is used as a device for promoting unity among the people. It consists of a large number of villages and or rural areas that makes an autonomous community in the Nigerian sense of political application. Igbo communities consist of autonomous units ranging from families, minimal and minor patriarchal, through major and maximal lineages, to entire villages and village-groups (Ifemesia, 2002: 39-40).

Such Igbo traditional community would be characterized with ruling elders, *Ndichie*<sup>9</sup> or rather chiefs who take care of the day-to-day political and social issues affecting a given Igbo community. The evidence of other organizations of married women, different age-groups

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<sup>9</sup> *Ndi Ichie* are individual men who out of their merit had earned themselves recognition in the Igbo society. They are traditional titleholders who generate decision making in the communities. They are the most important titleholders among others in Igbo land, and as unifying agencies they operate on a large scale among Igbo communities or groups. More will be said when I discuss the Igbo institutions.

association (men, boys and girls) is not farfetched. Most importantly, the Igbo community means more than just the people in it. As Ejiofor (1981: 105-106) rightly pointed out while explaining the Igbo (group) community,

...It is almost revered as living being with its own spirit. Society was viewed, not as a mass of individuals each with his own rights and liberties ...rather it was seen in terms of groups, one larger than the next. ...All were held together not by any initial contract or by choice, but by biological bond of kinship and immanent spirit of the tribe. ...The total life of the citizens arises and finds its expression in the group. Thus, the economy is organized within the same (group) context. The farming calendar from the date of bush burning to the day of the yam harvest festival is set for group. The strength of the group has become so internalized in the belief system of the people that unions, associations, and individual persons are named *Igwebuiké* – the group (community) is strength, *Adigwe* – If the community (group) supports (a venture succeeds; we shall make it; we shall be happy).

It is on this ground that the Igbo solidarity would be considered with special focus on community behaviour and its aspects/basis of expression. The ambition of every individual Igbo is to belong to a group he/she can call a community. The Igbo individualism is rooted in-group solidarity and the group an Igbo desired to push forward was his village. As Webster rightly pointed out, progress became not only an individual's desire to better oneself but also an obsession to help his town 'to get up'<sup>10</sup>. Hence the prestige of an individual was very much tied to the prestige of the town and vice versa (Webster, 1980: 205-206). This is my Igbo community. This is the value we are about to dive into.

## 2.8 TRADITIONAL CULTURE

Traditional culture as expressional concept gives a geographical spot and location to this study. It is important therefore we briefly explain its place at this juncture. Traditional culture is defined as set of customs, beliefs and valued practices that are identified with a rural or village setting. As valued practices, these beliefs and customs are passed on as valued practices from

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<sup>10</sup> This expression 'to-get-up' simply refers to a desire of helping and supporting every effort made to develop a given Igbo community. Here every body living in a community is expected and demanded to work towards a common good. It was by practice like this that the Igbo developed the theory of *Igba-boyi* in which a young man becomes an apprentice so to say, and able to stand on his own after training. This theory will be discussed in detail in the main body of this study.

one generation to the next. It is the body of oral belief, information, and evidence of things past, communicated from older generations to the present.

As applied to history, according Pickett (1965: 754), tradition signifies knowledge of the past handed down orally (or written) through a substantial foundation, and is of the highest value in tracing human experience and progress, both in the historic and prehistoric periods. This set of rules or beliefs are values that have played important roles and have given meaning and purpose to life of all who live in a given culture, community or nation. Therefore, in our context, traditional culture would mean those values or cultures that existed in pre-colonial times and that still communicate life in the present day Igbo society.

Moreover, traditional culture is seen as humane living, Ifemesia (2002: 2) sees traditional culture in the Igbo community as “a way of life emphatically centred upon human interests and values; a mode of living evidently characterized by empathy, and by consideration, and compassion for human beings”. It is in this light that the value of cultural solidarity among the Igbo will be studied. Hopefully, this study will open arguments for further consideration of our African values to be integrated in today’s religious, education, economic and political understanding of the contemporary states.

## **2.9 CONCLUSION**

In this chapter we have considered the literature review, identified and defined key concepts that will occur regularly in this study. Each of these titles, the areas and history they present emphasized different aspects of Igbo social life. In my undertaking, this study will consider Igbo cultural solidarity as an independent valued practice that is not to be interpreted based on any religion (Christian), values or teachings of any other foreign culture. Cultural solidarity advances a moral view that unites and brings together the Igbo people in their share of cultural understanding, values, history, folklore and philosophy. It will be my interest therefore to explore the dynamics of cultural solidarity as known and practiced in the Igbo ways of life with a view to advance rural development.

All the titles here mentioned above agree to an extent, that foreign models of economy, religion, education and or governance have not all achieved the desired result expected in the African rural settings. Hence, the burning calls for rethinking and redressing these foreign models by indigenization. Such required move and change will save the African continent from falling into total conflict and war in the scramble for natural resources that has till now benefited only a few privileged individuals in most African settings. With no doubt these foreign models have played significant roles in bringing about development in the city settings of African countries; but has failed to bring about meaningful change in the common life of the rural African dwellers.

Moreover, the need for this study on any aspect of African cultural value cannot be over emphasized. More importantly, because Africa faces enormous challenges to address or redress its difficult economic, religious, educational and political realities. Such study to provide a cultural re-evaluation will be vital to addressing the present realities of African crises with food security, job insecurity and lack of housing, disease and war. By focusing on the Igbo cultural solidarity, this study aims to provoke an argument to African leaders to attend to poverty eradication, diseases and lack of development. By so doing, governments will reach out to the vast majority of rural population, who mainly do not understand the present day borrowed political, educational and economic policies and programmes that have not responded to these challenges here mentioned.

Hence, as these challenges continue to militate against the growth and development of rural Africa, the need to study specific cultural value as a means to respond to challenges facing the continent and the entire masses cannot be under estimated or underrated. With this understanding, this study therefore provides us with a home-based replica and traditionally proven practice, value and model to enhance and understand rural development. Such ideas should not be purely for academic reasons, or to demonstrate that Africa's history is like that of other parts of the world, but to open a debate towards addressing African living realities.

Finally, the major contribution of this thesis is twofold: Firstly, this work is set out to analyze the Igbo cultural solidarity and to evaluate the impact of foreign cultures upon the Igbo

people's past. Secondly, I aim to provide some useful guidelines to the present generations in responding to the problems of governance and common good in the rural African setting, namely among the Igbo people. Nevertheless, I shall benefit from the past works done on Igbo social life and history as shown above. These works shall serve as foundation to my goal to analyze and contribute to the Igbo value system.

## CHAPTER 3

### THE IGBO CULTURAL SOLIDARITY AND DEVELOPMENT

#### 3.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter opens the fundamental basis by which the Igbo cultural solidarity addresses basic cultural and traditional developments among the Igbo people. The Igbo way of life as will be presented in this chapter whether it is educational, social, agricultural, economical, or religious aspects, promote the Igbo identity and its sense of cultural solidarity. The activity and task of every Igbo is founded in the family set up. The family is vital for the Igbo progress. Having exposed the Igbo history and its intricacies with regards to Igbo settlement, its world view and agriculture, this chapter will go on to focus on the Igbo family system as the centre of the cultural solidarity and development. In this sense, the Igbo understanding of solidarity becomes a law for every Igbo person to keep and observe. It is with such an understanding that the Igbo have developed a set of social laws like ostracism<sup>11</sup> to keep rebellious Igbo individuals and groups out of the community in order to maintain and sustain the solidarity movement in service of the common good for all in the land, Achebe (1965: 145).

In this chapter I will explain the first step in the Igbo domain of leadership, and while focusing on different levels of family among the Igbo people, I will point out the vital role the family plays in leading the Igbo community to cultural solidarity and development. The leadership meant here is to strengthen solidarity and propel all areas of community development among the Igbo people. As pointed out in the historical chapter above, the traditional Igbo had no King unlike their neighbours of the Muslim North and South-Western Nigeria. Thus the Igbo people were described as “Igbo *enweghi eze*”, that is Igbo people have no King. This statement should not be understood to mean that there exists a state of anarchy

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<sup>11</sup> This is a means by which the Igbo exercise corrective measures on its citizens who have proved impossible to lead and keep the vital rules and laws promoting life and solidarity in the land. People or persons in this category are sent out of the community till they reach a certain requirement to regain their freedom of belonging and association. This practice varies from community to community and can last for years or months depending on the nature of the offence.

among the Igbo or that they did not have leaders or some form of authority. It rather reflected a different type of government system confirming understanding. Mozia (1982:201) wrote:

...A unique form of solidarity spirit characterizes the Igbo political life. With such a spirit, everyone is, in his or her own way, committed to the growth of the community. There exist different stages of the government, ranging from the family to the town or village. At each stage there exists a fundamental unity, not only in the religious and cultural spheres, but also in matters of politics and economy, and there is a dynamic effort on the part of the traditional leaders to coordinate the solidarity actions of each member of the community.

In essence, the Igbo could not be accused of being ungovernable since they had a different type, model and method of governing system from their neighbours. Under the Igbo traditional system of governance, the role of the elder leaders<sup>12</sup> of the entire community was indispensable. The governance role the elders played was more of service and availability, and not of domination. This notion had come from the belief that the elder-leader was a representative of the ancestor who in the spiritual world guides the entire community. This elder-leader was also the embodiment of the traditional values and wisdom, which guided every Igbo to the common good. In this role, therefore every family is led by such an elder-leader who guides and leads the family to cultural, religious, economic, social and educational growth (Uchendu, 1965: 36-38). All this will be discussed in this chapter. Based on this notion of leadership, we shall now examine the role of the family as a unit of solidarity and development in the Igbo community. We shall also examine the extended (*Umunna*, children of the same father) family, village community and the town, which were considered as family extensions.

### **3.2 A HISTORY OF THE IGBO PEOPLE'S ORIGIN**

This study is however, not about Igbo history, this historical analysis will show the origins of belonging or cultural solidarity. The African history in general and the Igbo in particular, have

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<sup>12</sup>The Elder-Leader is usually the first male born called *Okpara*, among brothers and sisters in a given particular family who by birthright is tasked and responsible to particular issues and difficulties that arise. He is the first among equals of his blood family members. He attends the meeting of the Elders and while representing his family makes a meaningful contribution in response to the solidarity need and development of the Igbo community, to which he belongs.

not received their rightful places in modern day studies. This play-down attitude towards African history may be attributed to what Ifemesia (2002: 6) observed thus: "...African history do not possess that peculiar and indefinable African-ness which would make their indigenous readers freely relate to their spirit and message". It is, therefore, based on this concern that any aspect of history in this study would be appreciated, focused and commended.

As African nations participate in modern day technology and science to improve the common lives, the continent's history plays a very vital role to determine the future and redress the present system to enhance the life of the majority. This argument agrees with Ifemesia's (2002: 7) line of thought when he wrote:

...African history has a responsibility to inform young Africans and all, in appropriate terminology, of their immemorial heritage and traditional manner of living, to encourage them to have greater confidence in their own, and even to stimulate them to take a hard look at some of their current problems and see if the past could not help them, in some measure at least, to redress the imbalance of the present.

The Igbo cultural solidarity under consideration is based on such an understanding of social practice as a historical value system among the Igbo, that this study would be considered as a means of historical tool to re-evaluate the present day challenges in order to progress the necessary development in our African societies. As we consider solidarity in its role in rural development of the Igbo, we owe this knowledge to the historical culture that has passed through numerous generations. Let me now deliberate on the history of the Igbo origin.

Scholars have made efforts to identify the Igbo people from a historical perspective. Victor Uchendu 1965, Basden Green 1966, Elizabeth Isichei 1976 and Adiele Afigbo 1981 have all written extensively on the history of the Igbo people. The Igbo are to be found in the South-eastern of Nigeria. This stretches from the River Niger from the West of Agbor to the fringes of the Cross River and from the north of Nsukka highlands to some parts of the Atlantic Coast (Onwurah, 1984: 21). The Igbo nation covers a landmass of over 15,800 square kilometres (Ifemesia, 2002: 15). The Igbo people's language, Igbo, is the third largest spoken language in Nigeria after the Hausa/Fulani in the North and the Yoruba in the Southwest. The Igbo are estimated to be over 35 million people in the Nigerian population of about 140 million.

In his classification of African languages, Greenberg (1949) groups Igbo with the speech communities of the *Kwa* subfamily in the Niger-Congo linguistics group (Greenberg, 1949: 87). Quoting Uchendu, Onwurah (1984: 22) observed the difficulty of the nature of the Igbo language when he wrote:

It is marked by a complicated system of tones used to distinguish meaning and grammatical relations, a wide range of dialectical variations that is a source of difficulty to westerners, but not to the Igbo, and a tendency to vowel elision which makes it difficult to express a few of the spoken words in writing.

While this difficulty is true of every language, the Igbo language in Nigeria remains an oral and written language.

During the 20<sup>th</sup> century (from 1900 onwards), the colonizers described the Igbo as a people 'without history'. The Igbo people had no Kings, Chiefs or known cities. This was not the case among Igbo neighbours of Benin and the Oyo people who had already developed centralized governance before the advent of colonisation. The Igbo were said to be stateless (Afigbo, 1981: 1). This idea has raised questions among Igbo scholars.

A people with culture, myths, proverbs, folklores, and pithy sayings cannot be described as being 'without history'. Afigbo (1981: 2) gave reasons for this negative perception by the colonizers. He outlined four points in the Igbo cultural histories thus:

1. The Igbo did not know a literate culture.
2. The Igbo land lay outside the areas traversed by early travellers (Arabs or Europeans); the result was that the development of Igbo culture throughout the millennia before 1900 went undocumented.
3. The fact that the Igbo did not evolve centralized state systems comparable to their neighbours (Benin or Oyo), that had well developed institutions for the preservation and transmission of oral traditions, has meant that information which survives about the Igbo past is scanty and scrappy.
4. Finally and above all, scholars have not yet made a determined effort to tackle the problem of reconstructing the Igbo past. Historians are only beginning to exploit what little information exists on pre-colonial Igbo society (Afigbo, 1981: 2). There was a basic lack of interest in grand history among the Igbo as a people.

From the literacy point of view, differing from Afigbo is Ifemesia, who claimed the Igbo were among the pre-literate people of Africa. Their history was not committed to writing in any appreciable manner before the 1800 century. Though the Igbo developed an ideograph (written language using symbols or characters) known as *nsibidi*<sup>13</sup>, literacy as it is understood today came to Igbo society in the 1800 century (Ifemesia, 2002: 16-17). *Nsibidi* took the form of formalised pictograms, like Chinese writing. Isichei (1976: 35-38) pointed out that, had colonialism not disturbed the Igbo people and their neighbours from their own patterns of development, it seems likely that literacy would have been developed. *Nsibidi* writing would have acquired more characters, becoming a richer and more flexible vehicle of literary expression.

Ifemesia (2002: 17) furthermore, coming from another perspective, noted the art of reading and writing had come to Nigeria particularly in the North and South via the advent of Islam between eighth and the ninth century A.D. The reading or writing in Arabic was a result of Islamic influence in these areas. This literacy activity had taken place in the courts of the Oba, King of Benin, and the Olu, King of Warri. The Calabars, the Igbo's closest neighbours, Efik traders in the southeast had begun to keep English records by the eighteenth century. In all these activities, literacy did not reach the bulk of Igbo land and so no substantial material for Igbo history were put to writing before the eighteenth century.

### **3.3 THE IGBO PEOPLE'S SETTLEMENT**

The question of Igbo origin is the most complex among scholars of Igbo history. No particular scholar has a clear answer to this question: "Where did the Igbo come from?" It is not however, the task of this study to answer this question, rather this study seeks to support efforts of past and present scholars of Igbo history to respond to the question of origin of the Igbo people.

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<sup>13</sup> *Nsibidi* was a pre-colonial sign writing developed among the Igbo and her neighbours. It was mainly used by secret cults to preserve their valuable communications and also by the travelling smiths and could not easily spread rapidly because of its secrecy and not open to the commoners or public to learn.

Since the dawn of human history, according to Isichei (1976: 19-20) people have lived on the Igbo territory for the past 5000 years before the advent of colonialism. The heartland of the Igbo, which includes the old Okigwe-Owerri and Orlu divisions, was the first area to be settled. This claim of Igbo identity is also mirrored in proverbs such as *Igbo enweghi eze*, ‘the Igbo had no King or crown no King’. This is true according to Achebe (1958: 135) “...but the villagers told them that there was no king. We have men of high title and the chief priests and the elders...”. These men of honour and respect lead the people. This contradicts the Riverain Onitsha and Arochukwu who at the time had kings ruling among them. Isichei (1976: 23) observed that Onitsha and Arochukwu were said to have emigrated from neighbouring Benin Kingdom and Delta respectively. She wrote:

A few Igbo states such as Aboh and Onitsha, which had a tradition of origin from elsewhere were ruled by kings. These kings were regarded as sacred, and lived in ritual seclusion. But they were not absolute, and took decisions in conjunction with titled men, and representatives of other groups. Their decisions could be challenged and then persons deposed.

Quoting Nwahiri, Isichei (1976: 3) noted a statement made by a 90 year old Mbaise (in the old Okigwe-Owerri-Orlu divisions) Igbo man made while responding to the question where do the Igbo come from? “We did not come from anywhere and anyone who tells you we came from anywhere is a liar; write it down”. It is in expressions like this that she noted that Igbo scholars must embody the essential historical truth of Igbo origin. Igbo began to diverge from other related languages, such as Edo and Yoruba, perhaps 4000 years ago while still in its present day location.

In another view of Igbo settlement, Ifemesia (2002: 29) points out that *Nri*<sup>14</sup> right up to the end of nineteenth century, acquires the reputation in parts of Igbo land as conferrers of high titles and cleansers of abominations. Major A. G. Leonard, a British political officer, noted that within the neighbourhood of *Nri*, was to be found “the heart of the Ibo nationality”. *Nri-Awka*, Ifemesia claims belongs to the area that is described as the traditional Igbo heartland, which

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<sup>14</sup> *Nri* is the hometown of a priestly cult known as *nri* priests, whose particular services was connected with the coronation of kings and purification ceremonies. These priests had travelled so widely that they became well known all over Igbo territory. *Nri* remains the Awka area of Igbo land who were the first to come in contact with the European visitors own to the fact and presence of the River-Niger by which they came to Igbo land.

became the area by which the people earlier migrated to other parts of the Igbo country where they are found today.

Using archaeological data to determine the age long of a particular excavation by applying the radiocarbon date was the means employed by historians to reconstruct the Igbo past of the above concerns. Excavations made in some Igbo old sites have opened this window of distant the past. These include those of Ezi-Ukwu Ukpa Rock Shelter, which produced stone tools and pottery shreds dated 2935 B.C. – 15 A.D. Similar artefacts of the Late Stone Age have also been recovered in the Isi-Ugwu Obukpa Rock Shelter and on the University Agricultural Farm Site, both in the Nsukka area (Ifemesia 2002: 17-18).

All these were said to be the earliest found artefacts in the Nigeria area of research. Yet, the Igboekwu excavations found in the Njikoka (Awka) division of today's Anambra State consist of the most detailed information to date on the Igbo society. The storehouse or shrine, burial chamber, clay pit, bronze objects, iron weapons and implements have been radiocarbon dated to the ninth century A.D. (Ifemesia, 2002: 18). These facts are evidence of two or three millennia the Igbo had spent in their present day location before the Christian era (Afigbo, 1981: 5).

In another observation, Afigbo (1981: 5) noted that it is likely that the Igbo may have lost all memory of their migration into the area they now occupy. This is also the case of *Nri* of the Northern Igbo who evolved an elaborate and highly ritualised priest-kingship tradition. Yet, in the present time *Nri* cannot produce documents with respect to migrations from outside Igbo land. The loss of memory, Afigbo said, has led to the myth of their having been created where the Igbo are now found (Basden, 1966: 115).

Finally, some scholars have developed comparable theory in which the Igbo society has been associated with the Hebrew society. Some have even said 'Igbo' is actually an adulterated form of writing and naming of the word, "Hebrew". Onwurah (1984: 23-25) noted that modern Igbo scholars have suggested that the Igbo might have been the biblical lost tribe of Israel who, after contact with ancient Egypt, were pushed southwards as a result of the Arab invasion of

North Africa. While linking the Igbo to ancient Egypt, practices like mummification, early child circumcision, incision, tattooing, and sun worship are noticeable in the traditional Igbo society. Because of this conclusion, Afigbo (1981: 6) called it an 'oriental mirage'.

The important point in this section of our study is the fact that the Igbo inhabited their present place of abode from time immemorial and long before the Christian era. But not all the Igbo can be held in this regard. Recently the people of the east and west of the Niger had migrated from different locations. The Onitsha in the east came from Benin while Ibozo in the west came from Isuofia, all of Igbo mainland (heartland) neighbours as noted by Onwurah (1984: 24). Although one may notice this difference in history, the Igbo people remain united as Onwurah (1984: 25) observes:

...Though separated by the Niger, both east and west Igbo have retained their cultural as well as their psychic unity. ...Their attitude toward political questions and their identification with what they regard as their own leaders reveal the solidarity between the Igbo on both sides. One would have thought that lack of unity under any single political authority would have created an enormous diversity in custom, tradition, and institution among the Igbo. Rather there have been similarity and uniformity. There may be some differences, but the general outline is basically the same. This confirms that the Igbo were from the same stalk and not people welded together by British political power. The institutions are the same everywhere, though they may go by different names in different Igbo locations, but what is significant is that the underlying principles and practices are the same.

### **3.4 THE IGBO WORLD VIEW: A GENERAL OUTLOOK**

In the Igbo society as in many African societies, no man lives unto himself. The individual does not exist alone; he exists because of other people. While articulating this idea, as an African philosophy of the personhood, John Mbiti (1969: 142) writes thus: "I am because we are, and since we are therefore I am." In this rural African setting everyone knows how he/she is related to members of the village and clan or in the neighbourhood. This personhood understanding is not just found among the Igbo people but also seen in other African societies. Emphasizing on this common and shared principle among Africans, Uzukwu (1996: 37) using the rite of passage wrote:

...One may thus appreciate the importance of initiation and passage rites in the growth and development of persons in Africa. Through these rites one learns about and experiences the channels of relationship in order to become a person. One is human because of others, with others, and for others (*motho ke motho ka batho ka bang* – a Sotho, South African proverb): ‘I am because we are, and since we are therefore I am. ‘I belong, therefore I am’.

In fact, among the Igbo it is the society, especially the family either nuclear or extended that gives one a desired identity. As we shall discuss later, without the family, one is nothing and nobody. The point being emphasized here is that, the family is the beginning of the Igbo worldview. Every effort in life begins and ends with the family, extending to village, community and to the entire Igbo society.

Firstly, Uzuoku (1996: 37) noted that this African personhood philosophy may have been a universal trend. He pointed to Martin Luther King’s famous “I have a Dream” speech for a free non-racial America (human) society. Uzuoku says “Strangely enough, I can never be what I ought to be until you are what you ought to be. You can never be what you ought to be until I am what I ought to be.” Certainly, Luther’s pronouncement is not surprising since he was related to Africa, the birthplace of the human race. His expression has the same meaning as that of African philosophy.

Secondly, as noted above, no one person lives in isolation of his/her community group. It is in such understanding and practice that the strong sense of group-life-concern or solidarity (economic self support system) had been built and cemented. A clear example is the *Igba-boyi*<sup>15</sup> (apprenticeship) in the Igbo family system in which the so called ‘master’ as referred to in a particular business such as craftsmanship, trading and or local medicine would train the apprentice without charge. This age-long value of cultural solidarity unfortunately is slowly being eroded by the influence of western individualism. Yet, credit must be given to the foundation in which solidarity was built in the Igbo society. Despite the modern day challenges

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<sup>15</sup> *Igba-boyi* is an economic self-support system of apprenticeship that lasts for a period of agreed time (years training) whereby an Igbo trains a younger person who would in due time be set up in such business by the master and is supported financially and morally to succeed in his or her own business. This is sometimes referred to as ‘lifting-up’ one’s own family, village or society and it is a held high value among the Igbo people in the cultural solidarity practice and experience.

of individualism, Onwurah (1984: 26) maintains that cultural solidarity remains unmovable in the Igbo tradition.

Thirdly, Igbo religion forms another aspect of Igbo traditional worldview. As a belief in the divine origin and control of human and spiritual affairs, religion played an important role in the daily life of the Igbo people. In one of the earliest reports on Igbo religious affairs, in 1841 James Frederick, a missionary, wrote about the Igbo people:

God is continually heard. ‘Tshuku’ (a misspelling of *Chukwu*, the great God)<sup>16</sup> is supposed to do everything... Their notions of some of the attributes of the Supreme Being are, in many respects, correct, and their manner of expressing them striking. God made everything: He made both ‘White and Black’, is continually on their lips. Some of their parables are descriptive of the perfections of God (Isichei, 1976: 25).

Religion among the Igbo is very complex and every Igbo is aware of its role and function. Religion is not farfetched in the Igbo daily life and it is not separated as in the modern day religion. In daily life of the Igbo one would notice religious affairs going on. In this understanding, the Igbo believed that God is the creator of both material and spiritual worlds. While the humans rule the physical world, *Chukwu*, controls the Spiritual world.

### **3.5 IGBO AND AGRICULTURE**

The Igbo depended on the Land and agriculture for survival. Economically, Igbo men, women and children practised agriculture. Every age group had to contribute to the tilling of the land and production of food. Describing and quoting Olaudah Equiano<sup>17</sup> on the way of agriculture and its produce among traditional early Igbo, Isichei (1976: 27) wrote:

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<sup>16</sup> Words in bracket are mine.

<sup>17</sup> A remarkable Eighteenth century Igbo man sold into slavery. Olaudah Equiano, otherwise known as Gustavus Vassa the African! He published his autobiography in London in 1749 in which he narrated his experience of village life that is today attributed to the Igbo people of southeast Nigeria. He was born around 1745 and in 1756 he was kidnapped with the sister and sold into slavery and was brought to Virginia in the United States of America. He was removed later to England, and sold again to a sea captain who gave him the name Gustavus Vassa. In England, Equiano bought his freedom in 1766 (Ifemesia 2002: 27-29).

...Our land is uncommonly rich and fruitful, and produces all kinds of vegetables in great abundance. We have plenty of Indian corn (maize) and vast quantities of cotton and tobacco. Our pineapples grow without culture; they are about the size of the largest sugar loaf, and finely flavoured. We have also spices of different kinds, particularly pepper, and a variety of delicious fruits, which I have never seen in Europe ...all our industry, is exerted to improve these blessings of nature.

The Igbo people used crude implements in their tilling of the land. Implements like hoes, axes, shovels and beaks or pointed iron were use in digging the soil. They produced vegetables, yams, beans, plantain, cocoyam and other fruits. Yet among all these farm produce, the farming of yam (the King of all crops) is seen by the Igbo people as man's main duty to cultivate (Ukachukwu 2007: 252) and remains a major crop that is sold in all Igbo community markets. As rightly noted in his novel Achebe (1958: 15-16) acknowledges the vital place and role that the cultivation of yam plays among the Igbo people. Thus he wrote:

Nwakibie cleared his throat. It pleases me to see a young man like you these days when our youth have gone so soft. Many young men come to me to ask for yams but I have refused because I know they would just dump them in the earth and leave them to be choked by weeds. When I say no to them they think that I am hard-hearted. But it is not so. Eneke the bird says that since men have learned to shoot without missing, he has learnt to fly without perching. I have learnt to be stingy with my yams. But I can trust you. I know it as I look at you. As our fathers said, you can tell a ripe corn by its look. I shall give you twice four hundred yams. Go and prepare your farm.

In this piece we note the intense exchange between the two Igbo yam farmers. Among the Igbo people, the farming of yam is highly encouraged since it forms the central food sustenance and security. Hence the communal and socio-cultural values of promotion around yam title rites are performed and during which time special honorary titles are bestowed on all individuals who have worked hard to secure the community's food sustenance. These titles differ according to individual choice of names. Titles like *Eze Ji* (yam chief), *Di Ji* (expert yam cultivator), and *Oji Aka Eri Ala* (a specialist hand-weeder of the land) among others, are usually conferred on men who have distinguished themselves as great yam farmers and keepers of large yam barns (Nwakibie 2007: 252). The cultural value of titles or chieftaincy among the Igbo people of South-eastern Nigeria will be expanded in this study in chapter five of this work.

The Igbo people also kept bullocks, goats and chickens. Trade and craftsmanship took the Igbo people beyond their territory. The Igbo were entrepreneur and highly industrious. It was from this business-mindedness that the traditional Igbo were able to develop the four-day counting for a week calendar. This is fully demonstrated in the table below.

**TABLE NO. 1 IGBO CALENDAR**

THE FOUR WEEK DAYS	<u>EKE</u>	<u>ORIE</u>	<u>AFO</u>	<u>NKWO</u>
IZU-NTA (A WEEK OF SMALL WEEK)	4 <sup>TH</sup> DAY (A SMALL MARKET DAY)			
IZU-UKWU (BIG WEEK)	8 <sup>TH</sup> DAY (A BIG MARKET DAY)			
7 WEEKS OF 4 DAYS EACH	28 <sup>TH</sup> DAY ONE MONTH			
13 LUNAR MONTHS	364 DAYS A YEAR			

The market order is rotationally kept and known by all who live in the Igbo communities and the neighbours. In his account, Basden (1966: 151) wrote that the Igbo Calendar is divided into thirteen lunar months of twenty-eight days and seven weeks. The four days in the Igbo week are *Eke*, *Orie*, *Afo*, and *Nkwo* (*Izu-nta* that is small week or small market week). Two four-day periods make big week that is eight-days (*Izu-ukwu*, big week or big market week) [Uzukwu, 1988: 94].

