

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Background to the Study

The work explores the evolution of the local government institution in Urhoboland from 1916 to 1999. As a study on grassroots administration in the area, it invariably covers the impact of the system, especially in terms of political and socio-economic development.

Scholarly studies have demonstrated the relevance of grassroots political institutions to societal development and indicated that they started with the earliest political systems. On the other hand, local government is the modern terminology for this concept. Therefore, the study analyses the traditional grassroots institution in Urhoboland by 1916 before exploring the gradual creation of totally new grassroots structures and paradigms and their attendant dynamics which in some cases were more complex and also different in many respects from the traditional system among the Urhobo.

It has been observed that local government administration is yet to live up to expectation in Nigeria¹ even though it could be a key instrument of promoting national development. This has made it imperative to examine the index details in each locality in order to pinpoint the extent to which they are reflected in analysis of the general factors in the evolution of the system at the national and regional levels. For instance, the experience of the Urhobo and other ethnic groups in the former Warri District,² shows that what is now known as the “Niger Delta Question”³ has some link with the nature of the management of grassroots administration.

On the one hand, the major policies of British colonial local government system in Urhoboland gradually eroded some of its basic elements of political dynamism and compounded the nature of grassroots politics and inter-group relations. Among these policies were the creation of the multi-ethnic Warri Division in 1914, implementation of the Native Authority Ordinance of 1916⁴ and the appointment of a paramount chief for the Division in 1917. There was also the subordination of some sub-groups to the authority of others, while communities with monarchical institutions were apparently rated higher than those without a monarch. These led to the collapse of indigenous initiative in terms of political experiment and created enmity and conflicts among these sub-groups.⁵ In the light of the present complexities in the area (especially with regard to inter-group relations and grassroots administration), the extent of the reverberation of the problems associated with this new arrangement in subsequent decades needs thorough analysis. This structure impacted negatively on the creation of the *Jekri-Sobo* and Urhobo divisions in the 1930s and also lingered into the 1940s.⁶

On the other, though the local government reforms of the 1950s solved some problems in Urhoboland, this was not done without creating fresh ones. In the same way, the attainment of national sovereignty in 1960, the framing of new constitutions, the 1976 local government reforms, and the creation of more local governments raised fresh hopes for the people and local government authorities in the area. But such fresh hopes met with fresh problems and challenges.

First and foremost, the peculiarities of each community were hardly considered in policy-formulation and decision-making even when there was enough reason to do so. For instance, a mere problem of the relocation of a local government headquarters in a section of Warri waterside exploded into a major crisis in 1997 even when there was enough time to peacefully resolve the issue.⁷ Besides, the absence of compensation for the victims of the hazards of

petroleum exploitation became a major issue from the 1970s and this contributed to the crisis of grassroots administration.⁸

Yet, at the national level there are still controversies surrounding some basic issues in the local government system. Even though traditional rulers have featured prominently in the system, a study by Prof A. Jagun on the need for democratic local government system contends that they are not relevant to its operation.⁹ At the same time, though scholarly studies justify the existence of the local government institution,¹⁰ there are individuals and critics who believe the entire system should be scraped.¹¹ It is partly against this background that this study examines the Urhobo experience from 1916 to 1999.

Statement of the Problem

The lapses or shortcomings in the Nigerian local government system constitute a fundamental challenge to both scholars and policy makers. The failure of the system to live up to expectation is partly a product of the fact that both national policies on local government and scholarly evaluations of the evolutionary trend of grassroots administration at the national, regional and sub-regional levels have not in any way captured the key variables or indices of some localities. Urhoboland belongs to this set of communities.

One fact often beclouded by the concentration of all efforts on the crises of petroleum exploitation in the area is that it belongs to that part of the Western Niger Delta where local government administration has been most contentious. For this reason, the developmental indices of the local government institution in the area follow patterns that are quite distinctive in relation to those already analysed in existing studies at the national and regional levels.¹²

The issue is that the developmental trends of the local government system must strike a balance between local peculiarities of an area and the priorities of higher levels of government

because local government and higher levels of government complement one another. A negation of the priorities of one tier could be counter-productive in terms of development and therefore necessitates a return to the drawing board. This was the situation of Urhoboland up to 1999.

Thus, as we shall see in the course of this study, the search for reconciliation of local peculiarities with top-down reforms was a dominant issue in the history of the groups that made up the former Jekri-Sobo and Urhobo divisions up till the Warri local government crisis of the 1990s. An antecedent of this during the colonial period could be found in the failure of the warrant chief system in Igboland as a local government institution because it failed to match local peculiarities with the character of top-down reforms.¹³ At the national level it is also observed that:

... the local government structure in Nigeria appears to have been left behind in the debate on good governance, accountability and development as most analysts and development organisations focus on the federal and state governments. The implication is that local people have also been marginalised in programmes aimed at empowering Nigerians. It is instructive to note that these people constitute over 70% of Nigerians.¹⁴

In addition, from a decentralised local government system instituted by the colonial master, Nigeria graduated to a unified system in 1976 with the aim of ensuring the rapid development of the rural areas. After about forty years of a unified system, it is debatable whether Nigeria has achieved the objectives of the reform. An analysis of the Urhobo situation provides one key index at a micro-level for a practical and empirical reassessment of these perspectives derived from national survey.

Overall, the study is an analytical enquiry into the history of the local government system in Urhoboland up to 1999 with particular emphasis on how much harmony existed between local peculiarities and top-down reforms. This is explored in relation to the developmental impact of grassroots administration in the area within its evolutionary framework and the structural dynamics and challenges of the entire system.

Aim and Objectives of the Study

The aim of the research is to explore the history of the local government institution in Urhoboland. Its primary objectives are to:

1. evaluate the legal and political framework that underpins the evolution of the local government institution in Urhoboland commencing with the reforms of the 1910s to the 1940s;
2. investigate the level of harmony between local peculiarities and top-down reforms vis-a-vis the factors responsible for the sporadic crisis and conflicts in local government administration in the area since the 1950s;
3. evaluate the significance of reform efforts of the 1950s to 1980s in Urhoboland and their relevance to the area up to 1999;
4. assess the relationship between local government administration and the pattern of inter-group relations among the groups in the former Urhobo and *Jekri-Sobo* Divisions;
5. analyse the role played by the operation of local councils in inter-group land disputes in the area;
6. evaluate the impact of the local government system on Urhoboland from 1916-1999.

Significance of the Study

Focusing on Urhoboland, the work is a major historical study of the local government institution at the micro-level in Nigeria. It thus contributes to the understanding of grassroots administration

and development in the country. The work is also significant because as a micro-study, it projects the local experience of the Urhobo in addition to providing a probing ground for verifying the authenticity of theories and generalised facts about local government administration in Nigeria.

In addition to enhancing our analysis of grassroots politics and administration, its long-term perspective makes it path-breaking in the micro-study of local government administration in the Niger Delta. It is also expected that the research will inspire further studies in the area of grassroots administration, thereby leading to new and comparative paradigms and modelling.

Scope and Delimitation of the Study

The Urhobo community of the Western Niger Delta is the primary focus of this study.¹⁵ The entire Urhoboland is constituted into nine local governments –Ethiope East, Ethiope West, Okpe, Ughelli North, Ughelli South, Sapele, Udu, Uvwie and Warri South Local Government. These are among the twenty-five local government areas which make up Delta State.¹⁶

The area is used as a case study to contribute to the understanding of the nature and pattern of grassroots politics and administration in Nigeria. However, since Urhoboland is part of a larger society and could hardly be isolated from its neighbours in socio-political and economic activities, the study embraces some issues in the local government institutions and even political and economic activities of some of the neighbouring ethnic groups, particularly those under the umbrella of the former Urhobo and Jekri-Sobo divisions, that is the Isoko, Itsekiri and Western Ijaw.

The study spans a period of about eight decades. It starts from 1916 and terminates in 1999. In the history of grassroots administration in the Western Niger Delta, some importance is

attached to the year 1916 because the implementation of the Native Authority Ordinance of that year was a precursor to the appointment of a paramount chief for the multi-ethnic Warri Division in 1917. Therefore, it provides a starting point for a historical view of the major events relevant to the understanding of the forces at play during the period covered by the study. On the other hand, the year 1999 permits some explication of the ethnic and political conflicts in the Western Niger Delta towards the end of the 1990s and notably its impact on grassroots politics and administration. It also enables us to attempt a portrait of the impact of the local government policies up to the return to democratic rule in 1999.

Research Questions

In order to address the research problem from a proper perspective, the following fundamental questions are considered crucial to the analysis of major issues at stake.

1. What were the legal and constitutional frameworks that underpin the evolution of the local government institution in Urhoboland from 1917 to 1999?
2. How could one explain the sporadic crisis or conflicts in local government administration in the area since the 1950s?
3. What was the importance of reform efforts of the 1950s to the 1980s and how relevant were they to the Urhobo situation up to 1999?
4. What was the relationship between local government administration and the pattern of inter-group relations among the groups in the former Urhobo and *Jekri-Sobo* Divisions?
5. How did the operation of local councils impact on the pattern of land disputes in the area?
6. What was the overall impact of the local government institution on Urhoboland?

Operational Definition of Terms

Ethnic group: It refers to a group of people sharing the same culture, social and political institutions and speaking the same language. Its major derivatives, ethnicity and ethnocentrism would also be used in this study.

Grassroots Administration: It is used as a synonym for local government and local administration in this study.

Local Autonomy: This means the power each locally constituted political or administrative unit has to take decisions within the context of democratically accepted laws without undue control from higher levels of government.

Local Government Authority: It is also sometimes referred to as local authority in this study. It is the body constituted to control the affairs of a local government. In the present Nigerian government, it consists of an elected chairman and a number of elected councillors assisted by some administrative staff and a few professionals.

Niger Delta Question: This refers to the state of impasse in the Niger Delta until recently caused by (i) the absence of compensation for the victims of the hazards of petroleum exploitation, the perceived marginalisation of the indigenes and their struggle to control their petroleum resources, (ii) the environmental degradation and almost absence of development in the area, and (iii) the sporadic crises that have trailed the region since the exploration of petroleum resources.

Theoretical Framework

The evolution of grassroots institutions since time immemorial stems from the need for a level of government that can respond to the demand and aspirations of grassroots populace in addition to

tapping their initiatives and resources for national development. Since grassroots political institutions complement effort of higher levels of government and vice-versa, it automatically follows that any necessary local government reforms must strike a balance between the priorities of higher levels of government and those of each locality except where both are harmonious. Where the evolutionary pattern negates the interest of one party it is often counter-productive. This was the situation in Urhoboland up to 1999. But a number of theories have been developed for an ideal situation so that they can be a guide for rectifying such structures. Three of these are relevant to the Urhobo situation.

The first is the theory of grassroots democracy. It states that grassroots democratisation is the only key to the realisation of responsive local government system.¹⁷ Some versions of this theory define local government as simply the local branch of a democratic state.¹⁸ The theory emphasises popular democratic participation and according to some of its exponents, it emanates from Karl Marx's criticism of 18th and 19th centuries European bourgeois political institutions.¹⁹ It conceives democracy as a state of affairs in which all citizens particularly at the village and town levels participate and are encouraged to participate in the formulation of major decisions affecting the community.²⁰

The theory was widely embraced in Britain at the beginning of the 19th century. Its dominance is such that traditional argument in Britain about the value of local government primarily revolves round its democratic quality in addition to the principle of efficiency.²¹ Some of the British defenders of the theory are K. Young, G. Jones and J. Steward.²²

The theory is even more adhered to in U.S.A and Southern European countries like France and Italy.²³ Therefore, based on its principle of participatory democracy the unit of local government in U.S.A., France and Italy is by far smaller than that of Britain. Thus, the average

size of a local authority in Wales and England is over 120,000 people compared to 12,000 for U.S.A and 13,000 each for France and Italy.²⁴

The theory, therefore, implies that there can be no responsive local government system in a totalitarian or non-democratic state because the local authorities merely represent the interest of the central government rather than that of the people²⁵. However, many scholars in the field are of the view that this theory is yet to be adopted in most developing countries.²⁶

The theory of autonomy is closely related to that of democracy and is also given significant attention in the literature.²⁷ The main theme of the theory is that the concept of autonomy as it applies to local government should be clearly defined so as to make local authorities more productive and to enable them know the extent to which higher levels of government can act as a check on their power. According to Jon Pierre, this means local governments are to enjoy autonomy based on liberal values. In his view, the response of Western countries like U.S.A and Sweden to the issue is “legalistic and constitutional”²⁸ as they have granted their local governments some legal autonomy. In the light of the problem of autonomy in the Nigerian local government system,²⁹ this theory will constitute one modality for assessing the Urhobo experience.

The third is the relative efficiency theory of local government. This theory states that the legitimacy of local government solely depends on their relative administrative efficiency.³⁰ According to proponents of the theory, some services are distributed more efficiently by local governmental bodies than higher levels of government. The theory, therefore, contends that the number of public services and public policies placed under the jurisdiction of local authorities should depend on the level of administrative efficiency they have been able to exhibit.

These three theories are relevant to the Urhobo situation because the concepts of “democracy”, “autonomy” and “efficiency” constituted key elements in the evolution of the local government system in the area up to the local government crisis of the 1990s with regard to the demand for actualisation of functional local government institutions. For instance, in Urhoboland, efficiency was the only consideration for allowing a council to control its internally generated revenue during the transition from native courts to native administration, 1928-1936. At the same time based on their traditional republican political institution the ideals of democracy and autonomy were expected to be among the key indices in the review of local government structures though it was hardly practical to implement them in these early years of British colonialism. Moreover, the concepts of democracy and autonomy were among the most explosively analysed ones in the reform efforts of the 1950s to the 1980s.³¹ Part of the task of this study is to investigate the extent to which the evolutionary trend of the local government system in this part of the Western Niger Delta can fit into the innovatory structure and horizon of these three theories for an ideal situation.

Literature Review

There is obviously a growing literature on local government administration in Nigeria. Contributors to the literature can be roughly classified into two groups based on their respective approaches. The first set of studies discusses different concepts in the local government system and their practical application to solve the problems of contemporary grassroots administration in the country. They are classified here as conceptual approach. The second category of studies tries to reach conclusion from historical perspective and are hereby classified as historical or empirical approach.

As mentioned above, the first group examines different concepts in local government administration as an institution vis-à-vis grassroots politics and nation-building.³² The literature examines both in theory and practice contending issues in the present Nigerian local government system.

This section of the literature examines issues like local government autonomy, local government and democracy, local government and the management of urban development, local government and regional planning and local government and rural life.³³ Others are local government finance, resource allocation in local government, problems of local government, collection of rates, viability of local government, issues in local government reforms and the likes.³⁴ Since conceptual analysis is hardly effective in portraying past events, a dominant part of this literature only explores contemporary issues, while references to the past are reduced to the barest minimum.

The major contributors to studies in this category are scholars from the social sciences, some of whom are already cited above. Few of them are J.A.A. Ayoade, Alex Gboyega, Oladimeji Aborisade, A.T. Oyewo and I. B. Bello-Imam. In one of his works, J.A.A. Ayoade liaised with some other academics to explore the concept of grassroots democracy within the context of the contemporary local government structure in Nigeria.³⁵ On the other hand, Alex Gboyega, in one of his articles, examines the local government provisions of the 1979 constitution vis-a-vis the relationship between local government and higher levels of governments.³⁶

Oladimeji Aborisade and some other scholars examined the role of traditional rulers in contemporary grassroots administration and the extent of their integration into the local government structure.³⁷ Oyewo attempts an analysis of the concept of local government

autonomy as well as management problems in contemporary grassroots administration in Nigeria while, Bello-Imam, in one of his articles, examines the idea of presidentialism and its application to grassroots administration in Nigeria.³⁸ Finally, in a work entitled *Essays on Local Government Administration in Nigeria*, oyeleye oyediran discussed topical issues involving local government and democracy, local government and traditional leadership and the link between the challenges of federal administration and the local government system.³⁹

By virtue of their scope, these studies are unable to identify the peculiarities of individual communities in terms of challenges and other issues involved in the evolution of contemporary local government system in Nigeria. But their contribution is quite significant, because at a glance they are able to streamline the key issues in the history of local government administration in the country and provide a platform that could act as a valuable asset to micro-studies in the detailed exploration of what obtains in each locality. This is also true of the studies that employ historical approach.

However, the studies that employ the empirical methods of history are not as many as those in the first group. A major feature of studies in this section of the literature is that apart from the use of statistical data and oral information, there is a deliberate and conscious effort to analyse the problems of the past as one key instrument of understanding the present situation and therefore arriving at reliable conclusion.

Moreover, definitions of terms and concepts including the use of technical terms are reduced to the barest minimum. Among the major issues examined are the evolution of contemporary local government structure in Nigeria, indirect rule and the colonial local government system, local government and traditional institutions, local government and rural communities, local government and socio-economic development and grassroots politics.⁴⁰ A. D.

Yahaya, A. E. Afigbo, Obaro Ikime and Michael Crowder, B.C. Smith and R.M.C. Chukwurah attempt a historical analysis of some basic issues in the local government system in Nigeria. P. A. Igbafe also analyzed the colonial local government in the Benin Province with emphasis on the operation of the native courts system and its defects in the area.⁴¹

However, there are few studies whose approaches are both historical and conceptual and, therefore, may not be classified in either of the two sets of literature explained above. A good example is Alex Gboyega's work entitled, *Political Values and Local government in Nigeria*. In this study, political value is explored as a concept. He was able to highlight its impact on local government within the historical framework of the evolution of contemporary grassroots administration starting from the local government policies of the colonial period.⁴²

On the foreign scene, the depth of studies on the local government system varies from country to country. Like Nigeria, the local government institution in most other African countries still needs more scholarly attention. However, there are a number of inspiring studies that can act as a guide for prospective researchers in the field. Among them are the works of Colin Baker and Marc Howard Ross.⁴³ Colin Baker explores the development of the local government system in Malawi giving significant attention to the impact of British colonial policies on the entire structure. Documents of British colonial government form the bulk of the source material. Marc Howard Ross, on the other hand, examines the social and political behaviour of the masses at the grassroots level in Kenya using Nairobi as a case study. The study combines concepts and theories in its analysis of the impact of grassroots institutions on the political behaviour of the masses.

Outside the continent, particularly Europe and North America, works on local government administration have been able to embrace a wider horizon. Compared to works in

Nigeria, they provide elaborate facts and figures to justify the existence of the local government as an institution.⁴⁴ There is also explosive and broader analysis of existing theories resulting in the propounding of new ones.⁴⁵ A few of the studies are global in approach because they analyse topical issues in the local government system with case studies of selected countries from different continents.

Among them is Samuel Humes work, which is a comparative study of the local government institution of different countries selected from Africa, Europe, Asia, North America and South America.⁴⁶ Among the themes covered in this study is the mobilisation of human, material and financial resources at the grassroots level for communal development. Also included are types of local government and a comparative analysis of their features, concepts and theories as practised by different countries across the globe. Among its theoretical analysis is the local government as an extension of power distribution in the political system. Another work in this category is a study coordinated and published by the International Union of Local Government Authorities (IULA). It attempts a historical analysis of major concepts and theories in the practice of local government administration with illustrations based on the 20th century experiences of countries selected from Africa, Asia and Europe.⁴⁷ Also significant is a study entitled *Decentralization and Local Democracy in the World, First Global Report 2008*. It analyses the theories and practice of the local government system from the perspective of globalised structures and with special emphasis on local democracy.⁴⁸

The models explained in both studies may be broadly classified under western, African and Asia-Pacific types. Under each are sub-models. For instance, under the Western model are Nordic/German, British, French and North American sub-models. The Western models place high emphasis on elections and democracy as well as the freedom of the individual as the

bedrock of a productive local government institution. This is at its peak in North America where Jeffersonian grassroots democracy believes in the ‘sovereignty of the individual.’ African models vary from country to country but borrow some elements from the Western models due to colonial influence. Asia-Pacific itself consists of numerous sub-models, the most dominant ones being the Japanese, Chinese and Middle East systems. A major feature of these sub-models is the generical conception of the term, “local government as a sub-state or sub-provincial unit”, categorized as provinces, prefectures, cities, municipalities, counties, shires, communes, districts and wards. Here, particularly in the Japanese model, the preferred term for all units is ‘local autonomy’ to indicate in theory “freedom from central control...in managing local affairs.”⁴⁹

All the works in the literature are relevant to the present study because they constitute part of the theoretical and empirical platform upon which the researcher has explored the experience of the Urhobo. One feature of the studies on Nigeria is that majority of them cover the entire country or major geopolitical regions like the Northern Region and Western Region.

Obviously, the peculiarities of individual communities, especially rural ones, are unaddressed in the studies. Not surprisingly, this has created some problems of sweeping generalisations.⁵⁰ The rural communities of the Western Niger Delta are among the victims of this gap in the literature because grassroots administration in the area is yet to be studied as a theme of its own.

The present research is an attempt to examine the experience of this region by using the Urhobo as a case study. However, Onigu Otite and Obaro Ikime's works on some communities in the Western Niger Delta are characterised with description of some issues on grassroots politics and administration during the early years of the colonial period. But this is rather superficial for a

theme of this nature and of course the descriptions are mere allusions to the theme, while exploring other issues.

For instance, Onigu Otite gives a portrait of indigenous legal institutions of the Okpe people and explains why they were preferred to the native courts of the colonial local government system.⁵¹ On the other hand, Obaro Ikime attempts an explanation of some characteristics of the warrant chiefs institution and some pre-1920 features of the colonial legal system at the grassroots level in the Western Niger Delta.⁵² The present study takes a new dimension and different horizon because of its scope and detailed exploration of the various trends, stages and issues in the evolution of the local government system in the area carefully analysed within the political structure, legal and constitutional framework underpinning the entire system.

Research Methodology

The study adopts the conventional historical method. It is based on data collected from primary and secondary sources. Primary sources include oral information from well informed individuals with eye-witness knowledge of selected major events in grassroots politics and administration in the area. Among those interviewed are community leaders and major actors in grassroots politics and administration in Urhoboland, in particular, and the Western Niger Delta in general.

The study relies more on primary source materials because there are only few published works on local government administration in the Western Niger Delta. The primary sources are carefully analysed to understand the extent of dynamism and innovation achieved in grassroots administration in the area. Information bulletins, government gazettes and other official documents obtained from the Department of Local Government, Asaba and similar government

agencies are among the primary sources analysed. These are used to cross-check similar documents from the various local government authorities including documents and oral evidence from legally recognised traditional law courts and chieftaincy institutions. A juxtaposition of data from these source materials with newspapers, magazines and some categories of oral evidence also provides one means of verifying the authenticity of available data and information.

A good number of documents are also obtained from the Unified Local Government Service Board, Benin-City and the National Archives, Ibadan. Relevant documents are obtained from the different local government secretariats in the area. Among these are Warri North, Warri South, Warri South-West, Ughelli North and Ughelli South local governments. Others are Udu, Uvbie, Okpe, Sapele, Ehiopie-East and Ehiopie-West local governments. The electronic media, notably recent radio and television programmes on the nature of local government administration provided some useful materials for our purposes.

The materials from primary sources are supplemented by secondary source materials obtained from the available libraries and the internet. Therefore, valuable information tapped from a good number of scholarly works on local government administration, politics and economy are employed to complement some of the primary source materials as a means of arriving at objective conclusion.

Overall, the study combines chronological, thematic and statistical approach with descriptive and analytic elements in order to arrive at logical conclusions. Where necessary, fragmentary documents are well scrutinised so that they might be of some help in verification of other source materials and clarification of vital issues.

ENDNOTES

1. J. O. Aluko, “Nigerian local government system at cross roads” *Recall Journal Ibadan*, 2004; Kehinde A. Bolaji, “The Problem of Governance of Local Government in Nigeria”, *Nigerian Forum* (NIIA), March/April, 2008, Vol. 29, Nos. 3-4, 57
2. The Warri District consists of Urhobo, Isoko, Itsekiri and Western Ijaw. It was renamed Warri Division in 1914 and got a paramount chief in 1917. *The Nigeria Gazette*, Vol. IV, No. 45, 13th Sept., 1917; C.S.O. 26/2 File 11857 Vol. X, Annual Report, Warri Province, 1932, 3
3. On the “Niger Delta Question” see, Kiihpoye K. Aaron, “Truth without Reconciliation: The Niger Delta and The Continuing Challenge of National Reconciliation” in *The Crisis of the State and Regionalism in West Africa*, edited by A.W. Fawole and Charles Ukeje (Dakar: CODESRIA, 2005), 127-136.
4. Also see *Nigeria Gazette*, Vol. iv, No. 45, 13th Sept. 1917.
5. Reports on these conflicts (especially from 1917-26) are contained in many documents that are analysed in this study, e.g. Ughelle Papers, File 96/1925^A, Annual Report, Warri Division, 1925; Ughelle Papers, File 53/1924, Petition from Effurun Chiefs to Resident, Warri Province, 18 November, 1924; Ughelle Papers, File 26/1919, D.O Warri to Resident, Warri, Memo No 15/1920, 8 January 1920 etc.
6. C.S.O 26, File 26767, A Broad Scheme for the Reorganisation of Warri Province on Tribal Lines, 1930; the Warri Province Consisted of the Urhobo, Itsekiri, Isoko, Western Ijaw, Kwale and Aboh. Also see Obaro Ikime, *Niger Delta Rivalry: Itsekiri-Urhobo Relations and the European Presence, 1884-1936* (London: Longman, 1969), 190. As we shall see later, by 1938 the inter-ethnic conflicts in this division was the most dominant issue confronting colonial officials in the Western Niger Delta. e.g C.S.O 26 File 51642 XII Progress Report on the Jekri sub-tribe and the Sobo clans in the Jekri-Sobo Division, 7 and 13; C.S.O 26/2 11857 Vol. XV, Annual Report, Warri Province, 1938, 5.
7. This is discussed in chapter six of this study. Also see, Dr A.S. Akpotor, “Warri Crisis Survey – Urhobo Perspective” in *Conflict and Instability in the Niger Delta: The Warri case* edited by T.A. Imobighe, Celestine O. Bassey & J.B. Asuni (Ibadan: Spectrum Books, 2002), 166 – 169.
8. *Hazards of Oil Exploration in Bendel State* (Benin-City: Bendel Newspapers Corporation, 1980); Okechukwu Ibeanu. “Oil Conflict and Security in Rural Nigeria: Issues in the Ogoni Crisis”, *Harare African Association of Political Science*. Occasional Paper Series 1, no. 2 (1997):
9. Adedokun Jagun, “Traditional Rulers and the Concepts of Democracy and Local Government: A Paradigm of Harmony or Conflict?” in *Local Government and the*

Traditional Rulers in Nigeria, edited by Oladimeji Aborisade (Ile-Ife: University of Ife Press, 1985), 117-118.

