

## Proliferation of autonomous communities in southeastern Nigeria between 2000 and 2015: a bane to sustainable development in Imo State, Nigeria

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### Abstract

*The study is necessitated by the recent explosion in the number of autonomous communities in Imo state of the southeast Nigeria, between 2000 and 2015. Nine autonomous communities spread across the three geographical zones were covered. Literature was reviewed to ascertain the extent of fragmentation that is dangerously starring on the autonomous communities in Imo state. The survey research method was adopted. Primary data was gathered using the interview technique, informal discussions, focus group discussion (fgd), expert opinion, and town hall meetings to correlate the data, while library research constituted the secondary data. Findings revealed that the economic and political factors played major roles in the acquisition of autonomous communities as any person who can purchase the autonomous community with money stood the chance of being installed traditional ruler of such autonomous community. Therefore, there is a positive relationship between quest for traditional rulership stool and proliferation of autonomous communities. The work disagreed that the proliferation through splitting of autonomous communities may lead to grass root development. Rather work concludes that the proliferation generates conflict, disharmony and tussle for the revered traditional stool. It also looked at the zeal with which the entire southeastern communities clamour and fight for the creation of autonomous communities and views it as the outcome of the bastardisation of traditional institutions in the southeast of Nigeria. This study therefore, recommends that the creation of Autonomous communities by government to satisfy the present needs, should as well not compromise the needs of the future generations.*

**Keywords:** Proliferation, sustainable development, fragmentation, autonomous community, traditional ruler, traditional institution.

### Introduction

**Meaning of autonomous community:** The term autonomous community denotes a community of people with a shared awareness of belonging together<sup>1</sup>. Like any form of identity, an autonomous community is defined, and has re-defined itself, along its cultural boundaries, and citizens of the community confine themselves to a specific, territorially defined locality as their place of residence or origin.

As defined by the Imo state Government Law of 1981, (which came into force on 1st April of that year), the term autonomous community means ‘a group of people inhabiting an identifiable geographical area or areas, comprising one or more communities and bound by a common traditional and cultural way of life with a common historical heritage and recognized and approved as an autonomous community by the Government’<sup>2</sup>.

Lemchi also defined autonomous community in its modern context as ‘a group of people living together and sharing common values with a measure of independent and self-government’<sup>3</sup>.

Therefore, the term autonomous community denotes a community of people with a shared awareness of belonging together.

The autonomous community therefore, forms de facto, a fourth tier within the Nigerian federal system, still below that of the Local Government Area and created only to provide a territorial unit for the institution of Traditional Rulership.

Furthermore, the autonomous community as defined consists of several layers that are hierarchically structured as clans, kindred, villages and towns.

It is also important to know that, in an autonomous community, the town unions and the village group constitute some of the arms of the government. An autonomous community normally depends on contributions by town unions, social clubs and other associations for its sustenance.

An autonomous community maintains territorial supremacy and independence in its internal affairs and is headed by a traditional ruler known as *Eze*. The title of *Eze*, *Obi* or *Igwe* are reserved for government recognized traditional rulers in all the autonomous communities in the southeast of Nigeria, depending

on the area. The government of an autonomous community constitutes the general assembly and the *Eze*, with his cabinet members popularly known in the entire Igbo land of the southeast of Nigeria, as *Oha-na-eze*; meaning the people assembly and the *Eze*.

Today's conceptualizations of autonomous community in the Southeast of Nigeria is not necessarily the same as they were in the past. In the present era, autonomous communities existing in the entire southeast and Imo state in particular are equivalent to a town, while others are smaller than a town.

Autonomous community in most places are usually characterized by a common name, the location of community on a clearly defined territory, the sharing of common infrastructures such as schools, market and other social and economic institutions<sup>4</sup>.

Consequently, before the recent menace of indiscriminate creation of Autonomous community in the state, the name attached to each of the autonomous community traces their origin to a common ancestry. This is the reason why most Igbo communities begin their names with Umu-('children/offspring of'), Ndi-('people of') Mba-('Clan of'), Ani or Ala-('Land of'), Ama-('settlement of')<sup>5</sup>. In line with the above, the names attached to the traditional stools equally depended on the ancestral lineages of the various communities.