It is within this arrangement that the Igbo trading life revolves. So other agricultural and industrial products that are sold in these markets include blacksmith products like iron – hoes,

iron digger; brass products like bracelets, wristlets and anklets for adornments. The men also sold wooden instruments for farming and music. The women manufactured and sold earthenware like pots and tobacco pipes. Livestock like chicken and goats, food materials like cassava, yam, cocoyam, formed the principal commodities in these markets. One should not forget that 'slaves', who were prisoners of war or people convicted of serious crimes like murder or kidnapping, also became commodities for sale in these markets. The currency used by the Igbo in exchange of goods was cowries (Ifemesia, 2002:30). Much of these products were local and hardly was it mentioned that imported products were sold in these markets.

### **3.6 THE FAMILY AS FOCUS OF CULTURAL SOLIDARITY AND DEVELOPMENT**

In the Nigerian context, Okafor (1992: 1) gives us a working definition and understanding of the Igbo traditional family, he wrote:

...family is a social institution consisting of all persons who are descended through the same line from a common ancestor, and who still owe allegiance to or recognise the over-all authority of one of their member as head and legal successor to the said ancestral founder, together with any persons who though not blood descendants of the founder, are for some reason attached to the households of persons so descended, or have otherwise been absorbed into the lineage as a whole.

As I expand and explore the meaning of family in this section of cultural solidarity among the Igbo people, I will dwell on this definition as given above. In this understanding therefore, family as I will consider here is beyond father, mother and children. Rather, the family as I shall discuss in this study extends to the *Umunna*<sup>18</sup>, the village and the town as they represent and trace different levels of family roots or schools among the Igbo people of South Eastern Nigeria.

A family remains the first informal school for the Igbo cultural solidarity through which culture, tradition, religion and other aspects of development or well being are experienced and transmitted from one generation to the next. The family defines every individual's role

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<sup>18</sup> *Umunna* is the immediate extension of the Igbo understanding of the family. As we shall indicate later in this study, the *Umunna* are extended family cousins who live closely together or far apart but still maintain their family root.

and duty by which development is sought and achieved in a community. The development of different aspects of the Igbo way of life remains the focus of cultural solidarity in the Igbo family (Okafor 1992: 2-4).

The family institution provides the person with the social system in which every first male born *Okpara* in each Igbo cultural family is given the task of protecting the social peace and justice in the communities. By his birthright every first male child is a holder of the *Ofo*<sup>19</sup> a special symbol of unity and peace in the Igbo cultural family (Uchendu, 1965: 40). As holder of *Ofo*, this first male born child represents the ‘truth’ of the living and the ancestors in every community. He is the uniting force of the community as he performs his religious and civil duties as part of his task and responsibility. As an *Ofo* holder, one of his political duties is to promote peace by presiding and pronouncing verdicts over disputes between members of his family and or community members.

Moreover, the *Okpara* serves as a reminder to all individual members of the community to maintain their consciousness to participate in the social, political, economic and religious life. By this collaborative spirit therefore, the *Okpara* encourages all to make effort to destroy the spirit of selfishness and individualism, which is hostile to the Igbo solidarity. Equal development or common good for all is his focus and the goal of his office. Mozia (1982: 205) emphasizing the importance of *Okpara* wrote:

...on him lies the grave responsibility of preserving solidarity, peace and harmony within the community. He has the obligation of following the traditional laws of the Igbo (known as the *Omenani*, the happenings in the land), which are handed down by God to the community through the ancestors. The *Okpara* is responsible for the well being of the *Umunna* (the extended family) community he controls the channel of communication with the ancestors. ...He encourages the spirit of responsibility and co-responsibility among the members of the extended family and in that way he helps to promote unity and solidarity among the Igbo people.

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<sup>18</sup> *Ofo* is a branch of a tree known as *Detarium elastica*, a special piece of wood and central symbol of unity, authority and truth of the Igbo religion. Passed from one elder generation to the other to guide the wisdom and peace of Igbo communities, *Ofo* is inherited by the first male son (*Okpara*) as symbol of truth and justice. *Ofo*'s role in Igbo solidarity is such that in moments of dialogue or communal discussion the holder is in position to deliver the verdict (judgements) reached in truth by the Elder-leaders group and no one is expected to question it. *Ofo* unites both the past (ancestors) and the present (living). It is an emblem symbolising the link between *Chukwu* (the great God) and man (Ilogu 1974: 18-19). I will say more on *Ofo* in the next chapter when we treat the Igbo institutions of solidarity.

Family as the foundation for Igbo cultural solidarity is a place of informal learning in order to advance development in the form of awareness and knowledge in all aspects of Igbo cultural life. In this family school, the parents, elders and the entire community are charged with the responsibilities to prepare and train the young people who are expected to promote the Igbo sense of solidarity. Ifemesia (2002: 55-56) wrote:

...the family is the first agency for humanization and socialization in the Igbo person's life. It is thus the bedrock of every social and political community. ...United Nations document on social development refers to the family as "the basic unit of society and the natural environment for the growth and well being of all its members, particularly children and youth".

The immediate family as a distinct unit is thought to be intimately associated with the feeling of competence in the public life of the citizens of the Igbo nation. This feeling of self-consciousness and work towards the good of the family and society came with age and maturity of individual males. Every Igbo therefore played his or her part in advancing Igbo population growth, security and human development.

Firstly, this 'family school' of culture and identity development comes alive when father and mother have chances to teach and instruct their sons and daughters, as culture requires. The father has time to open the world of a male child to male tasks. The sons have to be brave, hard working, and taking up responsibilities for the family and the society at large. Likewise, a mother has time to answer the questions of her daughters for their gradual development in the family and society.

Secondly, the father and mother shared the responsibility of bringing up their children. These two took social pride in the community for having the ability to run their family successfully if their children are brought up in strict discipline, obedience, and submission to their parents and the other elder-leaders of the community. By so doing, children win for themselves relative freedom and happiness in Igbo families. Igbo parents wanted their children to be higher than they were and for this purpose, they toiled all their lives to support their children to reach their ultimate goal and development in the community. An adult Igbo child got married or built his own house; it was considered a great achievement and a mark of growth for the entire community (Ejiofor, 1981: 37).

Any such reality in an Igbo community becomes a feature that asserts a sense of individual responsibility, achievement, competence and autonomy. As an additional member to the elder-leader group (a new family head) in the community, the entire community celebrates and sometimes would award the new family head an *Ozo* title of honour and respect. Such title is a sign of solidarity in the community's development (Achebe 1965: 63). I shall discuss these titles in the next chapter when I evaluate Igbo institutions that enhance rural development.

Thirdly, the father as the head of the family is to protect and promote the life of his family. In the community he is expected to assert the presence of his family and protects its interest at the elder-leaders assemblies or activities. He is blamed if any member of his family is unjustly treated or denied any rights in the community. As he participates and represents his family at all levels of community activity, the father remains a means of cultural solidarity with the entire community (Achebe 1965: 48 and Basden 1966: 196).

Finally, though the father participates fully in the community activity his family remains a no interfering area for another family. Basden (1966: 147) observed that "...each hut (family) is a separate entity. It may be large or small, but it enjoys the privilege of being independent of its neighbours". Each Igbo family is autonomous of all others though it cooperates in the plans of the community growth or building. No one is expected to meddle into another family's business unless invited.

In conclusion, the significance of the practice of cultural solidarity among the Igbo shows that though the Igbo people are oriented towards living in solidarity with everybody else, individual uniqueness is respected. No individual person gets drowned by the community need, desire or decision. Rather each person remains the author of the community adventure for growth. Each individual is granted the right and opportunity of self expression. As Okafor (1981: 39) rightly noted, "...each Igbo family is the originator of its own conduct, the maker of its own history, and the chooser of its own alignments and alliances ...for effective existence and action, a family co-operates with its own lineage in unity and mutual assistance". However, shared life and the preservation of the Igbo identity remain the focus

for all. The aim of living in cultural solidarity with the entire community is to help and support individual families grow towards their full realization and development in all aspects of Igbo ways of life. Though this may sound very idealistic in today's world of individualism and division, the Igbo value of cultural solidarity challenges every Igbo citizen to refocus and redirect their personal need and want to enrich the common good of all who live in the communities.

As noted in the introduction to this chapter, let me present the three major family extensions namely the extended *Umunna* family, the village and the town which are all seen as the family of the different levels and determinations.

### **3.7 THE UMUNNA FAMILY**

The extended family as this is known gives us another level at which the Igbo people experience and express their cultural solidarity. This expression of solidarity creates or calls for a strong and wider bond of co-operation in times of difficulty or conflict among members and reveals the need for further interdependence and collective responsibility. By definition, the extended family is referred to as a patriarchal group tasked by their birth or natural role in the cultural solidarity to defend and promote the right of their members in the community. In his description of extended family, Mozia (1982: 203) says the extended family is a collection of several primary (blood related) families that pool their strength and encourage each member's co-operation for the growth and development of their members. It is vital to note that the practice of *Ubuntu*<sup>20</sup> among the Igbo is alive in the extended family. It supports each member of the family towards the full realisation of his or her potential. For instance in cases of the death of parents of a family member, the other families are expected to take care of the children of the deceased.

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<sup>20</sup> *Ubuntu* is a Xhosa (South Africa) term of expression for personhood relatedness to others. In practice it is a term that shows how close or distant relatives or non-related members of a society ought to share family ties and feelings when need be or arises. The concept *ubuntu* more perfectly understood as expressed in the Xhosa saying "*Umntu ngumntu ngabantu*" which implies that a person is only a person through his/her interaction, relatedness with other people. Refer also to the "Igbo world view" above.

The level or extent to which Igbo cultural solidarity can go is sometimes very complex. In the context of the extended (*Umunna*) family, solidarity prevails among all the members of the extended family. Affluence or poverty, honour or shame, gain or loss, would reflect on the entire image of the extended family. However, in recent times due to urbanisation and western education, and other influences like individualism and personal greed, cultural solidarity among the Igbo people has been fast eroded. Having accepted western civilization, together with the education and technological advancement that came with it, cultural solidarity among the Igbo communities is highly challenged. It is this reality of individualism that reduces the value of cultural solidarity that Ejiofor (1981: 39-40) wrote about thus:

...Western civilization was intertwined with capitalism, which considers the individual man the ultimate aim of abundance and welfare. If capitalist economy brought in private ownership with the competition that furthers progress, it also brought with it the egocentrism, which absolved one from one's duties as a brother's keeper. The philosophy of distribution (solidarity) gradually gave way to that of accumulation and concentration in the hands of a few, and one's social worth came to be boosted by one's ability to accumulate even more.

This western reality of "selfishness and individualism" is tearing apart close relations among the Igbo people. Individual families seem to focus on their own welfare and do not think much of their relations anymore. This modern western experience of individualism, which sometimes sees the society as a threat to the interests of the individual and which may define society as a collection of individuals, is alien to the Igbo and to African traditional community. While emphasising on the challenges that individualism poses to the Igbo (African) cultural solidarity, Uzukwu (1996: 42-44) wrote:

...while the African social definition of person displays the human person as subsistent relationship – in other words, the person as fundamentally "being-with," "living-with," belonging-to" – Western philosophy lays emphasis on the absolute originality and concreteness of the human person, a "being-for-itself."

As I already pointed out, the individual is never swallowed by the needs of the bigger community in the Igbo practice of solidarity. Instead the gifts of the individual are brought together to create humane community living that satisfies the aspirations of each and all in the Igbo principle of solidarity. In essence this leads to the human development of all who belong and co-operate in the community.

The alarming state of individualism in African countries has reached a frightening and scary level that demands a quick and radical response in our contemporary societies. It is this reality Uzukwu (1996: 106) pointed out that is indeed a worrying situation and calls for adequate attention by all. Africans, citing the research conducted in present day Democratic Republic of Congo and Cameroon on the effect of individualism among Africans pointed to the increase in practice of witchcraft among the people who felt left out in economic development. Jealousy against wealthy members of society finds expression in sortilege (divination) by the poor and those who think they are not benefiting from the wealth of the nation.

This scary situation is swallowing the Igbo community in which people have resorted to the membership of organisations known as “Secret Societies” and are involved in diabolic activities. Members are promised to be rich and wealthy in a short time and without working hard. The killing of family members and relatives are part of the ritual by which a member becomes rich. While articulating this virus Uzukwu (1996: 106-107) wrote thus:

...Witchcraft functions as a metaphor for balancing relationships in societies in which the relational notion of person, as displayed in community, dominates. This relational notion is being threatened by the radical individualism of the modern world. Africans appreciate wealth. But wealth accumulated must always be at the service of the community. The jealousy, which finds its expression through witchcraft, is in the final analysis, the expression of anger at the individualistic hoarding of goods, goods that should be utilized creatively for the common welfare (good). Thus, positively, witchcraft points to a value (of solidarity)<sup>21</sup> in danger of disappearing. It is a symbolic way of rejecting the hollow personality and empty patterns of relationship characteristic of... expressive individualism.

On the contrary, a state of “being-with”, “living-with” and “belonging-to” should remain the African philosophy of the person in a nation (Uzukwu 1996: 43). An African nation will be defined therefore as a nation where all who live in the modern state are provided for and are treated with equal respect, opportunity and chance to develop to their full potential. Further, it will be a nation where individuals are oriented towards the value of the community’s right over the individual’s accumulation of wealth and riches for oneself. By this notion, the

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<sup>21</sup> The words in bracket are mine.

challenges surrounding the true practice of solidarity among the Igbo people and the continent of Africa will be noted. Uzuoku (1996: 38) wrote yet:

The challenge of re-examining the meaning of solidarity in modern Africa must be courageously faced. Indeed, a new, viable, and dynamic model for building relationships beyond the limits of ethnicity has become imperative. In order to achieve this, it is my view that the interests and objectives of the ethnic groups, nationalities, and communities which make up Africa must be creatively received and reinterpreted as constitutive elements for the reconstruction of Africa. These interests and objectives will, in turn, be creatively harmonized with the reality of modern Western patterns, adopted since independence, which have become part and parcel of the African heritage, so that viable nations, regions, and a united Africa will emerge.

As we have noted above the order of solidarity begins at the level of the family and the extended family, all members of the Igbo community are charged to respond promptly to the needs of this bigger family and the Igbo community as a whole. No one individual thinks for oneself alone; rather a common effort is made to help others to come along the road to a collective common good. With such high spirit of collective concern for the development of both the individual and the group, the Igbo were able to unite efforts that led to rapid educational, roads, market and other infrastructural developments. In this effort, Uchendu (1965: 34) noted the pattern of development (“Getting Up”)<sup>22</sup> that took place in Igbo land; he wrote:

...In the days before (Igbo) contact with Europeans the prestige and influence of a town was measured by the strength of its able-bodied warriors, its diplomacy in dealing with its neighbours, its access to long-distance trade routes, the power of its oracles, the importance of its marketplace, and the degree of its craft specialization.

The Igbo hence have such proverbs to demonstrate a high level of unity that must exist among members of the *Umunna* family like “*Anyuko mamiri onu, obguo ofufu*” – best translated, when one urinates together, it foams. By so thinking and doing, the Igbo show that cultural solidarity is the best form and means of rural development (Ukpokolo 2009: 17-18; Echeruo 1971: 63-66).

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<sup>22</sup> “Getting up” is an expression used by Uchendu (1965: 34) to note the unity attitude that existed around traditional and modern Igbo communities for self-help development projects. In this instance, a well to do or rich member of a family, extended families, village and town units, unites effort to help and support members of any of the mentioned family categories to benefit and develop directly through his wealth. By so doing no one individual is rich but the family or community where one comes from.

Finally, it is vital to mention that the extended family remains the basic Igbo political development system that has its root in solidarity. The family too is basically the political unit in the Igbo system of government. As noted above, the *Umunna* are a lineage made up of a number of territorially kin-based units (Uchendu, 1965: 40). These are children of same father but may not be of same mothers. Traditionally, they live in one compound and there lies a unit of political authority. Houses are headed by men or women who are economically independent, but may not make any political decisions without first consulting the head of the compound known as *Okpara*, the first born owner of the compound and holder of the *Ofo* for the entire unit. The political office among the Igbo people is not by election or appointment but by birth right in the lineage. The political leader's obligation is to seek peace, justice, harmony and equality for all he represents in the village affairs. The individual's impeccable character however was the overriding quality that was needed for such political office. Hence, he would be disqualified if found to be of questionable character, even if he has the birth right to the office (Uchendu, 1965: 41). Let us now look at the village set up in which the elder's rule provides able leadership.

### **3.8 THE VILLAGE COMMUNITY**

The Igbo village community is made up of Igbo citizens who are well represented and have a strong guarantee of their well-being in the inter-family meetings and relations. The Igbo people work for progress and strength of all the community dwellers. Cultural solidarity as a value therefore helps the Igbo families to keep the informal and formal meetings held as a group in an atmosphere of rural cordiality at marriages, births, and occasional windfalls of achievements (Agbasiere 2000: 89-91). The village in this relation is another level of family unit composed of groups of individual and extended families who co-operate with each other for the purpose of well-being, protection from harm and support in time of need and difficulties. The village community therefore in all its ramifications provides the Igbo cultural solidarity with its second level of organised and recognised government after the *Umunna* family level among the Igbo people of South Eastern Nigeria (Okafor 1992: 4-5; Uchendu 1965: 41-43).

Most importantly, we must emphasize that the village is not an autonomous social unit within the traditional Igbo system. A village is an integral part of town. The village in the Igbo context depends on the decisions made at town level, which is an autonomous entity in the Nigerian political usage. Hence, at least five villages therefore make up an autonomous town.

At the level of Igbo village community, the first corporate and viable social unit comes to light. Ejiofor (1981: 48) pointed out that, at the village level, citizens begin to feel a sense of corporate independence and security, which would be strong enough to challenge the authority and solidarity of a weak town. The village is considered the strongest social and political unit within the Igbo political understanding. As the village forms the economic fabric of the people, it organizes the farming seasons and sites, collects contributions and levies (taxation) towards the maintenance building of village projects like halls, roads, water projects and scholarships etc... for its citizens' needs. In the Igbo political development, the Village Union is the highest political institution on its level. Solidarity demands therefore, that all Igbo people naturally belong to this union. One is excluded from the union if he/she has committed a crime against another member and is punishable by ex-communication (ostracism) from village activities (Achebe 1966: 145). Such punishable offences are detected in the set of rules developed in the Igbo culture and is governing the happenings in the land and is known as *Nso-ala*<sup>23</sup>.

As village rule demands, there are usually two (male and female) unions. The male union sees to the day to day running of village affairs while its female counterpart sees to the women and girls' issues. These political groups meet regularly as need may be and sometimes meet together as issues may demand. Village and individual issues that are discussed in this forum are well discussed since every member (adult male/female) of the village is given ample opportunity to make meaningful contributions that should lead to

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<sup>23</sup> *Nso-ala* means, what the land abhors and is generally translated as "abomination" or a supernatural offence of which the most dreaded include incest, pregnancy of a fellow village girl, the stealing of yams and or Kola nuts etc... These offences are most unwanted in the land and highly punishable by excommunication from all village activities. By this the Igbo nation has developed a set of rules to guide her citizen's moral and ethical behaviour in the communities.

common good or rural development. No one is denied a chance to contribute and all have equal opportunities until decisions are reached (Uchendu 1965: 38).

The Igbo political system of governance has a highly developed sense of respect for the individual. No one person or a selected few decide for the rest; rather all have equal chances to contribute in decision making to reach acceptable decisions. This political development has made the Igbo state or nation, an open-minded society in which all opinions are regarded as important and valuable. Although the Igbo governing system has the elder-leaders group as the ruling body, they do not rule or govern by domination but by service. The decisions that the elders announce in a given issue are only made when ample deliberation by the people has taken place (Uchendu 1965: 41).

The Igbo system of governance known and written about by Igbo scholars and authors as *Ohacrasi*<sup>24</sup> is the true definition of the Igbo people's way or system of governance. *Ohacrasi* therefore is the Igbo assembly who serve as a body politic in the deliberation of every aspect of law in trials and decision making (Okafor 1992: 59). This system of governance is fully demonstrated in the village level of governance and deliberations. The elder-leaders do not make decisions rather; they announce the conclusions reached by the entire village meeting union (Uchendu 1965: 42). The *Oha* (assembly) therefore, in this sense and understanding is in fact a kind of social self-check/pressure group so to say, preventing all other Igbo cultural institutions especially the *Omenala*<sup>25</sup> (legal) institution from deviating from their noble objectives which are to secure the peace, harmony, unity, happiness and the common good of the Igbo people. It is based on this understanding that Okafor (1992: 60) says, the supremacy of *Oha* the people's assembly over any individual or groups of individuals, is a living concept every Igbo person deeply acknowledges and is conscious about.

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<sup>24</sup> *Ohacrasi* literarily means "the group/assembly/crowd says"! It is the system of government where by the entire group or population participate actively in the day to day running of life affairs among the Igbo people. This means among the Igbo people no law is approved as law unless the assembly is in agreement with that law. Hence the assembly as a body tries and deliberates over every broken rule or conflict in order to arrive at a decision. No separate body or group is empowered or allowed by law and governance to make decisions but the assembly (Green 1969: 133-134).

<sup>25</sup> See the *Omenala* institution in chapter 5 (5.8) below.

The scenery described above however, is what Ottenberg (1971) called a 'gerontocracy' political culture; that is a political culture where a group of elders direct communal discussions and meetings leading to major events and resolutions. While explaining further in his work in this area of Igbo cultural solidarity and development, Duru (1980: 30) noted that this Igbo political system of council of elders directed discussions and exercised authority and leadership at the village-group level. He concludes thus...

...This... pattern can be found in all organizations, which contribute to the political system including title societies, secret societies, and *dibia* (Igbo medicine men/women) fraternities. The widely held Igbo value that wisdom comes with age confers respect and authority on elders in every aspect of daily life and is apparent in the effectiveness of the political process.

In conclusion the role of the village in Igbo cultural solidarity is focused on the common good of all who live in the land and co-operate with its improvement and survival. It is vital to note other specific areas by which the Igbo village contribute immensely towards the cultural solidarity and development of the Igbo nation. The Igbo village unions undertake many joint projects to create a people led and centred development. This cultural solidarity is possible by the means and practice of the traditional values and these would include the following points:

- The construction (expansion as population grows) or improvement of market-places and its surrounding.
- The creation or mounting of scholarship schemes in recent years.
- Road construction and maintenance (Egboh 1987: 64-76; 83-91).
- Organising social entertainment like Masquerade *egwugwu* and age-grade wrestling tournaments (Achebe 1965: 110-112 and Egboh 1987: 131-135).
- The establishment of a revolving loan/fund for the businessmen and women of the village (this will be expanded further in the next chapter as part of the Igbo institution of solidarity).
- The settlement of disputes among members.
- The review of the activities and involvement of their members living abroad and in other countries if need be to check crime and bad behaviour.
- They organise vigilance over the behaviour of her citizens.

- They also make sure that the village is fully represented in the higher Town Unions political organisation (Ejiofor, 1981: 50).

### **3.9 THE TOWN**

The town is the last level of family system in the Igbo nation and it represents the village government. The village government organises regular meetings as events and issues required, whereas Ejiofor (1981: 52) noted that, the town in the Igbo people context is a political unit composed of a group of villages whose ancestors claimed common descent and kinship. In its Igbo meaning this is *Ndi-ala or Ndi-Obodo*<sup>26</sup> that is people of the same land or place.

At the town level of Igbo traditional government every village is represented. As noted at the village level, at the Town Unions levels, the issues concerning individual villages are properly deliberated upon. All are given equal chances to contribute openly without restrictions until agreeable positions are reached. The village-group government is ruled by the principle of representation. The decisions that the town makes are not binding on any village that is not represented. The village-group's power and authority rests only on the agreement (consensus) of the village members. As Uchendu (1965: 44) rightly pointed out, every village member has equal right and voice. The representatives are not a permanent body of legislators but are selected at each session for their ability to present the viewpoint of their village. They have a "delegate" and not a "representative" status. As delegates they cannot commit their village to any matter not previously discussed and agreed upon by the people; but as representatives they possess the ability to commit on behalf of their village.

In current developments, the 'village' has been called "Progressive Union" or "Improvement Union", which depicts the intensity of Igbo cultural solidarity (Egboh 1981: 8-11). As will be

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<sup>26</sup> This is the understanding of Igbo village-groups in which their autonomy and self-determination manifest in their decisions and plans and the state is not expected to interfere. The Town Union in other words relates to the mentality of the people and most of the time the present day state governments need to liaise with the Unions to be able to reach the people.

emphasised in the next chapter when I tackle progressive union as one of the Igbo cultural institutions, it should be noted here that Igbo community progressive unions exist under a strict rule or role of working towards the common good of all who live in the community. The search and hunger for better life for Igbo communities remains at the centre of every community's progressive union. Ejiofor (1981:54) noted that these unions became famous after World War II as modernizing institutions. While it retains the heritage of culture and tradition, the Village Union takes the community into modernity. This means that ideas acquired through urban life are harmonized with the rich traditions of the Igbo people to bring about ordered continuity and change and adjust to the new setting. As the wellbeing for all members became the central concern of the improvement unions, building schools, hospitals, colleges, good internal roads, and rural water supply formed part of their tasks and responsibilities.

One of the most important development projects, very eminent among the Igbo Town Unions, is community centres or town halls in which activities are regularly organised and important meetings and community guests are hosted. The recent community centres/halls around Igbo communities replace the former market squares or the compound of a rich famous chief, which were regularly used as meeting venues among the Igbo. The community centres serve a great deal among Igbo communities and towns.

As a centre for deliberation and decision-making, the Igbo solidarity finds a great anchor around the ability of a given town or community to find a comfortable place or venue for community activities. The centre has a symbolic meaning of unity and solidarity among the Igbo and all who live in the land as a place of searching for and school of wisdom, where solutions to difficulties are sorted out and differences are settled. In the community centre, cases and conflicts are tried; verdicts and solutions are reached by the wisdom of all that deliberate openly and sincerely guided by the knowledge of the elder-leader's council. The following activities are at the heart of a community centre (the Igbo village square), according to Afigbo (1981: 176) all these have contributed in the social development of the Igbo nation and they include:

- Development project planning centre for all in the community

- Deliberation, issues meeting centre for the community
- A community centre for cultural school and traditional education
- A youth development centre for growth in the Igbo tradition
- Community fund raising and Launch centre
- A community praying centre in matters of religion
- All age-grade activities and training centre
- A court centre for peace and reconciliation (Duru, 1980:146).

All these developmental and social activities and more are the function of the meeting place, the centre, of the Igbo town community. It is from these centres that the Igbo propel development projects into action. As a centre of learning therefore, all future generations are regularly groomed to be community minded since that is the only way by which the Igbo nation would survive as solidarity continues to play a very uniting role among them. At this juncture, let us now focus on the socio-political basis for solidarity and development among the Igbo people.

### **3.10 Conclusion**

In this chapter I have used the Igbo family structural system to demonstrate the vital role family plays in promoting and focusing on the Igbo people cultural solidarity with a view to achieving or buttressing rural development. The brief Igbo history of origin, their settlement, their general world view and agriculture have shown different stages of cultural solidarity and have clarified the Igbo cultural practices that enhance rural growth in different aspects of life among the Igbo people of South-Eastern Nigeria.

The history of the Igbo people as noted above in this chapter will play a role in the development of this study, as Isichie (1976: 39) points out, much of the knowledge of the Igbo people's past comes from the oral traditions preserved in Igbo communities in the forms of stories, folklore, sage sayings, proverbs and in some cultural solidarity celebrations like

marriage ceremonies, new yam festivals<sup>27</sup> and funeral ceremonies etc.... This information is true of all traditional cultures with regard to preserving information through oral tradition. As an Igbo scholar, I hope this study as it unfolds will help to put beyond doubt the Igbo people's identity, uniqueness, their world view and their history. It is in the cultural solidarity of the Igbo people that this work provides us with a consideration of a value that could change a certain way of living, practice, life style, history and consciousness.

This chapter also notes one vital area of the Igbo way of life, and that is, agriculture. In the subsequent chapters I will discuss and note the role agricultural activities plays in the maintenance and protection of the Igbo cultural solidarity. I will clearly explain through chieftaincy titles as centre of agricultural produce promotion and expansion of cultural solidarity model among the Igbo people. In its cultural solidarity therefore the Igbo people have used agricultural activities as a means of attaining and sustaining its rural development (advancement).

