



PREFACE

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FOREWORD

This report contains excerpts from Peter U. Iniodu's Ph.D. dissertation, "Small Farm Production Credit for Food Crop Expansion in the Cross River State of Nigeria." It draws upon years of his living and working in Cross River State. It records observational facts that can be useful to students, faculty, and staff of American universities who seek to gain a better understanding of local African settings. The summary analysis of farming in the Annang Community of Cross River State shows the uniqueness of problems in a community and how existing institutions can be used to promote development.

With the evident zeal that Dr. Iniodu has shown during his Ph.D. program, I am sure his contribution to understanding the role of tradition and culture to agricultural development will be substantial. This is particularly significant since the need to increase food crop production in many of the developing nations continues to have high priority in development plans.

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PROMOTING AGRICULTURAL DEVELOPMENT THROUGH TRADITIONAL INSTITUTIONS: THE CASE OF ANNANG COMMUNITY IN THE CROSS RIVER STATE OF NIGERIA

by Peter Iniodu*

Economists in the recent past have attempted to formulate general guidelines for the economic development of Third World countries. In this effort, there is some agreement that: (1) agriculture is the mainstay of nearly all the less developed countries (LDC's); (2) the household is the main economic unit in these societies; and (3) the small farmer should be the focus of agricultural development programs.

While these propositions seem true, many development theorists assume homogenous agricultural situations and identical problems for the small farmers in the LDC's. But, a cursory examination of individual LDC's reveals that some development problems and situations are unique to individual countries and even

to individual regions of the same country. This suggests that development guidelines suitable to one country (or region) may not be appropriate to another.

The following summary analysis of farming in Annang Community of the Cross River State of Nigeria is designed to illustrate the uniqueness of development problems to a community and how existing institutions can be used to promote progress. It shows that, despite some similar characteristics between the Annang small farmer and his counterparts elsewhere, the institutional, climatic, and other factors confronting him may require development approaches different from those that might be used in other areas under different conditions.

FEATURES OF THE ANNANG COMMUNITY

Annang is a subtribe within what is generally referred to as the "Efik-Ibibio" tribal group. Annang people occupy all of Abak and Ikot Ekpene divisions and a part of Opobo division of the Cross River State in the southeastern extremity of Nigeria (Figure 1).¹ The Annangs form about 19 percent of the population of the Cross River State. This state, slightly larger than Maryland, U.S.A., occupies a land area of 11,166

square miles (28,920 km²) and has a population estimated at 5.5 million.

Figure 1. Nigeria, Cross River State, and the Annang Community (Abak, Ikot Ekpene, and part of Opobo Division).



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¹Based on the political divisions of the state prior to the 1977 reorganization in terms of Local Government Areas (LGA) instead of divisions.

Geographical Structure

The Annang Community occupies the rainforest region of the southeastern lowlands of Nigeria. The community is located between latitudes 4° and 5° north of the Equator and is characterized by tropical climate. It lies in the heavy rainfall zone of Nigeria with annual precipitation ranging between 80 inches in the hinterland to approximately 130 inches southward toward the coast [5, p. 1]. There are two

distinct seasons: the dry season and the rainy season. The dry season lasts from November to March. However, rain occurs throughout the year, with maximum amounts in July and August. January and February are the driest months. Land throughout the community is generally undulating. The characteristic vegetation is evergreen tropical rainforest with thick bushes and tall trees.

Traditional Political Structure

Throughout Annang land, the village is the basic political unit. Annang people live in communities under the rule of village heads. The village communities are arranged generally along traditional family lines. In most cases, members of the same village can trace their genealogy to a common ancestor. Consequently, village names are associated

with names of people, usually the names of the ancestral fathers of the village groups.² Each village head is thus looked upon as the survivor or the living representative of the ancestral founding father of the village. Herein lies the source of authority over his subjects or over the extended family system (Figure 2).

