



RESEARCH ARTICLE

IGBO DIASPORA AND THE AKU RUO ULO INITIATIVE: A STRATEGY FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF SOUTH EAST NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

The Igbo race stands out as one of the groups in the world with the highest diasporas presence outside their homeland. They are scattered all over the world, across the continents and countries. As widespread as Igbo Diasporas in foreign lands, so are their wealth, investments and resources. Unfortunately, the Igbo diasporas presence around the world and their achievements have not been much felt or impacted on the development and industrialization of the home front. Many years of success and lack of commensurate impact, amidst enormous wealth under their control have not reflected in the domestic economy. It is this situation that gave rise to the new popular slogan and initiative, ‘Aku Ruo Ulo’ as an inspiration and challenging call beckoning the Igbo diasporas to bring their wealth home for development and transformation of Igbo heartland of South East Nigeria. This study examined the role of Igbo diasporas in the development of Igboland in line with ‘Aku Ruo Ulo’ philosophy. The study is a qualitative research derived from secondary sources of data and guided by the Cohen Diaspora theoretical foundation. The paper recommends among other things, the adoption and promotion of ‘Aku Ruo Ulo’ philosophy among Igbo diasporas for the development of Igbo homeland.

Keywords: Igbo, diaspora, development, southeast, *aku ruo ulo*,

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1.0. INTRODUCTION

There is no part of the world you are without seeing Igbo people. Wherever you will see them, they are multiplying, building factories, companies, developing other regions, but their own region is underdeveloped. If you go to China, USA, Germany, Britain and other parts of Europe, they are everywhere developing them. Our people go to Abuja, there, the best estates are owned by Igbo people, what of Kano, Kaduna and all over the world as if they are cursed. It seems there is something wrong with South-East region. Every child born here want to go out, you don't blame them because there is no company anywhere in the South-East. You that is developing America, living big there, we are not saying that you should not develop where you are staying but, at least, bring one quarter of your investments home. If you bring one quarter home, I bring one quarter home, another person brings one quarter home, we don't need any help to develop our home. The same energy we are using to develop other regions; we have to apply the same in the South-East. You cannot expect a change until you make a move (Obi, 2024. Message of Hope, Restoration and Liberation to South-East region. <https://zpmon.org> 25/6/24).

The above statement by Evangelist Ebuka Obi of the Zion Prayer Movement Outreach at Ngor Okpala, Imo State is in tandem with the “Aku Ruo Ulo” initiative calling on Igbos in diaspora to evolve as a strategy for the development of the South-East. According to Obi (2024), the Igbo diasporas appetite for investment abroad at the expense of their homeland made them appear “like a bird put in a cage which continues to fly inside the cage, without exit. “The Jewish people in his assertion remained slaves everywhere around the world until they realized that they will make a move and develop their place and today, Israel is one of the world powers” (Obi, 2024).

The South-East Nigeria inhabited by the majority of Igbo ethnic group does not measure up with the other regions in economic investment because of the attitude of Igbo citizens to migrate abroad within and outside Nigeria to make their living. In the place they live, they make every effort to develop there and invest their wealth in the foreign and offshore lands.

It is impossible to travel to any city, town and hamlet in and around Nigeria, African countries and other parts of the world without meeting Igbo diasporas, resident, doing all sorts of businesses and investing massively. Most times, they outcompete the indigenes, natives or nationals of the areas (hosts) in investments.

Around Nigeria, in many states and cities you will find Igbo settlements and Neighbourhoods founded and built by them. There are Sabon Gari in Kano, Sabon Gari in Zaria, as well as other settlements in Kaduna, Jos, Lagos, Ibadan, Benin etc, inhabited mainly by Igbo diasporas, developed by them and littered with all sorts of investments owned by the Igbo people.

Before the emergence of Boko Haram insurgency, the Monday market in Maiduguri was like a market located in Igboland. In the market, one could buy any goods communicating in Igbo language, showing the preponderance of Igbo traders and businessmen in the market. In Jos,



the Terminus Market is almost an Igbo market where every reasonable goods and services is owned or carried out by the Igbos.