Finally, as noted yet in this chapter, life in the Igbo society is clearly not led in isolation from other community members; in essence, no one lives unto oneself. The individual does not exist alone; he exists because of other people. This shows in the inter-connectedness and in the inter-dependence on the activities that go on and that exists in any given Igbo community. This

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<sup>27</sup> New yam festivals or *Iwa-Ji* (as in Igbo language equivalent) are occasions of socio-cultural celebrations among Igbo communities whereby a new harvest season is celebrated by the entire community to commemorate a good harvest signalling food security among the entire community (Achebe 1965: 34). Yam as the main agricultural crop of the Igbo people and their staple food, calls for celebration after a harvesting season. The *Iwa-Ji* is a celebration depicting the prominence of yam in the socio-cultural life of the Igbo people. The *Iwa-Ji* is celebrated in the month of August of every year just before the beginning of the harvest season among the Igbo rural agricultural communities as noted by Ifemesia (2002:71-72). Each rural Igbo community has its own date and day of this august occasion. This day symbolizes the conclusion of a work cycle and the beginning of another. Invitation to the new yam festival is usually open to all who wish to attend meaning that, abundant food is ready for all; and not just the harvesters but for the entire community in celebration. A variety of festivities like cultural dances, masquerades parades and parties, etc. marks the beginning of the eating of new yam. This festival remains vital since it symbolizes the abundance of the produce. Similar festivals are held in the West African region like in Ghana where it is called the "*Homowo*"; that is "To Hoot at Hunger" Festival. By so doing the entire people hope for a good harvest to overcome famine in the coming planting year (<http://www.africanloft.com/iwa-ji-ofu-new-yam-festival-in-igboland/> consulted 18 April, 2011).

notion culminates with Uzuoku's (1996: 37) earlier notification above on the process of development of persons in the African communities. This development of persons is in depth in the cultural solidarity among the Igbo people by which all in the Igbo communities express their belonging or existence in the Igbo environment.

## **CHAPTER 4**

### **THE SOCIO-CULTURAL BASIS OF SOLIDARITY AMONG THE IGBO PEOPLE**

#### **4.1 INTRODUCTION**

The socio-cultural system on which the Igbo cultural solidarity and development are founded is very complex. Strictly speaking, both social and political dimensions of Igbo solidarity and development cannot be separated. They are rather interwoven. In this section of our study, I will illustrate the cultural background on which the socio-cultural bases of the Igbo people are founded. Also I will point out different gender roles, namely the fathers and mothers, the youth and *Umuada's*<sup>28</sup> age-groups socio-cultural roles that contribute towards the cultural solidarity and development of the Igbo people. As will be noted, other major political roles will be discussed in the next chapter when I treat the 'titled men and women'. For clarity, I will limit this section to what is known as "age-grade" functions in the Igbo socio-cultural development. By the age-grade divisions, the Igbo culture apportions responsibilities and roles to all individuals and groups to contribute meaningfully towards the common good.

#### **4.2 THE SOCIAL (INDIVIDUAL) BACKGROUND OF CULTURAL SOLIDARITY AND DEVELOPMENT: A HISTORICAL OUTLOOK**

The place of the individual in the Igbo society is guaranteed by the security of all who relate and associate in the land. This is true as one Igbo proverb confirms: "*Ugoh bere, Ugoh bere, nkesi ibeya-ebela nku kwaya*" meaning "let each bird perch and any that refuses the other to perch, let its wing break". Achebe (1965: 17) further confirms this as he writes: "...you will

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<sup>28</sup> This refers to a group of all the women born in a particular village state who are married outside their original village but play a reconciliatory role in their original median homes (Egboh 1981: 102-109). They are tasked with certain cultural responsibilities to play a peaceful role in times of crises among families or communities among the Igbo people. More will be said on the *Umuada* group in this section.

have what is good for you and I will have what is good for me.”<sup>29</sup> All therefore are given equal chance of opportunity, growth and protection. No one is denied their rights in the community except in cases of ex-communication in the community. In this instance, if one’s sentence is served, he/she is fully reintegrated into the activities and regains all rights in the community. No one is expected to discriminate against a former offender.

In essence, though the individual is respected and is the ultimate goal of the Igbo practice of solidarity, the entire community growth is the bigger focus and picture. As Uchendu (1965: 34) pointed out, this picture was noted by early Igbo history writers like Green who wrote: “...and how often does one hear, we want to make our place – or our market – get up”. This expression is very common to Igbo social life and experience. “To get up” is a response, which nourishes community spirit; the fruit of which is community development and growth. The common good is a constant desire in the Igbo nation and all work towards it. It is to this Uchendu (1965: 34-35) observed thus:

...Almost from the first the individual is aware of his dependence on his kin group and his community. He also realizes the necessity of making his own contribution to the group to which he owes so much. He seldom, if ever, becomes really detached from that group, wherever he may live. His concern for the progress of his town makes him loyal to it. ...Thus it is only by contributing to the progress of his town and increasing its prestige that his own feeling of security is enhanced.

Though individuals work or perform their roles in search of development for the community, the Igbo are very much aware that community development depends on self-help, which is easily achieved as a group. Some Igbo personal names tell the story of this claim and confirm the influence of the group on the individual in Igbo nation. These include:

***Igwebuiké***, = the group is strength or power;

***Ihekwunigwe***, = the essence of things consists in togetherness;

***Igwenagum***, = I am craving for togetherness;

***Igwekanma***, = togetherness is better;

***Igwenazor***, = the group can save;

***Igwedimma***, = the group is good or nice;

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<sup>29</sup> This is part of a prayer said by Nwakibie in Achebe’s *Things Fall Apart*, for his visitor Okonkwo as equal protection is wished for all who live in the land.

*Anyibuotu*, = we are one or we are together;

*Igwekamma*, = the group is better etc... (Ifemesia, 2000: 97).

These and many other personal names present or document the Igbo social life of how the group influences individual behaviour and function for community growth. As I already pointed out, the community funds most of the development projects, which include local roads, pipe borne water, market, village school, maternity centre, rural electrification, and community hall.

While considering the social function of the group among the Igbo people, Mozia (1982: 192-193) noted that, social needs (development projects) as pointed out above help to propel the group to seek ways to satisfy this desire. The underlying aim or the unifying factor among the people is development and growth of the group. It is about this he wrote:

...Such needs have really created a bond of unity among them and have led to the formation of socio-cultural unions and associations like “Improvement Unions” and Brothers Associations<sup>30</sup>. This type of association helps the members to create a strong solidarity and to express their interdependence and co-responsibility for one another.

Amazingly, quoting Ottenberg who wrote about the Igbo in the mid twentieth century, Mozia (1982: 193) emphasized the solidarity that exists among the Igbo communities in pursuit of development. It is about this he made the following observation:

...Villages compete to build the first and best schools, and village-groups to improve the market. Many social groups strive to push some of their talented sons ahead in schooling and to obtain scholarship, wealth or political influence are expected to use their stand for the benefit of the group with which they are associated.

The group in essence becomes bigger than the individual person’s need. The need of the community is viewed as much more important than that of the individual. Individuals try to contribute towards the growth and future of the Igbo community by paying the required dues for community projects.

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<sup>30</sup> The associations will be treated in full in the next chapter when I discuss the Institutions, the Igbo Unions.

Another dimension in which the Igbo solidarity becomes socially prominent is the recognition of the aged in which they are in social acceptance for being the social (library) deposition of wisdom and knowledge, tradition and culture that sustains the community history. As a value that is highly respected among the Igbo, old age is seen as a group affair that seeks the guidance and direction of the elderly. Ilogu (1974: 131) noted that respect for the aged is a means by which Igbo solidarity has developed the culture of harmony and moral conduct towards all among the Igbo people and especially the elderly. He observed:

...respect for age and its seniority order, is a symbol of acceptance that the community is more important than the individual, justice, social harmony together with order and unity, hospitality especially to the stranger, lack of deceit, honesty and co-operation as required of all in the community.

The Igbo people do not take for granted the age or elderly element for solidarity. Rather the respect that is accorded with old age comes with individual merit. People earn or deserve the respect that goes with old age. One must have been a hard working man or woman who had contributed by his or her effort to the growth and development of the Igbo community. Respect for the elderly does not result from their being still productive among the people, or their being rich or poor. Rather, respect accorded to the elderly is a mark of community growth in harmony and unity among the people.

Hence, with the wisdom and experience they have acquired the aged guard and preserve the Igbo culture and tradition. Moreover, they serve as good judges who after deliberation over a given case, stand a better chance to relate cases with the community history and events. The development of the Igbo judicial system has depended and still relies on its social order and thanks to the special service of the elder leader's group that render their service to the Igbo people when they play their role as judges (Agbasiere 2000: 42; 47). This service has been made possible since the elder-leader's group has a right to the *Ofo*,<sup>31</sup> the Igbo symbol of truth and justice as believed and acknowledged by the Igbo people (Okafor 1992: 7; 29-30).

Furthermore, the respect for the elderly among the Igbo is extended to the people outside the Igbo nation who are welcomed as visitors or travellers. Non-Igbo travellers or visitors are

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<sup>31</sup> Refer to footnote No. 17 above.

accorded with honour and dignity. The Igbo considers charity as a religious duty commanded by *Chukwu*, the ‘Supreme God’ whom they believe to be the creator of all humans. This notion will be further developed when I consider the religious basis for Igbo solidarity. The development of the Igbo understanding of the person had come from the value of respect that is deeply rooted in the Igbo culture and practice of solidarity. It is with this understanding in mind that Umeasiegbu (1979: 39) wrote:

...visitors and strangers often are astonished by the way the Igbo receive them. This way of life is inherited from their ancestors who hold that God can only help the villagers, if the villagers are kind and open hearted.

The age grade and parental group roles among the Igbo provide the socio-cultural (political) responsibilities which tradition had vested on different sexes and ages among the Igbo people that leads to solidarity and helps to promote common good. The age grade remains a powerful social organ, which serves as an instrument of development and social control in various affairs among the Igbo people. Each of the age grades has developed a moral code of conduct and constitutions that is geared towards community growth and individual well being (Egboh 1987: 83 and Ifemesia 2002: 81-86). Let me at this juncture point out in detail the social functions of the four known age grading groups, namely the fathers, the mothers, the youth and the *Umuada* group. By their group roles they demonstrate their contributions towards the rural growth and development of the Igbo people.

### **4.3 The Father’s Socio-Cultural Role**

The father grouping is an important dynamic age group that is highly responsible and is taxed with the building of the Igbo family to develop to full maturity. Each adult male is expected to play this important role by which the rural Igbo people are assured of progress and sustenance. The raising and sustenance of any Igbo family is an enormous task and responsibility to the adult male age grouping (Duru 1980: 122). This is so because among the Igbo, the family is the highest social institution and is considered sacred. Due to the strongly sacred nature of the family as stated above, its protection and security is tasked to the most respected ranked personality among the Igbo people, the Father. This clear role of the father

is noted by Achebe (1965: 47) as he lustrates Okonkwo in his *obi*<sup>32</sup> with his family. The father in this regard would include the social and political title holders like traditional chiefs, the council of elders, the *Ozo*<sup>33</sup>, male and or female<sup>34</sup> individual home owners.

However, as heads of monogamous or polygamous families in the Igbo communities, the father's age group is tasked with specific social and political responsibilities for the growth and social harmony of the Igbo people. These roles and responsibilities are directed towards the common good and are summed up as follows among others:

- They are the leadership group and authority in the home and community in general
- They are the custodians of unity and solidarity among the Igbo people
- They maintain peaceful coexistence among group members including settling disputes and mediating over conflicts
- They give advice to group members in order to help them solve problems
- They support and protect members from outside intrusion by brandishing physical or intellectual strength as needed
- They represent members whenever they are involved in disputes with others of another community or strangers
- They help in working towards the maintenance of a good reputation of fellow community members
- They encourage all to cooperate in the efforts of community growth and development

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<sup>32</sup> An *Obi* is a small hut located near the entrance of a compound where the male owner of a family entertains his visitors and where worship and sacrificial rituals take place (Duru 1980: 207).

<sup>33</sup> The *Ozo* is an Igbo honorary title given to certain men of honour who have achieved a high level of respect and development of the Igbo people either by their hard work or intellectual abilities. More will be said on this in the next chapter when I discuss the Igbo institutions that contribute towards the common good.

<sup>34</sup> In Igbo matrilineal traditions (communities) women of great honour and respect have enjoyed positions of leadership and therefore are accorded titles of Igbo respect namely chiefs (Agbasiere 2000: xxiv, Plate 1; 40-41). Another dimension of woman-fatherhood could come in such experience of childlessness in first marriage. The Igbo social culture permits such a woman after first husband's death without a child or a male child, to marry another woman whose children then are legally accepted as full heirs of the late husband and are entitled to all cultural rights and duties. The society accepts the children to be legally belonging to this family and thus share in the inheritance belonging to all members of such families (Onwurah, 1984: 29).

- Responsible in supporting their families, with the priority of establishing strong economic foundation for younger siblings
- They see to the education of members of their families or community (Duru, 1980: 122-126).

The family headed by the father figure who has achieved a higher standard of living or who has been able to “get-up” has a moral duty to “lift-up” the less fortunate families or community in the area of location. Communities always make proud statements of their sons who have achieved great things and have shared their wealth or knowledge with their communities of origin. All these and the provision of food, shelter and medical care would all be the socio-cultural roles that the fathers play towards the growth and development of the Igbo people as achieving cultural solidarity remain the focus.

#### **4.4 The Mother’s Socio-Cultural Role**

The Igbo socio-cultural environment seen in relation to gender role-play may be misinterpreted as a male chauvinist culture just like in some other African communities and traditions. The woman in Igbo life semantics in some instances is presented as subservient to their male counterparts. If such Igbo proverbs and sayings were to be evaluated one would note the inequality that exists between male and female sexes. Among these expressions include, “*Mma nwanyi bu di ya*” that is, ‘the beauty of a woman depends on the husband’. The man or husband in this sense is the measure of the ‘meaning’ or ‘value’ of the woman. This could be interpreted that whatever the woman becomes depends on the man. Obododimma (1998: 88) noted with harsh interpretation the point at hand, “...they (studies) overlook the fact that in the male-dominated Igbo culture particularly, and in some other African cultures as well, proverbs, *a daily way of communication*<sup>35</sup>, are appropriated by men to uphold themselves as producers and custodians of knowledge *wisdom* which women are thought to be incapable of...”.

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<sup>35</sup> Emphasis is mine.

This alleged inequality between the two sexes could be noted earlier in childbirth and the preference for a male child over the female among the Igbo people. Disparity also exists in what is known as ‘Compulsory Marriage-Out’ for the female sex among the Igbo people. This is also true upon the advent of the Christian Mission Education era that contributed to the Igbo growth and development and was referred as the “school miracle” in the Igbo nation by 1856 (Baur, 1994: 149; Afigbo, 1981: 336); the male child was preferably sent to school while the female stayed home. Only recently was this practice discouraged and eventually stopped, with society having witnessed the ability of female children to perform just as well in most cases. This is the vital background of this study and how it affected the social role of the Igbo woman in connection with cultural solidarity and development.

The place and role of the woman among the Igbo people is very crucial and highly valued. This is true as is evident from some Igbo proverbs and sayings: “*Nwanyi maramma k’oji aga mbaa*” that is, “the beautiful woman leads the entire community to another community”; or “*Agwa bu mma nwanyi*” that is, “good manners constitute the woman’s beauty” (Onwurah 1984: 40). This can also be interpreted as, “a well behaved/good woman is the beauty (prestige/honour/respect) of her community”. This means that in some instances, the Igbo semantics could be misinterpreted, misleading or misappropriated against the woman. Yet, the same Igbo social arena has a strong social paradigm that placed the ‘face’ of the woman in the forefront. The interest and the fulfilment of the woman or female child is consciously appreciated and cherished in both past and modern day Igbo era.

It is vital to distinguish between two categories of women among the Igbo people since they play different roles with regards to cultural solidarity in service of the common good. These are *Umuada* daughters of the land who are married - out to other communities but have been vested with traditional roles of disciplinary, uniting and reconciliatory duties (Agbasiere 2000: 41-42 and Green 1947: 170). *Umuinyom* is the second group of women and are married women of the land who are married-into a given Igbo community. Let me therefore point out the roles of the latter, *Umuinyom* on their contributions towards the cultural solidarity of the Igbo that had resulted in the improvement of life in general.

- The first vital identifiable role of the Igbo woman is the motherhood of giving birth and nurturing future life. Indeed the future and existence of the Igbo depend much on motherhood without which no society would survive. The development of the Igbo people has depended on this very act of motherhood since the manpower and population of the Igbo rely on it.
- The woman is the provider in the absence of the man; devoting more time and sustaining the family and the household; hence being identified with such activities as agriculture, local industries, trade, craft, salt production, pottery and textile industries (weaving) [Basden: 1966: 325-333].
- She is also revered as the continuous social trainer for self and for the community. Her duty of training is focused upon leadership, industry and above all, for her organizational ability which keeps the community together.
- The woman has a political power expression, which could be seen as a ‘consultative voice’, extensive consultation is regularly carried out over important matters that affect the larger Igbo population. The women also exert political influence especially in matters that concern women directly (Agbasiere 2000: 37-47).
- The women have their own council of elders just like their male counterparts. They try cases or issues concerning community but play a general role as advisers. Such issues that require a woman’s consultation would include the relocation of a market place.
- The mothers in other words are the ‘watchdogs’ of public morality. By this, Igbo women display openly by song acclaiming a distinguished community leader or person who had contributed immensely to the Igbo cultural solidarity and development. While on the other hand on behalf of the community, ridicule in song and mimic an incompetent or brutal leader or person to sanction and enforce discipline and restore order (Duru 1980: 127-131).
- The Igbo women also play the role of a political pressure group. By her public demonstrations organised for or against a particular decision or behaviour of persons and families that are not compatible with the Igbo *Omenala*<sup>36</sup>, Igbo ways of life in the land.

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<sup>36</sup> *Omenala* is a set of rules and regulations that guide the Igbo daily life. Its modern day equivalence is a constitution of a group or state. Literally it means what happens on the land and encompasses native law and custom that have been transmitted from generation to generation within Igbo society prescribing the

At any moment when public peace is threatened by any group of men, the Igbo women of an affected locality send delegates of protest to the community elders and if this is not heeded, then public demonstrations are the only alternative. Such situations prompted the famous 1929 Igbo women's protest in which the then British colonial government was forced to give up its stand and yielded to the women's demand and readjusted the role of the corrupt local Warrant Chiefs who aided the British in ruling the Igbo nation (Isichei, 1976: 145).

In recent times Igbo women have assumed another level of social role towards Igbo development. Hence the newly acquired roles resulting from the 'career women' who not only work hard as house wives but are also the ladies of the home in combination with their city modern day careers. In the midst of all this, the Igbo people regard the 'Motherhood' of the woman as authentic in the context of the modern development of culture and tradition, since she is seen as a gift to the Igbo people, one who confers some status on all, the upholder of morality (Agbasiere, 2000: 4-8).

#### **4.5 The Youth's Socio-Cultural Role**

The youth, namely young men age grade is the militant social and cultural group that plays a big solidarity role among the Igbo people. Young adult male group affiliate themselves to this age grade organization in which they play a social, cultural and political role in contribution to the common good of the Igbo people. Every young adult Igbo male looks forward to the age grade in anticipation. Questions may be raised of the whereabouts of the young adult Igbo girls and their roles in the socio-cultural arena under consideration. The Igbo culture did not discriminate against young adult girls. Of course Igbo girls participate in the daily affairs of the Igbo family/community tasks of manual and farm works, education, sports entertainment (dance group), road/market squire and river cleanings, but there is no particular socio-cultural function/role assigned to them (Agbasiere 2000: 45-46).

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ethics on which societal norms are based. A violation of these customary laws is dire consequences of a group-enforced or supernatural nature. One of the offences identifiable and highly punishable is incest. More will be said on this when the Igbo judicial institution will be discussed in the next chapter.

The young adult Igbo girls do join their male counterparts as events arise, (e.g. mass youth protests against individuals who may have broken the laws of the land) but they are unconsciously (constantly) reminded of the natural marriage movement whereby they leave their natural families to join their husbands' clan.

This condition may be explained by the natural expectation of every Igbo girl who may marry out of their community. As I noted above, every young adult Igbo girl looks forward to marry out of her community and by this marriage reality, community loses their young girls' presence and service to other communities. Hence, the wisdom not to assign the young Igbo adult girls any particular socio-cultural role or task has come from this natural movement out of their birth-families and communities. However, the next sub-title on *Umuada* will help us clarify further on the young adult Igbo girl's role which may be said to be postponed or reserved until marriage. It is reasonable to understand the wisdom of this design since marriage brings stability in the life of the married young woman.

This age grade group provides each associate with a sense of belonging and acceptance among the Igbo people. The major objective of this age grade is to develop the consciousness and a strong sense of membership of one among the Igbo community (Egboh 1987: 83-91). By so doing each Igbo young adult male develops a full sense of duties, responsibilities and his rights in the community. As a full member of the age grade, every Igbo young adult male is fully recognised and respected in his social and political rights and status in the community. However, every Igbo young adult male devotes himself to the effort of common good and development of the Igbo people and one's own personality. Basden (1966:196-198) and other writers while noting these developmental roles which are geared towards achieving the rural common good for all, identifies them as follows:

- These young adult males are the militant and law enforcement group who are regularly called to defend their father land against indiscipline and non-corporation of certain individuals in the land; the observation and respect of the Igbo enacted laws is the major focus here. If anyone feels unjustly treated, the elder-leader's council remains a place of appeal or to redress any unjust fallout from the young
- They are responsible for rural road maintenance

- They see to it that the markets and other trading spaces are clean and well kept and maintained
- Through the age grade, every member is tasked to build and contribute positively towards Igbo relationships among its family affiliates that are cemented in cultural solidarity display
- These form the major work/labour force for community projects like the building of community centres, farms and other community development projects
- They also form the major farming (agricultural) work force in individual Igbo families (Duru 1980: 131-140)
- They prepare the farm land for cultivation by clearing the bush
- The harvesting of major crops and food plants are part of the young men's responsibility
- The Igbo agriculture or farming is seasonal; hence during the dry season in which the Igbo people are relaxed with less work to do, the youth male age grade is taxed with entertainment of their communities and the people at large with wrestling contexts and masquerade dancing
- They work hard to be able to take care of the younger siblings in the family and beyond (extended families)
- These are also the major trading group who are able to travel far and wide to market their products and other articles in their possession (Agbasiere 2000: 45).

Finally, as Basden (1966: 196) rightly noted, all these duties and responsibilities are expected of every young Igbo man who must respond to the social and political needs of his living community. He wrote:

...Every young Igbo man upon reaching this manhood state, automatically enters upon the privileges and duties of citizenship, and bears his share in all that appertains to the well-being of the villages. He is called upon to contribute to the public festivals and sacrificial obligations, and to pay his quota towards any expenses incurred by the community. As required, he must render personal service in war and peace...

It is in so living that the Igbo solidarity is maintained and development is achieved as people and individuals play their roles in enriching the community vision for all.

#### **4.6 *Umuada*, Socio-Cultural Role**

The *Umuada* consist of all the women born in a particular village state who are married to other village communities but form a local association of daughters of their land of birth communities; this is a very crucial group and play a central role towards the Igbo cultural solidarity (Egboh 1987: 102). The *Umuada* married women's group are to be understood as a pressure group that keeps every social and cultural group among the Igbo people under check. As we shall see later this women's group plays a very vital role as it becomes a part of or a link and glue that binds the Igbo communities together as one people in search of peace, justice, high moral standard and the common good for all who co-exist peacefully in the land. This group of women are the most revered among the Igbo people. They are given disciplinary and unquestionable authority by the Igbo culture or tradition to protect the peace and serenity that all desire from their maiden homes, among Igbo communities. Though they are daughters of their original communities (families) yet, the Igbo tradition has vested in them enormous power to correct, discipline and deliver verdicts where necessary on individuals and groups of peoples who reside at the *Umuada* original homes to guarantee cultural solidarity of all who live in the Igbo communities to ensuring rural growth (Egboh 1987: 103 and Agbasiere 2000: 41).

The co-operation of all Igbo citizens with these daughters of the land with regards to the development of a common good is non-negotiable. Any individual or group who would not be in cultural solidarity with the community to achieve this common vision and dream of rural development may be penalised with a heavy punishment. This group of women are revered for their role among the Igbo people for such authority as the power of excommunication (ostracism), vested in them. People of different ages and sexes may attract such matching orders and punishment from this group if one is found wanting or non-co-operating with the community's initiatives for the common good (Agbasiere 2000: 40 and Duru 1980: 208).

The *Umuada* still take the joy and pride over their original places of birth that keeps progressing. They deal harshly with any group of persons who do not co-operate to the growth of the communities. By far the most significant channel for the exercise of female

influence within any Igbo community still remains that of the gathering of the *Umuada* ‘married daughters of the lineage’ as opposed to *Ndinyom* ‘wives of the lineage’. Every woman therefore irrespective of creed or social status is expected to belong to these village-based groups and to perform specific duties to keep to the cultural solidarity (Agbasiere 2000: 41). The following roles played by the *Umuada* towards the Igbo cultural solidarity and rural development are very eminent. These include the following as noted by (Egboh 1987: 103-107) among others:

- They have the right of arbitration within their natal lineage homes. Mediation of cases in order to bring peace and unity is a major task of this Igbo female grouping. Tradition has granted the *Umuada* the socio-cultural power to intervene and sometimes to impose settlements if need be.
- They settle quarrels concerning political, economic and ritual matters, which are beyond their male relatives; they are usually called upon to help to settle issues that may prove impossible
- The task of disciplining disruptive or disobedient relatives’ wives or husbands, boys and girls also falls within their domain. By this the *Umuada* has the authority to summon any individual or group of persons who are not co-operating towards the Igbo people’s solidarity to change their way of behaviour. Hence, they have powers to encourage all to contribute towards the rural growth of any Igbo community
- More so, the *Umuada* have the power to ostracize any proven incorrigible (incurable male/female families and individuals) behaviour noted in the lineage relative. In this sense, individuals or group of persons who are in rebellious disharmony with the *Omenala*<sup>37</sup> of the land, are exiled or ex-communicated from their communities by the *Umuada* for a period of time to sanction or discipline an individual to enforce cultural solidarity and progress in the Igbo communities.
- The *Umuada* of any unit of Igbo community functions as the final arbiter in all conflict situations within the respective lineage. Their verdicts are always final. The implementation of their decisions may be entrusted to male relatives to enforce.

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<sup>37</sup> This is a set of customary and unwritten laws that regulate the daily life activities. More will be said on *Omenala* in subsequent chapters since it forms one of the Igbo institutions of solidarity and development

Finally in matters of appeal adjudication, this group of women have the final say as in an appeal court. Their decisions are final and one is expected to welcome any judgement reached by the *Umuada* in cases of appeal (Agbasiere, 2000: 40-42). By these illustrations the Igbo *Umuada* group of women contribute immensely to the Igbo cultural solidarity and rural development.

At this juncture, in the next two sections I will consider the economic and religious basis in which cultural solidarity features prominently. It is in such activities as religious and economic life of the Igbo people that cultural solidarities and rural improvement are highly noted and practised.

#### **4.6.1 THE ECONOMIC BASIS OF CULTURAL SOLIDARITY AND DEVELOPMENT**

The Igbo solidarity that led to economic development can be described as engineering the advent of Igbo contacts with its neighbours including the far distant. Without doubt the Igbo, like their Edo, Igala, Ibibio and Yoruba neighbours, are an example of successful adaptation to the tropical rain forest environment of Northwest of Africa. The Igbo economic system can be studied under three major headings namely: agriculture, trade and manufacture. It is under these three phases that we shall look into the economic aspect of this study. Each of these three main realms of economic activity played an important part in the solidarity of the Igbo people. The survival of the Igbo so much depended on these three main economic aspects and determining the character and quality of their culture, even of their religion and world view (Afigbo, 1981: 124).

As this study is not about the anthropological history of the Igbo people in which the detailed three economic activities would be studied, I will rather summarize how these three areas led to the Igbo people's solidarity and development. Agriculture was the main economic activity, with trade and manufacture coming as subsidiaries.

#### 4.6.2 AGRICULTURE, TRADE AND MANUFACTURE AS BASIS OF CULTURAL SOLIDARITY

Afigbo (1981: 167) noted earlier while referring and agreeing to Equiano's narration of Agriculture being the chief employer among the Igbo people and Uchendu's illustration of farming being the Igbo force of life. The latter writing earlier on the Igbo economic activity noted thus (Uchendu, 1965: 27):

To remind an Igbo that he is *ori mgbe ahia loro*, 'one who eats only when the market holds' is to humiliate him/her. This does not imply that traders are not respected; all it means is that the Igbo see farming as their chief occupation and trading as subsidiary not a substitute for it.

One result of this Igbo attitude to agriculture was that every Igbo man and woman was a farmer (Afigbo, 1981: 167). Such was the importance of food production in the Igbo economy. Trade of course distributed the products of agriculture and manufacture around the Igbo major markets and their neighbours; the latter not only offered some relief from the other two more strenuous occupations, but it also supplied the technological base of Igbo society.