10. B. Smith, 'The Justification for Local Government' in *Politics and Government of Urban Canada* edited by L. D. Feldman & M. Goldrick (Toronto: Methuen publishers, 1972); K. Young, 'The Justification for Local Government' in *Essays on the Future of Local Government* edited by M. Goldsmith (Wakefield: West Yorks MCC Press)
11. Thus in an explosive interview, a key player in grassroots politics and administration, Barrister S.T. Borlokor contends, "There is so much waste at the local government level. They should be totally discarded ... What is the impact of local government as units of administration? Nothing! They share the money of all the contracts awarded." This is part of his response to the question, "Do you think the proposed creation of separate local governments in the area will permanently bring peace to the Warri axis?" *The Urhobo Voice*, Vol. 7, No. 223, November 17, 2003, 13; Also oral interview: January 3, 2013 (see bibliography for his profile).
12. These are among the studies discussed in the literature review
13. A. E. Afigbo, *The Warrant Chief: Indirect Rule in Southeastern Nigeria, 1891-1929* (London: Longman, 1972), 78-117 and 255-294.
14. Kehinde A. Bolaji, "The Problem of Governance of Local Government in Nigeria", *Nigerian Forum* (NIIA), March/April, 2008, Vol. 29, Nos. 3-4, 57
15. See the opening page of Chapter Two for population figures and geographical delimitation of the Urhobo. Also see, Albert, O. Aweto & J.L. Igben, "Geography of Urhoboland" in *The Urhobo People* edited by Onigu Oтите (Ibadan: Shaneson C. I. Ltd, 2003), 15
16. Also see the maps on pages 55-57.
17. Desmond S. King and Jon Pierre, eds. *Challenges to Local Government* (London: SAGE Publications. 1989), 42.
18. Ibid., 21.
19. Solomon Akhere Benjamin, *Grassroots Democratisation in Nigeria: Constraints and Prospects* (Ibadan: NISER. 1998), 22.
20. Ibid.
21. King and Pieere, *Challenges to Local Government.*, 16.
22. G. Jones and J. Steward, *The Case for Local Government.* (London: Allen & Unwin. 1985), 10-12; K. Young. "The Justification for Local Government" in *Essays of the Future of Local Government*, edited by M. Goldsmith (West Yorks: MCC. 1986), 8-20.

23. Desmond S. King and Jon Pierre, eds. *Challenges to Local Government*. (London: SAGE Publications, 1989), 18.
24. Ibid., 17
25. Solomon Akhere Benjamin, *Grassroots Democratisation in Nigeria: Constraints and Prospects* (Ibadan: NISER. 1998),12-13
26. Ibid., 13-14
27. Michael Goldsmith, “Local Autonomy: Theory and Practice” in *Challenges to Local Government*, edited by Desmond S. King & Jon Pierre 1989, 15-33.
28. Jon Pierre, “Assessing Local Autonomy” in *Challenges to Local Government*, edited by Desmond S. King and Jon Pierre (London: SAGE Publications, 1989), 39
29. Mike Adeyeye, “Democracy, Local Government and the Crisis of Autonomy in Nigeria” in *Socio-Legal Essays in Local Government Administration in Nigeria*, edited by John Ademola Yakubu (Ibadan: Demyaxs Law Books, 2003), 37.
30. L. J. Sharpe is a chief exponent of this theory. See, L.J. Sharpe, “Theories and Values of Local Government”, *Political Studies*, Vol. 18, 1970. 153-74; Desmond S. King and Jon Pierre, eds. *Challenges to Local Government* (London: SAGE Publications, 1989), 42.
31. Mike Adeyeye, “Democracy, Local Government and the Crisis of Autonomy in Nigeria” in *Socio-Legal Essays in Local Government Administration in Nigeria*, edited by John Ademola Yakubu (Ibadan: Demyaxs Law Books, 2003).
32. Such Studies include Oladimeji Aborisade, ed. *Readings in Nigerian Local Government*. (Ile-Ife: OAU Press. 1986); A.G. Onibokun, ed. *Financing Urban Services:A Critical Assessment of Local Government Ability and the Potentials of Private Sector Involvement in Urban Management in Nigeria*, (Ibadan: NISER. 1991); L. Adamolekun and L. Rowland, eds. *The New Local Government System in Nigeria*. (London: Heinemann Books, 1979).
33. Examples are: Mike Adeyeye, “Democracy, Local Government and the Crisis of Autonomy in Nigeria” in *Socio-Legal Essays in Local Government Administration in Nigeria*, edited by John Ademola Yakubu (Ibadan: Demyaxs Law Books, 2003); T. O. Okoye and C.O Olatunbara. “Local Government and Management of Urban Regional Development” in *Issues in Urban and Regional Development in Nigeria*, edited by Josephine Olu Abiodun. (Lagos: Published by Nigerian Geographical Association, 1993).
34. See, Dele Olowu, “Urban Local Government Finance in Nigeria: The Case of Lagos Municipal area” in *Public Administration and Development*, Vol. 12, 1992; Alex

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 37. Oladimeji Aborisade, ed. *Local Government and the Traditional Rulers in Nigeria* (Ile-Ife: O.A.U. Press, 1985).
 38. A.T. Oyewo, "Local Government Autonomy-Theoretical and Conceptual Framework" in *Socio-Legal Essays in Local Government Administration in Nigeria* edited by John Ademola Yakubu (Ibadan: Demyaxs Law Books, 2003); I.B. Bello-Imam, "Presidentialism at the Local Government Level in Nigeria: An Exploratory Analysis", *A Journal of the Nigerian Political Science Association*, Issue No. 7 (August 1992):68-79.
 39. Oyeleye Oyediran, *Essays on Local Government Administration in Nigeria* (Lagos: Project Publications Ltd, 1988).
 40. Example is: Magery Perham, *Native Administration in Nigeria* (London: Oxford University Press, 1937).
 41. A.D. Yahaya, *The Native Authority System in Northern Nigeria, 1950-1970* (Zaria: Ahmadu Bello University Press, 1980); A.E. Afigbo, *The Warrant Chiefs: Indirect Rule in Southeastern Nigeria, 1891-1929* (London: Longman, 1972); Michael Crowder and Obaro Ikime, eds. *West African Chiefs: Their Changing Status under Colonial Rule and Independence* (Ile-Ife: University of Ife Press, 1970); B.C. Smith. "The Power and Functions of Local Government in Nigeria: 1966-1980", *International Review of Administrative Sciences* 47, no. 4, (1981): 85-96; R.M.C. Chukwurah, "The Changing Role of Secretaries of Local Government, 1960-1980" in *The New Local Government System in Nigeria*, edited by E. Okoli (Nsukka: UNN Press, 1980); P.A. Igbafe, *Benin Under British Administration* (London: Longman Group Ltd, 1979), 181-215.
 42. Alex Gboyega, *Political Values and Local Government in Nigeria* (Lagos: Malthouse Press, 1987).
 43. Colin Baker, *The Evolution of the Local Government in Malawi* (Ile-Ife: University of Ife Press, 1975); & Marc Howard Ross, *Grassroots in an African City: Political Behavior in Nairobi* (London: the MIT Press, 1975).

44. B. Smith, 'The Justification for Local Government' in *Politics and Government of Urban Canada* edited by L. D. Feldman & M. Goldrick (Toronto: Methuen publishers, 1972); K. Young, 'The Justification for Local Government' in *Essays on the Future of Local Government* edited by M. Goldsmith (Wakefield: West Yorks MCC Press)
45. A. Syed, *The American Theory of Local Government* (New York: Random House Press, 1965); L.J. Sharpe, "Theories and Values of Local Government", *Political Studies*, Vol. 18, 1970. 153-74; L.J. Sharpe, "Theories of Local Government" in *Politics and Government of Urban Canada* edited by L. D. Feldman & M. Goldrick (Toronto: Methuen publishers, 1972).
46. Samuel Humes, *Local Governance and National Power: A Worldwide Comparison of Tradition and Change in Local Government* (New York: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1991).
47. *Decentralization and Local Democracy in the World, First Global Report 2008* (a co-publication of the World Bank and United Cities and Local Governments, coordinated by the Research Network on Local Governance in Europe (GRALE), 2009).
48. *LOCAL GOVERNMENT IN THE XXTH CENTURY* (coordinated and published by the International Union of Local Government Authorities (IULA), 1963)
49. *Decentralization and Local Democracy in the World, First Global Report 2008*, 54
50. To mention just one out of many, there are articles which claim none of the states which received N12 million grant from the Federal Government in 1973 set up a Local Government Loan Board – see, Ladipo Adamolekun, "The Idea of Local Government as a Third Tier of Government Revisited" in *Quarterly Journal of Administration*. Vol. XVIII, Nos. 3 and 4, 1984, 114. But as we shall see in the course of this study, this was never true of the Old Bendel State which was among the states that received this grant. Also see:-
 - a. Annual Volume of the Laws of Midwestern Nigeria: 1974 (Information Department, Benin City), A13 to A16.
 - b. Edict No. 7 of 1974 (Information Department, Benin City).
A detail discussion of this is done in chapter five.
51. Onigu Ote, *Autonomy and Dependence: The Urhobo Kingdom of Okpe in Modern Nigeria* (Ibadan: University of Ibadan Press, 1973), 162-66.
52. Obaro Ikime, *Niger Delta Rivalry: Itsekiri-Urhobo Relations and the European Presence, 1884-1936* (London: Longman, 1969), 197-200.

CHAPTER TWO

GEOGRAPHICAL BACKGROUND AND SOCIO-POLITICAL ORGANISATION

Urhoboland: Geographical Location

Urhoboland occupies roughly the area enclosed by latitudes 5° 15' and 6° North and longitudes 5° 40' and 6° 25' East. By the 1963 population census, the Urhobo had a total population of 591,736 while the 1976 estimates placed their population at 803,990.¹ On the other hand, by the 1991 census the population of the Urhobo was 1.5 million while the 2006 census figures placed their population at 1,879,155.²

The Urhobo are the aborigines of a number of towns and villages in the present Delta State of Nigeria where they constitute the largest ethnic group. They are sub-divided into a number of polities or clans namely, Agbassa (Agbara-Ame), Agbara-Otor, Agbarho, Agbon, Arhavwarien, Avwraka, Ephron-Otor (Efrun-Otor), Eghwu, Ewreni, Idjerhe, Oghara, Ogor, Okere, Okparabe, Okpe, Olomu, Orogun, Udu, Ughelli, Ughievwen (Jeremi), Ughwerun and Uvwie. Apart from Urhobo enclaves in Warri North Local Government (occupied by the Itekiri) and Warri South-West Local Government (dominated by the Ijaw), the entire Urhoboland is constituted into nine local governments—Ethiope East, Ethiope West, Okpe, Ughelli North, Ughelli South, Sapele, Udu Uvwie and Warri South Local Government areas.³ As mentioned in Chapter One, these are among the twenty-five local government areas which make up Delta State (also see Map on page 56).

Classified as the largest ethnic group in the western Niger Delta, the Urhobo were also among the largest ten ethnic groups in the country by the 1963 census.⁴ By statistical data

compiled in 1976 and 1985, Urhoboland consists of 536 towns and villages.⁵ The major towns are Warri,⁶ Sapele, Ughelli and Abraka. The Urhobo have as their immediate neighbours the Edo to the north, the Yoruba of Ondo to the north-west, the Ukwuani to the east and north-east and the Ijaw to the south. Others are the Isoko to the southeast and the Itsekiri to the south-west.

Warri and its Environs

It is significant to point out here that what is obtainable in Warri and its immediate environs is a network of interlocking settlements involving the Urhobo, Itsekiri and Western Ijaw. Thus, just as there are Urhobo enclaves in Ijawland and Itsekiriland so are Itsekiri enclaves in Warri South, and even Sapele and Ethiope West Local Governments, particularly Oghara. Similarly there are Ijaw enclaves in Warri South and Ughelli South Local Governments. Warri constitutes a focal point in local government administration in this part of the Western Niger Delta because it is a metropolis founded by three ethnic groups. For instance, as we shall see later, it is largely for this reason that the local government crises and their attendant land disputes of the 1920s to 1970s and those of the 1990s originated from Warri.

The available historical evidence indicates that the three groups were in the area before the 15th century.⁷ However, E.J. Alagoa has demonstrated that the Ijaw of the Niger Delta are of relative antiquity in the area.⁸ This implies that they might have been there before other groups. The British colonial government also entered into treaties of “protection” with all the groups in the 19th century.⁹ Warri occupies an area of about 1,520 square miles which is bounded roughly by latitudes 5°20’ and 6° North and longitudes 5°5’ and 5°40’ East. At present the territory comprises of three administrative units, namely, Warri North Local Government, Warri South Local Government, and Warri South-West Local Government.

There are no sufficient facts and figures to trace precisely the outlay and demographic evolution of the town. However, the first reliable figure that gives us some insight into this was the one compiled by P. C. Lloyd in the 1950s. In this data, out of a population of 22,500 the Urhobo constituted 38%, while the Itsekiri were 15%. The Igbo migrant population in the area was relatively large as it constituted 28%. All other groups, including the Ijaw amounted to 19%.¹⁰ Such data were not made available for Warri by the census figure of 1963 and the 1976 estimated population data. But the population of the Warri divisional council in both cases was 145,060 and 201,774 respectively. In the census figure of 1991, the population of Warri North local government was 90,893, while that of Warri South local government was 235,750. It was the population figure of 2006 that was able to provide detail similar to the data compiled from the 1950s census by P. C. Lloyd. By this figure, the Urhobo constitute over 90 percent of the population of Warri South Local Government, the Itsekiri constitute over 80 percent of Warri North Local Government, while the Western Ijaw constitute over 70 percent of Warri South-West Local Government.¹¹

Physical Features and Traditional Occupations

Urhoboland is part of the evergreen forest belt of southern Nigeria. The vegetation is dominated by the oil palm tree, the exploitation of which constitutes a major occupation of the people. The rubber tree also became a dominant part of the vegetation by the beginning of the 19th century.¹² Swampy forest is however, the characteristic vegetation of the waterlogged areas including some river valleys and this is found in few riverine communities in Ewu, Ewvreni, Uwherun and Ughienvwen clans including south of the Sapele River as well as the fringes of the Ethiope and Jamieson rivers.

Such areas are trailed by or, at least, dotted with the raffia palm. The vegetation is also dominated by different species of timber and this has made lumbering a lucrative occupation in the area - the foundation of the Sapele Sawmill industry. Obviously the vegetation has a remarkable effect on the nature and pattern of traditional occupations among the Urhobo.

Agriculture was a common occupation of the Urhobo. In spite of the introduction of rubber tree at the beginning of the 19th century, palm oil and palm kernel were still the dominant export produce of the Urhobo up to the end of the colonial period.¹³ There is enough evidence to agree with oral tradition that the palm oil industry flourished in Urhoboland several decades before the commencement of the oversea export trade and that the Itsekiri and Western Ijaw obtained much of their palm oil from the Urhobo.¹⁴

However, the production of palm kernels did not receive any boost until the development of the oversea export trade. Most of the palm kernels before then were destroyed apart from a little quantity set aside for preparation of local pomade. Both before and after the development of European commerce in this commodity, and until the end of the colonial period, palm oil was the chief source of revenue for the Urhobo. Up to the 1970s most Urhobo families were also sustained through income from this traditional occupation. However, with the spread of western education coupled with changes in the social structure and economy of the larger Nigerian society, a good member of the Urhobo gradually got employed as artisans and in some other occupations thus reducing the number of those in traditional occupations.

Before palm oil became a major European demand, much of the oil produced was mainly for local consumption and sale to surrounding peoples. Until the complete demise of trade by barter most clans accepted oil stored in earthenware pots for payment of bride-price. Palm oil was therefore of social and economic significance to the Urhobo people.

Closely related to the palm oil industry was the production of alcohol. However, only Urhobo communities in the riverine area like Okwagbe, Gbaregolor and Ovwregbala were engaged in this occupation because it required the availability of raffia palm which provided the raw material, palm wine, for its production. The raffia palm was only found in commercial quantity along the coast. The practice of tapping the palm tree to obtain palm wine, adopted by some Urhobo in the interior had to stop because of the serious adverse effect it had on the life span of the tree.

Locally produced alcohol was therefore hardly sufficient and the Urhobo had to buy from the Western Ijaw who were said to have discovered this technology earlier due to the abundance of raffia palm in Ijawland.¹⁵ Apart from its economic role, *agbakara* (traditional alcohol) was also of social significance among the Urhobo even up to the 1960s because it was combined with palm wine for entertainment of guests during special occasions like marriage, funeral ceremony and festivals. It is a well established fact by tradition that there was no record of adulterated alcohol in the history of any Urhobo community until the emergence of *ogogoro*, a brand of alcohol which originated in Sapele and distilled with the aid of a sub-standard Western oriented technology.¹⁶ “Sapele water” became a popular mock name for *ogogoro* because of the frequent rate of its adulteration which resulted in series of litigations even in traditional law courts.¹⁷

We may now look at the rubber tree which is yet to be given any attention in existing studies on the Urhobo. This is probably because for two major reasons, this plant occupied a secondary position in the economic activities of the Urhobo until the 1960s. Firstly, it was only useful as a cash crop and completely useless in the absence of foreign demand for it since there was no local means of processing it. Secondly, it was introduced in the latter half of the 19th

century, long after palm produce had been established as the mainstay of the people's economy.¹⁸

However, the rubber industry enjoys some advantages which not only enabled it to draw some people away from palm oil production in the 1960s, but also has helped to sustain it till date. This is simply the fact that unlike the case of palm produce both women and youths could single-handedly and independently engage in the collection of latex from the rubber tree which was converted into rubber sheets for export. On the other hand, the local technology for the extraction and processing of palm oil is such that culturally both women and youths can only participate by assisting their respective family heads, ie the men. The labour and material resources required for the setting up of an oil processing mill was beyond the reach of women and youths. In fact, the cost and demand were such that some were jointly owned by two or three family heads within the same extended family.¹⁹ The reverse was the case in the rubber industry. In fact collection of latex provided a ready vacation job for interested secondary school students in the rural communities of the area, even up to the 1990s. In the system there were two sets of buyers between the producer and the exporter. Retail buyers bought from the producers and sold to the wholesale buyers who in turn sold to the exporters.

Yet, another advantage enjoyed by the rubber industry is that unlike the palm tree that can hardly survive in waterlogged terrains, the rubber tree could grow well not only on dry land but also in swamps, creeks, streams and similar terrains. Not only that, it proved highly resistant to the hazards of petroleum exploitation and other handicaps compared to the palm tree. Therefore, despite the ferocious nature of petroleum exploitation, eroding the integrity of the soil and preventing it from sustaining the growth of many crops,²⁰ the rubber tree has survived with ease. The result is that most farmers in the area still find it easier to earn a daily income from the

collection of rubber latex than any other agricultural engagement.²¹ However, because of the importance of food vis-à-vis the need to reduce the problem of food scarcity, many communities are making relentless effort to restrict the growth of rubber trees to the waterlogged areas which cannot sustain food crops. This is in spite of the fact that petroleum exploitation has undermined the fertility of farmlands and considerably reduced yield per acre almost making farming unviable in some communities of the area. This means the people do not see the revenue realised from the rubber industry as any significant compensation for the sharp decline in the production of food crops.

Apart from the vegetational features that impacted on major traditional occupations, there is, however, also the need to examine some other features more closely. As a deltaic plain, the entire area is less than 30 metres above sea level. There are no prominent hills rising above the general land surface but the terrain could be said to be rugged due to the presence of a network of creeks and streams that flow into a number of rivers, the latter being the channels through which the Niger enters the sea. One of these rivers is the Ethiope, which flows through Sapele and parts of Abraka clan.²²

Another major one is the Warri River which waters some parts of Ughienvwe, Agbarho, Agbon and Abraka clans. On the other hand, a tributary of the Forcados River is connected to the Okpare and Ekakpamre Creeks. It also links the Kiagbodo River which flows through Ughelli and waters part of the Isoko clans of Owe and Emevo. In the south the territories of Ewu, Ewureni and Uwherun clans are flooded during the wet season when the Ewu River overflows its bank partly as a result of rains and partly due to floods from the Niger which flow into it through the Forcados River and Surrounding creeks (see maps on pages 59-60).

Generally, Urhoboland constitutes the landward extension of the Niger Delta plain. In the absence of prominent hills, vast areas are either flat or gently undulating with land elevation decreasing southwards towards the Atlantic Ocean. The rivers are flat-floored, flooding adjoining areas during the rainy season and giving rise to seasonal swamps in the south. However, the north is on comparatively high land and flooding in this area is rare and quite negligible. Thus, Urhoboland was well supplied with water, while a good number of its communities were also accessible from the coast through the Ethiope and Warri Rivers as well as streams which flow into the area from the Forcados and Ase rivers.

However, the topography did not promote the type of easy communication, transportation and expansion of states found in plains with neither rivers nor hills. This became a secondary factor that defined the political history and political institutions of the Urhobo. In communities where creeks and rivers sometimes act as natural boundaries and often as natural barriers against effective inter-group relations, non-centralised political institutions tend to prevail over centralisation. They also tend to promote the survival of small political units over a long period of time by discouraging inter-group fusion.

This was a factor in the origin of a non-centralised political system among the Urhobo in which the clan constituted the highest political units in some areas, while the village constituted the highest in others with correspondingly small local government units that guaranteed the practice of direct democracy at the grassroots level. Invariably, non-centralisation promotes republicanism.

Historically for two reasons the impediment posed by geographical features was more pronounced before the 19th century. In the first place, by 1600 water transport technology was still in its infancy in the Western Niger Delta. Over the years, there was improvement in the

building of canoes and by 1900 this had attained some measure of perfection thus resulting in some improvement in transportation and therefore inter-group relations. Moreover, even by the 17th century some of the creeks which are now big and passable were small and shallow ones which could scarcely take a flat-bottomed canoe.²³

In fact, it has been argued that the impediment created by the topography prevented foreign travellers and traders from visiting the area until the end of the 19th century. It is also argued that for the same reason “the Ijaw and Itsekiri, both renowned ‘water men’, scarcely penetrated beyond the peripheral area of Urhoboland before the coming of the British and a greater part of the Urhobo country remained largely unknown and remote till the opening decade of the 20th century”.²⁴

However, some other factors equally accounted for this. In the first place, the early Europeans, like the Portuguese, who visited the Western Niger Delta were able to satisfy their commercial needs or obtain the agricultural produce they needed without penetrating the interior. This they did by establishing good commercial relations with the Itsekiri that were directly at the coastline

Again, it was relatively easy for the Europeans to establish such relations with the Itsekiri because the latter had centralised political system compared to the Urhobo and Western Ijaw with many political units that had to be consulted before any diplomatic and commercial relations could be legalised.

The Itsekiri, therefore, acted as middlemen between the Europeans and the ethnic groups that were not directly on the coastline. Through local trade the Itsekiri obtained palm oil, pepper, yam, plantain, corn and various products of the cassava plant from the Urhobo,²⁵ while the Europeans bought some of these items, especially palm oil from the Itsekiri. On the other hand,

the early Christian missionaries lacked the resources to penetrate many communities partly because it was a maiden effort and they were, therefore, handicapped in various ways. For this reason, they could not penetrate Urhoboland. In fact, the Portuguese missionaries only managed to plant Christianity on the Itsekiri royal family. Yet the Christian faith in this royal family was gradually on the decline before the abolition of the slave trade.

Actually, one must be careful not to exaggerate the role of geographical factor as a limitation to the penetration of Urhoboland by foreigners. Indeed, at the eve of colonisation, British officials on a mission to annex the Western Niger Delta penetrated Urhoboland through the Ethiope and Warri rivers and signed treaties with Urhobo towns along the two rivers before visiting other Urhobo communities.²⁶ On the other hand, the Itsekiri and Ijaw were respected for their mastery of the water. But they did not make use of the rivers which flow from the heart of Urhoboland because they live directly along the coastline (region of the mangrove fresh water vegetation), which provided all they needed for their traditional occupation of fishing and salt making better than what the adjoining rivers could offer.

Finally, as mentioned above, compared to centralised polities, commercial and other relations with non-centralised societies like the Urhobo and Western Ijaw involved signing treaties with numerous individual clans and sub-clans, which is more tasking, expensive and could be unviable. Partly for this reason early travellers, traders and missionaries of the 16th century only established relations with the Itsekiri even though the Western Ijaw were also directly on the same coastline. For the same reason, the British occupation of the Western Niger Delta started with the annexation of Itsekiriland.²⁷

Traditions of Origin, Linguistic Features and Related Issues

Much has been written on the origin of the Urhobo. There are also significant studies on their traditional political institutions which form the theme of the next sub-title.²⁸ Therefore, apart from issues completely left out and those yet to be well addressed, only an outline analysis would be attempted here. As mentioned above, Urhoboland consists of numerous socially related clans or polities each made up of a number of towns and villages. Each clan traces its origin to a common ancestor and has its local tongue which is a dialect of the Urhobo language. However, a group of clans may trace their origin to a common ancestor. For instance, the Ughelli, Ogor, Agbarho and Orogun clans patrilineally believe in a common progenitor and share very striking similarities in their social institutions. Moreover, the linguistic similarities between the first three is such that other Urhobo classified them as clans with identical local tongues or dialects.²⁹ Similarly, the Ughievwen and Udu clans believe in a common progenitor and the difference between their dialect, which is only in accent, is hardly discernible by non-natives of the two clans.

Three of the clans have dialects with quite distinct linguistic features making them so unintelligible that no natives of other clans can understand them except with previous thorough learning. The most prominent among them is the Okpe dialect because the clan has the largest population in Urhoboland. Others are the Uvwie and Orogun dialects.

The Urhobo language is modelled on the Agbarho dialect which invariably is the standard dialect of the language.³⁰ Apart from the Okpe, Uvwie and Orogun dialects, already mentioned above, the similarity between the language and the local tongue of each clan is such that one who understands the language can easily understand any of the dialects.

In spite of the fact that the standard dialect provides the only linguistic umbrella for social interaction and communication among all the sub-groups, it was faced with some challenges and crisis of complete acceptability up to the 1980s. For instance, even before 1983 when the Okpe Clan successfully obtained a column for its dialect in the then Bendel Television Authority (BTV), it had openly occasionally demanded for a recognition of its “language” side-by-side with the Urhobo language.

Due to the relatively large size of the Okpe clan, this dialect has been able to penetrate some non-Okpe communities in the area formerly officially designated as Western Urhobo by the colonial master in 1938.³¹ These communities, notably few villages from Abraka, Agbon and Oghara clans acquired the dialect through gradual learning as a result of commercial and social interaction.

Few other clans also probably nursed one grudge or the other until the 1980s. With the spread of Christianity, elders in Udu and Ughievwen clans occasionally questioned (in the 1970s) the rationale behind the use of “another dialect” for prayers in their local churches by their own sons and daughters. This was even reflected in a track of an album of one of the most celebrated Urhobo musicians, Chief Ogute Otan who, sharing the views of the elders, asked whether the God of Urhoboland only understands Agbarho dialect.³²

The most generally accepted tradition of origin of the Agbarho clan tends to explain what led to the adoption of its local tongue as the standard dialect of the Urhobo. According to it, Agbarho did not originate from only one stock like other Urhobo clans. Rather, it was a heterogeneous community with people from most other Urhobo clans that came to be regarded as one people by some historical accident which, however, the tradition could not explain.