At Lagos, the Igbo founded and built the Kosofe Market at Ketu, built the Alaba International Market, occupies the trade fair complex, Alaba Suru Market, Owode, Computer village, Oshodi, Agege markets etc. In Cotonu Benin Republic, there is the Biafran Market controlled by the Igbo diasporas. In all these, the Igbos invest and re-invest all their incomes and earnings and try to outclass the natives in every sphere of development, all in foreign lands.

Back home in Igbo land, what you see is abandoned towns and villages littered with magnificent empty mansions that do not create wealth, earn income and employ people. This has attracted the Igbo diasporas the disgusting and mockery appellation, “Oka mma na ama,” a metaphor for a people that are homeless and those who value foreign lands more than their own.

It is because of this that a new initiative known as “Aku Ruo Ulo” has been conceptualized and propagated by lovers of “Alaigbo” development as a veritable strategy for the development and transformation of Igbo homeland of South-East Nigeria.

2.0. Theoretical Foundation and Clarification of Concepts.

2.1. Theoretical Foundation

Even though there are many theories that explain diaspora issues, this study is anchored on the Robin Cohen’s Theory of Diaspora as its theoretical foundation and guide. Cohen (1987) in his theory identifies five types of diasporas. These are:

The Victim Diasporas: Which are diasporas that were forced to go to exile. They include, the Jewish people, the African people and the American people who became diasporas.

The Labour Diasporas: They are those who embark on mass migration in search of work and other economic opportunities like the Indian and Turkish diasporas.

The Trade Diasporas: They are those seeking to open trade routes and links like the Lebanese and Chinese diasporas. Also, there is the

Imperial Diasporas: who migrate to foreign lands to build empires like the British and French diasporas and lastly,

The Cultural Diasporas: made up of those who move in chain migration and here one can locate the Caribbean diasporas.

A critical assessment of the five typologies of diasporas identified by Cohen (2023) shows that the Igbo diasporas of South-East Nigeria can be located within labour and trade



diasporas. Firstly, the Igbo people travel massively to other lands in search of greener pastures where they take up various types of income earning jobs. Secondly, the Igbo nation is known throughout Nigeria and beyond as successful traders who have accumulated much wealth through trading enterprises. These have made the Igbos, the most visible group of diasporas in anywhere only second to the indigenous population or natives. The Igbo diasporas are talented gifted, enterprising, dynamic and competitive, hence their presence everywhere is never unnoticed as a result of their successes in any area of business and endeavour.

2.2. Clarification of Igbo Diasporas Concept and the Aku Ruo Ulo Initiative

The word diaspora is of Greek origin. It is derived from the Greek word diaspeirein which means “to scatter, or spread out” (Merriam Webster.com dictionary. <https://www.merriamwebster.com/dictionary/diaspora.9/9/24>). The word originally refers to the settling of the Jews outside Israel following their Babylonia Exile in 586 BC. It is the movement, migration or scattering of a people away from an established or ancestral homeland.

According to Dictionary.com, the world Diaspora is now commonly used:

In a generic sense for communities of migrants living or settled permanently in other countries, away from their origins and identity and maintaining various degrees of contact with mother country, any group migration or flight from a country or region, any group that has been dispersed outside its traditional homeland, especially involuntarily, as Africans during the trans-Atlantic slave trade; any religious group living as a minority among people of the prevailing religion. (see also Nwachukwu, 2018).

Shefler (1986), sees modern diasporas as “ethnic minority groups of migrant origins residing and acting in host countries of origin –their homelands. The issue of diasporas is a global phenomenon. Emigration and immigration of people has been in existence throughout history. It is either voluntary migration or forced or imposed migration. The Jews were once exiled to Babylon on forced migration. The Tran-Saharan and, Trans-Atlantic slave trades were forced migration of Africans to Arabia and the Americas.

The modern times has witnessed series of voluntary migrations of different societies, often as a result of the search for better living standard and sometimes, in search of safety.

The Igbo people of Southern Nigeria have for more than a century been involved in diasporas migration outside their enclave. The South-East Nigeria which is the Igbo heartland with five states structure has significant size of its population, especially the working and youthful populations living abroad as diasporas, accumulating enormous wealth, making investments and contributing to the economic growth and development of their host countries and communities.