In a rather clear understanding of Igbo solidarity and development with regard to their economic activities, we can note their prominent chieftaincy titles<sup>38</sup> that were acquired by means or a sign of hard work in the Igbo economy (Achebe 1965: 6-7). By the honorary chieftaincy titles, hard working Igbo men and women were recognised particularly in the production of yam or rearing of great numbers of livestock. Igbo community titles like "*Eze-Ji*" 'King of Yam' or "*Ogbu Efi*" 'Elephant or Beast killer' respectively are awarded to people of great farm productions that had sustained the Igbo population by their hard work. By so doing the Igbo had been able to work in solidarity with all who live and survive in the Igbo land. It is with regard to such reality that Cole (1982: 7) wrote:

Wealth in this society was not traditionally calculated... In a... social system with a land-based economy it was the size of the family that really mattered. A man with many wives was a man with many children. These in turn led to well-stocked yam

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<sup>38</sup> Titles of this nature though will be discussed in details in the chapter below, played a vital role in Igbo solidarity. Titles mainly play the role of social recognition of individuals for the promotion of morals, hard work, leadership and protection of Igbo integrity. Every Igbo man and woman look forward to such social recognition since it centres on promotion of solidarity among the Igbo.

barns, to the acquisition of goats and cows, pawns and slaves, and titles – the public validation of status achieved. Such prestige added... to positions of power and leadership.

Such chieftaincy titles played an important role in the Igbo people's solidarity and development. A successful Igbo man or woman farmer with numerous descendants would as it were, seek or be advised to do so by the elders, to be socially recognised by taking a local title. However, it must be noted that this title taking is not a simple matter of the purchase of political power with wealth. Rather as Isichei (1976: 22) noted, "...title system served as a substitute for social security; the man who acquired a title paid to do so, and shared in the payments of later entrants. A title was a guarantee of character, as well as of success. The entrant went through protracted and arduous rituals, and his later life was surrounded by religious restrictions..."

The possession of wealth does not guarantee or earn any Igbo person status of prestige in the community (Cole 1982:9-10). Wealth in the individual hand must serve the good of the community for one to be recognised as having made a social impact in the life of the people. Also, how one made his or her wealth played an important role and was highly considered before an individual could be accorded with the honour of any local or cultural titles. All who had acquired wealth illegally or wrongly are not recognised with such social status of titles of chieftaincy. One must keep to the moral and ethical standard of acquiring wealth; that is *Omenala* (customs and traditions that govern the land). The violation of the regulations of rural life and daily activities is highly abhorred by the Igbo people. Attesting to this understanding Cole (1982: 10) wrote:

The democratic and communal character of village social life and political organization both supplements and complements the individual Igbo's preoccupation with status. Prestige is achieved only with the cooperation and support, material and moral, of a man's lineage. For his superior status to be validated, he must in turn share its benefits. This pattern permeated the whole social fabric. ...Similarly a village or town recognizes and respects an individual for the benefits he can confer upon the group.

As pointed out earlier, if any Igbo individual achieves economic development by his or her own hard work, one does not earn automatic social prestige or be conferred a community

chieftaincy title. Rather, an act of cultural solidarity must have been displayed by means of sharing the wealth with the community. This is done by supporting the weak and poor members of the community, donating freely to the community expensive celebrations and rituals and helping to secure scholarship funding to the less privileged among the Igbo people (Ejiofor, 1981: 123). Such recognition of individuals who have achieved a level of development in agriculture, trade or manufacture has promoted healthy competitions among the Igbo people. Every Igbo person as noted above looks forward to such social acknowledgment and recognition that promotes one's social status. Therefore every average Igbo person works hard to earn this community prestige and respect.

The Igbo people's response to the inevitable changes in the modern economic era however, has been very positive. Writing on the Igbo response in the modern setting, Nzimiro (1971:165) notes that the Igbo movement from their traditional base into the modern setting was motivated by a complex of factors but principally by economic considerations. The desire to participate in the economic activities which brought more monetary reward than the traditional agricultural activities which, as the incursion of money into the economy developed; could not yield as much reward as those provided by the new occupations. This modern epoch brought a desired change, which the Igbo people needed to transform itself into as a formidable force of respect.

The pattern of Igbo traditional economy changed with the injection of money into Igbo society. The full response to the new economic system, the capitalist system, induced the Igbo people to a greater pursuit of money-earning activities. As observed by Nzimiro (1971: 175), the movement away from their homes to other areas was a reaction to the new monetary stimuli. Out of this new environment for the traditional Igbo grew the patriotic and improvement unions that strengthen the Igbo solidarity and development. The Igbo people are a solidarity minded group. They always try in all circumstances to keep together in unity of one purpose, the development of one's original home. It is on this that Nzimiro (1971: 175) further emphasised, "...associated with the rise of new urban settlements in Nigeria and the massive flow of Igbo populations from villages into them was the evolution of clan and

town associations catering for the interests of the Igbo urban migrants and providing a link between them and their rural base and rural culture”.

The Igbo’s positive response to the new economy other than the former agricultural, trade and manufacture based economy brought an enormous desired development among the Igbo people. While writing on the title “*The Igbo entrepreneur in the political economy of Nigeria*” Olutayo-Olanrewaju (1999: 163) noted the rapid change of Igbo focus on the local economy. As the Igbo people migrated to the urban areas to participate in this newfound economy as traders, shopkeepers, clerks, skilled workers, and domestic employees, they rose into white-collar positions in a short time, soon to cultivate an intellectual elite consisting of educators, journalists, professionals and businessmen and women.

While still emphasising on the reason for such a rapid success of the Igbo in a short time of encounter with the new economy, Olutayo (1999: 163) and Okonjo (1976: 39) further maintained that the Igbo have been able to achieve these by generating and maintaining a communal civic spirit in the Diaspora. The communal spirit Olutayo (1999: 163) insists is the life-blood of the entrepreneurial ability of the Igbo people, and it manifests itself in the apprenticeship<sup>39</sup> network founded to achieve economic progress. It was on this economic advancement that he wrote:

The Igbo formed mutual benefit association, credit societies and “improvement” organisation, which had ties with rural homelands. An Igbo Union was formed in Lagos in 1934 and later expanded to become the Igbo Federal Union (subsequently the Igbo State Union) in 1944, to include all local Igbo associations throughout the country. Frequency, the “improvement” or “progressive” unions, as they were called, functioned as organs of local self government, providing ad hoc courts to settle disputes, supplying members with welfare benefits or employment opportunities, levying taxes, and generating a communal civic spirit<sup>40</sup>.

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<sup>39</sup> The apprenticeship system was fully developed among the Igbo just after the Nigerian and Biafra civil war in the mid 1960s. A lot of Igbo men and women were displaced in their daily economic and social activities by this war. At the end of the war apprenticeship was introduced to help these able men and women to stand on their own again having learnt one trade or the other from fellow relatives or friends. This system had worked so well that Igbo people (land) recovered so much from its loss and became vibrant again with numerous economic activities that eventually encouraged development.

<sup>40</sup> More will be said on the Igbo improvement unions in the next chapter since it serves as one of the Igbo institutions of solidarity.

Credit must be given therefore to the Igbo communal civic spirit in other words, solidarity. Solidarity is the major force and value that has propelled the Igbo society to such height of economic development that followed colonialism. The resilience of the Igbo culture to hold together shows a remarkable buoyancy of the Igbo people's practice in their cultural solidarity. In essence, this successful modernisation complemented the communal fabric and the traditional means of food production.

In this section I have examined the economic basis of the Igbo people's solidarity, namely, agriculture, trade and manufacture. Trade as noted played a very prominent part in the modern Igbo people's economy. Its role was made prominent partly because of the effect of the Nigeria – Biafra civil war in the early 1960s among the Igbo people. The destruction and disruption of the agricultural activities among the Igbo people in this era of war in turn, promoted trade and travel as noted above. This led to the strengthening of two important solidarity aspects, namely apprenticeship and development unions.

Apprenticeship in trade and manufacture had its strong anchor on the effects of the war since agriculture; the primary life activity of the Igbo people was disrupted. Hence, the search for an alternative way of life became inevitable. Talented and hard working individual Igbo people were able to promote trade through apprenticeship whereby young and adult male and female folks were taught by their knowledgeable close/distant relatives of new economic activities namely, trade and blacksmith etc. This new dimension of trade, also in turn promoted development unions<sup>41</sup> among the Igbo people. This was as a result of many Igbo people who had travelled outside their original homes in search of new trade. By development unions the new city migrants kept together in unions to be able to protect their interests in the new city life. The development unions will be discussed in detail in the next chapter since it forms one of the Igbo institutions of cultural solidarity.

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<sup>41</sup> Development unions will be discussed in the next chapter when I look into the Igbo cultural institutions that promoted solidarity among the people.

#### 4.6.3 THE RELIGIOUS BASIS OF CULTURAL SOLIDARITY AMONG THE IGBO

The Igbo religious basis on which cultural solidarity is practised is very complex. In this session therefore I will discuss four vital areas in which religion has affected the practice of solidarity among the Igbo people. This includes the Igbo people's belief in *Chukwu*, the Great Spirit. Secondly, I will present the Igbo people's belief on Earth-spirit, the *Ala*. Thirdly; I will discuss the belief in the ancestors as a basis for cultural solidarity among the Igbo people. Finally, I will present the positive and negative influences of the Christian religion on the Igbo people's practice of solidarity. All these areas in Igbo and the Christian religion will help us to identify the role and place of religion in the Igbo people's value and practice of cultural solidarity in search of rural development.

Religion is an act of personal or group expression of a set of beliefs in a divine being; that is worshiped, honoured, followed and of course revered. Mozia (1987: 174) noted solidarity as exists or found in the Igbo religion are embodied in the Igbo people's religious-cultural life, in their names, language and expression, proverbs, folk tales and, in their moral values. By these religious dimensions the Igbo people developed a sense of piety in which they experienced unity and common good. As I evaluate these four aspects of Igbo people's religion, we shall note that their faith in *Chukwu*<sup>42</sup> remains a fundamental source for solidarity, (Agbasiere, 2000: 50). Their faith in spirits and ancestors constitute a vital part of their religious following that will explore further. Therefore in this section I will show how the Igbo sense of religion has achieved growth as in general life harmony with all who live among the Igbo people. I will seek to demonstrate how these beliefs affect, promote and strengthen the Igbo sense of cultural solidarity. As a means that has encouraged the Igbo search for common good, I will show how religion has contributed to the Igbo people's growth and development.

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<sup>42</sup> Literally *Chukwu* means higher or greater *Chi* (the personal god). The term *Chukwu* has been variously translated as 'Supreme Being', 'the Great Being, 'Supreme Spirit', 'God', 'the Great God'. All this expresses the meaning of *Chukwu* among the Igbo.

#### 4.6.4 THE IGBO BELIEF IN *CHUKWU* AS A MEANS OF CULTURAL SOLIDARITY AND DEVELOPMENT

*Chukwu* is believed to be the creator of all things and for this reason he is known as *Chineke* as noted by Achebe (1958: 162-163). As god who carried or fashioned the world he is called *Osebuluwa*. This god has the control of all things in existence and has power over all things. All good comes from him. He is the maker of all human beings and all things in existence. All created things, both physical and spiritual are all under his control. As Uchendu (1965: 94) rightly affirms "... the idea of a creator of all things is focal to Igbo theology; the Igbo believe in a supreme god, a high god, who is all good". The belief in one great god (spirit) makes it possible for the Igbo to see unity (solidarity) in their religious practise hence creating a unifying effect to all who live in the land.

The Igbo religious expression of believing in one great god has enforced unity of purpose and interest since all in the land see *Chukwu* as the creator and owner of all human beings. In another understanding the Igbo people have the conviction that all people in the land are one god's family. All belong and must be treated as such. No one must be discriminated against because all belong to this one family of a great god. Individuals are to be respected and honoured amidst the activities of the community. It is from this principle that the notion of "*Chi*"<sup>43</sup> better interpreted as 'personal god' is to be understood. This religious notion of the Igbo people has been misinterpreted by early and contemporary Igbo writers who saw the Igbo religion as polytheistic rather than monotheistic in nature. The *chi* notion in Igbo religion is therefore not god multiplied rather it is god personalised. In it understanding therefore, the Igbo people believe that all human beings have a personal *chi* that the Great Spirit has assigned to all for personal progression and protection. It is to this truth Agbasiere (2000: 54) wisely testified thus:

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<sup>43</sup> In ordinary usage *chi* refers to light in contrast to darkness. With reference to Igbo religion *chi* has been understood and interpreted in different ways like 'a kind of tutelary spirit', 'personal genius', and or 'a personal guiding spirit'. It is best known as an individual's personal god and is symbolized in Igbo traditional religion by a sacred tree that is planted near the front of the house in the family compound. This *chi* is associated with either personal fortune or misfortune. It is seen as a complex principle affecting every individual's existence for good or ill. *Chi* therefore represents the focal point of a 'personal religion' (Agbasiere, 2000: 54). *Chi* in this sense emanates from the spirit messenger of the godhead, *Chukwu* in Igbo religion.

...The Igbo notion of chi is a ...principle, which defines individual human behaviour. It will be shown that what symbolizes and reinforces dominance in social control and prestige in the community is the uniqueness of the individual person. This uniqueness is given emphasis in the notion of chi...

Yet, while differentiating and demonstrating further the role of and belief on *Chi* among the Igbo cultural solidarity Agbasiere (2000: 103) continued thus:

...ironically, many Igbo affirm that a history of barrenness in any girl's family would hardly deter prospective husbands, since they share the common belief that it is *Chi* that gives fecundity and not human beings. Obviously, Igbo belief in *Chi*, as the principle of individual identity and achievement ('destiny'), is an attenuating (acceptable) factor in what appears an association of fertility with pre-marital chastity.

In such understanding and practice, the Igbo religion has developed a sense of individual responsibility to oneself and the community in general. Though the entire Igbo people follow the principle of *Chukwu*, who is responsible for the universe, the individual is given a genuine space and place to express ones opinion and desire for self-fulfilment and enrichment. The personal contract and relationship with the divine via one's *chi* is highly respected in the Igbo religious domain. The individual is not neglected or negated; hence the promotion and presence of personal worshiping altars among the Igbo religious practices as different from the public worshiping grounds or sacrificial altars.

Finally, the Igbo high god manifests his will for human beings through other spirits who act as god's intermediaries (messengers) who directly carry out the work of maintaining solidarity and harmony in the Igbo world (Mozia, 1987:178). These spirit- intermediaries promote personal and individual encounter and relationship with *Chukwu* thereby leading one to full relatedness with all others, co-operating in solidarity with all among the Igbo people. It is to this opinion that Mozia (1987: 178) wrote on:

...the Igbo can have individual and collective relationship with God (*Chukwu*). It is in fact the consciousness of the personal relationship that frees them from the slavery of isolation and urges them to work together for a creative solidarity among themselves. ...the way to total liberation is through the profound consciousness of our union with God, which make us aware of our union with our fellow men and our union with all creation.

It is therefore in this unique sense that Igbo religion had played an important role to bring about development in this basic religious understanding as the Igbo live in solidarity with all in the land.

#### **4.6.5 THE BELIEF IN EARTH-SPIRIT “ALA”<sup>44</sup>: AS A BASIS FOR CULTURAL SOLIDARITY AND DEVELOPMENT AMONG THE IGBO PEOPLE**

As already mentioned, *Chukwu* the great one god in the Igbo religion is considered to operate or function through other intermediaries namely spirits. Among these spirit intermediaries are the *Igwe*, the “sky-spirit”, *Anyanwu*, the “sun-spirit”, and the *Ala*; the “earth-spirit” otherwise known as Mother-earth goddess/spirit. *Ala*, the land as the main focus in this section should be understood as a major force in Igbo understanding and practice of cultural solidarity. *Ala* is known and regarded as the ‘Custodian of Morality’ since she is also attributed with the ownership of all human beings (Agbasiere, 2000: 63).

As Mozia (1987: 197) noted, “...the Igbo people’s strong faith in this spirit (*Ala*) is so important to their moral and religious life, because *Ala* is the custodian of the unifying laws of Igbo morality, whose infringement results in disunity and disintegration of the bond of unity among the people”. As the custodian of public and private morality, *Ala* spirit acts as a true intermediary of *Chukwu*. Among her roles is to preserve unity or solidarity in the Igbo community by guiding the people towards the observance of the moral laws. In unity, there is a common belief by the Igbo people to entrust certain control and guide to the *Ala* spirit.

Offences against *Ala* is treated with heavy punishment and people dare not commit such offences as adultery, homicide, poisoning of another person, stealing of farm products...etc which are all regarded as abominable. *Ala* may kill by bouncing the wicked on the ground until they are dead. *Ala* does not kill for minor offences. Only such offences classified as

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<sup>44</sup> *Ala* in the Igbo religious understanding is a major spirit intermediary otherwise known as “Mother-Earth-Goddess”. The earth spirit is considered to be a prominent spiritual force (a deity agent) that controls morality among the Igbo and is believed to be offended if native laws and customs are violated. In the case of moral violation of natural laws like intentional murder, the mother-earth spirit is said to be offended and a number of sacrifices and punishment is duly pronounced on the culprit (Okafor 1992:78).

*Nso-ala* (what the land abhors or what is generally known as taboo) as mentioned above, warrants mother-earth's anger and appropriate punishment is apportioned in reestablishment of solidarity among the offended community.

All these crimes mentioned above are in reality sins against the solidarity of the community. While quoting Parrinder therefore, Mozia (1981: 180) affirms that: "...the earth forbids bloodshed and so is a sanction of solidarity for the community". On natural laws in which *Ala* is the custodian, Okafor (1992: 78) emphasised that the gravity of homicide for instance is not mitigated by the circumstance and nature of the crime. The individual involved in such crime is subjected to punishment such as periodic or total banishment from free association in the community (Uchendu, 1965: 42). Such offence must have serious infringement on the solidarity and development of the Igbo community.

The Igbo regard the right to life so fundamental and so undeniable that no person or institution has the authority or power to order the execution of a murderer. As life is considered to be protected and nourished by the earth-goddess. Uchendu (1965: 42-43), writing on this observed:

Homicide is an offence against *Ala*—the earth deity. ...it is important to realize that the village has no power to impose capital punishment. In fact, no social group or institution has this power. Everything affecting the life of the villager is regulated by custom. The life of the individual is highly respected; it is protected by the earth-goddess. The villagers can bring social pressure, but the murderer must hang oneself.

One's own hanging in this instance (suicide) may not necessarily mean to kill oneself. Rather, one is also considered dead to his community if he takes the initiative to self and family imposed exile or banishment from original Igbo community due to one's offence against the mother-earth spirit (goddess), the land (Achebe 1966: 28).

Finally, the moral development in reconciliation and settlement of certain conflicts among the Igbo people is assigned to the role of earth-spirit. *Ala* is connected with reconciling or mediating between people in any form of conflict. In effect of this role every Igbo community has a shrine referred to as *Ihu-Ala* (the face of the earth) where regular sacrifices are made and major trials, discussions and decisions are reached and given a ritual binding

force (Agbasiere, 2000: 52). In any of the instances, the elders of the land known as representatives of *Ala* try to settle such cases before the *Ihu-Ala*. This shows that it is *Ala* who actually and ultimately reconciles the two parties in conflict. All concerned are expected to show full cooperation by living in solidarity with all again. By this function *Ala* serves as a symbol of solidarity and unity. Peace and harmony is always the focus of the mother-earth spirit and all are expected to respect and revere the mother-earth spirit.

#### **4.6.6 THE ANCESTORS: AS A BASIS OF CULTURAL SOLIDARITY AND DEVELOPMENT AMONG THE IGBO**

The ancestors form part of the force intermediary by which the Igbo people identify the functions of *Chukwu* in Igbo religious experience. The dead generations of Igbo people occupy a special place in the Igbo religious affairs and therefore are considered to have a strong influence in the Igbo people's solidarity and development. As Uchendu (1965: 102) further emphasised, the Igbo people picture their ancestors as the invisible segment of the lineage. The ancestors he said are not worshiped but honoured or respected. There is reverence for the ancestors who though not visible, are believed to still live among the community and therefore are sometimes referred to as the living-dead members.

It is based on these reasons therefore, that the ancestors are fed with ordinary home foods like water and palm/*raphia* wine in the form of libation. Piece of kola-nuts may be given when community and individual members meet. The cult of the ancestors is chiefly observed through the Igbo traditional *Icho-Oji*<sup>45</sup> 'kola-nut' ceremony, which takes place on various social occasions. The procedure usually includes the showing of the kola-nut to be broken to the ancestors who, though invisible, are supposed to be present (Agbasiere, 2000: 55).

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<sup>45</sup> *Oji*, a kola nut is a living symbol that represents unity and solidarity in the Igbo culture. It is the first food offered and shared with the visitor or stranger as a symbol of welcoming and acceptance. It represents the call on the ancestors and *Ala*, the goddess and *Chukwu* the great God, to participate, witness and guide fully the proceedings of discussions between two friends or fighting parties in search of reconciliation. As used for all rituals, without *Oji*, no prayers can go on since it is the first gift to present to God or ancestors (Ilogu 1974: 130). More will be said on *Oji* in the next chapter when I discuss the Igbo institutions of solidarity and development among the Igbo.

The understanding of the relationship between the ancestors and the living members of the Igbo people is vital to the understanding of the role of the ancestors in the preservation of cultural solidarity and development among the Igbo people. As Mozia (1987: 181) noted while quoting Parrinder:

...The African community is a single continuing unit conscious of no distinction in quality between its members who are still 'here' on the earth and its members now 'there', wherever it be that the ancestors are living. But... some elements of enhanced power are attributed to the ancestors.

This notion is very much applicable to the Igbo community. It is indeed with such close contact or relationship that the Igbo people hold the ancestors. Their influence on the living members is still so strongly felt that all seek the good and development of the Igbo communities. The ancestors are believed to manifest interest in the solidarity welfare development of their living relatives.

As founders and custodians of the Igbo people's moral, social, political, religious and traditional institutions, the ancestors are accorded with great respect and reverence by the living members of their lineage. The Igbo people's *Omenala*<sup>46</sup> is a very wide source of morals that guide the people's solidarity and is attributed to the ancestor's institution (Duru 1980: 90-95). It is therefore by such ancestral construct that the Igbo people are inspired to moral and social harmony. Solidarity as an end result leads to the common good of all who live in the land among the Igbo people founded by the great ancestors. While emphasising on the negative and disrespectful attitudes towards *Omenala* Duru (1980: 95) rightly noted the following, having interviewed some Igbo elders in his work on the issue at hand:

...Christianity has done harm to *Omenala*...they (the elders) cited that formerly people would not steal yams or engage in sexual intercourse with a relatives because of the serious consequences to them and their families. They added, "Now these offenses happen because the Christians no longer observe the ways of their fore fathers...and the younger generation will have to live with the consequences."

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<sup>46</sup> *Omenala* are the moral customs and guides founded by the ancestors to regulate the daily life of the Igbo (Duru 1980: 207). Recently Igbo scholars and writers have compiled these to be the juridical institutions of the Igbo people. This is type of constitution that guides all human activities. More will be said on this in the next chapter since *omenala* is one of the Igbo people's cultural institutions that preserve solidarity.

Finally, the Igbo belief in the reincarnation of the ancestors remains a religious dimension that contributes immensely to the cultural solidarity of the Igbo people. This belief has a strong social and moral influence on the Igbo people. A person who has lived a morally good life, which is identified as life conducted in accordance with *Omenala*, can attain the status of reincarnation. Any Igbo who lived and died for the promotion of moral and social development among the people earns the status of an ancestor (Agbasiere, 2000: 56). Reincarnation remains a pivotal institution for the maintenance of political and moral cohesion since the dead parents are believed to have made a comeback.

#### **4.6.7 THE ADVENT OF CHRISTIANITY AND IGBO CULTURAL SOLIDARITY AND DEVELOPMENT**

The advent of Christianity among the Igbo is dated AD 1857 when the missionaries first arrived in Onitsha in the port of River Niger from where they penetrated into the mainland (Baur, 1994: 147). Indeed, given the vital and crucial role played by the Christian religion, this study cannot be complete without referring to the impact and influence it has had on the Igbo people's cultural solidarity and development.

To a number of Igbo traditionalist or conservative writers and scholars, the advent of Christianity was rather disruptive and destructive to the Igbo cultural solidarity and growth. Chinua Achebe's 1965 novel "*Things fall apart*" for example, was mainly directed against this disruption of Igbo cultural solidarity and growth by Christianity via western colonialism (Achebe 1965: 161). Yet, to the Igbo progressives like Michael Mozia (1987: 21), the event of Christianity was a total liberating, reformatory, positive and growth from what he called "imperfect and manipulative" cultural solidarity and rural development. Whichever way one looks at it, it is obvious that Christianity brought both positive and negative influences. It is this understanding that I would like to discuss below, these influences of Christianity on the Igbo cultural solidarity and development.

#### **4.6.8 POSITIVE INFLUENCE OF CHRISTIANITY ON CULTURAL SOLIDARITY AND DEVELOPMENT AMONG THE IGBO PEOPLE**

Firstly, in what was later known as the ‘school-miracle’, credit must be given to the Christian Missions for their use of the Western education as part and parcel of their Christian evangelization. This initiative led to more Igbo community founded schools to educate the huge illiterate population. Emphasizing this positive impact, Baur (1994: 149-152) clearly noted how the missionaries used the Western education to lure Igbo families into believing and being attracted to the new found Christian religion (Achebe 1966: 164-165). It is important to note that this method of Christian evangelization opened up a new avenue of learning and embracing modernisation more easily by the Igbo people and helping them to be able to communicate to the foreign world of Christianity thereby encouraging a common good for all who live in the Igbo society.

Though the Igbo resisted formal education at first, they in time embraced it as part of the common good for all Igbo people who lived in the land and later, western education became a pride venture for all Igbo people. Community based Igbo schools became truly a venture or project to reach out to all its sons and daughters whom the Igbo prided in and prized as their future, equal to all foreign agents of modernisation. By taking pride in all the learned in its communities, education became a strong agent of cultural solidarity hence, scholarships were encouraged, community sponsored school projects grew, more and more less privileged Igbo families or individuals were sponsored to formal education and more bright Igbo students had the opportunity to study in foreign countries like Britain and America on community sponsored scholarship projects (Egboh 1987: 25-35).

Before the rise and establishment of Christianity among the Igbo of South Eastern Nigeria, during the late 19th century and early 20th century, the birth of twins and other multiple births in most parts of Igbo land and its neighboring communities such as the Ibibio people were seen as an abomination (scandalous) and a curse from the gods. Multiple births were believed to be a thing belonging only to lower animals while single births belonged to humans. The reason behind this belief may have been the result of ignorance and limited

knowledge of the human biological makeup. Twins were killed by abandonment in the community's "evil forest"<sup>47</sup> or in some cases were instantly killed. After the birth, the mother of the twins went through cleansing rituals to purify her from the abomination (<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ibibiopeople> [Assessed on 21 February 2011]). A second or another type of killing that took place among the Igbo people was the human sacrifice which took place when chiefs and some noblemen holding *Ozo*<sup>48</sup> titles died and were being buried. These noble title holders who would have died were believed to be in need of their slaves or servants in the spirit world, hence the need for human sacrifices (Ilogu, 1974:64-67).

By all means this mad, insane and unacceptable 'cultural practice' had to come to an end and it is thanks to the new Christian religion. The abolition of this practice of human sacrifice and the killing of twins in the Igbo culture are attributed to the emergence of Christianity among the Igbo people (Myers (2010: 1). At the abolition of these practices in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, Mary Slessor<sup>49</sup> (1848-1915) who was a missionary among the Efick (Calabar) people of the West coast of South-eastern Igbo people, endured very difficult situations in order to bring to an end these inhuman practices. It was about this great woman, Slessor's missionary work that Myers (2010: 1) wrote thus...

...wherever Mary Slessor went on her triumphal tour among the churches, the people were enthralled as they heard her tell, in a simple and humble manner, how

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<sup>47</sup> The evil forest referred to the bush where human bodies believed to have died of abominable courses like swollen stomach and leprosy were dumped and twin babies were left for dead to be eaten up by ants and leopards (Achebe 1966: 135-136).

<sup>48</sup> The *Ozo* titled men and women will be fully explained in chapter 5 as I explore the Igbo cultural and development institutions.

<sup>49</sup> Who was this woman who could triumph over such conditions? She was Mary Slessor, born in Aberdeen, Scotland, December 2, 1848, and known as the White Queen of Calabar, a region on the west coast of Africa. Concerning this intrepid woman, J. H. Morrison pays this tribute: "She is entitled to a place in the front ranks of the heroines of history, and if goodness be counted an essential element of true greatness, if eminence be reckoned by love and self-sacrifice, by years of endurance and suffering, by a life of sustained heroism and purest devotion, it will be found difficult, if not impossible, to name her equal." (Myers, 2010; <http://www.wholesomeword.org/missions/islessor.html> [Accessed 21 February 2011]); such was Mary Slessor's influential missionary work and I am personally grateful for the abolition since I am a twin born at the period just after the abolition. As a twin what a great role Christianity played in saving my life among many other Igbo children who died for such a barbaric practice.

she had endured hunger and thirst under the flaming sun of Africa, had been smitten down by tropical fevers, had controlled drunken cannibals brandishing loaded muskets, had mastered hundreds of frenzied natives lusting for blood and had faced death a thousand times in her endeavour to bring redemption's story to Africans... They were moved to tears as she told of the slave markets, of human sacrifice, of cannibalism...But the stories the Scotch Christians liked best of all were those telling how she had rescued from death hundreds of baby twins and other deserted babies thrown out in the forest to perish of hunger or to be eaten by ants or leopards. The stories were made doubly impressive by the presence of [four of these children](#) who had been cast off and then rescued (<http://www.wholesomeword.org/missions/islessor.html> [Accessed on 21st February 2011]).