On the benefits of autonomous community, Uzoigwe posits that, there has always been a strong belief that Autonomous communities lead to more effective and better development at the grassroots level<sup>6</sup>. According to him, autonomous community is seen as essentially beneficial and innocuous sort of home rule that is crucial for Igbo communities, and indeed, for the wider Nigerian political, economic and social development.

Supporting the above assertion, Onyema opined that, the bases for the recent fragmentation of autonomous communities is for a more effective development at the grassroots level<sup>7</sup>. For this particular reason there are as many autonomous communities as there are many traditional rulers as well in Imo state today in the name of sustainable governance.

**Origin and structures of autonomous communities:** The origin of autonomous community in Igbo land (southeast of Nigeria) in general can be traced to the pre-colonial era when communities existed in the form of autonomous village units<sup>8</sup>.

The autonomous community forms, de facto, a fourth tier within the Nigerian federal system, still below that of the Local Government Area and created only to provide a territorial unit for the institution of Traditional Rulership. However, the official recognition and political backing for Autonomous communities and chieftaincy institutions received a boost in the course of the Nigeria-wide local government reforms of 1976, which created structures still existing today<sup>6</sup>. The concept of the Autonomous

Community was subsequently introduced as an additional administrative division in Imo and Anambra States which was created out of the former East-Central State in 1975, alongside other nineteen (19) states in Nigeria.

The declared aim of the reform was to bring government closer to the people, and to strengthen the role of the autonomous community as the 4<sup>th</sup> tier behind the local government which is the third tier of government, and the state and Federal government coming behind.

In other words, one Traditional Ruler was officially recognized in every autonomous community which also specified the standards for their recognition.

These standards have established a certain uniformity among Traditional Rulers in the southeast, which includes the core Igbo areas comprising Anambra, Imo, and the three States carved out of them later: Abia, Enugu (both created in 1991) and Ebonyi (created in 1996). The autonomous community therefore, forms, de facto, a fourth tier within the Nigerian federal system, still below that of the Local Government Area and created only to provide a territorial unit for the institution of Traditional Rulership.

Subsequently, on the entire southeast of Nigeria, the establishment of autonomous communities and the installation of Traditional Rulers originated on the recommendations made by a committee consisting of academics and civil servants in 1976<sup>1</sup>. This committee was chaired by Adiele Afigbo, the most prominent historian of Igbo extraction (then professor at the University of Nigeria, Nsukka), and whose writings have strongly influenced the understanding of pre-colonial Igbo social and political order.

The 1976 committee came up with a rather formal proposal, designed to divide, to a certain extent, local government spheres of action. This proposal was successively enacted into State legislation and since then, governments of the southeast States began to recognize traditional rulers in line with and as proposed by Autonomous Communities. According to the law, government refrains from intervention into the details for the selection process of a Traditional Ruler, but it reserves the right of deposing any one of them in some cases, in the interest of peace, order and good governance.

**Statement of the problem:** Prior to 1999, creation of autonomous communities in Imo state did not pose much threat as it has today. Remarkably, the autonomous communities established in line with their ancestral lineages were peacefully co-habited by members of the Clans, Kindreds or Villages that formed the autonomous units.

For more than two decades, various communities in Imo state in particular and the entire southeast in general have been a victim of consequential *ezeship* tussle resulting from the proliferation of autonomous communities.

The reversal, in recent times, of the great cultural values and traditional ethical norms in the creation of autonomous communities is of great concern to the academic world.

Consequently, the customary rules of social decorum are abbreviated or wantonly ignored, resulting to the proliferation of autonomous communities.

Therefore, the recent disintegration of historical kingdoms and traditional communities into mushroom autonomous communities has become a thorny issue in the history of Imo state.

From 303 in 1999, the number of autonomous communities in the state has risen to 752 in 2014, as contained in gazettes of Imo state 2015<sup>2</sup>.

Prince News (Oct. 17, 2010) summed this with a caption titled; 'Autonomous communities for sale in Imo state'<sup>9</sup>? This is a clear indication of the phenomenon being studied.

