

The igbo entrepreneurship

Business



Introduction Economic displacement is considered to be an external force that influences the development of entrepreneurship. Entrepreneurship is seen as a key element in the development of the economy as it creates employment, increases investment and nation's consumption, and serves as economic dynamism. Before the advent of colonial government, Nigeria was characterized by a low level of unemployment due to the entrepreneurial engagement of people. Being the largest country in Africa and having one of the largest black populations, Nigeria estimated at about 140 million citizens. 17 million Nigerians are considered to live outside the country due to the rapid increase in poverty.

Nigeria is home for between 250-400 ethnic groups, but only four major groups primarily constitute the population of Nigeria, among them Fulani, Hausa, Yoruba, and Igbo comprising 60 percent of the total population. The Ibo ethnic group of Nigeria is particularly popular for its entrepreneurship culture and development of enterprise. The society of Igbo was traditionally non-hierarchical and decentralized making its members convert from European missionaries into Christians. During the colonial rule of Britain, a lot of Igbo representatives performed military roles, served in government, and played central roles in the independence of Nigeria. Nowadays times are different and the group is less dominant in politics. Entrepreneurship in Nigeria Nigeria may boast relatively strong entrepreneurial forces due to poverty rise and lack of jobs which leave no other choice for people.

There are non-profit organizations which are dedicated to promote entrepreneurship in Nigeria. Entrepreneurship activity in Nigeria is rather a necessity and is carried out in a hostile environment which is caused by

Nigeria's economic decline. The infrastructure is a barrier to success as it limits entrepreneurial effectiveness. Economic and political instability and lack of basic needs stifle the activity of entrepreneurs. Being a barrier to the success of entrepreneurial activity, the Nigerian government is plagued by greed and corruption.

It ignores laws which may promote free enterprise and enforcement of Nigerian patent which discourages entrepreneurs from commercialization of people's inventions and ideas. Foreign investors do not seek to provide resources for entrepreneurship in the country due to political turmoil. Most of the entrepreneurs in the country operate in Abuja (the coast of Nigeria). The Igbo, the ethnic group in Nigeria, is internationally recognized for its entrepreneurship and culture. The government of Nigeria is going to implement the program to help promote exports from Nigeria and allow entrepreneurs to do business outside the country.

In spite of lower taxes, increased price ceilings, and incorporation of modern technology which increases entrepreneurs incentives in the country, there are still a lot of barriers to entrepreneurship in Nigeria. Origin and History of the Ethnic Group The Igbo is considered to be the second largest group who lives in the southern part of Nigeria. Being socially and culturally diverse, they consist of many subgroups. In spite of the fact that they live in different villages which are scattered, all of them speak the same language. As the tribe has no stories of their own concerning their origins, historians suggest two theories. According to one theory there exists a core area.

Another theory speaks about the Igbo as descendants from immigrant waves from the west and north who arrived in the in the fourteenth or fifteenth century, among them Nzam, Nri and Anam. The Igbo people were politically independent communities. Europeans and the British identified the Igbo as a tribe. But many scholars argue concerning this issue and identify them as a nation which is similar to the Native Americans Cherokee or Japanese despite the fact that the Igbo have physical state which is officially recognized. The predominance of the ethnic group was marked by the second migration wave to the coast between 1450 and 1800. It was slave trade that caused the migration to the coast.

It is believed that the first Igbo in Nigeria may have moved onto the Awka-Orlu plateau nearly four or five thousand years ago and they were closely related to their neighbors the Igala, Yoruba, Bini, and Idoma, so they share linguistic ties with them. Worldwide attention was caught by the Igbo in the 1960s after the attempts of secede from Nigeria and the Republic of Biafra independence. Europeans started to contact with the tribe in the middle of the fifteen century with the Portuguese arrival. Europeans confined themselves to slave trade on the coast of Niger that is why the main item of the Igbo's commerce was slaves. In 1807 the slave trade was abolished and the coastal areas were strongly controlled. The Southern Nigeria Protectorate which included the Igboland, was created in 1900.

Nigeria was a British colony until 1960. The country became independent on October 1, 1960. In the early 1960s, large reserves of oil were discovered near the Igboland and it caused the fear among the Igbo that they could be cut out of revenues from the natural resources of the country. In 1967, there

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was a movement of secessionists in Biafra state. The movement led to the war with the Nigerian government which lasted for 30 months. As the result hundreds of thousands of Igbo people starved to death.

