

# African Political System and Grassroots Governance - A Focus on Igwebuike Philosophy: Evidence from Onicha Enugu-Ezike; A Northern Igbo Community of South-Eastern Nigeria

<sup>1</sup>Kenneth C. Asogwa,

<sup>2</sup>Samuel N. Asogwa,

<sup>3</sup>Collins, A. Omeh,

<sup>4</sup>Romanus, O. Ugwuanyi,

<sup>5</sup>Chibuke, C. Ogbonna &

<sup>6</sup>Ijeoma, P. Ogbonne

<sup>1&6</sup>Institute of African studies,  
University of Nigeria, Nsukka

<sup>2&3</sup>Department of Political Science,  
University of Nigeria, Nsukka

<sup>4</sup>Department of Public  
Administration & Local  
Government (PALG)

University of Nigeria, Nsukka

<sup>5</sup>Institute for Development Studies,  
University of Nigeria, Enugu  
Campus

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## Abstract

The study explores the impact of the indigenous political system on political recruitment, focusing on the African political philosophy of "Igwebuike" and social structure on grassroots governance. Previous research connects the strength of African political systems today to the actions of modern political leaders. Using a community engagement approach with oral interviews and a qualitative method, the study found that local political leaders and representatives come from an established zoning system. Still, the village is not empowered to set agendas for these leaders. Women also lack formal structures of representation. The village's political system shows a unique aspect though, the "ohu" caste social structures remained marginalized by the tradition, facing restrictions in marriage and leadership roles. The political process is open to all qualified village members, regardless of their social or caste status, except for financial limitations. Additionally, the "Igwebuike" philosophy has strengthened the village's efforts to overcome social and political challenges. This principle continues to be relevant today and symbolizes the community's shared goals and successes.

*Corresponding Author:*

Kenneth C. Asogwa

### **Background to the Study**

The selection and perhaps, the election of political leaders for the people's representation is a complex reality. It involves the consideration of several factors ranging from the type or form of government, modes of power struggle or electoral procedures to the people's choices. An authoritarian regime or political institution ceases power by the use of force. They would go ahead to domesticate the power in a sort of perpetual family inheritance or possession. These they invariably actualize with the political, psychology and religious manipulations that are available to them. This is a general characteristic of all related regimes known to human history in terms of hereditary or absolute monarchy, communists, autocrats and the likes. Indeed, the ability to control and influence people's action and choices is the major onus of power struggle and acquisition. The method of executing the privileges or the rights of the power is fundamental to understanding the suitability of the political system adopted.

The Igbo society has historically been a democratic state from time immemorial (Chukwu, 2016). Its democratic structures were consolidated through the adoption of democracy as the official form of governance by the Nigerian state in 29<sup>th</sup> May, 1999. For the reasons of its distinctive nature as one that allows for the equal representation of the people, from the majority groups to the least minions of the society. Eme and Mbagwu (2008) confirm that the core semantic element of democracy is social equality. Democracy remains, so far, the most suitable form of government for a diverse society like Nigeria. The country is made up of more than two hundred and fifty ethnic groups, with the Igbo, Hausa, and Yoruba as the prominent groups. Each of these groups adopts electoral principles of democratic elections to the selection and election of their leaders and representatives. These are also extended to the grassroots levels of villages and communities that utilize such an approach in the recruitment process of their political leaders and representatives at the state and federal tiers of the government. These representatives legislate and deliberate on issues and policies as the opinion leaders of their people, who have chosen them based on character, integrity, trust, and truthfulness. In some fora, representatives are chosen or elected for special interests like women, children, special needs, professions, class, and ethnicity. For instance, in Nigerian intra-party leadership systems, every member of the party is represented by a leader. This is for the sheer fact that such member(s) constitute a minute segment of the larger Nigerian population.