Precisely, Abgarho is said to be a conglomeration of several peoples from Ughelli, Olomu, Eghwu, Uwherun and Uvwie.

According to Onigu Otite and Rev. Enajero Aravware, the identity of each unit can still be recognised in the structure of the town even after the lapse of several centuries.³³ The tradition claims that the town was big and prosperous making it a centre of commerce. Thus, apart from incorporating majority of the Urhobo dialects, its economic significance also enabled it to evolve what became accepted as the standard dialect. Therefore, the adoption of the Agbarho dialect as the standard dialect must have dated back to the early decades of settlement in the Niger Delta. In other words, majority of the sub-groups acquired the language in addition to their respective local tongues before or during migration.

This takes us to the origin of the Urhobo. Obviously, there is need to combine the linguistic evidence with traditions of origin in order to arrive at an objective conclusion. Some of the traditions trace the origin of the Urhobo to Ijaw, Igboland and Ile-Ife, while a few trace the migrations to Egypt and Sudan.³⁴ But majority of the traditions claim Benin origin for different clans though they are rather conflicting in their explanation of the detail of migration.³⁵

Traditionally, the Urhobo and most other ethnic groups in the old Warri and Benin provinces believe there are significant linguistic similarities between their languages and the Edo language. This is often used to justify the claim of a Benin origin. This contention is further supported by studies in ethnography and anthropology, conducted by foreign scholars, which classified the Urhobo and some of their neighbours as Edo-speaking peoples, claiming that these ethnic groups share more similarities with the Edo in language and culture than they do with the Yoruba.³⁶

The traditions of origin are rather conflicting as mentioned above. The most obvious fact from the traditions is that the migration of the Urhobo did not take place at once, and at no time in history had any of the sub-groups or neighbouring states been able to impose its authority upon all the Urhobo polities through conquest or some other means in order to replace the political scene of decentralisation with that of centralisation. In other words, majority of the groups might have migrated at a certain period in history into their present settlements in the Niger Delta before they were later joined by some other groups who came in bit by bit. This is also reflected in the evolution of the language and its numerous dialects.

Combining the interpretation of the traditions with the available findings in linguistic and ethnography, it is reasonable to conclude that majority of the Urhobo migrated from Benin. Since some of the traditions claim Ijaw and Igbo origin, it will be fair to also conclude that few of the sub-groups migrated from Igboland or the Ijaw country. Indeed, E.J. Alagoa has demonstrated that the Ijaw are of relative antiquity in their present place of settlement.³⁷ There are actually a number of complexities surrounding the origin of the peoples in the Western Niger Delta, and considering this the available evidence is hardly enough to sustain the claim of a Benin origin for all the Urhobo clans.

Indeed, analysing the Benin factor in the origin of the peoples of the Western Niger Delta, with the Western Ijaw as a case study, E.J. Alagoa feels there is need to exercise some caution in this regard. Illustrating his point, he said that where a group was not quite sure of its origin, it is likely to claim “one that was powerful and distant enough to confer on it a kind of prestige or legitimacy” without “posing any immediate threat to its political independence”,³⁸ This points to some element of veneration and in the light of the numerous myths among the Urhobo on the exploits and impact of the Old Benin kingdom,³⁹ this contention cannot be completely discarded.

For instance, based on linguistic and ethnographic data, Onigu Otite is of the view that all the traditions, even those that claim Sudan and Egyptian origin, are relevant to the understanding of the origin of the Urhobo and none may, therefore, be dismissed because the early history of the Urhobo, like that of their neighbours, cannot be separated from the early history of any of the Kwa language groups.⁴⁰

According to him, and Greenberg also, the Kwa language groups at a point in history consisted of one society sharing one language and historical traditions and that “this historical linguistic point of continuities and discontinuities” explains or at least accommodates Urhobo traditions of origin from Ile-Ife and the Sudan.⁴¹ This is also linked to studies which classified the Kwa group of languages as part of the Western Sudanic (or Niger-Congo) language family.⁴²

Moreover, traditions among the Urhobo are replete with assertions of original dwellers and owners of their territory. Otite refers to them as “autochthonous people”⁴³ with no known history of migration from anywhere else. In other words, they were aboriginal inhabitants of the territory since time immemorial. According to J.W. Hubbard, the distinctive characteristics of the various Urhobo and Isoko groups are a result of the super-imposition of Ijaw, Igbo and later Edo immigrants upon an aboriginal people already speaking Edo-type dialect.⁴⁴

The social composition of the Urhobo has been influenced by the numerous nature of migrations. This produced the earliest settlements and has some significant traits in common with those of most other groups in the Niger Delta.⁴⁵ The noticeable trend is that within the diverse sub-groups are striking networks of social relationships, including linguistic and cultural affinities which create a form of harmony and homogeneity in spite of the semi-autonomous status of each sub-group. Again, within the umbrella of a common linguistic and cultural entity, sharp contrasts are created by the determination of most sub-groups to retain or preserve their

respective identities. Within such structures, conflicts were inevitable. Some descriptions of such conflicts could be found in a number of studies on the Niger Delta.⁴⁶

Change was a constant index in the system as conflicts combined with other factors to create new structures. But whether or not all such changes constitute dynamism is still an issue for research and thorough examination. For instance, the ease with which the coastal Western Niger Delta people embraced western culture, the development of pidgin English as a result of this contact and the restriction of their indigenous languages to their rural communities are antithetical to their search for identity and the quest for progress.

It may look ironical that such development could survive in a society where each subgroup is very conscious of its social and linguistic identities. Yet, that was the reality of the time. In communities with competing identities due to complexities in social relations and linguistic composition, a foreign culture that is needed by all groups for little economic and social benefits can easily dominate the area. For instance, the existence of numerous autonomous linguistic groups in the Western Niger Delta hindered the evolution of a well accepted lingua-franca in the area. This accelerated the development of pidgin English in the face of contact with a foreign culture that had to be accommodated in one way or the other for commercial and social reasons.

Pre-colonial Political Institutions

The Urhobo are known for non-centralised republican political system. However, as we shall see below, some Urhobo communities gradually evolved centralised political institutions starting from the 18th century. Like the Igbo segmentary republican system, the village constituted the highest political unit in Urhoboland.⁴⁷ As mentioned above, each clan consisted of various villages. However, in Urhoboland one of the villages acted as a headquarters which was not the

case in Igboland. The village used as the headquarters was the one believed to be the earliest settlement – from where other communities were formed through a hiving-off process.

Thus, every village had to maintain some legal and social relationships with the headquarters. For instance, the highest court of justice was established at the headquarters. The same was true of the most authoritative deity. Consequently, there were annual festivals celebrated by every clan during which each village had to send its representatives to the headquarters. Finally, only the headquarters had the constitutional right to confer chieftaincy titles on people.⁴⁸

But the internal administration of every village was done without any control from the headquarters. For instance, the appointment of political leaders at the village level was done without reference to the headquarters and the latter could not influence any political decision taken by a village. The system is, therefore, best described as a semi-confederal republican political set-up in which the villages enjoyed considerable measure of autonomy.

For effective local administration, the village was sub-divided into quarters or wards each of which was made up of various compounds. In the quarter, the maintenance of law and order and promotion of the welfare of the lineage group were the responsibility of the heads of compounds. The head of affairs in each quarter was the eldest man.

The actual administration of the village was done by two institutions – the Village Council and the Village Assembly. The former was made up of the village Chairman (*Otsidiagbara*), spokesman (*Otota*), the youth leader (*Ohwuvwie*) and the representatives of the various quarters that constituted the village. In most communities, the Village Council was assisted by the Council of Elders (*Ekpako*). The Village Assembly on the

other hand was made up of every male adult of the village in addition to the head of the *eghweya*(women folk)

In appointment of leaders, gerontocracy is practised at the ward level because the head of each ward is the eldest man. However, practically elders with proven records of ability and achievement, like acquisition of chieftaincy titles, could be granted wider audience in the Village Council than their counterparts who were only qualified on account of age.

Elsewhere, ability and achievement were the primary considerations for appointment of political office holders. For instance, the *Otota* and *Otsidiabgara* had to be sociable individuals well versed in the traditions, laws and customs not only of the village, but of the entire clan. They were, in fact, chosen because they possessed these qualities as well as a commanding personality. In most communities, these two individuals were invariably title holders. The *Ohwuvwie* or youth leader must be a youth with good records in terms of ability and manners. In a way, therefore, it was a political experiment that tried to tap the experience of the elders and combine it with the talent of young vibrant men for effective leadership.

By the nature of the system, the eldest man in the village had to be a member of the Village Council. However, in some places such a man had to be titled if he desired to be recognised. For instance, in Ukhuokori, the eldest man, *Okaroro* had to be titled. But in Agbarho Clan, while a non-titled *Okaroro* could even be head of his Village Council, he could not represent the village at the clan level because, as mentioned above, acquisition of chieftaincy title was a requirement for the latter.⁴⁹

In most clans, all the title holders of a village were to represent it at the headquarters. In some clans, each village appointed one or two representatives who must be title holders, except where a village had no title holder. Historically, however, there is no record of any village

without title holder at any point in time.⁵⁰ In some clans, there was the position of *Oletu* or *Olotu-ode* who was the military commander of the clan. He was selected for his proven valour in war and similar experiences. Tradition claims that in few clans he combined the office with the position of the clan head during the 19th century.⁵¹

Checks and Balances in the System: The deliberation of the Village Council was often dominated by the Chairman and Spokesman. The Village Council could not take any decision on major issues affecting the village without summoning the Village Assembly. In this way, the latter acted as a check on the power of the former.

However, there were other checks and balances in the system and everything was done to avoid the concentration of power in any one hand.⁵² Many villages recognised the office of *Ovie*, a non-hereditary king whose position was ceremonial and acted as the religious head of the community. Precisely, he was practically a priest-king. But as the head of the deities his opinion on key issues could not be ignored. He was, therefore, one instrument of check and balance in the system. Moreover, it was a system with due respect for ability and achievement combined with a moderate element of gerontocracy. Therefore, holders of chieftaincy titles in the Village Council including the Council of Elders (where it was recognised) commanded a measure of constitutional authority that could be effectively employed to antagonise a spokesman or chairman that tried to be autocratic.

The *Eghweya* (women folk) could at times also constitute a crucial instrument of check on all other constituted authorities. This body was represented by their leader who could invite one or two other experienced women to attend the Village Assembly with her, especially if the assembly is to handle a crucial issue affecting women. The *Eghweya* representatives were allowed in the assembly to protect the interest of their members.

Tradition allowed them to have strong prerogative over laws affecting women. In fact, in theory they had veto power in the passing of some bills in this category. If an important bill affecting women was allowed to become law without due recognition of this veto power, it would be considered by the *Eghweya* authority as a breach of tradition and if handled with levity, could gradually develop into the type of protest in J.P. Clack's *The Wive's Revolt* where the *Eghweya* held the entire society to ransom until the law was reversed.⁵³

The *Eghweya* protected all social and economic institutions that directly benefited them. Among these were marital arrangements, virginity, land tenure and farming. For instance, the institution of *Opha* (bride) in traditional Urhobo society was of key importance to the women folk, though any bill bordering on it must consider the interest of other groups in the community. This is because it is a crucial stage in the marital arrangement of the bride, well celebrated and sponsored not only by the bride's mother, but also by the bride's father as well as the bridegroom and his relations. Therefore, bills involving the sharing of benefits therein could produce explosive arguments in the Village Assembly as the *Eghweya* would consider it an item under their prerogative. In practice, therefore, the veto power enjoyed by the *Eghweya* in some of the issues under their prerogative could be abused and therefore required the involvement of experienced and sometimes elderly members of the group in leadership to avoid such abuse.

This section would not be complete without a portrait of the entire role of women in traditional Urhobo political system. Actually, an important aspect of Urhobo pre-colonial political institutions yet to be addressed in existing historical studies is the role of women in the political structure. Two major factors account for the neglect of this theme. In the first place, the prevailing pre-eminence of patriarchal tradition in every facet of life in the Western Niger Delta

made even indigenous researchers to neglect the theme. In Urhoboland itself, succession and inheritance is strictly patrilineal.

Secondly, British colonialism in the Western Niger Delta was based on a principle of autocracy rooted in a structure that accorded more respect to societies with absolute monarchical institutions, while deliberate efforts were made to erode all democratic institutions. This new development further shelved much of the role of the *eghweya* institution in the political system because it could only function in a republican structure as it was meant to act as one agency of checks and balances in the system.

Since only few elements of this political institution survived the crisis of transition into colonial rule, it was difficult for early writers to give it any attention. Rather, the major exploits of the women in Urhobo political history at the time when the *Eghweya* institution was vibrant only survived in oral literature and traditional history of the Urhobo part of which found itself in modern literary portraits like J.P. Clarks, *The Wives Revolt*.⁵⁴

This literary work dramatises the offensive political tool usually employed by the women folk as a last resort in the checks and balance system. The *Eghweya* was not just a pressure group like the *Otu-emo* that may only embark on protests through peaceful demonstrations or otherwise. Rather, apart from being well represented in the law making organ, the Village Assembly, it had its own law court that settled disputes.⁵⁵

Though the court heard cases from both sexes on all issues, it was specially meant to handle cases involving divorce, marital disputes and gender discrimination. However, gender disparity was such that by the end of the 19th century it was considered derogatory for a male adult to file a suit in the *eghweya* court. Thus, socially there was a deliberate effort by the men to confine it to women's affairs except where a man was charged there by a woman.

Apparently, the *Eghweya* body was able to establish itself as a political institution because of the key leadership role a few women played during the migration of some groups into their present area and at the early stage of their settlement. A few of the sub-groups were actually led by women because their headmen died either during or at the eve of the migration. Where a sub-group lost its headman in this way, his wife may play an active role in leadership of the group. In some cases, like the case of the Udu Clan, the woman became the leader because apart from being politically vibrant, she was experienced enough in terms of age and otherwise.

According to tradition, Udu lost her husband, who was the leader of a sub-group at the eve of migration from Benin. She was a politically vibrant and sociable woman and therefore took over the leadership of the group. The clan was later named after her.⁵⁶ Therefore, the women played a remarkable role in socio-political organisation at the early stage of settlement by such clans.

Apparently, in trying to cope with the exigencies of an era, e.g period of war, crisis or migration, pragmatism and realism were major considerations in the appointment of leaders and this gave few capable women the opportunity to distinguish themselves in some pre-colonial Urhobo communities. Such cases were also recorded in some other parts of the Niger Delta and neighbouring states. For instance, apart from Queen Kambasa of Bonny City State, Idia, mother of Oba Esigie accepted the position of the military commander of the Benin army in a crucial battle that would determine the survival of the Kingdom when no other member of the Benin army was bold enough to accept the challenge.⁵⁷

But in the case of the Urhobo, as the early leaders died in a society with strict partilineal heritage, the traditional political role of women declined. In spite of this, however, through the influence of a few Urhobo communities which recognised the role of women in leadership, most

of the other clans had village assemblies which allowed appropriate representation of the *Eghweya*.

Reasons for the Practice of Republicanism: It must be pointed out that majority of the Urhobo sub-groups migrated from Benin after being exposed to series of experiments on centralised political institutions. The demands of centralised political system involved significant sacrifices from the masses thus resulting in migration of people to neighbouring uninhabited geographical zones.⁵⁸ For instance, a popular tradition claims that the Ughienvwe and some other clans migrated from Benin when an *Oba*, against the suggestion of his advisers, decreed that a group of men made up of individuals handpicked from different sub-groups should be formed to cut and trap up a silk cotton tree with the aim of sustaining the cotton bolls and preventing them from being waisted.⁵⁹ According to the tradition, those handpicked were to be given the option of death if they failed to actualise the mission. Perhaps the *Oba* wanted to employ this to get rid of his political critics and dissidents. The tradition is symbolic because it portrays an authoritarian regime.

As a group of people with a world view that life is a formality and not worth such sacrifices,⁶⁰ the Urhobo and other sub-groups from Benin, therefore, came to the Niger Delta with an idea of liberal simple political institutions, a sharp contrast to the political system they were exposed to in Benin. Secondly, the few sub-groups of non-Edo origin easily embraced the new political system for three reasons. It enabled them to preserve their own traditional institutions and avoid being dominated by more numerous migrant groups. Moreover, it promoted smooth cultural integration rather than acculturation of some sub-groups. Finally, it provided enough time or period for interaction and understanding of the socio-political and economic institutions of each group.

Therefore, these original inhabitants were not people with mere rudimentary knowledge of existing or prevailing political systems. Rather, their previous experience coupled with the creation of a new society made up of migrants with diverse social institutions and political culture compelled them to adopt the republican non-centralised system of government. The political structure was, therefore, directly related to the cultural composition of the newly formed community. It must be admitted, however, that the rugged nature of the topography of this sub-region already discussed above had helped to sustain this political structure for a longer period of time.

Adoption of Monarchical Institutions: There was transition into monarchical institution in Okpe, Ughelli, Agbaro, Ogor, and Agbarha clans in the first half of the 18th century. Tradition dated the evolution of these monarchies to the first half of the 17th century.⁶¹ However, if this is anything to go by, they remained rather insignificant in the affairs of the Western Niger Delta until the 18th century. These monarchs were the religious and political head of their respective communities though the pre-existing egalitarian republican structure impacted conspicuously on their operation. Firstly, they were constitutional monarchs each advised by a council of chiefs including a spokesman, all of whom acted as a check on the power of the king. Therefore, certain key institutions of the previous system managed to survive thereby further liberalising the constitutional monarchy in such a way that other Urhobo communities hardly believe that these monarchs wielded more power than their own republican leaders.⁶² One of such institutions is the *Ewheya* which represented the interest of women in the social structure and political system. The other was the spokesman that worked hand-in-hand with the Council of Chiefs. The appointment of the spokesman was done by the elders and Council of Chiefs before its approval by the *Ovie*. Once appointed, the *Ovie* could not single-handedly terminate his appointment.

The second factor that accounted for the liberal structure of these monarchical institutions was the revolutionary nature of the 19th century political innovations in the Western Niger Delta which made republicanism a vogue of the day. The situation was such that even the Itsekiri, with a well established dynasty and a long history of monarchical political system liberalised the pattern of succession to their throne. For this reason, primogeniture was rejected as a mode of succession to the Itsekiri throne, that is, apart from the eldest son, all other sons, brothers and half-brothers of a late *Olu* were constitutionally qualified to contest for the throne.⁶³ The aim was to increase the chances of enthroning individuals with the necessary drive, organising ability and charismatic leadership qualities without completely reverting to the Urhobo republican model. Not only that, dynastic and royal privileges were no more requirements for other political appointments. The following extract provides some description of the scene:

Where before decent was a major factor in determining the role a man played in the political and social life of the Itsekiri community, in the new situation wealth derived from trade increasingly became the surest qualification for the acquisition of power and influence. This situation made it possible for men with the necessary drive and organising ability to rise to positions of great power and authority within the Itsekiri community. This was the situation which produced the class of *nouveaur* riches to which Nana belonged and which dominated Itsekiri history throughout the second half of the nineteenth century.⁶⁴

There was, however, a clash between the statusquo and the new wave of liberalism when the Itsekiri could not get a leader that combined dynastic and royal privileges with the organising ability and charismatic leadership qualities of the new age. The efforts made in 1851 and 1853 to appoint an *Olu* failed because to the average Itsekiri indigene the legitimate princes did not only lack the leadership quality of the era, they were also “too poor to command respect in an age in which wealth and political authority went hand-in-hand.”⁶⁵

Oritsemone, Ebrimoni and others who met the requirement of the new age on account of leadership quality and possession of wealth were rejected by the minority conservative faction on

the grounds that they were born into the royal family by slave women. Having failed to appoint an *Olu*, the Governor of the Benin River appointed by the British became the only executive authority in Itsekiriland. In this changed circumstance, the status of the Governor became radically upgraded and the Itsekiri now rallied around him for dedicated leadership, especially against the white traders in the difficult matter of fixing acceptable prices. Also, the Europeans saw the Governor as the head of the Itsekiri whose responsibility it was to ensure peace and order in commerce.⁶⁶

The popular Nana Olomu whose reign lasted from 1884 to 1894 was the last Governor of the Benin River. Therefore, the period of the interregnum (1848-1936) was not an era without a leader in Itsekiriland, but an age in which the Itsekiri monarch failed to function because of the determination of the Itsekiri to be part of the new revolutionary political trend in the Western Niger Delta.

For two reasons, the Urhobo monarchs did not actually pass through the Itsekiri experience. In the first place, the appointment of the spokesman of each of these monarchs followed the pattern of the Urhobo polities operating republican political system. Therefore, unlike the Itsekiri spokesman appointed solely by the *Olu* and responsible to him, the spokesman of each of the Urhobo monarchies was selected based on organisational skills and leadership qualities, not just by the *Ovie* but by the entire kingmakers and elders. With such administrative structure, he could be relied upon for effective leadership when an *Ovie* happened to lack these qualities. Moreover, it was easier in these Urhobo kingdoms to have *Ivie* (plural of *Ovie*) that combined dynastic and royal privileges with possession of wealth and leadership qualities of the age because unlike the Itsekiri their constitution did not reject candidates born into the royal family by slave women.

Another factor responsible for this new development, especially the need for centralisation and unity, was a later awareness that the lustre and wealth provided by the lush tropical vegetation were wrought in great challenges – challenges which, according to tradition, the Niger Delta communities have contended with up till date.⁶⁷ The earliest challenges were apparently those of environmental hazards caused by natural disasters like flood and attack from wild animals.

Also included was the acute rugged topography which constituted a serious impediment to transport, communication and trade in maiden settlements, apart from being a hindrance to effective exploitation of the palm oil tree. Like most other communities in the Niger Delta, the Urhobo relied on palm oil. But for this product to form the mainstay of the economies of the respective communities, there was need for enough market. Yet, trade between each group and its immediate neighbour did not provide enough commerce because the economies of the early Niger Delta communities were not complementary. Apart from the Ijaw and the Itsekiri that concentrated on fishing and salt making, maiden settlements in Urhoboland and other parts of the Niger Delta apparently relied only on palm produce apart from common food crops like pepper, yam, cassava, plantain, melon, cocoyam, sweet potatoe and few others. In modern economic theories, they would be described as competitive economies.

Gradually, there was awareness in the respective communities that it would have been easier for a united society to address the various challenges encountered in the course of history compared to competing semi-autonomous political units and sub-groups.⁶⁸ The existence of semi-autonomous political units and sub-groups determined to retain their respective identities is apparently the most striking common features of all communities in the Niger Delta. This gives

the region a semblance of harmony in spite of the enormous challenges emanating from constant change and conflict and also sharp contrast in terms of linguistic and cultural identities.

Nevertheless, the consciousness of oneness which developed among the Urhobo and some other Niger Delta societies in the 19th century that gradually led to the formation of the Union of Niger Delta (UND) and later the Niger Delta Peoples Congress (NDPC) in 1946⁶⁹ was due more to the need to contain the acute challenges faced by the area rather than the common features in social organisations and political institutions. The Urhobo communities, like other groups in the Niger Delta, quite conscious of their autonomy and respective social identities, embraced centralisation for this reason. However, the claim by tradition that the Niger Delta communities have contended with these challenges till date need to be given a second assessment.

Perhaps, it was believed that the development of trade between the area and other regions including contact with the Europeans would provide a means of countering these challenges. But this was not the case. Rather, it attracted more problems. Thus, a new element was added to these challenges starting with the expansion of the palm oil industry and later the introduction of the legitimate trade from the second half of the 19th century to the first half of the 20th century – it was how to contain the exploitation of the region by foreign intruders. Obviously, European governments, multinational firms and traders got the lion's share of the palm oil commerce.⁷⁰ In some cases, only the crumbs were left for the indigenes as European nations and multinational companies devised different strategies to monopolise the exportation of this produce, a factor that led to the Akassa raid of the 1890s and the deportation of some key political leaders in the region.⁷¹

With what has become known as the Niger Delta Question, however, it is believed that the emergence of Nigeria as a nation and the subsequent attainment of sovereignty in 1960 have not in any way minimised these challenges.⁷² Rather, it has continued as a conspicuous trend into the contemporary history of the Niger Delta. This is reflected in the gross underdevelopment of the region in spite of the exploitation of its lush petroleum resources which provides over 70 per cent of the country's national revenue. Therefore, the history of the Niger Delta since time immemorial has been dominated by the unsuccessful effort of the natives to effectively tap their natural resources and later their relentless agitation to have a say in the exploitation of these resources.⁷³

The social and political organisation of the age-long Itsekiri kingdom, and to some extent the Benin and Aboh kingdoms also impacted on the political institutions of the Urhobo during the 18th and 19th centuries. This is because the decades of commercial relations with the Itsekiri led to exchange of ideas in both commerce and politics.⁷⁴ Thus, as the Itsekiri analysed the pros and cons of republicanism and injected one or two features of the system into their monarchical institution in order to liberalise it, a good number of the Urhobo communities also assessed the benefit of centralisation and decided to restructure their political institutions to embrace some form of centralisation.

The Local Government Unit:- A Re-assessment

Grassroots administration was based on direct democracy and a ward constituted a local government unit. As mentioned above, each village was sub-divided into wards while each ward was made up of a number of compounds. The local government unit was, therefore, relatively small with emphasis on the liberty of the individual. Though Urhobo philosophy believes in the

pre-eminence of the society over the individual,⁷⁵ it was a local authority system that gives priority to the freedom of the individual because without the individual there is no society. On the other hand, the central government, particularly at the clan level, gave priority to the interest of the entire society. The small size of local government units made it easy to tap the ideas and initiatives of people at the grassroots level for the development of the entire community.

It must be recalled, however, that the enormous size and large population of modern nation states have made the practice of representative government, otherwise known as indirect democracy, inevitable. Yet, the Urhobo traditional grassroots system is not a utopia because in most modern societies since the 19th century there is emphasis on the progressive creation of more local governments with the sole aim of considerably reducing the size of local government units in order to establish a grassroots structure that can give effective attention to the ideas and liberty of the individual.