Thus the study argued that the creation or rather the proliferation of autonomous communities in Imo state cannot bring about sustainable governance that will lead to sustainable development of the various communities as claimed by the government. In other words, what is obtained from the random creation of autonomous communities in Imo state is the tussle for *ezeship* (traditional head) which often results to conflict, social vices, destruction of lives and property in the various communities.

Regrettable, researches on themes, such as the Igbo traditional political systems and likes are common, compared to the paucity of researches on the vexed issue of autonomous community proliferation and its sustainability on the people of Imo state.

It is against this backdrop that this study is aimed at examining the issue of autonomous community proliferation and to establish whether or not it is sustainable for the future of these autonomous communities.

**Scope of the study:** This study is on the 'proliferation of autonomous communities in Imo state, Southeast of Nigeria, between 2000 and 2015'. The study covers nine autonomous communities drawn from the nine Local Government Areas in the three senatorial zones in Imo state. The autonomous communities are: Ubah (Umuaka) autonomous community in Njaba LGA, and Umuokanne autonomous community in Ohaji/Egbema LGA, Mgbidi autonomous community in Oru West LGA, Umuokwara-Akokwa autonomous community in Ideato North LGA, (Imo West Senatorial district-Orlu); Awo-Mbieri autonomous community in Mbaitoli LGA, Okwunakuwa-Uvuru autonomous community in Aboh Mbaise LGA, Ihiagwa in Owerri West LGA, (Imo East Senatorial district- Owerri); and Ezianya-Okwe autonomous community in Onuimo LGA, Osuwere in Isiala Mbano LGA, (Imo South Senatorial district-Okigwe).

## Theoretical framework

**Political economy approach:** The political economy approach postulates that economy determines other facets of social life. For Marx, a change in the substructure (economy or ownership of means of production) is expected to produce a corresponding change in the superstructure (polity), that is, ideas, structures, belief, value systems and other institutions. Marx adopted historical and dialectical materialism which states that the material conditions of existence and the inherent contradictions, are the basis upon which society moves or develops.

In other words, powerful personalities in every era acquired more wealth and use it to acquire more titles for the benefit such an exercise was anticipated to bring.

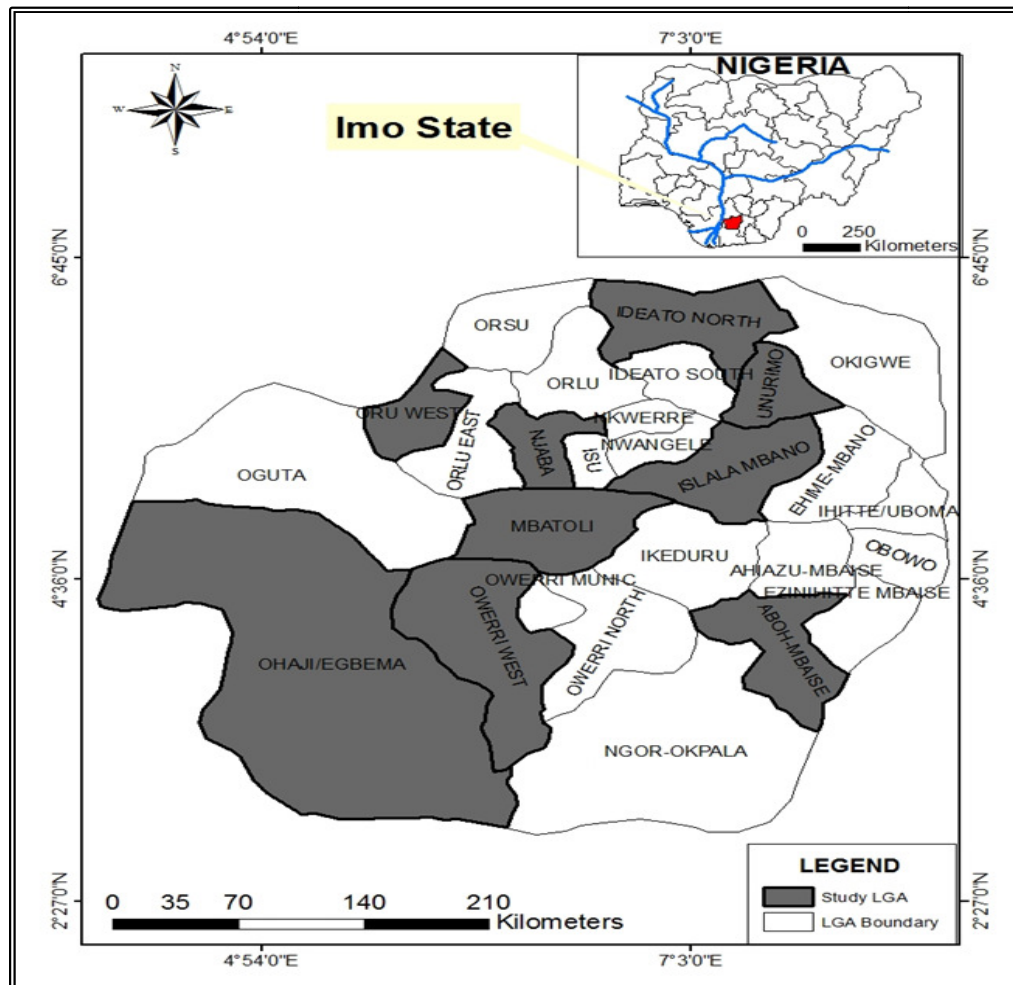
This is the case of Imo state where in every community, wealthy individuals are struggling to have an Autonomous community and the attached Eze. This will enable them to get closer to the state apparatus and a share from the state resources. Therefore, the proliferation of autonomous communities has something to do with materialistic tendency in man.