Within Nigeria for instance, it is not possible to visit any city outside the Igbo homeland of South-east without finding the Igbo diasporas engaged in meaningful enterprises, owning astonishing wealth and investments and sometimes out competing the native populations in many areas of human endeavour. For instance, in his well-researched worked on *Igbo Nation and the Principles of Self-Determination: The Issues Involved, Challenges and Prospects*, Mr. Ikenna Egeonu made certain revelations. According to him (Egeonu, 2020),

in 1999 and thereafter, Obasanjo's Federal Capital Territory minister Nasir El-Rufai clearly informed his audience that 70% properties in Abuja belonged to the Igbos. Similarly, in Lagos, it is indisputable that over 60% property, even businesses belong to the Igbos.

He further states that, "From Benin to Kano, from Port-Harcourt to Minna, the success narrative of the Igbo nation is the same" (Egeonu, 2020). This is the evidence of unimpaired genius, adventurous spirit, indomitable courage of the Igbo race and diasporas.

Throughout the 36 states of the Federal Republic of Nigeria and the Federal Capital Territory Abuja, and their cities, the Igbos constitute the majority in their home land states and are second to the indigenous population and host communities, making waves. Beyond Nigeria, there are today, Igbo Americans, Igbo Canadians, Igbo Chinese, Igbo Indians, Igbo British, Igbo Equatorial Guineans, Igbo Ghanaians, Igbo South Africans and millions scattered in other parts of Europe, Asia, Americas, Australia and Africa. Indeed, there is a popular saying in Igboland that "wherever you go and fail to find the Igbo, run away because such place is uninhabitable".

The Igbo maxism, "Onye ije ka onye ishi awo amaihe" which translates to " a traveller is more knowledgeable than a grey hair elder", explains the characteristic social mobility of the Igbo nation. According to Ogbuagu (2006), "several studies show that the Igbos believe in spacial and social mobility in pursuit of opportunities". This assertion is further buttressed by Uchendu (1995) who describes the Igbos as "pragmatic frontiersmen with persistent history of migration settlement of new lands". The Igbo people have the adaptive capacity to any environment they are found. They also have the instinct to tame any environment, however harsh it may be, hence, the Igbo diasporas have in a place like Lagos filled and reclaimed swamps and lagoons where they founded new habitations, and transforming them from waste to wealth.

Some people ignorantly believe that diasporas are only citizens who reside, live or domicile in foreign countries or offshore residents while referring to domestic or onshore resident citizens outside Igbo homeland as living abroad. This is uninformed misconception. Abroad means beyond the boundaries of one's country or in/to a foreign country (BBC English Dictionary). It is to go to a country that is not the one you normally live. Diasporas therefore refer to those citizens who migrate outside the homeland both within and outside the country while those who leave the homeland and migrate to foreign countries and abroad.



The Igbo people have remained travelers from early civilization, although these travels concentrated within the Igbo geographical entity. It is difficult to find any Igbo community/culture area whose name and kits and kins are not located in one or two more places within Igbo nation. The table below contains list of Igbo communities, culture areas with diasporas settlements in other near and distant lands:

S/N	Name	Location/State/LGA
1	Isu (Isu Ama), Isunjaba, Isu Umuoze, Isuochi, Isuikwuato, Isu Aniocha, Ibuzo, Isuofia, Isu Ohazara	Orlu L.G.A. Imo State, Abia State, Delta State, Anambra State, Ebonyi State.
2	Arochukwu, Aro Ngwa, Aro Ndizuogu, Aro Amuro	Abia State, Imo State.
3	Orsu, Orsu Ihiteukwa, Orsu Obodo, Orsu Umenyi, Orsu Umuoghu.	Imo State, Anambra State.
4	Umuawada Onitsha, Umuawada Onicha Ezinihitte, Onicha Olona, Onicha Ugbo.	Anambra State, Imo State, Delta State.
5	Ubulu Ihejiofor, Uburu Ekwe, Ubulu Uku, Ubulu Isiuze, Ubulu Unor, Ubulu Okiti	Imo State, Delta State.
6	Egbema, Egbema Ozubulu. Egbema.	Imo and Rivers State, Anambra State. Delta and Edo State
7	Enugu, Enugu Ezike, Enugwu Ukwu, Enugwu Agidi, Enugwu Aguleri, Enugwu Nanka	Enugu State, Anambra State.
8	Umuowa (Orlu), Umuowa (Ngor Okpala, Umuowa Ibu (Okigwe).	Imo State.
9	Umuna (Orlu), Umuna (Onuimo) Umuna.	Imo State, Enugu State.
10	Awka, Awka Etiti	Anambra State.
11	Akwakuma (Owerri), Akuma, Akwakuma Okporo	Imo State.
12	Ugbele-Akah, Ugbele Izombe, Ugbele (Ideato).	Imo State.
13	Uba Umuaka, Uba Izombe, Uba Ifakala, Ubahaeze Orodo.	Imo State.
14	Adazi Enu, Adazi Ani, Adazi Nnukwu.	Anambra State.
15	Umuoze (Nwangele), Umuoze Ugiri (Mbano)	Imo State.
16	Abajah or Agbaja (Nwangele), Abajah (Mbano), Agbaja.	Imo State, Enugu State.
17	UmunumoAmandugba, Umunumo Mbano.	Imo State.
18	Aboh/Abo (Ndokwa East), Aboh Mbaise, Aboh Ihiteowere (Orlu), Abomege (Onicha)	Delta State, Imo State, Ebonyi State.

