

**THE WAY FORWARD
FOR IKONO IBOM CLAN
IN UYO LOCAL GOVERNMENT AREA
OF AKWA IBOM STATE**

BY

**MFONOBONG UBONG
IKOT OKU IKONO**

Part 1

The Power of a Cooperative Model For Business

As we attempt to raise the standard of living in Ikono Ibom land, there is the need to consider critically how to make wealth. Today, I want to look at the issue of using the cooperative model to finance business for the purpose of creating wealth. I must state here in all honesty that paid employment with the government cannot give us the level of wealth we need for the upliftment of Ikono Ibom.

The word cooperative has a very elastic meaning but for the purpose of my discourse, I will zero in on 3 meanings as found in the English dictionary:

1. Doing something or working with others for a common purpose or benefit.
2. A jointly owned commercial enterprise that produces and distributes goods and services and is run for the benefit of its owners
3. An association formed and operated for the benefit of its owners.

The summation of these 3 definitions is that in a cooperative setting, people willingly go into an arrangement to contribute business resources with the hope of greater personal gain than if they worked solo.

Cooperative is about the oldest business model for business or project financing. It has been used in military, manufacturing, trading and other forms of human endeavors. As far back as Genesis chapter 11, we see the first recorded act of project financing through cooperative effort at the Tower of Babel. The bible is full of stories of cooperative activities especially in warfare.

In modern times, the cooperative model is widely used in business, trade and in warfare. That is why we have a lot of cooperative organizations all around the world. There is NATO, European Union, ECOWAS, OSEA, etc. The single thing common about these mentioned organizations is that they contribute for the good of member countries. For instance, if a country is mad enough to attack a NATO country, then such a country would know that it has set a war in array against several countries at once.

Even within a nation a lot of cooperative activities take place between states, business organizations and individuals. This is because the cooperative model offers the cheapest basis for financing a business or project.

Growing up I used to notice something as a child. A man would want to build a house. All he needed was a cooperative action and pronto, he has a house built fully from a near cashless base. The same results were obtained with farm/agricultural endeavors where a man or woman would own a large farm by going into cooperative relationships with their peers.

Why am I going into these historicals? My reason is simple: If we are serious about economic emancipation in Ikono Ibom land, we need to look for a business or project financing model that will recognize our low capital position arising from our economic history. My position is that the cooperation model offers the optimum approach. Others have done it and have prospered by it. I will mention two groups of people to buttress my campaign position:

The Igbos:

The Igbo people of Nigeria have perfected the use of cooperative model to their big advantage. In every business area that they have found themselves they have employed this strategy. I take one typical example that you can easily notice around here. The supermarket business. By using this model, the igbos boys as we call them have made it impossible for our people to compete in this business. How do they do it? By forming a loose cooperative of 5 to 10 people or units of people, the number of them involved will collectively stock one person's shop at a time and this will be done for all the members. When the last person has been served, the cycle starts all over again. Believe me, give this group a maximum of five years, each of them will own bigger shops and could single handedly fund his own business.

The Indians/Lebanese:

The average Indian or Lebanese boy arrives in Apapa port as a stowaway with a haphazard bag over his back. He quickly seeks and locates his kinsman who has a business and before you know it, the once poor man would own a thriving business and give him under a decade, he becomes a powerful entrepreneur in town.

I make bold therefore to recommend this model to our people of ikono ibom clan. The good thing about this model is that it can be used for any business endeavor. The cooperative can be of any number of people from two and above. It can even be of two existing thriving businesses where the owners want to expand.

This is an abridged procedure I recommend:

1. Find a person or persons of like minds who desire to do business
2. Do a feasibility study and determine the type of business you want to engage in. For this model of funding especially, you are looking to deal in goods or services that are in demand in a

particular location. Discuss and agree with your team on the line of business both or all of you want to be involved in following your feasibility study.

3. It is very essential that you have some form of written agreement. Let each of you sign an undertaking not to renege on the terms of operating this model. If you can afford a lawyer go for it otherwise just know that an agreement is basically what you subscribe to and agree to do.

4. Establish a start up capital for the business. This is where I need to sound a note of caution. This model is based on small business format. In setting a start up capital, I strongly recommend that you and other members of your group should settle for an affordable capital. Don't go for an amount that you will need to go about begging for support so that you wont get disappointed and start bearing grudges against people around you. Even N10, 000 can start up a business!

5. Decide who takes the seed money first. I propose that this be done orderly and transparently so that confidence can be built up by everyone. I suggest balloting to pick the order of taking turns. Once the order of setting up is established, you proceed to the next stage.

6. Funding or stocking up the business. This is another crucial stage. This is a make or mar stage. If the business capital is not properly applied, the cooperative can die at this stage. This is my suggestion here:

Gather the money into a purse. I can give a guide to those interested on how to do this.

If it's an entirely new business that needs a shop or location, the group should ensure a shop location and payment for the shop. Or, it can be a precondition that to be a part of the cooperative you must own a shop or business location.

Stock up. Whatever your business, stock up and begin operation immediately.