The Igbo were reintegrated into Nigerian society after the war. In spite of the ethnic tension, nowadays they play an important role in the oil trade in southeastern Nigeria. The Igbo land is located in southeastern Nigeria and covers the area of about 15, 800 square miles. It has four distinct areas, the deltas which are low-lying and the river bank areas of the Igbo country are heavily flooded during the rainy season, but they are very fertile with a rather high central belt. The population of Igbo is estimated to be about 4 million people. Culture and Beliefs of the Igbo People The Igbo is the Nigeria's major and most enterprising ethnic group.

Their culture is known as 'self-help and self-enterprise' which serves as an ideology and mantra of the group. Representatives of the Igbo ethnic group are deeply religious and most of them have converted to Christianity, but there are still many of those who follow traditional religion of the Igbo. The traditional pouring of libation is still considered to be a mark of honor to the gods. The language of the tribe belongs to the language family of Niger-Congo and is the part of the Kwa subfamily but there are a lot of dialects. The system of the Igbo's folk beliefs has the explanations how everything in the world appeared. They also explain the functions of earthly and heavenly bosses and suggest how to behave towards spirits, gods, and ancestors.

They believe that the world is ruled by visible and invisible forces, among them dead, living, and those who are going to be born. Many of the belief

practices are organized locally, but in general, the major beliefs of the Igbo religion are commonly shared by the representatives of the Igbo. The widest political community is considered to be the lineage or the village. The Igbo people believe in a Supreme god named Chukwu Abiama. According to their beliefs he keeps watch over his creatures.

He observed everything from the distance and seldom interferes in the human affairs. Sacrifices are made only to the minor gods and Chukwu Abiama is believed to be the ultimate receiver of these sacrifices. Minor gods may be subject to human weaknesses and passions. They may have human traits and be industrious, kind, hospitable, unmerciful, envious, and treacherous. The Igbo people also believe in a variety of spirits and their good will is directly related to the way people treat them. These spirits occupy rivers, forests, and cultivated land.

A significant aspect of Igbo culture is a kola nut which is eaten during social and family visits, as well as very formal gatherings. They have a saying that the person that brings kola also brings life. The kola nut may be blessed and broken only by men who have titles or usually the eldest person present. People are known for their titles rather than names. The Igbo have a very great respect for elders.

Strong kinship and brotherhood bonds are observed among the Igbos. The negative aspect about Igbo culture is that they have been massively exploited in the political terrain of Nigeria. It is done with the aim to rule a situation which causes the Igbo's desire and search for leadership. In the paper 'The Igbo Entrepreneur in the political economy of Nigeria'

Olanrewaju Akinpelu Olutayo writes that “ the Igbo, when compared to the other major ethnic groups in Nigeria, are in the forefront of entrepreneurial activities, especially in the informal sector”. The Igbo Entrepreneurial Activities The majority of the Igbo entrepreneurial activities is carried out outside the Igbo states due to limited land resources.

In the business endeavors Ndigbo have always relied on self-enterprise and self-help which have resulted from their losses during the Nigeria-Biafra civil war. The Igbo entrepreneurs are known for their perseverance, determination, and courage. Many of the Igbo business men were really successful in the post-war era as not bothering about the losses and traumas they managed to build large enterprises. Among the famous Igbo entrepreneurs of the past were Chief Augustine who was the biggest transporter in Nigeria with his Ekene Dili Chukwu transport business, Chief R. O. Nkwocha, Chief D.

O Nkwonta and Chief F. G. N Okoye who owned large scale contracting and construction enterprises, Chief John Anyaehie, Chief Nnana Kalu, Chief Ferdinand Anaghara, Sir Louis Odumegwu-Ojukwu and Chief Onwuka Kalu thrived in the real estate industry, Chief G. E Chikeluba and his partners were focused and thrived at the GMP Group. But times are quite different now. Most of the mentioned entrepreneurs have already passed on and their businesses have also crumpled leaving a lot of questions of what was wrong and why they do not thrive nowadays.

The ability of the Igbo entrepreneurship dates back to the beginnings of the trade with the Europeans but in the twentieth century the trade became a

pleasure and necessity. The markets which belonged to Igbo became their main features of life and “ the breath of life”. Until the beginning of the twentieth century the Igbo were free, and the most unique fact about the economic relations of the Igbo with Europeans was that they were really continuous, intensive, and of long duration. New items of material culture were acquired by the Igbo through trade, %uFB01rst in slaves and later in palm products, new wealth, and new standards of values and prestige. The communities of Igbo were exposed to legitimate trade.