Therefore, the development of grassroots administration in most modern democracies accommodates this principle. For instance, American perspectives on the value of local government, even as early as the first half of the 19th century, not only stressed the libertarian and participatory aspects of grassroots administration, it also laid emphasis on the need to protect the individual and his rights even at the expense of government interest.⁷⁶ Both Jeffersonian democracy and Madisonian liberalism give paramountcy to the freedom and rights of the individual at the expense of constituted authority in grassroots administration. Therefore, Jeffersonian grassroots democracy believes in local authorities with “a right to self-government as an expression of the sovereignty of the individual”.⁷⁷

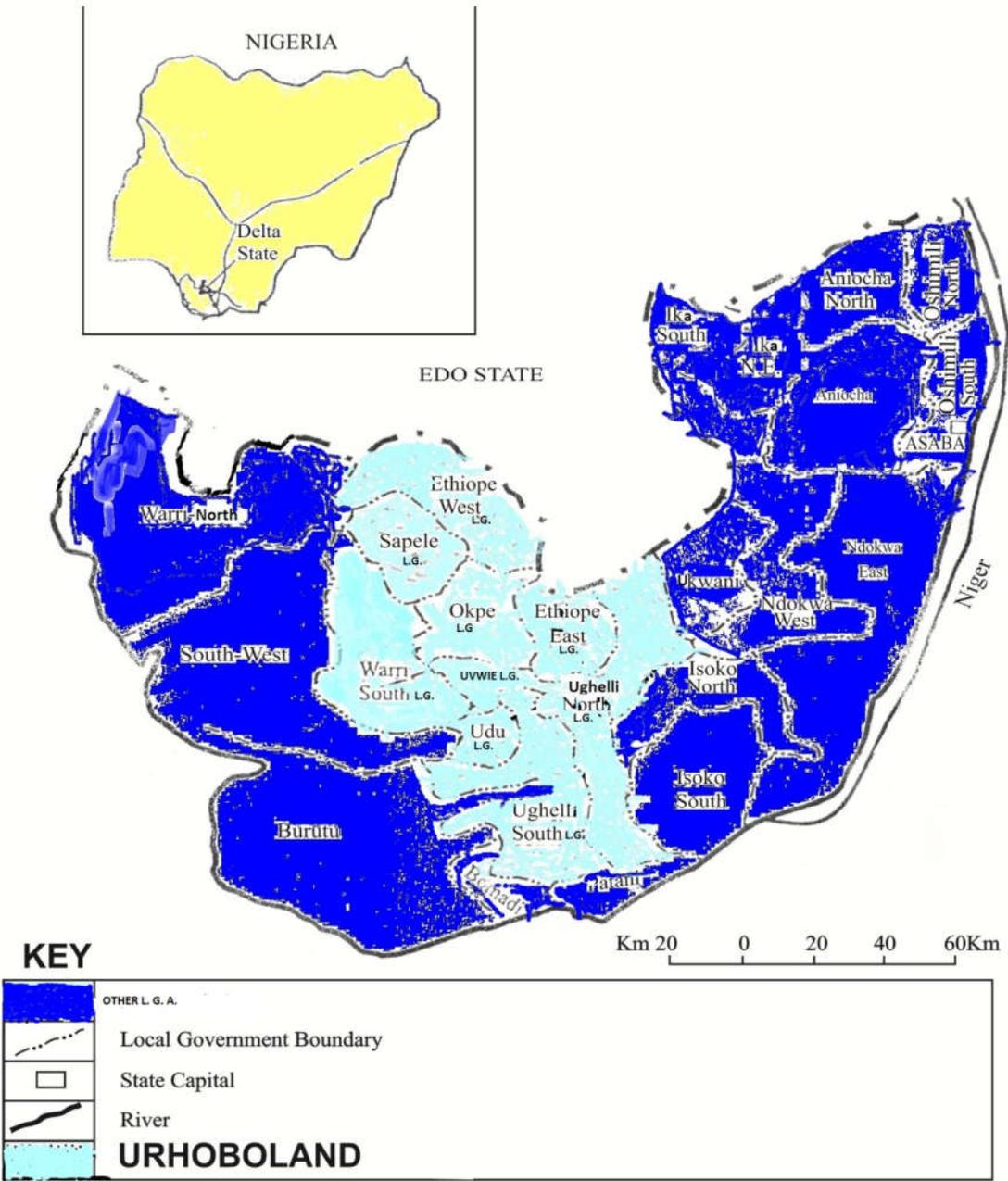
As a system that was relatively democratic and autonomous within the standard of its era, pre-colonial Urhobo local government institutions, therefore, captures both the theory of

grassroots democracy and that of autonomy explained in the introduction to this study. With the structure of this traditional local government in terms of the small size of each local government unit, it may not be practical to employ it for most modern nation states considering their enormous geographical size and population. However, its emphasis on democracy and autonomy is significant in the light of contemporary theories of local government.



Source: Website of the Urhobo Historical Society www.waado.org

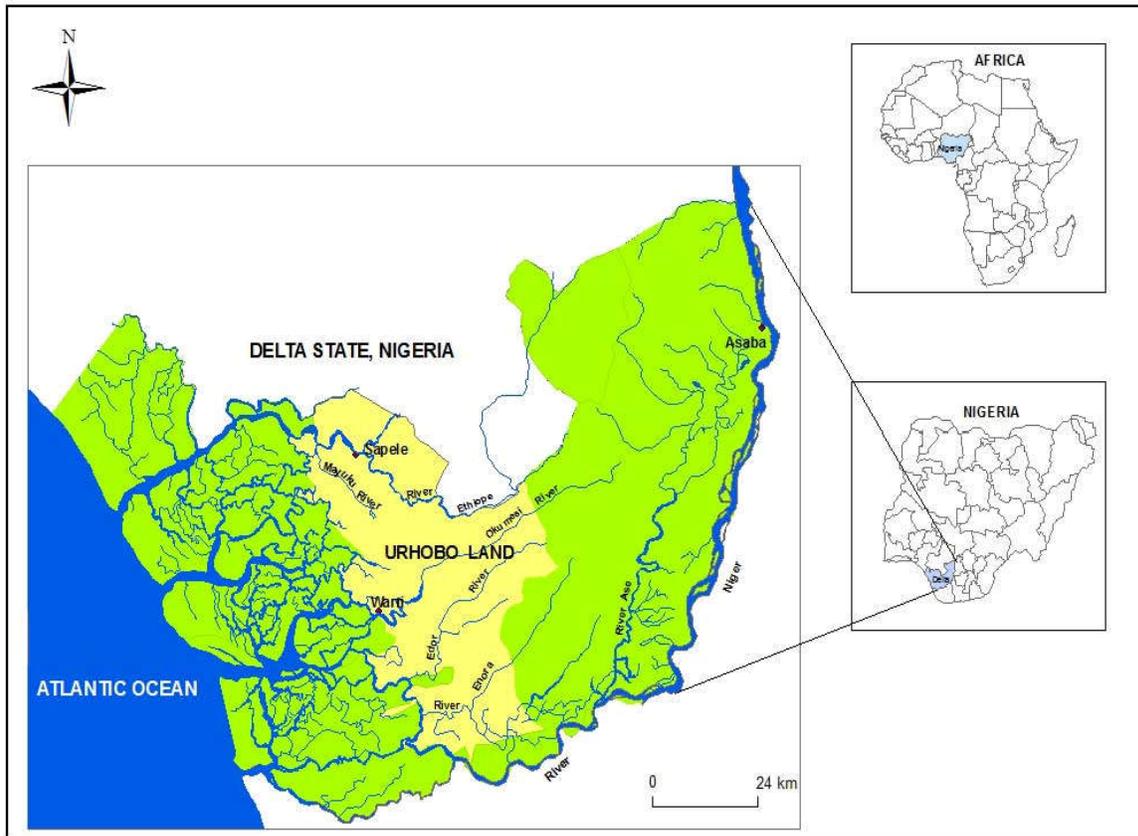
A Map of Delta State Identifying Local Governments in Urhoboland



MAP OF DELTA STATE: LOCAL GOVT. AREAS

Source: developed from T.A. Imobighe, C.O. Bassey & J.B. Asuni, eds. *Conflict and Instability in the Niger Delta: The Warri Case* by (Ibadan: Spectrum Books, 2002).

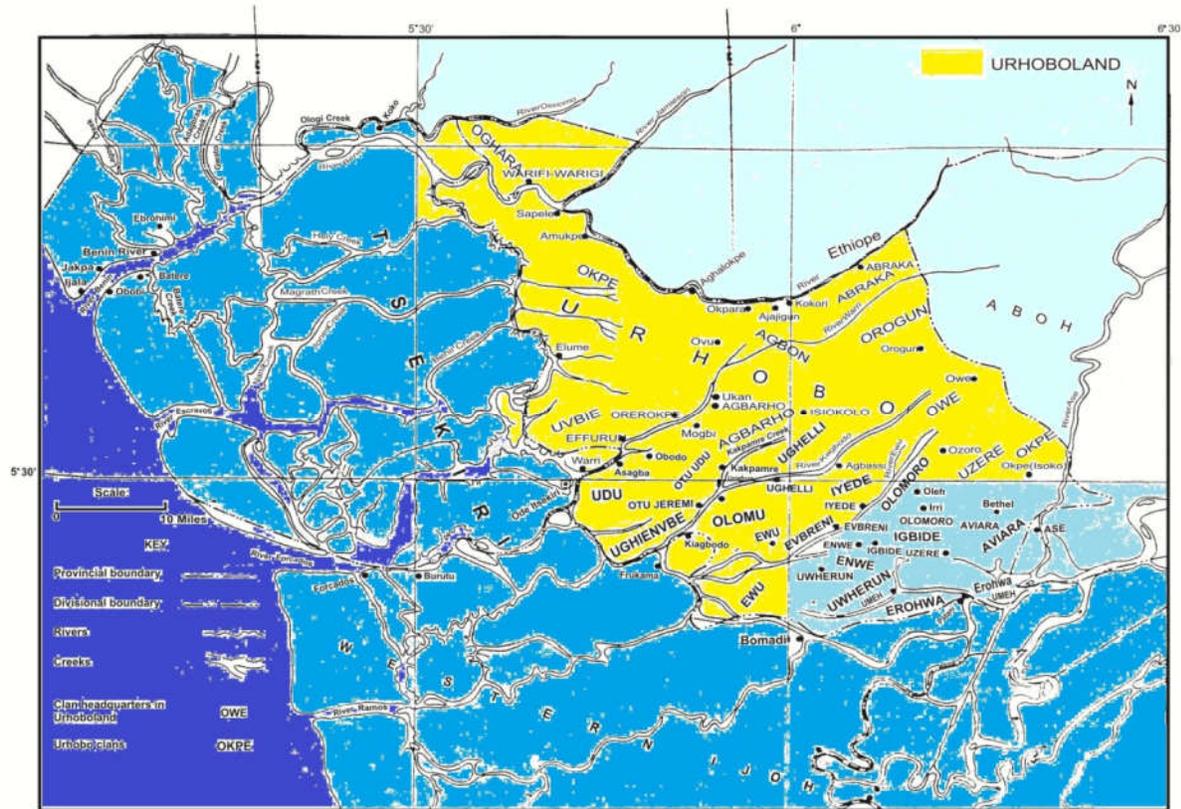
A Map of Delta State, Nigeria, Showing Urhoboland and Major Rivers of Western Niger Delta



Map drawn by Professor Francis Odemerho, Southern Illinois University, Edwardsville, USA

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Urhoboland and its Neighbours



Source: Developed by author from: Obaro Ikime, *Niger Delta Rivalry* (London: Longman Publishers, 1969)

ENDNOTES

1. *Quarterly Abstract of Statistics* (1st Quarter, January to March 1976), Ministry of Economic Development, Statistics Division, Benin-City, 4-5
2. Albert O. Aweto, "An Outline Geography of Urhoboland" in *Studies in Urhobo Culture* edited by Peter P. Ekeh (Lagos: Published by Urhobo Historical Society, 2005), 683-84.
3. Ibid.; "National Population commission," *Annual Abstract of Statistics, 2008*, published by National Bureau of Statistics(NBS) Plot 762, Independence Avenue, Central Business District, Abuja. www.nigerianstat.gov.ng; Also see, Albert, O. Aweto & J.L. Igben, "Geography of Urhoboland" in *The Urhobo People* edited by Onigu Otite (Ibadan: Shaneson C. I. Ltd, 2003), 15
4. See maps and appendices I, II and III; Albert O. Aweto & J. L. Igben, "Geography of Urhoboland" in *The Urhobo People* edited by Onigu Otite (Ibadan: Shaneson C. I. Ltd, 2003), 15
5. Quarterly Abstracts of Statistics, 1976, 31-32; & *Bendel State Digest of Local Government Statistics*, No. 1, Ministry of Finance and Economic Planning, Statistics Office, 1985, 34-35.
6. The Warri town was founded by three aboriginal groups, Western Ijaw, Urhobo and Itsekiri
7. Obaro Ikime, *Niger Delta Rivalry: Itsekiri-Urhobo Relations and the Establishment of British Rule, 1884-1936* (London: Longman Publishers, 1969), chapter one; E.J. Alagoa, *A History of the Niger Delta: An Historical Interpretation of Ijo Oral Traditions* (Ibadan: University Press, 1972)
8. E. J. Alagoa, "Ijaw Origins and Migrations", *Nigeria Magazine*, No.9, Dec. 1966, 279-88
9. P. Ekeh, (ed.) *Warri City & British Colonial rule in western Niger Delta* (New York, Lagos: Published by Urhobo Historical Society, 2004); Obaro Ikime, *Niger Delta Rivalry: Itsekiri-Urhobo Relations and the Establishment of British Rule, 1884-1936* (London: Longman Publishers, 1969).
10. See appendix IV
11. "National Population commission," *Annual Abstract of Statistics, 2008*, published by National Bureau of Statistics(NBS) Plot 762, Independence Avenue, Central Business District, Abuja. www.nigerianstat.gov.ng. Also see table 6.1, chapter 6 for other details.

12. The rubber tree is not an indigenous plant of the Urhobo. According to documents of late Mr Ezekiel Kalamuka Bork, retired chairman of the Education Committee, former Ughelli Local Government Council (also see Chapter 4, endnote 86), tradition claims that it was introduced into the Niger Delta in the 19th century. On the other hand it is a well established fact that rubber production in commercial quantity in West Africa only commenced in the last quarter of the 19th century— A.A. Boahen, *Topics in West Africa History* (London: Longman,1968), 123-124.
13. Also see Obaro Ikime, *Niger Delta Rivalry: Itsekiri-Urhobo Relations and the Establishment of British Rule, 1884-1936* (London: Longman Publishers, 1969), 6.
14. Oral Interviews: Frederick Alibo(75yrs), retired councillor & Frederick Obikoko(70yrs), Secretary of Oto-Udu town, Udu clan;also see Obaro Ikime, 1969, 6
15. Oral Interview: Frederick Alibo(75yrs), retired councillor & Frederick Obikoko(70yrs), Secretary of Oto-Udu town, Udu clan
16. Records of Igbu-Eshovwi Traditional Law Court, Otu-Jeremi, 1973 analysing a suit filed by Mr J.O. Oghenerume against Madam Otume Ogbe over the sale of adulterated alcohol – Oral Interview: Frederick Alibo(75yrs). As a primary school pupil then, the writer accompanied his father to the law court on the first day the case came out for hearing making him an eyewitness. The father, Chief Ashe Obigba, was a member of the panel of judges constituted to handle the case.
17. Records of Igbu-Eshovwi Traditional Law Court, Otu-Jeremi, 1973
18. Apparently the same reasons account for the failure of colonial officials to give it any attention in their records. Oral Interview: Mr. F.E. Okodevu, retired principal, 80 yrs.
19. The oil processing mill, *okoh* is preferably sited in the farm away from the town with serious consideration for availability of the only raw material, palm fruit. It consists of a well built wooden trough (from which the name *okoh* is derived) used for treading palm fruits in order to extract the oil. There must be a reliable well because much water is required for floating the oil. The *okoh* is designed with some element of comfort and leisure, if possible a home away from home. For this reason it is provided with everything for cooking, leisure, farming and at least a simple house or some huts. In some cases it is a semi-hamlet.
20. For the impact of petroleum exploitation on vegetation and agriculture in the Niger Delta see J. Oluwatimilehin, “The Ecological Impact of the Oil Industry in the Niger Delta of Nigeria”, Unpublished M.Sc Thesis, University of Ife, 1981. & Daniel A Omoweh, *Shell, the state and underdevelopment of the Niger Delta of Nigeria: A Study in Environmental Degradation* (Trenton: Africa World Press, 2001)
21. Oral Interviews: James Mrakpo(78yrs), retired Chaiman of Ughelli Local Government Council resides in Ughelli.-Dec. 17 2013

22. Also see, Albert, O. Aweto & J.L. Igben, "Geography of Urhoboland in *The Urhobo People* edited by Onigu Otite (Ibadan: Shaneson C. I. Ltd, 2003), 15
23. Also see Obaro Ikime, *Niger Delta Rivalry*, 1969, 3
24. Ibid., 3
25. Oral Interview: Chief Kpebo Marere, 85 yrs, *Odede* of Ade Court, Otughievwen 6th June, 2012; also see Obaro Ikime, *Niger Delta Rivalry*, 1969, 48
26. Obaro Ikime, 1969, 4
27. See Ibid.; chapter three, for British annexation of Itsekiriland.
28. See the following:
Peter P. Ekeh (ed.), *Studies in Urhobo Culture* (Lagos: Published by Urhobo Historical Society, 2005); Onigu Otite (ed.) *The Urhobo People* (Ibadan: Shaneson C. I. Ltd, 2003); Obaro Ikime, *Niger Delta Rivalry*, 1969, chapter 1
29. Other Urhobo cannot identify any differences between the three dialects but it is known from natives of the clans that there are conspicuous differences in accent which are hardly discernible by non-natives.
30. So far, it is the dialect used for documentation and official records among the Urhobo. This is the type of Urhobo found in the "Eta r'urhobo" coloun of the *Urhobo Voice* (a newspaper), *Ibaiboro Ofuafofon* (Urhobo version of the *Holy Bible*), chapters 17, 18, 21 & 22 of *Studies in Urhobo Culture* and other publications in the Urhobo language.
31. See page 150 for more details on Western Urhobo.
32. "Daniel Okumagba" by Ogute Otan, Best Urhobo Musician, 1973.
33. See Appendix V for population size of Urhobo clans (1963 Census).
34. Onigu Otite (ed.), *The Urhobo People* (Ibadan: Shaneson C.I. Ltd, 2003), 28-29.
35. Obaro Ikime, *Niger Delta Rivalry*, 1969, chapter one.
36. R. E. Bradbury, *The Benin Kingdom and the Edo-Speaking Peoples of South Western Nigeria* (London: International African Institute, 1957)
J.H. Greenberg, "The Classification of African Languages", *American Anthropologists*, 1948, Vol. 50, pp. 24-30.
37. Obaro Ikime, "Peoples Kingdoms of th Delta Province" in *Groundwork of Nigerian History* edited by Obaro Ikime (Ibadan: Heinemann, 1984), 95; E. J. Alagoa, "Ijaw Origins and Migrations", *Nigeria Magazine*, No.9, Dec. 1966, 279-88
38. The traditions of origin are replete with such myths. For instance, there is the myth of Ovo a giant from Benin with extra-ordinary power who could uproot trees and create

streams with foot match. However, there is yet to be any significant analysis of these myths in any study on the Urhobo.

39. Obaro Ikime, "Peoples Kingdoms of th Delta Province" in *Groundwork of Nigerian History* edited by Obaro Ikime (Ibadan: Heinemann, 1984), 95; E. J. Alagoa, "Ijaw Origins and Migrations", *Nigeria Magazine*, No.9, Dec. 1966, 279-88
40. Onigu Otite, 2003, 34
41. Ibid; J. H. Greenberg, "The Classification of African Languages", *American Anthropologists* Vol. 50, 24-29.
42. Ibid.
43. Ibid.
44. R. E. Bradbury, *The Benin Kingdom and the Edo-Speaking Peoples of South Western Nigeria*, 129
45. Also see E.J. Alagoa, *A History of the Niger Delta: An Historical Interpretation of Ijo Oral Traditions* (Ibadan: University Press, 1972)
46. Ibid; E.J. Alagoa & Adadonye Fombo, J.P., *A Chronicle of Grand Bonny* (Ibadan: University Press, 1972); Charles Ogan, *Unity of a People: Search for Peace in Okrika, Rivers State, Nigeria* (Aba: Georjek Nigeria Ltd, 1988)
47. Also see Obaro Ikime, *Niger Delta Rivalry*, 1969, 18
48. Oral Interview: Kpebo Marere, the *Odede* (Head) of the Ade Chieftaincy and Traditional Court of Justice, Otughienvwe, Jeremi Clan. April, 2008.
49. Oral Interview: Chief P. O. Abollo, 75 yrs, Ohonvoren of Agbarho, Sept. 14, 2014
50. Ibid.; Oral Interview: Chief Kpebo Marere, 85 yrs, *Odede* of Ade Court, Otughievwen 6th June, 2012.
51. Also see Obaro Ikime, 1969, 23; Every clan had a special title for its head whose appointment was based on ability and exceptional quality of leadership (see Appendix III for titles).
52. Also see Obaro Ikime, 1969, 25
53. The play is a portrait of women reaction to the attempt of the Erhuvwarien community in Urhoboland (dominated by the men) to sideline them in the sharing of a particular sum of money, an act the women conceived as a breach of established customs and traditions as well as a negation of their right- J.P. Clark, *The Wives Revolt* (Ibadan: University Press, 1991).

54. The first two scenes of J.P. Clarks' *The Wives Revolt* reveals deeply the established norms, customs and traditions that underly the women's action. But without an understanding of this tradition, there is the tendency to approach the play as simply a conflict between men and women in an Urhobo village "over the sharing of compensation fee paid by an oil company". On the other hand, Bruce Onobrakpeya, a renowned artist of Urhobo origin knows that his portrait of the functional role of women in the area has a deep historical and cultural undertone. See Philomina Ofuafo, "Women Involvement in Political and Economic Development in Traditional Urhobo Society. A Visual Representation of Bruce Onobrakpeya Art Works" in *Gender, Sexuality, History & Culture in Africa*, (Abstracts) 3rd Annual International Colloquium, Gender Studies Group, University of Lagos, June, 2010, 30.
55. Such legal institutions still exist in a number of communities in Ughievwen and Udu clans. The filing of suits is done through the spokesperson of the *Eghweya* while her residence or that of the eldest member of the group serves as the law court.
56. Oral Interview: Chief Siloko Okpolemu, June 2010; G.G. Darah, "Udu" in *The Urhobo People* edited by Onigu Otite (Ibadan: Shaneson C.I. Ltd, 2003), 263-275.
57. E.K. Alagoa, "Queen Kambasa of Bonny" in *Nigerian Women: A Historical Perspective* edited by Bolanle Awe (Ibadan: Bookcraft Ltd, 2001), 27-40.
Jacob Egharevba, *The Origin of Benin* (Benin-City: BDNA Museum, 1973), 7
58. Oral Interview: Okotie Ejowhomu I, *Omosivie* (King) of Agbarho, 86 yrs, 2010.
59. Ibid.
60. Reflected in traditional names like Akpo-eghagha (life is a formality), Onomuo-akpokpo (who takes the world with him at death) and Oboakpororo (humanity's view of life), all used to imply that there is crucial need for moderation in life because its glories are often not worth the sacrifice of humanity.
61. Onigu Otite, *Autonomy and Dependence: The Urhobo Kingdom of Okpe in Modern Nigeria* (Ibadan: University Press, 1973).
F.O. Ibru, "A History of the Ogor Kingdom" presented during the Coronation of the 13th *Ovie* of Ogor, May 9, 1987. "Coronation of H.R.H. Adjara II of Ogor", *The Guardian* (Nigeria), Wednesday, May 6 1987, p. 10
62. Oral Interview: Samson Ogboru, traditional Chief and former spokesman of Otughievwen, Jeremi Clan (90 yrs), 9th July 2012.
63. Obaro Ikime, *Merchant Prince of the Niger Delta: The Rise and Fall of Nana Olomu, Last Governor of the Benin River* (London: Heinemann Books Ltd, 1968), 8
C.O. Omoneukarin, *Itsekiri Law and Custom* (Lagos, 1942), 26
64. Obaro Ikime, 1968, 9
65. Ibid., 16

66. Ibid., 17
67. Oral Interview: (a) Kpebo Marere of *Ade* Traditional Chieftaincy Court, Otughievwen, 6th June, 1995. (b) Samson Ogboru, July 9, 2012.
68. Ibid.; also see “Coronation of H.R.H. Adjara II of Ogor”, *The Guardian* (Nigeria), Wednesday, May 6 1987, 10
69. Also see ‘Statement issued by the Niger Delta Peoples Congress (NDPC), founded since 1946’ *The Punch*, Monday, February 19, 2007, 60; For Union of the Niger Delta (UND) see *Vanguard*, Monday Nov. 26, 2001, Vol. 17, No. 4882, 1-2
70. Obaro Ikime, “The Western Niger Delta in the 19th Century” in *Groundwork of Nigerian History* edited by Obaro Ikime (Ibadan: Longman, 1984).
71. Obaro Ikime, *Merchant Prince of the Niger Delta*, 1968; E.J. Alagoa & Adadonye Fombo, *A Chronicle of Grand Bonny* (Ibadan: University Press, 1972), 29-34
72. Kiiikpoye K. Aaron, “Truth Without Reconciliation: The Niger Delta and the Continuing Challenge of National Reconciliation: in *The Crisis of the State and Regionalism in Africa* edited by W. Alade Fawole & Charles Ukeje (Dakar: CODESRIA Books, 2005), 127-137
73. Ibid.
74. Obaro Ikime, *Merchant Prince of the Niger Delta*, 1968, 5-10
75. Oghenenuvweno Aganbi, “Eku Celebrates Echoroko Festival”, *The Urhobo Voice*, Sept 29, 2003, Vol. 6, No. 216, 6
Also see analysis of Urhobo world view and response to the nature of grassroots politics in Warri during the interview of Barrister Solomon Terhere Borlokor — Mevayen Obire, “Urhobo are Warri Landlords, says Borlokor”, *The Urhobo Voice*, Nov. 17, 2003, Vol. 7, No. 223, 13-14.
76. Michael Goldsmith, “Local Autonomy: Theory and Practice” in *Challenges to Local Government* edited by Desmond S. King & Jon Pierre (London: Sage Publications, 1986), 18
77. Ibid.

CHAPTER THREE

THE EVOLUTION OF COLONIAL LOCAL GOVERNMENT UP TO 1933

After the annexation of Urhoboland by the British during the first decade of the twentieth century¹ the area became part of the Warri District, later renamed Warri Division in 1914. This was followed by the appointment of a paramount chief for the division in 1917. Only the Urhobo clans of Agbon, Orogun and Abraka were not part of the Warri Division. Agbon was merged with the Kwale Division, while the other two were under the jurisdiction of the Aboh Division²

The Native Courts Proclamation of 1900, 1901 and 1906 as well as the Native Court Ordinance of 1914 played a crucial role in the evolution of colonial local government in Urhoboland and other parts of the Western Niger Delta up to 1934. Equally significant was the Native Authority Ordinance of 1916. In particular, they provided the legal and legislative framework for implementation of the colonial grassroots administration.

