



FUDMA JOURNAL OF ARTS (FUDJARTS)

Volume 2 Special Edition 2018

**A Publication of the Faculty of Arts,
Federal University Dutsinma, Katsina State**

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Volume 2 SPECIAL EDITION 2018

ISSN: 2636-4530

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FUDMA Journal of Arts (FUDJARTS) is a semiannual publication of the Faculty of Arts, Federal University Dutsinma, Katsina State. It is an Intellectual sign post of the Faculty's commitment to avowed ideals of scholarship in the Arts and Humanities generally. Papers for publication must be written in clear unambiguous and concise English. **Typed double spaced with font size 12 in Times New Roman with 3cm margin.** All manuscripts must be original, analytical and not previously published in part or whole in whatever form elsewhere. **Manuscripts must not exceed 15 pages including references. Authors are at liberty to adopt MLA or APA referencing style.** All papers submitted must bear authors names, affiliated institutions, and e-mail addresses. Manuscript for publication in the Journal should include in the main text **an abstract not exceeding 250 words, an introduction, main body and conclusion** depending on the type of subject covered or disciplinary orientation of the paper. All tables, figures, graphs, diagrams and photographs should be numbered and integrated appropriately. Intending contributors should send e-copies of their papers via the Journal e-mail: **fudmajournalarts@gmail.com**

NOTE

Views expressed in the journal are neither those of the Faculty of Arts, Federal University Dutsinma nor the Editorial team but those of authors.

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THE RESILIENCE OF THE INDIGENOUS ECONOMY OF THE BOKI PEOPLE IN THE EASTERN NIGER DELTA AREA OF NIGERIA, 1900- 2005

Odeigah, Theresa Nfam

Abstract

Agriculture and trade were the primordial economic activities of the people of Boki and it was their main occupation and source of livelihood. This contributed to the growth and development of the indigenous economy of the Boki people. The indigenous economy consisted basically of farming, salt production, fishing, hunting, animal rearing and trade. These economic activities of the people were capable of generating surplus produce after it met the needs of the people. Some of the agricultural produce was yam, palm oil, cocoyam, plantain, banana and maize. The crops defied the ecological barriers and this gave room for good harvest. The indigenous people of Boki depended, on indigenous vestigial implements such as hoes, diggers, cutlasses and sickles, which were very vital to the cultivation of the land. All these implements were locally fabricated and it was a source of employment for some of the people of Boki. Exchange goods and services between the Boki people and other communities held sway, and these exchanges attracted long and short distance trade among the people. Trade was also a crucial component of the indigenous economy, that harnessed the disadvantages of the disparities of products among the various communities and this also encouraged the establishment of large markets. This paper examines critically, the significant development in the indigenous economy of the Boki people 1900-2005, using a historic-structural and multi-disciplinary approaches and it concludes, that the Boki indigenous economy met the needs of the people and they had surplus, to trade with the neighbouring communities.

Keywords: Resilience, Indigenous, Economy, Agriculture, Trade

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Introduction

The indigenous economy of the Boki people in the Eastern Niger Delta Area of Nigeria was built on agriculture, crafts and trade. The economy flourished and attracted patronage from the different parts of Nigeria. The coming of the Europeans and the consequent colonial rule did not hinder the economic activities of the Boki people (Offum, 2017). The indigenous people maintained their economic affiliation and their zeal for self-determination. The economic policies put in place by the colonial masters did not really distort the production of the indigenous products and the eventual distribution of goods to other communities. The colonial masters built on the already existing economic platform and further transformed the economy. The imposition of colonial rule affected mainly export products like cocoa, timber, rubber and cotton among others. The indigenous economy grew side by side with the colonial economy. The Eastern Niger Delta Area as a whole, agriculture played a significant role in the contribution of economic growth of the people (Allen, 1968, p379).

According to Evans Pritchard, who was one of the foremost anthropologists and the pioneer researcher in social structure, history and religion in Africa, he emphasised that, man first transformed into an agricultural being, controlling his own food supply, which also helped man to begin to plant, cultivate, harvest, consume and also sell the products. The system of agriculture was based on shifting cultivation and rotation. Some of the crops included yam, garri, cocoyam, plantain, okro, pumpkin and vegetables and these were regularly planted. Palm oil, plantain, banana and maize production, fishing, hunting and crafts also contributed to the tremendous growth and development of the economy at that time in Boki (Adam, 1901, p29). Agriculture was very vital to the indigenous economy, because the land was fertile for cultivation of different types of crops. Agriculture was an occupation that engaged both the men and the women of Boki, including the children who were mostly occupied in the farms. It is pertinent to note that agriculture has been the most common economic activity of the Boki people and it has remained so even till date (Calabar Reporters, 2017, p20).