Impressively the Igbo population that lived in this century of carnage of innocent lives were very open to this message of redemption from the Christian religion. This was against the evil of innocent lives destroyed in a blind practice of unawareness and lack of proper scientific knowledge of twin births. At this juncture, it must be noted that any human culture that does not save, care and nourish human life is rather retrogressive and does not develop society. Hence the Igbo culture at these practices destroyed the progression, course or route to human development (Ilogu 1974:66). Of course, any reasonable person would ask how such a dark practice and culture could be termed cultural solidarity or development.

The Igbo response to the enlightenment that came with Christianity should be loudly applauded for having reacted positively to save the life of Igbo people and the innocent twin babies that were destroyed without full knowledge and awareness of human biology of the possibility of a woman giving birth to twins. The fact that there was a safe passage of the abolition of such practices, traces and shows cultural development among the Igbo people. The general or total discontinuity of this practice indicated and demonstrated the strong spirit of cultural solidarity by which the Igbo culture had united the entire Igbo citizens. Development as have been noted above is a positive growth of human understanding and practice that culminates into common good. Obviously the common good noted in the abolition of twins killing and human sacrifice is the respect and acceptance of all human life among the Igbo people.

Finally, another positive element of the evangelical mission of Christianity among the Igbo people with regards to its effect on the Igbo nation is the introduction of health facilities like Church clinics, community and large town hospitals that served the Igbo people and its neighbours. The new modern way of health care that was introduced by Christian missionaries contributed in building cultural solidarity among the Igbo people as the entire communities embraced and sought to establish more health care centres and clinics. Clinics and health centres became obvious positive targets for community projects to provide a new way of health care for the population. In most Igbo communities, it became a major ambition to provide their own health centre or clinic for the people. It is because of such positive response to modernise that these health facilities united the Igbo people in search of better health and they took pride in contributing to the realization of these visions and needs (Egboh 1987: 42; 65; 72). All these positive influences are attributed to the advent of Christianity among the Igbo people and have contributed immensely to the cultural solidarity and social growth among the people.

#### **4.6.9 NEGATIVE INFLUENCE OF CHRISTIANITY ON CULTURAL SOLIDARITY AND DEVELOPMENT AMONG THE IGBO**

As we have noted the positive influences that Christianity had on the Igbo cultural solidarity, likewise, the not so-positive can be noted too. It is this face or side of Christianity among the Igbo people as it may have been among other indigenous Africans that is terribly disappointing. This is so because Christianity is attributed with the ridicule and suppression of the rituals and destruction of the images and objects associated with the indigenous religious, political, social and cultural rituals (Okonjo, 1976: 34). Okonjo makes the following observations, while quoting Kraemer thus:

The missionary is a revolutionary and he has to be so, for to preach and plant Christianity means to make a frontal attack on the beliefs, the customs, the apprehensions of life and the world and by implication (because tribal religions are primarily social realities) on the social structures and bases of primitive society. The missionary enterprise need not be ashamed of this, because colonial administrations, planters, merchants, western penetration, etc. perform a much more severe and destructive attack.

Unfortunately and painfully so, this was the attitude and face of Christian missionaries who introduced the new religion to the Igbo people and Africans in general. In other words, the aim was to contribute to the complete uprooting and destruction of indigenous life in Africa. Hence, Igbo values faced a “frontal attack” from the Christian missionaries. Visible among the value destructions as noted by Ilogu (1974: 72-75) are the following:

- The belief in Spirits and the reverence of the Ancestors was abolished and the people lost the morality of the continuity of ancestral moral observances that bound the people together.
- The bride wealth that played an important role in cementing relationships between two families in marriage was misunderstood as bride purchase and was interfered with.
- Polygamy was abolished and men with more than one wife were forced to abandon their legal marriages and families were destroyed and children in such marriages scattered without care.
- Customs like title taking that played important roles in Igbo promotion of unity and dignity of hard work was discouraged as idol worship (Egboh 1987: 128-130).
- Traditional dancing that recreated people, a means of keeping solidarity among the Igbo people and a way of socialization was discouraged too (Okonjo, 1976: 34-35).
- The village or local religious priest (*dibia*) who controlled the social psychology and served the religious consciousness among the Igbo people was highly suppressed and eventually destroyed (Ilogu 1974: 52).
- The Igbo customs respecting nature and the environment were not spared either. The respect of great “trees and forests” that is currently acknowledged as nature conservation was misunderstood and interpreted as animalistic worship and therefore was unrecognised and abolished.
- In her quotation and reference to Westermann, Oduyoye (1986: 31) noted how Europe’s attention turned from northern Africa and the Nile Basin to West Africa after the Portuguese adventurers brought gold and slaves back to Europe. The conversion of Africans to Christianity was one of the motives behind those adventures and “even slave-raiding and slave-trading were seriously regarded as acts

of Christian charity, because they seemed to be the only means by which the salvation of heathen souls could be effected.”

All these and more are the negative influences identified with the introduction of Christianity. The negative attitude of the missionaries towards all these indigenous Igbo values militated against the growth and stability of cultural solidarity among the people. To a large extent, one is tempted to suggest or think that most of the traditional belief systems in the Igbo culture were negatively affected as noted above at the advent of Christianity. This was the case in most African or other contexts (cultures and traditions) at their point of meeting with Christianity. Strange though this situation may be and may sound, the Christian religion was regularly accused of imposing itself on foreign cultures at its first contact.

To this extent and progress Christianity has been described as missionary religion which makes it a converting and combating religion of other cultures. We can draw our attention also to the Holy Bible's instance of our context in discussion. According to Acts 15:1-35, some Jews did protest or disagree with the accepting of foreign individuals (Gentiles) into their midst, because of rules and regulations that were not respected. Hence, it is not foreign to note all these changes that came with Christianity at any point in time with other cultures. In a rather welcoming attitude towards some of these changes or challenges that come with Christianity, I am tempted to agree or believe that it is even better to see human life spared through slave trading, than the series of killing and cannibalism that took place in and around the earlier-traditional African context.

#### **4.6.10 CONCLUSION**

In this chapter I have discussed the structures in Igbo society and some modern features that have supported and clarified the role of the sexes in the cultural solidarity in relation with rural development of the Igbo people. These aspects include the family and all its extensions, religion, tradition, socio-cultural and economic models have all been influenced by the Igbo practice of cultural solidarity in search of a common good. In all aspects of social life among

the Igbo people that have been described above, there is a very close link between individual and group solidarity that culminate in the common good. Though the Igbo people respect the individual as a unique person, the group interest is not neglected or disregarded. Likewise, the same rule guards the group's decisions over the individual person. This understanding indicates the balance that should exist in life among the Igbo people. Cultural solidarity therefore as noted above seeks development, but it is not sought at the expense of any of the parties or agents of development among the Igbo people.

In essence, common good (development) as featured in this chapter entails the human stimuli of longing and desiring growth. Such growth in any human society can be compared with the plant growing in the dark in search of the sun. Any entrance of the Sun into the dark space of the plant attracts the natural response of the plant towards the light. Similarly, the Igbo people have responded naturally towards development or growth. The search for common good as we have disclosed above among the Igbo people, has demonstrated to be a natural response towards development. Cultural solidarity has become the strong agent by which the people have responded towards achieving the common good.

In a special reference to women, I have equally noted clearly the place and role of women in achieving economic and cultural stability among the Igbo people of South-Eastern Nigeria as they play their role in cultural solidarity. This is vital since it is usually claimed that women did not play vital roles in cultural solidarity among the Igbo people. I must point out clearly in this study that women are not only consumers of culture, but they are also equal producers of it. It should be noted that before colonization, Igbo women were actively involved in all economic, religious, educational, political and other spheres of life. Although women among some Nigerian groups for instance did not cultivate, Igbo women were active cultivators. Also, contrary to the common notion that Igbo women did not cultivate yam, Chuku (2005: 56) shows that Igbo women in some parts of Ndi-Olugbo zone (under Owerri local area as part of this study's investigation) grew yam. Moreover, in pre-colonial times, women had their own land, separate from their husbands (Basden 1966: 264-265; 300). They determined how and when to use the proceeds accrued from their farming and processing activities.

As noted above in the role of the mothers in the Igbo socio-cultural activities, Igbo women were actively involved in all the phases of palm oil and kernel production. Division of labour was also practiced: while men cut the palm fruit and pounded the fruits, women and children carried the branches to the processing centres to process palm oil produce and crack the kernels for local body-cream and soap production Chuku (2005: 65-70). The integration of pre-colonial economies into the current of colonial domination and expropriation did not lead to the death of women's agricultural activities. Based on the significant position the women played as farmers and food processors, Chuku suggests that, "women held their families' bowls or stomachs." Their activities also extended to the areas of salt production, pottery, and textile industries. The fact that these economic activities were carried out exclusively by women allowed them to effectively register their significance and indispensability.

Furthermore, I have shown how and why we can say cultural solidarity is the tool for rural development among the Igbo of south-eastern Nigeria. In other words, cultural solidarity is the very value that propels the basic life of the Igbo and can be seen as the fundamental value of Igbo life and business. As a basic value in Igbo tradition, cultural solidarity has been used in this study to show different aspects of its practice, as an attempt to reveal the various types of bonds that fasten together the Igbo people. The recognition and the interpersonal expression of these bonds at various levels of their community life make it very difficult for any individual Igbo to live a life of isolation or individualism.

The dynamic and enduring nature of cultural solidarity among the Igbo is such that it continues to promote and sustain the group and individuals living in the Igbo tradition. Of course, as the world continues to grow in urbanization, the Igbo solidarity value faces a difficult time to survive. There is no doubt that the continuously changing socio-economic and political situations are challenging and threatening its continued existence. As Mozia (1987: 243) noted today and more than ever, the individualistic, materialistic and secularistic tendencies are tremendously challenging the survival of cultural solidarity value among the Igbo people.

These are threatening to the Igbo cultural solidarity and community growth in as much as they reduce the individual and group responsibility towards the community as we have noted above. The major focus for Igbo cultural solidarity is the search for a common good of all who live in the community. Materialism, individualism and other tendencies that go with modernity all project and focus too much on the individual thereby caring less of the community and the group. A living instance, Mozia (1987: 244) continued, is the earlier secularization of all schools belonging to Church and private agencies by the Nigerian government in 1972; and this move was detrimental and affected the religious and moral standards in the schools that always tried to preserve the people's traditional sense of cultural solidarity.

Finally, one should not have the sense that I am resisting change in the Igbo tradition, change is a fundamental condition for human growth or development; rather, human cultures and traditions need to protect various values like the Igbo solidarity so that individuals and groups are fully aware of their cultural heritage and value to protect them. Every human tradition must be afforded this protection no matter the wave of change anyone may seek. Human beings deserve some tradition to fall back on when modernity cannot or can no longer offer any reliable comfort and continuity.

## CHAPTER 5

### **THE IGBO INSTITUTIONS AND SYMBOLS AS BASES OF CULTURAL SOLIDARITY AND DEVELOPMENT**

#### **5.1 INTRODUCTION**

In this chapter I will focus on the symbols and institutions which will illustrate and demonstrate the symbolic elements and roles in the institutions that exist among the Igbo people. By defining these two terms I will show how institutions and symbols contribute immensely to the practice of cultural solidarity among the Igbo people. These institutions as will be described, govern and administer the rules in order to encourage and aid development among the Igbo social, educational, political, economical and religious worldviews/affairs. Having defined these vital terms (symbols and institutions) in the Igbo cultural solidarity, I will further discuss in this chapter the *Oji* and *Ofo* symbols and the vital roles they play in the development of Igbo cultural solidarity. *Oji*, in particular is a kola nut and as a living symbol it represents life in solidarity among the Igbo people. *Ofo* on the other hand plays the role of leadership, justice and truth.

Other major institutions that will be discussed here include the *Dibia* (institution of local priests), the *Ozo* (institution of local title holders), the Unions (institution of development organizations), the *Igba-Ndu* ritual (institution of settlement and reconciliation rites), the *Omenala* (institution of Igbo juridical system) and the *Mmanwu* (institution of sports and recreation) among others. The Igbo people have these institutions that control different spheres and shape the life activities of groups and individual people. These institutions have been designed by culture, customs and events of tradition in the course of time, years and generations. Let me at this juncture define both institution and symbol as they co-exist.

Definitions: From the onset it is important to define these two prominent terms namely “symbol” and “institution” as mentioned in the sub-heading above. These two terms as may be experienced in any given Igbo society work hand in hand and should be understood as complementing each other. Igbo symbolic items are found and used in established

institutions among social communities. In layman's understanding, symbols are established customs, laws, or relationships in an institutional society or community. A good example is the *Oji* (Kola nut), whose case will be explained below. It is important also to observe that symbols can only exist in an established institution. This therefore means institutions give meaning to symbols; without which symbols remain ordinary objects holding and signifying individual meanings giving to the observer or human eyes. Hence, institutions use symbols to establish and communicate certain meanings and understanding or relationship that should exist among citizens of a community. However, institution on the other hand is a well-established and structured pattern of behaviour or of relationships that is accepted as a fundamental part of a culture, tradition and or system. A clear instance here would be marriage, the institution of the family.

Edger and Rhonda (2000: 142), quoting Williams defined institution as: ...a means of a definite set of interrelated norms, beliefs, and values centred on important and recurrent social needs and activities...examples are family and kinship, social stratification, economic system, the polity, education, and religion. Continuing he notes that beliefs as they are, are conceptions of realities, of how things are. On the other hand values represent conceptions of desirability, of how things should be. Through shared experience and social interaction, communities, classes, ethnic groupings, or whole societies can come to be characterized by similarities of values and beliefs (Edger 2000: 146). By institutions a society comes to be known and recognised for its beliefs and customs (e.g. family system as noted among the Igbo of South-Eastern Nigeria in chapter 3 above).

Symbolism is a vital tool or element to defining the Igbo cultural solidarity and many other cultures in the African context. While identifying the vital role and place of symbolism in the human culture Ingold (1994: 366) wrote:

...without symbolism there could be no culture. A symbol is an artefact: a 'thing' that exists out there somewhere in space and time. As a 'thing', a symbol has material reality and is experienced through the senses. It is a 'thing' that represents: that is culturally involved in such a way that it can be used in a multiplicity of contexts to convey meaning, not just about itself, but about cultural processes and relationships. Every symbol participates in a web of significances that we call culture. ...any symbol resonates (echo) with meaning. The meaning of a symbol is not a 'thing', and

it can only be grasped inductively by observation of many instances of the social uses of that symbol, or similar symbols.

Etymologically speaking, the word *symbol* came from the Greek *σύμβολον* (*sýmbolon*) from the root words *συν-* (*syn-*), meaning "together," and *βολή* (*bolē*), "a throw", having the approximate meaning of "to throw together", literally a "co-incident", also "sign, ticket, or contract" (<http://simple.wikipedia.org/wiki/symbol> [accessed 16 March 2011]). According to Glazier and Hellwig (1994: 834) broadly speaking, symbol they said is a sensible reality (e.g. an object, word, or drawing) that represents another reality not directly perceivable or expressed. A good instance can be two people who share love and symbolize it by a bunch of roses or the exchange of rings. Glazier also distinguishes between "symbol" and "sign". Signs can be created at will and bear no intrinsic relation to what they represent. On the other hand a symbol has permanent or consistent meaning to what it represents. For instance the Cross has a symbolic meaning for Christianity, and may not acquire another meaning even if it is used in a different objective; while a traffic sign could change in shape or colour, without changing its meaning.

Symbols therefore are the largest and strongest elements or materials of hidden communication among the Igbo people. By definition Dulles (1992: 131) says symbols are images or objects that present the hidden reality. Whether we talk about religion or socio-cultural realities, symbols are representations which make one participate in the hidden reality which they present. In this sense, symbols become hidden truths that reveal a deeper meaning of what it represents. In themselves they do mean the objects they stand for; but as symbols they stand for different, future or deeper meaning and understanding. Hence, in nature symbols are pregnant with hidden meanings. In a religious context, symbols are seen as those objects or natural phenomena which reveal the presence of the Supreme Being among the traditional Igbo people. Symbols bring new meaning and awareness into the life of the user. It is therefore an object that communicates and searches for meaning in everyday's human interaction in the community.

As a means of human or Igbo way of communication, symbols are social events among the traditional Igbo serving as a means of cultural solidarity. They have the capability to bind,

and engage the whole individual and community to a meaningful communication. Symbols also have the ability to transcend ordinary objects to a deeper meaning to the objects they are. In symbols, the hidden meaning they communicate is made present to the ordinary eye of the human observer. In themselves symbols are images of representation and not themselves what they represent. Symbols among the Igbo serve as a bridging element through which they consult, search, and communicate values of socio-cultural activities amongst the citizens.

According to Addis (1954: 772), symbols are an outward expression, or thing, or action, may have an inward meaning, is a familiar fact which is the basis of all simile (image) and metaphor. Illustrating further, he says the representation of a lion brings to our mind not only the king of beasts, but the qualities of strength and courage. In the domain of religion, in which there is much which, by reason of its spiritual character, cannot be directly represented, the use of material outward signs to convey inward spiritual meanings is a necessity. In this way meanings and values are communicated to all who understand by visualising (picture) the spiritual into physical signs.

In another instance, Adams (1987:198) while centring symbols on religion says it is the very life's breath of religion. Every sentiment, every ideal, every institution associated with the phenomenon of religion, be it noble or ignoble, subsists in an atmosphere of symbols. In addition, while explaining its role, Adams says it is through symbols that religions survive in our midst and through it that we gain access to the religious life of past or alien cultures. Hence, symbols are like windows through which deep meanings are communicated and let open to the ordinary eye. They let open the dark side and hidden knowledge they represent to the observing eye. By so doing, symbols seem to serve the purpose of preserving and protecting the unique heritage in religious affairs and other social activities in the human society in general. Symbols therefore carry messages and meanings of the image they present to the observing individual.

The details of each and every Igbo institution are not fully documented in writing. It is only recently when efforts were made to document some of these. Rather, oral traditions and

practices have kept the Igbo institutions in the memory of every living generation. As I have noted in the Igbo people's history, the Igbo as a people cannot boast of any single political authority or central government which may have existed elsewhere among their neighbours; yet, these institutions are conspicuously present in every Igbo autonomous community. Therefore, as a general Igbo consciousness, the evidence of these institutions of cultural solidarity, (considering the fact and lack of any central government) show a high level of oral traditional development and endurance of Igbo aspects of life. This reason also confirms the belief that the Igbo as a people have one stalk of origin and not a conglomeration of assorted people bonded together by colonialism. Though these institutions differ from place to place among the Igbo people, the underlying principle and practice are the same in every Igbo community. These institutions are all channelled towards the growth and well-being of every Igbo person.

This chapter brings into the open the society's role as a group to foster development in various Igbo aspects of life. Each Igbo community is designed as a self-governing group who are able to effect a group development with little or no support of the present Nigerian political establishments. To this Egboh (1987: Foreword pages) wrote:

...the Igbo communities, with or without financial assistance from government, had succeeded in building primary and secondary schools, in granting a series of scholarships, constructing roads and bridges, developing markets and motor parks, erecting hospitals, health and civic centres, and providing pipe-borne water, rural electrification and postal facilities. All of this had gone a long way in making the rural areas more attractive to live in, thereby encouraging in those areas, the development and growth of cottage industries which had helped to attract back to the rural communities most of the unemployed able-bodied youths who had migrated from the rural areas to the towns in search of employment.

At this juncture, let me consider the major symbols, elements and institutions of Igbo cultural solidarity.

## 5.2 THE *OJI* “KOLA-NUT KING”: IGBO FIRST SYMBOL OF CULTURAL SOLIDARITY AND DEVELOPMENT

The Kola nut tree<sup>50</sup> is locally grown among the Igbo and other parts of Nigeria to meet the local demand. Among the Igbo people, it is said that the sharing of meals and drinks is considered less important than first, sharing the kola nut. The sharing of kola has developed a symbolic value of cultural solidarity of true peace and co-existence among Igbo communities. The presentation of kola in a community meeting calls for ritual prayers in which the community expresses a willingness to co-operate with all in the land for its growth and development. Since growth and development can meaningfully happen or take place in a conducive environment the sharing of kola-nut among the Igbo people creates such perfect trust and peaceful ground for community development. Such is the vital social and ritual role *Oji* plays in the Igbo culture. It is about this value that Uchendu (1965: 74) wrote:

...the kola nut is the greatest symbol of Igbo hospitality. It always comes first. “It is the King.” To be presented with a kola nut is to be made welcome; ...and one is most welcome when kola is shared with joy and prayer.

The kola nut as an Igbo symbol of solidarity and unity plays a vital role in keeping the Igbo communities together in their effort to establish common good. It serves the purpose of peace and unity among the people. In the presentation of a kola nut before any group meeting, sincerity of purpose is testified and justified. All who are present in such community development ventures are reassured of a clear purpose of progress. Hence, without the presentation of kola nut by the host (be it individual family, group of persons or the community as a whole) a meeting’s agenda may not be introduced before the participants. Such is the role of *Oji* among the Igbo people.

Among other roles of *Oji* is its symbolic and meaningful use in the settlement of conflict between two brothers, groups and community. As noted by Ukaegbu (<http://kaleidoscope.igbonet.com/culture/kolanutseries/jukaegbu/>. Accessed 23 Feb. 2011),

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<sup>50</sup> Kola tree is botanically known as *cola-acuminata* and *cola-nitida* depending on the species one is dealing with, as a nut grown on the tree, when matured and is harvested, can be chewed but contains caffeine.

a case between two brothers, Ezeakam and Igwe was settled by their eldest brother (after dialogue and deliberation has taken place)<sup>51</sup> Elem, who “...brought a piece of kola nut and divided it into two and gave one half to each.” When settling murder case in an Abiriba (a town in northern Igbo land) traditional way, kola nut is normally used (to cement the agreement reached). In a general sense, the kola nut in Igbo land constitutes a remarkable social symbol of hospitality, life, peace, kindness, good-will, commensality, fraternity, reconciliation and integrity. The kola is a typical multi-referential social symbol. ...the kola nut and palm wine are jointly used in the Igbo sacrament of *Igba-Ndu* – final reconciliation of man with God in all disputes or misunderstandings.” The unconditional attention given to *Oji* symbolism reveals much of the Igbo cultural identity.

*Oji* therefore remains the ‘King’ symbol that directs the Igbo people’s venture to development, growth and expansion. As *Oji* is noted in every Igbo people’s activities, the role and its value cannot be over emphasised. Other such areas of usage include marriage introductions between two families, all religious rituals, all social gatherings and in all individual visitations to friends and even conflict parties in search of reconciliation.

### **5.3 THE *OFO*<sup>52</sup>: IGBO SYMBOL OF TRUTH AND LEADERSHIP IN CULTURAL SOLIDARITY AND DEVELOPMENT**

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<sup>51</sup> The words in the brackets are mine

<sup>52</sup>In Igbo believe system *Ofo* is thought to have come from *Chukwu* (God), who intends it to be used by leaders of different categories in Igbo land, in order to promote justice and fair play in their areas of authority. Igbo scholars like Ejizu (1986: 20-23) recorded a belief (Myth) that: “It is believed that in the heavenly compound of *Chukwu* there is an *Ofo* tree similar to the *Ofo* tree on earth. Through this tree the Supreme Being transmits his blessing to the creatures who occupy the compounds. The holder of earthly *Ofo* is believed to receive communications spiritually from the Creator and his obligation to be just as the Creator”. The function or role of *Ofo* in Igbo socio-religious and political leadership cannot be over emphasized. For instance, in the actual service of socio-religious leadership, *Ofo* is always used by Elder’s group in all major events in Igbo life. Such events like sacrifice (*Ichu-Aja*), inaugurating a Chief, enacting a law, making vital judgments at meetings, oath taking, etc, require the use of *Ofo* to authenticate the exercise. In fact, the Igbo theology of leadership is based on the significance of *Ofo* (Igwebuikie 2010:27).

The Igbo term *Ofo* is the proper name for two related objects. First, it refers to a particular plant species which grows in the Igbo land. And second in a derived sense, it identifies the twig or branch let from the wood of that tree. Both the plant and its stick are equally referred to as *Ofo*. The tree is a local feral (uncultivated) plant. Its nearest classification would be the oil bean tree. When fully grown, *Ofo* plant could tower to some sixty (60) feet high, and bulk to some three (3) feet in diameter in its main trunk. It is

The *Ofo* is a symbolic element of authority among the Igbo people. In its understanding among the Igbo people, *Ofo* is defined as a special consecrated piece of stick and a central/sacred symbol of unity, justice, law, authority and truth of the Igbo religion. It is primarily a staff of office which symbolises justice, law, authority and truth of the Igbo religion. It is primarily a staff of office (a wooden symbol of authority) which symbolizes justice, righteousness and truth (Njaka, 1974:25). In other words *Ofo* promotes, guides and builds cultural solidarity. As noted in the previous chapter, each family, village community and town among the Igbo people, has established authority otherwise known as an *Ofo* holder. The holder or bearer of *Ofo* remains a leader of a specific grouping or community that leads with the elder-leader group to the desired development. The *Ofo* gives the leader a natural right to oppose any move that do not encourage and advance development in the Igbo communities.

*Ofo* as noted earlier is a branch of a tree known as *Detarium elastica* a special piece of wood that is revered and has a central symbol of unity, authority, peace and justice, and truth among the Igbo people. In matters of religious development among the Igbo people, *Ofo* remains the most important symbol (Okafor, 1992:31). Since the elder-holder of *Ofo* is considered to be 'righteous' or at least a good person, through this function he reveals the wills of the Great Spirit (God), the ancestors and truth in community matters of arbitration, he is highly demanded by this task to seek truth and commune common good in the community. In its role as conferrer of authority and leadership, *Ofo* is used to consecrate chiefs and titleholders, laws are ratified and consecrated with the *Ofo* and none of these is valid without *Ofo* being used. Ezeanya (1967:3) described *Ofo* as the Igbo traditional symbol of justice and truth which occupies a place of honour in the religious life of the Igbo people. By these activities the *Ofo* holder plays an important role in politics, religion and judiciary. Symbolising ancestral office, the *Ofo* bearer holds ritual authority to challenge any individual

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pertinent to note that, Dalziel J. McEwen (1872-1948, a Scottish botanist) was reported to have identified the *Ofo* tree, botanically, as *Detarium Senegalense* (*Detarium elastica*, note footnote 17 above). And this has been the name widely used for *Ofo*, the tree and its twigs (branch), by subsequent writers like, Green, Ilogu, Njaka, Uzukwu and others (Ejizu, 1986:22). To show the importance of *Ofo* among the Igbo people, families name their children like *Ofokanshi* (*Ofo* as truth is stronger than poison), *Ofoleta* (*Ofo* as truth looks after one) *Ofonaeche* (*Ofo* as truth protects), *Ogujiofor* (He who has *Ofo* as truth has it all), *Ihejiofor* (*Ofo* holds the truth like the light) *O ji Ofo k'ala* (He who holds *Ofo* as truth, overcomes all obstacles), etc.

or group of people who have not co-operated with the common effort to achieve growth and development among the Igbo communities.

The *Ofo* influence brings with it a quality demanded of Igbo leaders and emphasizes their transparent orientation. The leader should be accessible to all just as *Ofo* representation. Any leader who holds *Ofo* is required to vindicate his innocence regularly through the *iju-ogu*<sup>53</sup> religious rite, the affirmation of innocence (Uchendu, 1965:17). Hence, since the *Ofo* holder inherits an ancestral political and religious office he will be required to fulfil the following conditions and tasks at the inauguration of his office which he holds on behalf of the village or town family as understood among the Igbo people.

- He must be a responsible person of respect through his impeccable or unquestionable character in the community.
- He must be the first male born son in the family or his extended family must enjoy that position in a given Igbo community. In cases where a first-born has any natural impediment (deaf and dumb and blindness for example), another fitting male is chosen to fulfil this office.
- The *Ofo* serves the purpose of conflict resolution and reconciliation
- He must be a natural citizen of the Igbo village community
- It serves for the unity character of a given Igbo community
- He must be one who has sworn an oath of office to protect the solidarity and development among the Igbo people or a community (Jell-Bahlsen 1980:210-214).

The *Ofo* holder among the Igbo people having fulfilled these conditions is tasked with a responsibility of political and religious leadership. By his role of leadership, the *Ofo* symbol holder plays the central role of motivating the entire community to pursue justice in a peaceful manner in every act of growth and development. Whether in community efforts to

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<sup>53</sup> The *iju-ogu* rite is a religious rite by which an *Ofo* holder proclaims or confesses before the public his innocence over a judgement or settlement of a conflict. By it he calls on the ancestors and God to be his witness of telling the truth by holding the authority and truth symbol the *Ofo*, and all are expected to accept his confessions and proceedings therewith.

protect culture or in its observance of traditions that have developed in the course of time, the *Ofo* holder plays the sealing role of community living towards a common harmony. Therefore in conflict periods, the *Ofo* symbol plays the role of reconciling the conflict parties. It is in these symbolic roles that *Ofo* is held in high honours among the Igbo people. While emphasizing on *Ofo* social and political roles Okafor (1992: 33) noted thus:

...*Ofo* therefore in its symbolic function is highly social and political; it has been successfully used to sanctify laws and this prevents their violation. The Igbo has utilized *Ofo* in his religion in the regulation of social order, in the adjudication of cases, and in the maintenance of effective administration.