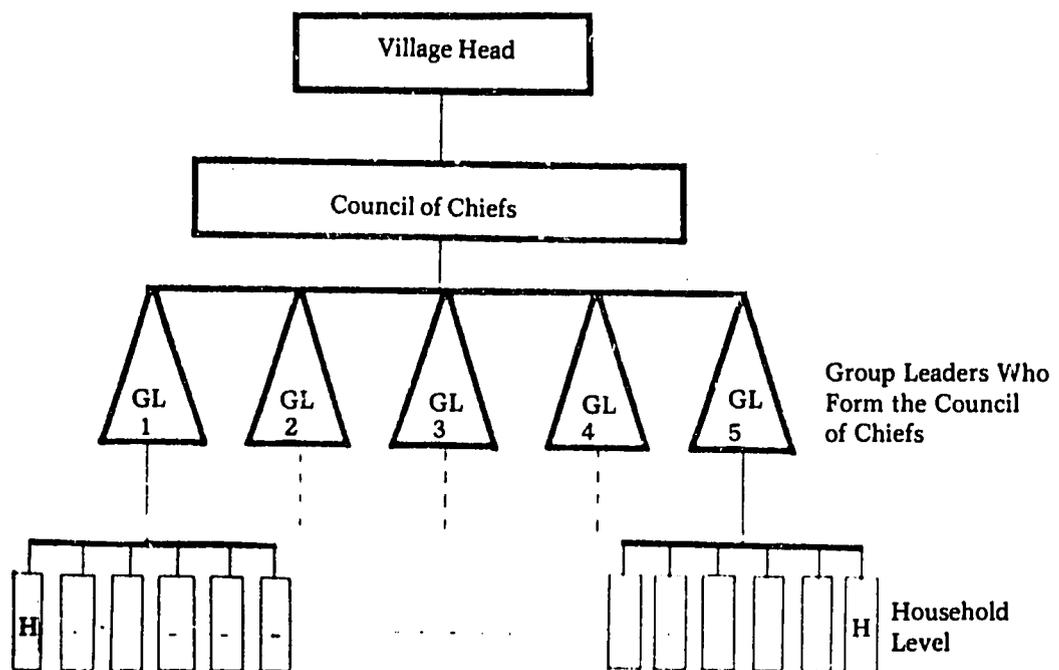


Figure 2. Administrative Structure of the Village

The village head is the traditional ruler of the village and the custodian of village culture. He formulates rules and sanctions which govern the conduct of his own people and settles disputes among them. In

earlier days, he, in consultation with his assistants, declared wars against neighboring villages and negotiated peace treaties with them. Today, he is the liaison between the government and his people. Although his powers are now extremely limited by government, he still plays a major role in the government of his people. For example, he is responsible for collecting "head taxes" from his people and paying the proceeds to government. He still settles disputes

²This is why in Nigeria the names of some villages begin with "Ikot" such as Ikot Etuk Udo, meaning "followers of" Etuk Udo and some beginning with "Nto," like Nto Ntang, meaning "children of" Ntang. These are villages in Abak and Ikot Expene divisions, respectively.

among his people and thus avoids the costs (social and economic) of going to court. His most important role lies in settling land disputes involving people in his own jurisdiction. He and his assistants — usually the oldest surviving males in the villages — are assumed to have a clear knowledge as to the true ownership of every parcel of land in the village.

In addition, it is the village head who controls all communal land in the village and assigns it for individual and group projects. He and his assistants have the exclusive power to dispossess any individual of his piece of land and assign it for such projects as church, school or village hall building, road construction, or opening a new market, without compensation. He also has the power of declaring "communal work days," during which all members of the village are employed in some community projects such as road building, school work, and cleaning the river.

Economic and Social Structure

The Annang community is predominantly a rural society. Urban facilities are limited to the division and/or local government administrative headquarters. Farming is the major occupation among the Annang people.

As a potential farmer, every Annang man inherits some parcels of land from his family and is bound to retain all of them for eventual transfer to subsequent generations in the same family. He can pledge some of the land allotted to him and obtain cash for immediate use on condition that he will redeem it back during his lifetime, provided that the pledgee cultivates it for at least one farming season before such redemption.³ If the pledgor dies without redeeming the land, any of his sons or his most immediate relative (if he has no son) has the right to redeem it. No interest payment is involved.

Although the Annang man can pledge his land, he cannot make an outright sale of any piece of land allocated to him by his family. Where the sale of land is permitted, it must take place between members of the same family or at least within the village.

One common feature of the Annang system is that each male child has a right to a share of the father's holdings. Thus, by implication, the size of farm holdings is a declining function of the number of male family members. A large family, however, is regarded by the Annang man as an asset, both in terms of farm

Defaulters on such occasions are heavily penalized.