The British High Commissioner, Sir Ralph Moor, was the architect of the Native Courts Proclamation of 1900 and that of 1901.³ The proclamations recognised two sets of courts – native councils and minor courts. It is pertinent to point out from the outset that the native councils and native courts constituted the pivot of colonial grassroots administration in the Western Niger Delta up to the early 1930s because apart from constituting the judicial organ of government, they equally represented the legislative and executive arms of government at the grassroots level.⁴ For instance, the courts were in charge of all administrative and executive works among the natives including the promotion of trade, agriculture and education at the grassroots level. They were encouraged to make native laws and act as instruments of exposing the chiefs to the administrative machinery of the new local government system.⁵

Before 1914, there were two figures that featured prominently in the system in this part of the Western Niger Delta—the District Commissioner and High Commissioner. The District Commissioner presided over native councils. But he could appoint deputies (who must be European officials) to act for him in his absence.⁶ Members of minor courts were to be appointed by the High Commissioner or his representative. Once appointed, they could not be removed from office without special sanction of the High Commissioner. The president of a minor court was to be selected by the members on a three-month rotational basis. Minor courts were to administer native laws and customs in which all the parties concerned were natives. However, non-natives could by their own consent be tried by a minor court.

The native councils had wider power than minor courts. In civil cases, the latter could only try personal suits involving damage, debt and property or asset whose financial term did not exceed 25 (except in the property of a deceased person which could be worth as much as 50). But native councils were allowed to handle similar cases even where the money or value of goods involved was up to 200. In criminal cases, a native council was granted authority to try offences committed within its district for which the punishment could be:

- (i) imprisonment for a term not exceeding two years with or without flogging not exceeding fifteen strokes;
- (ii) imprisonment for a term not exceeding one year with or without hard labour, and a fine not exceeding £100;
- (iii) a fine not exceeding £100.

The minor courts could try similar cases where the punishment could be:

- (i) imprisonment not exceeding six months with or without hard labour, with or without flogging not exceeding fifteen strokes;
- (ii) imprisonment for a term not exceeding three months, with or without hard labour, and a fine not exceeding £25;
- (iii) a fine not exceeding £50.⁷

An amendment proclamation was issued in 1903 by which the District Commissioner was made a member of all native courts in his district.⁸ This amendment also conferred on the minor courts equal jurisdiction with the native councils in civil cases. Again, by this amendment,

whenever the District Commissioner sat on any of the minor court, he conferred on such court by that very act, the jurisdiction of a native council.

The Assistant District Commissioner was also authorised to sit on, and act as president of any minor court in his district in the absence of the District Commissioner. On the other hand, the District Commissioner was empowered to appoint a vice-president to act for him and his assistant in their absence. But this was subject to the approval of the High Commissioner, while the candidate for the office of the vice-president in a particular native court must be a member nominated by other members of such native court.⁹

The Native Courts Proclamation of 1906 was issued following the amalgamation of the protectorate of Southern Nigeria and Colony of Lagos. It did not actually modify the provisions of the earlier ones except that for the first time the High Commissioner was empowered to appoint any member of any native court to be the president of such court.¹⁰

The administrative hierarchy of the system, starting from implementation of the Native Court Ordinance of 1914, was simple. Both the warrant chiefs and court clerks featured prominently in the system. Under them was the messenger. The former two were answerable to a District Officer (D.O.). In some cases, the clerks were said to have wielded more power than the warrant chiefs¹¹ and the fact that the names of clerks like Mr Okitikpe, Mr Esiri and Mr Bar Rolle were still recited among elders in many Urhobo communities during the 1970s gives credence to this claim.¹² The first two clerks were Urhobo, while the third was a Sierra Leonian. However, the names of warrant chiefs are equally remembered though this is expected since they were the ones who interacted with the people. Among these were Oharisi, Fekanrhurhobo, Ogbe and Skin. The first two were Urhobo while the others were Itsekiri.¹³

At the provincial level was the Resident who was the head of the province. The District Officers (D.Os.) were to send monthly reports to the Resident with emphasis on new developments in their respective local government areas. They were, however, allowed to send letters or emergency reports any period of the month. The duties of the court clerk, on the other hand, were well specified in Government Gazettes containing the laws of colonial grassroots institutions.¹⁴ The court clerk had to be present at every court meeting. It was his duty to make sure that at least three warrant chiefs (the official quorum) were present in each court sitting. He was, therefore, to inform the appropriate authority if any warrant chief was found wanting in this regard. Any one with the intention of inspecting the records of a case in order to obtain a copy must also do so “under the personal supervision of the clerk.” However, such individual must have gone through other necessary official procedure stipulated by the law in respect of this for the court clerk to grant him audience.

The court clerk was also to keep the records of fees collected and cases heard as well as summonses taken out. Any piece of information to the warrant chiefs must pass through the court clerk. The court scribe was in those days, therefore, an extremely powerful and influential personage in the eyes of the generality of the people and the warrant chiefs.¹⁵ Some of them were actually unpopular with the people partly because of the corrupt way they used this power and partly because they often arrogated to themselves more power than what they were constitutionally entitled to.¹⁶

The court clerk was allowed to give orders to the chiefs based on the instructions of the D.O.¹⁷ Only the court scribe could read the written law and therefore could easily mislead the chiefs if it suited his purpose to do so. Moreover, the fact that the court records were in his

custody gave him added prestige while his frequent visits to the headquarters enhanced the respect accorded to him by the warrant chiefs and the people alike.

In a corrupt system like the case of the Warri Division, the position and power of the court clerk made him quite amenable to bribery, especially as the Division came under a paramount chief in 1917 who further compounded the corruption in the system.¹⁸ Under such situation, it is not surprising that some sources describe the court clerks as one instrument of corruption in the colonial local government system claiming that they “were in many ways a law unto themselves”.¹⁹ Their portrait by tradition is hardly different as the court scribe is classified among colonial grassroots officials who receive presents from the people in order to influence a court case in their favour.²⁰

It is in reaction to this that the Assistant District Officer in charge of Sapele, Mr Aveling, complained in 1922 that the native court clerks were in some cases the actual judges. According to him, it was easy for the court clerk to distort the evidence and verdict of a case because the presiding chiefs were not literate enough to read the legal documents (ie the written law), which are among the essential determinants of the validation of an evidence. To overcome this shortcoming he recommended the inclusion of educated young men in the courts who could check the records of the court clerks.²¹

Even the paramount chief of the Warri Division, Chief Dogho, was forced to complain about the authority and apparent arrogance of the court scribes on a good number of times. In his report about the Benin River Native Court in 1925, he informed the D.O. that the clerk in charge was always interfering with the court’s decision and often prevented the chiefs from passing judgement based on their own assessment of the available evidence. However, it is not clear whether such interference was in the interest of justice or not since Dogho himself proved to be

more corrupt than the clerks. What even made the paramount chief more furious was the clerk's habit of smoking in the court in complete defiance of court rules and regulations.²² The position and power of the court clerk were not reviewed until the reorganisation of the 1930s.

Most early clerks in Urhoboland were non-indigenes of the area. Western education and influence started late in Urhoboland compared to their neighbours like the Itsekiri and Benin. Thus, apart from the schools established in Warri and Sapele in 1902 and 1903, there were no other schools in the Urhobo hinterland until the 1920s.²³ There were, therefore, only few individuals in the area who were literate enough to be offered the job of a clerk. Even in 1922, of the seventeen court clerks in the then Warri Division, only one was an Urhobo. In fact, of the remaining sixteen only seven were from the neighbouring ethnic groups, while eight were from the Igbo speaking part of the country. One was a Sierra Leonian.²⁴

The creation of the office of a paramount chief in the Warri Division constitutes a major focus of this chapter and will be explored below. Such a Chief helped in the appointment of warrant chiefs in his area of jurisdiction and was answerable to the Resident though the D.O. was constitutionally required to act as a check on his power, particularly where there was obvious demonstration of abuse of power by such chief.²⁵

The entire grassroots system was, therefore, co-ordinated by the D.O., though in spite of the power he enjoyed he was far from the people by virtue of his position. Moreover, only whitemen were offered the position of a D.O. in this part of the Western Niger Delta. It is, however, not certain whether qualified Africans were eligible to apply for it. The Warri Division also had Assistant District Officers (A.D.Os.).²⁶ Since Warri was the provincial headquarters, the D.O. of the Warri Division was apparently saddled with too many responsibilities compared to

the D.Os. of other divisions. Therefore, he had a number of A.D.Os who were assigned different responsibilities to help reduce his workload.

The Native Courts Ordinance of October 1, 1914 was, therefore, partly a response to the need to restructure the colonial local government system following the amalgamation of the Protectorates of Northern and Southern Nigeria on January 1, 1914. This Ordinance contained a number of significant modifications. First, only non-Europeans were allowed to be presidents of the native courts. It was Lugard's opinion that the native courts would not display the type of independence and responsibility he was looking forward to "if dominated by the presence of a European."²⁷ Secondly, the idea of a "paramount chief" or "head chief" was well defined. Thus, apart from the *Alkali* courts in Northern Nigeria, there were two other categories provided for as follows:

[The first type consisted] of a paramount or head chief with or without minor chiefs or other persons acting either in conjunction with the paramount chief or head chief as judges or sitting as assessors. The second category of court was to have as members chief or other persons representing the communities inhabiting the area within which the court exercises jurisdiction as may from time to time be appointed by the Resident.²⁸

Each of the courts within these two categories was to have its president and vice-president appointed from its members by the Resident. Where there was a "paramount chief" the Resident was to appoint the members of the native courts or judicial council based on those nominated by the paramount chief or in consultation with him.²⁹ Also introduced was a native court of appeal with a code of native laws and customs including procedure which varied from place to place.

In 1916, Lugard promulgated the Native Authority Ordinance³⁰ as a corollary to his Native Court Ordinance of 1914. This was because of his determination to extend to the South what has been operating in the North. This Ordinance empowered the Governor to appoint any Chief as a "native authority". Any "other native or any Tribunal" could also be constituted into

native authority The Governor could subordinate the native authority of one area to that of another area.³¹

As mentioned above, these proclamations and ordinances had an overwhelming effect on the development of colonial grassroots administration in Urhoboland up to 1934. The desire to create a uniform grassroots administration was initially interpreted by colonial officials to mean that the system would not accommodate the peculiarities of individual communities. In particular, as we shall see in this chapter with reference to the Western Niger Delta, each community was expected to realign its political and social institutions and even the pattern of inter-group relations with the grassroots policies of the government.

Even if political and social institutions were resilient enough to cope with the new political order, the nature of inter-group relations between the Urhobo and their immediate neighbours proved otherwise, though quite peaceful before the introduction of colonial grassroots administration. For this reason, inter-group relations proved to be the only factor with a significant effect on the implementation of the colonial local government system in the area. Population and economic viability of an area were hardly considered at the grassroots level at this early stage of British colonialism. As we shall also see below, the colonial government did not respond to the pressure of inter-group relations between the Urhobo and their neighbours until it had been compounded by the new grassroots system. In particular, the new grassroots system marked the beginning of explosive inter-group relations between the Urhobo, the Itsekiri and the Western Ijaw.

Precursor of the Native Courts Proclamation and Native Courts Ordinance

For purpose of clarity and avoidance of ambiguity, there is need to attempt some analysis of the precursor of the Native Courts Proclamation of 1900. To begin with, there was

establishment of what has been termed by some sources as “Court of Equity” or “Governing Councils” at selected centres in the Niger Delta before the Native Courts Proclamation of 1900. These “Courts of Equity” or “Governing Councils” were designed to meet the need of European traders who sought for some form of constituted authority sufficiently powerful enough to settle disputes even between European traders and Africans before such disputes would lead to strife, trade stoppage and the likes.³²

This was a time when “one solitary figure was expected to keep control over hundreds of miles of the Niger Delta” in an effort to expand British commercial and imperial interest while “consular administration consisted solely of chance visits in a gun boat”.³³ The “Consular Courts” system was introduced by the first Consul-General, Sir Claude Macdonald. Some form of secretariats known as vice-consulates were established in selected centres in 1891 which were also engaged as Consular Courts before 1900. This was largely due to the establishment of the Oil Rivers Protectorate, later expanded to form Niger Coast Protectorate because it ushered in a new era which called for more efficient instruments of administration.³⁴

This is why studies which are not particularly confined to grassroots administration sweepingly conclude that the Native Courts Proclamations of 1900 and 1901 “merely legalised institutions which were already in existence”.³⁵ As we shall see below, the structure created by these two proclamations was by far more complex and comprehensive than that of the consular era.

There are only few records on the operation of the consular courts. According to Harold Bindloss, the courts were voluntarily patronised by Nigerians. The most common cases brought by litigants were slave dealing, wife-snatching and child stealing. Others were attempted murder and firing at trade canoes.³⁶

The Urhobo aborigines of Warri were the first to feel the impact of consular administration at the grassroots level as a result of the establishment of consular court at Warri in 1891. However, in the same year, Henry Lionel Gallwey, the first Vice-Consul of the Benin River, acting on instruction from the Consul-General paid a visit to “the Oil Markets of the Sobo and Abrakar districts”. According to him,

The objects of the visit were manifold, the most important being the establishment of law and order; the selecting of suitable sites for a vice-consulate, barracks and constabulary posts; to impress upon the natives the great advantages to be gained by the cultivation of such crops as coffee, cocoa, etc., and enquire into the reasons for the slackness of trade in the Sobo district generally.³⁷

At this time, more vice-consulates backed up by “barracks and constabulary posts” were established in some other parts of the country while in his report Gallwey wrote, “I consider Sapele to be a very good place to establish a vice-consulate”.³⁸ One primary aim of the tour was to identify relevant sites for the establishment of consulate. In November 1891, the Consul-General, Macdonald, himself inspected some selected sites in Sapele when he visited the town. He discovered that a great deal of clearing would be required but the people of Sapele promised to do the clearing themselves. The need for the Sapele Consulate became so urgent that in 1892, a hulk was purchased at the cost of 1,800 and fitted out in one of the sites to serve as a consulate, prison and barracks without waiting for the erection of permanent buildings.³⁹

The urgent demand for the setting up of the Sapele Vice-Consulate arose from the fact that the town was considered by the British as a better alternative to the Benin River Vice-Consulate which has been serving the Ethiope region and Lower Benin River. This is because the Benin River Vice-Consulate was located far away in the heart of the Delta Creek and waterlogged region hardly accessible by the oil producers of the hinterland since they are non-riverine dwellers. Land transportation to this vice-consulate was completely ruled out. On the

other hand, apart from being part of the oil producing communities of the Ethiope hinterland easily accessible by land, Sapele was also strategically located to serve this area as a vice-consulate because of the presence of a port.

The situation was such that by 1895 the Benin River Vice-Consulate was only acting as a customs port. Despite this, British officials insisted that this function should also be transferred to Sapele to avoid the problem of delay in the shipping of goods.

Therefore, the Urhobo of the Ethiope region and their satellite communities that supply oil to European merchants via the Sapele Vice-Consulate were assumed to be under the umbrella of this consulate and a number of them must have felt its impact with regard to administration of justice. It is obvious from the available records that the Urhobo started taking advantage of the new development as early as 1894:

Now that Sapele is well opened, and every native being allowed to trade at every market ... very little produce from the rich Ethiope country will find its way to the lower river factories – as the natives are beginning to appreciate the fact that by selling their produce at Sapele they save 90 miles of canoe journey.⁴⁰

However, Urhobo communities in the interior were too far away from the influence of consular administration in terms of adjudication of justice and otherwise.

British officials knew the lapses in the consular administrative system and it is not surprising that new legal institutions were introduced to supplement consular administration before the native courts proclamations of the 1900s. Thus by 1896, there were two constituted colonial legal institutions, one at Warri and the other at Abraka– sometimes described as native councils or native courts.⁴¹ The one at Warri had jurisdiction over a number of Urhobo communities – Effurun, Tori, Effuruntor, Mogba, Asagba, Agbassa, Adeji and Aladja (Ogbe-Sobo). It also had jurisdiction over the Itsekiri and the Ijaw aborigines of Warri Town. Only the Abraka Court was sited in the heart of Urhoboland before 1900.

On the other hand, despite the number of communities the Warri Native Court was meant to serve, all its sixteen members except one (an Ijaw) were Itsekiri. According to Obaro Ikime, “from the predominance of Itsekiri members one can only conclude that the British appointed to the court those with whom they were already familiar, namely, the Itsekiri at the coast.”⁴² Moreover, by 1896 the British penetration of Urhoboland was yet to be completed. Effurun was burnt down in 1894 just after the clash between the British and Nana⁴³ and it was, therefore, difficult for the British to select members from here and a good number of other Urhobo communities because of the feeling that the people were still too anti-British to react favourably to British sponsored native courts. It is, therefore, fair to conclude that the British did not deliberately subject the Urhobo to an Itsekiri dominated court.

It is, however, difficult to say whether the affected Urhobo communities were able to conceive the action of the colonial government from the above perspective, at least until the colonial officials were able to perfect the penetration of Urhoboland. What is certain is that there were no Urhobo agitations against their marginalisation in the Warri Court until new developments, which followed the creation of the Warri Division— in particular the appointment of a head chief for the entire division in 1917.⁴⁴

The Operation of the Native Courts before the Appointment of a Head Chief for the Warri Division

As a result of the Native Courts Proclamation of 1900 and that of 1906, eight minor courts were set up in Urhoboland between 1900 and May 1906. These courts were sited at Gbogidi, Agbarho (Ajareyube), Okpare, Sapele, Okpara, Abraka, Otu-Jeremi (Otu-Ughienvwe) and Ughelli (Ughelle). The first three were opened in 1900, that of Sapele was commissioned by 1902, while

the last four were established in 1904.⁴⁵ In addition, Jeremi (Ughienvwe) clan was placed under the jurisdiction of a native court in Frukama, an Ijaw town along their border with Urhoboland.⁴⁶ It is, however, not clear whether the membership of this court consisted of some Urhobo. Meanwhile, the two pre-1900 courts at Warri and Abraka were upgraded, the former to a native council and the latter to a native court and both continued to function according to the power granted them. The Sapele minor court was converted to a native council with effect from October 10 1903, following the recommendation of a colonial official, Mr. Justice Menendez who toured the area for the purpose of inspection and reorganisation.⁴⁷

What is, however, significant is that two basic features trailed the colonial local government structure in this part of the Western Niger Delta up till 1916 and some decades ahead. In the first place, the colonial grassroots system only gave negligible consideration to inter-group relations in the implementation of its programmes and policies until there was serious protest by those groups which felt marginalised. The second was the inadequate nature of the native courts. The first factor was reflected in the membership composition of the Warri Native Council which started as an ordinary court in 1896.⁴⁸ It was apparently overlooked by the affected communities as it emanated from the maiden grassroots policies of the colonial government. But probably, the failure of the affected communities to protest against this and other initial attempts at marginalisation of some groups was wrongly interpreted by the colonial government to mean that such communities were comfortable with the new grassroots structure and thus no need for a review of the system. The native court of Frukama, mentioned above, had no Urhobo member, yet it had jurisdiction over a number of Urhobo towns from Jeremi Clan.

Even the native courts sited in selected Urhobo clans only satisfied the interest of few communities in the area for three reasons. In the first place, the indigenes of the clans who had to

travel what has been described as “prohibitive distances”⁴⁹ outside their territory in order to attend a court conceived the entire system as one designed to subject them to those clans in which the native courts were sited. In other words, the colonial officials were either not patient enough to understand the essential ingredients of Urhobo political institutions or deliberately ignored its segmentary republican nature in which each clan preserved with pride its distinctive political culture. This might be partly due to the need to reduce administrative cost or the burden of administrative work. It could also be the result of erroneously preconceived models derived from the political institutions of some other groups where such models were successful.⁵⁰

Thus, from the onset, the grassroots system failed to reconcile the aspirations of local institutions with those of top-down reforms. For instance, many of the thirty-two communities under the jurisdiction of the Agbarho native court were outside the confines of the clan. Moreover, Ewu, Iyede and Ughelli had to attend the Okpare court until they got their own courts. Part of the Jeremi clan was placed under the jurisdiction of Gbogidi court before a court was opened in Otu-Jeremi.⁵¹

Again, the colonial government made no serious effort to ensure that every community under the jurisdiction of a particular native court was represented in the membership composition of the court. This was the second reason why, at best, the native courts were viewed with gross dissatisfaction by many communities, because in pre-British days the Urhobo clan was self-sufficient in matters of justice and mode of government and its relationship with the others was based on terms of equality.⁵² This dissatisfaction was more glaring, however, among Urhobo settlements like the Uvbie Clan (Effurun), which had to attend the Warri Native Council often labelled “Itsekiri native court” by the Urhobo because of the nature of its membership

composition. This became a source of considerable tension between the Itsekiri and affected Urhobo communities in later years.⁵³

The third factor was the clause (Clause xii) in the Native Courts Proclamation of 1901 which stated that:

Where a Native Court is established in any district the civil and criminal jurisdiction of such court shall as respects natives be exclusive of all other native jurisdictions in such districts, and no jurisdiction shall be exercised in such district by any other native authority whatsoever.⁵⁴

This clause thus rendered traditional tribunals illegal. The judicial power which the village councils and the various age grades had been accustomed to was thus rendered null and void. The executive powers of the traditional institutions were equally rendered illegal, because, as mentioned above, the native courts were also empowered to perform legislative and executive functions at the grassroots level. With this clause, every constituted local authority without the consent of the government practically attracted utter suspicion. Communities with native courts, however, felt compensated in some ways. According to some sources, this more than any other factor made the implementation of the native courts proclamation in this area highly unpopular with majority of the people.⁵⁵

The insufficient nature of the native courts was, therefore, indisputable and there was need to increase their numbers even if the government was ready to adapt their operation to suit the prevailing trend in inter-group relations. The inadequacy of the native courts created two major problems. As mentioned above the native courts were too far from many communities that most people felt aggrieved over the distance they had to travel in order to settle disputes. The second was the problem of representation and legitimacy where a native court had jurisdiction over two or more clans. The only way to guarantee political legitimacy (that is acceptance by the

people) in such situation was to ensure that every clan was well represented in the membership composition of the native court serving it.

Even though the primary focus of indirect rule was to recognise the traditional rulers of each community, this was never taken seriously if at all it was given a thought. Rather, the prevailing policy was to pick a handful of traditional rulers from the headquarters of the clan the native court was sited. It was only in few cases that few traditional rulers were picked from neighbouring clans under the jurisdiction of such court. As if that was not enough, the membership of some native courts consisted of “foreigners” from neighbouring ethnic groups (e.g Itsekiri).⁵⁶ This was why most clans conceived the system as one designed to subordinate them either to the authority of the clan the native court was sited or impose upon them the political institutions of neighbouring ethnic groups.

For instance, the table below identifies five native courts in Urhoboland and the number of non-Urhobo in the membership composition of each court by 1905. Considering the

Table 3.1: Five Native Courts in Urhoboland and their Membership Composition

Native Court	No. of Urhobo	No. of Non-Urhobo	Total
Abraka-Okpara	11	6 Itsekiri	17
Agbarho (Ajareyube)	16	3 Itsekiri	19
Gbogidi	17	1 Itsekiri	18
Sapele	11	5 Itsekiri	16
Okpare	15	1 Ijaw	16

Source: Government Gazette, No. 8, March 1905, pp. 192-96

republican nature of Urhobo political institutions and the numerous number of communities in most clans, the native courts were too few to accommodate all those recognised by tradition as leaders. But a policy ensuring that all clans under the jurisdiction of a native court were well represented in such native court in addition to the exclusion of non-indigenes from the

membership would have boosted both political legitimacy and participation at the grassroots level and reduced grievances and conflicts to the barest minimum.

Some sources claim that efficient supervision was the decisive consideration in the siting of the native courts all over the country, thus accounting for their insufficient nature. According to an administrative officer the government was faced with a dilemma which was extremely difficult to resolve. On the one hand, it was considered utterly unsatisfactory by the government to set up courts that were not under frequent European supervision.⁵⁷ On the other hand, the agitation against taking disputes to native courts that were too far away from many communities could not be ignored. It was considered a difficult task, especially in a period when the colonial officials had no confidence in the ability of the traditional chiefs to perform their duties efficiently. In addition, it was a time when many of these chiefs were finding it difficult to adjust in trying to cope with a new political structure and a new approach to the implementation of the functions of government.⁵⁸

Perhaps, the establishment of sufficient native courts was not practicable in the early decades of the colonial regime. But appropriate representation of every clan in a native court among the Urhobo was obviously realistic. If this and other practicable approaches or remedies were hardly given a thought, then the claim that the provision of sufficient native courts was not pragmatic might well be conceived by the indigenes as a ruse. Nevertheless, the situation was still within control until 1917 when the government commenced the implementation of the 1916 Native Authority Ordinance. Until then, inter-group relations was not compounded, though strained while the truncated nature of political legitimacy and participation could still be rectified with ease.

Indeed, the earliest court members were among the most prominent indigenes of their respective Urhobo communities. They were men who occupied positions of authority in their towns and villages, among whom were Ogharisi of Ughelli, Fekanrurhobo of Oginibo, Asagba of Amukpe, Buluku of Oteri and Okpalefe of Mogba. For instance, Fekanrurhobo, was the son of a prominent traditional chief in the Ughienwwe clan. The father was also the *Odede-Ade*, that is the head of the Ade Court and Chieftaincy Institution, which is the highest traditional law court and chieftaincy body in Ughienwwe clan till date. Ogharisi was from the royal family of Ughelli. The *Ovie* (king) of Ughelli who reigned during the 1960s and 1970s was his son.⁵⁹ The sixteen court members appointed in Agbarho in 1900 were said to have been selected in the residence of the clan's head, the *Osivie*.⁶⁰

Therefore, in spite of the non-centralised and republican nature of Urhobo political institutions which made it rather complex compared to societies with centralised political system like their Itsekiri neighbours, the District Commissioners did make some efforts to select the genuine traditional leaders, at least, in communities which had some prior contact with colonial officials before the establishment of native courts. Among such communities were Abraka, Agbarho, Gbogidi, Okpara and Ughelli.⁶¹ It must be admitted, however, that there were among the early sets of court members people who were not in any way qualified to be there by the requirement of traditional political institutions of each clan. This was partly because the genuine leaders and title holders (Ehonvwonren, Odion and Ekpako) often tended to sit back and watch the development before committing themselves.⁶²

But the implementation of the 1916 Native Authority Ordinance resulting in the restructuring of the Warri Division in 1917 and the subsequent appointment of Chief Dogho Numa⁶³ as the paramount chief of the Warri Division had far reaching adverse effects on

grassroots administration among the Urhobo and even their immediate neighbours, especially in terms of political participation and inter-group relations.

