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## IMPACT OF GLOBALIZATION ON THE ECONOMIC TRANSFORMATION OF UROMI PEOPLE IN EDO STATE, NIGERIA

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### **Abstract**

*This research work intends to examine the impact of globalization on the economic transformation of Uromi economy especially in view of its present transformation from an overwhelmingly agrarian economy over the years into a capitalist economy. It specifically pinpoints aspects of traditional Uromi economy that have been influenced by globalization and provides insight into the origins, migration and settlement pattern of the people, their economic activities and how Uromi people came to terms with the process of economic transformation in this age of globalization. Primary data will be collected using oral interview, questionnaire and archival materials. Secondary data would be collected from relevant documentary data bases.*

### **INTRODUCTION**

The area known as Uromi was a district in the defunct Ishan Division of the Mid-Western region now Edo State of Nigeria. Uromi district as a whole measures 60sq miles. Its territory is bounded on the North by Afema/Etsako; on the North West by Irrua; on the North East by Ugboha and Ubiaja, while on the South by Ugbegun and Igueben. Uromi is situated mainly on a high ridge on the Esan plateau. The whole district is forested. Over the years, a lot of myths and prejudices enveloped the history of Uromi people like that of many other African people. These misconceptions which began as early as the colonial period have systematically grown to greater prominence today. This development attracts a deep-seated initiative of a research like this, with the hope to establish the historical authenticity of the people on solid foundations.

### **A Brief Origin of Uromi People**

Whenever a group of people recognize themselves as an entity, they like to share some explanation of their origins, they do not like to feel they are without roots. Such group recant stories of how they came to live in their present area, these stories tell of migration or divine creations of warfare or leadership of a founder hero. Such stories.... validate the people's right to the land they occupy (Thurstan Shaw, 1978:9). This is true of Uromi People of Edo State and it is against this backdrop that this aspect of this research provides insight into the theories of origins, migrations, and settlement pattern of Uromi people. In spite of the various myths of origin of Uromi people, two are considered here.

#### **(a) Migration from Egypt or the Middle East**

Uromi is one of the earliest settlements, among the 35 kingdoms in Esan Land. The Uromi Community is composed of three sub-groups of Okhiode, Obiyuan and Oberhuan. These groupings are the developments that defined the people's political and social evolution (Ehiabhi, 2015:3). Migration from Egypt or the Middle East explains that the search for fertile

land by an Egyptian party resulted in the kukuruku settlement, further penetrating South by Efa, the occupation of the fertile plain of Bini and the settlement at Ugboka. A variance of the same account alludes to a tripartite group comprising Egyptians, Hebrews and Sudanese which arrive at Uhe, with the Hebrews serving as advance party to search for fertile land. The incapacitation of Efa at Ugboka due to an injury, and desertion of Sudanese subjects became the earliest settlers at Uromi. (Otoide, 2011: 16-18). What is important here according to this story is that there was migration from Egypt or the Middle East. However, a critical question that needs an answer here is whether the area were not occupied before this new arrivals from the Middle East. This is food for thought in subsequent research about Uromi history.

(b) **The Benin Myth of Migration**

This is another version about the origins of Uromi. Benin myth of migration was narrated by A.P. Ojiefoh. According to him, the first settlers of Uromi migrated into the chiefdom about 1025 A.D. during the reign of Ogiso Orire, grandson of Ogiso Ere. It is said that there was an outbreak of small pox epidemic in Benin Kingdom and that through divination, it was revealed that witchcraft activities were responsible for the outbreak of small pox that ravaged the Benin Community. The Ogiso (King) ordered a total hunt and elimination of confirmed witches and wizards, an order that resulted in the murder of so many people. Accordingly Ojiefoh argued that those who escaped ran into the jungle until they found themselves on the table land now called Uromi. (Ojiefoh, 2002: 31 – 33).

**Traditional Economic Activities of Uromi People**

The economic might of pre-colonial Uromi was based on agricultural production which most of the population participated. Trade was also an important component of the economy and many Uromi people were involved in both internal and external trade with neighbouring communities. In addition, a vast majority of the population were also involved in other economic activities such as hunting, manufacturing and handicraft production. In recent years the economy of Nigeria including Uromi has witnessed a global interpretation of economies. This powerful thrust has been associated with far-reaching consequences which is believed will enhance the economic well-being of the people.

