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Igba Boi: *Africa's Greatest Business Incubator*

By Chukwunwike Ossai

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FEATURE
IMAGE

Overview of Nnewi

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The Igba boy system is one of the most significant Igbo traditions. It helps young boys learn a trade, earn money, and share wealth, especially in Anambra State, Nnewi. This system has made Nnewi turn into the “Japan of Africa” for the sake of most billionaires who come from there. We will give you a lot of details about how Igba boys work, what they did in Nnewi, and how they share money for Igbo land and beyond. Igba boys are like apprenticeships that train boys to become big-time businessmen.

It has three main steps: Pick boys and join them: Big men who have made it in life are being addressed as ‘Oga’. When you go to the village, you will find good potential in young boys, mostly children from families or communities. There is an Igbo culture that says, “Don’t leave your brother behind” (onye Aghala Nnwanne ya). The boy follows his boss to the city to stay with him while the boss provides food to eat, offers shelter by housing him in his house, and sometimes even gives him money to pay hospital bills.

The boy then works at his boss’s shop. He does things like selling, cleaning, and even fetching water. Learning work and skills For over two to seven years, the boy learns everything about the business—how to sell, manage stock, talk to customers, negotiate goods and save money.

The boss then teaches him how to be honest, work hard, and always stay sharp. The boys aren’t paid salaries, but they gain better experience that will help mould and sharpen them in the future. His boss is like a teacher and a father figure who shows him the way to success. When the boy has completed his learning and training stage,

his boss then “sets him up” with a lot of money or shop rent to start his own business and become independent. The price range of this settlement could be 5 million naira or more, depending on the agreed-upon agreement. Finally, the boss pours out his blessings on him by praying for his boy. The prayer aspect is very important because some people believe that a boss’s prayer is even more important than the money given. This system is not just about learning the work; it ensures success is shared, even if the new employee has already completed training with their boss. It follows an Igbo adage that says everybody is supposed to have something, no matter how little. (Umunnannwezuoaku).

History and Culture The Igba boy started a long time ago, but it became famous after the Nigerian Civil War (1967-1970). The war eventually scattered the Igbo’s finances, especially when the bank accounts were cancelled. Igbo people then used the system to rebuild their economy. They didn’t have much, but they used families and communities to stand up and start up again. In Igbo culture, people believe that “wealth must evident in a mans community” (Aku ruo uno). So, big men had to carry their money to their villages to help their people and train boys. This system is like Ubuntu—your money is not just for you; it’s for the community.

Mostly, boys who do Igba Boi for the sake of culture don’t allow girls to stay with another man who’s not family. But women can do a smaller version called Imu Ahia or Imu Oru, for which they pay a small amount of money and learn for a short time, typically six months to one year, while staying at home.

Nnewi, with over 900,000 people, is the headquarters of Igba Boi’s success. Forbes said Nnewi has more billionaires per person than any other place in Africa. All this is because of the Igba Boi system.

Big men who come from Nnewi Some great people Igba Boi has helped at Nnewi are: Cosmas Maduka (Coscharis Group): He started as an Apprentice who slept at his uncle’s shop. After he finished in 1976, he was given 200 naira, equivalent to around \$1,500 today. He

built a Coscharis with it, which is worth \$500 million today. He also works in the car manufacturing and oil business.

Innocent Chukwuma (Innoson Motors): He learned under Chief Romanus Eze Onwuka, a big motorcycle parts dealer. After settling, he started Innoson Motors, the biggest local car maker in Africa.

Cletus Ibeto (Ibeto Group): It is worth about \$ 3.8 billion, all from the training of Igba Boi.

Alex Chika Okafor (Chicaso Group): He worked hard as an apprentice, and his settlement helped him build a \$400 million business in manufacturing and oil. These people didn't just make money; they went so far as to train other boys, so the cycle continued.

Like Prof. Ndubisi Ekekwe says This system encourages people to compete while still respecting each other and pushing Nnewi forward.

How Nnewi Changed Nnewi's Economy became famous and large all because of Igba Boi Car Business Hub: Nnewi is a hub for car spare parts and is home to Innoson Vehicle Manufacturing, Nigeria's first local car factory. Big Market: Nkwo Nnewi market is a hub where people from all over West Africa come to buy goods. Boys from Nnewi who learn a trade open shops in places like Onitsha, Aba, and Lagos, so the money circulates. City Growth: The money from Igba Boi has built better roads, houses, and schools in Nnewi. It is one of Africa's fastest-growing cities, with a 5.18% growth rate.

Culture and Community Igba boys made Igbo culture strong. Big men must carry money to their villages, train boys, and help the community as a whole. This follows the Akuruno way, which is to use your money to inspire others. At Nnewi, everybody was hustling to make it. How Igba Boi shares wealth Igba Boi is not like white capitalism, where people keep the money for themselves. Igba boi system allows for the distribution of wealth. Help Poor Boys: Boys who lack financial means or education can join Igba Boi to learn a trade. Just like Ebuka at Nnewi, he opened his shop just eight months after finishing his

apprenticeship. The boss gives settlements, such as money or goods, so boys don't need loans that are hard to get. This has made millions of guys independent with their businesses in Nigeria.

Money for Many Generations: When the boy's training is completed, he becomes the boss of himself and trains other guys, just like Obinna, who has been settled and now has two boys under him. This has created many millionaires and billionaires at Nnewi, like Louis Odumegwu Ojukwu, who trains transport bosses like Chief Illodibe. **Helps the communities develop:** Big men use their money to build houses, schools, and markets in villages. This makes places like Nnewi look good and improve. Like Obinna said, Igba Boi helps boys and their families escape poverty. **Money spread around the Region:** Igba Boi made Southeast Nigeria, especially Nnewi, Onitsha, and Aba, into huge business centres. Even Traders from West Africa come to buy things, so money flows into Igbo land mostly as a result of the Igbo boy system.

Problems that occur: Sometimes, the boss doesn't give the actual settlement as agreed by both parties and because the agreement wasn't documented, the boy has no say and can do nothing.

Women who do Imu Ahia don't get big settlements. Nowadays, young people want to make quick money without undergoing the long-term training that Igba Boys undergo. Some boys steal from their boss or even run away from their workplace.

No written agreement: Since their agreement wasn't documented, it sometimes led to a fight when the boss failed to do what he had promised. For today's work, people have changed Igba Boi. Young boys now use the system for tech business or real estate. Companies like Hero Lager hosted the Igba Boi Competition, which awarded boys 50 million naira in 2021 to start their businesses. People like Benedict Okoro tried to add papers and certificates to the system to make it stronger.

Even with problems like wicked bosses, women matter, and a new

mindset, Igbo boy still show that Igbo culture teaches the world how to distribute wealth and grow together. As Robert Neuwirth said, Igba Boi is “the biggest business incubator in the world.” If only people studied it well, it could eradicate joblessness and poverty. It’s a system that everyone should respect worldwide!

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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An enthusiast in tech with deep passion for studying and showcasing the vibrant cultural heritage of southern Nigeria . Combining my skill with my obsession towards African history and traditions to create contributions that impacts the digital space.



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