The Implementation of the Native Authority Ordinance of 1916 and the Appointment of a Paramount Chief

The native courts were conceived as instruments of teaching the warrant chiefs the functioning of the government with regard to administration of justice, making of laws and implementation of programmes with the overall objective of developing the communities under their jurisdiction. The building of roads and “other works of public utility” were to be funded with the money realised from court fees and fines.⁶⁴

The courts were also charged with the development of trade, agriculture, education and social services within their respective territories. The detail of these responsibilities was contained in a formidable list of duties which some British officials often invoked in trying to justify the claim that the native court system, as part of the indirect rule structure, was meant to preserve the traditional political institutions of the peoples concerned. It has been observed that since “many of these officers knew little about the traditional system in the period before 1930, they were hardly in a position to know what to preserve.”⁶⁵ This statement might look rather causal at the time it was made considering the theme of that study. But significantly enough it summed up the impact of the appointment of a paramount chief in the Warri Division. This is partly because, as we shall see later part of this study, colonial officials later discovered that it was among the key mistakes of colonial local government policies in the area.

The first appointments under this native authority ordinance were made in 1917. By a gazette notice conferring on certain individuals the status of “Recognized Chiefs”, Chief Dogho

Numa was appointed second class chief and “native authority” for the entire Warri Division and was the only one honoured with such position in the Warri Province.⁶⁶ For one thing, the British could not find a single constituted authority accepted to all the Urhobo because of the nature of their political institutions. Secondly, accustomed to the idea of emir-type native authorities with a single paramount chief having jurisdiction over a large group of people, the colonial government paid little regard, in this situation, to the ethnic differences between the Urhobo, Isoko, Itsekiri and the Ijaw. Moreover, the presence of a man like Dogho Numa who the British rated as a personality with high integrity merely made the slip easier.

At this point there may be need to outline some of the assistance given to the British by Dogho that earned him this popularity. The first was the provision of thirty people to accompany a British representative, Gallwey, on a voyage through the creeks from the Niger Delta to Lagos in 1891.⁶⁷ Nana provided a large canoe for the journey, but refused to provide the crew on the grounds that his slaves would escape once they got to Lagos. He also won the deep gratitude of the British government during the Benin expeditions of 1896 and 1897. He warned the British officials, led by Consul Philips against their plan to visit Benin. Even though they refused to heed this warning, he still provided them with all the necessary assistance. He equipped the canoes that patrolled the creeks to pick up information and any survivors after the disaster experienced by the expedition.⁶⁸ Perhaps, nothing explains his personality by British rating better than the fact that he was a two-time proud winner of a British commemorative medal.

Finally, to the British, though other divisions of the Warri province had no paramount chief, the appointment of such a chief in the Warri Division, as the headquarters of the province, was crucial to the consolidation of the colonial administration in the province. It was also partly an effort to address clause 23 of the Native Court Ordinance of 1914. The clause made provision

for the creation of a native court of appeal headed by a president at the headquarters of each province.⁶⁹ Dogho was equally conceived to be an excellent candidate for this office.

At the same time, the British were aware of the social intercourse between the various groups, especially in terms of intermarriage which they felt provided a semblance of unity. In fact, the reason why the government was able to appease Urhobo communities who demanded for the removal of Itsekiri chiefs from their native courts before 1917 was that almost all the chiefs involved were married to Urhobo women and had even lived in the affected communities for some years as a result of their commercial ventures.⁷⁰

Dogho was, therefore, appointed to represent the interest of the various groups in terms of intergroup relations, political participation and otherwise and present their demands to the government strictly on merit. Dogho, however, failed to live up to expectation by the standard of the colonial government. To begin with, as indicated above, there were on the whole only a few non-Urhobo chiefs in Urhobo courts before 1917. At the same time, following agitations from the Urhobo, the colonial government came up with a policy to gradually withdraw these chiefs from Urhobo courts and Dogho was now expected to follow this policy strictly. But no sooner had he taken the oath of office than he saw himself representing only his personal interests and those of his cronies rather than the interest of the entire division. Therefore, contrary to the expectation of the Urhobo and even colonial officials, not only did he fail to withdraw non-indigenes from urhobo native courts, the number of Itsekiri chiefs in the Urhobo courts rather increased.

By 1920, the number of Itsekiri in the membership composition of Abraka, Okpara and Gbogidi courts increased at the expense of the indigenes, while Itsekiri chiefs were now found in newly created Urhobo native courts at Ewu, Uwherun, Ivorogbo and Okpare whose membership

originally consisted of only the Urhobo.⁷¹ Some Itsekiri chiefs were transferred to native courts in Urhoboland simply because they selfishly demanded for it in order to enhance their trading activities.⁷² The situation became so glaring and unplaced that colonial officials, particularly the District Officers (D.Os), had to send reports to the Resident requesting for his intervention.⁷³

In one of such cases which involved the transfer of an Itsekiri, Ekeke, to Okpare Native Court, the D.O. demanded the removal of Ekeke from the court and in his letter to the resident he wrote,

I cannot quite understand why he [Ekeke] should hold an official position as warranted Chief in a town which being composed entirely of Sobo he by no means represents.⁷⁴

Among others, the Uwherun people protested against the inclusion of a new Itsekiri, Chief Apo, on the membership list of their native court in 1920 and demanded for his immediate removal. This was conveyed to the Resident in a memorandum from the D.O.⁷⁵ The Itsekiri appointments were not only irregular, their representation was also out of proportion to their numbers. Thus, by 1930 the ratio of Itsekiri chiefs to Itsekiri settlers in Agbon clan was one to twenty-six, while the ratio of Urhobo chiefs to the Urhobo population of the same clan was one to five hundred and seventeen.⁷⁶ Put in another form, seven Itsekiri chiefs represented the 180 estimated Itsekiri migrants to the clan while, nine Urhobo chiefs represented the estimated population of 4,652 indigenes of the clan.

At this point, it must be mentioned that the presence of Itsekiri chiefs in pre-1917 Urhobo courts attracted negligible protests from the affected communities for three reasons. First, as explained above, most of the chiefs involved were married to Urhobo women and had even settled in those communities for a number of years. Secondly, these were among the results of implementation of maiden policies and programmes of the colonial government and it was felt that with time the situation would be corrected. In fact, this point was strongly employed by

colonial officials in trying to pacify the affected communities. Finally, most Urhobo communities also took into consideration the view of some colonial officials that in order to reduce the burden of administrative work of the latter, a few Itsekiri chiefs should be tentatively allowed in a number of native courts in Urhoboland to initiate Urhobo chiefs into the system since the system started earlier in Itsekiriland.⁷⁷

After some years, the same officials admitted that these chiefs had already served their purpose and their continued presence in Urhobo courts was nothing but a source of trouble.⁷⁸ Therefore, in the 1920s when these three factors had completely outlived their usefulness the colonial grassroots system headed by Chief Dogho in the Warri Division was bound to have considerable adverse effects on the nature of political participation among the Urhobo as other ethnic groups now saw Dogho as representing only Itsekiri interest. For the same reason, it compounded the pattern of inter-group relations among the ethnic groups in the Warri Division.

Yet, the anomalies and irregularities created by Dogho's career in the colonial local government system in the Western Niger Delta went far beyond this. As a paramount chief of the Division, the 1916 Native Authority Ordinance granted him the power to nominate chiefs and present them to the Resident for approval. This was the clause he abusively exploited in his bid to ensure that his supporters dominated all the native courts.⁷⁹

In accordance with clause 23 of the Native Courts Ordinance of 1914, a Native Court of Appeal was set up in Warri to serve the entire province and Dogho was also appointed the president. Appeals to this court, therefore, came from the entire Warri Province. Since the courts were also to act as legislative and executive arms of the government, the membership composition of such court of appeal was constitutionally required to reflect proportionately the

population of each ethnic group and sub-group in the province. But rather than follow this, people travelled long distances only to face a court with a preponderance of Itsekiri chiefs over Urhobo, Kwale, Ijaw, Isoko and Aboh, presided over by Dogho. Though there are no figures or data on the number of chiefs from each ethnic group, the picture is clear as most of the documents described the court as “predominantly Jekri” in composition, while some described it as “virtually an Itsekiri court”.⁸⁰

The unpopularity of the court is mentioned in almost every *intelligence report* on Urhobo communities during the 1920s.⁸¹ The Urhobo identified three shortcomings in their demand for a reform of the appeal court. The first was that Itsekiri chiefs outnumbered their Urhobo counterpart with an alarming difference, even though they were all nominated by Dogho. This implies that the Urhobo members of the court were so few that majority of Urhobo clans had no representation at all. The unrepresented clans had no confidence in the court and found it unnecessary to take their appeals there.⁸² Secondly, Urhobo communities located in the interior had considerable distances to travel in order to attend the appeal court. It was hardly worthwhile to travel what must have appeared a long journey in those days to attend a court which to the Urhobo could not guarantee fair trial by the standards of the time due to the nature of its composition.

With the membership composition of the court as explained above, the Urhobo felt, rightly or wrongly, that their own laws and customs were not adequately accommodated. What was mostly dreaded by the Urhobo was that they had no confidence in the ability of the court to give a fair verdict in cases involving Itsekiri and non-Itsekiri. This was more so because, on account of distance, the few non-Itsekiri members of the court who might in one way or the other act as a check and help to ensure fair trial were not always present.⁸³

The Warri Native Court of Appeal, was therefore a source of controversy and conflicts in different ways in the entire grassroots system. To some extent, both Urhobo and non-Urhobo communities having their own native courts could avoid this court of Appeal because it only served them as an appeal court. But this was not the case of Uvbie Clan (Effurun) and other Urhobo communities directly under the jurisdiction of the Appeal Court. They saw the operation of the court as oppressive and continued to demand for reform or the creation of their own native court.

In November 1923, the chiefs of Effurun clan, therefore, addressed a petition to the Resident with regard to this issue. They protested against the ratio of Urhobo chiefs to Itsekiri chiefs in the Warri Native Court of Appeal, especially with regard to the hearing of cases, an issue they described as perversion of justice.⁸⁴ According to them, it was autocratic “for one Urhobo chief to debate or argue three Itsekiri chiefs for justice, especially in a case Itsekiri v. Urhobo.”⁸⁵

The Effurun chiefs and elders demanded for a situation where two Urhobo chiefs could sit with two Itsekiri. According to them, if the above demand could not be granted different days of the week should be set apart for the hearing of Itsekiri and Urhobo cases to avoid conflict in the administration of justice. By this proposal Itsekiri chiefs would adjudicate over purely Itsekiri cases, while Urhobo litigants had their cases handled by their own chiefs.⁸⁶

Another petition was written by the Effurun people in 1924 because the first one was not given any significant attention. This was followed by a third one in 1926 before the Resident accepted a new arrangement by which two Itsekiri and two Urhobo chiefs were to form a quorum.⁸⁷ This was, however, a good gesture from the colonial grassroots authority and is among

the issues which demonstrated that colonial officials were gradually getting to understand the need to consider inter-group relations in policy formulation at the local government level.

Even if the Effurun people did not accept the offer with joy (as the D.O. reported)⁸⁸ it was partly because the granting of the request had taken longer time than expected and partly because there were new developments in the Division which they felt should be addressed by key players in the local government system without waiting for such petitions. The most crucial of these new developments was the question of the ownership of Warri land, which became a major issue in grassroots administration starting from the mid-1920s when the paramount Chief of the Warri Division was charged to court by the Itsekiri over the issue.⁸⁹ Though the Itsekiri lost the case they were granted a number of concessions in 1924 and the Urhobo and Ijaw inhabitants of Warri expected the government to be objective in its approach to this matter and therefore grant them entitlement to the rents accruing to their land without waiting for further legal actions.

Finally, there was the person and position of Dogho whose abuse of power had made the Urhobo prejudiced against the court. However, this point may not be fully understood until we have a complete portrait of Dogho's operation of the colonial grassroots system, particularly his administration of justice, dedication to service, and commitment to impartiality or otherwise.

Here again it must be stated that Dogho abused his office in different ways. In the process he only compounded the challenges of the colonial local government system by complicating the problem of inter-group relations and considerably reducing the average level of political participation. If he had the power to nominate chiefs (which he abused), he had no authority to remove or suspend them once they had been appointed. Suspension or termination of appointment was the sole prerogative of the Resident using power delegated to him by the

Governor. Yet, in 1920, Dogho attempted suspending two warrant chiefs, one at Patani Native Court and other at Evbreni Native Court. Apparently, there were personal grievances between him and these chiefs and he decided to use his position against them. When the D.O. saw the letter of suspension sent to the Patani chief through the court clerk, he strongly protested against Dogho's action by writing to the Resident:

Will you please... inform me if Chief Dore has authority to temporarily suspend chief without reference to yourself or the D.O... Even if Chief Dore has authority to suspend chiefs in this way I strongly object to his writing to the court clerks except through me and I beg to point out that if any trouble occurred through such orders I should have to enquire into and settle the disputes and not Chief Dore.⁹⁰

Again, in 1919, the D.O. got a report that Dogho was in the habit of using his position to obtain palm oil at 5 a puncheon from a number of Urhobo villages, while he sold the oil to the factories at 20 a puncheon. The D.O. sported the use of threat against the affected communities and therefore asked the Resident to advise him on the best way to curtail Dogho's excesses in this regard. In his reply, the Resident promised to warn him and reiterated that Dogho had no right of the sort, adding that he would lose his presidency of the Appeal Court if he persisted in such actions. This followed the occurrence of a similar incident at Evbreni.⁹¹ Dogho also used his position to compel the chiefs of Frukama Native Court to provide him 200 "sticks" in the same year for the building of his house, threatening to use his office in one way or the order to deal with them (e.g. by issuing summons on them) if they failed to comply.⁹²

Also significant is the fact that Dogho's corrupt practices and administrative ineptitude filtered down to the least level in the operation of the warrant chief institution around which the colonial local government system in the Western Niger Delta was structured up till the early years of the 1930s. For one thing, immediately Dogho assumed the office of a "paramount chief" the abuses in the warrant chief system multiplied. It became practically established that the

surest means to be appointed as warrant chief was to secure the support of Chief Dogho.⁹³ As mentioned above, what he had abusively exploited was the fact that the Resident was legally compelled to consult him before the approval of the appointment of any warrant chief.

In the process, Dogho often received canoe loads of presents from a number of prospective candidates in the entire Division to secure his support for their applications. Occasionally, some elders also tentatively sent a child or relation to Dogho to work for him following the established culture of pawning among the Urhobo, Isoko, Itsekiri and Western Ijaw. This might be combined with presents or used as an alternative to presents by candidates seeking the office of warrant chiefs or those who want Dogho to influence a case pending in court in their favour.⁹⁴ This practice continued until the creation of two other appeal courts and the adoption of some measures to curb the power and influence of Dogho, all in the first half of the 1920s.

However, before Dogho got his appointment in 1917, it was usual for the British political officers to ask the existing warrant chiefs to select new ones, thus avoiding the laborious process of seeking the opinion of the village elders as a whole. This was often abused as the warrant chiefs soon saw themselves as a class of “king makers” that could do and undo, collecting bribes from prospective candidates instead of observing established customs and traditions. During the “regime” of Dogho, this degenerated to a stage where a retiring chief recommended his brother or son to succeed him,⁹⁵ thus tending to render hereditary an office conferred on individuals on account of their age, title and personal abilities and attributes. However, the D.Os apparently accepted some of such recommendations without assessing their genuineness.⁹⁶ It must be mentioned at this point that the colonial government has been largely blamed for the political woes of Dogho’s career.⁹⁷

Those who placed much of the blame on the colonial government did so for three reasons. The first is the contention that Dogho's appointment to have jurisdiction over non-Itsekiri communities was a contradiction of the entire indirect rule principle of protecting the political institutions of each ethnic group without imposing the leaders of one group upon another. Even the D.Os in charge of the Warri Division were among the first to criticise the government and draw its attention to this. To cite just one example, Mr. Murphy, a D.O. wrote:

The proposal that Chief Dore should issue orders to Sobo chiefs appears to be the negation of the principles of Government through tribes and clans which administrative officers have recently been exhorted to carry out.⁹⁸

Secondly, the absence of effective checks and balances in the system has been raised as a major point against the colonial government in respect of Dogho's career.

Finally, but most important, is the fact that Chief Dogho was imposed on all the groups in the Warri Division. The portrait of Dogho by traditions from Urhobo and other ethnic groups as representing Itsekiri interest is not tenable. As we shall see below, the Itsekiri did as much as other ethnic groups to bring him down. This conception of the career of Dogho in Urhobo traditions must have evolved in later years when the Itsekiri started exaggerated portrait of their past glories with one faction painting Dogho as a "hero" who established Itsekiri "empire" that colonised all their neighbouring groups.⁹⁹ This portrait of Dogho was also based on the premise that he favoured more Itsekiri indigenes with the office of warrant chiefs at the expense of other ethnic groups. Dogho actually represented just a minority faction among the Itsekiri.¹⁰⁰

What made the difference in the distribution of the office of warrant chiefs was that other Itsekiri found it easier than non-Itsekiri to have access to the members of this faction who now surrounded him as his cronies. It is this faction that built up Dogho in wealth and social status.

The faction was initially headed by Dogho's father, Numa and was once described by H.L. Gallwey as "people on the left bank of the Benin River."¹⁰¹

Dogho was portrayed by tradition as a sycophant of the British and the role he played in the fall of Nana Olomu and the Benin expedition of 1897 made Urhobo traditions to describe him as a traitor. The veracity of these traditions is actually established by the available records.¹⁰² For instance, both the Urhobo and Itsekiri supported the British team of 1896 to Benin headed by Consul Phillip in terms of provision of carriers and a number of canoes because they expected it to be peaceful. But they discern the sinister motive behind the second expedition of 1897 and refused to be part of it in any way. In spite of this, in order to be in the good books of the colonial government Dogho gave the expedition total support and even aided the team with carriers and some canoes.¹⁰³

All the groups in the Warri Division were quite conversant with this background of Chief Dogho before he assumed the office of the paramount chief in 1917. The Itsekiri, like any other group, complied with the government because they had no option though they took some pride in the fact that Dogho was their kinsman. The Itsekiri were quite uncomfortable with the ineptitude of Dogho's administration, but what they dreaded most was that Dogho's office prevented them from reviving the office of their *Olu* (King).¹⁰⁴

In spite of the above criticisms, it must be admitted that the government faced a serious challenge, a challenge still noticeable in contemporary Nigerian politics and leadership crisis, namely that of leaders who refuse to think above sectional interests, conceiving leadership as an avenue for personal aggrandisement rather than a means of serving and developing the society. Admittedly, initially Dogho received no penalty for his actions. For instance, nothing significant

was done by the Resident to reprimand Dogho for his action over the cases of the Patani Chief and the 200 “sticks” mentioned above.¹⁰⁵

The same was true of previous ones. For instance, in the case of Apo, an Itsekiri who occupied the seat of a warrant chief in the Urhobo town of Uwherun, the Resident neither removed him nor issue Dogho a query apart from admitting that it was a mistake to have “Jekri as warrant chiefs in Sobo native courts.”¹⁰⁶ Despite protests of the Uwherun people conveyed to him in a memorandum from the D.O., he failed to address the issue objectively.

However, later developments in the colonial local government system in Urhoboland revealed that two reasons account for this initial reaction of the colonial government to Dogho’s inept administration. For one thing the Office of Dogho was not without some check. For instance, he had no authority to suspend a chief without the approval of the D.O. or Resident.¹⁰⁷ The Resident had overriding veto power over him and his subordinates. Therefore, the Resident could use his veto power to control Dogho’s actions. But more important is the fact that the government apparently expected Dogho to learn with time and live above abuse of office and parochialism. He was also expected to record improvement in general administrative acumen. When, by the 1920s, he was still found wanting in this respect considerable steps were taken by the government to whittle down the political power and influence he had enjoyed before then.

In the first place, due to numerous protests of the Urhobo and some other groups against the Warri Appeal Court, another appeal court was established in the province in 1923 in the Kwale Division.¹⁰⁸ It is significant to note that this division included the Urhobo clan of Agbon which spear-headed most of the protests against Dogho’s abuse of power. However, apart from the Kwale area itself, this appeal court was only meant to serve Sapele and few other communities. Assuring the members of Sapele Native Court on the exclusion of the indigenes of

the area from the Warri Appeal Court, the Resident wrote, "No appeals from Sapele Native Court are now allowed to be taken in Warri Appeal Court over which Dore dominates."¹⁰⁹

For the same reason, an Isoko Appeal Court was formally opened at Ase on December 3, 1926.¹¹⁰ The Isoko communities were in that year constituted into a sub-district under an Assistant District Officer (A.D.O), with headquarters at Ase on the Niger. Isoko clans had until then been neglected due to their distance from the headquarters at Warri.¹¹¹ With this development, people from the Urhobo communities of Uwherun and Evbreni started taking their appeals to Ase rather than Warri though the latter was more readily accessible.

But of utmost importance was the check on Dogho's control over the funds generated from renting out of Warri land to the British government. Most of the pieces of land given out to the British were in Ogbe-Ijaw and Adler's Town. A new decision was taken by the colonial government on the Warri Division after a court action against Dogho in June 1922 by a faction of the Itsekiri led by William Moore, claiming that some other people were also entitled to a share of the funds. However, Dogho won the case when it came up for hearing in April 1923 as the judge, Mr. Justice Webber stated that having won legal recognition as the head of the Itsekiri, Dogho was "the man with whom the Government would negotiate in all matters connected with the Jekri nation and their land".¹¹²

Nevertheless, the case had significant administrative repercussions which in turn had adverse effects on Dogho's career and influence. The colonial government discovered after the case that Dogho had neither spent the money on public utilities nor paid anything to those entitled to a share of it. In order to avoid future dissensions, the Lieutenant-Governor held a meeting with Itsekiri chiefs in November 1924 during which it was decided that Chief Dogho should be entitled to just one-sixth of the rent derived from Itsekiriland. The total fund realised

was about 306.¹¹³In the process, new arrangements were put in place in form of a check on Dogho's office with regard to the use of this fund. Dogho was to cough out the remaining five-sixths into a trust fund, while the money was banked in the name of the Resident. The money was to be used for public works and similar projects. Secondly, apart from Dogho, two other people, Ogbobine and Omagbemi, were appointed as trustees over the fund; that is, they were to act as a check on Dogho's power in the utilisation of any such funds. Finally, no expenditure could be incurred from the money without the approval of the Resident.¹¹⁴Though Dogho still retained his position as the paramount chief of the Division, the incident curtailed his overall power and influence.

Apparently there was also the need to extend this to other lands in the Warri metropolis upon which Dogho had collected rent from the government. Probably this was not done because the Urhobo and Ijaw aborigenes of Warri were yet to address this issue in their protests against the shortcomings of the colonial local government system.

Reacting to this one-sided arrangement, the Urhobo people of Agbassah took court action in 1926 to stop Dogho from collecting rent on land in the Agbassah area and to possibly refund what he had already collected. Referring to the suit of April 1923 handled by Mr Justice Webber and an appeal filed against it in 1924, the presiding judge, Justice Maxwell dismissed the case in favour of Dogho.¹¹⁵

However, what became known as the "Agbassah land case" remained a source of tension in grassroots administration until the 1970s.¹¹⁶The government did not see the need to give the Agbassah demand any special attention because there was no provision for compensation of the original owners of such lands despite the two suits of 1923 and 1926. The penalty for Dogho was to pay five-sixths of all the rent into a trust fund.

The Ijaw, however, did not record any protest even though a good number of the plots of land leased to the British government were located in their area, notably Ogbe-Ijaw, and were cited by Itsekiri chiefs in trying to gather enough evidence against Dogho. There is need to note that the Ijaw of Warri Division took this position in grassroots politics and the affairs of local government administration and rarely protested against being marginalised until the last quarter of the 20th century for reasons to be explained in the next chapter.¹¹⁷

As we shall see in the next chapter, they were sidelined by colonial local government authorities. But the refusal to address their demands resulted in accumulated grievances among members of the group by the last quarter of the 20th century with which other Western Ijaw felt seriously concerned partly because of the commercial and political significance of Warri as the largest commercial centre in the area.¹¹⁸ With the rise of ethnic nationalism in the Western Niger Delta and subsequent assurance among all subgroups of total support from their respective ethnic groups in case of external aggression, the Ijaw of the Western Niger Delta thus emerged the most militant and explosive group in their response to any form of marginalisation and exploitation since the last quarter of the 20th century. In addition, as we shall see later in the course of this study, the land factor in Warri metropolis became a crucial issue in inter-group relations until the 1970s because of the failure of the colonial grassroots system to amicably and objectively address the situation from the outset.

The colonial government also tried to improve on the level of political participation by taking some steps to rectify the warrant chiefs institution between 1919 and 1926. However, the effort was not enough to sanitise the situation since there were numerous complaints against these chiefs. There were frequent allegations of warrant chiefs aiding and abetting criminals, unlawful arrest, holding court at home and acceptance of bribes. In 1919, eight warrant chiefs

were suspended for one offence or the other. Three were later dismissed.¹¹⁹ One was also dismissed for being involved in stealing, while three were convicted for unlawful arrest.¹²⁰

In 1921, some warrant chiefs in Ewu were relieved of their office for their apparent involvement in murder. The evidence was, however, not strong enough for them to face death penalty.¹²¹ In 1926, the warrant chiefs of Agbon were served letters of query for aiding criminals and thereby creating tension in the Kwale Division. However, tradition claims the chiefs only supported those protesting against the shortcomings of the colonial local government system.¹²²

The colonial government found that the position of Dogho had also compounded inter-group relations as other groups conceived him as representing Itsekiri interest. The government efforts to rectify the situation yielded little or no result. The creation of two other appeal courts explained above was partly to promote cordial inter-group relations by pacifying the Urhobo, Isoko, Ijaw, and Ukwani. Nevertheless, the response of the government constituted just a palliative to the situation. For one thing, even though other groups conceived Dogho as representing Itsekiri interest they were quite aware of the fact that he was imposed upon them by the British, not the Itsekiri, and that he therefore derived his power from the colonial government.¹²³ The effort of the government to address the situation after sowing the seeds of complete discord was, therefore, not taken seriously by any group.

From the perspective of intergroup relations, the creation of the office of a paramount chief and the appointment of Chief Dogho for this position proved to be one of the greatest mistakes in the history of grassroots administration in the Western Niger Delta because the seeds of discord sown during the period continued to reverberate and literally constitute the foundation of explosive intergroup relations between the Urhobo, Itsekiri and Western Ijaw. The colonial

government discovered this by the second half of the 1920s and decided to make intergroup relations a key variable in its subsequent local government policies in the area.