Hill [3, pp. 18-23] and Jackson [4] express the view that voluntary community cooperation can be readily achieved under effective leadership in Southeastern Nigeria. Hill points out that, while the natives of this region (including the Annangs) are individualistic, they effect successful community development programs such as the construction of schools, roads, bridges, clinics, dispensaries and water systems when subjected to the "gospel of self-help." This is especially true of those Annang villages in which there is an awareness that progress can be achieved through the effort of individuals in the community rather than through help from government. In such villages, the village head has the support and backing of the elite class. In a situation such as this, the office of the village head can be used to development advantage.

labor supply and prestige.⁴ In general, a family size of 6 to 10 persons is common in Annang villages. However, in some polygamous homes, families with 12 to 20 members are found. Farming constitutes the major source of the Annang family income, but the Annangs supplement their farm income from petty trades and local crafts.

One of the most difficult problems facing economists and planners in Nigeria has been their inability to measure correctly the real per capita income of the nation. This is particularly true in the Annang community. Among the Annangs there is a complete absence of farm records, and this makes it extremely difficult to make even a rough estimate of a farm family's net income. For one thing, only a very small portion of the farm output passes through the market. Farmers hardly ever place a market value on produce consumed at home. In fact, they take pride in independence since consumption is not determined by market prices.

Another source of difficulty in determining farmer income is that farmers harvest their crops in small quantities as domestic needs arise. As a result, the farmers themselves have scarcely any idea as to the measurement of the quantity of a particular crop harvested from a piece of land.

A third source of difficulty, which has led to an underestimate of the farm income, is that all estimates tend to be based on the major food crops (yams, cassava, maize, cocoyam), while the value of the supplementary crops (fluted pumpkins, melons, peppers, and beans) has been neglected. Scarcely any estimator has taken into consideration the value of the plantains, bananas, and pineapples which nearly every Annang farmer has in his backyard because these are not considered as regular farm crops. Also, the farm income estimate excludes the value of home raised animals (goats, sheep, and pigs) or the value of eggs

³A farming cycle takes four or five years in Annang. Land is left in fallow during this period to regain its natural fertility before it is cleared again for cultivation.

⁴More important, children are essentially the only sources of support for the parents at their old age. Thus, the larger the number of children, the greater the expected level of old age support. Here again, emphasis is on sons rather than daughters.

and poultry raised by most Annang farmers on a small scale. Until a value is placed on all farm crops and livestock, and a more detailed estimate is made of the

home-consumed domestically-produced food items, the average net farm income of the Nigerian (and the Annang) farmer will continue to be underestimated.

The Farming Season

The farming season begins in January, the middle of the dry season, with the clearing of the farm plots. Pruning of trees and plants follows immediately, and the materials from the clearing and pruning are chopped and spread evenly on the plots to dry. At the approach of the rainy season, the clearings are burnt and the land prepared for planting.

In some villages, the season is declared open only after the performance of traditional rites and rituals by local "priests" on the recommendation of the village head. Due to difficulties in determining the exact date for these traditional practices, the opening of the farming season is sometimes delayed for several weeks. Such delays usually affect crop production.

The farming season varies in duration according to the crops planted. Most crops are harvested by the end of October. Crops such as cassava, however, may remain unharvested for 18 months due to the lack of storage facilities. Under normal circumstances, cassava should be harvested by November. But since it is mainly planted for home consumption, and because there are no means for storing it for future use, the farmer harvests only that quantity that will satisfy the family needs for a given period of time, say one week, and leaves the rest in the field until needed. In general, crops are harvested as they mature.

Farming Technique

Shifting cultivation is practiced not only by the Annangs but also by other communities throughout Cross River State. By this technique, the farmer leaves each plot of land in a fallow for four or five years so that it can regain its natural fertility before returning it again to cultivation. This is the only "known and proven technique" by which the Annang farmer can improve soil fertility. He has no other means of replenishing the soil once it is denuded of its natural fertility through cultivation. Moreover, when the decision is made to recultivate a particular parcel of land in the village, it is made by the village leadership and not by the farmer himself. Thus, even when the individual farmer learns new farming techniques and has the resources to improve the land and reduce the fallow period, he is prevented from doing so by culture and tradition.

The United Nations Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO) has condemned shifting cultivation as "a backward type of agricultural practice" and "a backward stage of cultivation" [7, p. 35]. Population pressure on land has already reduced the fallow period from 8 years in the 1940's and 1950's to 4 or 5 years in the 1960's and 1970's. The Annang farmer claims that this reduction in the fallow period has resulted in a decline in crop yields.