Members of this group should hang around the business brother or sister and provide a monitoring service, giving advice where necessary.

The time for stocking up the next member of the group should be confirmed and every member, including the man that has taken off, works towards it

7. Some traits for success

It is important to state here that owning or starting a business does not guarantee financial returns or profitability. Some basic rules of engagement or behaviour must be in place.

Diligence – You do not stock your shop and go home to sleep. You must observe business hours making sure customers know that if they come to your shop, they will meet you to transact business with you. So set the time you must be in the shop and let your pastor know that you will be in your business place at such hours. There are exceptions though but that is my general advice.

Discipline – Talking about discipline, I want to pay attention to financial discipline here. Your business money is like a loan. You must exercise discipline so you can grow your business and also contribute seed money to other members of the cooperative. If one member of the group fails, chances are that the whole arrangement will fail. You need to agree on how much money per month you can use from the business and that amount must strictly come from the profit.

Accountability- Whenever I am called upon to run a turnaround programme for a failing small scale business, the first problem I always notice is that of accounting in the business. The word accounting comes from the root word account, which essentially means to report. When we talk about accounting in business, it simply means give a report of your activities as far as the business is concerned. It is not strictly a matter of reeling out figures, although ultimately, figures MUST follow. The stark truth is that if you don't do accounting for the business, you will never be able to say whether you have run the business profitably or not. I recommend a strict accounting regime for what you are doing. What I find people do is that the business becomes an ATM machine without an ATM card. It is worse when you run a business that brings in money like mfang ukana (so much cash but not much value) Let us take a typical example. You invested about N120, 000 to purchase a photocopier for your business centre. You know that you charge just N20 or so for each job. But as you are working, you are constantly spending as you are paid: N10 for a crying child's biscuit, someone just finished a N60 job and you immediately bought a bottle of water. I bet you, by the time you scrap that photocopier as unserviceable, you won't know how much you have realized from that investment. I beg you, don't go into a cooperative relationship with this kind of attitude because you will not only kill your own business but the others as well!

Faithfulness – the matter of faithfulness in a cooperative relationship cannot be over flogged. It's critical and foundational. You have to be faithful to the cooperative, to your customers and to God as a servant. No wonder Paul says in 1 Corinthians 4:2 that as a servant, you are required to be faithful. In running a business you are first and foremost a servant.

Customer care – It's very important to maintain a very good customer care profile. Gone are the days when you could just do business anyhow and get away with it. Today, in some organizations, customer care managers are high ranking officers. You too cannot afford to do less. Your customers are your bosses and determine whether you will survive or perish in business. Treat them well. So much to say on this but space will not allow me.

Conclusion:

The purpose of this essay was primarily to show that you could enter business without having all the money required. I am sure you would have heard people say, if I had so and so money, I could have launched into business. My goal in this write was to show that you could actually take a “loan” from your peers to start a business without knowing it.

I am hoping that some young Ikono Ibom enterprising youths will find something reasonable in this write up and challenge themselves to change the narratives of their lives. If there are such people who would want to get more insight I volunteer to help with more explanations and guidance.

Part 2

The Power of a Partnership Model For The Business Development of Ikono Ibom Clan

Oh, how time flies! I can't just believe it is already over three months since I posted the first part of this series on business. It was actually designed to be a trilogy. A trilogy on business. Between the first post and now, a lot of things have happened. There was the usual bustle and hustle of Christmas and all its razzmatazz. I even had to take time off to run an errand for my first son who drafted me to lead him to the ancient kingdom of Ekpoma in Edo State to go pick a bride. What a nuptial celebration show that was!!!

But I am back now. Let me discuss this second segment of this business trilogy titled “The Power of a Partnership Model For The Business Development of Ikono Ibom Clan.”

Before I proceed let me chip in a comment on the reception accorded the first part of this series. Did it make any sense? Was it received well? Probably. I ask these questions because I noticed that the people who commented and showed interest and asked salient questions were the comfortable members on this forum: they have employment or business and obviously wanted to add to their store of knowledge. If you recall that knowledge is wealth, I can see those ones using the knowledge to enhance their wealth generation profile. What about those who didn't consider the post useful? God help them, they will keep expecting someone to connect them to government jobs even where those jobs do not exist and when such connections are not available, they get angry with every imaginary non-performing big men from Ikono Ibom.

Don't get me wrong, it's not bad to start off with paid employment. But let me shock everyone in this forum! If I knew what I know today or if I had the benefit of the kind of thing I am posting here, I would not have spent more than ten years in paid employment, a long enough time to settle what I would described as “home follow come challenges.” I am still praying an Ikono young person will receive sense in what I am saying here.

Back to the business of today, "Partnership as a business model." In discussing this issue, I intend to leverage on two dictionary definitions:

1. A cooperative relationship between people or groups who agree to share responsibility for achieving some specific goals.
2. A contract between two or more persons who agree to pool talent and money to run a business and share profits or losses.