The Policy of Native Administration and the Introduction of Taxation

By the last quarter of the 1920s, while colonial officials in charge of the Warri Division were still looking at the drawing board in a bid to minimise tensions associated with inter-group relations, a new local government policy tagged “Native Administration” was introduced from the top. The policy had taxation as just one aspect of its broad programme.¹²⁴

Native Administration as a policy was however, not officially announced until October, 1927, that is, after the taxation aspect of the policy had erupted into riots and crisis in the Warri Division and some other parts of the Warri Province.¹²⁵ Essentially, the policy empowers indigenous authorities to rule over their subjects and control the native treasuries into which was to be paid 50% of the tax revenue including court fees of each community. The fund was meant for the payment of salaries of the ruling authorities and their staff, and for the execution of local public works.¹²⁶

Apparently the entire scene was too complex and the colonial officials in charge of the Warri Division did not actually know where to start from when it came to implementation of the policy. The taxation aspect was heculian in outlook and they concluded the earlier the people were alerted and enlightened about it the better. Taxation had been introduced into Yorubaland and Benin Kingdom between 1914 and 1920 and it was not until 1927 that attempts were made to extend it to the Warri Province. The only reason for this delay was the impression that the communities in the area were unaccustomed to the idea of taxation before the colonial period.¹²⁷

In order to give administrative officers enough time to prepare the mind of the people, mobilize them, and also compile nominal rolls of all those who would be liable to pay tax, the implementation proper was postponed to 1928.¹²⁸ But the actual counting of the people after the passing of the law in April 1927 was welcomed with protests which resulted in riots before the end of the year.¹²⁹

All the groups in the Warri Division were involved in the riots. In the process, the Urhobo and Isoko tentatively entered into dialogue with the Itsekiri. This dialogue was initiated by the majority faction among the Itsekiri, with Eda Otuedon (also known as Otu-Edo) as its Chief spokesman. The faction was popularly known as the “Young Jekri Party”. It loathed the shortcomings of Dogho’s administration and left no stone unturned in trying to antagonise him. It was also its intention to exploit the dialogue against the office of Dogho and it has been opined that the total support given to the introduction of taxation by Dogho apparently accounted for its utter rejection by the faction.¹³⁰

Some sources claim that Otuedon had some connection with the Nigerian National Democratic Party (NNDP), formed by Herbert Macaulay, which encouraged him in the protest against direct taxation.¹³¹ After winning over the bulk of the Itsekiri, Eda Otuedon proceeded to canvass the support of the Urhobo who were even violently antagonistic to the introduction of taxation. This resulted in a joint meeting of the two ethnic groups at the end of July 1927 in Warri (precisely at Igbudu).

During the meeting, Otuedon found a companion in an Urhobo by name Oshue, a native of Obodo town. Oshue was described as fiery and eloquent and had the gift of an orator, probably a semi-demagogue.¹³² The agitation reached its peak during the months of August to October. In most Urhobo communities it took the form of hostility to the administrative officers

in addition to the rescue of prisoners from the hands of both the police and court messengers. There was also boycott of trade and the closure of native courts apart from the destruction of the property of warrant chiefs, court scribes and messengers, some of whom were also directly attacked. The ensuing chaos was such that police officers were sent to patrol Urhoboland during the last two months of 1927.¹³³

In the prevailing circumstances, the government was forced to take two steps. The first was to proffer solutions to the crisis. Secondly, for the first time effort was made to investigate the socio-political organisation of the people with a view to identifying where power ought to reside. It was also believed that from such investigation could emanate fresh remedies to the problem of tensions in intergroup relations.

As the government commenced its inquiry after the furore of 1927 in order to identify the essential ingredients of the traditional social, political and judicial institutions of the various groups in the division, the team of enquiry saw the need to demonstrate early enough the difference between the new and the old systems because of an observation that the people embraced the new system with keen interest. Just before the enquiry the people were made to understand the benefits of the new system and the difference between it and the old including the fact that taxation was just one aspect of this broad policy.¹³⁴

Consequently, some of the demands made by the people during the protests were considered for implementation even before the completion of the enquiry. One of the demands of the people during the riot was that the collection of tax should be handled by District Officers (D.Os) and not warrant chiefs. But the D.Os were too few to handle this task alone. As a result of this, even before the compilation of the *intelligence reports* through the enquiry, the council of

elders of each village in Urhoboland was being used to collect the tax in collaboration with the D.Os.¹³⁵

This actually marked the beginning of the transfer of authority from warrant chiefs to the traditional authorities in the Warri Division.¹³⁶ In fact, the title “Warrant Chief” was abolished in 1928 and in its place was substituted “court member”. Among the Urhobo and Isoko, some elders(*Ekpako*)of the village council were enlisted as court members to minimise friction between the native courts and the village traditional political institutions, which consisted chiefly of the village council and village assembly.¹³⁷

The new system made no provision for the office of a paramount chief in the Warri Division and thus the remnant of Dogho’s power and influence was almost completely eroded as the Itsekiri now exploited the opportunity to intensify the revival of their traditional monarchy, while the colonial government advised Dogho to withdraw from active service, but with pension as incentive. Even though Dogho was quite reluctant to accept the new arrangement, he remained, at best, a mere figure-head in the running of the local government until his death in 1932.¹³⁸

One implication of the new structure was emphasis on ethnic consideration. It was out of question to have chiefs from other ethnic groups in Urhobo courts and vice-versa. In fact, the new system insisted on scribes and court members being indigenes of their respective clans or communities.

Finally, the relation of the court clerks and messengers to the court members was re-examined because in the previous system(as explained above) many of them practically conceived themselves as masters rather than servants to court members. For instance, court clerks and messengers often felt they could only take orders from the D.O. and hence any order

from court members to them should pass through the D.O. It was, therefore, decided that the D.O. should have his own messengers as distinct from the court messengers.¹³⁹ The office clerks still remained responsible to the D.O., but he was made to understand the need to effectively cooperate with administrative officers and court members.

On the other hand, based on the *intelligence reports* compiled by various D.Os., the Resident came up in 1930 with what became known as “A Broad Scheme for the Reorganization of Warri Province on tribal lines.”¹⁴⁰ The reorganisation made provision for the creation of village and clan councils to serve as local authorities in Urhobo communities. The scheme also provided for the grouping of the local authorities into a higher body known as Native Administration including the restructuring of the entire province into new divisions along ethnic lines. In other words, no division should embrace more than one ethnic group.¹⁴¹

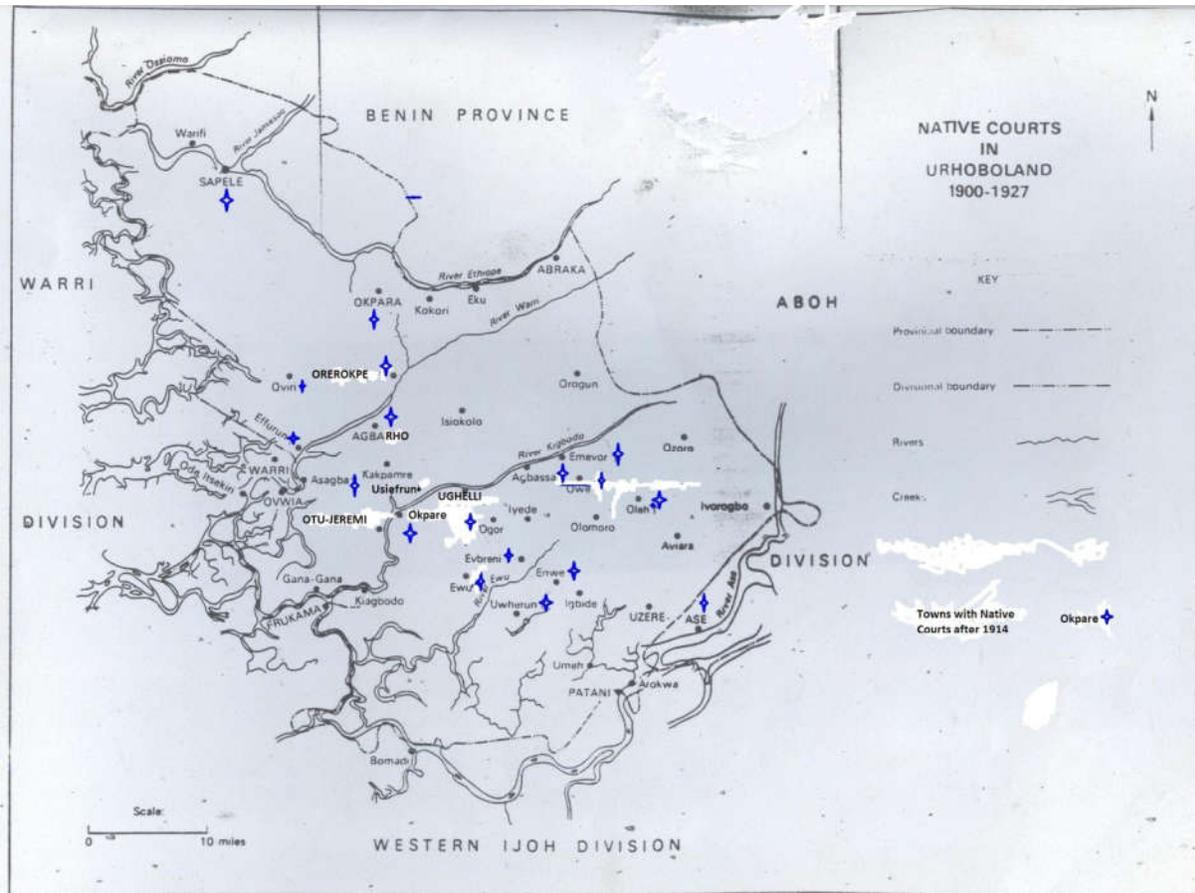
In December 1930, the Lieutenant Governor approved the scheme and the years 1931 to 1932 were spent drawing proposals based on the new scheme. This was primarily because the local government institution was unable to reach any satisfactory consensus between local peculiarities of the area and the aspirations of reforms from higher levels of government. Ironically enough, apart from the period of the reorganisation, 1932-1949 forming the theme of the next chapter, this turned out to be the pattern of local government administration in the area up till the local government crisis of 1997-1999 in Warri and its immediate environs.

Among the new proposals was a plan to split the Warri Division into two, namely, *Sobo* (Urhobo) Division and *Jekri-Sobo* Division. The Urhobo Division consisted of majority of the Urhobo and the entire Isoko. On the other hand, the *Jekri-Sobo* Division was made up of the Itsekiri and the Urhobo and Ijaw aborigines of Warri including five neighbouring Urhobo clans, namely, Agbon, Oghara, Okpe, Udu and Uvbie.¹⁴² Until the reorganisation, Agbon was under the

jurisdiction of kwale Division. However, in spite of the reorganisation, the Urhobo clans of Abraka and Orogun were placed under Aboh Division.

The structure of the *Jekri-Sobo* Division, in addition to the inclusion of the Urhobo clans of Abraka and Orogun in the Aboh Division, implies that the principle of creation of divisions along ethnic lines was not strictly adhered to. With such apparent contradiction, it was easy for groups which were not satisfied with the new arrangement to invoke the legal provisions of the reorganisation to backup their demands. Not surprisingly, most of these proposals were not implemented until 1934 due to a number of challenges, the major one being the controversy which trailed the proposed Jekri-Sobo Division. The details of these and the aftermath of the reorganisation era form the theme of the next chapter.

Native Courts in Urhoboland



Source: Developed by author from: Obaro Ikime, *Niger Delta Rivalry* (London: Longman Publishers, 1969)

ENDNOTES

1. For detail of British penetration of Urhoboland, see T. E. A. Salubi, “The Establishment of British Administration in the Urhobo Country”, *J.H.S.N.*, Vol. 1 No. 3, Dec. 1958
2. C.S.O. 26/2 File 11857, Vol. 1, Annual Report, Warri Province, 1923. The Warri Division was split into Urhobo Division and Jekri-Sobo Division in 1936. As a result of this, Agbon came under the jurisdiction of the latter. In 1938, the Jekri-Sobo Division was granted two native administrations, Western Urhobo Native Administration and Itsekiri Native Administrations. But Urhobo Division had only one native administration. In 1949, the Western Urhobo Native Administration was merged with the Urhobo Division, while the remnant of the Jekri-Sobo Division was renamed Warri Division. This was the structure until the 1950s local government reforms when the entire area was reconstituted into six councils—Western Urhobo District Council, Sapele Urban District Council, Central Urhobo District Council, Eastern Urhobo(Isoko) District Council, Warri Divisional Council and Warri Urban District Council. Following this arrangement, Abraka was placed under Western Urhobo District Council, while Orogun came under the jurisdiction of Central Urhobo District Council. See chapters five and six for subsequent ones up to the 1990s.
3. Cal. Prof. 10/2 Vol. 1, “Native Courts Proclamation, 1900” (No. 9 of 1900).
4. Obaro Ikime, *Niger Delta Rivalry: Itsekiri-Urhobo Relations and the Establishment of British Rule, 1884-1936* (London: Longman Publishers, 1969), 175
5. Ibid.
6. Obaro Ikime, *Niger Delta Rivalry*, 1969, 172-73; Cal. Prof. 10/2, Vol. 1 “Native Courts Proclamation 1900” (Clausex).
7. Colonial Office 588/2 “The Native Court Proclamation” (No. 7 of 1906) cited in Obaro Ikime, *Niger Delta Rivalry*, 1969, 172-73.
8. Ibid.
9. Ibid.
10. Ibid.
11. Oral Interview : Robert Oharisi, (80 yrs), Traditional Chief of Ughelli, Ovie’s Palace, Otovwodo Street, Ughelli Town, Dec. 2, 2013.
12. Ibid; The names of a number of these clerks are contained in: Government Gazettes, No. 2, February 28, 1903; Government Gazettes, No. 110, August 31, 1903

13. Oral Interview: Robert Oharisi (80 yrs) Southern Nigeria Government Gazette, No. 8, March 30, 1905, 195-96
14. Government Gazette: Vol. II, No. 18, 30 Sept. 1901, 361; Government Gazette: Vol. III, No. 6, April 30 1903, 122; Government Gazette: Vol. III, No. 15, Nov. 15, 1902 (Supplement), xxii
15. Also see, Obaro Ikime, "Chief Dogho: 'The Lugardian System in Warri' 1917-1932", *J.H.S.N*, 3no. 2 (Dec. 1965): 314-327.
16. This attitude of the court clerk in the area apparently started before 1914 with implementation of the Native Courts Proclamation of 1900 and 1901, because the District Commissioner of Warri reported in 1904, "I have had to remove the clerk of Bogidi and Aj Eyubi for various misdemeanours chiefly arising from his idea that he was a kind of Native Consul in these parts." —Supplement to Government Gazette, No. 10, June 1904, 187; Annual Report, Warri District, March Quarter 1904
17. War. Prof Paper, File 30/10, D.O. Warri, to Clerks, Native Courts Memo No. 512/5/1921; Ughelle Papers, File 43/11/1921, D.O. Warri to Clerks, Native Court, Jeremi, 12 November 1921; File 43/V/1921 D.O. Warri to Clerk, Ivorogbo Native Court.
18. See pages 91-93 for the nature of such corruption.
19. Obaro Ikime, "The Anti-tax Riots in Warri Province, 1927-28", *J.H.S.N* III, no. 3 (June 1967), 565.
20. Oral Interview: Frederick Obikoko (70 yrs), the Secretary of Oto-Udu Town in Udu Clan, 15 Dec, 2013
Robert Oharisi, (85 yrs).
21. Ughelle Papers, File 49/1922, A.D.O. to Resident, Warri, 26 Sept. 1922.
22. Ughelle Papers, File 93/1925, D.O. Warri to Resident, Memo of 9 Dec. 1925. (According to this document only the Paramount Chief was allowed to smoke in the court). Some lapses in the office of the court clerks are discussed here.
23. Obaro Ikime, *Niger Delta Rivalry*, 1969, 203
24. Ughelle Papers, File 33/1922, Handling Over Notes, Warri Division: H.G. Aveling (D.O.) to H.B. Butler (D.O.) 18 Dec. 1922.
25. For instance, in the case of the Warri Division, the D.Os. involvement helped the government to curtail abuse of power by the paramount chief. See p. 88
26. Ughelle Papers, File 28/1921, Handing over notes, Warri Division: B.G. Wood (D.O.) to H. Maddocks (A.D.O.) June 1921.

27. F.D. Lugard, *Notes for Political Officers* (Lagos:Government Press, 1914).
28. Ibid.
29. Ibid.
30. The Nigerian Gazette, Vol. IV, No. 45, 13 Sept., 1917 (Notice No. 104), 350-53; also see Colonial Office 656/2 The Native Authority Ordinance, 1916 (No. XIV of 1916), cited in Obaro Ikime, *Niger Delta Rivalry*, 1969, 191-92
31. Ibid.
32. Obaro Ikime, *Niger Delta Rivalry*, 1969, 168-169
33. Ibid.
34. Harold Bindloss, *In the Niger Country* (London, Edinburg: Penguin Books, 1898), 144-45
35. Ibid.
36. Ibid., 45
37. Gallwey's Report on his visit – Enclosure in Macdonald to F.O., No. 30, Dec. 12, 1891. Cited in Obaro Ikime, *Niger Delta Rivalry*, 1969, 128.
38. Ibid., 130
39. Ibid.
40. Cal. Prof. 8/2 Vol. 1 Report on the Benin District for Quarter ending, Dec. 31, 1894.
41. Southern Nigeria Government Gazette, No. 8, 30 March 1905, 192-95.
42. Obaro Ikime, 1969, 170.
43. T. E. A. Salubi, “The Establishment of British Administration in the Urhobo Country”, *J.H.S.N.* 1, no. 3 (Dec. 1958).
44. This is discussed below.
45. Southern Nigeria Government Gazette, No. 8, 30 March 1905, 192-95.
46. Ibid.

47. Ibid.
48. See pages 77 and 79-80
49. Obaro Ikime, *Niger Delta Rivalry*, 1969, 174
50. This was the dominant lapses in Igboland. It cannot therefore be completely ruled out from the Western Niger Delta situation.
51. Southern Nigeria Government Gazette, No. 8, 30 March 1905.
Obaro Ikime, 1969, 174
52. See Chapter 1 of this work & Onigu Otite, *The Urhobo People*(Ibadan: Shaneson C.I. Ltd, 2003)
53. Ughelle Papers, File 53/1924, Petition from Effurun Chiefs to Resident, Warri Province, 18th November 1923; also see pp. 30-31 of this study.
54. Colonial Office 588/1 “The Native Courts Proclamation 1900” cited in Obaro Ikime, 1969, 171
55. Ibid.
56. C.S.O. 26 File 27994: Intelligence Report on Iyede Clan, 10.
57. *Supplement to Government Gazette*, No 30, June 1904, 180; *Annual Report Western Division*, 1904 (Year Ending March, 31)
58. Ibid., also see, Obaro Ikime, *Niger Delta Rivalry*, 1969, 175
59. It is in fact significant to note that these personalities were among those who signed the earliest agreements and treaties with the British in Urhoboland. A list of personalities from the Western Niger Delta involved in these treaties and agreements could be found in: Southern Nigeria Government Gazette, No. 8, March 30, 1905, 195.
60. C.S.O. 26 File 27999, Agbadu clan Intelligence Report, 1900.
Tradition claims that this was not peculiar to Agbarho. Oral Interview: Eruohwo II, J.P., the Ovie (King) of Effurun(75yrs)- Dec. 3, 2013
61. Obaro Ikime, 1969, 177
62. Ibid.; Oral Interview : Eruohwo II, J.P., the Ovie (King) of Effurun(75yrs)
63. Obaro Ikime, “Chief Dogho: The Lugardian System in Warri 1917-1932” *J. H.S.N*, 1965 Vol. 3, No. 2

64. Colonial Reports No. 289 (C.d. 3-12): *Niger Coast Protectorate 1898-99*, 9-10
65. Obaro Ikime, *Niger Delta Rivalry*, 1969, 176
66. The Warri Province was made up of four divisions namely: Aboh, Kwale, Warri and Western Ijaw. Also see: *Nigeria Gazette*, Vol. iv, No. 45, 13th Sept. 1917. The Warri Division, as mentioned above, consisted of all the Urhobo (except Abraka, Agbon and Orogun Clans), Isoko, Itsekiri and the Ijaw Aborigines of Warri Township.
67. H. L. Gallway: "Journeys in the Benin Country" *Journal of the Royal Geographical Society* 1 (1893), 124
68. Obaro Ikime, "Chief Dogho: The Lugardian System in Warri 1917-1932" *J. H.S.N* 3, no. 2 (1965)
69. Ibid.
70. For intermarriage and social intercourse between the Urhobo and Itsekiri, see: M.O. Ashe, "Inter-group Relations and Local Government Administration in the Urhobo Division of Western Nigeria, 1934-1967". A Post-Graduate Seminar Paper, Department of History & Strategic Studies, University of Lagos, Akoka, 2008, 13-14
71. C.S.O. 26/2 File 11329/S.I. Resident, Warri, to Secretary, Southern Provinces, No. 3064/1909, 26th April 1919; Ughelle Papers, File 25/1919, Shelton (D.O. Warri) to Resident, Memo No. 230/1919, April 16, 1919.
72. Ibid.
73. Ughelle Papers, File 58/19, D.O. to Resident, May 14, 1920; Ughelle Paper, D.O. to Resident, Memo No. 349/1920, May 31, 1920.
74. Ughelle Papers, File 25/1919, Shelton (D.O. Warri) to Resident, Memo No. 230/1919, April 16, 1919.
75. Ughelle Papers, File 26/1919, D.O., Warri, to Resident, Memo No. 15/1920, & January 1920.
76. C.S.O 26 File 28903, Intelligence Report, Agbon Clan, 1930, 30
77. Ughelle Paper, File 96/1925, Annual Report, Warri Division, 1925
78. Ibid.

79. Majority of the documents on local government administration in the Warri Division during the first half of the 1920s have something on this e.g Ughelle Papers, Resident to D.O., Memo No. 330/1920, May 31, 1920.
80. C.S.O. 26 File 27630, Intelligence Report on Jeremi (Ughienvwe) Clan,1920; C.S.O. 26 File 21943, Intelligence Report on Ukpe Clan,1920.
81. Few examples in a file compiled in the 1920s are:
C.S.O. 26 File 28903 Intelligence Report on Agbon Clan.
File 20653 ” ” ” Ewu Clan.
File 26770 ” ” ” Olomu Clan.
File 39797 ” ” ” Udu Clan.
82. C.S.O. 26 File 27630, Intelligence Report, Jeremi Clan ; C.S.O. 26 File 27998, Intelligence Report, Evbreni Clan.
83. Ibid.
84. Ughelle Papers, File 53/1924, Petition from Effurun Chiefs to Resident, Warri Province, Nov. 18 1923.
85. Ibid.
86. Ibid.
87. Ughelle Papers, File 112/26, Annual Report, Warri Province, Nov. 18 1923.
88. Ibid.
89. See pages 97-98
90. Ughelle Papers, File 58/19, D.O. to Resident, May 14 1920; Ughelle Papers, D.O. to Resident, Memo No. 349/1920, May 31, 1920.
91. Ughelle Papers, Resident to D.O., Memo No 330/1920, May 31 1920.
On sale of palm oil to factory, see:
Ughelle Papers, File 58/19, D.O. to Resident, Memo No. 601/1919.
92. Ibid; Ughelle Papers, D.O. to Resident, Memo No. 15/58/19; The “sticks” refer to hardwood obtained from the coastal forests of the Western Niger Delta highly rated for roofing of houses.
93. Also see: Obaro Ikime, *Niger Delta Rivalry*, 1969, 198-199
94. Ibid.

95. A list of such recommendations could be found in Ughelle Papers, File 25/1919, Shelton to Resident, Memo No. 233/1919. 16th April, 1919.
96. Ibid.
97. Obaro Ikime, “Chief Dogho...” 1965,
98. Ughelle Papers, File 41/1921, Murphy to Resident, Memo, November 3, 1925.
99. See chapter 4, pages 142 & 148.
100. Also see Obaro Ikime, *Niger Delta Rivalry*, 1969, 186.
101. Ibid.
102. Ibid, 185-188; Alan Boisragon: *The Benin Massacre*, London, 1897, 56 cited in Obaro Ikime, *Niger Delta Rivalry*, 1969, 187; Cal. Prof. 10/3 Vol. 1 Gallwey’s comments on Sapele District Quarterly Report, September, 1900.
103. Ibid.
104. The result is that even as early as 1922, the Itsekiri strongly demonstrated their resentment against the position of Dogho. Some details could be found in the following documents:- C.S.O. 26/2 File 11857, Vol. V, Annual Report, Warri Province, 1927, 6; C.O.S. 26 File 09209, Annual Report, Warri Province, 1922; William Moore, *A History of the Itsekiri (Stockwell: Penguin Books, 1936), 161.*
105. See page 92 above.
106. Ughelle Papers, File 26/1919, D.O., Warri to Resident, Warri, Memo No. 15/1920, January 8, 1920
107. Obaro Ikime, “Chief Dogho: The Lugardian System in Warri 1917-1932” *J. H.S.N* 3, 3, no. 2 (1965); Ughelle Papers, File 58/19, D.O. to Resident, May 14 1920; Ughelle Papers, D.O. to Resident, Memo No. 349/1920, May 31, 1920.
108. C.S.O. 26/2 File 11857, Vol. 1 Annual Report, Warri Province, 1923.
109. Ibid.
110. Ughelle Papers, File 98/1929, Annual Report, Warri Division, 1926.
111. Ibid.;
Oral Interview: Frederick Obikoko (70yrs), Secretary of Oto-Udu Town, Udu Clan Dec. 15, 2013

112. William Moore, *A History of Itsekiri*, Stockwell, 1936, 161-162
113. C.S.O. 26/2 File 11857, Vol. 11, Annual Report, Warri Province, 1924
114. Ibid.
115. William Moore, 1936, 183-184; Ughelle Papers, File 96/125A, Annual Report, Warri Division, 1925.
116. This is discussed in chapter 5 under “Question of the Ownership of Warri Land”; also see Obaro Ikime, *Niger Delta Rivalry*, 1969, 215-216.
117. This is given more illustration in Chapters Four and Six.
118. Oral Interview: J.W.S. Ilavbare (80yrs) retired Secretary of the Ughelli Local Government Secretariat, Dec. 20, 2013; Emomine John & Okies Veeky, “Obasanjo Advices Against Separate Local Governments in Warri”, *The Urhobo Voice*, Vol. 6, No. 216, Sept. 29, 2003, Vol. 6, No. 216, 1, 11 & 19.
119. Ughelle Papers, File 68/1921, Annual Report, Warri Division, 1921; Ughelle Paper, File 26/1919, List of Warrant Chiefs Sentenced.
120. Ibid.
121. Ibid.
122. Ughelle Papers, File 68/1921, Annual Report, Warri Division, 1921.
123. Oral Interview: Robert Oharisi, (80 yrs), Traditional Chief of Ughelli, Ovie’s Palace, Otovwodo Street, Ughelli Town, Dec. 2, 2013; For alleged involvement of the warrant chiefs in criminal activities see: Kwale Papers, File K 10/1923, Letter From a group of night guards to D.O., Kwale; C.S.O. 26/2 File 11857, Vol. IV, Warri Province, Annual Report, 1926.
124. See Obaro Ikime, *Niger Delta Rivalry*, 1969, 219
125. Obaro Ikime, “The Anti-tax Riots in Warri Province, 1927-28”, *J.H.S.N.* III, no. 3 (June 1967, 557-559).
126. Ibid.;
War. Prof. 3/9 File 201/27, Annual Report, Warri Division, 1927, 2-3.
127. Ibid.
128. Obaro Ikime, “The Anti-tax Riots in Warri Province, 1927-28”, 1967, 557-559.