The above communities and culture areas are not sometimes mere coincidence. There is ancestral and cultural links between some of them that are grouped together, although, now separated by many years of evolution and civilization.



At the end of Nigeria-Biafra war of 1967 to 1970, the misery, savagery, destruction, deprivation and poverty that befell the Igbo of South East led to a new form of migration that extended the frontiers of Igbo Diasporas. The Igbo people were left with nothing to start a new life and with the Nigerian government post-war policy that gave Igbo citizens only 20 pounds irrespective of huge amounts of money they kept in the banks before the war, the people had to migrate to different places within and outside the country as a survival strategy. In these places, the Igbo Diasporas by their entrepreneurial, creative and irrepressible talents have established business empires and attained enviable positions in their chosen careers, a development that has attracted hatred and envy against the Igbo Diasporas.

Another development that has contributed to the migration of the Igbo people to foreign lands for survival is the years of little or lack of federal infrastructure in Igboland of South East. There seem to be a deliberate Nigerian government's policy to deny federal projects and presence in the zone. There are no federal industries, refinery, railway (the one that passes from Port Harcourt through Aba to Enugu is moribund), sea or river port, functional international airports, standard federal roads and other important federal institutions whose availability would have discouraged emigration of the Igbo diasporas to other centres of these attractions. These and other reasons explain why the Igbo Diasporas are everywhere within Nigeria and across the globe.

3.0. METHODOLOGY

This study is qualitative in nature. It draws mostly from existing literature and oral tradition as indices for developing literal and logical discourse on Igbo Diaspora and the aku ruo ulo initiative using the southeast Nigeria as a case study.

4.0. DISCOURSES

4.1. Igbo Diasporas Wealth and Investment Outside Igboland

No other ethnic group in Nigeria has created wealth and invested outside her homeland than the Igbo. This development is courtesy of the indomitable and resourceful character of the Igbo diasporas. The Igbo have made inventions that grew the economies of their host countries and communities and established industries and businesses that added value to the development of their host societies. Ogbuagu (2006), identified a group of Igbo successful, though not representative of the whole, who have in both history and contemporary times attempted or are attempting to participate as individuals or groups in external business and overall economic activities.

Specifically, he mentioned Philip Emeagwali who built the computer machine that linked 65,536 processors across the internet to the machine and the machine became the first system to achieve 3.1 billion calculations per second (Ogbuagu, 2006). Dale Emeagwali, the wife of



Philip Emeagwali also achieved a breakthrough in medical research on cancer and won the scientist of the year award of the National Technical Association in the United States. According to Ogbuagu (2006), Uche Oji, based in London was managing director of J.P Morgan. As an Engineer, he embraced technological innovations in semi –conductor research, and in touch with leading scientists, researchers and laboratories worldwide, enabling him have dominion of the market-place by controlling the cutting edge of technological innovation (Daily champion, March 16, 2006). Among this list of overseas based Igbo diasporas is James Obi from Umuaka, who has shown abiding and entrepreneurial skills and competed at managerial levels with success in the United States. James Obi is one of the richest Africans in America. In 1995 as chairman (Daily champion, 2006):

He acquired a dwindling Eddy Match Company originally owned by the largest match producer in the US and brought it back to full range of business. He is a member of business advisory committee to the United Nations and other organizations (See Ogbuagu, 2006).

