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Igbodo: *A Community Formed by Convergence*

By Idenze Ezeme

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FEATURE
IMAGE

**Barr. Ikechukwu Nkeobikwu
Osedume I, the traditional ruler of
Igbodo.**

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IGBODO

Igbodo: A Community Formed by Convergence

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Igbodo is an Ika-Igbo community in present-day Ika North-East Local Government Area of Delta State. It is traditionally made up of six principal villages: Anikpekwu, Anieyime, Ilabor, Ndobu, Idumu-Obior and Idumu-Ozei.

Its history is unusual because the community itself remembers being formed by people coming together from different ancestral settlements. The well-known saying “Igbodo bia abia” expresses this. In the traditional reading, it means that Igbodo is a community whose people came from different places. The community’s own account names seven places of ancestral connection: Ute-Ogbeje, Nri, Ukhun, Obior, Issele-Uku, Mbiri and Benin.

So Igbodo is not the product of one migration. It is better understood as an Ika-Igbo community built through successive migrations, settlement and political joining.

01

How Igbodo Came Together

Igbodo tradition says the different migrant groups eventually merged into a common community. It was not a case of one founder establishing a town and bringing everyone else under his rule. Several groups arrived from different parts of the wider Niger-Igbo region and gradually organised themselves into one political community. Each village kept the memory of its own ancestors while taking part in Igbodo’s shared political and cultural institutions. The Ika North-East

Local Government recognises the same six-village structure.

02

Anikpekwu

Anikpekwu is traditionally linked to Ikpekwu, also called Ekpekun. Its oral history connects him with the Benin area and says that, as the migrant groups were organising themselves into one community, a dispute arose over political leadership. Ikpekwu is said to have held important symbols of authority and to have become associated with the Aniozuzu shrine, which gave his lineage a significant place in the emerging order of Igbodo. This is the history of one part of Igbodo, not proof that the whole community came from the same place.

03

Anieyime

Anieyime traces its ancestry to Ute-Ogbeje and names Eyime as its founder. Because Anieyime and Anikpekwu are so closely related, people later assumed they shared an origin, but Igbodo's own account rejects that and holds that Anieyime came from Ute-Ogbeje. The tradition connects Ute-Ogbeje with the wider Nri-related movement into western Igboland, alongside Owa, Ogwashi-Uku and Utchi, placing this part of Igbodo firmly in an Igbo migration tradition. The name Eyime, still common in the region, keeps the memory of that link alive.

04

Ilabor

Ilabor traces its ancestry to Ukhun, near Ekpoma in present-day Edo State, and names Kehue as its founder. Kehue had two sons, Amasi and Zenakpo, whose descendants formed important branches of the community, and the Okpukpu structure preserves their memory. The designation Ilabor Ukhun'Gbede recalls Kehue's maternal connection with Agbede. Ilabor is therefore a separate migratory strand, coming from the northern Edo/Esan borderland before being absorbed into the Ika-Igbo community.

05

Ndobu

Ndobu preserves a strong Nri-Igbo connection. Its people trace their origin to Ihi in Nri, as the name Ndobu Ihi-Ochi shows. Its closeness to Ilabor led to later assumptions of a common origin, but Ndobu's own tradition holds to a separate ancestry from Nri.

The tradition also records Chime, whose association with Ndobu has sometimes been used to claim links with other communities. The local account says this came from marriage and political-religious relationships, not from Ndobu's founding. Another branch, Ndobu Idumu-Mbiri, traces its ancestry to Ikeze in Mbiri, where the group had a maternal connection before settling within Ndobu. Ndobu thus shows Igbo's layered population: mainly Nri in origin, with another branch linked to Mbiri.

06

Idumu-Obior and Idumu-Ozei

These two are treated as distinct quarters but keep closely connected traditions. Idumu-Obior was founded by Ohem'Ugbede, remembered as an Iyase of Obior, and Idumu-Ozei by Ozei, described as a royal son of Obior. Other groups later joined them. Umuasibe came from Obior, and Idumu-Isei, led by Kwazu, came from Issele-Uku. Idumu-Wolor is associated with migration from the Benin area. These quarters show especially well how Igbodo was assembled from different communities and not from a single founding journey.

07

Many Origins, One Identity

The ancestors of today's Igbodo are remembered as coming from Nri, Ute-Ogbeje, Obior, Mbiri, Issele-Uku, Ukhun and the Benin area. This does not make Igbodo fragmented. It explains where its distinctive identity came from. Different groups joined one settlement, built common political institutions and slowly formed a shared Igbodo identity, which "Igbodo bia abia" sums up. The reading also fits broader research on Anioma, which describes the western Niger region as a zone where Igbo communities mixed heavily with neighbouring peoples and where varied migration histories shaped individual communities.

08

Within the Ika-Igbo World

Though its groups keep different migration traditions, Igbodo developed firmly within the Ika-Igbo cultural and linguistic setting. It lies in Ika territory and is recognised as a community of Ika North-East, and contemporary research identifies it as an Igbo-speaking community with historical ties to the Anioma/Western Igbo region. Its social organisation, village structure, lineages, age grades and titles are best read within the wider frame of Igbo political and social life, while allowing for the particular history of Ika communities.

09

Traditional Government

Igbodo distinguishes between clan-level and village-level chiefs. Clan chiefs are called Nzele Ani, and village chiefs Nzele Ogbe.

- Nzele Ani titles: Iyase, Odogwu, Isama, Oza, Okwulegwe, Onihe
- Nzele Ogbe titles: Iyase, Odogwu, Isama, Uwolor, Oza, Okwulegwe

The distribution and succession of titles differ between villages. In Ndobu and Ilabor, some titles rotate among the villages, while other sections follow different arrangements. Other recognised titles include Odoziani, Okailolo, Obaseki and Olikeze, and the community's account notes that Olikeze is never given to a native of Igbodo. This layered system shows that Igbodo was never governed by one ruler alone. Village, lineage and titled institutions all remain part of its traditional government.

The Obi and Igbodo's Unity

In the modern traditional system, Igbodo is also under an Obi, the central ruler and keeper of the community's traditions. The six villages keep their own identities and leaders while taking part in the wider kingdom. The central kingship sits alongside the older village and lineage institutions and does not replace them.

Igbodo's history is a story of convergence. Its six villages keep different ancestral traditions, with Nri, Ute-Ogbeje, Obior, Mbiri, Issele-Uku, Ukhun and the Benin area all present in the oral histories. No single one of these origins explains the whole. The community emerged as different groups settled and merged politically, each holding on to part of its own ancestry while joining a common Igbodo society. This fits the wider history of Ika-Igbo and Western Igbo population movements, where communities were repeatedly formed through migration, marriage, alliance and incorporation. "Igbodo bia abia" remains the best summary: a community whose people came together from different places and became one.

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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Nze is an Igbo history and culture enthusiast with an in-depth passion for exploring the rich cultural heritage, traditions, and historical narratives of the Igbo people. His works is mostly focused on pre-colonial Igbo societies, traditional belief systems, leadership systems, and the impact of European colonialism.



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