In view of the advantages of the Marxian political economy approach in de-mystifying social reality, it has been adopted as the theoretical guide for this work. The advantages are obvious as could be seen from its ability to bring out the inter-connections between politics and economics which are the basis for autonomous community proliferation. Therefore, political and economic undertone are the central theme that dragged this research to the Marxian political economy approach as the theoretical stand point in explicating the recent explosion of autonomous community in Imo state.

Therefore, Marxist political economy perspective provides a particular view of the phenomenon under study.

**Creation of autonomous community in Imo state:** In Imo state and the entire southeast of Nigeria, Autonomous community can be seen as the 4<sup>th</sup> tier of government behind the Local government area. However, the creation of autonomous community is a process that is guided by customs and traditions of the people in a constituted geographical area.

As stipulated by the Imo state Laws of 2006, the House of Assembly shall have powers to create new autonomous communities or the merging of existing ones as the law provides. To qualify for autonomy, any community or group of communities seeking autonomy shall have a common tradition, common identity and be homogeneous with at least a total population of 5,000 people of notable adults (men and women). Such community shall have a secondary school recognized by government, and/or a common parish center (Church). In addition, the community shall indicate in writing, its preparedness to contribute to the welfare of its *Eze*.<sup>2</sup>



**Figure-1:** Imo State Showing the Study Locations (Onyema, 2016).

Preoccupied with the need for developments, goal achievements and modernization, every succeeding government in Imo state in particular create new autonomous communities.

The creation of new autonomous communities as long as the need arises and in situations where they meet established criteria is a path in the right direction.

According to Lemchi, the basic need for the creation of autonomous community is to decentralize government functions and for socio-political and economic development at the grassroots<sup>3</sup>. Therefore, preoccupied with the need for developments, goal achievements and modernization, every succeeding government in Imo state create new autonomous communities.

Also the standard for qualification as Autonomous community is set by the Government. According the state laws, any community or group of communities seeking autonomy shall have among others, a common tradition, common identity and homogenous with at least a total population of 5,000 people of notable adults (men and women).

The creation of Autonomous community is the sole responsibility of the state House of Assembly. In addition, the community shall indicate in writing, its preparedness to contribute to the welfare of its traditional ruler. According to the law in question, community requesting to be recognized by the government as an autonomous community shall make its application direct to the Imo State House of Assembly. The law further noted that, where an application for creation of new autonomous community is sent to the House of Assembly for consideration, the House of Assembly within 60 days, thereof, shall signify that it recognizes or withholds recognition.

