

Ekwolo (Rivalry) and Issues of Community Development in Nando: the Role of the Elite

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Abstract

No doubt, Ekwolo (Rivalry) has become the subject of our community “Small talk” Such that every negative thing or our inability to achieve Community Development is attributed to it. When two people disagree on any issue or there are differing groups, Ekwolo will be accused as the cause of the different views. What therefore is Ekwolo? Can it engender Community Development? What is the role of the Elite in engendering Community Development? These are the questions I seek answers in this paper. My conclusion is that Ekwolo as Local Rivalry is a natural phenomenon that exists not only within human being but also among all the living organisms that struggle for competitive advantage on limited and scarce resources. Therefore it is not only found in Nando but everywhere. The paper identified “strategic Ekwolo” as the one capable of engendering community development and argued that the Elites must not limit themselves in propounding theories of development but must be involved in the urgent need of community development. Using Mmuta Age Grade of Nando, Anambra State, Nigeria as a case study, the paper called for the harmonization of their potentials for Nando development.

Key Words: Strategic Ekwolo; Local Rivalry; Community Development; Elites; Age Grade

Introduction

Indeed, Ekwolo (Rivalry) has become the subject of our community “Small talk” Such that every negative thing or our inability to achieve growth and development is attributed to it. Chief Elias Ajamma had argued that, it is hard to conceptualize Ekwolo in English language without losing its meaning and existence. He revealed that the rivalry was between the youths in ages of 15-20 and was popular among the youths of Oṃabala and Amakom region. Writing further in his classic 2005 book “The Age Grade System: The Home Grown Igbo Democracy”. Chief Ajamma said that Ekwolo is the by-product of Age-Grade System in Oṃabala or Amakom area of Anambra state. The system he said was a main part of the culture and social syntheses of that time which had dug their roots deep into the way of life of the people. There were lot of merry-making, happiness, satisfaction and self fulfillment in the system. Food, fish, bush meat, pure palm wine, were produced in abundance exhilarating atmosphere diffused everywhere. Community life was well organized and community activity equilibrium was not disorientated. They lived in their little paradise on earth. Chief Ajamma added that since those who practice Ekwolo are in the first rug of age grade, so it did not affect the Age-Grade System.

The Ekwolo system, according to Ajamma was an enigma to those who were not involved or did not appreciate the intrinsic value of Ekwolo and the impact it had in moulding the culture of Qmabala people.

To them, the underlying reason for Ekwolo was friendship, first among the members of group, and second among the entire members of the age-grade irrespective of group loyalty. Hence they could call each other “Okwu m” irrespective of group they belong. Ajamma was optimistic in arguing that the English word “friend” is too light to express “Okwu m” as practiced in Ekwolo Age-grade system. He was optimistic in saying that the attributes of Okwu (friendship) as existed in the system can best expressed in the words of Robert Blair. “Friendship! Mysterious cement of the soul! Sweetener of life! And solder of society!” friendship evolved from the soul; it gave meaning, value and comfort to life, and it created peace, unity, loyalty and security in the society.

To Chief Ajamma, if Ekwolo is rivalry or competition, then there is nothing bad about it. He argued that the bad practices of the olden days like wrestling, whipping and fighting and the negative impact on formal education were indeed in tune with the custom, tradition and aspirations of the time, that is to say that they were acceptable at that time. If it does not suite our thinking today, it does not mean they were bad in those days. What it shows is that customs and tradition are dynamic, since change is the only permanent thing in life. It therefore means that the bad areas of the competition should be change without destroying the principle of the competition.