The Igboland was almost occupied by Britain by 1906. Merchant capitalists were destroyed. Thus, the production and distribution of goods which were made for exports could be anybody’s business and economic contacts between European and Igbo were established on a broad basis. It increased the number of people, mostly peasants, who participated in the trade. Peasants traded in a small scale due to lack or absence of access to loans and interests unlike other coastal traders. Succession planning is what the majority of Igbo-owned businesses constantly battle with.

The business practice is usually transferred for controlling to the male child who is the eldest in a family who sometimes appears to be the least competent. The rest of the siblings remain sidelined which leads to mismanagement these businesses. Compound problems are also caused by the polygamous lifestyles as in cases of sudden death; the preference is given to each surviving wife and her children. Having no government assistance since the end of the civil war, the Igbo moved from trade to industry. Before undertaking an industrial venture most of the industrialists possessed apprenticeship, elementary education and experience in trading.

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The industrial venture included an international component which was taken mostly from such Asian countries as Taiwan, Japan, and South Korea.

It is said that in the nineteenth-century the equipment which was manufactured in Europe was sent to these Asiatic countries in order to copy it and then to have it imported back into Nigeria. After the civil war Asians were invited to assist in the industries establishing in Nigeria. Most of the industries were located near home due to “ strong community ties, the loss of properties outside the Igboland and the need for security”. But this activity was limited because of absence of land. The main good for export are palm oil and palm kernels which are harvested from the palm tree fruit. It is a profitable business in case of export in large quantities.

Other important elements of their economy are local crafts, physical labor, and trading. High level of literacy helped many of the Igbo representatives to become business entrepreneurs and civil servants. Discussion To answer the general research question which concerns entrepreneurship of the Igbo, different questions, including Nigeria entrepreneur activity, culture and origin of the Igbo, and others, were investigated with quantitative as well as with qualitative research methods. Statistics shows that the Igbos are among the fastest growing ethnic group in the world as they make up nearly 80% of Lagos, 40% of Northern cities and hundreds of them spread to Ghana every day. They are migrating to UK, Canada, America and other countries. Their migration is mostly related to their love to education, progression, leadership and hatred to stagnation in ramifications.

It has been found out that the Igbo people have no own state and are considered to be a decentralized group. Unfortunately, there exists a stereotype concerning decentralized or stateless societies as they are thought to be small in population and geographic area, nomadic or semi-nomadic. In reality most decentralized societies are not nomadic and are agriculturally-based. The Igbo speaking people are the example of a decentralized society in Africa. They lived in villages which were politically autonomous, there was no hereditary chief system, and all decisions were made by a council of leaders or a headman who was selected by the council.

Except the councils there were organizations of religious bias, kinship ties organizations, and secret societies which were responsible for providing regulations of governing people's lives. They also controlled the balance of power and did not allow any institution or group gain too much of it. The Igbo people developed a many folded economy that was based on textiles, agriculture, and trade. It researches show that the Igbo ethnic group plays an important role in the membership of Nigeria among the civilized nations league. They are the only tribe which possesses the visibility of patriotism and modernization and translate it into patriotism and immense need in love of country.

Conclusion The entrepreneurial skills and ability of the Igbo has been influenced by the experience with the Europeans. By the seventeenth-century, the Igbo supremacy was undermined because of the increased importance which focused on the slave trade which was carried out in this part of Nigeria. The slave trade abolition, the free trade establishment, and the colonial rule introduction left the Igbo political economy which had no

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inequality pattern which was clear cut. It became inevitable for them to migrate outside their communities and to become engaged in different sorts of activities (mostly trade) to survive and to achieve status mobility. But in the way to success they met enormous obstacle which were surmounted due to determination, courage, and perseverance.

The importance and relevance of the Igbo to the world began in the middle of the 19th century. But the Igbo started to migrate to different part of the world as they were pressed to seek their livelihood avenues outside tribal boundaries due to the limited resources of the land. The Igbo entrepreneurship emerged in the period after the Biafra war. It was caused by factors inherent to the culture and society of the Igbo people and due to economic and political realities which the ethnic group was to face in Nigeria. As their entrepreneurship was of spontaneous nature, it is not sensitive to political instability, wars, and economic downturns. But in spite of these positive characteristics, the Igbo entrepreneurship faces a lot of constrains and problems.

The Igbos have been widely known and respected for their skills in entrepreneurship, but they are often criticized for the lack of unity and ability to defend common interests. They are also recognized due to their dominance in the commerce of Nigeria and as a merchant class where hedonism is seen as the main goal. Their aim is to be known and respected worldwide, to be prominent, and to boast material wealth and ingenuity as theylike to see themselves as valiant.