Having pointed out these two main Igbo solidarity symbols that is the *Oji* and *Ofo* let me turn to the Igbo institutions that have contributed immensely to the growth and development of the people.

#### **5.4 THE *DIBIA*<sup>54</sup> FRATERNITY: INSTITUTION OF THE COMMUNITY PRIEST IN CULTURAL SOLIDARITY AND DEVELOPMENT AMONG THE IGBO**

The *dibia* fraternity among the Igbo people's cultural development is comprised of a number of men and women who are entrusted with the local medical knowledge of curative powers. These herbs, roots and leaves are prepared as charms that positively or negatively influence a particular individual or group behaviour. In the Igbo religious institution, this group of individuals play the role of community or village priests and psychologists as the case may be.

As priests, the Igbo *dibia* fraternity conduct all religious rituals, offer the required sacrifices for continued peace and solidarity of the Igbo people and also attend to all who may require cultural medical cure of one sickness or the other. As psychologists, this same group

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<sup>54</sup> The *dibia* is a term used by the Igbo to describe a group of men and women who have formed an association of local medicine healers and through this association they meet regularly in protection of their practices and rights from being violated. Not only do they meet to protect their interests and share new knowledge of local medical cures of certain illnesses in solidarity with all members, they also meet to discuss their difficulties and regulations in practicing their profession in any Igbo communities.

functions as therapists to individuals or group of persons who may be in need of mental or spiritual stability during a malfunctioning instance in Igbo communities. Henceforth, Jell-Bahlsen (1980: 157) noted thus:

...active *dibias* are outstanding individuals who are highly respected and sometimes feared due to their extraordinary abilities to handle issues and cases of ill health presented to them. *Dibias* are consulted in all major events of life such as childbirth-difficulties, family misfortunes, illness and search for cure of diseases and other life-crises.

As Okafor (1992: 32) noted, the term *dibia* is loosely and widely used among the Igbo people to describe various functionaries like a diviner, herbalist or a medicine man or woman but are all grouped under the *dibia* fraternity institution. A *dibia* in the strict sense of the word refers to a particular 'calling' of an individual to perform some life saving mission to the community. Therefore, a *dibia's* profession is not a moneymaking venture but a mission that is a calling in this sense.

In the Igbo cultural development, an individual who saves lives by providing such services as explained herewith is mainly paid by the charity of the people. He or she does not charge in the form of money for the services but accepts the offer from people in the form of live animals or a portion of meat, vegetables, cassava roots, yams and coco yam tubers etc...for payment. While affirming this value among the Igbo people on *dibia* fraternity institutional development, Uzuoku (1996: 126-127) expressed disappointment while evaluating the recent developments in the Christian Church and the ministers who use their gifts or ministry as money making ventures. He wrote thus:

...Priests... who parade gifts to fascinate the laypeople or to make money are comparable to the *Ofeke-dibia* (foolish, fake and ignorant medicine men) of the Igbo tradition. They constitute a danger to the community because they could practice sorcery or poisoning to make money. All those services surrounding that reality which is generically referred to in African tradition as *Ogwu* (Igbo) - meaning medication, herbs – are considered beneficial social services when positively rendered; ...they are never primarily considered as a source of wealth or of the provision of one's livelihood.

Such value indeed challenges our contemporary way of living where social services to save human life have become a money centred venture. In recent times disturbing news of poor people dying or being turned away by our social medical centres because they have no

money to pay for their medical treatments have become the order of the day. Life saving treatments should not be based on who has money or not. The social medical services must be based on equal human rights where all are treated with respect and dignity. The Igbo cultural solidarity practice in this case remains a challenge in our societies where the poor die from treatable diseases since they cannot afford the cost of treatment. This point will be further stressed in the next chapter as we evaluate this study.

### **5.5 THE OZO: INSTITUTION OF THE TITLED MEN AND WOMEN IN IGBO CULTURAL SOLIDARITY AND DEVELOPMENT**

Among the Igbo people, titled men and women serve on an important cultural and educational decision making body. In the Igbo cultural organisation, the institution of the titled men and women is comprised of a number of influential Igbo personnel; namely the elder men and women leaders, different heads of village communities, heads of village-groups (towns), heads of *dibia* village fraternities, heads of Igbo town unions and the heads of *Mmanwu* (masquerade) institutions etc...(Duru, 1980: 30).

Chieftaincy titles therefore among the Igbo people in its practice of cultural solidarity serve the purpose and target to promote hard work, high moral standard in the society and to encourage and recognise individual achievements. In its focus, the individual remains the centre and concern, while the community reflects the courage and acceptance of the individual's hard work. The individual is highly promoted by way of recognition of personal contributions towards the Igbo people's growth and development. It is to this effect and demonstration Jell-Bahlsen (1980: 136) wrote:

...individual progress is an evident goal of the individual members of Igbo society. Traditionally, such individual progress is based on the individual's productivity contributing towards the reproduction of society as a whole; society is thereby constantly reconstituted. The individual progresses and reaches successively higher levels of social status throughout his/her life, thereby participating in society and contributing towards the continuation of society constantly reproduce society physically as well as the social relations and culture of their society.

This means that every hard working Igbo individual is entitled to become a title holder, the mark of community approval and encouragement. Though a community may approach an individual to take a title because one has contributed immensely to the development of his or her community, one who can afford by payment for some kind of title in one's community may still do so. Yet, one must have made his money honestly to qualify for such titles and for them to be worth any value in the community. This rule is in place to protect the important value or role title plays among the Igbo people. Generally, persons of ability, well reflected, diligence and good sense of respect earn themselves such recognitions and worthy respect in the Igbo cultural solidarity in their respective communities. It is based on these reasons that Ifemesia (2002:87-88) wrote thus...

...the privileges and obligations of the title-holder demanded that such wealth must have obtained honestly, a condition which was easily ascertained in a small community where everybody knew everybody else. Generally, wealth was regarded as a reflection of ability, diligence and good sense; hence the demonstration of wealth or well-being in title-taking gave a new and higher status (of course to encourage more individual productivity in the community)<sup>55</sup>. *Ozo* (among other titles) was of course, acquired only by the freeborn<sup>56</sup> citizen and by the naturalized resident alien. The title-holder was looked upon as a man or woman of reliable character, tact, integrity and sound judgement; a man in favour with his people, able to build up some following, and to contribute materially to the progress of the community.

Painfully though, it must be noted that currently "money" has taken the centre stage with regards to some cases of chieftaincy title taking among the Igbo people. In modern times it has been known that some wealthy persons have succeeded in "purchasing" the right to the *Ozo*-titles reserved for a certain group of families since it is hereditary in nature. This is so because of corruption resulting from individual greed and disrespect of tradition. Owing to this reason, there is discrimination against such *Ozos* whose "roots" as it were are not in the "blessed soil," but in the fleeting (transitory) air (Egudu 1971: 76-79).

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<sup>55</sup> Words in brackets are mine.

<sup>56</sup> Freeborn citizens is emphasised here since the *Ozo* title among the Igbo people is held at the highest honour and is reserved for highly respected individuals in the society. To some Igbo community traditions, it is a hereditary title. None of the not-free citizens like the *Osu* (Slaves) as was earlier practised among Igbo communities was allowed to hold such titles. The *Osu* are members of a class-based social group who are descendants of cult slaves who had been sacrificed (not killed) but dedicated to a deity generations ago (Duru, 1980: 207).

Not only this, the love of money among Igbo leaders in recent times have contributed to the disrespect for the process of selection of worthy members of the society to be honoured and recognised with the Igbo gesture of chieftaincy titles. Bribery and corruption of the traditional officials by the wealthy and well connected in the society have weighed down the significance accorded to chieftaincy titles among the Igbo people. Sources of individual money are no longer checked before people are accorded with Igbo titles these days. Corrupt individuals rather get to have titles no matter where their money comes from. The Igbo so called “Kings” have connived with thieves, robbers and even known corrupt individuals in government to arrange titles outside the community’s approval. This is a huge challenge to the Igbo cultural solidarity and development in this modern day era. I will return to this worrisome concern in the next chapter when I make the critical evaluation of this study.

The titled men and women play a significant role and command respect in cultural solidarity in governance of the Igbo people. In matters of adjudications and any development ventures among the communities, decisions are still reached through and based on a consultative process. No one person (even the title holders) in the Igbo community is allowed to make any unilateral decisions on matters that affect the entire community. All interest groups and individuals are consulted on issues affecting them.

The institution of titled men and women can be identified with the following cultural solidarity and development functions, roles and tasks in and around Igbo communities:

- As custodians of the Igbo people’s cultural solidarity, the titled men and women are charged with the vital role of guarding and protecting the Igbo community values, hence they remain a major asset to Igbo development (Achebe, 1966: 63).
- The Igbo economic growth rests in their hands since almost all of them are great yam (food) producers who have shown great ability to feed their community. An adult member of Igbo society is expected to raise many children and he proves himself as a good farmer in yam production. His taking a title completes his social status as a respected hard working individual (Jell-Bahlsen, 1980: 138-148).
- As a group that constitutes peace and justice institution among Igbo people, its role in conflict and crises resolution remains very prominent.

- As an individual's wealth grows and one expected to join this association, the central idea is to encourage solidarity through the sharing of one's wealth and riches. Hence, this group functions as a propeller to the even distribution of wealth in the community as a whole. Title holders therefore play the role among the rich Igbo people to share their wealth with the poor and the needy of the community (Isichei, 1976: 104; Agbasiere, 2000: 40; Ifemesie, 2002: 87-90).

Hence, titles primarily engage every Igbo in social recognition of individuals for the promotion of morals, hard work, leadership and protection of Igbo integrity in their long search for solidarity. As an institution, titleholders exercise a form of social control by laying down certain rules of conduct for their members and proscribing certain forms of behaviour, which are considered unworthy of a titled man or woman. Even today as Uchendu (1965: 82) noted, this institution has not out lived its usefulness, nor has it lost its appeal to the contemporary Igbo people (Achebe, 1965: 63).

Finally, every Igbo man and woman looks forward to such social recognition and therefore promotion of the individual commitment and hard work to contribute to the growth and development of the Igbo people. Titles centre on promotion of solidarity among every Igbo. Women are also accorded with this social honour and respect for their contribution towards the growth of the Igbo people (Ifemesie, 2002: 87). In Igbo matrilineal traditions therefore, women of great honour and respect had enjoyed positions of leadership and consequently were accorded titles of Igbo respect namely chiefs and *Lolo* (Lady of honour) [Agbasiere, 2000: xxiv, Plate 1; 40-41].

## **5.6 THE IGBO INSTITUTION OF DEVELOPMENT UNIONS IN CULTURAL SOLIDARITY AND DEVELOPMENT**

As noted in our last chapter, every Igbo community before the colonial era was an autonomous unit and had pursued its own interest and independent policies in social, economic and political matters in search of common good. Communal solidarity was always the centre and major successes, depended on how a community was able to drive, manage or

steer this wagon to its desired conclusion. However, to do justice to the institution of the Igbo Development Unions, a brief historical background will be necessary and unavoidable to help us understand this aspect of our study. The Igbo people in the era of colonialism were faced with the inescapable presence of the outside world (just like any other people's colonial experience); various Igbo communities lost their political power and therefore their independence. This political and social reality change dawned among the Igbo when the British conquered Igbo land between 1900 and 1910 (Egboh, 1987: 8).

Alongside these inevitable changes were three other major ones that affected immensely the Igbo ways of life; namely Christianity (new way of religious belief and following came into place), Western Education (Western system of primary and secondary education produced village graduates in search of new life) and Urbanization (small and big cities came into place and attracted a huge number of population); all these factors led the traditional Igbo people to look elsewhere for survival from the changes. The Igbo people who were known for their firm rootedness in village communities were now to leave and settle outside (abroad) their village groups (Uchendu, 1965: 38; Egboh, 1987: 9).

However, the following changes and factors could be attributed to the formation of Igbo Development/Welfare Union's Institution as noted by Egboh (1987: 10-12), thus:

- Having left their known home surrounding and settled in the new urban centres, the Igbo people were faced with enormous challenges of isolation away from home. Their general feeling was that this isolation, over the years, might lead to a complete submergence of their traditional values and ways of life.
- More so, as the Igbo people were scattered in different parts of the new urban centres where they sojourned, they lost their traditional village life style and found it difficult to secure the co-operation of their fellows (as was the case in village community) in the solution of common problems.
- There was also what was referred to as 'heterogeneous elements' as the urban centres harboured people from different villages and ethnic groups. These diverse elements sometimes revived in their new environments hostilities which had plagued them in the villages and ethnic areas from which they had come; with the result that each of

the groups feared that its rivals might constitute a serious threat to its means of existence and livelihood in the urban areas.

To address all these concerns and difficulties therefore, unity was to be maintained in the form of cultural solidarity among these Igbo urban dwellers. This situation created among the Igbo people a strong desire and sense for a reunion with their kith and kin in the villages. It was based on this state of affairs that each Igbo group and tribe came to the conclusion to establish associations of their members in each of the urban areas where they were residing (Coleman, 1958: 213-214; Isichei, 1976: 217 and Egboh, 1987: 11).

Uchendu (1965: 37), while verifying the foundation and formation of the Family-Unions, Village-Unions, Town-Unions and Development/Welfare Unions as they are known in different expressions or names of this institution among the Igbo people, wrote:

...in Nigerian and other West African cities where some Igbo people work or seek paid labour, the need to protect themselves and to educate the newcomers in the city ways, as well as to act as pressure groups in their respective village and district politics, led to the formation of various associations called Family Meetings or Improvement Unions. These associations meet at home... to plan welfare developments, map strategy for the local councillors, and, in an election year, influence voting through propaganda and the reinterpretation of major political issues in language their people can understand. As opinion leaders and innovators, their role is to explain the demands of their changing world to their people and to analyze the implications of the political choices they make at the polls.

Hence, the Development Unions among the Igbo people came about as a result of its reaction to the contact with the foreign world and therefore serves as a means, the Igbo people were to manage, re-adjust or cope with this event or advent of the western world and modernity. The birth of development union-institution was very much a contemporary age in which an Igbo living outside his/her natural location was able to keep contact with their aspirations and desires back in their rural communities.

This is the understanding of Igbo village-groups in which their autonomy and self-determination manifest in their decisions or plans, and the state is not expected to interfere. The Town Unions in other words relate to the mentality of the Igbo people and most of the

time the present day state governments need to liaise with the Unions to be able to reach the Igbo people. But most of all, these unions are to protect the larger interests and development plans of their Igbo communities; and it is on this note that I will enumerate the developmental roles and activities of the Igbo Unions to improve the common life of every Igbo both at home and abroad. Nzimiro, (1971: 175) identify the following roles:

- Igbo Unions serve as link between the Igbo urban migrants and their rural based are to maintain cultural solidarity among all Igbo people. Hence, for the Igbo who are outside their home communities, these associations based on the lineage structure, became important centres for readjustment and for contact with “home” people.
- The urban situation into which the Igbo people found themselves did not provide them with adequate social adjustment. The improvement and Patriotic Unions seemed to fulfil this need and help them adjust to the rigours of the new setting, among other things, making available to them ideas and attitudes with which they were familiar in their rural base.
- Having been exposed to the new urban social life in their various stations, these Igbo elites used these associations as channels through which urban cultural ideas and habits were transmitted to the Igbo villages. They were forward in the establishment of modern institutions such as schools, hospitals and clinic/health centres, and pipe-borne water. Also identical to these Unions are the establishments of new modern-built markets, community halls and recreational facilities for their “towns” (Nzimiro, 1971: 176).

Finally, it must be noted here that much of the achievements recorded by the Igbo by means of educational institutions and modern amenities were a result of the single-minded exertions of the Patriotic and Improvement Unions. Emphasising the importance of these Igbo Unions earlier on Uchendu (1965: 38) wrote:

...for the Igbo, helping the town “to get up”<sup>57</sup> is nothing short of an obsession. It requires community action and self-sponsored welfare programs, which in turn demand sacrifice from the individual as well as from the town. The town helps its

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<sup>57</sup> Refer to footnote No. 21 above.

citizens to “get up” just as the citizens help the town. The prestige of one is tied to the prestige of the other.

### **5.7 IGBA-NDU: IGBO INSTITUTIONAL MECHANISM FOR RECONCILIATION IN CULTURAL SOLIDARITY AND DEVELOPMENT**

Among the Igbo people, cultural solidarity or unity is a means of rural development and improvement which is highly valued as this study has shown so far. Yet, in the search or midst of this great human value, the Igbo people have experienced conflicts, problems and misunderstandings in dealing with one another. The Igbo in its life paradigm, *Igba-ndu* (binding-rebinding-life together), was designed as a cultural mechanism of resolving these conflicts which is bound to occur. Winning each other’s trust again after conflict, requires another mechanism in order to be able to live or dwell in the land in peace; remains there the central focus of this life mending ritual, which is the institution of reconciliation. This mechanism *Igba-ndu* among the Igbo people is a means of communal, individual or group deliberation, consultation or dialogue seeking understanding and amendment over issues surrounding two conflicting parties; and is described as a religio-cultural design of the Igbo institution to manage conflict among its members.

In its first dimension, *Igba-ndu* ritual among the Igbo is an institution used as a tool to establish a formal and fundamental agreement between parties to treat each other with respect and dignity. Emphasising on the value of this institution among the Igbo cultural solidarity, Isichei (1976: 65) noted that *Igba-ndu* is a type of blood covenant whereby parties involved agree to respect each other’s dealings especially in commerce. Rural mutual understanding is reached at by the ritual, which involves mixing their life-blood, a symbol of shared life and to respect other people’s way and style of life. Oduyoye (1986: 111) observed:

...As a technique... *Igba-ndu* is universal practice among the Igbo people; by which the bonds of kinship were simulated and expanded. Leading traders in towns through which a trade route passed would form these bonds with each other, guaranteeing each other’s safety while they were within their sphere of influence. Lesser men, travelling, made use of such a wealthy and powerful patron’s protection.

In its second dimension, *Igba-ndu* serves as an institution of re-binding life together after conflict has occurred and is to be sorted out between two troubled parties. In this setting it serves as the final ritual by which an individual's or group conflict is resolved and settled. Conflict or misunderstanding between two Igbo individuals or communities can be a hindrance or obstacle to rural development since it harms their cultural solidarity. It is on this second application that Uchendu (1965: 17) wrote:

...to dispel suspicion and reassure themselves that no evil is planned, two friends whose relations are strained may resort to *Igba-ndu* - a formal oath for re-establishing confidence - in which one may drink the blood of the other. A stranger may be required to swear repeatedly to his host ...patron-client relationships as well as doctor-patient relationships may be strengthened by repeated swearing of fidelity.

It is because of this reality that we can reasonably conclude that the Igbo people put so much value on transparent living. And they are realistic enough to believe that some people will not live up to the ideal behaviour unless they are constrained to do so. On a positive note though, the Igbo people must be commended for finding a place and system of conflict resolution and management.

Moreover, the dynamism these two dimensions of the *Igba-ndu* among the Igbo people is the frequent renewal, re-mending and the reconstruction of human relationship that is endangered by well-known human limitations. These limitations cut across the human spectrum. Marriage and relationships between families, business associates, clans and village-groups are ritually renewed when endangered by betrayal and failure of one party or the other to keep the agreements. While emphasising on this institutional development in the Igbo cultural solidarity Uzukwu (1996: 86-87) wrote:

...the ritual for this renewal is called...binding life together or making a covenant. God, ancestors, divinities (especially the powerful Earth Spirit), and the entire community act together in the rite to re-create the society. The terms for renewal are spelled out. The participants call on all the divinities to bear united witness of their commitment to the life-enhancing terms of behaviour. This ritual has been Christianized and has been yielding interesting results in the healing and renewal of relationships of all types.

The *Igba-ndu* ritual has two main dimensions namely, the symbolic act of libation and the sharing in the meal. These two acts are very significant in the celebration of this covenantal

feast. Libation as an act of offering (pouring) drink to the gods and as food thrown to the ancestors is a visible sign of the participation of the ancestors and the necessary spirits. By such a physical presentation, the mind of the partakers is led into the assurance of the sanction of the ancestral world. Libation by its own virtue plays the role of bringing or making present the invisible presence of the spirit world. Past and present are reunited and are made one. In some cases, during a given ritual meal as Oduyoye (1986: 111) points out, food is placed on the grave of an ancestor showing his or her full participation.

Of course, when the dead (spirit world) have been fed in this sense, the people present are invited to join in the meal which has been provided and approved by the ancestor's participation in the ritual. A shared meal brings the covenant to a close and a refusal of anyone will be seen to show or demonstrate hostility and ill will. The Igbo abhors this kind of behaviour and thus the Igbo expression of at least *i metu nri aka m'obu onu*; 'touching or testing the meal' to show that one has no ill will over the celebration and the covenant reached over a conflict resolution event (Anyanele, 2001:6).

Finally, in the eventuality of practising this ritual institution, the act of sharing a meal by the two reconciling or covenantal parties, becomes the crowning event. In essence, whenever the 'ritual meal' (as *Igba-ndu* is sometimes called) is celebrated, peace, joy and happiness, unity and harmony are the reached targets. The re-enforcement of life bond that exists in the Igbo communities in support of all that cohabit in the land is always the focus. The participation of one and all in the very act of 'sharing meal' is a symbolic gesture of re-enforcement of the life of all. A covenant of cultural solidarity is reached to respect all who live in the land; and one dare not think of breaking the agreement made in the ritual meal. The *Igba-ndu* as an Igbo institution of life mending, serves a great deal to improve the rural Igbo life of development. It is this point that shall be highly credited for providing a much needed peace in the Igbo cultural solidarity.

## 5.8 THE *OMENALA*: THE IGBO JURIDICAL INSTITUTION OF PEACE AND JUSTICE IN CULTURAL SOLIDARITY AND DEVELOPMENT

*Omenala* is a set of known unwritten rules and regulations that guide the Igbo daily life. Its modern day equivalence is a written constitution of a group or State. Literally it means what happens on the land and encompasses native law and customs that have been transmitted from one generation to the next, within Igbo society, and it prescribes the ethics on which societal norms are based. A violation of these customary laws has dire consequences for a group-enforcement. Ostracism<sup>58</sup> (that is an offender being ex-communicated from Igbo village community activities [Achebe 1966: 145-46]), as appropriate punishment for an individual's offence against the community, could be enforced therefore when an Igbo individual breaks a customary law that merits such treatment. According to Mozia (1987: 221), *Omenala* are legitimate acts and reactions observed in the land. It includes all provisions and prohibitions, traditional beliefs and practices that are contained in the unwritten laws and customs and brought down from the ancestors their Igbo posterities.

In another thought Ifemesia (2002: 35) noted a clear distinction between the Igbo *Omenala* (customary laws) as opposed to *Iwu*<sup>59</sup> (enacted laws). While *Omenala* means action in

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<sup>58</sup> Ostracism among the Igbo people should be well understood and placed in applicable situations. Ostracism remains a symbolic act of healing process between an offender and the community... offended. Offences that could attract this penalty include a proven crime of sleeping with another man's or woman's wife/husband, incest and notorious break into a yam barn among many other cases. At any instance of crime committed, the offender is prevented from having any kind of dealings with the entire community. This is a painful experience. But the result or remedy achieved by this is among others psychological balance, spiritual and good mental frame of mind to keep the moral standard of the community. This type of case may last for one or two years depending on the nature of the offence. At the end of the period, the offender is required to pay a fine or offer a sacrifice to appease the ancestors, spirits and the Mother Earth and to be able to reintegrate oneself in the community's life.

When a required sacrifice has been done (which involves the killing of a goat or chicken as the village assembly is convoked for a ritual meal; and as libation and offering of Oji by the Shrine-Priest is done [Arenze 1974:31-34]), the offender and the land are believed to have been healed (Uzukwu 1997:51-54). The offender again is reintegrated into the community and nobody is expected to refer to the case already forgiven, otherwise offence is taken against the individual. Through this long process of searching for peace and coherence, unity, friendship and trust is restored again in the community.

<sup>59</sup> It might be useful to mention at this juncture that at last a beginning has been made in the systematic codification or collection of Igbo customary law (*Omenala*) itself. Some years ago Dr. S.N.C. Obi, the former Commissioner for Law Revision in Anambra State, together with his team of 8 law officers published *The Customary Law Manual: A Manual of Customary Law Obtaining in the former Anambra*

accordance with (the stipulations of) the land, *Iwu* means something decided, enacted or struck. In other words, there is something of a natural element in the institution of *Omenala* while *Iwu* is an acquired act and imitation in quality. In yet another distinction, while *Omenala* can be linked to the ancestors (first observers) and to God (as in natural law) it cannot be easily altered or repealed; whereas *Iwu* is enacted by man and can be revoked by any man in position or office to do so (Duru, 1980: 90). Hence realising the divine origin of the Igbo customary laws (*Omenala*), notes that the living members of the communities show great respect for them and see them as an indispensable means of bringing about unity or cultural solidarity among the living Igbo communities.

On the content of *Omenala*, it is expressed in some basic norms, which serve as provisions and prohibitions for people in every age and place. These norms encourage whatever will help to promote community solidarity that leads to the common good; yet, it also forbids whatever is detrimental to the community comfort or good. Some of these norms include the following, as noted by Okafor (1992: 28-29; 35 and Duru 1980: 90-96):

- No one claims equality with *Chukwu*, the great God
- Sexual offences like incest in any form are unacceptable
- Homicide or murder of human life is unacceptable
- The stealing of farm produce of a neighbour or anyone else is offence
- The stealing of livestock from a neighbour or a stranger is unacceptable
- Killing of dedicated and sacred animals (Achebe 1965: 167)
- Cutting down of sacred trees
- The unmasking of an official Masquerade (Achebe (1965: 168)

These and many others are some contents of the customary Igbo laws, which target promotion of life and the well-being of Igbo communities. In the instance of any of these offences in a given Igbo community, one could attract the punishment of being excommunicated from community activities so that the community is not corrupted with the

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and Imo States of South-Eastern Nigeria (Enugu: Government Printer, 1977). This comprises in its nearly 400 page work which was ascertained in the course of field research carried out over a period of five years (Ifemesia, 2002: 35).

wrong of an individual. Excommunications could last for years until one shows a full sign of repentance and willingness to keep to the unity of moral behaviour that guide the community.

In essence, these laws protect the dignity of the human person and the integrity of the family as well as the socio-economic, political and educational life of the Igbo people. The strengthening of Igbo cultural solidarity leading to its rural development is the vital role of *Omenala*. While quoting Osuji on this point Mozia (1987: 224) noted thus:

...The Igbo norms are meant to protect moral principles, which are manifested in the customs and cultures enveloping such values, like solidarity found in it. The norms are types of restricting order “don’ts” – which has been rectified...and handed down to the community through the ancestors.

## **5.9 THE *MMANWU*: MASQUERADE INSTITUTION OF SPORTS AND RECREATION IN IGBO CULTURAL SOLIDARITY AND DEVELOPMENT**

The *Mmanwu* institution is the final major Igbo development institution that plays an important role in achieving cultural solidarity as the focus remains on the common good of all. The masquerade institution in other words, can also be referred to as a ‘Secret’<sup>60</sup> society. The Igbo people in the course of time had developed a tradition of discipline as Achebe (1958: 155) noted, dancing and competitive wrestling (socialization) are also part of their recreational community activities. Societies of this kind are mainly divided into age groups whereby every age group in the community is assigned to a particular role and duty to render as a social group. More importantly, it must be noted that by membership of these societies male citizens especially, were recognised as responsible for the growth and common good of the community. The man then was no longer the stripling who was mainly concerned with his private family and playmates, but someone who took part fully in communal labour and other village activities (Ifemesie, 2002: 79).

Meanwhile the following roles and responsibilities that have enhanced life around Igbo communities can be noted as assigned to different secret societies as they contribute to the

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<sup>60</sup> *Mmanwu* or ‘secret’ society is likewise known for its restrictions for membership. There are two main categories: those which were secret largely because they were not open to women and children; and those which were much more secret because they were not even open to all adult males in the community until they reach a particular age or achieve a certain high level of social stature.