What can be distilled from the above definitions is a business situation where two or more people agree to pool resources, skills, expertise etc. to prosecute business and share profits and losses as the case may be. There are three discernable models in partnership:

1. All the partners are involved in the business on a daily routine basis. In this model the partners can decide to take monthly salaries as well as share profits at regular periods of say, 3 months, 6 month or yearly as they had decided in their operating agreement. They can also decide to delay gratification until it's time for sharing profits.
2. Some partners could be working on a daily routine basis while others do not have to show up daily at work place. In this model, the partner(s) who work regularly at the business must be paid salary for their time and also share the business profits as and when due.
3. In the third model, all the partners are profitably engaged in other lucrative ventures but decide to set up the partnership business to get an additional stream of income. Here, the partners need to painstakingly set up a default management team for the business and design a review template which they will use to monitor the performance. Such a template would necessarily include periodic accounting reports and annual business closure meetings.

Whichever model is chosen will depend on the circumstances of setting up the business and once the needful are done, I can guarantee that the partnership will yield expected goals.

WHAT BUSINESSES CAN YOU DO WITH A PARTNERSHIP MODEL?

When this question comes up, people's minds go the big professional firms which must be located in the big city centres. Businesses like law practice, medicine, engineering and the like. This notion is very wrong and that is why our villages and clan are centres of abject poverty and disillusionment.

One purpose of undertaking this series of write ups is to challenge us all to begin to localize those big things we hear happen in the so-called cities and metropolitan centres. I am talking of things that will raise the standard of living in Ikono Ibom lands. I mean a system of businesses

that will lead to our people in the rural areas having access to modern things like portable water, electricity, good and affordable schools and hospitals, recreational centres, etc, etc. To get to that Eldorado, we must begin to set up functional and profitable businesses in our rural areas which will attract residency, and perpetuity. A partnership model is my recommendation for setting up such businesses. Since our rural areas are basically virgin business lands, a partnership offers the cushion of sharing risks and also eventually sharing profits.

So what business? I will wager on,

1. AGRICULTURE:

Oil will soon finish or become irrelevant as a big earner in Nigeria. And I cannot point to any Ikono Ibo man or woman who has ever played a big part in the oil business in Nigeria. The best we had were 8 – 5 salary earners including yours truly. Therefore now that it's almost certain that the scramble to get to Port Harcourt, Warri or Lagos for oil jobs will soon come to an end, do we not think it is time to look elsewhere? In agriculture, we have a good history and experience in the palm produce sector. It is a sector that can never be unprofitable. When this sector was abandoned for the petroleum sector, things were still striving for the palm produce industry for those who had sense. Ask Coscharis, for instance!

A partnership can do well in the palm produce and its associated business where even the kernel shell is equally useful. Some partners can buy a farm and plant. In engaging in this business let me assure you that in the Nigeria that is coming, if you decide to disinvest from the palm oil business after say, 20 years, people will be falling over themselves to buy from you. Such residual farms will become the petroleum industry equivalent of OML, and other marginal fields. Quote me.

b. CASSAVA

This arguably is another cash cow for any business partnership that is ready to “bend low.” The cassava business is a from-leaf- to- root business. I can tell you for free that on the day you are harvesting your cassava, the partners in snail rearing will be rushing to buy the cassava leaves. Cassava meal is a national and international staple consumed in west Africa and some south American countries. The federal government has since approved that bread flour in the country should have a 10% cassava flour content. The pharmaceutical industry needs cassava starch as binders. Now, the big one: Cassava chips are in high demand in the industrial centres internationally. Don't forget that the cassava stock is reusable and cassava is an annual crop. Cassava can be planted conveniently in the same land used for palm trees.

c. PLANTAIN AND BANANA

This is another cash cow for any partnership that wants to mint cash. The Pakistani man will tell that everything on the plantain tree is useful and there is the saying that one banana a day keeps the doctor away. Plantain and banana supply is grossly inadequate. Several downstream activities and products such chips and flour can result from plantain and banana production.

d. MAIZE, OTHER GRAINS

Maize farming is another area that partnership can invest in. There is not enough maize at affordable price for human consumption, not to talk of for the production of feeds for the animal husbandry and poultry sectors.

e. ANIMAL HUSBANDRY AND POULTRY

I get so ashamed each time I get into Akwa Ibom and I discover that it is only ebot asanu that is on offer. How did it happen that our good old smelling goats disappeared and have been replaced by ebot asanu. Back then in our growing up days, virtually every family had 'itie ebot' where goats were reared and it used to be our joy as children to go for ikim ebot. Even 404 meat is now imported from the north, some hungry haggard miserable looking things. We even import chicken! Abasi mbok, nsuto mkpo!!! Anyway, that has to change. With the warning food blockade from the north recently, both the family scale and industrial scale meat production have to start in earnest. A partnership investment in goat, cattle and chicken production is both a big income earner and massive job creator.

f. ONIONS AND TOMATOES

It is a fat lie to believe that onions and tomatoes can only grow big in the north. I am reliably informed that good quality onions and tomatoes can be planted in several parts of the south. Ikono Ibom must be among those places.

g. Other agricultural products that partnership can go into include coconut, oranges, pineapple, quava, etc. By the way, lemon (udang aya) is promising to be a source of income soon.