The Igbo society formally constitutes the five states of Abia, Anambra, Ebonyi, Enugu, and Imo. Since the creation of these states in the late 90s, they have state governments with functional legislative assemblies, operating local government council systems and community-level local/state governments proxies in the capacity of roughly constitutional monarchs like *Igwe* or *Eze* (monarchs). The federal legislative structure divides these states into three zones of senatorial representation for the Senate of the bicameral national assembly. They are individually further delimited into small-sized constituencies of at least two local governments from which lawmakers of the House of Representatives are selected or elected. The local government system is also broken down

into ward units of two or more communities, which project their choice of candidates for representation at the local councils and executives. The study, however is an attempt at exploring the processes or procedures in which Onicha Enugu-Ezike recruits their political leaders at the various capacities of representation in the government enterprise. It also briskly delves to investigate the following questions: the contribution of the community in agenda-setting of the political leaders, the role of the minorities in the community, the deliberation of politics, and the compelling philosophy behind the community's common accomplishments.

### **An Overview of the Onicha Enugu-Ezike Community**

Enugu Ezike, or Ezike Oba, as the case may be, south-eastern Nigeria occupies the northernmost fringes of Igboland and is located between latitude 70 02'N and 70 26'E and between 60 58'N and 70 31'E, covering an area of approximately 260 square kilometres with a population density of more than 800 persons per square kilometre. Its population was projected to be 285,000 in 1991 and to be 350,000 in 2006. It is made up of four clans that comprise thirty-three villages. They have unequal numerical membership by birth to the four main progenitors/sons: Ezeodo, Essodo, Itodo and Ozzi. The villages that make up the town of Enugu-Ezike are remarkably characterized by the nature of their cultural and traditional homogeneity. The element cut across the different aspects of their culture, politics, socio-economic and religious landscapes. Ozzi is however, traditionally known as the least born of the four, it also acclaims the twenty out of the entire thirty-three villages including Onicha Enugu-Ezike.

The village, commonly acclaimed with the prestige of the best palm-wine quality in the Enugu Ezike town is located in the southernmost part of the town. It is naturally land locked by neighbouring communities of Amufie in the north, Olido in the northeast, in the easternmost axis, is the Ogbodu village, Iheakpu-Awka in the southeastern borders, with Okata and Umuida in the northwest axis. Indeed, Onicha Enugu-Ezike is a prominent village that is comprised of three confederate communities with loosed central authority of gerontocratic quality – in the *Onyishi*. These communities include Agbedo-Aba Okwo, Onicha-Ogbo and Ossai-Ukwuaba. They constitute as a single entity: Onicha Enugu; to make up the ancestral stead of what is today referred to as Nkpamute.

Nkpamute is a designation of four villages that have maintained kin affinities from time immemorial: Aguibeje, Nkpamute-ulo, Onicha Enugu, and Ugwu-Attama. However, following the restructuring of modern monarchical system in the town of Enugu-Ezike during the administration of the former governor of Enugu state, Chimaroke Nnamani (1999-2007), Onicha Enugu-Ezike like the other villages, operates constitutional monarchy in the capacity of an *Igwe* (Jerome Mamah, personal communication). Even though the roles of traditional monarchs or rulers are not captured in the 1999 Nigerian constitution (Okonkwo et al, 2019; Omitola et al, 2021). The office of the *Igwe* is remarkable as neither fixed or hereditary. It is rather tenured and systematically rotates among the different clannish sections of the three communities that make up Onicha Enugu. The authority of the *Igwe* is also neither totalitarian or authoritarian. It is basically an

institution for the maintenance of law and order at the local level. The *igwe* acts as the chief security officer for the state government's project on community-policing (Lawrence Attamah, personal communication). In the Nigeria political framework, Onicha Enugu is identifiable with ward VI unit out of the twenty wards that constitute Igbo-Eze North local council. The local government is largely made up of Enugu-Ezike and the Ette communities. It is further delimited into two state constituencies of: Umuozzi constituency I and Umuozzi constituency II. The village under discourse belongs to the former. Furthermore, the local government is delimited with Udenu local government for federal constituency in the national house of representative. Alongside with the remaining four local governments in a part of the Nsukka cultural area, as prudently delimited, the six of them constitute the Enugu-North senatorial district in the Nigerian house of the senate.