The shifting cultivation pattern explains, in part, why individual holdings are relatively small. The annual holdings of the individual farmer constitute about one-fifth of his mean total holdings. The introduction of inputs to increase fertility and the abolition of shifting cultivation would increase individual holdings 4 to 5 times.

Cropping Pattern

Mixed cropping is the norm in Annang farming systems. By this method, different crops are planted simultaneously on the same piece of land without regard to soil type and specific crop requirements. Thus, there is acute competition among crops for the limited amount of plant food in the soil. However, some villages designate specific areas for particular crops, usually "prestige" crops. In Ikot Ekang of Abak Division, for example, the area known as "Itikke" is not supposed to be planted to cassava by any farmer, even though the rich, sandy loam soil of that area is suitable for that crop. The area is traditionally reserv-

ed for yams with maize, fluted pumpkins, melons, beans, and peppers as complementary crops. Evidence from an experimental farm in an adjoining area with similar climatic and agronomic conditions show that the farmer could triple the farm income from "Itikke" by planting cassava and maize — two complementary crops — instead of planting the "prestige" yam crop which is more labor demanding. This is an example of enterprise combinations being dictated by culture and tradition rather than by existing economic conditions.

Livestock activities in the area are limited by the

prevalence of the tsetse fly which affects the lives of cattle. However, large-scale mechanized piggery and poultry operations are becoming popular. At the tradi-

tional level, each farmer generally keeps a few goats and sheep for meat. In addition, a small number of poultry is kept for eggs in nearly every home.

Agricultural Labor: Men and Women's Roles

One major feature of the labor force is the distinction between male and female labor. This distinction is necessary because, in the Annang community (and in Nigeria as a whole), certain tasks are performed by men and others exclusively by women. The clearing of thick bushes and pruning of tall trees, for example, require greater physical exertion than women can provide and are performed only by men. On the other hand, activities such as weeding and carrying of inputs to, and products from, the fields are ascribed to women. Even when male and female laborers appear to be engaged in the same operation, they may, in fact, be performing separate tasks. An example is where a man and his wife are said to be engaged in harvesting yams or cassava when observation indicates that the man is actually digging the tubers out of the ground, while the wife is engaged in gathering and carrying the tubers home.

Sex distinction in occupational assignments within traditional agriculture does not imply that the male is more productive than the female. Rather, it is consistent with the principle of division of labor and specialization as identified in the Annang community. Women, for instance, are perceived locally to be faster than men in weeding and in "burying of crops in the ground" during planting, whereas men are faster in other operations. This type of specialization among workers for whatever reason often results in increased production because it permits the development and refinement of skills, eliminates the waste involved in moving from one task to another, and simplifies the various tasks. Collinson, in his studies of management in peasant agriculture, has recognized this perceived phenomenon of productivity differentials among the sexes at different tasks when he stated:

When a woman works at half the speed of a man on one operation and twice as fast on another, fixing her equivalent value at .50 on the basis of the first will grossly underestimate family labor capacity on the second [2, p. 201].

When the average daily rate of remuneration is considered, men are paid better than women during all the work seasons. The wage differential among sexes is explained in terms of the degree of physical exertion required by the male and female who perform each task. Differences which can be explained in this way may be regarded as "normal" even though they may be attributable in part to indirect discrimination in education and other respects. Differences in earnings based on the degree of physical exertion seem to be among those "normal" differences.

In addition to family labor, hired labor is used during the first period of the crop season (January-April), the period when most labor is required. The use of hired male labor is not necessarily due to labor shortage but because some tasks, like the pruning of oil palm trees, require the services of experts. Consequently, hiring skilled workmen who specialize in this kind of work is inevitable, even in the face of excess family labor. Second, most farm activities depend on the season in which they must be performed. Clearing, for example, must be completed by the middle of January if other activities are to move on schedule, due to changes in temperatures and rainfall. Thus, the earliest activities and tasks require a special effort in order to meet time limitations. The activities which require urgency, and for which hired labor is used, include the clearing of farm plots, pruning of trees, planting of yams and cocoyam and yam staking. Female labor is hired mainly for yam, cassava, and cocoyam planting as well as for weeding.