2. AGRO ALLIED PROCESSING

Partners in the agro industry should actually decide at what point they want to operate. They can choose purely to be primary producers. Which means that they will sell their products to others. Or, a processing line could be added to their business. On the other hand, another partnership group can buy the raw farm product and use it for processing and this becomes their business. It is a win-win situation.

The other day on this platform I saw a display of packaged products from a sweet potato farm. I think there was potato chips and flour in that post. These are useful products that can be commercialized under a partnership model. I would advise that instead of struggling alone with limited finance and other resources, seek for partnership.

3. SERVICES

In my preamble for this post, I drew attention to the fact that one pivot of development of Ikono Ibom would be a matrix system that provides access to modern amenities to the people of the rural areas. For instance if a man who has lived in comfort abroad wants to move back home to establish a business in say, Iton Ikono, can he survive? What about his children? Will they attend those dilapidated schools in Ikono that we keep posting on social media about? Or, will the man keep his family in the city far removed from Ikono so that he would go to the hinterland to do business? Would that not increase his cost of production which he must ultimately pass on to his customers?

The simple solution to this problem is the application of partnership model in the provision of the needed services so that the entrepreneur can concentrate on his business. That way too, our new generation children can comfortably enjoy living in our local villages.

Let us look at some of the services we need to have in our villages wherever people are running businesses under partnership models. I need to reiterate that these services are also businesses which also must run on partnership.

a. Medical

Health care delivery is a very critical component of any growing and sustainable society. Medical professionals or marketers must be on the lookout to identify where “it is happening” and quickly work to bridge the gap. It may mean starting with ordinary dispensaries run by professional nurses and midwives. Medical doctors could also be part of such a primary healthcare delivery system. So, again Ikono Ibom must invest in medical education for their children. For that to happen, science education must be encouraged at primary levels so that you don’t have every child seeking admission to read pol science, history and the sundry arts courses. But the point being made here is that for thriving businesses in our ikono ibom land, we must have partners to provide medical services so that even workers can access the most elementary medicare .

b. Schools

Schools run by partnership will be one of the businesses in communities where core economic businesses are springing up. Workers in the big farms will need to send their children to schools, so also the owners of the communities who will see this development as an added advantage of the opening of their hitherto rural dwellings. The initial emphasis here will be for kindergarten,

nursery and primary schools so that young families can take care of this important aspect of raising a family.

c. Transportation

One thing that causes a slack on businesses is where a core business begins to worry about ancillary services. If I must run, for instance, a palm fruit or cassava or maize farm, I don't have to be the one providing tractor or lorry services for the evacuation of harvests. A group of partners can take this up as their own bit of business in the value chain. The same goes for personnel transportation. If there is functional, effective and affordable public transportation in an industrial zone, everyone does not need to have private cars or a fleet of cars.

d. Marketing

No matter what quantity or quality of products you have, not many people outside the location will patronize it except there is a deliberate policy to advertise it and showcase such products to the wider markets. This is where partners can form marketing groups and take up this part of the business chain as their own contribution.

e. Legal services

There is no reason why every upcoming lawyer must insist on having his or her Head Chambers in the crowded space of the city if there are thriving farm holdings in the rural areas where they can offer some counsel and notary services. I have a personal story on this. Over 2 decades ago when my maternal grandfather who was both a landowner and farmer needed a legal service. I was a resident in faraway Kaduna and he phoned me about the issue. Then I remembered a young high school mate who had a legal practice in Uyo. I phoned the lawyer and I told him to expect my grandfather. I then told my grandfather to visit his office in Uyo and that he should take some money along. Trust village people, my grandfather packed some good cash into his 'dross' wallet and went to the lawyer. When the lawyer saw him, he looked down on the old man and treated him poorly. The summary is that my grandfather went back to his village with his money and the lawyer lost a great client and continued to sweat in the hot sun of Uyo moving from court to court looking for lucrative clients. The point that took me to that story is that if the lawyer had his base in my grandfather's village where he would have known the man in person the story would have had a win-win ending. I am almost too sure that there is no single law chamber in any of the 18 villages of Ikono Ibom, including Ikot Oku and Ikot Ayan, supposedly cosmopolitan villages of Ikono Ibom! If we are not prepared to have a paradigm shift, we sure cannot go too far!

f. Security Services

Never in the history of our country had security become such a topical issue as it is today. With killer herdsmen migrating from every part of Africa to Nigeria, any business that wishes to grow has to put security in its planning. Moreover, if I were to invest in hectares of palm or cassava farms stretching from one village to another, then security becomes a critical budget issue. Business partners would need to enter the business chain to provide this needed service.

g. Housing

If we must have a rural Ikono Ibom developing into an industrial zone, then the necessity to provide decent, purposeful and affordable accommodation is an imperative. Business partners must come up and provide small and medium housing schemes for workers and managers close to the farms and processing centres.

h. We cannot possibly exhaust the list of services that can be promoted with partnership for our envisaged economic emancipation. The above listing represents the major ones. Business partners can, as they prospect, discover areas where services are needed like, surveying, facility management, hotel and guesthouses, cinemas, financial services (including microfinance services), tailoring (some work situations will need uniforms, for instance) artisans (mechanics, welders, electricians, plumbers,) etc. Other ancillary services will spring up also because a lot more people will want to have a piece of the cake in the Ikono Ibom emerging wonders.