### **The Recruitment Process for Political Leaders in Onicha Enugu-Ezike Community**

The focus of this section shall be devoted to the exploration of the recruitment process of three prominent political institution in Onicha Enugu. These institutions are: constitutional monarchy, town union presidency, and local council representative office. These offices are recognized as inherently political due to a number of factors ranging from their process of emergence, value allocation, nature of public service and job objectives. The process through which these offices emerge hinges on the decision of the local people themselves as expressed through the veritable agency of ballot box. This is predicated on the common choice of the people as a democratic village society. The importance of this approach is primarily anchored on the verity that the society, just the like the general Igbo democratic nation, intrinsically have aversion to subjugation, domination and authoritarianism. All the same, it has immensely contributed to cushioning the adverse effects of the socio-political realities inherent in a complex society.

It has been earlier acknowledged that the Onicha Enugu village is a conglomerate of three semi-autonomous communities; though quite unified to be identified in that terminology. These entities are: Agbedo-Aba Okwo, Onicha-Ogbo and Ossai-Ukwuaba. In the traditional governance, each of these entities are known as *ekwe-maa* (community or clan). *Ekwe-maa* is a term that is used to describe a group of people with common traceable ancestry and history. The three entities above are traditionally delimited into five *ekwe-maa* or communities. this is usually done by bringing together the kindreds that share the common progenitors. These five *ekwe-maa* or clan include: Asanya-Ojife clan, Alumona-Ojife (umu-orie) clan, Owa-Agbedo clan, Ezeja n'Ogbo (Onicha-Ogbo) clan and Ossai-Ukwuaba (umu-ossai) clan. The first of the three clans constitute the Agbedo-Aba Okwo community. The eldest male person in an *ekwe-maa* or community is culturally identified as the *Olo-oha*, and *Ede* for the female counterpart. In Onicha Enugu village each of these clans has absolute authority over the operationality of the process of marriage, burial and funeral activities and basic requirements for the enthronement of new public officials like *Olo-oha* (the eldest man at the *ekwe-maa*/community / clan level), *Ude/Okpe* (the eldest man at the levels of a kindred), *Ede* (the female equivalent of the *Olo-oha* and *Onyishi*) and *Nkpozi* (public relation officers or the chief information officer) (Oyibo Apollo, personal

communication). This grassroot structure assures the smooth running of affairs of the local population. In spite of such ostensible confederal power structure, the entire village is largely unified by many traditional and political systems which make the governance less confederate but not unitary and authoritarian. An outstanding gerontocratic leadership by the *Onyishi* becomes pertinent here. The *Onyishi* is the eldest man of the entire village made up of the five *ekwe-maa* or communities as mentioned earlier. A female equivalent in such capacity is the *Ede* who heads only the *Umuada* federation. The two personalities are culturally believed to have been rewarded by nature with old age.

However, the *Onyishi* wields certain level of religious, moral and political authority with the council of the *olo-oha* and *ude* (Elders). There is a tinge of political influence in the office of the *Onyishi*. This however, does not portend that it involves periodic electoral framework that enables the change or emergence of the next *Onyishi*. The office is basically a natural reward for being the oldest person in the community (Thomas Urama, personal communication). While it is not tenured for fixed periods or terms, it is also not transmitted to, or heritable by, the offspring. A new *Onyishi* emerges at the demise of the predecessor, who has apparently rose through the ranks of the eldest person of his kindred or clan (*olo-oha* of a clan/*ekwe-maa* or *ude/okpe* of a kindred). Until now, the question of paternal originality existed as cap that was placed on some individuals, in some cases, kindreds, as naturally unentitled to be enthroned as an *Onyishi*: the *ohu* caste syndrome (Jerome Mamah, personal communication).