Igbo cultural solidarity. As noted by some Igbo scholars and authors like (Ogbalu, 1966: 39-42; Ifemesie, 2002: 78-81) these will include:

- The maintenance of law and order which is one of the prominent functions of the masquerade institution. As a body, they serve as the police of the community.
- In some communities *Mmanwu* is sought after to play or act as a dispute settlement instrument. In disputes of parties over a piece of land or properties of this nature, *Mmanwu* group had been called upon to put an embargo on the use of the disputed land until settlement and ownership of the land had been established through peaceful means provided by Igbo tradition and culture. By so doing they provide or serve as peaceful instruments among the Igbo village communities (Jell-bahlsen, 1980: 152-155).
- This group serves as the standing army of Igbo communities, as youths and adults are usefully trained to defend the Igbo land.
- They enforce the decisions of the people's (Elder-leaders) council and inspiring awe and respect for authority in the people.
- These societies promote moral and character-building envisioned for every Igbo in all generations.
- They also provide a bond of union which transcend kinship affiliations not only within the community but also between it and others in which similar institutions are obtained.
- They provide a yearly or periodical dancing and wrestling competitions that keep the Igbo communities entertained.
- They also organize groups to carry out such public duties as the cleaning of the community source of water-supply, the building and maintenance of roads and bridges, village playing ground and assembly houses.
- They collect community or village dues and fines for punishment of crimes committed in the community or elsewhere.
- Finally, the Igbo secret societies and the concept of the spiritual presence of the ancestors helped to ensure that social continuity was preserved, hereditary rights respected, conduct regulated, and the community entertained (Egboh, 1987: 131-136).

Masquerade as an institution remains a great value of cultural solidarity, humane and unifying components of the old dispensation whose advantages today could be carefully maintained. Not to forget of course its possibilities if further explored, to encourage mutual understanding and extensive cooperation between the Igbo village communities and its neighbours. Initially the role of these secret societies was to contribute immensely towards the cultural solidarity and growth of the Igbo communities as demonstrated by all the roles assigned to it.

At this juncture, it is vital to note a typical concern of an outsider or individual observer of the Igbo institutions and their clear separation in function; the point in consideration is an observer who may wonder how all these institutions can function without clashing with one another at some stage. To the Igbo people, life is not cut into pieces or divided and separated from one issue to the other; rather issues of life augment and complement each other for the good of the society. A law therefore is a given or enacted according to the dictates of the gods or ancestors and indicated by elder-leaders and the community. This is tradition; the moral code dictator. As Okafor (1992: 67-68) rightly noted:

...in some cases however, issues of public interest would be considered privately by an independent group such as age-group (grade) association, council of elder-leaders and titled-men (women); and then brought to the public for further deliberation.

In another instance, further clarifications with regard to these two main types of offence; there is the abomination offence (*nso*) and the others. It is on this Green (1964:99) pointed out thus:

...there are offenses which might be called ordinary human laws and those whose breach is held to be not only illegal but also offence against a supernatural power particularly Ala (the earth) the land. ...such offenses are usually said to be *nso* (taboo) and are distinguished from merely natural offenses.

The law after approval binds all the members of that clan. In any case, the will of the people expressed by the *Oha* (people) in which voting is made, sometimes remains final. At the end, the conscience or spiritual binder is exercised over the consent of the people. This is done by the use of *Ofo* by the chief priests of the clan. If any law passed in this process is broken by any members of the community, it is considered an offence against God, ancestors (the living dead), the Mother-Earth and indeed, the community as a whole.

Note in the example given above there are a number of institutions involved in the exercise of their duties and functions in the making and protecting of the law. These include:

The Ofo symbol spiritual enactment (The symbol of ancestors/spirit presence)

The Dibia, institution of the community priest (Agent for Ofo usage enacting the law)

The Ozo, titled men (women) institution (The protectors and custodians of laws)

The development union (age-group/grade) and the Mmanwu institutions (Policing of the law) and

The Omenala institution (Justice administered by elder-leaders and community).

In this one act of making and protecting the law, most of the Igbo institutions can be seen present and yet, functioning as a unit. All groups are dully assigned their duties as the need arises. There is no conflict whatsoever when an issue comes up to be considered. In any case, when issues like policing the law arises, the development union and *Mmanwu* institutions work hand in hand. But the main issue is that a recognised and respected body/institution is involved when a crime is committed and action needs to be taken.

Other institutions that may not be discussed in this study but worth mentioning here will include the New-Yam festivals; by this feast like celebration, the Igbo introduce the period of new yam harvest. It introduces the time of abundance and food security amongst Igbo communities thereby assuring communities of their survival and continued sustenance in their existence. Secondly, we note the institution of Apprenticeship. This institution as noted in chapter 2 above<sup>61</sup> *Igba-boyi* is a 21<sup>st</sup> century founded institution. It became prominent after the Nigerian-Biafra civil war in the early 1960s. Many able bodied individual Igbo people were found without work or unemployed after this civil war.

Hence, the need of apprenticeship came to be practiced by the Igbo society to re-engage its young minds into the social economy. Young men and women were to be re-introduced into the economic and social stream by serving a known and well to do business man or woman/master (E.g. hand crafts work, blacksmith, buying and sailing products, sowing and

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<sup>61</sup> Ref. to 2.10 above – The Igbo world views...and footnote No.13.

tailoring, textile (local fabric) production etc.), in order to set-up one's own business having served the master, he/she is set free after the elapse of an agreed period of time. The servant in question is morally and financially supported by the master who helps him/her to set-up his/her own business. By this, the cultural solidarity provides a new sense of belonging, by being able to participate again in the modern socio-economic activities among the Igbo people.

Furthermore, it should be noted that the birth and death (burial) institutions are strong marks of cultural solidarity among the Igbo people. In the former institution, the Igbo celebrate birth in the well known naming ceremony by which a newly born is named according to customs and regulations of the land. The later refers to the end of an elder's life by which the Igbo celebrate death. In this case, only the elder's death is celebrated, having lived, contributed and achieved in the Igbo development and in the common good of all who dwell in the land. Indeed the death of a young Igbo citizen is considered a curse and a waste of man power to the growth of the Igbo society. It is by all these institutions herewith discussed that the Igbo people can be defined and respected for their unique way of life in its customs and traditions.

Finally, the *Ohu* and *Osu*<sup>62</sup> cast systems, known to be slavery institutions that existed among the Igbo is another regrettable occurrences of how the individual rights were not respected. This cast system degraded human beings and was therefore a breach of human rights as it may be interpreted today. It discriminated against a class of individuals who were segregated (e.g. restricted on issues of free association in the community and free marriage to any members of the community of their choice etc...) for their association with a particular religious belief and social practice.

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<sup>62</sup> *Osu* is a cult-slave while *Ohu* is a bought-slave and their descendants. The application of this law with regard to the category of *ohu* has become less rigid with the advent of Christianity and education (Agbasiere 2000:96, 103). Green (1964: 24) noted that an *Osu* is a religious slave originally...freeborn (somebody is not in any way associated with the blood relation among the Igbo people), but bought ...and offered as a slave to some deity whose wrath has been aroused and whom the sacrifice of a mere fowl or goat could not satisfy (but human in the form of whole life dedication to its service). In all understanding therefore, *Osu* are members of a class-based social group who are descendants of cult slaves who had been sacrificed to a deity generations ago. This practice has since been discouraged and disbanded by Christian belief and western education that have spread though out Igbo land.

## 5.10 CONCLUSION

This chapter has provided us with an insight into the institutional establishment among the Igbo people by which cultural solidarity is the means of experience. Through these institutions as noted above, the Igbo people had sought development in social, economic, political and educational encounter with individuals and groups alike. By this exposure we have demonstrated in this study how the Igbo cultural solidarity, has provided various bonds that hold the Igbo people and propel them towards growth. One great value that comes across this institutional element of the Igbo cultural solidarity is the interpersonal expression at the diverse levels of their communal lives. The beauty of the Igbo cultural institutions as described above is their overlapping nature. In the provision of a particular amenity in a given Igbo community, a number of institutions can be identified. This means that in the provision of water, good road or market square for the community the elders, development unions and masquerade institutions are all involved. All institutions are tasked with the effort to keep the Igbo community united in search of the common good.

The dynamic and enduring nature of this bond is such that it relied on the promotion and sustenance of the spirit of cultural solidarity between the present and past members of the Igbo communities. As tradition, this link of the living and the ancestors gives meaning to the future which is the hope for Igbo survival. By so doing, the Igbo in their cultural solidarity stress the importance of the past, (the ancestors) which gives meaning and security to the future growth of the Igbo communities. However it must be noted that in spite of the immense value of cultural solidarity among the Igbo people, there is no doubt that the continuous changing socio-economic and political situation is challenging and threatening its continued existence.

Cultural solidarity as a means of development among the Igbo is facing an enormous challenge or test of survival in today's world of secularism, materialism and individualism. Common good is hardly the concern of people any longer. Individualism has become the order of the day. The poor people are abandoned to their own fate. The community concern

for its less privileged is fast becoming a thing of the past. I will come back to this concern in the next chapter as I evaluate this whole study.

The Igbo society has faced inevitable changes however, one of these has to do with the socio-political changes that have affected the Igbo cultural institutions as we have noted above. Although these changes were unavoidable and have also benefited the Igbo communities, they have also taken their toll on the traditional values like Igbo the cultural solidarity. Post colonialism for instance brought 'kingship' (State Affairs) into the Igbo society thereby destroying the elder-leaders system of governance. As Willie Hobbs (2001: 453-459) rightly noted:

...the stateless society of the Igbo was ideal in keeping any particular man from monopolizing the village and being prone to corruption. It is this same feature that situates wisdom in the *ndichie*<sup>63</sup> (collective), and not the individual men who leave the village unable to collect themselves after the Christian zealot, Enoch, unmask one of the nine *egwugwu*<sup>64</sup> (the Igbo equivalent of a judge)...

There is no doubt that Igbo people's contact with the outside world has affected its socio-political, economic and educational way of life. Yet the resistant or resilient human spirit or rather, the nature of the Igbo culture can be noted in the survival of the value and practice of cultural solidarity in the midst of all this turbulent changes among the Igbo people.

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<sup>63</sup> *Ndichie* falls under the *Ozo* titled men political institution among the Igbo as described above, while *egwugwu* comes to the meaning of *Mmanwu* secret societies of sport which also serve as policing order in the land; see these topics as described above.

<sup>64</sup> See 'Things Fall Apart' Achebe (1965: 168).

## **CHAPTER 6**

### **MANAGING THE SITUATION: LIVING WITH THE REALITY**

#### **6.1 INTRODUCTION**

This concluding chapter will be divided into three sections. Namely the critical evaluation, practical suggestions: a solution outlook and the general conclusion. In all this, I will emphasise the managing of the situation of the Igbo which I have described above. Hence, living with the reality of the present circumstances of the Igbo people, common good is no longer the focus of an average Igbo person. By living with the reality, I will propose practical suggestions to attain a certain state of solution. Of course, for the Igbo this will mean to get “Restless” until the value of common good is restored in the communities. To “Relax” with the present situation will be a taboo and unacceptable behaviour among the Igbo people’s communities. To say the least, to get “restless” about the present situation among the Igbo (Africa) people, is to address or redress the state of affairs to which no urgency has been shown by our leaders in redressing suffering conditions facing millions of the African people.

In the first section of this chapter, I will make a critical evaluation of this study. The daily life of the Igbo people will serve as a point of reference to find a political or social application to addressing our present situation. The assessment of this study will afford me a moment of truth in pointing out some good aspects of this study and its limitations.

The second section of this chapter will address practical suggestions as a means of offering some solution to the problems raised in this study. Solutions here would include practical points that have emerged through the exposition of the cultural solidarity of the Igbo people, thereby using major values as noted above, as a means or tool in the search for solutions to the present day political individualism that has destroyed the value system of common good in the rural development. This will finally lead me to the general conclusion of this study on the Igbo cultural solidarity.

## 6.2 A CRITICAL EVALUATION

At this stage of my study of the Igbo cultural solidarity, it is my interest to evaluate this complex study of the Igbo people. Indeed it should be observed that this study has shown us the antiquity of aristocracy and monarchy and the paraphernalia among the Igbo people of South Eastern Nigeria. The departure today of actual practice from the admired saying regarding kingship and the absence of absoluteness from, and the unfailing inter-dependence of traditional Igbo ideas of life and the world have all been noted. But as Ifemesia (2002:116) noted as well, we have seen instances of the latter-day abandonment of age-long cultural humane beliefs and practices in favour of others often more fashionable than humane cultural solidarity practised in the traditional Igbo communities.

These are true and inevitable changes every culture and practice goes through; yet it is evidently clear in the words of Nzimiro (1971:177), quoting Mitchel that

...change has not penetrated equally to all sections of culture and belief and the adoption of a new set of customs and beliefs in one context does not necessarily imply a corresponding modification of custom and belief in another. A change in one aspect of social system may alter one institution completely, modify yet another, and leave a third relatively unaffected.

I am sure this analyzes the true state of Igbo cultural solidarity as I have demonstrated above. Notably, not only the Igbo people's situation as illustrated in this study but all human cultures is open to assimilation and reformation at any point of foreign cultural contact. Yet, the Igbo people have a natural obligation to hold fast those values and the cultural heritage that have defined them as noted in this study.

It might as well be for the Igbo people to take a close and serious look at some of their present-day social and political problems in the light of their cultural heritage and practice. For there is the possibility that these problems, including cases of misunderstanding among themselves and of themselves by others, could be referred, in some degree, to their unhelpful departure from some of those ancestral concepts and usages by which they had lived and made good through time. Ifemesia (2002:117) continues to observe that this deviation has evidently contributed to the glamorization of such peculiar phenomena and behaviour as

kingless and restiveness, individualism and materialism, assertiveness and aggressiveness – manifestations which have not always redounded to peace and harmony among the Igbo people themselves, nor between them and their neighbours. Perhaps the Igbo people may be able to improve their present position in many respects by picking up more of the time-honoured threads from where they were left off in the not-too-remote past. In a rather clearer sense, the traditional cultural solidarity exposed above, has a lot to contribute and correct in today's mishaps and misgivings among the Igbo peoples as noted in this study.

Indeed, this study has provided us with enough information and evidence of internal social and political cohesion and community, of spontaneous and sustained physical and mental, emotional and spiritual cultural activities among the Igbo people. More so, all these have focused upon human interests and values; upon empathy, consideration and compassion for human beings. Indeed, the discussions and findings presented in this study, clearly demonstrates the complexity and profundity of the cultural solidarity among the Igbo people of South-Eastern Nigeria. Let us therefore consider some of the challenging factors and aspects of Igbo cultural solidarity today as noted above that need some urgent attention since they epitomize a positive or negative connotation other than common good.

Moreover, the Igbo cultural institution of the community priest (*Dibia* fraternity) as noted in this study<sup>65</sup>, presents us with enormous challenges in comparison with the role of the present day health care provision to the entire Igbo or African populace. As observed in the institution above, there is a universal sense of general or common health care in the traditional Igbo community. Today the story has changed. The focus has changed from health care to money making venture or practice. It should be noted though that there are communities and states that provide free health care services to its citizens, this must be commended and applauded. Situations and instances of communities or countries where the sick and elderly people die while waiting for unaffordable medical treatment are condemned by the value of common good system that has prevailed through the history of the Igbo people as outlined in this study. It is therefore a scandal on the face of the African continent,

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<sup>65</sup> See the Institutions of Igbo cultural solidarity development as discussed in Chapter 4 of this study.

so rich in natural resources and yet we hear and read about people dying of curable diseases of Malaria, Tuberculosis etc...all the time. The “common good” vision is reserved for the so called heads of states and their cabinet cohorts who are flown overseas in search of cures for their own diseases when they fall ill, at the expense of their country’s ordinary tax payers. This is disheartening and should be discouraged by all means.

However, looking at the original intention of the Igbo *Mmanwu*, the Masquerade institution of sports and recreational development (namely entertainment, policing and serving as law enforcement agent etc...), as discussed in chapter 4 of this study, raises contextual issues that are worrying. In today’s experience, the activities of the masquerade institution among the Igbo communities have become diabolical instead of the original intention mentioned herewith. Other than being for entertainment and law enforcement, this institution has been used by village criminals and robbers to terrorize and victimise innocent lives among Igbo communities. Individual Igbo people who may be accused of one wrong doing or the other in their communities are unjustly tried and punished by the members of this institution.

It is therefore deplorable that this institution has been hijacked and used by criminals to extort money and other valuable goods from less protected and powerless citizens of Igbo communities. The Igbo culture has lost control of the masquerade institution. In essence, only the elder-group leaders as recommended by law can try and recommend punishment for offenders in the community. No other group is allowed by cultural law to punish any offender unless a case is tried openly in the view of the community and punishment recommended by the elders group<sup>66</sup>. Something needs to be done and urgently to restore the cultural value that the *Mmanwu* institution has provided for the entire Igbo community. This study serves such purpose to call for restoration and renewal (Okafor 1992: 57-60 and Green 1964: 133-34).

The question therefore that arises here is that of peace and justice in the present day Igbo and African communities. The need to police our rural and urban communities against crimes and

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<sup>66</sup> Refer to the *Ofo*, a symbol of Igbo leadership cultural institution of solidarity in chapter 4.

violence that face innocent citizens daily is the challenge that the Igbo institution of *Mmanwu* presents to all state governments in Africa. The security of life and property of every citizen must be respected and protected. The need for the state security (the police and the military) to protect all who live in the communities becomes a rural development effort that needs no compromise of any kind. The usual news and comments about security personnel corruption and complaisance over criminals and offenders that have encouraged mob-justice must be looked at as taboos and scandals to the rural growth and development of Africa. This therefore means that every effort must be made to eliminate all criminal elements who have been employed in the state security systems. Purging the security institutions of these corrupt and criminal elements will fully secure the life of rural and urban dwellers of African communities. This is the role *Mmanwu* institution had and will continue to play in the Igbo communities (Achebe 1965: 170-172).

Another concern that calls for attention among the Igbo cultural institutions is the *Ozo* titled men and women association. Again, this challenge arises from the change of objectives in title taking among the Igbo communities of South-Eastern Nigeria. The need for chieftaincy title among the Igbo people arises from the intention of the culture to encourage and establish high morals in the society, hard work, and high level food security in recognition and honour of one's achievements for the survival of a given Igbo community<sup>67</sup>.

The need to revive and maintain this age-old cultural solidarity value is very vital for the survival of the Igbo communities since no society can survive without food security. Looking at the situation of African states today where millions of people go without food and thousands die of starvation, the need to boost our agricultural activities cannot be over emphasised. However, this natural design of the Igbo people to encourage production has been abused in so many ways. Title taking is no longer on merit and is not in recognition of achievements in the Igbo cultural solidarity anymore. It has been rather usurped for money mongering by the so called Igbo Kings who offer chieftaincy titles to individuals based on how much money they are ready to offer.

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<sup>67</sup> Refer to the Socio-economic basis for Igbo cultural solidarity in chapter 4 of this study.

In reality, the point being made here is that individual Igbo citizens who merit chieftaincy titles based on their achievements and hard work are denied and no longer recognised since they do not offer money to “buy” titles. Corrupt politicians, known armed robbers, and trouble makers in the communities have all offered money to buy chieftaincy titles. The purpose and value of chieftaincy titles have been defeated and corrupted. It is therefore the opinion of this study that the original purpose of chieftaincy titles in the nature it came, be rekindled and be reminiscent of the original vision of the Igbo people, to encourage hard work, reward excellence and authenticate good morals. The core issue remains ‘merit’ awards; no one who do not qualify for this honorary awards should be recognised as such. Ukpokolo (2009: 3) defines these titles thus:

...chieftaincy titles, names and appellations are instruments through which the conferred distinguishes the self in a stratified society, and through this process reflects the social values and goals inherent in the people’s socio-economic world. Through wealth distribution and ‘exchange mechanisms’ associated with the new position, the conferred further navigates his way in the social space. The ‘exchange mechanisms’ associated with title holding again, not only reflects a people’s attempt at coming to terms with the problems of scarcity of resources in the face of contending demands and challenges, but also constitutes a proactive way of resolving the dilemma that characterizes inherent social inequality in a socio-cultural and economic space...

Such indeed is the role and place of chieftaincy titles among the Igbo cultural solidarity. Chieftaincy therefore remains a means of community recognition of individual’s meaningful contributions in the well being of the Igbo people. Hence, whatever degrees of respect, prestige and power or status accruing to the title holders is such that they in the first instance, worked for it; and secondly, must work to sustain their individual relevance or fall off by the side.

Furthermore, the African continent in the past and most recently, has witnessed the brutal and inhumane criminal activities of sexual abuse, domestic violence, cultural discrimination etc. emitted to the ‘woman’ (Anyakoha 2003: 1-2). The Igbo cultural solidarity that is under investigation is inclusive in this practice of maltreating the woman. A clear example is the event noted in chapter 4; where there is an ‘under-toned exclusion’ of the girl child from distinct task and clear responsibility in the Igbo cultural solidarity; in participation and contribution towards the general common good. As noted earlier in this study, the Igbo

cultural solidarity had delayed this role until marriage had taken place<sup>68</sup> in the life of the girl child. Hence, the strong and uncompromising role of the *Umuada* among the Igbo communities can be related to this event of 'role-delay' of the girl child.

This role delay of the girl child may be associated with the disrespect, disempowerment, abuse and violence towards the woman since African cultures have treated and looked at the girl child with a 'second class' understanding; meaning that the male child is the real deal. Therefore, this study is of the opinion that the girl child's role should be made clear to empower them just like the male child counterpart. Every child in the family whether male or female should be given adequate attention for growth and be allowed participation in the common good aim of the cultural solidarity. This situation of the girl child calls for urgent attention and the need for cultural review and renewal to restore the full and equal human dignity and respect accorded to all women.

While observing the urgent need for African cultures to promote the events of women, Anyakoha (2003: 18) wrote thus:

...these different views on ways of empowering women for development...Female education have been recognized as the key to development. Education could empower the *Umuada*, by enhancing their literacy, equipping them with saleable skills. These could in turn enhance their status and help them extend their power to economic, health and political spheres. The recommendations or findings are also consistent with the stipulations of the National Policy on Women in Nigeria (Federal Republic of Nigerian 2000).

It consequently follows that this study has revealed that *Umuada* still wield their age-long power in conflict resolution and checking on individual and group discipline to achieving a desired common good in their different kindred. The Igbo cultural solidarity is therefore challenged to make women as equal and important as their male counterparts. By so doing this study agues for the role of women to extend beyond ceremonial or socio-cultural traditional practices into the economic, health and political spheres for development at the grass root level in the modern day Igbo societies. A deliberate action and change of view and

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<sup>68</sup> Refer to 4.4 and 4.5 in chapter 4 above.

focus should be made towards the womanhood to realise their full potential skill maturity towards the cultural solidarity in search of rural development.

The *Umuada* in all its ramifications can therefore play a vital role as an institution promoting women's economic, educational, health and political spheres in the present day Igbo cultural solidarity practices. The development of their roles in these areas of life cannot be overstated or disregarded. No Igbo community will be expected to discriminate, exclude or postpone the vital role of the girl child (by whom the *Umuada* emerge) at any stage or state and in the form or style it may be exhibited. If indeed this practice of discrimination and less important attitude toward the girl child is not addressed and adequately attended to; all efforts being made in Africa and among the Igbo people in particular to promote and develop the girl child will not yield any meaningful fruit or achievement.

As Anyakoha (2003: 19) conclude on this argument, since *Umuada* is a vital and powerful grouping in the cultural solidarity among the Igbo traditional norms and practices, the institution should be empowered for such extension of power for development at grass roots level. This move is very vital as this study has noted the need for Africa and the Igbo people in particular to face the reality in order to stand the challenges of rural development. All obstacles and hindrances that have been noted in this study (lack of proper education, lack of economic power, exclusion from major decision making i.e. political power and full participation in some cultural practises and clear ownership of agricultural lands etc...), preventing the womanhood from developing fully in all its potential must be removed by the relevant bodies and cultures. No culture has the right to delay or postpone this development to take place; in order for them to make the necessary contributions towards the rural growth and common good. All humans beings therefore, whether men or women have been given a natural right to contribute to growth and to the common good towards the general well being of all who dwell in the society.

In effect, the evaluation I have made herewith demonstrates the challenges facing the Igbo cultural institutions, its practice, relevance and meaningfulness in today's contemporary world. There is no doubt over the relevancy or the vital role and place of these institutions

among the Igbo people as discussed in chapter four of this study. These institutions in the life of the Igbo people still contribute immensely to their growth and remain the necessary force that propels positive changes or growth in the Igbo rural communities.

In essence, the exposition of the Igbo cultural solidarity as the major concern in this study is also directed to the revival, restoration, consolidation and preservation of the Igbo cultural heritage. Hence, the challenges facing the Igbo cultural solidarity is in no way the rejection or condemnation of these values herewith noted. Rather, this is to serve a purpose of re-discovery and is a call to the renewal and the preservation of these Igbo cultural values.

### **6.3 PRACTICAL SUGGESTIONS: LIVING WITH THE REALITY: A HOME-BASED MODEL/PROPOSAL FOR RURAL DEVELOPMENT**

The Igbo people of South-Eastern Nigeria and Africa in general presently face a gloomy and challenging situation in terms of economic prosperity leading to full growth and development in all aspects of life. Religion as a strong tool that affected and dominated the Igbo people's thinking and way of life, needs to provide some level of understanding or response to the present day crisis. Following this line of thought, Uzukwu (1996: 3) suggests that African (Christian) theology must offer a response and thus he wrote:

...in order to combat our pessimism, or misery, and our oppression, foreign or local, and to reconstruct in an enduring way, we must learn to depend fully on our own resources, without being the less attentive to the realities of a modern world and a global village. The Church, aided by the reflection of her theologians, will become a more credible agent of change when Christian life emerges from the realities of the African context and Christian theology responds to questions posed by the context and is nourished by local resources (one of these resources will be to capitalize on the values presented here with the Igbo cultural solidarity)<sup>69</sup>. These resources are derived from the social, political, economic, and religious values which have been sustaining African communities as they face change and development in their encounter with the realities of the modern world.

This is true when we reflect on the role of theology in human sphere and in particular of the Igbo people's religious beliefs and practices as demonstrated in this study. Christian theology

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<sup>69</sup> The words in bracket are mine.

should not be used to propagate “escapism”<sup>70</sup> from the reality of the African situation. Living with the reality would lead to all theologies (Christian and otherwise) to rise and stand up to the challenges facing our present day social difficulties hampering the creation of common good. Believers and practices of different religions should not be made to believe or live in such a way as to propagate that there is a better life elsewhere than the present life. The life we live here and now should be able to provide comfort, peace, joy and hope for the future generations. We cannot suspend or postpone the common good that should be offered to all who live in any human society.

In essence, religious solution to faith based opinions (ideas, problems or issues) in our world today should not serve as economic, social and political solutions. In other words social or economic problems should have equivalent model solutions not otherwise. This is vital in order to face the true reality of the Igbo people’s lives or the African world. All efforts should be made not to be distracted from the main issues that harm, divide and destroy the focus to create common good in the life of Africans. As Uzukwu (1996: 4) rightly concludes, it is therefore a clear truth to proclaim that for the majority of Africans, the integral well-being of humans in this world is seen as the ultimate reality and meaning. Not in another world to come after this present one! There is no other world that has been given to humans but this. Therefore every effort must be made to get all people comfortable in it. This will be possible by the common sense of establishing common good policy at all levels of human dealings.

However, recalling some of the issues dealt with in this study, Ukachukwu (2007: 258) noted the *Iri Ji Ohuru* festivals<sup>71</sup> by which individual Igbo persons are honoured with chieftaincy titles as merited. This festival should not be seen as just occasions of joyful celebrations but moments for an Igbo to fulfil a religious obligation to cultivate yams however small and

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<sup>70</sup> This refers to a situation where one is not facing the reality of life. In our circumstance religion I mean should not serve as Opium according to Karl Max. In the human reality of suffering of hunger, violence, disease and other anomalies religion or theology should provide an answer. Faith should work out a practical solution, not by postponement to another life or world to come.

<sup>71</sup> See 3.5 above “Igbo and Agriculture”. In this festival the Igbo communities celebrate the arrival of new harvesting season whereby food assurance becomes eminent. *Iri Ji ohuru* is otherwise known as New-Yam-Festivals among the Igbo of South-Eastern Nigeria.

whatever the species. This annual appearance of yam proclaims a renewal and revival message in the Igbo world view. It reminds the Igbo person that life's cycle is like that of a yam tuber. Like humankind's course in life to be born, to grow, to reach maturity and old age, to die and to regenerate among one's own as a necessary fact. This rural development and consciousness in the Igbo cultural solidarity calls and assigns to every individual Igbo a duty and responsibility to farm and secure the Igbo food economy. Farming or agricultural activities is neglected in the present day Igbo communities and Africa in the pursuit of raw cash in the present day economic dispensation. Food security is no longer a thought of serious concern for all in African rural communities. This annual New-Yam celebration calls for change of mind in economic policies in every African state and government.

The yearly new yam festival among the Igbo people is therefore a new call to go back to the land. It is in the activity in the land that Africa will find food security thereby saving the lives of millions of her children who starve to death due to lack of food. The Igbo new yam festival reminds the present day state rulers of every African state to renew and attend to new policies of food production in order to secure the lives of millions. The state policies of arms race in African countries, the pursuit of white elephant projects, and unnecessary squander of state funds in merry making, the unending state banquets and parties must be curtailed, giving way to common good via state profound involvement in farming projects and food production. Such life sustaining projects are not negotiable. The urgent call for African states to attain the need for food production in the continent is such that the Igbo *Iri-Ji Ohuru* reminds the people to keep the tradition of the promotion of food production among Igbo communities.