Apart from these and many other offshore Igbo diasporas who have made breakthrough in foreign lands, there are numerous Igbo diasporas whose investments are scattered in different Nigerian cities and states. Nnamani (2001), observes that: most of our (Igbo) heaviest estate owners have their properties located outside Igboland. Most of our industrialists have their factories and businesses outside Igbo land and our young and old have followed them to where it is happening. Most of our merchants and haulage operators have their bases in other areas, forcing the rest of us to follow suit.

The table below shows some of the Igbo diasporas businessmen and women and their investments outside Igbo land:

S/N	Name	Location	Investment
1	Leo Stan Ekeh	Lagos	Zinox Technology Limited
2	Stella Okoli	Lagos	Emzor Pharmaceutical and Industries Limited
3	Eric Umeofia	Kaduna/Lagos	Erisko Foods Limited
4	Ifeanyi Ubah	Lagos	Capital Oil
5	Ernest Azudialu	Lagos	Nestor Oil
6	Tony Ezenna	Lagos	Orange Drugs
7	Cosmas Maduka	Lagos	Coscaris
8	Daniel Chukwudozie	Lagos/Calabar	Dozzy Group
9	Arthur Eze	Lagos	Atlas Oranto Petroleum
10	Cletus Ibeto	Port Harcourt	Ibeto Cement
11	Emeka Offor	Lagos	Chrome Group
12	Orji Uzo Kanu	Lagos	Sun Newspapers
13	Lazarus Mouka	Lagos	Chosen Charismatic Ministry
14	Ebuka Obi	Lagos	Zion Ministries

Source: Author's Compilation (2025).



According to Chief Emmanuel Iwuanyanwu, the former president of Ohaneze Ndigbo (2021), “Igbo investments in other parts of the country are put on the average of 2 trillion US Dollars”. Similarly Udegbe (2013) states that the list of Igbo diasporas businesses and investments located outside Igboland and South East Nigeria are difficult to enumerate and can hardly be captured in any study. It may surprise some people that two Christian religious ministries are included in the above table. The inclusion of these ministries stems from the fact that religious institutions nowadays are not only the instruments of evangelism and spiritual development but have become bastions of Business and wealth creation. Pastors from Yoruba land like Oyedepo, Adeboye, Kumuyi, Olukoya etc, have used their ministries to create business empires, such as the establishment of universities in Yorubaland.

4.2. Aku Ruo Ulo: Strategy for Development of Igbo Land by Diasporas

The Igbo diasporas have in no small measure contributed immensely, sometimes above the indigenes of the areas they dwell in Nigeria, in the industrial and commercial development of their host cities, communities and states. Of all the major ethnic groups in Nigeria, none has invested heavily outside their home land more than the Igbo. Yet, when you visit the Igbo homeland of South East Nigeria, what you see in the cities and villages are only magnificent residential edifices littered everywhere, sometimes unoccupied. These beautiful buildings that adorn every nook and cranny of Igboland are deceptive and mere eldorado. Because they are empty residential buildings, they do not create wealth or add economic value to Igboland. Because of lack of investment and industrialization of “Ala Igbo,” the people are tempted to migrate to other places within and outside Nigeria in search of employment and means of livelihood, yet, wherever they go, most of the significant investments there are owned and managed by Igbo diasporas. The Igbo entrepreneurship and economic growth has become a source of worry, envy and hatred from their hosts to the extent that Igbo Diasporas investments have repeatedly been targets of vicious attacks by other Nigerians. In many of these places, government policies have been deliberately initiated to destroy Igbo businesses and investments.

In the face of their threats and challenges, there have been several patriotic calls for the Igbos to have a rethink, redirect and bring at least part of their investments home, not only for the safety of their investments but for the development and employment generation in Igboland. Ironically some Igbo Diasporas feel safe investing outside than within Igbo enclave. It is difficult to decipher the reason for this mindset. Many are quick at blindly claim that there is nothing in Igboland, hence the area is not developed. These people forget that what made the places they live seem more developed than their homeland is because of their investments in those areas. Why are the Igbos afraid or uncomfortable to invest at home? Professor Charles Soludo, former Central Bank Governor in 2005 statement, is a wakeup call to the Igbos. Thus, according to him (Soludo 2005),



If you must go to the moon, you must not be afraid of something that flies like aeroplane. It is the power of idea, the power of dreams...countries, societies and individuals cannot move forward unless they can dream these dreams.