(i) **Agriculture**

Agricultural Production was the primary economic activity that formed both the means of livelihood and a strong factor for the rise of Uromi nation. Indeed, the first revolution that transformed human economy gave man control over his food supply. Man began to grow crops and improved by selection of numerous plants and trees that are edible. And he succeeded in taming and firmly attaching to his person certain species of animal in return for the fodder he was able to offer, the protection he could afford, and the forethought he could exercise. (Childe, 1936: 59). This economic revolution has been branded as the “Neolithic revolution”.

The peoples of West Africa, like other peoples in many parts of the world, developed their agriculture independently thousands of years before the advent of Christ. Though, there was a great deal of agricultural borrowings, by 1900, agriculture in West Africa had undergone many stages of evolution and had reached a stage of near-equilibrium. African economic historians have variously written to prove the antiquity and independent growth of agriculture in West Africa. (Omagu, 2012:20). Uromi like most traditional African societies was overwhelmingly an agrarian economy which was made possible because of favourable climatic conditions and rich humus loamy soil, which characterized the area.

The nature of soil and the terrain of Uromi determined the form of agriculture the people practiced and the crops planted. Shifting cultivation, a process which entails the intense cultivation of a piece of land for a given period, after which the land is abandoned for some years to enable the land, regains its fertility was also practiced. This method which is perhaps the oldest form of agricultural practice in West Africa may have been commonly practiced

either because of the land tenure system, customs, the settlement pattern adopted by the people as well as the lack of knowledge of highly mechanized farming (Adekola, 2011:12). Different Varieties of crops produced range from cassava, yam and cocoyam cultivated in large volume, also, secondary crops like legumes, cereals, bush and tree fruits, groundnuts, banana, palms etc. The cultivation of water yam led to the expansion of farmland. (Okoduwa, 2018: 23).

Agricultural labour requirements in pre-colonial Uromi were met through, household, cooperative labour, age-grade labour etc. African labour force according to Toyin Falola is more varied than it is generally assumed. (Falola, 2000: 179). Household labour remains the first identifiable source of labour among Uromi people. Men who had large families could easily mobilize “internal labour” for their farm work. As a matter of fact, it is the need to meet agricultural labour requirement that made many men to marry many wives and raise large families.

For cooperative labour, men, young men, ladies and women could work in form of a group into a hair to working in rotation for members. (Okhueigbe, 2020). The farm implements used by farmers reflected the traditional nature of Uromi agricultural production. The different sizes of hoes (egue) manufactured by local blacksmiths are used for weeding, planting and making of mounds. Also, machete (opia) manufactured locally was used for bush clearing, cutting tree branches and the felling of trees. Axes (uze) featured as another important tool used by farmers for uprooting roots stumping operations and chopping huge wood into bits. The pre-colonial Uromi farmers had no access to iron file for sharpening machete (onima) and axes (uze) (Oyanebho, 2020).

(ii) **Hunting**

Hunting, a relevant supplement to agriculture remains as part of the subsistence strategy of rural peoples widely practiced in many Uromi villages. Hunters were highly celebrated because of their bravery because they formed the nucleus of the community informal defense squad. Hunters were specialists and the occupation was restricted to men who allegedly had charms to overcome physical and metaphysical dangers associated with their occupation. In pre-colonial Uromi, hunting expedition was divided into two main groups i.e. Cooperative and individual hunting. For the co-operative, the day and time to meet at a particular place is agreed upon. On the D-Day, hunters met and decided on the hunting ground they will go to. At the end of which, parts of the animal killed are dismembered and shared among those who were less fortunate for that day. Hunters used well-domesticated dogs during hunting exercise to help draw the attention of animals in the bush. (Omagu, 2012).