Talking about food production, the Igbo people whose ancestors had been fed with yams instead of dependence on handouts cannot grow lazy in the contemporary social economic and agricultural cultures of the present day. This study has clearly demonstrated and called on the entire Igbo communities to stand on their feet to repossess their ancient heritage in the production of food that has sustained the entire Igbo population for many centuries. As Ukachukwu (2007: 260) rightly pointed out, a major rural development lesson and challenge of the yearly celebrated *Iri-Ji Ohuru* festival is that every Igbo (man or woman) must strive

to excel in any enterprise they invest their talents in, especially in agriculture. Hence he wrote:

...the bountiful production of yams in ancient Igbo land with crude implements reminds of the industry and diligence that had hardened the sinews of their ancestors. ...the industry of ...yesteryears must be replicated in various skills and expertise the postmodern age requires of the Igbo. They must join the course being championed by the latest advancements in biotechnology required to revolutionize modern agriculture, cultivation and marketability of yams. To achieve this ambition, the Igbo must curtail overdependence on oil, since the present oil-driven economy in Nigeria can easily be subverted by unexpected winds of change...the unstoppable crises in the Niger Delta, the main oil producing region in Nigeria, are definite signs of the time and a “hand-writing on the wall” of woes if agriculture continues to be neglected.

The neglect of agriculture will surely rain down doom for the Igbo if no urgent action is taken to revive the massive production of yam and other sustainable foodstuffs. It is indeed by this truth that all Igbo communities and African rural communities are encouraged to return to the land. Agriculture at all levels of the economy is the major solution to the lack of food in Africa and therefore requires unequivocal approach by the present day state governments of African countries. Massive food production is the right and sustainable way for rural development.

On the 16<sup>th</sup> of June every year and of course 2011 was the marking of the 35<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the massacre of school children in Soweto, South Africa by the apartheid government in 1976; eventually this event was adopted by the Organisation of African Unity (OAU), now African Union (AU) in 1990 as ‘A Day for the African Child’ <http://www.au.int/content/day-african-child-2011-theme-all-together-urgent-action-favour-street-children> (accessed on 21 June 2011). By this event all Africans were reminded to champion, cherish, encourage, support, defend and respect the course of the African-Child in honour of the sacrificial role played by the children of Soweto in liberating South Africa and in making such great impact in the mind of all African youth and the young alike. This call has become imminent since no society can progress with neglecting its young since they remain the security of the future.

In any case, this call is not new; rather it is a reminder and a renewal of a value that is slowly being eaten away by selfishness and greed among Igbo people and Africans in general. Children are a prize or crown of every Igbo community as this study has shown; since they

are the hope of the future. Yet, the streets of African cities are littered by these highly prized individuals (African children) found often rummaging in rubbish bins looking for food for the day, in hunger, begging and sleeping along the streets and left in the gutters to die and be eaten up by wild ants and nocturnal animals. One cannot not help but stop and ask: Is this the African *Ubuntu* as noted in item 3.7 above? In the early days of every traditional African community as noted in this section, extended families were the answers and solutions to families which experienced parental problems or early death or who could not care or train their own offspring for one reason or the other.

While African families and communities like the Igbo people glory in their past highly prized practices and in the chocolate-coated value-terms like “*Ubuntu*”, the present day happenings present us with enormous challenges and much less to desire. Nevertheless, by deciding to lay emphasis on the 2011 commemoration of the Day of the African Child on June 16<sup>th</sup> as noted above, the African Union Committee on the Rights and Welfare of the Child specified the category of the children, those on the African city streets. By so doing they highlighted the serious threat in African societies posed to their stability and cohesion by this ugly phenomenon of ‘Street Children’. Meanwhile, due to the supposedly practice of “*Ubuntu*” among Africans, Kabore (2011: 2) noted that while the concept of the African family has always given the impression that the street children phenomenon would be marginal on the continent; meaningful considerations needs to be made on the incident of street children. She therefore raises the question whether it is still possible today for the most vulnerable of children to easily find protection and refuge with a member of their community, which itself is struggling for its own survival?

The simple answer this study provides is, going back to the roots and to the basics. Africans cannot continue to boast of their past glories while these challenges live on. Our social engagements with neighbours and relations need to change and renew themselves. Such past practices like *Ubuntu* as this study has emphasised the need to be practical in our own present time and places. The desire and over competition to own more properties and fat bank accounts and salaries must give way to community need and common good. Cultural solidarity in this sense must be understood as a natural gift to all human societies and needs

to be highly respected and recognised for its positive role to improve the rural or grass root development. This is the main value this study brings on board.

In her address to the African Union 21<sup>st</sup> edition on the occasion of the 'Day of the African Child' Kabore (2011: 3-4) noted the main causes of the street children phenomenon in African cities and enumerated them thus:

...direct causes which could explain why children stay on the streets of many towns in our continent include...“handing over” of children to guardians, inhuman treatment, armed conflict, discord between spouses, separations and difficulties associated with parenthood, direct consequences of STIs/HIV-AIDS, etc.

While articulating the sufferings and ugly encounters these street children often stumble upon she noted the fatal threats and bad behaviours associated with street life. And thus she continues:

...Children are battered by weather conditions, hardship, destitution, diseases, accidents and apathy. They also face insecurity, acts of violence, sexual abuse in an environment where might is right ...young girls (boys) are solicited for sex from a very tender age and they end up in prostitution.

While dwelling on this same point on discussion in items 3.4 and 3.7 above, I have noted the role *Ubuntu* plays in the extended family system in the cultural solidarity among the Igbo people and Africans in general. By this understanding the individual could only be affirmed because of the affirmation of the rest or other individuals in the community including children.

In this practice of *Ubuntu* therefore, individual Igbo people and Africans in general focus on the common good that benefit the entire community and not just the individual. Individualism is thereby eliminated, giving way to a community oriented social mind set. This value is highly needed in our world today where the individual has been seen as the most prized and respected over the community's need and values. The Capitalist mind-set of 'competitive' world economy, education, politics, riches etc...has to a large extent sidelined the community while the individual is propagated to the highest. Hence, it is the aim of this study to call for renewal and reformation of the African social engagement in those aspects of family (the street children phenomenon for example) and social life that the individual has

been honoured and respected over the community values and needs. *Ubuntu* helps the African societies to refocus and renew its vigour towards the emancipation of the African child.

Another conscious development that we can note through this study on Igbo people's cultural solidarity is the unity value that comes in the course of the new yam festival. The communal get-together and sharing of food together that the new yam festival re-enacts reflect the typical Igbo communitarian experience of the philosophy of *Umunna wu ike* (the strength/power of a people lies in togetherness)<sup>72</sup>. Communal eating remains a cherished value in the cultural solidarity among the Igbo of South-Eastern Nigeria. Ukachukwu (2007: 258-259) on this vital value writes thus:

...it is through eating together (opportunities provided by new yam festival ceremonies)<sup>73</sup> that Igbo people come to renew their commitment to the primacy...of blood bond and the significance of consanguine relationships in the kin group. He who refuses to eat together with his *Umunna* is looked upon as dubious and malicious. It is in eating and drinking together that the Igbo celebrate their sisterhood and brotherhood ties. It is at such gatherings that they know persons who are deviants in the community. This spirit of cultural solidarity and sharing in commensal meals have made the Igbo well disposed to accept the new era that Christian teaching<sup>74</sup> brought...

The bond that exists among the Igbo people therefore is the fact that socio-cultural meanings are shared by members of the group and as shared values integrate the individuals into a community, such bonds sustain the mutual exchange of meanings. Ukpokolo (2009:10), emphasising on the value of togetherness or unity notes that communitarianism, which aptly captures the nature of traditional Igbo cultural solidarity wrote:

...instead of such values as individual interests, autonomy, universality, natural right and neutrality, communitarian philosophy is framed in terms of the common good, social practices and traditions, character, solidarity and social responsibility...in essence, the individual's interest is in agreement with the group interests, which is concretized in the value system. To this extent, there is a symbiotic relationship

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<sup>72</sup> Refer to the *Umunna* level of family as treated in 3.3 in chapter 3 above.

<sup>73</sup> Words in bracket are mine.

<sup>74</sup> Refer to 4.6.8 on chapter 4 above on the "positive influence of Christianity on cultural solidarity and development among the Igbo.

between the self and the group; a situation where one nourishes and gives life to the other...

Unity of purpose is such great value and character that the Igbo cultural solidarity brings on board to rural development to challenge the negative attitudes characterised with discrimination, sabotage, division and segregation that is always the case militating against development in rural African communities.

Furthermore, chieftaincy titles as rural community development agents remain a 'motivation' which serve the Igbo people in their cultural solidarity to work hard and to achieve. Hence, healthy competition among young and old Igbo people therefore becomes a positive development to achieving community recognition. Ukpokolo (2009:7) while emphasizing on this point notes that stratification is universal and necessary because of the requirement faced by any society of placing and motivating individuals in the social structure. This kind of stratification serves as a motivational factor to place certain individuals in a functioning mechanism to occupy social positions. As a good agent for rural development, such cultures concern itself with motivation at two different levels namely to inspire in individuals the desire to fill certain positions, and once in these positions, the desire to perform the duties attached to them.

Such inspiration and duties motivate the honoured to remain a hardworking individual to keep the status accorded. And for the inspired, their focus on community improvement at all levels becomes the duty of individuals who seek community recognition. Honorary chieftaincy conferment is a community's show of appreciation, performance, role, connectedness, acceptance and acknowledgement of those so honoured for their contributions in community development, and functions as encouragement for further assistance and participation. It is, therefore, a form of motivation for effective community participation and engineering. Ukpokolo (2009: 8-9) concludes that in this wise recognition, such conferment becomes a symbolic social activity, where dramatic performances are geared towards social cohesion and cultural solidarity.

By holding in high esteem such values, the Igbo people have been able to encourage rural development and fair or common distribution of individual wealth and achievements in the Igbo rural communities. While agreeing to this rural value of Igbo chieftaincy cultural solidarity in development, Olatunji (2006: 104-107) rightly noted that some other values visible include sharing resources, burden and solidarity, reciprocal obligation, social harmony and mutual trust. Emphatically he wrote thus:

...each person seeks personal fulfilment through participation in the evolving social structures of the community, finds personal liberty in the expanded self-development cultivated through these activities, and honours a traditional complex of agreed-on commitments.

The emphasis on chieftaincy title holder's role toward the social development of the rural Igbo people is vital here since they are a sought of 'models' on whom younger Igbo people anchor their vision. In essence as Ukpokolo (2009: 17) continued elsewhere, the roles the individual title holder performs in the society can exist independent of the other. The individual's performances form interlinks. That is, all of the bearer's performances form a systemic whole where each segment makes the other relevant. So, when scholarships are offered to the impoverished students, foodstuff (food-parcels) are supplied to the widows and the underprivileged, one participates actively in fund raising and launchings for community schools and other developmental projects, one can boast of having settled one's former apprentices<sup>75</sup> who are, possibly, doing well in the business world, (which in itself symbolizes fairness, justice, generosity and love for peaceful co-existence and rural development), one is then a symbol of a people's enviable cultural heritage. Such an individual must be a model against which others must measure themselves.

Hence, as noted in the institution of *Igba-Ndu*<sup>76</sup> cultural solidarity among the Igbo people, its role on conflict resolution and reconciliation remains a model that can be utilised in our African situation today ridden with conflict and crisis. This ritual,<sup>77</sup> whenever it is celebrated

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<sup>75</sup> Please refer to 3.4 above 'Igbo world view: A general outlook' and foot note No. 15.

<sup>76</sup> Please note chapter 5 on institutions as discussed above in this study.

generates transformation among Igbo communities in search of peace and reconciliation after conflict or crisis has occurred. As noted by Igwebuike (2010: 17), whenever the *Igba-ndu* meal is celebrated, peace, joy, happiness, unity and harmony is the target to be reached. The reinforcement of life bond which exists in the Igbo communities in support of all who cohabit in the land is always the focus. A positive dimension that is finally realised is a type of covenant that is created. Oduyoye (1986: 111) confirms this notion as follows:

...Because we Africans have our roots in the same soil, drink from the same river or recognize the same divinity, a bond is created that one does not dream of breaking; it imposes a responsibility to each other that all endeavour to fulfil. Unity of life therefore is the cohesive principle in the African community. We human beings, with all created things, participate in life whole source is the One God. ...the mixing of blood, a symbol of shared life, is binding because between friends the blood-covenant actually involves mixing their life blood. The action underscores the sacredness of all covenants.

Among the Igbo people, conflict is not just resolved but reconciliation is sought too. This entails that physical, emotional or spiritual solution is sought after a conflict has occurred. The Igbo understanding clearly states that a conflict situation presents us with both physical and emotional (psychological) damages. This mechanism provides a two way resolution of conflicts; hence the need for emotional ritual-meal healing (organised for two parties or communities involved) after the actual dialogue to resolve a conflict is achieved.

Based on this value therefore, I strongly argue that the Igbo people's value of *Igba-ndu* institutional model of conflict resolutions can be recommended to serve on a larger scale in the African continent as a model of conflict resolution. Open dialogue with and among conflict parties is the start to such conflict resolutions. Capturing the true conflict situation of the African continent Uzukwu (1996: 1-2) noted that Africa has seen many scar faces in her many crises. The unending wars in Somalia, the Southern Sudan, and the Democratic Republic of Congo and in Northern Uganda to name a few conflict zones need a proper and open dialogue for a resolution. The need to resolve these conflicts cannot be over emphasised

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<sup>77</sup> *Igba-Ndu* as a ritual is the final or concluding phase celebrated as communal meal in which all participants partake in; and by it the particular Igbo community cements all peaceful agreements arrived during the proceedings of communal dialogue and discussions over conflict or crisis that had occurred.

since individual groups are prevented from farming or cultivating fertile lands. The areas' land resources are virtually wasted and are useless for hungry civilians.

Africa has not been able to feed its teeming population owing to conflicts and crises in these areas. The need for interpersonal, communal, state or international reconciliation will have to be sought by all means necessary to achieve a wholeness that will establish a long lasting peace, comfort and the security of the future generations. It is about these wide ranging problems and lack of peace and security that Uzukwu (1996:150) proposed thus:

... I, rather, foresee and propose reconciliation based on linkages, networks, or relationships between peoples, cultures, classes, worlds, and continents. The effective ministry of this reconciliation may lead to the creation of a new earth and a new kind of living based on the humane principle that a human person is human because of other humans.

Furthermore, in Chapter 4 I noted the function of the assembly in the running of the daily affairs of the Igbo people. The *Oha* therefore play a very vital role in all life deliberations, law making and case trials in full participation of the ruling body of the Igbo people. Okafor (1992: 57) while observing this operation wrote thus:

...the Igbo legislative system which is founded on the principle of "*Oha*cracy" (the assembly says or have decided)<sup>78</sup> makes it absolutely impossible for any piece of legislation with sectional bias to be enacted into a law. The Igbo legislative system provides that no individual or group of individuals could make laws to the exclusion of one or others. The village general assembly, *Oha*, is a legislative assembly. ...and everybody takes an active part in deliberations ...everybody who has a view to express on the matter is given a hearing. ...when all...opinion have been heard ...a selected few mainly people who are held in high esteem and with sufficient wisdom to discern "public opinion" ...will retire into an "*izuzu* session", consultative session which is in no way final. The assembly will react either for or against, until acceptable decision may be reached.

At the end of this process is the announcement of an agreed piece of legislative law or judgement over a case when it is reached, and accepted by all or the majority of all present and if no agreement is reached, another deliberation day is fixed for all to gather again. The public opinion must prevail or reign on all that is deliberated upon. No one is allowed by law to hijack or dominate the process and practices on the land for a private gain or interest. The

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<sup>78</sup>The words in brackets are mine.

objective of this said process therefore remains the common good and development of all who live in the Igbo communities. The value manifested by this process in the modern day practice and understanding of legislature and governance in party politics is highly remarkable and must be acknowledged. Indeed, this study, has offered the challenge to evaluate and renew such practices among other values that have not yielded the desired results in the African rural communities. In our present day African legislature and governance, focus on party politics, interests and ideologies seems to dominate the common good that should enrich all who live in the society.

In other words, the law which virtually all the members of the community took part in the making as in the case of the Igbo people, cannot at the same time be against the common interest and good of the same community. The absence of political parties with warring ideologies in Igbo “*Oha*cracy” is a positive political reality for it enables the individuals to speak truly, freely and honestly on a given issue without reference to political party ideology and pursuits (Okafor 1992: 58). This means that during a legislative deliberation, people speak without bias or sectional interest in mind. The law that is finally adopted cannot but be for the common good and development of the entire rural community and not just a section or few who may have a particular interest over others. The people’s good and comfort therefore, must remain the centre and focus of every legislature and governance in our African or today’s state practices. Okafor (1992: 60) concludes thus:

...my contention here is that in the typical Igbo social set-up the people’s affairs whether executive, judicial or legislative, revolve round the *Oha* – the people themselves. ...*Oha* centred. ...the logical consequence of this social atmosphere is that tyrannical laws are not enactible (enacted) because of the rigid checks and balances; favouritism or sectionalism, twin social diseases which prevent justice (rural development) are not thrivable (obtainable)<sup>79</sup> in the political climate; and *Oha*centrism promises the greatest happiness for the greatest number.

Moreover, in contemporary times, Igbo communities have been blamed therefore for their deep involvement in partisan politics through their development unions, the agent for rural growth and development, and this action has brought a defective result or effect towards the development efforts in Igbo rural communities (Egboh 1987: 170-172). African politics

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<sup>79</sup> The words in brackets are mine.

(political parties) are yet to mature in the provision of common (holistic) service to the entire citizens (people) of a particular country without separating development from communities that did not vote for the winning or governing party.

Hence, communities that have openly opposed the winning party are always denied of government's support for its development programmes. It is based on such negative effects that participation in partisan politics should be a no go area for Igbo development unions with their respective communities. Yet while they fully participate in the political or electoral processes in their respective communities, care must be taken not to provoke any negative feeling towards their communities in order to avert this danger of neglect or being left out in the cold by any ruling political party.

In addition, another open difficulty to cultural solidarity and development among Igbo communities is the problem of succession to vacant positions in the chieftaincy institution. In most Igbo communities as noted by Egboh (1987: 182), disagreements over who should succeed to the communities' vacant chieftaincy titles had resulted in serious disputes and disagreements. This situation had split and caused divisions in the development unions down the foundation thereby halting all development work and efforts in the affected communities. This situation sometimes had led to serious conflicts that had cost the life of innocent leading individual members of particular Igbo communities. The influence of recognised chieftaincies is very vital in today's Igbo solidarity and development hence; the local government administrations had their connections with these agencies (Chiefs) to all existing communities. The Chiefs role therefore remains vital in other to attract support and approval of the local authorities for any Igbo community to enjoy the governments' provision of any goods and services.

In essence, disruptions caused by this kind of disputes over chieftaincy titles have not contributed positively towards the growth and development of Igbo communities. Therefore, chieftaincy titles as noted in chapter four of this study should not be seen as a political appointment but rather a symbolic honorary gesture by Igbo customs and communities on individuals in recognition of their immense positive contributions to the growth of their

communities. The chieftaincy is a symbol of unity or solidarity of the Igbo people in their cultural identity. Its role to unify, strengthens and fortifies Igbo culture and identity and supports community growth and development and should therefore be the focus of such practices. With such understanding therefore, the Chieftaincy should serve the growth, solidarity and development of the Igbo communities.

Furthermore, on the crisis and corruption surrounding the chieftaincy titles as noted above among Igbo communities, the need to check on the misappropriation of funds belonging to the communities becomes an urgent matter. The issue of payment of money by any kind of person for the reception of Igbo chieftaincy titles signify a high level of corruption going on in the Igbo kingship customs. The chieftaincy titles are offered to individuals who have merited it by their hard-work and high moral standard in the society. These days, things have changed since any doubtful person of questionable character in Igbo communities can offer money and be accepted for such honour reserved for the worthy. Corruption of this kind remains one of the greatest evils militating against rural development and solidarity among Igbo communities and African states in general.

Hence, the call for renewal and reform against such Igbo practices remains the purpose of this study and is the focus, survival and growth of Igbo communities. The principle of Merit-Awards should be the determinant factor for which community respect is accorded to responsible Igbo individuals in their respective communities. The Igbo chieftaincy awards in whatever category it comes must be focused promoting hard work, moral uprightness, achievements, respect for Igbo cultural practises and protection of human life, achievers on new modern and technological inventions among Igbo communities and development in general. No Igbo sons and daughters should be accorded with Igbo respectful titles without a clear knowledge of their source of income, wealth and or riches. Ill gotten monies and riches through corrupt practices must be rejected and not welcome in the communities as it was in the old good days. The Igbo customs and laws that have guided the people for thousands of years must always be honoured and respected by all who live in the land.

## 6.4 GENERAL CONCLUSION

As I come to the conclusion of this study it is fitting to remind us that cultural development among the Igbo people is as old as the human existence in the Igbo geographical location in the South-Eastern Nigeria. As noted above though, certain areas of this cultural development like the western education in the case of building schools and electrification of the rural areas, could only take root with the help of the early contact with the western civilization. Hence, it is true to state that urbanization, capitalism, and western education are some factors which have influenced the Igbo people, changing their traditional value systems (e.g. cultural solidarity), and making them take up new positions and new values as the case may be. Ifemesia (2002:115) noted thus:

...down the millennia, long before the coming of Western Christian missionaries and others (colonialism), the Igbo people just led their lives and ordered their affairs in the way they found most suitable to their basic and periodic needs, in keeping with their natural environment...the Igbo people did not undergo any irreversible social and political revolution as a result of dramatic and traumatic external intervention. Indeed, nothing had happened to invalidate the wisdom of the ancients *Igbo groups that have been transmitted to the present day generations*<sup>80</sup>.

In hunger and pursuit for rural growth for western modernization, the Igbo communities employed the instruments of Development or Welfare Unionism as noted above in chapters three and four above. Each community organised its own welfare union branch comprising both the newly city migrants and their farming rural communities, but federated to the central union organisation. This central body was vested with powers of control that they were able to realise the expected positive changes (development) through the monitory contributions of its branches. It must be noted that these development unions are in existence till this day in all cities and to countries where an ample number of Igbo people have migrated.

As the drive for rural modernisation continues, other similar organisations came on board to assist the Igbo people's growth and progress. These include women associations, parent-teacher associations, age-grades, social clubs, co-operative societies and Christian communities had all helped to make life worth living in the village setting (Egboh 1987:180).

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<sup>80</sup> The emphasis is mine.

Hence, such amenities like health institutions, primary and secondary schools, pipe-borne water, town halls or civic centres, accessible roads, modern markets and postal services were provided. Economic projects like cassava, rubber and palm plantations came as a result of these organisations to help improve the entire life in the Igbo rural communities. It should be noted that while these other organisations centred their effort on the provision of socio-economic institutions, the Christian communities were determined on the provision of churches of cathedrals and pro-cathedrals that beautified the village communities.

Several reasons can be identified to explain great length of success stories among the Igbo people's self-help and growth as noted in this study. The Igbo people's origin from the same stock, having a common Igbo language, worshipping the same superintending Earth Deity, enjoying the common sense of identity by short and long distant trade communications, cultural relations that existed among village-groups and clans were among other symbolic evidences that led to this unity of purpose and growth (Ifemesia 2002: 115). All these therefore aided the Igbo people by their possession of this common heritage, experienced a sense of cultural uniformity and unity throughout the span of their broad native land.

As part of its focus, this study aimed to contribute to the Igbo revival and reform of their cultural heritage which most of the time suffered neglect and was ignored for foreign or strange cultures. At the advent of Christianity and western culture in Nigeria and the Igbo land in particular, the Igbo people were challenged to modernise. By so doing, the Igbo people neglected their own cultural practises which were of great value and meaningful to their daily life experiences and local growth. The desire to look like others (the west) ended with the achievement of independence in the early Twentieth Century when suddenly the Igbo people realised the vital need to return to their roots and revive the Igbo identity. Thus such Igbo institutional practises as noted above<sup>81</sup> in this study were revived with the intention to renew and relive the Igbo uniqueness.

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<sup>81</sup> See the "Igbo Institutions of Cultural Solidarity" on chapter 5.

The government on its part has played a very vital role by giving incentives to rural Igbo communities by way of providing technical assistance, funds and advice to these communities' development work. As Egboh (1987: 181) rightly noted, the government had also helped by training the local leaders who supervised the prosecution of some of the development projects, and had encouraged its agencies, the local government authorities to take over the management of some of the completed projects like the rural water scheme and the rural electrification etc. The task and function of co-operative societies towards this regard of rural development effort is equally the government initiative in support of rural self-initiative for growth and common good.

This study has clearly demonstrated and revealed the unique nature of cultural solidarity as different from other forms of solidarity. This study provides us with a dialogue between the ancient and new or modern life of the Igbo society. These two genres do not oppose each other; rather they complement for the common good of all who live in the Igbo society. This study is aimed at illustrating the application of the spirit of self-help, reliance and determination to demonstrate what a people can accomplish if the spirits of team work, selflessness, perseverance and commitment to common good or objective is the motivation. A developing nation should emulate this noble role that development unions have played among the Igbo people to realise a viable and honest independent nation.

This study challenges the Nigerian nation as a whole to re-direct and redress its own affairs as a nation undeveloped and which needs the right direction towards achieving a common development goal for all who live in the Nigerian society. As Egboh (1997: 185) rightly noted:

...Nigeria need to borrow a leaf from the leadership performance of the development unions and allied organisations among the Igbo society ...or any other developing country for that matter would be able to make greater progress in the interest of all, if it is to develop, and take its rightful place among the developed countries of the world.

The value of common good that has been described and demonstrated in this study is such that it promotes and nourishes life to its full realization if all members of a given society respond accordingly. This is so because as Njoku (2004: 187) rightly noted, common good is

a horizon of values and responsibilities to be realized and tasks to be done in the mutual complementation and development of members of society or state. It is this type of common good that he calls “Common Good of Covenanted Will” and thus he (2004: 187) wrote;

...covenanted subjects come to life (come-alive) because people want to bring out the best in themselves and to create the best conditions within which their flourishing can be realized. The common good of covenanted political communities and persons is an ambient (surrounding) of values (life, health, property, education, peace and security, etc.) which individuals and communities desire by the sheer fact of their nature as a community of persons bound together to foster their integral development and well-being. In other words, actions of leaders and the led alike are judged good or bad, right or wrong according as they foster or impede the common good or human development.

Hence, the present day government, leaders and the entire populace of Nigeria can borrow a leaf from this and improve on the policy of pursuing a common goal that would enrich all who live in the Nigerian society. By the practice of common good where effort is centred on improving the life of all who live in a society, all citizens of Nigeria would feel a sense of belonging and be committed to the improvement of life in its surroundings. The rampant Nigerian difficulties and evils of sectionalism, ethnic segregation, language discrimination, tribalism, religio-political divisions and conflicts and conscious exclusions of some sections of the country on economic development matters, would give way to conscious and mutual respect for the human person. The leaders and the led would be able to work together in full consciousness for a holistic approach on cultural and all aspects of development/growth of the entire individual and the community as a whole.

As Uzukwu (1996:151) rightly acknowledges, this conscious change would mean to all leaders in religion, politics and traditional Africa to adopt a model for listening to the reality on the ground (e.g. abject poverty, regional and state conflicts, immense hunger and untold suffering and unemployment to mention but a few) through involving the masses on a conversation to change. He goes on to say that it is through this listening model which in political terms may be called consultation, deliberation, or decentralization at all levels, that Africa will learn to carry out her task in the present day world. This model would mean the

very practice of consultative forum noted in chapter four above<sup>82</sup> in this study of the cultural solidarity among the Igbo people. This difficult situation of suffering in all ramifications of life in African states calls for a radical reaction and turnaround in other to address or redress this cruel malignance. Uzuoku (1996:152), once again writing on this about-turn (*metanoya*<sup>83</sup>), explains:

...people sally forth, abandon cherished property, abandon the security of their homes, expose their flanks, put their lives on the line, and die in order to realize the higher motives on which society is founded.

Only in taking such steps to renew life and give authentic meaning to all who live in the society, will we be addressing life as it should. Abandonment of one's self interest (individualism) for the good of all other individuals and groups who co-exist in the society is the right call of change. With this in mind, Uzuoku (1996:152) continues:

Africa has come to such a crossroads! The most sacred sanctuaries of value and meaning are being eroded by criminal manipulators, military Mafiosi, and archaic propagators of an authoritarianism which holds the Spirit of life captive. The cry "Of what worth is life!" must publicly resound as a cry of open, frank, bold witness...

In essence, life on this continent (Africa) has been held captive, hostage and enslaved. Life must be liberated from the enslavement of the present day political empty promises and deception. The ordinary person must make their "so-called leaders" accountable at all levels of governance. By so doing the whole act of dialogue and listening as proposed in the Igbo cultural solidarity practice will be realised.

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<sup>82</sup> See the Institutions of *Ofo* and *Oji* as symbols of leadership in the chapter 5 above.

<sup>83</sup> *Metanoya* is a Greek co-Christian term used to describe a converting or repentant person making a conscious abandonment of his or her former life for a new Christian discovered life. This is a turnabout or turnaround for a better way of following the Christian practice. To think differently or to reconsider ones way of life becomes a challenge to the repenting individual.

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