

An Investigation of the Impact of International Remittance on the Architectural Element of the Landscape of Isiala Nsulu Autonomous Community, Abia State, Nigeria

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Abstract

International money remittance is money and goods sent to origin of remitters from their host countries. In the past twenty years, many rural and urban dwellers have migrated to Europe, United States and Asia and anywhere, but Nigeria, due to unemployment and poverty. This has seen our professionals leave in search of green pastures. Most of them lived in non-decent residences in the urban area in Nigeria before migrating and had no houses in their respective rural areas. Isiala Nsulu autonomous community is one of such committees whose youth migrated. Most of these migrants have been able to remit money and goods, which have been used in improving the lifestyle of their families, build new houses of exotic styles and in renovating the old. This study investigated how much their remittances have affected the architectural element of the landscape of Isiala Nsulu autonomous community. The study got data from the families of 100 remitters and, the buildings they have commissioned as well as its values. It was discovered that 46% had built houses and that the buildings changed the very traditional architectural outlook of the communities. The study recommended that remitters invest in industrial and agricultural projects to help provide employment for youths and limit migration.

Keywords: Impact, International Remittance, Architectural Element, Landscape

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Background to the Study

According to Adams (2006) and De-Sheribuin (2006), the relationship between migration and rural development is a subject that has generated much debate in academics, therefore the subject of migration and rural dwellers and development is not new. They have been great increase number of people, both skilled and professional who migrate from their rural habitat to developed urban cities, especially among the poor developing countries. Madu (2006) attribute the cause of this voluntary urge to migrate by rural dwellers is as a result of, inequality in income. According to Ajero and Onokala (2013), this inequality in income is because of concentration of wealth assets, purchasing capacity, economic activities, and variety of service in urban areas, and also subsequent neglect and degradation of rural environment.

According to World Bank (2005), this drift by rural dwellers away from their known habitats to other nations, in search of better conditions of living is a survival strategy. In furtherance to this assertion by World Bank (2005) Ajero and Onokala highlighted the importance of the assessment of the effect of migration in the rural environment. Both underscored the effects as catalyzing the charge process of not only the fate of the migrants but also the families left behind. The effect also shows on the outstanding progress the local environments witness due to migrant's remittance.

According to the World Bank study, the remittance has become pivotal income for life sustenance as recipient families spend money sent to them on immediate needs such as food, clothing, education health care, water and sanitation. According to World Bank (2005), the ability of migrants to make up for labour shortage in the rural areas depend on the amount and value of remittances, received by migrant families at home especially in developing nations. Adams (1991) noted in a similar study that the effect of internal migration in the migrant's rural origin is best understood in two distinctive ways,

- 1 The migrants remit money back home to their families, and the beneficiary families use the money for different needs.
- 2 That the rural migrants execute different outstanding developmental projects, in their rural origins. In support of the later Ajero and Onokala (2013) explained that the enabling factor that promotes the carrying out of commercial projects is the diaspora association formed by migrants in their respective host nations.
- 3 Both Ajaero and Onokala (2013) noted that many of these associations of such rural communities have contributed meaningfully to the construction of roads, provision of water, education funds for schools, renovation of schools, building and equipping libraries.

The oil boom of the 1980s prospered Nigeria and provided employment for her graduates. The economy then provided for foreign investors, while industries boomed. This is not the case today because successive military interventions into the polity of the nation created an unfriendly environment for investment, and the economy collapsed. The decline was further complicated in the last seventeen years of democracy, due to misrule and high level

of corruption, militants and jihadist insurgency. The once investment haven collapsed with many companies relocating to Ghana and other safe countries.

This period under study has witnessed the highest number of unemployment, causing the migration of youths and professionals to countries like United State of America, Europe, Asia, Middle East and any other nation, outside Nigeria that is willing to accommodate and provide living for them. Most families today struggle to sponsor at least one of their children to these countries, with a view of improving their standard of living. These migrants work, save and remit money and goods to their families. The money and goods they remit home adds value to their family's standard of living, this most times is evidenced in the new buildings they commission and the renovation of the old. Isiala Nsulu autonomous area is one of such communities whose professional and youths migrated for similar reasons.