This dream and idea is the Aku Ruo Ulo initiative for Igbo diasporas investments and relocation of part of their businesses to Igboland, without which, South East cannot develop. According to Ozoemena (2023), the Aku Ruo Ulo phrase means, “Let us bring our wealth home”. The initiative he states, underscores succinctly, the concept of an Igbo adage that says: “Ana esi n’ulo mara nma puwa na ama” (beauty begins from home to outside). Ozoemena (2003) further states that:

Over the years, many Igbos have left their region in search of better opportunities in other parts of the country. They settle, invest, and conduct their businesses there. The South East region of Nigeria is facing a major issue of brain drain as many of its educated youths tend to leave the region and settle in other parts of the country. This deprives the region of the valuable contribution that these young minds could make towards its economic development. In other words, the best and brightest minds of the region end up leaving and settling elsewhere, instead of staying and helping to build the development of their region, Alaigbo.

In line and support of the same Aku ruo ulo philosophy as a strategy for Igbo homeland development, Mazi Sam Ohuabunwa bemoaned the situation where Ndigbo largely abandoned home for foreign lands. In his words:

Anywhere we go (Igbos), we settle down, build our businesses, grow our families, build houses, and begin to develop those areas. Yet, so often, the people we have helped to develop their areas turn around to threaten us. In many cases our lives and assets are assaulted and destroyed. It is true that perhaps, learning from our experiences, during the civil war, many of us have built houses at home. But most of the houses are only guest houses visited once or twice a year. The entire south east is ravaged by poverty, essentially because of low investment in the region (Ohuabunwa. Sam. www.thewhistler.ng/peace. 17/9/24).

The “Aku ruo ulo” Diaspora Initiative and Philosophy is Inspired by a lot of Factors which include:

- i. The dispossession of the Igbos of their investments by deliberate Nigerian government policy of Abandoned Property.
- ii. The incessant killing of Igbos and destruction of their properties and investments in other parts of Nigeria, especially in the North and West.
- iii. The recurrent threats from other Nigerians in the north and west to chase Igbos away from their states and cities and take over their investments.



- iv. The numerous stealth Igbo diasporas host government policy initiatives and legislations to stifle and undermine Igbo businesses by quit orders, declaring Igbo properties illegal structures and total closure and takeover of their business premises and markets and most recently;
- v. The quit notice given to the Igbos by the Arewa Youths,s as well as the threat by the Oba Rilwan Akiolu of Lagos during the 2015 General Elections in Nigeria to throw the Igbo people into the Atlantic ocean.

Notwithstanding the offshore or beyond the borders xenophobic attacks of Diasporas in South Africa, which was not limited to the Igbo diasporas, it seems that Igbo diasporas investments and even lives are safer outside the country than within Nigeria. With the unending threats to Igbo diasporas to quit from Lagos, Kano, Kaduna and other parts of Nigeria, the enactment of legislations and initiating of policies to close markets constructed and occupied by Igbos, the bulldozing of the Igbo shops, the manifest designs to take over their investments forcefully by sending them away, the organized attacks on Ibo businessmen and residents in other Nigerian cities and states and the imposition of heavy taxes and levies on the Igbos living and doing business in these places, it has become imperative for the Igbo diasporas to think home and invest in Igboland where security of their investments, lives and properties will be guaranteed.

It is important to note that Igboland of South East Nigeria is rapidly urbanizing in relative terms. Many new cities and towns are emerging, some with markets bigger and more developed than most of the places where Igbos are living and investing. The whole Anambra and Imo States for instance, have high level of physical development to the level of becoming an integrated and urbanized one mega city states. For specifics, mention can be made of the following emerging economic and commercial centres which are developing geometrically. These include but not limited to Ozubulu, Ihiala, Oraifite, Nnobi, Awka Etiti, Ekwulobia, Uga, Alor, Ojoto, Okija, Uli, Abagana, Mgbidi, Awo Omamma, Orlu, Akokwa, Umuaka, Ahiara, Enyiogugu, Umuakagu, Anara, Okigwe, Umuagwo, Oguta, Egbema, Awo Idemili, Okpala excetra. The same urbanization and development of new cities and towns is visible in Abia, Enugu and Ebonyi states. All these places are begging the Igbo Diasporas to come home and invest there and build industrial clusters.