However, town unionism is a prominent local institution established alongside constitutional monarchy that exist in the political structure of Enugu state government. It is empowered by the state laws to oversee the administration and execution of state government policies in the village level through effective middle-man function; between the state and the local community. In Onicha Enugu, the establishment of the town union organization in the late 90s has fostered social cohesion by addressing local issues and developing the community while preserving the cultural heritage. The town union have a leadership structure that comprises of elected executives by the members. These executives are distributed to the five *ekwe-maa* of the village: Asanya, Alumona (*umu-orie*), Owa, Ezeja n'Ogbo (Onicha-Ogbo) and Ossai-Ukwuaba (*umu-ossai*). These five of them are found in the three communities that make up the village. The Asanya, Alumona and Owa constitutes the Agbedo-Aba community whereas Ezeja n'Ogbo and Ossai-Ukwuaba respectively builds up the Onicha-Ogbo and Umu-Ossai communities. In contemporary history, *ekwe-maa* is literally translated to as a clan or community. It was the traditional way of delineating a people according to their paternal affinities. In order words, *ekwe-maa* presupposes a group of people who trace their descent to common ancestor. It was originally a clannish designation for the right of possession or custodian of ancestral masquerade cult. In the traditional administrative parlance, the *ekwe-maa* is highly necessary in the distribution of power and organization of the masquerade activities (Jerome Mamah, personal communication). Each clan was believed to have inherited from their forebearer charms and masquerade cults, as sort of their relatedness and unity. In the modern administrative structure village, the *ekwe-maa* has been largely

replaced with the modern concepts of communities that could portend the possibilities of the union of relatives and non-relatives. It is undeniable that the *ekwe-maa* institution is strongly utilized to some extent in the constitution of local leadership structures like in the town union executive membership and in the *Igwe* cabinet establishment. The office of the chief executive officer or president of the town union organization rotates among the five *ekwe-maa* blocks. This is also applicable to other executive positions. The village's town union executives comprise of the president, vice-president, abroad union president, secretary, financial secretary, provost, public relations officer, three ex-officio members, a representative of the *igwe's* cabinet, *oha* Onicha representative, the Onyishi regent, a representative from the security outfit, and youth leader. Each of these are not randomly selected or allocated to the *ekwe-maa*. A great care is observed to ensure equitable representation of the five *ekwe-maa* or clans. This is primarily established for democratic reasons and to prevent the domination of power in that aspect.

On another level, the institution of monarchy in the Onicha Enugu is fundamentally constitutional. It has never been part of the people's culture. This is implied to underscore the fact that the institution is foreign to the socio-cultural tradition of the village. It is a product of the state government's effort at implementing and stabilizing community-based security mechanism. The *igwe* is the face of the monarchical system. It is always a normative belief among the people that the *igwe* is not a custodian of the people's culture and traditions, which the *Onyishi*, by nature, is empowered to be so. Since the early 80s, Onicha Enugu has produced two *igwe*. The first *igwe* HRH Raymond Iyida doubled as the *igwe* of the village and as the overall majesty of Enugu-Ezike town until his death. The *Igwe* Iyida was a product of Onicha-Ogbo *ekwe-maa* or clan. In the spirit of democracy and justice, the *igweship* position was zoned to the Umuowa *ekwe-maa* group. This became the provenance of the rotation of the office of the *igwe*. It was in the reason that in the history of public offices among the *ekwe-maa*, Umuowa lagged behind. Thus, it became justifiable, that the Umuowa *ekwe-maa* has no outstanding public role. The effect of this action led to a protracted *igweship* tussle between two prominent Umuowa sons: Late Mr. Elias Ugwu and Mr. James Idoko, the latter would later emerge one in 2007. The *Igwe* James Idoko who at the time of this study is still the incumbent *Igwe* of Onicha Enugu. The zoning of prominent offices takes in consideration of what sort of office or position does each of the five *ekwe-maa* holds. Upon the establishment or installation of a new *Igwe*, the law of equality demands for the selection of the *Igwe's* cabinet according to the five *ekwe-maa*. This rule is binding and must be respected before the inclusion of cabinet representatives of interest groups and/or others who were appointed on the merit of either a stakeholder's inherent vantage or sheer representation of opinion groups. Moreover, it is highly insinuated that at the demise of the current *igwe* in question, the office shall be as a matter of fairness, be bequeathed to the Umuossai *ekwe-maa* or community. This is based on the historical verity that it has not produced any (Jerome Mamah, personal communication)