Also, in his article titled “Ekwolo a blessing or a curse to Nando” published in Nando Reformer Magazine (2001) an NDU Northern Forum quarterly magazine, Chief Edwin Nwabja, underscore the argument that ekwolo is limited to Nando and Qmabala region when he traced the origin of Ekwolo to the beginning of man socialization. He maintained that if Ekwolo is rivalry between persons, group, families and villages then it must have been as old as man. As such it is not found in Nando alone. He was optimistic in saying that the term like any other social term has two sides; negative and positive. While regretting that the negative side has been in practice in Nando, he concluded that the rivalries if turned to positive practice will lead to greater development. Chief Jerome Nnegbo (NDU Kaduna) argued that “Ekwolo of Nando brand is a seed of discord, destruction and conspiracy” his views was not different from that of Chief John Oguejiofor (NDU Zaria), Chief Ogbanje Okeke (NDU Jos) and other Nandonians across the North but Chief Gabriel Udekara, after agreeing with above views added that it is an abnormal phenomena which is part of Nando from birth. And I ask does a man come into birth with negative thing?

Can Ekwolo Engender Community Development?

From the above analysis, one will understand that Ekwolo in itself is not bad, and that it is a natural phenomenon that has existed with living organism in their endeavor to live and coexist in their quest to ride off persistent disequilibrium in the ecology both in human and non-human ecosystem. Disequilibrium in the ecology conjures competition among living organisms. Competition demands that living organisms seek competitive advantage because; sooner or later one must displace the other. Ecologists recognize two primary forms of competition: natural competition and strategic competition. Natural competition works by a process of trial and error, challenges are tried and tested. Those that benefit are generally adopted and maintained. While those not desirable are discarded, no need of foresight or commitment, it is natural selections based on adaptation and survival of the fittest.

By contrast, strategic competition compresses time, competitors do not have the luxury of time and patience involved in natural competition that is hinged on adaptation. Competitive issues that might take generations to evolve are made to occur in a few short years. How? Rather than adapt to the way things are, strategists reconstruct the strategic avenue by combining intelligence, imagination, accumulated resources and coordinated behaviour to confront competition, and to search for competitive advantage. From the above, one can argue that the Ekwolo practiced in Nando, Qmabala or Amakom region are natural competition of trial and error with its retrogressive attributes. What Nando needs now is “strategic Ekwolo” that combines intelligence, imagination, accumulated resources to search for competitive advantage over our neighbours in community development!

In other words, we need to look at Ekwolo being practiced in Nando with a view of sustaining its merits and discarding its demerits. Strategic Ekwolo conjures a situation whereby Chief Ikem Emeneka gave Nando One Million Naira (N1 million) for electricity project, another of his age mate decided to give Nando either One or two million naira for pipe borne water project and another donates five million naira for hospital building and maintenance.

Strategic Ekwolo involves a situation where Engr. Simon Obidike as President General of Nando gave Igwe Nando a Mercedes Benz as gift and Chief Sylvester Odivie Jr, becoming President General of Nando today, builds a befitting palace for Igwe (the king). It is a competition whereby another senior civil servant in Nando strives to surpass the record of Chief Patrick Atuanya, in providing jobs to teaming Nando youths.

It is a rivalry where other uniformed men in Nando feeling challenged by the wonderful records of Chief Achumū (Agūnaechemba) in securing our town through intelligent policing and leadership surpass his record. Strategic Ekwolo does not seek what you will do to yourself, but what you will do to your society to bring about development and growth and touch the lives of the ordinary people positively. It involves adding your Time, Treasure and Talent (3Ts) to achieve growth and sustainable development in your community. It is a challenge and desire to outdo others in the same or similar position and opportunity. It is a desire on the part of men to live an enduring legacy in the lives of others. Strategic Ekwolo is action oriented for one’s community. If Chief John Agbata had led Northern forum to acquire land in Abuja and solved many cases in north, produced first edition of Reformer magazine among others, then Chief Mike Ogbue and Chief Ignatius Ifemenem should surpass the records. On the individual level, if one’s age mate achieves great things, one works harder or smarter to surpass him. It is not pulling one down. It is not sponsoring group with one’s resources to disorganize one’s village or community. It is not contesting for kingship position for self-actualization and social recognition. It is service oriented, with either one’s Talent, Treasure or/and Time (3 Ts). The olden days of Ekwolo in Nando, which this paper identified as natural competition of trial and error with all its defects has ended in Nando with the coming into effect of the “Qchunagali Ekwolo” Age-grade. This age-grade is assumed to have ended the negative aspect of Ekwolo. Today, what Nando need is strategic Ekwolo which is aimed at development. Healthy rivalry should be encouraged among the youths in the area of quest for academic excellence, success in business, apprenticeship, sports, music etc. Nando as a Community needs Community Bank, or Macro-Finance Bank, good road network, portable water, good and functional hospital, Community Town Hall and recreational centers. Let our entrepreneurs and business men and women compete for these provisions. Let them use their political connection to get government presence in Nando. The government hospital and the