The Igbo Diasporas can re-enact the Nnewi spirit and replicate and develop more cities like Nnewi. Ogbuagu (2006), states that “ the high level of development of industrial and manufacturing enterprises in Nnewi, particularly after the Nigerian civil war has led many to refer to it as the Japan or Taiwan of Africa”. This includes the development of some of the largest markets and commercial centre in Nigeria. Today, Nnewi, has become a popular commercial and industrial hub that made it a business destination. Cars, motorcycles, electric cables, automobile spare parts, engine oil, industrial chemicals, cosmetics, foods, drugs and



many others are made in Nnewi. Even the Igbo mega cities of Enugu, Owerri, Umuahia, Abakaliki, Awka, Onitsha and Aba are in need of new investments.

4.3. Challenges of Aku Ruo Ulo Initiative

Whereas the Aku ruo ulo initiative for Igbo Diasporas investment and development of Igboland is a noble philosophy, there are many challenges and obstacles that stand on the way of its realization. These challenges are very often expressed by some Igbo Diasporas who have shown unwillingness or reluctance to accept this patriotic call for the development of the South East homeland. It has been a very difficult task convincing many Igbo Diasporas on the unassailable need to invest in part or whole, or relocate their businesses to Igboland. Most Igbos have lived so long in diaspora, integrated and inculturated in their places of domiciliation that moving elsewhere or answering this home coming call is near impossible. Yet, each day that passes, no matter the number of years they have lived outside, especially within Nigeria, there is provocative sad reminder by their hosts that they are strangers, and repeated threats to destroy and cease their properties. In the north west, north east and west of the country, the constant threat to undermine Igbo businesses and properties has become public policy. The abandoned properties ceased from the Igbo Diasporas after the Nigeria civil war, 1967-1970, are still in the hands of those who appropriated them. It has become clear that there is no other place within Nigeria where the Igbo man's investments is safer except in Igbo homeland of South East.

The diasporas investments outside south east have taken businesses away from the zone, lowered the Gross Domestic Product (GDP), the internally generated revenue and created huge unemployment within the south east. In the midst of every crisis in the north and west, the Igbo Diasporas become the victims, and their investments and means of livelihood attacked. "Professor Uzodinma Nwala's Alaigbo Development Foundation has been in the forefront of Alaigbo development, especially from the standpoint of economy (Egeonu, 2020). This development as envisaged by this foundation and the Aku ruo ulo initiative can only be realized if there is a conscious and patriotic effort of the Igbo diasporas to hid to this re-echoing call on them to think home and invest at home.

Inspite of all these, the number one challenge to diasporas return of investments to south east is the lack of will and commitment by them. Many of them harbour the erroneous belief and mindset that they cannot flourish or do well in Igboland with their businesses, hence, they have become the proverbial "Oka nma na ama", or better still, "Agbara na ere na mba" (the oracle or deity that thrives in foreign land). Why are the Diasporas afraid of their land even in the face of harsh business environment outside? The irony is that many places the Igbos are living and doing business in other Nigerian cities and states are not even more developed and comfortable than their home communities and villages, yet, they prefer to remain where they are.



A recent study by Forbes in 2023 shows that Igbo is the richest tribe in Africa (<https://www.legit.ng> 23/9/24). Many other studies have also confirmed this. The same Forbes (<http://www.forbes.com>) list of top 10 richest tribes in Nigeria confirmed the Igbo as the richest tribe in the country. However, this reality has not reflected in the investment and industrial outlook of the Igbo homeland of south east Nigeria, except the magnificent residential edifices that adorn the length and breadth of Igboland.