In the political terrain, the village has a structure through which potential councillors could emerge. The office of the ward councillor for the local government legislative

councillor is the only political office, most proximate to the village. Being part of the constituent members of Ozzi Ward VI, the office of councillor rotates among the four villages that make the ward, viz: Nkpamute, Okata, Onicha-Enugu, and Ugwu-Attama. In her own case, the Onicha-Enugu village institutionalized a pattern that regulates the zoning of the wards' councillorship position when it is their turn to produce one for the ward. The four of the five *ekwe-maa* groups have in one time in history produced a councillor, except for the Umuowa group. At the time of this research, the current councillor of the ward; Mr. Chibuogwu Collins idoko is a product of the village with particular reference to the Umuossai *ekwe-maa* or community. It is however presumed that in any time in the history of zoning the councillorship position again to the village, it shall become the customary right of the Umuowa to produce one in the name of the village for the entire ward vi (Stephen Eze, personal communication).

It is crucial to note about the regressive structure of the zoning formula for elective positions like these prominent three offices we have study so far, viz: the *igweship* position, town union president, and the councillorship office. The allocation of the inalienable right to produce the next office translates to an intra-zoning structure that could exist within an *ekwe-maa*. The *ekwe-maa* considers within itself about its section that should do so. This is because, an *ekwe-maa* or community or clan is made of two or more kindred groups: Umunna. A great time of consideration is given in this game. For instance, the Umuasanya *ekwe-maa* (the researcher's) houses at the moment, twelve *umunnna* or kindred groups. For the sake of equity, particular kindred are not allowed to re-produce or monopolize the offices when zoned to the *ekwe mma*. It can be obtainable otherwise on the merit of the absence of qualified candidates or on the ground of vote of confidence. Meanwhile, at present, each of the five *ekwe-maa* has at least an outstanding traditional or political leadership position in terms of the town union president (Onicha-Ogbo), *igwe* (Umuowa) and councillorship (Umuossai) (Christopher Onah, personal communication). The immediate past town union president and councillor came from the remaining two clans: Umualumona and Umuasanya respectively. On such backdrop that other minor offices are shared among the five *ekwe-maa* like the office of the prime minister, town union executive members, council ward executives (that the village shall be entitled to) and in some cases, political parties' officials. This institutionalized structure around the election and emergence of political leaders in the village has been positively tremendous. The process has helped to reduce the risk of potential domination and dictatorial tendencies of any of the offices. So far, the three offices have contributed in the building and development of the community's common good and social growth.

### **The Contribution of the Community in setting Agenda for the Political Leaders**

The previous section analysed the recruitment process for the emergence of political leaders in the above village. The offices are affirmed, by the merit of their services and objectives as political. These offices are the *igwe*, town union president and local council representative- the council. For the reason of their elective nature, these political leaders are obviously in possession of the inalienable right to draft number of feasible and cogent agendas they may wish to pursue while in active service; for their respective clans they

emerged from, and for the entire community (Lawrence Attamah, personal communication). Perhaps, through the activities and platform of socio-political activism and pressure groups, these political leaders could be influenced in their choices of the agenda they wish to work on. The community's elite often influence the agenda-setting of these political leaders. The elites are better categorized as the stakeholders who have served and contributed to the development and progress of the community. They have done so in different capacities as political leaders, religious leaders, philanthropists, intellectuals, service men and business moguls. Moreover, through the advisory inputs and wise counsels of the elders-in-council, important issues are identified and publicized so as to get to the attention of these political leaders. A formal lobbying mechanism could also be adopted by them. The lobbyist delegation primarily consists of members of the elders' council (*nd'oha/ndi oha*). They would be sent to the political leaders to register their concern over an issue(s). the traditional characteristics of such visit is usually accompanied with four pieces of kolanut, two gallons of palmwine, a bottle of whisky and a carton of lager beer (Lawrence Attamah, personal communication). These items are presented by the leader of the team on behalf of the elders' council. The team leader in this event is not chosen haphazardly. The choice of selecting the team leader is with utmost care in terms of his ability to convey the message of the elders-in-council fluently and most importantly, in his ability to convince their host.