community secondary school in Nando are an eye sore now. Let Strategic Ekwolo cause them to be modernized. This is what strategic Ekwolo is all about. It encourages a peaceful settlement of land disputes out of court and not spending our resources in feeding the wealthy lawyers and justices of various courts. Let the well to do Nando persons provide categories of trophies and cups for various sporting activities so that Nando youth will engage themselves in healthy competition thereby identifying sportsmen and women in Nando for national and international competitions. We have Okochas, Kanus, Federers, Williams, Mike tysons in Nando. Let them be developed to maturity that is strategic Ekwolo. Mr. Kenneth Obalum (Dr. Iguedo) must be commended in this regard because today Nando youths compete for Iguedo Unity Cup on yearly basis.

Let Educational Trust fund, be set up to train indigent students, so that Nando can produce doctors, lawyers, Engineers, etc from the have-nots, so that the poor will have a say in Nando in the 21st century. This is Ekwolo put into action. Today there are competition and rivalry in virtually all walks of life in all the villages, towns, countries and world over. It had existed in the past; it is in the present and will continue in the future. Ekwolo is part of life, part of Nando and cannot be removed from life. What we need is to change our mentality about it, explore its advantages towards community development.

The Mm̄ta Age Grade and Nando Development

In an article I published on the internet page of UMUNANDO, NANDO PROGRESSIVE and other online media in April 2013 or there about, titled “Harmonizing Mm̄ta Age Grade Potentials for Nando Development” I identified wonderful potentials God endowed on these elder statesmen. In the introduction of that article, I said:

Mm̄ta Age-grade where group of people born in Nando between 1948-1950, that is to say that the youngest among them should be 65 years of age while the oldest should be 67 years old. Together with Mmeghe age grade (1945-1948) and Udoka age-grade (1950-1952) they form OJIANA in their various villages in Nando and shall make up the next set of Irunaano of Nando. After local political rivalry (Ekwolo) was sent packing by Ōchunagal̄i Ekwolo Age Grade, Mmeghe age grade came up to usher new life in Nando already badly dented by Ekwolo of many years. With Mmeghe age grade announcing a “New Dawn Era” in Nando, Mm̄ta age grade came up with philosophy of teaching Nando the way to greatness and development. Hence Nando were looking up to Mm̄ta as shining light of the community. Just as Udoka age grade announce that they are here to bring the lasting peace in Nando. Whether all these age groupings were able to achieve the philosophy behind their names, is outside the scope of this write up.

Therefore, Mm̄ta Age Grade did not just come up to teach Nando the way to greatness and development but that Nando looked up to them as the shining light of the community! He whom much is given much is expected! Indeed, Mm̄ta age group are highly Blessed by God both with wisdom and material resources, some of them are so intelligent that one wonders if they actually went to formal education. Despite these group’s positive potentials, they are said to be most hit by local Ekwolo that seem unending. In that article, I was not out to indict anybody from that very highly respected statesmen but to argue for the need for them to come together for the growth and development of Nando. My conclusion therefore was that the rise in greatness of one should not be seen as down fall of others but a complementary for the sake of political soul of Nando. I still

stand on that till today. In that article, we studied six of them which included--- Chief Christopher Ogbue (Ohita), Igwe Anthony Okoma (Eze ndi Igbo Kuje), Igwe F. Chukwuemeka (Eze Ndi Igbo Kogi), Chief Mofunanya (Takuradi), Chief Christopher Emeneka (Ochiagha), and Chief Dominic Onuigbo (Onwa).

