
Entrepreneurship and the “Cubana Principle” As the Basis of Igbo Cosmology

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ABSTRACT

The growth of any economy is hinged on great entrepreneurship development of its citizens. Hence every country that wants development has to encourage entrepreneurship. In Nigeria we have observed that entrepreneurship is an embodiment of the Igbo cosmology. However, our paper shall be centered on a new principle that appears to magnify the entrepreneurship qualities of the Igbos. This principle is called the “Cubana Principle”. It is a variant of the Igbo traditional entrepreneurship life. This principle derived its name from a procedure applied by a popular businessman – Obi Cubana (Obinna Iyiegbu) in giving assistance to over fifty youths on entrepreneurship training in their various vocations. The success of this principle generated an investigation. This paper analyzes this principle and postulates that though it’s a variant of the Igbo entrepreneurial character, if applied, may yield greater results in the development of the nation. The paper shall be descriptive, analytic and prescriptive in approach.

KEYWORDS: *Cubana Principle, Entrepreneurship, Apprenticeship, Igbo Cosmology, Development.*

INTRODUCTION

Entrepreneurship is the basis of economic development. The Igbos all over the world cherishes economic achievements. They understand entrepreneurship as a potent economic force, Chinweuba Ezeugwu (2017). Thus, the basic value of entrepreneurship to the Igbo people is glaring, such that life cannot be preserved, enriched or sustained without wealth. It is generally said in Nigeria that any city, village or hamlet where you do not find an Igbo man, you should run away because nothing good can emanate from such community. Thus, all over the globe, there appears to be no place where an Igbo man cannot be found. Why is this so? It is believed that they are highly enterprising and can find opportunities in every situation of life. The Igbo takes wherever he finds himself as home, hence he can invest in landed properties, stocks and goods as long as he is allowed to co-exist. Any wonder in Nigeria, he builds high rise building and establish companies in Lagos, Abuja, Kano and Kaduna, but may not have a good building at his home town – why? He does this because he believes in business before pleasure. The multiple entrepreneurial training they have, attest to their success.

ENTERPRENEURSHIP AS THE BASIS OF NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Entrepreneurs are increasing in importance throughout the world and have been the basis of the economic development of China, USA, Japan and other developed economies. Many businesses in Nigeria have been undertaken by people and ran at loss due to lack of required

skills. Roth (2014) defined entrepreneurship “as the capacity and willingness to develop, organize and manage a business venture along with any of its risks in order to make a profit”. The Ndigbo in Nigeria appear to have an innate capacity and willingness to develop, organize and manage businesses. Hence, wherever they are found in Nigeria, there will be development because entrepreneurship is the basis of development. It is a fact that sustainable development goals in Nigeria depends on the effectiveness of entrepreneurial development programmes.

Entrepreneurs utilize businesses to create products and services that solve the problems of man. Thus, they are the back bone of every economy because they provide the financial base that fuels and pays wages and brings benefits to the economy. They are the ones that really pay taxes and contribute to national development. According to Alan Hall (2012), entrepreneurs are America’s highest source of economic prosperity and growth. He went further to emphasize that successful entrepreneurs are the backbone and lifeblood of the US economy. Entrepreneurship stimulates the growth of employment by generating new jobs when entrepreneurs enter the market. Okoro, et al (nd) posits that for African countries to promote sustainable employment and reduce poverty and in addition create jobs, they must emphasize and foster entrepreneurship.

The activities and impact of entrepreneurs on the socio-economic life of nations are quite tremendous. The small and medium enterprises sub-sector in Nigeria has been increasing and more impact is being felt in wealth generation, employment with the promotion of entrepreneurial programmes.

APPRENTICESHIP IN IGBO COSMOLOGY AS SPRINGBOARD OF ENTREPRENEURSHIP

Many Igbos, due to their innate entrepreneurial abilities do not rely on government assistance for employment. They believe in the dignity of labour of the human person, hence every individual tries to prove to his neighbor that he or she is not lazy and can sustain himself or herself with skills. On this premise, from childhood an Igbo begins to conceptualize the skills where he will express himself. This innate awareness is buttressed by the belief that “*Aku ne si obi ike*” which implies that wealth gives confidence. No wonder parents call their children “*Akunaesiobike*”. To achieve this, it is enshrined cosmologically in the Igbo tradition that entrepreneurial laziness should not be found in any individual. The step to the achievement of this objective after basic or higher education is to enroll into apprenticeship.

Apprenticeship within Igbo parlance is called “*Imu ahia*” or “*Igba boi*” which literally means learning a trade or serving an experienced businessman or woman to develop needed skills to make one financially independent. This tradition of apprenticeship has been the basis of the success of all Igbo businessmen and women.

The spirit of mentorship is an inherent part of the Igbo of Southeastern Nigeria. Onyeka Onwenu (2021) stated that “Recently, Harvard University and others around the world have begun the study and teaching of the apprenticeship programme of Ndigbo, describing it as the largest business incubation programme in the world”. The Igbos like many other ethnic groups believes in maintaining legacy, values, customs and norms. Nnamdi Machie (2021) states “...for the Igbos, business continuity seems paramount as a means to ensuring that there are trans-generational business legacies”. This attempt at maintaining legacies of business success account for efficiency and expertise in entrepreneurial programmes.

IGBA BOI (APPRENTICESHIP) SYSTEM

In the development of entrepreneurial skills, *Igba boi* (apprenticeship) system is a major procedure. In this system is the “*Imu ahia*” learning a trade or how to trade on goods and services such as electronics, computer hardware or software, etc. and “*Imu oru aka*” which is learning a skill or craft such as welding and fabrication, etc.