In line with this, a copy of the constitution of an autonomous community has to be forwarded to the Chairman of the Local Government in accordance with the provisions of section (5) of the same law. The constitution shall also contain the customary laws of the community and any amendment of such constitution shall be approved by the governor if there is a good reason or cause for such an amendment.

The average size of Autonomous Communities has been declining over the years due to the indiscriminate creation of more units.

The demand and creation of autonomous communities in Imo state has continued to be a controversial exercise, by both the present and past governments. This is because the communities yearning for autonomies and the House of Assembly members who have appropriated the power to approve the creation of autonomous communities see it as a goldmine. In other words, at the centre of it, all is money. To these parties, it is a perfect conduit to make money that cannot be audited or questioned by anybody.

However, the creation of autonomous community is a process that is guided by customs and traditions of the people in a constituted geographical area.

The arguments employed to demand a new autonomous community fall into three groups. First, reference is made to a common sense of belonging, a common history and institutions, such as markets and symbols of traditional religion. Secondly, there are criteria of administrative viability and convenience, such as centrality, a certain level of economic and infrastructural development etc.

Finally, the demand for a new autonomous community is usually supported by arguing that the existing administrative setup involves some kind of discrimination and marginalization, and that to create a separate unit would be in the interest of development as well as political fairness.

## Methodology

This study adopted the descriptive survey method of data collection. Primary data was gathered using the questionnaire,

oral interview technique, informal discussions, focus group discussion (fgd), expert opinion, and town hall meetings to correlate the data, while newspaper cuttings, and publications to compliment the primary data.

The questionnaire was careful designed because it is a sort of self – administered interview and requires no interviewer or proctor to interpret it to the respondents.

The questionnaire was considered suitable since it is generally used in empirical social research in Sociology. On the whole, a total of one thousand, three hundred and twenty five (1325) copies of questionnaire were proportionally distributed to the nine autonomous communities which formed the research locations. Out of this number, one thousand, two hundred and seventy (1270) were retrieved and analyzed, using simple percentages and the Z-test.

**Population for the study:** The target population of this study included households heads, traditional rulers, chiefs and town union Executive members cut across the 27 Local Government Areas of Imo state.

**Sample size:** Sample size was determined using the total number of households in each autonomous community and taking 10% of the total number of households as recommended by Oyegun in his book, Essentials of social and environmental research<sup>10</sup>. The total number of sample size produced from the nine autonomous communities is 1270. The study allotted number of sample respondents to each autonomous community in proportion to their population as in the Table-1.

**Table-1:** The population of the study areas.

Names of Autonomous Communities covered in the study.	Population of Autonomous communities	No. of Households	Sample Size	No. of sample collected	% of sample collected	No / % of sample not collected
Umuokanne	13467	2245	225	220	97.8%	5 (2.2%)
Mgbidi	6,643	1107	111	96	86.5%	15(13.5)
Ubah (Umuaka)	9,646	1608	161	150	93.2%	11 (6.8)
Umuokwara Akokwa	10,084	1681	168	163	97.0%	5 (3.0)
Awo-Mbieri	7,176	1196	120	118	98.3%	2 (1.7)
Okwunakuwa-Uvuru	5,883	981	98	95	96.9%	3 (3.1)
Ihiagwa	13,365	2228	223	215	96.4%	8 (3.6)
Eziama-Okwe	6,559	1093	109	105	96.3%	4 (3.7)
Osuowere	6580	1097	110	108	98.2%	2 (1.8)
TOTAL	79,403	13,236	1325	1270	95.85%	55(4.15%)

Population of Imo state by localities. Source: Imo state Ministry of Economics and Planning, Owerri.

**Sampling Techniques/ Procedures:** The Multi-stage technique that makes use of different sampling techniques such as probability and non-probability methods was used for the study. As Ifeanacho puts it; 'Multi-stage implies selecting a sample from a sample'<sup>11</sup>.

Ab initio, Imo state with twenty seven (27) Local government areas were grouped into three Clusters using the three Senatorial districts in the state. Imo West Senatorial district (Orlu) forms cluster one (1) with 12 Local government areas; Imo East Senatorial district (Owerri) also forms cluster two (2) with 9 Local government areas; and Imo South Senatorial district (Okigwe) formed cluster three (3) with 6 Local government areas.