It is however, normative within the context of the local communities for the public opinion to be expressed through the medium of the elders' council, *igwe's* cabinet and religious institutions. For instance, the chief priest (the *Attama*) plays a significant role in influencing agenda-setting of the political leaders. In his capacity to act as both the eyes and ears of the community's deity is well respected but feared by the local population. In exceptional cases, enlightened individuals in the community could become the mouthpiece of the people who acclaims the qualities of charismatic leadership and opinion leader of the local population (Christopher Onah, personal communication). Indeed, it has demonstrated the various means through which Onicha Enugu-Ezike contributes to the agenda-setting of the political leaders. The instrumentality of public opinion, elite and stakeholders, enlightened persons and the elders-in-council, the community influences and shapes the agenda-setting of elective leaders in the community, viz: the *igwe*, the town union president and the ward councillor.

### **The Role of the Minorities in the Political Process of the Onicha Enugu-Ezike Community**

Within the context of the discussion of the political system and development of the above community, it is pertinent to underscore the fact that the minorities are limited to women, youths, indigent persons and the slaves (*nd' ohu/ndi ohu*). However, at present, there exist no single group or organization through which these minorities are identified except the unhinged youth association (Monica Idoko, Lawrence Attamah, Jerome Mamah, Christopher Onah, personal communications). It becomes almost to an impossible adventure at finding the role or contribution of each of the groups in the political process of the community. For the sheer reasons of financial capacity, the indices of the modern

society in general leverages on the individual monetary will to be electable; whether as female, youth or slave. Perhaps, only to the disadvantage of the poor. This portends as obstacle strewn on the paths of the indigent persons from playing significant role in the political process. Just like every other modern capitalist society, Onicha Enugu-Ezike as local community is made up of significant percentile of poor individuals. The reality of such group of the population implies the existence of social class. Nevertheless, there is obvious absence of evidence on the disenfranchisement of the indigent population in the village (Stephen Eze, personal communication). They utilize the platforms of elders' council and proximate influential personalities, and religious agencies to convey their satisfaction or grievances. On another hand, the community has established pattern of reaching out to this class of indigent population. One of the prominent avenues is through periodic material and food donations by politicians and philanthropists in the community. In the wise, the existence of the slave class is for most times recalled during the process of contracting two opposite sexes for marriage (Lawrence Attamah, personal communication). It is as a norm of the people to question the credibility of the couples' paternal histories and originality. But in the political corridor, it is open to the participation of all including the more traditional nuanced gerontocratic stools and leadership. This age-long practice that does not allow some persons the right to the position of *onyishi*, *olo-oha*, *ude/okpe*, *ede* and other clannish offices, has been abolished in Onicha Enugu-Ezike (Lawrence Attamah, personal communication). The discrimination does not persist any longer as those individuals considered as slaves have become equally entitled to ascend to the offices of the aforementioned traditional leaderships (Christopher Onah, personal communication).

However, the youth organization seems to be the only viable union for a part of the minor group. Although, the organization is not quite formidable in terms of long-operations and existence, but within the periods of its comebacks, there is a clear indication of its enormous stride and input in the development of the community (Nna nwa Ezeudo, personal communication). In the current dispensation, the Onicha Enugu-Ezike Youth Organization (O.Y.O), as ably led by Mr. Nna nwa Ezeudo, has become a prominent influencer to the cause of facilitating infrastructural developments in the community. They actualization most of their goals by acting as pressure groups on the political leaders and through the instrumentality of canvassing for generous donations from high and medium profiled personalities of the community (Ifeanyi Ossai, personal communication). In politics, the youth voice echoes strongly on the qualification and electoral process of choosing the next leader. For instance, during the election of the incumbent president of the town union organization, in the person of Mr. Romanus Ugwu, of the Onicha-Ogbo clan. The youth organization played significant role in suing for peace and equity in the process. It was a contested issue among the stakeholders on which clan should produce the next town union president. In the absence of accurate records, there was a distortion of facts and the consequent outcome of violent acts of power struggle between the eligible clan and other contending clans that acclaimed that it was their turn. By the interference of youthful sagacity, the situation fell under the control of the youth organization. They took charge of the process to allocate values accordingly