Chief Ogbue lives a very quiet life in Onitsha yet he has mobilized the great Ogbue family to invest in human capital development that today the family has produced over 12 graduates in various fields including medical doctors, pharmacists among others. Chief Mofunanya (takuradi) is a foremost entrepreneur and a business expert; he owns a microfinance bank in Onitsha and serves as its chairman. Igwe Anthony Okoma is the current Eze Ndi Igbo in Kuje Abuja, a very quiet gentleman who finds joy in investing in real estate business. Nando seem to have known little about this great man who own many developed and undeveloped estates in and around Abuja. His humble personality made him unnoticeable yet he is highly blessed with both wisdom and materials. Igwe F. Chukwuemeka is indeed not a stranger in Nando socio-political activities; he has paid his due in all the socio-cultural life of Nando. This outspoken great man metaphors from being Eze Ndi Igbo in Ankpa to Eze Ndi Igbo Kogi State, he is indeed very skilled in business management and leadership hence have piloted the affairs of the Igbo in Kogi to great admiration. I have technically left the two last people in our chosen case study because of the controversies they have generated in Nando in the last few years. Talking about Chief Christopher Ikem Emeneka (Ochiagha Nando) and Chief Dominic Onuigbo (Onwa), they seem to stand tall among their contemporaries in the recent time, their stories in Nando in recent time seem to take the dimension of the story of Chinua Achebe and Wole Soyinka in Nigeria literature cycle. While their supporters will fight and kill each other on who is greater, the two elder statesmen will seat over a glass of wine and Suya and discuss and argue for and against social injustices in Nigeria with differing views. I still remember vividly when Wole Soyinka won Nobel prize for literature in 1986 to be the first and only African to be so honored, Achebe on arrival from USA was asked by journalist in airport what was his take home on that award, he congratulated his colleague, but added that “It does not make him the Asiwaju of literature in Nigeria” what Achebe was saying in effect was that, the award did not make Wole the “king” or the “leader” of Nigeria literature. This singular statement opened a long debate between the supporters of the duo till date. Well, since Wole and Achebe are not the central idea of our discussion, let return to our discussion.

I have had an honor of interviewing both Chief Emeneka and Chief Onuigbo on issues bordering on Nando politics, culture and social synthesis and have their opinions published in online internet media. I had in those articles paid a very high tribute to these great sons of Akamanato Nando. Though the dichotomy of the two seems to top the “small talks” of Nando people whenever our people are in group just as weather dominate the small talk of British people. Aside the issue of Ekwolo in Nando the greatest and the utmost discussion among Nando people is the “greater between the two” but after a very long reflection of that debate, I come to conclusion that the debate should rather be on “how to harmonize” their potentials for Nando growth. The debate on who is greater has not and will not help Nando. One of Nando stakeholder had argued that “a champion does not reign forever” that after some time, another champion emerges and the old gives way for the new one.” I rather see this argument and logic as very weak one. A title holder does not lose his title simply because another intends to be a champion. The normal procedure is for the intending champion to engage the title holder in a competition and defeat him to assume the position of a champion. But in this case, I don’t think it is a question of champion and title holding. Another side of it has it that a man should not be allowed to lord over Nando and I ask

should we blame a man who lord over Nando when the same Nando allow him to lord over them? I may be sounding philosophical here but the truth is that Nando should be blamed if one man lords over them. But is there any man lording over Nando? I don't really think so!

The gospel truth is that Chief Emeneka have been in forefront of promoting Nando in both socio-political and cultural life within Nigeria state. He had joined politics since 1979 when his mates were still struggling to eke out a living; his foremost title taking "Ochiagha Nando" in early 90s had assisted in publicizing the very remote town and placed it to the knowingness of many Igbo and indeed Nigeria as the Osadebe Abube 85 special track promoted Nando. His one million Naira donation to Nando for electricity project has not been equaled. Suffice it therefore to say, that Chief Emeneka Ochiagha Nando's name cannot be forgotten when history of Nando is to be written.