Within each sampled Local Government Area, one autonomous community was randomly selected using the table of random numbers. In all, nine (9) autonomous communities are covered by the survey. Proportionally, four (4) Autonomous communities emerged from cluster one, three (3) from cluster two and two (2) from cluster three.

These communities are large and populous with the result that it was not easy to go round all the households. Doing so would consume more money, energy and time than necessary. In order to give the entire population a fair chance of being represented in the sample, the systematic sample technique was employed to select our respondents. This is a probability sampling method which according to Ukwuije would approximate random sampling if the population frame list is arranged in an unbiased fashion<sup>12</sup>. This ensured that heads of households, traditional rulers, chiefs, *Nze na ozo* title holders, the elites which include prominent politicians, leaders of town unions, the community government council (CGC), women and youths associations from the nine autonomous communities was adequately represented in the sample. These constituted our population.

Also, houses in the rural areas of Imo state are randomly scattered. Therefore, respondents are selected from households along the major roads or route ways in the community. This is in harmony with the work of Onyenechere on 'Spatial Analysis of Rural Women and Informal Economic Activities in the Development process of Rural Areas', in Imo State. Systematic sampling technique is used to select the household for the survey<sup>13</sup>.

To choose sample units, we developed a list of households, and an interval number was randomly chosen. This means that in every interval of ten in the list, one sample (respondent) was systematically selected and this continued until the sample area was covered. Where the head of the household is a woman, the next house is chosen and thereafter the sampling interval of every tenth house is adjustedly maintained.

**Methods and sources of Data Collection:** The questionnaire method, interview technique, observational methods comprising both participant and non-participant methods, panel analysis and

telephone surveys were used. In conducting this research, primary and secondary data collection formed the main sources of data.

**Primary Data:** The main source of data consists of information from sample survey with 1270 respondents to a questionnaire of 46 variables designed to elicit information on the proliferation of autonomous community. Oral interviews are used to extract relevant information from government circles and from town union officials in order to abstract independent information on the proliferation of autonomous communities in Imo state. Also field work participant observation and key informant interviews was technically applied.

Our questionnaire is divided into three sections. Section A seeks information on the socio – economic characteristics of the respondent. Section B contains open ended questions where the respondents gives a 'yes' or 'no' answer. Section C, on the other hand, involves the use of Likert Scales, where our respondent is required to score his feelings using the scale of (a) Strongly Agree (S.A), (b) Agree (A), (c) Disagree (D), (d) and Strongly Disagree (S.D). Likert scales are used to obtain responses to the questions and also determine the degree of agreement and disagreement on the issues raised.

The questionnaire was administered to the nine autonomous communities in the research areas, namely; Mgbidi, Ubah (Umuaka), Umuokanne, Umuokwara-Akokwa, Awo-Mbieri, Ihiagwa, Okwunakuwa-Uvuru, Ezianya-Okwe, and Osuowere autonomous communities.

On the whole, a total of one thousand, three hundred and twenty five (1325) copies of questionnaire were distributed in proportion to the population of each research area. Out of this number, one thousand, two hundred and seventy (1270) were retrieved and analyzed.

The study substantially made use of oral interview to extract relevant information from knowledgeable adults in the study areas. The respondents here were; Traditional rulers *Ezes*, Chiefs, Chief priests, eldest *Nze-na-Ozo* title holders, key informants, and leaders of town unions, women and youth's associations from the nine autonomous communities studied.

**Secondary sources:** Secondary sources of data included statistical records from the Ministry of Chieftaincy and Community Development Owerri, Imo State House of Assembly, and Ministry of planning and Economic development, Owerri. The study also generated data from the review of existing literature, government official gazettes, journals, internet facilities, magazines and newspaper publications, unpublished works and library books.

## Results and discussion

In this work, both qualitative and quantitative methods were used in presenting and analyzing data. Simple percentages,

Frequency tables, descriptive statistics (histogram, bar and pie charts), and Z test of mean was used in testing the hypotheses concerning the difference between the observed frequency of a sample and corresponding set of expected or theoretical frequencies<sup>14</sup>.