and realize the emergence of the current town union president of the Onicha-Ogbo extraction (Lawrence Attamah, personal communication).

It is somewhat disheartening to discover the non-existence of formal organization for the community's women folks. In spite of the availability of avalanche number of *Umuada* groups of different kindred, they do not identify with a particular association for the expression and protection of their rights, freedom and opinions (Oyibo Apollo, Monica Idoko, Angella Iyida, personal communication). The voices of women are only heard through the platform of the three political parties that exist in the Ozzi Ward VI unit. These parties are: People's Democratic Party (PDP), Labour Party (LP), and the All-Progressives' Congress (APC). Each of these parties has the party's women group, led by a woman leader. It is at this level that the community's women alongside other women from the remaining three villages (that constitutes as Ozzi Ward VI) identifies with issues bordering on their affairs. This is only tenable within the merit of their membership of the political party in question.

### **The Deliberation of Politics in the entire Onicha Enugu-Ezike Community**

In matters of politics and power struggle, the Onicha Enugu-Ezike community does not trivialize it. The business of politics as a significant process through which people ascend to leadership positions in communities has profound impact in the destiny of a people. For this reason, the Onicha Enugu people are not apathy in the aspect of deliberating political process so long as it concerns their common good. The people are strongly united to support their own when in contest for power with external candidates. Jerome Mamah (personal communication) recalls with wistful nostalgia about the people's past support and eventual celebrations of their sons' election respective victories as local government chairman in 1996, state commissioner in 2003 and state house of assembly member in 2003. The victories in poll of Mr. Emeka Ukwuaba and Late Mr. Sunday Ali (Aliphem), remains the demonstration of the community's commitment in the matters of power struggle. The community has conscientize her people on the merit of prioritizing the business of politics as a fundamental shaper of their destinies. It is based on that fact that she has produced both men and women who have contested and won various political positions even beyond the village's level. It is considered as important the contribution of elites and stakeholders in influencing the people's political behaviour. These elites are primarily political leaders of different capacities who exert a certain level of influence on the people. They do this successfully at the Umunna/kindred levels through philanthropic gestures. The Umunna reciprocates the kind tendencies by throwing their weight behind the elite as commonly captured in the phrase; *anyi soko nbe nwanenchi anyi s'r' anyi soro!* (we follow/support our brother to where he points to) (Lawrence Attamah; Jerome Mamah, personal communication).

The few educated members of the community tend to decode the dangers of such sheepish social attitude of the people. They have supposed that it has perpetuated the continued exploitation of the people's intelligence and innocence, the enhancement of personality cult among the people, the unaccountable disposition of these political class,