PARTNERSHIP FINANCE

I always advise people who want to do business in a group to sit down and tame the monster of finance or money. The A to Z as it concerns finance has to be discussed, agreed upon and documented in black and white.

a. Equity

This will refer to what each partner will contribute to the partnership which in turn determines what each person draws out less cost of business. Equity finance can be a mix of any asset including land, building, machineries and seedlings. Whatever the mix, the overriding condition is that everything must be documented, even if you are dealing with blood relations.

b. Financial cycle

There is only one way to do business correctly: by applying business methods. Fixing a financial cycle is one such business strategy. The partners must decide when to share business profit. Such a cycle will depend on the type of business. Suggested convenient cycles are quarterly, half-yearly or yearly. It is expected that if not at the start but somewhere along the line, the partnership will hire accounting staff. However before that happens, it is recommended that partners will contract with financial services providers to look at the business accounts and provide advice regularly.

c. Financial reserve

One very good business finance strategy is to create a financial reserve, after all costs and share withdrawals. The advantage of this is multifold: it could become a funds hedge against business harsh seasons. It could be used for business expansion at short notice without bothering the partners. It's advisable that such reserve funds be kept in a very solid store such as purchasing convertible assets like land, building, solid world currency and government bonds or bank fixed deposits. Having a financial reserve is also an incentive for partnership perpetuity.

FURTHER THOUGHTS AND CONCLUSIONS

1. As I have said severally in my monologues on this platform, the resources for the development of Ikono Ibom of our dream will not come from people in paid employment especially civil servants no matter how highly placed they are or how much they can steal from government treasuries (let me shock us on this, though. A time is coming that it will be a very risky business for anybody to seek to amass wealth by stealing from commonwealth treasuries. We are much closer to that period.) The only tangible advantage a civil servant can add to this narrative is where he/she is able to attract government infrastructure to our clan. So let us begin our wealth creation by leveraging on business strategies as outlined here.

2. Do not go into partnership with any person(s) who do not provide a stake in the partnership in terms of finance or other business assets that they can also lose if the business goes down. This thought line will be a veritable incentive for everyone to work to make the partnership profitable for everyone. In other words, it is not enough to have a partner whose main contribution is to "manage" the business. Let everyone bring something to the table so that there will be enough profitability (profit-on-the-table.) Let me quickly answer a question that is burning on most readers' lips: what, if a partner will be good in managing a business but does not have any assets to bring to the table? I am going to answer this in two ways. One, very bluntly, he is not meant to be a partner. You can make the person an employee. In my second answer, I am going to be reluctantly cautious: If the person must be a partner, then he must agree to pay his equity from his earnings in the organization. For a start this would mean that this guy must submit to work as a staff partner earning monthly salary and earning shares as agreed. The partner group must therefore without any iota of sentiment agree with him how much of his salary and percentage of

his dividend must be excised out of him for his equity payment and, a signed and sealed instruction will then be passed to the finance department or the finance company managing the partnership finance for execution.

3. You can start your life by getting employed as a fresh graduate or something but have your eye and ears open so that by the 5th year or so you can have a business shop running somewhere (Yoruba style.) This can be one good instance of using model 2 of partnership.

4. If you believe in the small Akwa Ibom man syndrome (apologies to late Akpan Isemin) you might as well forget about getting involved in business by partnership because the prospect being discussed here is for massive wealth creation. We are not talking about etok okok, etok ndidia or etok ufok possibilities here.

5. If a partnership needs to be dissolved, then all the assets including reserved funds shall be shared according to the equity formula used in running the partnership. Let us always bear in mind that there are other partnerships that would gladly bid for the purchase of your residual partnership. This winding up process is another job creator for other partnerships including lawyers, marketers and financial services teams.

6. I am hoping that some young Ikono Ibom enterprising youths will find something reasonable in this write up and challenge themselves to change the narratives of their lives and eventually that of our clan. If there are such people who would want to get more insight I volunteer to help with more explanations and guidance.

Part 3

The Imperative of An Apprenticeship Model For The Business Development of Ikono Ibom Clan.

I like it when I keep my promise. It gives me out as a true child of my father, God. He is a promise keeping God. My promise was that I was going to make three posts on business development for the industrial turnaround of our great clan. Today I am fulfilling that promise as I post the last segment of what I had termed a “trilogy of business.”

The purpose of this last segment is to present an education material that should act as an enhancer for the substance of the first two segments. Recall that in the premier post, I had put up an argument that we need to leverage on the time tested cooperative format to run businesses for our individual and collective benefits. In my second post, I had become very specific and held that the form of cooperative known as partnership holds the key to rapid and monumental

industrialization of Ikono Ibom. In this last post, I am raising a concern on the necessity to initiate and sustain a system of continuous flow of skilled manpower for our development quest. I want to call this segment, the “icing on the cake.”