**Nature of autonomous community proliferation:** For decades past, the creation of autonomous communities has continued to be a controversial exercise by the various layers of government in Imo state. And this has been an issue of great concern for both the community and government as well. Autonomous community gives her consent and preparedness by providing for themselves, the necessary requirements for the creation and take-off of the new autonomous community. This will be in line with the laws of Imo state 2003 and 2006 for the creation of autonomous communities.

The recent proliferation of autonomous community in Imo state are assumed as exercise narrowed to satisfy the interest of certain individuals such as the politicians and those who are close to the corridors of power.

The available statistics from the official gazette published by the government of Imo state of Nigeria, shows that, by the year 2015, Imo state alone has about 750 Autonomous communities<sup>2</sup>.

This is a very impressive statistic showing evidence that in the course of a decade, communities in Imo state had undergone fundamental socio-economic, political and conceptual transformations leading to the creation of mushroom autonomous communities.

Today, all of the 27 LGAs in the Imo state consists of several Autonomous Communities, even though the numbers vary widely. Thus, the average figure of Autonomous Communities per LGA of Imo state is about 10, but the variation is great. In some cases, an LGA comprises only a few Autonomous Communities as in Owerri Municipal, which before it was splintered in 2015, has only one autonomous community, *Owerrinchi-ise* Autonomous community.

In other cases, however, a thorough process of fragmentation has taken place. A good example of such fragmentation as contained in a state gazette, is the case of Mbaitoli LGA where the number of Autonomous Communities has risen to about 40 from the existing 9 Autonomous Communities in 1999<sup>15</sup>. In Mbieri, one of the nine towns in Mbaitoli LGA, there is evidence of thorough fragmentation with already 8 Autonomous Communities, while additional 5 even though not yet gazette, has received the blessings of the state House of Assembly.

The case of Mbaitoli and its federating town of Mbieri is cited here as an example. However, in other LGA's in the state, the nature of proliferation going on are similar and the by-products are tussles on who will occupy the highly revered *ezeship* (traditional headship) throne.

The inability of successive governments at all levels to depoliticize the creation of autonomous communities has led to unguided legislations on the creation of autonomous communities in Imo state.

The reason to this development is that, the communities yearning for autonomies and members of the Imo State House of Assembly who have been appropriated with the power to create and approve an autonomous community, see it as a goldmine. To these parties, in other words, creation of autonomous community is a perfect conduit to make money that cannot be questioned or audited.

Therefore, the sudden explosion of new autonomous communities has resulted in the creation of pockets of kingdoms in every individual village setting and at the same time making mockery of a rather highly revered institution of *ezeship* (traditional rulership) in Imo state.

Earlier in 1983, Chinua Achebe, whose scholarly works have attracted the attention of the world's biggest library, observed the foundation of the proliferation of autonomous communities in the old Imo and Anambra states. He lamented on the rising number of traditional rulers and autonomous communities in the then Anambra state, (now Anambra, Ebonyi and Enugu states) and Imo state, (now Abia and Imo states) which according to him, swung to eight hundred and forty in the two former states which is known today as southeast geopolitical area of Nigeria<sup>16</sup>.

In his view, Chinedu Osuji, reporting for Leader Newspaper of December 6, 2014, compared the present Anambra State with 120 Autonomous Communities and Traditional Rulers with Imo State where 637 Autonomous Communities and 637 Traditional Rulers already existed in 2014<sup>17</sup>. This development is now a bane to the vast number of autonomous communities in Imo state, and might remain unresolved by both the present and future governments.

In the same vein, Kanayo Umeh reporting for the Guardian Newspaper of April 16, 2013, laments that, 'all over Imo state, many communities are embroiled in turmoil because some vested interests seeking power saw the granting of autonomous community as a gold mine'<sup>18</sup>. It continued that, the resultant effect is that the traditional stool in many communities has been hijacked and desecrated by mediocre elements, who lack integrity and have nothing to offer the people but only to take advantage of the traditional stool to feather their own nests. As earlier mentioned, for the fact that the customary rules of social decorum are abbreviated or wantonly ignored, considerations are no longer on the visibility for future development of the new autonomous community. In some communities, there are series of conflicts ranging from tussling for the headship of the throne, to many other social vices as a result of the fragmentation.