godfatherism and the dearth of oppositions (Christopher Onah, personal communication). Albeit, others appreciate it as one of the basic instruments of the people's cohesion especially with regard to politics. However, there seems to be a common acceptance for negotiation and dialogue in relation to intra-power struggle between and among her own. The community in consultation with, and obedience to the wise counsel of the Onyishi, systematically engages the aspirants and/or contenders in brotherly dialogue. Through this approach, the most preferred candidate is elected for the position in question (Lawrence Attamah, personal communication). A typical recollection of this social approach to internal wrangling and quest for power was vividly seen during the 2022 town union presidential election. According to Lawrence Attamah (personal communication), the position of the president of the town union was misconceived by the Asanya *ekwe-maa*/clan as their turn. It immediately led two persons of the same kindred to throw in their hat in the ring; Mr. Jerome Mamah and Mr. Kanayo Mbah. Their initial campaign strategies degenerated to the false assumption that it was an election between the older generation (Mamah), who was in his early 70s and the younger generation (Mbah), in his mid-30s. It took the concerted effort of the community's persons of affluence, and the youth organization in collaboration with the then *olo-oha*-in-council, Late Ude Ugwu Idoko to bring the two brothers to dialogue. In the process, a historical distortion was corrected to discover that it was actually the turn of the Onicha-Ogbo *ekwe-maa* to produce the next town union president. They did so in the person of the incumbent president, Mr. Romanus Ugwu. The people endorsed his election in forgone to the candidacy of other. The same scenario repeated itself during the contest for the *igweship* position in 2007. The community initiated for a gentle-man agreement between the two aspirants: Mr. James Idoko and Late Mr. Elias Ugwuomah, who were from the same kindred of the Owa *ekwe mma*/clan. The people latter settled for the former who is the Igwe as at the time of this research. Onicha Enugu-Ezike is a community that acclaims this popular badge of distinction in forming common front when in matters of political process and leadership (Jerome Mamah, personal communication). The community always portray this attitude of uniting with common disposition in the pursuit of common goals and objectives. The community is politically active.

### **Igwebuiké: The Philosophy Behind Onicha Enugu-Ezike Socio-Political Projects**

The *igwebuiké* concept has remained an age-long political philosophy of the Onicha Enugu people. It demonstrates the people's will at common good, development and progress. The etymology of the Igbo *igwebuiké* mantra comes from three root words: *igwe* means "to come together" or "union", *bu* connotes "is" or "being" or "exists" and *ike* stands for "strength" or "power" or "ability". Therefore, the concept reads *igwe* (union) + *bu* (is) + *ike* (strength). It connotes literally "union" or "strength in unity". It is used to emphasize that there is strength in the people's unity. It is also phenomenon that is used to imply the description of the positive delivery of seemed difficult tasks through social cohesion and group work. According to Kanu (2017), *igwebuiké* has nearest equivalents like complementarity, harmony, communality etc. indeed, Onicha Enugu has indeed beckoned on that philosophical concept as the bedrock on which they accomplish or actualize their goals as brothers and sisters. Oyibo Apollo and Thomas Urama (personal

communications) recount the brave wars the community engaged with her neighbouring communities in an attempt to expand her borders. The warriors then were primarily motivated by the principle of *igwebuike*. Even though fewer of their attempts returned negative, it underscored the basic idea of the common will and determination the people built and sustain till this current age. Christopher Onah and Jerome Mamah (personal communications) respectively confirm about the common proverbial parlance of the people in relation to the *igwebuike* principle in the following expression: *a yir' jororo ne amag' onye ike gwur'* (a people's common movement conceals the weak from sight/ when we walk together, we don't know who gets tired). This philosophical principle is still in practice among the people even in the current dispensations. This is especially observed in the topics of socio-political behaviour which makes it possible for the people to constitute themselves as common front for clinching political positions.

### **Conclusion**

The study explored the nature of political process and system in Onicha Enugu-Ezike. It found out the three broad classes of political leaderships exist in the community, which include: the *igweship* office, the town union presidency and counsellorship position. These positions were found out as neither hereditary nor permanent. They are not fixed but tenured; described as political by their nature, service and obligations. The process through which they are recruited is largely by the instrument of democratic process and zoning pattern. The elected leaders consolidate the people's legitimacy by workable agenda for the people. The community, on the other hand, may influence the agenda-setting by public opinion, the inputs of opinion leaders and the elders' council. Politics is a serious business in Onicha Enugu Enugu-Ezike. A concerted effort by the people is specially devoted by the people in deliberating the election and administration of political offices, as an inevitable value that shapes their collective destiny. The common unity and progress in Onicha Enugu-Ezike stems from the common mantra of the people that when they walk together to work in group, the weakling remains unidentifiable as the task is easily achieved. The *igwebuike* principle from time-immemorial sustains the perseverance of the community in actualizing their common objectives as people with a common traceable ancestor.

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