Ajaero and Onokala (2013) concluded that every population rank community development projects in an order of importance they believe will guarantee their satisfaction and happiness. Both agreed that the presence of these projects carried out by remittances from these migrants is evidence of socio-economic. Notable among the socio-economic changes that come with rural migrant remittances is the change in the architectural element of the rural landscape, which comes in the form of new buildings of exotic designs, renovations and remodeling of the existing old ones. Therefore it is this element of landscape that this paper focuses on comparing the architectural element of the landscape, before the period of migration, to what it is in the last twenty years. The aim is to find out how much international money remittances have improved the architectural element of the landscape of Isiala Nsulu autonomous community.

Literature Review

Remittances and the Local Economy

International remittance refers to money and goods that are transmitted to households, back home by people working away from their origin communities (Adams Jr, 1991). In many cases such resources transfers can have a profound impact on poverty, income distribution and economic development in rural areas of third world (Stark, 1980; Cox & Jimenez, 1990).

In developing countries, most poor people live and work in the countryside (rural areas). Rural income tends to be lower than incomes earned in either the urban sector or abroad. It is this disparity between rural incomes and expected incomes elsewhere that causes rural residents to migrate, either to urban areas or abroad (Adams Jr, 1991). However, there is no general consensus about the effect of international remittance on rural income distribution in third world (Adams Jr, 1991) Lipton (1980) argues that in India, for instance, internal remittances worsen rural inequality because they are earned mainly by the upper-income villagers. This finding proved the same with Gilani, Khan and Igbal (1981). Adams Jr, (1991), (1989) arrived at similar findings, in a study of rural Egypt. On the other hand, some empirical studies suggest very different outcome, Taylor and Yitzhaki (1986)'s finding revealed that international and internal remittances have an egalitarian effect on rural income distribution in Mexico.

Landscape

Landscape is the visible features of an area of land, its landform, and how they integrate with natural or man-made features. A landscape includes the physical elements of geographically defined landforms such as (ice-capped) mountains, hills, water bodies such as rivers, lakes, ponds and the sea, living elements of land cover including indigenous vegetation, human elements including different forms of land use, buildings and transitory elements such as lighting and weather condition (Erler, 2005; Steeler, 2005). This paper concerns itself with architectural products like buildings as an element of landscape of Isiala Nsulu autonomous area.

Landscape design, therefore, is the process of shaping the natural and built environment to create satisfying places for people to live, work and play and environments for plants and animals to think (Fairbrother, 1974). This is not always the practice where nature has naturally put most of these elements in place, and man modifies them to suite his purpose, Amaechi (2008) defined rural as that which is rural and not urban, and having rural characteristics. Isiala Nsulu autonomous area is rural and not urban, its landscape therefore is natural and is only modified by man to serve his purpose. Rural landscape and rural settlement are linked, with the settlement defining the landscape (Amaechi, 2008).

Traditional Architecture

Traditional architecture is the way of building which makes serious use of the familiar symbolic forms of a particular culture of a particular people in a particular place. Vernacular architecture is the segment of the body of traditional architecture of a people which serves the more humble purpose in their society (Amaechi, 2008). It is this architecture that has thrived since the cradle of Ngwa settlement and characterized its landscape. This ancient, humble, climate responsive architecture according to (Dmochowski, 1990) that is gradually being replaced by new, exotic designs. This is perhaps due to Dmochowski (1990) findings about traditional Igbo building materials. Dmochowski (1990) stated that the static and non-flexible nature of this traditional architecture of Igbo area resulting from the local building materials which he inferred are static, inflexible and not adaptable to modernism, that is responsible for its gradually being replaced by modern styles.

Igbo Compounds

The Igbos developed a variety of compound designs, consequent upon the general plan of the village, which in turn depended mainly on socio-cultural factors, but also in geographical ones (Dmochowski, 1990). The Igbos natural habitat is their rural communities, just like most other Africans (Ukaegbu, 2005). Families or lineage, in particular, have their own meeting places in buildings of socio-religious character, such meeting houses were, for instance, the Obu house which combined the function of a gateway to the compound, a meeting place and the family shrine (Dmochowski, 1990).