This is as serious as jeopardizing the future of these communities, as well development in dire need suffers a big

setback. Therefore, this is a bane to the sustainable governance and development of the autonomous communities in Imo state.

Analyses of the field work, shows that the proliferation of autonomous communities in Imo state cannot set the pace for sustainable governance and development. Instead it will continue to create great burden for communities and other tiers of government in the state. Another great concern is that communities and the state might be getting close to cultural extinction through the proliferation of autonomous communities unless immediate actions are taken to stop this menace. This is because emphasis is no longer on community's cultural boundaries which existed in the past.

However, field analysis further revealed that, it is the competition for political and economic power that leads to the recent proliferation of autonomous communities in Imo state.

Because of the economic and political domination, only persons who can be able to purchase the autonomous community and the *ezeship* stool with money stand the chances of being installed *Eze* of his autonomous community.

## Conclusion

Therefore, in Imo state today, even the Deaf and Blind can feel the dexterity exhibited by the state House of Assembly in creating autonomous communities while a great number of pressing issues are not attained to by this law making arm of government.

There is no legally-defined right of any particular community to become an Autonomous Community. Its establishment is within the discretion of the respective state government and thus subject to negotiation and lobbying with government officials. In some communities, agitation for autonomous community are influenced by *ezeship* tussles.

This may arise from sectional interests in the selection and appointment of the *Eze* (Traditional ruler) which tend to generate *ezeship* tussle and thereafter fragmentation of the Autonomous Community.

A perusal of literature showed a strong relationship between proliferation of autonomous communities and *ezeship* tussles which rests on the economic and political factors. In some communities, agitation for autonomous community are influenced by *ezeship* tussles.

This may arise from sectional interests in the selection and appointment of the *Eze* (Traditional ruler) which tend to generate *ezeship* tussle and thereafter fragmentation of the Autonomous Community. Therefore, the interests of the government, town unions and other stakeholders contribute to the proliferation of autonomous community in Imo state?

The study argued that, the pattern of fragmentation of autonomous communities going on in Imo state today cannot

enhance the much needed sustainable development rather it will bring a lot of set-back on the development of these communities. For instance, an autonomous community existing with a common market, health Centre, school, and other infrastructures as provided by the definition, if divided into two or more, will find it very difficult to share these unmovable infrastructures among the new autonomous communities.

From the survey of some autonomous communities, the maintenance of these fixed assets of infrastructure are abandoned because no group is ready to claimed ownership of it.

The argument this study is posing is on weather this type of development through the creation of autonomous communities can improve the quality of life within communities, now that other communities throughout the nations of the world are putting their visions into actions.

**Recommendations:** The study therefore, recommends that, the various tiers of government in the state should reconsider their over zealousness in creating new autonomous communities or even merging the communities that cannot sustain its existence.

Following from the foregoing discussions, drastic and concerted efforts must be taken to address issues of creation of new autonomous communities in Imo state.

Instead of wasting time and spending the available scarce resources on multiplications of autonomous communities leading to multiplication of *ezeship* tussles and other conflicts engulfing the entire state, government should channel the funds to improving some rural roads in the state. The people in government should take time to visit some roads in the local government areas and other semi-urban areas such as World Bank, Industrial layout located in Onitsha road, to mention but a few and ascertain the state of rural roads whose conditions paint the picture of abandoned communities that don't matter to government.

Experience has shown that nobody who drives along any of these rural roads would fail to take his car to the mechanics at the end of the day.

Giving attention to these areas will enhance the socio economic development of the communities most of which are food baskets of the state, instead of the ongoing impressionistic creation of autonomous communities.

The study further recommends that the creation of Autonomous communities by government to satisfy the present needs, should as well take cognizance of the future development of the various communities without compromising their sustainability. This is the precise meaning of Dhameja's Sustainable development which focused on satisfying the present needs without compromising on the needs of the future generations<sup>19</sup>.



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