The Indigenous Economic Activities

The Boki indigenous economy was mostly subsistence and it embraced five broad production types which included farming, fishing, hunting, animal rearing and craft industry. Some foreign explorers like William

Allen, even attested to the prominence of agriculture and the commitment of the indigenous people in the production of agricultural products (Etta, 2017).

Farming

The economy embraced different segments of production, like food crop which was a dominant sector. All families practiced agriculture as a means of livelihood. According to Njoku, because agriculture was the most prominent of their economic engagements, it became possible for specialisation of occupational groups to take place, because specialisation also enhanced the production of agricultural products (Njoku, 2001, 11-12). Another factor that helped in the production of food crops, were the soil, vegetation and climatic conditions which were favourable to agriculture. The eco-system was mostly associated with regular rainfall which helped in the growth and development of food crops and also non-food crops (Odey, 2017).

Farming was one of the key factors in the growth and development of the Boki economy. The major characteristic of the Boki economy was the fact that it was based on agriculture. Agriculture was the occupation of the people right from inception (Hopkins, 1973, 28). The production of goods and services was fully enhanced and met the needs of the people. The economy was dynamic and it sustained the ancient people of Boki. Oral interviews conducted show that the economy was not solely subsistence, there were also inter-communal commercial activities in which goods and services were exchanged (Odey, 2017). It is important to note that goods from Boki were carried as far as the Northern part of Nigeria to such major towns as Kano and Kaduna.

Almost all the Boki people were involved in farming activities and the practice was dictated by the favourable climatic condition. The soil in Boki was good for the different agricultural crops and cultivation was facilitated by good rainfall (Nku, 2017). The rainfall supported the root crops in the environment and yielded good harvests. Farming was an occupation of both the women and the men. Places like Ntamante, Bansan, Ugep-Oskom and Oku all in Boki, had the greatest farm produce and their farmers were known as the greatest yam farmers in Boki. People from the other parts of Cross River and Akwa-Ibom State benefited from the agricultural prowess of the Boki people (Oboli, 1957, 77). This made the Efiks and the Ibibios travel down to Boki to purchase yams. Other parts of Boki such as the Eastern Boki

were also prodigious farmers especially in the production of plantain, pineapple and banana. These products remained the principal occupation of the overwhelming majority of the indigenes (Bisong, 2017).

Above all, labour also contributed to the success of the economy and was crucial in the process of farming as well during harvesting and sale of the produce. Labour was mostly recruited through children, wives, relations and slaves. Adam Smith, in his *Wealth of Nations* said "A numerous family of children, instead of being a burden was a source of opulence and prosperity to the parents" (Adams, 1901). Another form of labour in Boki that helped the farmers was the communal assistance. This was a form of labour that involved the whole community and it was particularly very useful for large farms (Obadike, 1987, 142-143).

Hunting

The Boki economy was not limited to agriculture alone, but also hunting played a major role. Hunting in Boki was a popular occupation that was practiced among the men and it was an old occupation of the people. Hunting was a highly skilled and respected occupation (Abang, 2017). It was pursued as a part-time job, which played a significant role in the indigenous economy. Hunting was carried out in groups or it could be individual based and it was mostly effective during the dry season (Njoku, 10-11). Places like Bashua, Bansan Osokom, Bunyia, Oku-bushuyu, Bekpo, Nsadop, Borum, , Ise-bendegha and Orimekpang among others were good in hunting expedition. Occasionally, there were hunting expeditions organised by the various communities in Boki (Otu, 2017). The yields of animals from such expeditions were usually high and the community leaders were also given some of the notable animals killed, such as elephants or leopards as gifts. Hunting expeditions also helped in unifying the various communities in Boki and also served as a means of community mobilisation (Obi, 2017). Hunting expedition was usually carried out in the dry season, because the period was usually associated with less farming activities for the men and also a period when reduced vegetation cover exposed animals to hunters. It was conducted mostly at night and occasionally in the day.

The hunters somehow developed unique skills which include extra-sensory sensitivity which enabled them see well at night and be unnoticed by the animals. Hunters have also been said to commune

with the spirits in the bush and this was helpful in detecting the presence of animals (Njoku, 30). During the day hunting was combined with other activities, such as harvesting of crops among other activities. It was an occupation that took place all the year round, but was mostly intensively practiced during the dry season. Hunters moved quietly in bush to avoid noise and distraction of the animals, some of the hunters needed a very high degree of skill and experience for the animals to be caught (Alagoa, 1880, 56-57).