Rural Settlement

A rural settlement is a compact settlement with a resident population of not more than 20,000 people characterized by fairly highly agricultural labour content of at least 40% and with few amenities (usually less than ten) such as roads, communication networks, public utilities like water, electricity, financial institution, health and education, recreation facilities (Alozie, 2016). The world started off with people inhabiting rural settlements, and them surviving off the food they farmed. As time progressed, people moved out to the urban areas, but many stayed in these rural settlements. People have remained inhabiting rural settlements for the same purpose they did hundreds of years ago, farming. Rural settlements offer farmers large open range of lands to raise animals and grow crops. (Alozie, 2016) There are many types of rural settlements such as:

Clustered Rural Settlement: A rural settlement where a number of families live in close proximity to each other, with fields surrounding the collective houses collective houses and farm, buildings. A clustered rural settlement typically includes homes, barns, tool sheds, and other farm structures. Each person that lives on a clustered rural settlement is allocated strips of land in the surrounding fields. The strips of land are allocated, some people own are allocated differently, some people own or rent the land. When the population of a settlement grows too large for the capacity of the surrounding fields, new settlements are established nearby. Homes, public buildings, and fields in clustered rural settlements are arranged according to local cultural and physical characteristics. Clustered rural settlements are often arranged in one of two types of patterns; circular and linear (Alozie, 2016).

Circular Rural Settlement: The circular form consists of a central open space surrounded by structures. This model has a center with homes, barns, schools, and churches and as you move away from the center, it is surrounded by farmland. Small garden plots were located in the first ring surrounding the village, with cultivated land, pastures and woodlands in successive rings (Alozie, 2016).

Linear Rural Settlement: Linear rural settlement feature buildings clustered along a road, river, or dike to facilitate communications. The fields extend behind the buildings in long, narrow strips. The town would follow the river. The town goes in a straight line because this so that the river can supply the people with a water source and the availability to travel and communicate. Roads were constructed in parallel to the river for access to inland farms. In this way, a new linear settlement emerged along each road, parallel to the original river front settlement (Alozie, 2016).

Dispersed Rural Settlement: A rural settlement which has farmers living on individual farms isolated from neighbors rather than alongside other farmers in settlements. Isiala Nsulu autonomous community like all other settlement in Ngwa land is linear. This settlement as explained earlier develops along the roads, leading to prominent needs of the people. The people live in compounds of small and large families, with long lanes leading to their compounds. The buildings in the compounds are arranged in hierarchy of age.

(Alozie, 2016). Some buildings as elements become landmarks to the landscape of their rural environment.

This was the character of the landscape of the people before the white man came in 1870 (Isichie, 1976). This landscape began to change, as people acquired more western orientation. The people maintained the linear settlement pattern but began to live in isolation close to the roads. It is this landscape that this study sorts to know how international money remittances have impacted.

Environmental Impact Assessment

Environmental assessment (EA) is the assessment of the environmental consequences (positive and negative) of a plan, policy, program or actual projects prior to the decision to move forward with the proposed action (Nwafor, 2006). Environmental impact assessment (EIA) is usually used when applied to actual projects by individuals or companies (Eccleston 2011). The purpose of the assessment is to ensure that decision-makers consider the environmental impacts when deciding whether or not to proceed with a project.

Buildings are architectural products, and their construction do impact on their immediate environments. Construction sites provide work for professionals like architects and engineers; it provides work for skilled and unskilled labour. Sometimes commercial activities start around these construction sites and some commercial areas that started due to the construction of works of architecture are known to have developed into full daily markets. This study as an objective investigated the impact of construction activities on the economy and social life of the immediate environment and at large.

Methodology

The Study Area

The study area is made up of three communities which come up to form Isiala Nsulu autonomous area, in Isiala Ngwa North Local Government Area of Abia state. The area is made up of Eziala which is the ancestral crown and the custodians of ancient deity Ala Nsulu, a deity that bonded the entire twenty seven communities in Nsulu before Christianity. Eziala remains the political headquarters of Nsulu till date. Other two communities that make up Isiala Nsulu autonomous area are Umuati and Umuala Ukwu. Isiala Nsulu has an estimated population of forty three thousand, nine hundred and fifty five NPC (2018). Nsulu area span from Ntigha express road junction, extending to parts of umuahia, Ikwuano, Ibibio in Akwa Ibom state and Obingwa Local Government Area as neighbours.

Table 1: Population of the Autonomous Area

Title	Male	Female	Total
Eziala	9,210	10,700	19,910
Umuati	4,258	6,422	10,680
Umuala Ukwu	5,640	7,725	13,365
Total	19,108	14,847	43,955

Source: Field work 2018

Selection of Samples

Three communities make up Isiala Nsulu autonomous area, and the number of migrants in each of the three communities that make up the area could be easily counted, therefore purposive sampling is employed, in this research. This is because the number of migrants is small. There are 100 migrants from the area of study. The sample population therefore is 100.