Land Tenure System and Farm Size

It has been pointed out that land in the Annang farming system is acquired through inheritance and that each son has a right to a share of his father's land. Daughters have no right to a share of the family land since if they marry it will be out of the family. Land, in general, is regarded throughout the system as property of the extended family system, and the right to cultivate it is granted to the individual member by the traditional head of that system. The division of a father's land rather equally among his sons rather than by primogeniture is the practice throughout the Annang community [2, pp. 262-266]. This has

resulted in repeated fragmentation of farm holdings over generations. It is also worthy to note that the Annang man places a very high premium on the number of children, particularly sons, that he has. The more sons he has the happier he is supposed to be, notwithstanding the impact of the number of sons on the resulting land fragmentation.

In addition to the tenure system which promotes fragmentation, certain types of land and areas within the village community are recognized as more suitable to growing certain crops or are traditionally set aside for particular crops. Since most farmers at-

tempt to produce all crops generally grown in the area, each son requires a share of each type of land in each area. A survey of the farm size structure in Eastern Nigeria by Smock [6, p. 197] shows each farmer cultivating 6 farm plots each year, all scattered throughout the village area. Thus, for a farmer with 3 sons, each of the 6 plots will be subdivided into 3 separate shares upon his demise rather than 2 plots being given to each son.

From the point of view of development, fragmentation tends to result in farm holdings being uneconomic in size, holdings that are too small to support a family. This, in turn, has tended to intensify rotations and reduce crop yields. Much time is lost in moving from one plot of land to another. If this traditional pattern of inheritance is allowed to continue, it appears that the units of farmland per farmer will become so small that farmers will be incapable of providing even a bare subsistence for their families under existing cultivation techniques. This process is evident because Nigeria, which was self-sufficient in food production in the 1950's and 1960's, now imports food that costs more than \$1 billion annually [8, p. 66].

On the surface, consolidation appears to provide an immediate and logical solution to the problem of farm size. Implementing a consolidation program, however, is very difficult. The present land reform program in Nigeria, for instance, is aimed at providing viable economic units for small farmers. However, a compulsory land consolidation program in a community where everyone depends on private land for a livelihood, and where there are extremely limited alternative sources of employment, those likely to be dispossessed of land will undoubtedly provide "stubborn" opposition.

It appears that some initial progress can be made through education without a direct attack on tradition. Educating the farm people, and particularly the village leadership, through demonstration projects that show how each farmer can increase his farm income by specializing in the crops for which his land is most suited would be a step in the right direction. The demonstration should also show the farmers how they could use the increased income to purchase additional food needed from other farmers in the community. Thus, instead of splitting each of the father's plots by the number of children according to present inheritance practices, each plot would be held intact and the number of plots would be shared equally among the sons. This is not a solution to the fragmentation process but it would result in more efficient use of the land. Improving soil fertility programs should be a corollary to this approach.

Attention should also be given to the problem of shifting cultivation. The cause of the problem is simply that farmers, in general, have no other way of replenishing the soil. This can be remedied by providing sufficient amounts of fertilizers, seeds of high yielding crop varieties, and other quality inputs. Ir-

rigation is not a serious problem in Annang agriculture because there is adequate rainfall throughout the year.

The problem of land tenure and farm size in Annang agriculture could be ameliorated somewhat by promoting voluntary consolidation because, by the culture, the Annangs can exchange one plot of land for another at a traditional ceremony with no money involved. Since all members of the same family tend to have farm plots in the same general areas, they can engage voluntarily in such exchanges. This kind of land exchanges, however, is subject to many problems. Generally, each farmer tends to regard his own land as better than that of others and is not willing to make an exchange without other considerations. For voluntary exchange to work, local assistance in developing an accounting system and agreeable exchange arrangements would be essential.

SUMMARY

The village head, as an institution, is a powerful force in the Annang community. He commands the respect of his people. Any development programs that bypass him are likely to meet with stern opposition. His cooperation and participation in planning development programs are needed if such programs are to be implemented successfully. He can initiate development projects if he is educated sufficiently concerning the merits of such projects. For example, knowledge of the comparative advantage to be derived by individuals in the community through specializing in crops for which the soil is better suited could induce him to initiate voluntary land exchange which may result in economies of size in production. Development guidelines appropriate for the Annang community may not be suitable to surrounding communities that have different patterns of traditional leadership.

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