The number two challenge is the enabling business environment in different states in the Igbo south east. This situation is promoted by the inept leaderships in the states who have continuously failed to motivate, encourage and inspire diaspora investors through the provision of standard infrastructure, such as roads, electricity, railways, markets, dry and river ports, including security for business to thrive. For instance, a visit to Owerri, the Imo state capital at some of the markets established by Rochas Okorocha's administration to attract Igbo diaspora business men such as Alaba market, Rochas market, Naze Industrial Market etc, have neither good roads nor electricity and water. Other older markets built by Achike Udenwa administration like Building materials market at Umuonyeali Mbieri and Building materials market at Naze which is the single biggest market, east of the Niger have no good roads leading to them. In such a situation, it is difficult to do business in these markets which should be catalysts for trade and investment. The story is the same in all cities and states in the south east.

The number three challenge is the lost generations syndrome of Igbo diasporas. The high migration nature of the Igbos has over the years created a massive number of Igbos and their offsprings who have lost their Igbo origin and identity because of many years in diaspora who are no longer prepared to come back to their roots. This generation of Igbos have been so westernized, inculturated and integrated in their places of residence/domiciliation and taken up the nationality of the countries and states. They have forgotten their cultural background while their children and descendants cannot speak Igbo language or identify with anything Igbo. This development is a reality that has permeated every part of Igboland. In many cases, the Igbo diasporas parents who are still nostalgic of their Igbo origin and identity but knows that they have lost their children to western civilization and abroadism, have decided to come back home to adopt new children or remarry (for those still young) start a new homes. This is the agony of many Igbo Diasporas and the reason for lost generation syndrome befalling the Igbos.

Worse still, there is the recent "Ezeigbo" phenomenon making waves among some Igbos in diaspora. Nowadays, we hear of Ezeigbo Lagos, Jos, Kaduna, Kano, Sokoto, London, Washington, Rome etc. There, they have created new chieftaincy titles in foreign lands, while some have formed communities that may never think about their homes again. To such Diasporas, talking of Aku ruo ulo to them is a taboo, as they have taken new identities and built new homes abroad.



5.0. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

It is an established fact that Igboland of south east Nigeria is in a serious need of development. It is also important to know as has been stated in this study that the main reason for this state of affairs is the lack of Diasporas investment in Igbo homeland. Because the Igbos are the most migratory group in Nigeria, their wealth and investments are concentrated and littered where they are domiciled, living the homeland without investments, except empty palatial country home residential buildings which do not create wealth, but only depreciate because of wears and tiers. The lack of industries and employment inherent in Igboland is the resultant effect of Diasporas non challant attitude towards, and repudiation of investments back to and relocation of part of their wealth at home.

This is why the south east is the least industrialized zone in the country with the concomitant unemployment surge, forcing the youths to migrate to other zones /regions and foreign lands in search of greener pastures and means of livelihood. In the light of these, it is absolutely necessary that the Igbo diasporas should listen to the clarion call of the Igbo statesmen and women to bring back their wealth and investments so that Igboland will develop and compete with other zones in wealth, investment and development, in line with Aku ruo ulo initiative as a strategy for development of south east Nigeria. To achieve this goal, the following recommendations are put forward to salvage the situation:

- i. There is need for political leadership awakening and support for Aku ruo ulo initiative through a policy programme that will inspire and encourage mass diasporas return of their wealth and investment to Igboland.
- ii. There is need for upgrading of the road and electricity infrastructure in the whole of south east. Lack of these is disincentive to investment.
- iii. It is important for the federal and state governments to join hands and provide the zone with functional international airports and river ports to promote movement of investors, goods and services in the zone as well as the immediate opening of the seaports at Port Harcourt, Calabar and Ibaka which have nearest proximity to south east, instead of relying on the Lagos ports.
- iv. South East governments should open industrial estates with state of the art infrastructure in every nook and cranny Igboland. This should not be limited to the major cities as south east zone is fast and physical turning to integrated mega city.
- v. The security of the zone must be enhanced as it is a minimum requirement for investments to thrive. The level of insecurity in the zone, especially since the IPOB agitation for the sovereign state of Biafra is nauseating. It has even affected the already few investments and businesses in south east.
- vi. The south east governments should jointly construct integrated modern railway system to link all the major cities in Igboland to facilitate movement and ease of doing business in the zone.



- vii. The south east needs mechanized farms in every local government in Igboland including ranches managed by indigenes for animal husbandry for food security and income generation. To achieve this, the governments in the zone should provide lands with moratorium to investors ready to invest in agriculture.

Competing Interest

The author declares that no conflicting exist in this Manuscript.

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