Of equal gospel truth is that, Chief Dominic Onuigbo (Onwa Igbo nine) has also arrived, this great progressive son of Nando has paid his dues to be recognized in all socio-political life of Nando. He made first impact in politics in Anambra state in year 2003 during the Administration of Mbadinuju. Though he had been in politics in Northern Nigeria as far back as the Military era of Gen. Ibrahim Babagida and since then till the end of Military era, no Nigeria Head of State did not dine with him. In 2003, he donated one million naira to the PDP camp of Mbadinuju and was made the leader of that camp in Nando and since then he has remained in active politics in Nando. In an interview with me some time before the funeral of his Beloved mother, he told me that he is not struggling with any one for political leadership of Nando but that he is doing his best to move Nando forward. Chief Onuigbo who is great entrepreneur with special interest in Hotel management has commissioned his "ultra-modern house" in Nando whose kind has not been seen in the entire Omabala region. So Onwa has also arrived and "must" be accommodated.

Honestly, am not interested in the personal achievements of these two great sons of Akamanato Nando and other Mmụta age grade, but on how best Nando can manage their ego for Nando development. I was among the delegates of Ndu Northern Forum who invited these two brothers in 2003 to a meeting in Awka on the need for both to work as a team though in a different camp for Nando growth and progress. That meeting could not yield much result. Though in the recent time the two have reached some level of compromise following their coming together in APGA party for the election of Hon Obinna Emeneka and other Apga candidates in the last election but much is still desired! In other communities, with many iroko trees, each belonging to different political camp but when it comes to community interest, they will unite to attract development to their community.

In Communities like Osumenyi, Ezinifite, Awkuzu, Aguleri, Umueri among others, two to three great men take up the projects of town hall, hospital, and postal office among other things. One man had just built "abattoir" or cow slaughtering Market in Umunya and the market is seriously giving the famous Nteje meat market competition. Today people from the zone have the option of buying from either Nteje or Umunya. In less than one year after the take-off of Umunya meat market over 50 cows is said to be slaughtered there on daily basis and has given over 2,000 people of Umunya employment including youths, women and men.

Nando and Ikem Ivite in the last eight (8) years of Gov. Peter Obi as Governor of Anambra state, received over 12million naira subvention (palliative fund) respectively from Government of Anambra state, yet no good market, town hall, hospital and motor able roads. If our leaders are

sincere to us, 2million naira is enough to transform nkwo and afo Ikem market to modern markets, another 4 million is enough to give Nando and Ikem Ivite town halls. Umueri recreation center value is not more than that amount. And another 2million can fix Nando general hospital.

There is no big city you go within Nigeria and you will not see community town halls built by one or two people and handed over to their community but Nando do not have town hall in any part of Nigeria.

These are indeed sympathetic stories. Mmuta age grade can give Nando a befitting town hall, two or three persons from Mmuta or indeed other age grade can do that. This is “strategic Ekwolo” ekwolo put in action. Until Ekwolo in Nando is transformed to Strategic Ekwolo, we cannot move forward. It is not a question of installing President General Nando but a question of ensuring that Nando moves forward.

Conclusion and the Role of the Elite

No doubt, the problem of Africa and Less Developing Countries (LDC's) is leadership! This is so because we have continued to make wrong choice! Dr. Joseph Shevel, the President of Galilee International Management Institute, Israel, was a Keynote Speaker at the 6th International Conference of the Faculty of Social Science Nnamdi Azikiwe University Awka between 2nd and 5th Dec, 2015. He spoke on the main theme of the conference, New Media and Capacity Building in Developing Economies. In his presentation, he gave a graphic data of the sorry state of Nigeria from 1960-2015 and projected what it will look like between 2050-2100 if drastic change did not take place. He identified lack of investment in Education and Research, Agriculture, Science and technology and population explosion as major obstacle to Nigeria and Africa development. He indicted the Elite, Academia and Institute of higher learning for conspiring with political elite in the under developing the country. The right training and research are not taking place in our universities. The institutes of learning are no longer the role model molding and Academia and Elites are not leading by examples. Therefore, there is need for paradigm shift to be championed by the Academia and elites through making right choices, partaking more in practice than theory and showing leadership examples. The elites in Ikem Ivite and indeed Nando in general much actively participate in community development. Politics is too much important to be left in the hands of the politicians alone.