When I write on a matter like this, I usually start from first principles. What exactly are we talking about when we use the term apprentice or apprenticeship? This is what my dictionary says:

Apprentice – an apprentice is someone who works with an expert to learn a trade and acquire a skill.

Apprenticeship – a work situation in which a person is gaining instruction in a trade or art.

What the above definitions give is that an apprentice is a person who commits to work with an expert to earn a skill in a particular trade.

Let me narrate a story that has stayed at the back of my head for a while now. You know that by dexterous craftsmanship, vehicle parts can be repaired and they would look as good as new. I made an observation about the repairs of the plastic covers of vehicle headlamp. Two young men are the object of my story. One was an Igbo boy and a signed apprentice and the other a non Igbo Nigerian and obviously, jobless. The Igbo man was comfortably undergoing his apprenticeship scheme and on this particular day, the non-Igbo had visited and found the Igbo painstakingly studying hands-on what he was being taught. The non-Igbo, non-apprentice then boasted to his friend that he didn't need to undergo that strenuous programme to master the work and set himself up. He continued to watch for a few moments and felt that he could do it. Thereafter, he set himself up and started soliciting for jobs. He got a big break or so he thought. A brand new Honda accord, which was involved in a minor accident, was given to him to repair the plastic cover of the headlamp. Our man so messed up the job that he ended up in a police cell for over three days and nights. This story shows how important the matter of apprenticeship is, especially if we want embark on a massive industrialization of Ikono Ibom clan.

There are two forms of education, the formal and informal forms. In the formal realm, the instruction delivery is mostly theoretical. The informal format has many variants. The aim of the informal education is to cause the student to learn by observing and carrying out real situation practical work before graduating. Most of the variants of this mode of education do not produce adequate results. For instance, you might have heard of the various government schemes for hands-on training. The truth is that most graduates of such schemes are half-baked because really, by government shoddy designs such centres are not meant to produce good graduates. The NDE thing comes to mind here.

For our industrial development, I want to recommend and dwell on the Igbo apprenticeship model. Hate or love them, the Igbos have made a phenomenal success of their apprenticeship so much so that all over the world, the Igbos are reputed to be the national group with the best apprenticeship programme in the whole world. Little wonder therefore why they are so fiercely successful at what they do producing the most billionaires in Nigeria unaided by the government.

In the Igbo culture, you can hardly get to start any informal skill business or trading without undergoing an apprenticeship training. Some other Nigerians when for instance they want to start a provision business would just go to market buy those items and stock their shops. But before you know it, they will fold up the business after sustaining quantum losses. The funny thing is that you may find the same person moving into sales of clothes. I can assure you such a person will meet the same failure. Has any person ever bothered to find out why Mma Nko provision Store or Ekaette/Okon clothes lines failed whereas Ndubisi provisions store has developed so well that he now has a chain of supermarkets, including one in the same building that Nko's own failed?

The answer is in the use of the apprenticeship model by the Igbo traders. The programme exposes the apprentice to arrangement of goods in the shop, pricing mechanism, coding of items, sourcing for stock, cash handling, etc. The apprentice watches and understudies the master closely for a period. Towards the end of the apprenticeship, the master increases the latitude for decision making by the apprentice and offers correction where the apprentice makes mistakes. By the time the apprentice obtains his "freedom", the master opens a brand new business of the same genre for his erstwhile apprentice of a value pre-agreed. The master continues for some time to offer a hovering supervision to his graduate until the new one perfects his trade and also begins to get his own apprentices.

No matter what we think of the Igbos or whatever emotions we may have towards them, the narrative above has always been at the foundation of their break records success in trade and commerce and they do not intend to relinquish that premier position soon. There is virtually nothing the Igbo nation does not have an apprenticeship scheme for. Even women who sell crayfish in the market go through apprenticeship!

What is my point in going into the Igbo narrative? My point is that if we want to be a successful industrial and commercial clan, perhaps a premier in Akwa Ibom, then we have to have a paradigm shift in our business sense.

If you read the first two parts of this trilogy, you would understand my drift: It's that we as a people must encourage entrepreneurial training in preparation for what we hope to turn Ikono Ibom to. In our to-do-list for this year in IIUF, I saw we have a plan for mentorship. That mentoring programme must encourage our teeming youth to voluntarily submit to apprenticeship

training. Our young ones on their own must choose the part of apprenticeship for their personal development.

I heard a story recently. A group of siblings wanted to set up one of their own in entrepreneurship. They asked the young what he would want to do so that they could set up for him. The young man just told his seniors to just give him whatever amount they wanted to use to set up the business with. When I heard their story I laughed and cracked ribs. Same way, I hear a lot of clamouring for mentoring and empowerment by youth in Ikono Ibom. The youth are quick to accuse their elders of not mentoring and empowering them. From my short stay on this forum, I discovered that what this youth are asking for is handouts and bless me crumbs. I made the observation before and I am making it again: I am yet to hear an Ikono Ibom youth say on this forum, if I can see an entrepreneur that would absorb me into his business as his apprentice with a promise to set me up in that business, I am willing to submit and serve such a master for the required number of years. Let someone on this forum contradict me on this! So, the absence of a conversation like this confirms to me that what my people really want is not a scheme that will turn them into fishermen but they want to be perpetual fish receivers. Correct me if I am wrong, with facts!