Animals like grass-cutters, leopard, lion, deer, and elephants among others were killed by hunters. Elephant tusks were used as part of the title men's dressing. Animals like leopard were important because, the skin was used as a symbol of authority and bravery. Hunters who were able to kill animals like elephants and leopards were held in high honour and praised in songs during major ceremonies (<https://en.wikipedia.org>). Hunters used indigenous equipment like bows, spears, arrows, traps, matches, snares, traps and local guns. The guns most times turned out to be dangerous to the owners, because of accidental discharged from bullet which was a common hazard among hunters (Odey, 2017).

Animals were hunted for consumption and some were sold for commercial purposes. Animal skins such as that of crocodile and leopards were also used for native medication especially the whiskers, claws and fangs of the leopard. Traders from Northern Nigeria came regularly in purchase of the hides and skin of these animals (Bisong, 2017). The skill and the method of hunting made hunters to be brave and enjoy safety during their operations. Because of the bravery of some hunters, they were always honoured with historic praise names such as *Njuoeyim* and *Oganonate* among others meaning brave hunters and strong men. Animals like elephants were not only a source of meat for consumption, but also a source of ivory (Edor, 2017).

Fishing

Fishing was a part time occupation among the people of Boki in the Eastern Niger Delta Area. It was a popular occupation among the women not many men participated in fishing. The terrain of Boki is filled with different streams and waterways suitable for fishing. Some of the varieties of fish caught were electric fish; cat fish and tilapia among others (Afu, 2017). Fishing implements were locally fabricated among the people especially the men who were specialist, those instruments such as nets and baskets among others were made by them (Alagoa, 57).

The fishing practiced in Boki did not warrant individuals travelling to other places like Calabar or Ikom to look for rivers to fish, but it was practiced within communities in Boki. Occasionally there were fishing expeditions that brought people together which improved socialisation and unity among the various communities. Fish was mostly consumed as delicacies, and was a rich source of protein (Agan, 2017). The fish was mostly used for domestic consumption and some were for commercial purposes to generate some income for the family. One major significant improvement that occurred in the fishing industry then was the local production of fishing nets. This made fishing easier and the yield also increased. Once the fish was caught and taken home, the next stage was the processing of the fish (Abang, 2017). Most times the processing, preservation, and the storage were done by the women who afterwards transported them to the local markets for sale.

Palm Wine Production

Palm wine production was another occupation that contributed to the economic growth of the Boki people, *Batoumu* as is fondly called in Boki, was an important indigenous alcoholic drink that was used in social functions, traditional ceremonies, and cultural festivals among others. It was a special brew meant mainly for the men and a few of the women. Most women engaged in the selling of the palm wine for business as their source of livelihood. Palm wine was got from palm trees and the process was tedious, because men had to climb the palm trees or uproot them, before the process of tapping the wine could commence (Peter, 2017). Some of the palm wine tappers were very adept in the business that they were sought after in the communities to supply them with their natural good palm wine.

Market

Market was an important economic place where transactions took place every five days. Daily markets were not common in Boki. The markets were periodic in most communities. Communities took their product such as yam, pottery wares, vegetables, palm oil and garri to the market for sale. Many traders came from far and near to buy these items. The most significant market in Boki, is the Okundi and Kakwagom market (Otu, 2017). This market attracted traders and individuals from both far and near to purchase food items. In this market, food stuffs from different parts of Boki were brought for sale. The market was known for the availability of different products and was therefore a great meeting

point for traders and farmers. Farmers were also simultaneously selling their goods as well as maintaining relationship with their customers. This exchange of goods and services contributed a great deal to the growth of the indigenous Boki economy (Ekang, 2017).

It is pertinent to note that, in spite of the fact that agriculture was the backbone of the economy there were other sectors that also contributed to the economic growth of the area. The sector accounted for about 40 percent of the economy and these sectors were mostly in the area of palm produce, cocoa, timber and rubber (Nkim, 2017). These products provided the raw materials for the manufacturing sector and even the crafts sector (Ozim, 2017). These sectors contributed to the transformation of the economy, because some of these products were exported out of Nigeria to the European countries. This enabled the Europeans to enter the hinterland areas to buy cocoa, timber, palm oil and rubber which were used in the manufacturing of lubricants, candles and creams among others (Ojong, 2006, 145).

Conclusion

In conclusion, the economy of Boki in the Eastern Niger Delta area flourished and it played a vital role in the growth and development of the people of Boki. Boki is known for its agricultural produce and the diversification of the indigenous economy was one of the major reasons for the success of the Boki economy. The economy depended largely on unskilled labour by various age groups, families and professional hunters among others, resulting in dynamic and market oriented economy. The diversification into different crops like yam, cassava, cocoyam, garri and palm oil among others was a major strength of the indigenous Boki economy. The favourable climate and the good terrain gave opportunity for the Boki natural economic potentials to flourish.

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