(iii) **Manufacturing**

Contrary to the erroneously held belief by some racist European Scholars about African societies as backward, Uromi people through their manufacturing activities have not only dispelled this false claim but have also punctured this balloon of falsehood perpetrated by these disgruntled Europeans about African past. There are many manufacturing activities engaged in by pre-colonial Uromi people ranging from agricultural tools, war implements, varieties of baskets, household furniture as well as residential buildings made by mould blocks. These manufacturing activities developed in line with the available technology. (Talbot 1969:23) Soap making was yet another economic activity that flourished in pre-colonial Uromi and was dominated by women. This may be due to the fact that soap making requires patience which it was thought women possessed. (Bassey 1992:1-3).

(iv) **Trade**

Trade was equally important to the economic growth of the people. Trading activities among Uromi people was organized at two levels i.e. local trade as well as long distance trade for the purposes of comparative cost advantage. Local trade was between different villages within

Uromi while the long distance trade involved Uromi people and her neighbours. Local trade was the earliest form of trade that majority of people engaged in pre-colonial Uromi. (Oiwoh, 2020). Local distance trade took care of the exchange and distribution of products between different village groups such as Ewoiyi, Ukoni, Amendokhian, Egbele, Arue, Efandion etc. Organization of market during this period was largely influenced by the beautiful agricultural and non-agricultural products of the people. As a result, varieties of goods were supplied to market places. The cowry was the standard medium of exchanges in those days in Uromi community (Ojiefoh, 2020).

Long distance trade also took place among pre-colonial Uromi people. The fact that colonization provided incentives to greater production beyond the one needed at subsistence level, the surpluses necessitated a long distance trade for exchange. Long distance trade which involved people across borders created the opportunity for different varieties of goods to be exchanged. It was under this circumstance that Uromi people traded with their neighbours such as Ugboha, Irrua, Ubiaja, Ewohimi, Ekpoma, Ozigono, Ugbegun, Igueben etc. (Usianlele, 2020). Farm products, such as yams, groundnut, and livestock were sold. Other trade items included goats, dogs, chicken and pigs.

### **IMPACT OF GLOBALIZATION ON THE ECONOMIC TRANSFORMATION UROMI PEOPLE OF EDO STATE**

There are several views on how globalization has impacted on the economic lives of Uromi people of Edo State. While for some people globalization has positively impacted on the lives of the people, others argue that it has negatively impacted on the lives of Uromi people. Running through this debate, this part examines both the positive and negative impact of globalization on the economic life of Uromi people.

#### **a. Agricultural economy**

The impact of globalisation on the agricultural sector of Uromi economy is both positive and negative. Positively, globalisation has revolutionized the way agricultural activities are carried out in Uromi Land. Mechanization and post-harvesting operations is boosting food production in the area (Daniel, 2020:20). Indeed access to mechanization especially tractors has reduced drudgery and promote sustainable agronomical practices. The impact of globalisation has flourished to our agriculture and its engagements. Without a need to reiterate it, it is obvious that the world has gone beyond the reliance of farmers on cutlass and hoes to do their agricultural activities for them. (Falola, 2019:19) In order for them to consolidate their gains, our farmers in Nigeria, particularly those in Uromi must look into what globalisation can do for them to maximize their potentials to the fullest.

Negatively speaking, globalisation has led to the mass migration of Uromi people to other parts of Edo State and even Nigeria as a whole to help them develop their economies. The past decade has seen rural livelihoods collapsing in Uromi due to mass migration of our men and women. Today, a lot of Uromi sons and daughters migrate to other parts of Nigeria in search of jobs of all sorts. In the same vein, Uromi has witnessed an influx of migrant Labourers to provide labour needs during farming season for a fee. Even the Hausas from the Northern part of Nigeria provides labour needs to Uromi farmers. In all, the government should provide the needed assistance to Uromi people by making them have access to technological inventions that will help their agricultural activities. Agriculture simply remains the propeller of Uromi economic growth.