To move forward, we need to have a two-prong conversation on this forum: we have to have business men/women and entrepreneurs of Ikono Ibom origin come to this forum and offer to take into their enterprises any number of apprentices of their choices for so and so number of years and also covenant to set up such apprentices in that same business on graduation. In passing, I need to state that setting up the business means that the ex-apprentice will just open the business place one morning and start running the business.

The other leg of my demand conversation is that we need to see on a streaming continuity; Ikono Ibom youth come to this forum to say also, I am interested in this area of enterprise. If I can find from Ikono Ibom a man/woman who would give me an opportunity to be an apprentice in the business so that after so and so number of years my master can set me up in that same type of business.

In my second post of this trilogy, I raised 3 areas of enterprise where Ikono Ibom people can go into partnership. These are Agriculture, agro allied business and services. These three areas have a massive potential to create thousands of apprenticeship positions for Ikono Ibom youth. The blunt truth is that no one can just jump in and become, say, a palm fruit harvester, a palm wine tapper or a garri processor. You have to be skilled in such a business.

Let us consider the requirements for a profitable Apprenticeship programme:

1. LEGAL

In a typical Ibibio culture, it was customary to pick your relative's child and take him or her to the city where you were doing business. Whether the young person is involved directly in the business or not, he/she has no part in the perpetual profit of the business. That happened because there was no legal framework on what would accrue to the young person. But that is not what we are talking about here.

In this scheme, it is a win-win proposition. The entrepreneur or business owner will covenant to take in a prospect for an agreed length of time during which time, the apprentice will learn the business on the job while serving his or her principal faithfully and diligently throughout the period. It is not usually required that the apprentice is paid a regular monthly salary but a compassionate master may at his discretion give out stipend to the apprentice as he/she may wish. At the end of the apprenticeship period, the apprentice will be rewarded with a fully setup business of the same genre.

The process described above must be put down on paper and both parties would sign and the signing must be witnessed by one witness brought by each prospective master and apprentice.

2. APPRENTICE

It is time to advise the would-be apprentice. If you are lucky to be hired by a business owner for an apprenticeship, you need to realize that it is not going to a bed of roses. Neither is it a type of Federal or State government job. Let me spell it out bluntly: you are serving your principal so that at the end of the programme, you will wake up the following morning and move into a business premises owned by you. The cost of that new business is the effort you will put in to contribute to the growth and profitability of your principal's business for the period. It requires you to have the mentality of working for a private business organization.

I Cor 4:2 puts up faithfulness as a mandatory requirement for a servant when it says, "moreover, it is required in stewards that a man be found faithful." Let me coin this issue in a motor park language: the matter must be so important to you that you put your full faith on it. You won't play ping-pong with the opportunity and hope to gain a fully funded business at the end of the day. You must be faithful and trustworthy. The minimum test of faithfulness for you shall be that you will be convinced within yourself that the profitability of the business is to you.

You should show diligence and unquestionable fidelity to the business. The Ikono man like any other Ibibio man is a fiercely republican person. He has this 'ndongo awo' spirit. This spirit has always been counterproductive for the Ibibio nation and is the last thing needed in this arrangement. An ndongo awo spirit is an island spirit, a retrogressive, an anti-development spirit.

An ndongo awo spirit interpreted in English means hater of authority. It is a vagabond spirit and no vagabond ever prospers.

3. THE ENTREPRENEUR (MASTER)

When I was addressing the apprentice, I used a scripture from the bible. Same thing here. This is one scripture I want to recommend to any person who wants to develop Ikono Ibom by engaging in the human capital development of the clan. Col 4:1 says, “Masters, give unto your servants that which is just and equal, knowing that ye also have a Master in heaven.” The summary of this is that whatever a master does to his servant will be done to him by the supreme Master. In Ibibio, this is saying that “se awo ato ayaadok.” So, do unto your apprentice what you would want someone else to do to you or someone you know for instance, your child. I believe this is clear enough.

Be a promise keeper. Or, better still, an agreement keeper. Keep the agreement you had reached with the apprentice before he/she started.

I would advise that settlement should never be done in cash. When you settle by setting up a business for your graduate apprentice, everyone will see and the apprentice can never deny he was ever settled. But if you decide to do cash settlement, the guy may squander the cash and go around telling people that you are still owing him/her settlement. It will be your word against his, and some people may prefer to believe the delinquent person more than you. That is why you need an agreement and then stick to the letters of the agreement.

Avoid manufacturing an excuse so that you will not settle your apprentice. I have learnt something about the Igbo apprentice scheme which an Ikono Ibom person must avoid like a plague: what I call the Potiphar’s Wife Syndrome (PWS.) The PWS happens close to the end of the apprenticeship programme. All of a sudden, Oga’s wife will begin to throw up faults against an apprentice, mostly contrived. The wife begins to encourage the husband not to settle the apprentice. It can also be the real Potiphar’s wife situation where Joseph is punished because he refused to play ball with madam. It has often been reported in the Igbo narrative. Our people must avoid this by all means. I can assure us that it carries curses.