The Igbos of Southeastern Nigeria are noted for financing and investing on human capital development through vocational training. This dates back to the slave trade business of the 15th century. Igbo ethnic group during the slave trade were exposed to entrepreneurship through contact with slave masters. Ohadike, Don C (1998).

The *igba boi* system is an organized procedure recognized as a legitimate educational method for entrepreneurial development. An apprentice and his master agree on terms of service and settlement at the end of apprenticeship by way of reward. Most times the family members and the successful businessman or woman agree that the apprentice serve his master between four and seven years depending on the age of the apprentice. At the end of the agreed service year, the master settles him with a huge sum of money or establishes him to be independent in the business. It has to be stated here that though *igba boi*, *imu ahia* and *imu oruaka* are all apprenticeship but their processes are not the same. *Igba boi* entails the apprentice serving and learning from the master with the notion that the master settles or establishes him or her at the agreed period. *Imu ahia* and *imu oru aka* is the type that the apprentice pays the masters to learn the trade or skill. Ejo-Orasei et al (2019) corroborates this that “The *Imu-ahia* and *imu-oru aka* was seen as the dominant type of the Igbo entrepreneurship and apprentice system”.

Successful entrepreneurs have been created through the apprenticeship system of the Igbos. It is postulated that the Igbo apprenticeship system raised more millionaires than the business schools all over the world. BBC’s Chiagozie Nwonwu (2021) wrote concerning one Mr. Orie, “The shop and everything in it was given to Mr. Onyeka Orie after Mr. Orie worked for his boss without payment for several years, learning the trade”.

THE “CUBANA PRINCIPLE”

The “Cubana Principle” may not be known or popular as a business strategy. It is a coinage from the method adopted by a popular Igbo businessman called Obi Cubana (Obinna Inyiegbu) to improve and facilitate entrepreneurship among youths. This principle is a special business strategy motivated by the spirit of philanthropy.

The “Cubana Principle” is a variant of the *Igba boi* or *Imu-ahia* system of the Igbos. Its success on application necessitated this research. The “Cubana principle” is a method whereby the Igbos philanthropic businessman sponsors individuals or youths to undertake entrepreneurial training under a successful businessman and pays or compensates the individuals for their services rendered to their bosses. This compensation comes by replicating or establishing the individual on the trade or skill learnt.

On the *igba boi* apprenticeship system, young people within the Igbo community leave their families and loved ones to serve successful business people for an agreed period. Richard Kwameh Krah (2021) said that the scheme has its roots traced to the social club called “The Peoples Club of Nigeria” which was formed in 1971. It was predicated on the Igbo philosophy of “*onye a hana nwanne ya*”, meaning “do not leave your brother behind”. Historically scholars perceived that it was developed as a method of dealing with the post-

civil war economic crisis in Nigeria. On the “Cubana Principle”, the philanthropist takes a different strategy. The successful businessman does not “payoff” or “settle” the young man or servant at the end of the agreed year of service or training. The onus of settlement rest on the philanthropist who sponsored the training.

Seun Opejobi (2021) noted how Obi Cubana helped to establish some individuals from Oba his hometown in 2013. Most of those he helped to establish became millionaires and billionaires in the various business endeavours. “In 2013, I pushed 53 uneducated Oba boys into the market to learn trade. In 2017, I withdrew all of them from their ogas (bosses) and settled all of them with 3 million naira each and paid for their shops. He went further to posit that he linked 40 of them into importation and made them’ use my name and platform for the importation of goods”. The reward Obi Cubana got was that they showed great gratitude during the burial of his late mother. He added that “they also help me in their capacity when I require their help”.

AN ANALYSIS OF THE OBI CUBANA PRINCIPLE

On delving into this principle that yielded success from the account of Obi Cubana, there are certain contending conditions that emerged. The questions that arose were, is this a viable economic strategy? Will the application of this principle withstand economic crisis?

This from our analysis, may not be a viable economic strategy. However, for the philanthropist, he may have self-fulfillment. There are possible reasons why this procedure may fail in future. This principle may have been successful to Obi Cubana probably because the boys he sent for these entrepreneurial training may not have been told that they will be compensated by Obi, if he did inform them, then it must be wonderful for him to have over eighty percent success.

Those under “*igba boi*” system are expected to respect their bosses, loyal and be trustworthy in their dealings. No fraudulent servant makes it at the end because he needs to be settled by his satisfied boss.

In the application of the “Cubana Principle” there is the likelihood that the apprentice knowing fully well that his master is not the one to establish him but the sponsor may not become the good apprentice he ought to be knowing that “He who pays the piper dictates the tune”, there might be an element of insubordination, knowing that a different boss will pay his bills. The result will be lack of concentration and laxity on the part of the apprenticeship. Thus output after training might be low because that was what was exhibited during training.

To the sponsor of the principle, two things may confront him, it is either self-realization that he has contributed to people’s lives or disappointed at those assisted to stand financially if they fail or become ungrateful.

RECOMMENDATION AND CONCLUSION

Entrepreneurship being the key to national development should be highly encouraged through sustainable development programme by the government. Vocational and technical education which is the engine of industrialization has to be given regular attention it deserves. In situation where the government fails in its social responsibility, the Igbo apprenticeship system should be encouraged nationwide. The reason is that entrepreneurship is the basis of economic development. The *cubana* principle should be encouraged especially by kindhearted philanthropists who are interested in national development because it propels small and medium scale industrialization. The reason is that the principle even if it does not

financially empower the sponsor, the nation's economy will improve, and the posterity of the sponsor will not be lost. Full scale industrialization is what builds and sustains economic development of nations, thus it is necessary to create an enabling environment and policies that will make it thrive.

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