Table 2: Number of Migrants

Community	US/Canada	Europe	Asia	Total
Eziala	23	12	3	38
Umuati	15	13	5	33
Umuala Ukwu	17	9	3	29
Total	55	34	11	100

Source: Field work 2018

Data Collection

The study employed mixed methods approach for data collection and analysis. Mixed methods approach have recently been utilized in development research in Nigeria and have been noted to be user friendly, especially where paucity or absence of baseline data or when dealing with low literacy levels (Nzeadibe & Ajaero, 2010). In data collection for this study, questionnaires were administered to heads of families or households whose members migrated. This became necessary in order to ascertain information on rural migration outside Nigeria. The questionnaires addressed how long the migrants have stayed in host country, nature of remittance, if the migrant owned a building before migrating, or if he has built one or is building one. The questionnaire sort information on the amount of money spent in building projects by the remitters. The questionnaires were administered and retrieved on spot by the researchers. Interviews were further arranged with family heads to clear doubts arising from construction cost.

Table 3: Remitters Residential Status before Migrating

Community	Duplex	Bungalow	Total
Eziala	-	2	2
Umuati	-	3	3
Umuala Ukwu	-	1	1
Total	-	6	6

Source: Field work 2018

Findings

It was discovered in contrast to Lipton (1980) that international remittance improved on the lives of the rural and urban families of migrants. The study reveals that only a very small population 0.23% of the community migrated. 6% of the 100 remitters owned houses (bungalows) before travelling Table 3. The average years that remitters have spent in their host nation ten, within which period, forty-six houses have been built by remitters representing 46% and an estimated Eight Hundred and Ninety-two Million Naira, have been remitted for buildings. Twelve more buildings estimates at one hundred and eighty-two million naira are at different stages Table 5. In all 58% of the migrants have either completed or started a building project.

Table 4: Remitters with Completed Projects and Cost Estimates

Community	Duplex	Bungalow	Total	Cost ₦ Million
Eziala	10	10	20	483
Umuati	6	5	11	186m
Umuala Ukwu	7	8	15	223
Total	23	23	46	892

Source: Field work 2018

Table 5: Projects under Various Stages of Construction and Renovation

Community	Duplex	Bungalow	Total	Cost ₦ Million
Eziala	2	2	4	60
Umuati	3	3	5	82
Umuala Ukwu	2	1	3	40
Total	7	5	12	182

Source: Field work 2018

Analysis of Findings

This in no small means changed the traditional building vista that characterized the community to one that greatly enhanced the architectural element of the landscape, thus improving the rural value and expectations of the dwellers towards life, its further impact on the life of these rural dwellers come from the benefits from wages earned during construction of buildings. The earned wages went to purchase food, and other social welfares. In cost a total estimated amount of One billion, seventy-four million Naira has been remitted.

Conclusion

This study revealed that migrants, usually remit money to their families regularly and as the need arose. They also embarked on building projects, as well as community developmental projects in their rural communities of origin. Ajaero and Onokala (2013) described the projects by the remitters as indicator of socioeconomic development. They assert that the projects and the uses, to which their remittances are put, end up improving life in their communities and increase their happiness and satisfaction. The study also was able to quantify the amount of remittance injected into the economy of the area at least the ones that went into capital projects. The amount is an indicator or an index that could tell the impact of these projects on the life of the rural dwellers. The study therefore concluded that international remittances has been beneficial and improved the architectural element of the landscape of Isiala Nsulu autonomous community. It was discovered that besides the changes in the landscape brought about by the erection of new buildings, rural dwellers earned wages from working in the construction sites. The money they earned went into feeding, health care and education to mention a few.

Recommendations

The study recommended that remitters invest in industries, agricultural projects, and skill acquisition centres to create more impact on the youth by providing employment. It concluded that international money remittance into the rural communities of Isiala Nsulu, autonomous area have positively improved on the architectural element of the landscape, by limiting the monotony of traditional mud houses stacked away into family compounds to modern, developed linearly but no longer in compounds. This has succeeded in promoting a transition to modernity. It is expected that if remitters invest in industries, agriculture, and skill acquisition centers, that the rate of migration by the youths will reduce.

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