WHAT BUSINESS CAN TAKE APPRENTICES?

Basically, any business !

But we must bear in mind where we are coming from. Our objective is to develop Ikono Ibom land. My last post surmised that we can effectively develop ikono Ibom if we invest massively in Agriculture and Agro allied businesses. Therefore, I would encourage entrepreneurs in agriculture, allied businesses and associated services to take on apprentices. This will make available trained work force for our envisaged clan wide development.

FURTHER THOUGHTS AND CONCLUSION

1. The issue of trained manpower is a critical problem for Akwa Ibom in general. Ikono Ibom clan also counts among. In most areas of services, Akwa Ibom does not have properly trained artisans. Let me mention the building industry. A man was discussing with me yesterday the issue of poor quality of tiling in his house in Uyo. The same house I had noticed has problem with ceiling, roofing, plumbing. If you watch other houses around you, you will also notice poor quality finishing on them. If you investigate, you will discover that those shoddy jobs were done by Akwa Ibom artisans. So, if Ikono Ibom wants to change the narrative, then we must invest in lower level manpower development. I am talking of mechanics, tailors, painters, carpenters, plumbers, tilers, panel beaters, electricians, name them.

2. You would also notice that to get good quality jobs, these artisans are usually imported into our state from other states. Is it not a shame that a poor state will be importing labour from Yoruba states, Togo and Benin republic thereby instigating capital flight from our state? I almost lost a brand new hi-tech car (of that time) to an Uyo mechanic in 2005 because the guy neither had the tool nor the expertise to handle a car of such “sophistication.” In fact, that car never performed optimally after I succeeded in getting the car back to Lagos because some vital sensors in the car had been destroyed due to poor workmanship. And the mechanic was reputed to be one of the best in Uyo at that time!

3. Technology is changing almost every day. If you are trained already, get re-trained in new and emerging technology. If you are an artisan, get updated and keep abreast with changing times. If a new technology comes into town, locate someone that has the expertise and go and submit to that person as an apprentice and learn. Don't feel that because you are Oga, you cannot acquire new knowledge.

4. To get a change, the leadership of Ikono Ibom must seriously consider working with business owners and entrepreneurs to launch a massive apprenticeship scheme for our people. We can arrange a special talkshop involving our entrepreneurs, business owners and prospective apprenticeship operators. Such seminars will encourage high participation of people.

5. Our youth should quit looking for a finished product or comfort zone. My thinking is that Nigeria was developed from top to bottom. The country started out as an inverted pyramid, too many started at the top and many more people are still gunning for the top of the pyramid which has now become overloaded but standing on the tip of the pyramid. The pyramid is tilting and is going for a crash. If the pyramid eventually falls and the base which now serves as the top, hits the ground, there is bound to be a destruction of a cataclysmic proportion. Can the Ikono Ibom Youth jump off the top of the pyramid now and start building the real pyramid? By getting

trained in skills acquisition, going through apprenticeship? This will act as preparation for the opportunities that will explode when the contrived Nigerian pyramid finally hits the ground.

6. My dear young person, you went to the university, right? Great! The builders of the about-to crash-pyramid promised you that your university degree will fetch you a white collar job (whatever that means) and you have been roaming the streets looking for the proverbial white collar job since you obtained your degree to no avail. Guy, it is time to shift your paradigm. Those jobs are not there. We have about 200 universities in Nigeria today churning out graduates in tens of thousands every year. From what you see in this country today, do you think all the governments and companies in the country have the capacity to employ all the graduates? The future lies in skill acquisition through intensive apprenticeship schemes, so that when the government provides the infrastructure after the tottering pyramid has crashed, and genuine entrepreneurs have taken over the business landscape, you will be found employable.

7. More than 50% of Igbos we find in business hold at least one university degree. They became apprentices with their certificate in hand. Ikono Ibom, youth go and do likewise. Go and learn how to sell spare parts, or anything. Beg a business owner to take you as an apprentice, learn the trade and I bet you in a couple of years you will start employing Ph. D. holders. Go and ask the owner of Innoson Motors. He started off as an apprentice mechanic and became a mechanic. The rest is history.

8. Finally, I am hoping that I have not bored you too much with my dogo turenci (long grammar) but I am earnestly hoping that some young Ikono Ibom enterprising youths will find something reasonable in this write up and challenge themselves to change the narratives of their lives and eventually that of our clan. If there are such people who would want to get more insight I volunteer to help with more explanations and guidance.

9. This brings us to the end of this trilogy. My next writing will likely be on politics. We cannot refuse to talk about politics and hope we can go far. Fear not, my discourse on politics will be titled, "Non-Partisan Political Insights." I believe what the leadership of this forum is afraid of is a situation where APC and PDP will come in and be fighting themselves or be campaigning for votes. I am begging the leadership to allow for non-partisan discussions so that we can learn and prepare to participate fruitfully in politics.