#### **b. Banking economy**

Banking and globalization are becoming inseparable. Several banks in Uromi ranging from First Bank, Zenith Bank, Fidelity Bank, Union Bank, etc are driving the economic growth and transformation of Uromi with technology which is the backbone of globalization. Virtually all bankers in Uromi interviewed in the course of this research emphasized the need for technology in business, digital offering, agent banking, wholesale and transaction banking etc. Uromi sons and daughters can now

conduct financial services via mobile wallets, payment apps, online lending and agent banking such as point of sales (POS) scattered all over the place. (Collins, 2020:13). In other words, Uromi economy has been “digitalized” in the age of globalization especially in the Banking economic sector. Added to the above, is the proliferation of Automated Teller Machines (ATMs) that have made banking easy in Uromi.

However, cash-less banking has faced several criticism in Uromi because of poor quality of service, double debits, excess cashiers to loss of funds to fraudsters, with e-payment users having sad stories to tell. For this reason, many bank customers in Uromi don’t take e-payment channels like Automated Tell Machines (ATM), point of sale (POS), internet banking, among others seriously (Collins, 2020: 28). Despite these e-payment challenges, Uromi people now enjoy revamped banking system.

c. **Business economy**

The advancement in technology has opened up Uromi business to global economy. For instance, the internet provides platform for all forms of businesses online. Marketing online is faster, cost effective, requires less staff and engaging. The benefits are enormous (Mbanan 2018:66). Nowadays, Uromi businessman are exploiting the various advantages that come with globalization to move forward their businesses. Put differently, access to internet has been a major contributing factor in the expansion of businesses in Uromi town. Retail giants such as Amazon and Walmart are technological disruptions that have turned online shopping into a thing of joy. Be that as it may, i.e. despite these benefits that globalization presents, an internet shutdown is a big disruption that can prevent smooth conduct of businesses online.

d. **Entertainment and tourism economy**

In terms of entertainment, Uromi musicians for instance are now able to purchase modern musical gadgets to relieve Uromi people the stress of daily existence, creating unlimited employment for DJs, drinking lounge owners, strip club entertainers (Chidi, 2020:46). In today’s Uromi Modern hotels are scattered all over the place such as Citadel hotel along New Agbor road, Standard hotel along Oyomon road, Tonerio hotel behind Uromi main market. (ILuobe, 2020). All these hotels are globalization enabled because the equipments used in the building of the hotels and the gadgets used are all tied to the phenomenon of globalization. Caterers, decorators, facemake-up specialists have boosted their enterprises through the instrument of globalization.

e. **Diaspora remittances**

With the advent of globalization, Uromi sons and daughters are now able to travel abroad with the availability of air travel which was non-existent in the pre-colonial period. Today, we can see “Uromians” not only in different parts of Europe, Asia, Africa but also in the Americas. Monies sent home by those sons and daughters have helped in no small measure in boosting the local economy in areas such as Housing, Automobiles and Business Enterprises etc. However, the migration opportunities that comes with globalization is also afflicted with some negative trends. For instance, the career aspirations of most Uromi youths today is to become a “yahoo-yahoo” boy that can suddenly emerge from penury into instant wealth of a magnitude that will dazzle the imagination of even the most adventurous entrepreneur.

Globalisation has raised a generation of Uromi youths that can be described as 419ers, scammers, email hackers and money launderers. These boys have built mind boggling mansions with the power of money while residing in Malaysia, Senegal, Kenya, etc (Inetianbor, 2020). They achieve this economic status through social media deceit, digital extortion, hacking of accounts. They inflict financial ruin to their “clients.” They prefer stolen money to hard work (Taju, 2020: 13).

## Conclusion

This research specifically pin-point how different aspects of traditional Uromi economy has been influenced by globalization. The research undertook an examination of the origins and settlement pattern of Uromi people of Edo State, their traditional economic activities and how the community gradually came to terms with the phenomenon of globalization. Globalization has opened up Uromi economy to world capitalist economy although this is not without its constraints such as fluctuations in exchange rate, internet shut down etc. The proliferation of information technologies have brought unlimited opportunities in terms of retail and wholesale trade while at the same time opening the flood gate of crimes such as advance fee fraud, hacking etc. The argument in this research is that the adaptation of Uromi people to globalization has brought with it both positive and negative impact, but with the positive impact far outweighing the negative impact.

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