129. Obaro Ikime, *Niger Delta Rivalry*, 1969, 221.
130. Obaro Ikime, "The Anti-tax Riots in Warri Province, 1927-28", 1967; C.S.O. 26/2 File 11857 Vol. V, Annual Report Warri Province 1927, 8.
131. Obaro Ikime, "The Anti-tax Riots in Warri Province, 1927-28", 1967; C.S.O. 26/2 File 11857 Vol. V, Annual Report Warri Province 1927, 6.
132. See Obaro Ikime, *Niger Delta Rivalry*, 1969, 222.
133. C.S.O. 26 File 09098 Vol X, Chief Commissioner's Inspection Notes, Warri Province, 1939, 17.
134. Obaro Ikime, "The Anti-tax Riots in Warri Province, 1927-28", 1967
135. Obaro Ikime, *Niger Delta Rivalry*, 1969, 229; C.S.O. 26/2 File 11857 Vol. VI, Annual Report, Warri Province, 1928, 20-23.
136. Ibid.
137. Ibid.
138. Obaro Ikime, *Niger Delta Rivalry*, 1969, 231; C.S.O. 26/2, File 11857, Vol. VI, Annual Report, Warri Province, 1928, 20-25 & 39.
139. C.S.O. 26/2 File 11857 Vol. X, Annual Report, Warri Province, 1932, 10.
140. Ughelle Papers, File 64/1928, Warri Division–Political and Administrative Report for Quarter ending Sept. 30, 1929, 8.
141. C.S.O. 26, File 26767, A Broad Scheme for the Reorganization of Warri Province on tribal lines; C.S.O. 26/2, File 11857, Vol. VIII, Annual Report Warri Province, 1930.
(NB:- The report was only useful for grassroots administration while the Resident was to determine the breaking up of the province into divisions).
142. Ibid.

CHAPTER FOUR

THE REORGANISATION AND ITS AFTERMATH IN THE URHOBO DIVISION, 1934-1949

Origin of the Reorganisation, Introduction of Taxation and Creation of Local Councils

Reorganisation is a term used to describe the trends in colonial grassroots administration in the Warri Province from 1930 to the 1940s. There is tendency to attribute the reorganisation to the introduction of the Native Administration system and the subsequent anti-tax riots which erupted in the Warri Division partly due to the taxation aspect of the new grassroots system.

Yet, the origin of the reorganisation is rooted in the years before these two events, notably the native courts era. That is why some sources claim that, “in some respects, taxation was more the occasion than the real cause of the 1927 riots”¹. During the second half of the 1920s colonial officials discovered that the native court system was a complete failure in the Warri Division because the peculiarity of the area was not addressed. As explained in chapter three, the appointment of a paramount chief based on models adopted in the North proved to be a gross error.²This, coupled with the nature of the warrant chief institution (which imposed non-indigenes on some communities as their warrant chiefs) compounded the pattern of inter-group relations apart from its gross adverse effect on political participation.

Even colonial officials like Messrs Murphy, Shelton and E.R. Chadwick drew the attention of the government to the need to address the peculiarities of the Warri Division. At the same time they observed that the appointment of a paramount chief for the area constituted a wrong approach in the operation of the colonial local government system.³ Thus, the anti-tax riots were in a way an expression of the grievances of the people against the native courts system and warrant chiefs institution.

It is not surprising that government property was left intact during the riots. Court houses and rest houses and other public buildings were not destroyed. But warrant chiefs were assaulted, beaten and some of them had their property destroyed. In Uwherun, the warrant chiefs were assaulted and also compelled to pay a fine of 30 each for their role in the corrupt native court system.⁴ An Assistant District Officer (A.D.O) was also threatened and mobbed at Uwherun. At the same time, the car of Mr de la Mothe, a D.O. in charge of the Kwale Division, was damaged while Mr Swayne, A.D.O, Warri was mobbed at Agbarho. Prison gates were vandalised and prisoners set free in Agbarho, Otu-Ughienvwe, Oleh and Owe.⁵

In one of the events at Sapele, “so determined and dangerous” was the crowd that in their clash with a police officer he killed one Urhobo and wounded two. This occurred during the tour of the area on September 30, 1927 by a senior official of the government in connection with the effort to enlighten the people on the relevance of taxation. While addressing a large meeting in the town a policeman arrested a man attempting to create disturbance and the people reacted violently trying to rescue the man from the police.⁶The local agents of the government, notably the warrant chiefs, court scribes and messengers constituted

the primary objects of attack by the crowd.⁷ This was not just due to their apparent acceptance of the imposition of taxation without prior consultation with the people; it was even due more to their high-handedness and corrupt practices during the native courts era. Indeed, as we shall see in this chapter the Urhobo and Isoko responded positively to the payment of tax such that even the colonial government commended their achievement in this respect. The Itsekiri responded late because of their inability to resolve the factional conflicts over the agitation for the revival of their monarch.⁸

The role played by the introduction of taxation in what became known as the “Anti-Tax Riots” has therefore been exaggerated. However, a “sullen and suspicious” attitude was said to have trailed the response of the people as soon as the administrative officers commenced their propaganda tours in connection with the taxation clause of the Native Administration system.⁹ This implies that taxation acted as the immediate cause of the riots and to that extent it is significant. To some extent, the anti-tax riots impacted on government decisions and policies during the reorganisation era vis-à-vis the implementation of the Native Administration system. For instance, information gathered during the riots by administrative officers further convinced the government about the poor nature of political participation of the native courts era coupled with how the appointment of a paramount chief vis-à-vis the warrant chief institution compounded the nature of inter-group relations. Thus, in the Warri Division, the reorganisation was meant to address these two basic set-backs of the native courts period, while taxation could be regarded as a product of the newly implemented Native Administration system.

On the crucial issue of taxation, as pointed out in the last chapter the Warri Province and the provinces in the eastern part of the country were excluded from participating even between 1914 and 1920 when its success in the North encouraged its extension to Yorubaland and the

Benin Kingdom. As regards its extension to the Yoruba country and Benin Kingdom, it was argued that these two areas share some striking similarities with the “Fulani states” in terms of political culture since they possessed “paramount chiefs” apart from being accustomed to the payment of tribute and tolls to centralised and constituted authorities in their pre-colonial political institutions.

The danger of conflict and threat to a stable government meant that there was need to exercise some caution in the introduction of taxation. Therefore, the Warri Province and most of those in the East were left out due to their political culture since they neither had “paramount chiefs” nor accustomed to the idea of tribute. By 1927, however, the then Governor of Nigeria, Sir Graeme Thomson, felt the time was ripe enough for the extension of the system to these other provinces.¹⁰

As mentioned in the previous chapter, based on field reports compiled by the D.Os, the Resident came up in 1930 with what became known as “A Broad Scheme for the Reorganisation of the Warri Province on Tribal Lines”.¹¹The reorganisation era started with this scheme and therefore commenced as early as 1930, but did not face serious challenges until the formal approval of the proposed divisions in 1934. The reorganisation era extended to the late 1930s, while its impact lingered on up to 1949. It commenced with the overhauling of the administrative structure of the local government system partly through the setting up of local councils. This was followed by adjustment of geographical boundaries through the creation of new divisions.

Since much of this arrangement was derived from the survey of 1928-1930, there is need to look at this in some detail vis-à-vis the outcome of the events of 1934 and the immediate subsequent years. Based on this survey, the colonial government conceived the arrangement as a concrete one emanating from empirically verified facts, whereas some of the affected groups saw

it as an experiment or at best a tentative guiding framework to keep the system from total collapse, while looking at the drawing board for one acceptable to all key players.

The reorganisation started in Urhoboland with the fine-tuning of the key policies and programmes implemented following the field surveys. This was one of the major pre-occupations of the era up to 1936. Among these was the transition from the native courts to Native Administration by reorganising the village and clan councils as tentative local government units. It was hoped that after a number of years, these local councils “would see the need for a larger unit within which to operate and would on their own initiate ... a superior sub-tribal native authority”.¹² These local councils were rated and classified into different grades (B, C & D) based on their size and capability. Most village local councils were granted judicial powers of grade “D.” Few of them were rated as grade “C” court. On the other hand, most clan councils were rated as grade “B” court with only very few granted grade “C” judicial power.¹³ The Urhobo clans of Abraka and Orogun under other divisions and the entire Urhobo communities under the proposed *Jekri-Sobo* Division followed more or less the same pattern.

The duty of District Officers (D.Os.) in the new dispensation was also formally specified before 1934 as the local councils in each clan were placed under the supervision of District Officers (D.Os.). But the councils were charged to follow customs and tradition in the operation of the new grassroots system. Collection of tax was a key function of the Native Administration and was often used to assess the viability and otherwise of each local council.

Therefore, unlike the native courts period, the Native Administration system embraced the political institutions of every clan even up to the village level such that there was a multiplicity of courts-many of which had very limited powers and incapable of keeping proper records of proceedings.¹⁴For instance, Ughienvwe clan alone had a total of thirty-three courts. This single

difference was, however, enough for the people to conceive it as a new system. Indeed, it is said to have made the Urhobo very enthusiastic about the reorganisation. A significant proof of this was that all the Urhobo clans excelled in the collection of tax and this was the key yardstick for measuring the success of the new system.¹⁵ This has been observed as a factor which made the colonial government satisfied with the progress of the new local government system in Urhoboland from 1928-1936.¹⁶

The new system marked the beginning of a happy era for those communities whose litigants had to travel long distances in order to attend native courts in other towns. The new system emphasised their relative independence as distinct units apart from relieving them of this burden. Moreover, under the new system many people were to be actively involved in the running of the affairs of each native authority compared to the previous one where few warrant chiefs held each community to ransom. Finally, on the more material side the system provided employment for many more people in addition to a handful remuneration, partly due to the multiplicity of native councils, compared to the native court system that benefited just few warrant chiefs.¹⁷

From the point of view of efficiency, however, the administration was not comfortable with the numerous local councils in Urhoboland, compared to communities like Itsekiriland where such councils were reduced to the barest minimum because of their centralised political system. Nevertheless, the government had to tolerate these multiple councils for the first few years of the reorganisation due to three major reasons. In the first place, to retain the already established enthusiasm and continued co-operation of the Urhobo communities, it was considered expedient to give every village at this initial stage an opportunity to manage its affairs through its titled men, the age grades, and the elders.

Secondly, as the government yielded to the cry of each village for its own council, it was hoped that the village themselves would discover that it was in their interests to federate and form large units to enhance efficiency and general development. The fulfilment of this hope, however, started late in 1937 when the Ughienvwe clan regrouped its previous thirty-three local councils into only four.¹⁸ This example was copied by other clans in 1937 and 1938. Finally, the prompt and efficient collection of taxes convinced the District Officers that the new local government machinery was vigorous enough to produce expected results.

Before the regrouping of local councils into what was sometimes described as superior “sub-tribal native authority” subordinated to the Divisional Council there existed up to 1934 a Finance Committee made up of delegates from each clan including a number of educated individuals selected by the District Officer (D.O.).¹⁹ These delegates could be changed from meeting to meeting. The main duty of this Committee was to assist the D.O. to draw up estimates and plan public works like building of roads, bridges, wells and market stalls which were striking features of the reorganisation era and was actually one significant element that distinguished the Native Administration system from the native courts grassroots institution.

The introduction of taxation made all these possible and therefore gave the Native Administration grassroots system an innovatory outlook in Urhoboland, compared to the previous system of native courts. Recorded success of this nature in some places probably tend to justify the reaction of the Governor of Nigeria, Sir Graeme Thomson, when he said before the 1930s, “I think that the most important thing that has happened during my brief term of office is ... the extension of this system of Native Administration to the hitherto untaxed provinces of Southern Nigeria”.²⁰

The extension of taxation to the Warri Province in 1927 was apparently contradictory to previous policy of the colonial government which excluded the area from payment of tax. The previous policy was based on the absence of natural paramount chiefs coupled with non-collection of tribute in their traditional political institutions. The government, however, advanced two advantages in trying to justify what looked like a contradiction to some people. One of these was the observation that no progress could be made in government policy of educating the people and preparing them for self-government except there was enough fund; and that such fund could only be realised through direct taxation. Secondly, it was argued that if the government was to operate on the basis of merit and justice, direct taxation must be extended to the Warri Province and other similar untaxed provinces of the South in order to bring them in line with other parts of the country.²¹ It must be admitted that the relative innovatory outlook of the Native Administration grassroots system among the Urhobo and Isoko tended to justify this contention.

For instance, apart from feeder roads, in most cases the local government councils had to support government agencies at the federal level in the construction of roads. This is because villages and towns were mobilised by the local councils in collaboration with federal government agencies in charge of public works to enhance the building of roads. Most roads, especially at the local level, were built by requesting one village to cut a path to the next, with little reward in form of a stipend to the participants. The villagers merely followed the direction of the footpaths that earlier existed. These were only being made wide and it explains why most colonial roads were often winding. Where bridges had to be constructed experts from public works agencies had to step in to supervise their construction.²²

Obviously, the local government policies of the reorganisation era had their more practical side. A great deal of emphasis was placed on public works during the reorganisation

period as a means of demonstrating the benefits derivable from the Native Administration system. The government considered it necessary to convince the tax payer in a practical way that his money was being rationally and profitably utilised. Many clan councils embarked on the construction of roads and bridges. Some attention was also given to the building of market stalls and sinking of wells.²³ There was rapid development of a network of tracks and roads which, apart from connecting each clan to the other, linked the entire Urhobo country to the government centres at Warri and Sapele.

In 1932, the construction of the Ughelli-Warri motor road started through the joint effort of some local councils supported by the colonial government at the federal level.²⁴ By this year, the road system was developed enough for light motor-traffic to use the Ughelli-Obetim, Obetim-Warri, and Okpare-Emevo roads.²⁵ Thus, this renewed effort assiduously adopted by the local councils did not just complement maiden road construction programmes started during the years of British penetration. Rather, it was a more co-ordinated approach which replaced the previous one.

It must be admitted, however, that this policy started in Urhoboland as early as the 1900s with the Road and Creeks Ordinance of 1903²⁶ which gave the colonial government the right to engage the people for the purpose of road construction. For example, by 1911 Warri-Sapele road was completed through this means and as early as 1904 a road linked Gbogidi to Okpare, while another connecting Sapele to Ukwuani area was completed in 1906. The policy was apparently better utilised during the Native Administration era to develop the existing roads and increase the number of feeder roads without forced labour allegations against the local councils which trailed its application until the commencement of the new system.²⁷

The achievement of the local councils in this respect impacted positively on the expansion of European factories. European factories and trading concerns that had restricted their activities to the coastline in trying to tap the palm oil industry started setting up satellite offices and annexes in the nearby interior. It would appear that this was a major reason why the local government councils enjoyed massive support from the people in the construction of roads because this new development displaced the middlemen, notably the Itsekiri and some Ijaw, who until then got a better share of the profit from the palm oil trade. The Urhobo could now sell their palm produce directly to European trading companies.

With two roads linking Okpare, one from Emevo and the other from Ughelli, the town became the largest commercial centre in the eastern part of Urhoboland. However, its position as the confluence of the Kiagbodo river and the Kakpamre creek was equally significant in the emergence of the town as a commercial centre. This implies it was accessible by both land and water transport. Apart from Messrs John Holt and Co., both the African and Eastern Trading Corporation and the Niger Company expanded their factories and commercial activities at Okpare.²⁸ They, however, had their annexes in the area before the reorganisation.²⁹ Similarly, a German firm, the Dekage Trading Company, expanded its trading activities at Okan in Agbarho clan. For the same reason, some long established factories at Frukama and Ganagana in Ijawland started extending their trading activities to the Urhobo country.

Therefore, compared to the native courts period, the Native Administration era introduced a number of changes. When Dogho died in 1932, the Warri Native Court of Appeal was conveniently closed down and this completely, marked the end of any remnant of petitions and protests demanding for a reform of the court. The government decided to overhaul the structure and composition of the Appeal Courts in the former Warri Division and the entire

grassroots legal institution. For this reason, the Isoko Appeal Court at Ase was closed down in the same year.³⁰

However, no appeal courts were established in the Urhobo Division until 1936.³¹ Rather, appeal courts were created at the headquarters of some clans and each community was placed under the jurisdiction of the appeal court nearest to it. These courts were able to make up for the absence of a central appeal court. But it was felt that a superior appeal court was necessary because in some clan councils most of the members of the Appeal Court were also those who had heard the cases before they were brought up on appeal from the village councils.

Therefore, up to 1936 litigants were also allowed to appeal to the D.O and he was granted the right to hear the appeal or refer it back to the clan council based on his assessment of the issue at stake. At the end of 1936, an Urhobo-Isoko Appeal Court was set up. This court was to sit at Ughelli and at Oleh in rotation. Therefore, it was peripatetic in operation. This was in recognition of the reluctance of the Isoko to accept a joint appeal court with the Urhobo as it could involve frequent travelling to Ughelli.³² Even as early as 1931, the Isoko made their feelings known with regard to this issue when the government proposed the dissolution of the existing appeal courts in order to overhaul the system.³³ The Assistant District Officer (A.D.O) of Ase reported that the Isoko insisted on having separate Isoko Appeal Court. He also discovered through his personal field works that the masses would reject a joint appeal court except one sited in Isokoland.³⁴

In the reorganisation, the Urhobo saw the answer to a number of problems which had exercised their minds during the native courts period. For instance, the problem of having non-indigenes as court members which accompanied the warrant chief system became a thing of the past. As mentioned above, the Itsekiri were able to exploit it to dominate a number of Urhobo

native courts because at the initial stage colonial officials felt it would help Urhobo chiefs to understand the system faster since native courts were first opened in Itsekiriland.

Moreover, the proposed Urhobo Division with Ughelli as the headquarters proved to be of remarkable moral and psychological significance. This is because the Urhobo did not see the Warri Native Council with overwhelming proportion of Itsekiri chiefs at the expense of other groups as representing their interest. The Itsekiri had this advantage at the early stage of the colonial grassroots system because they were the first in the area to come in contact with Western influence and education. In particular, with the political career of Chief Dogho the Warri Council became closely associated with Itsekiri predominance.

Moreso, during this time, with routine office work to attend to in addition to road transport and communication that were in their infancy, the D.Os. were hardly in touch with the Urhobo communities and their aspirations except perhaps those that were close to Warri. Only occasional visits to native courts centres was all that could be attempted. In these circumstances the problems and demands of Urhobo communities could hardly be understood or sympathetically addressed. The result was that the portrait of the Urhobo by colonial officials was largely done through the spectacles of their Itsekiri neighbour with a consequent stereotype labelling - "bush", "uncivilized" and "backward".³⁵ According to P.C. Lloyd, the emergence of Dogho in the local government scene as a paramount chief largely worsened this situation.³⁶

With the new system, especially starting from 1933, it became possible for administrative officers resident in Ughelli to seek to know the truth about the Urhobo as an ethnic group. Therefore, the reorganisation and the establishment of divisional headquarters in Urhoboland enabled colonial officials to see the character and aspirations of the Urhobo in their proper perspective. Indeed, as we shall see below this was a major consideration when the Urhobo of

the Jekri-Sobo Division demanded for a separate local government headquarters in their own land.³⁷

As explained in the previous chapter, unlike the native courts period, the positions of both court clerks and messengers were defined. They were now to act as servants of the courts and therefore servants of the Elders-in-Council since these courts were more or less the same as the village and clan councils. In order to make this new arrangement a reality all previous court clerks and messengers had their appointments terminated during the inauguration of clan courts, though with compensation for most of them.³⁸

This meant the appointment of a new set of court scribes and each court was given free hand to appoint its own clerk. As a matter of principle, the new system only allowed each court to appoint clerks from the area under its jurisdiction. It allowed a former court clerk to be reappointed, but only by the court in charge of his community. This implies that “complete strangers” could not be appointed. In traditional Urhobo political system, the *Iko* served as messengers. This was revived partly because it was cost-effective, especially in the running of village and clan councils.³⁹ Unlike the native courts messengers the *Iko* were not engaged as full time workers. For this reason, they were only entitled to occasional allowance in form of bonus based on the number of cases handled. The result of this new development was that the previous court messengers were not eligible for reappointment.

Finally, the need to inculcate financial responsibility into the village and clan councils was also taken seriously if not considered crucial. This was primarily because the success achieved by these councils in the collection of tax convinced the administrative officers that the machinery for local government was not only productive but also well handled. Thus, sixty percent of the tax collected and forty percent of court process fees was given back to the local

authority of the community from which it had been collected. Apart from financing purely local public works, the money was to be used for the payment of allowances and salaries of both executive and judicial members of the council's staff. These councils were allowed to determine the actual appropriation and distribution of this money based on customs and traditions.⁴⁰

However, and as mentioned above, the payment of certain proportion of the proceeds from taxation and court fees into the native treasury of each council was a general policy of the Native Administration system and was first adopted in the North.⁴¹ In the Western Niger Delta, the policy was first implemented in communities whose councils recorded outstanding success in tax collection. For instance, even as late as 1938 the administrative officers were still reluctant to approve the adoption of the policy in Itsekiriland because the record of tax collection in the area was poor for reasons already explained above.⁴²

Overall, the Urhobo demand for “a separate ledger—a separate Native Treasury in which all the clerks and office boys will be purely Urhobo” was gradually coming into reality before 1940. Only the Urhobo under the Jekri-Sobo Division and Aboh Division could not get this demand fully actualised until the second half of the 1940s.

In the educational sector these local councils probably deserve the praises they received from colonial officials as contained in the records.⁴³ In these early years of Western education, however, the local councils only collaborated with the missionaries to enlighten the masses and encourage them to send their children to schools. The reorganisation era witnessed the establishment of new schools and the expansion of some old ones set up during the second half of the 1920s. But these schools were built by the Church Missionary Society (C.M.S), Roman Catholic Mission and the African Church. In 1934, the Rev. J.W. Welch, the C.M.S Supervisor of schools who established a school in Uwherun in 1928 decided to extend the C.M.S.

educational scheme to embrace other Urhobo communities.⁴⁴ By 1935, both the Catholic Mission and African Church already had various schools in Urhoboland, but still decided to follow the C.M.S example by expanding their horizon.⁴⁵

The major factor that actually aided the establishment of more schools during this era was that unlike the native court period the problem of acute shortage of qualified teachers was considerably reduced by the establishment of a Teacher Training College at Warri in the closing months of 1929, the period of transition from native courts to Native Administration system. The local government councils of the Warri Province were commended because they contributed much of the fund used to set up this institution.⁴⁶ In Urhoboland, the effort of the local councils also led to the opening of what was then known as Native Administration School in Ughelli in 1933. Two of such schools were also set up in 1934 in Agbarho and Ughienvwe respectively, with a plan to establish two others in subsequent years.⁴⁷ It must be admitted that these were the first set of schools ever established through the effort of local government in Urhoboland. All other schools belonged to the Christian missionaries.

Apparently, the local councils were also commended for their effort in this sector because for the first time the Urhobo were said to be on par with the Itsekiri in terms of the number of pupils in Warri and Sapele schools.⁴⁸ This indirectly implies that their enlightenment campaign had yielded significant results. This assessment was based on the 1936 figure of pupils in Government School Warri where the Urhobo and Itsekiri had a total of 157 and 155 pupils respectively out of a total of 389. In earlier years, the Itsekiri had majority of pupils in the Warri and Sapele schools and a significant number of their wards in other schools.⁴⁹ This was, therefore, a commendable improvement. On population ratio however, it did not put the Urhobo

on par with the Itsekiri considering the fact that the population of the latter could be regarded as a small fraction of that of the former.⁵⁰

Schools were opened in Warri and Sapele in 1902 and 1903 and most of the early pupils were Itsekiri.⁵¹ The primary reason was that colonial grassroots institutions and Western influence started earlier in Itsekiriland. In addition, missions and schools did not penetrate the larger part of Urhoboland until the 1920s. As a result, the Itsekiri held most of the clerical posts in this early period and even dominated most other activities in the then Warri Division during the 1920s.⁵² However, a study by P.C. Lloyd demonstrates that “this dominant role of the Itsekiri was increasingly contested by the Urhobo from the 1930s onwards as political consciousness and education developed among them”.⁵³

The veracity of this view is further established by the nature of the composition of the members of staff of the Urhobo Divisional Treasury formed on April 1, 1932 in preparation for the formal approval of the proposed Urhobo Divisional Council scheduled to resume duty in 1934. For the first time, all the candidates were indigenes of the area.⁵⁴ In the past, on account of educational qualification, majority of such officials were non-Urhobo. Therefore, by the second half of the 1930s Urhobo communities could supply all the personnel required by their Native Administration. The effort made by the native authorities in the educational sector was said to be a major contributing factor.⁵⁵

This Divisional Treasury worked hand-in-hand with the Finance Committee mentioned earlier.⁵⁶ In fact, the D.O. was made to co-ordinate the activities of the two bodies especially in the drawing up of estimates and planning of public works so that the members could learn from him. The overall aim was for the Committee to gradually develop into the nucleus of a divisional

council which could in later years take over from the D.O. in the proposed Urhobo Division and act as a superior authority.⁵⁷

As mentioned above, in spite of the proposal to create divisional councils there was significant emphasis on smaller units of grassroots administration and in Urhoboland the focus was therefore on the clan. The criticism against the councils at the clan level in their judicial capacity was that the large number of people involved tended to make a court sitting rather rowdy and often made unanimous decisions almost impossible.⁵⁸ Despite such shortcomings, it was noted that “for most part the elders perform their duties conscientiously and... local public opinion counteracts tendencies to biased judgements” arising from the large size of the bench.⁵⁹

Another criticism was in connection with the office of the newly appointed scribes whose activities produced badly kept records arising from their low standard of education. The policy of employing only indigenes to handle the affairs of each native authority led to the appointment of individuals with poor educational background. In fact, it was decided in 1930 that each clan should nominate individuals to be trained as clerks at the headquarters and then sent back to work in their respective clans of origin.⁶⁰ This is because the number of such indigenous personnel were grossly inadequate as some villages had no individual of such capacity. Despite this lapse, Captain Pender, the D.O. of Jekri-Sobo Division argued that it was better to have started in this way.⁶¹ These challenges were therefore conceived by all key players as inevitable stage in the new system.

Approval of Divisional Councils and Challenges Encountered

It was in the creation of divisions that the system faced explosive challenges that generated series of tensions and conflicts. In particular, it was in this area that the Itsekiri and a section of the

Urhobo saw it as an experiment. It all started when the Resident proposed the creation of a “Jekri-Sobo” Native Administration contrary to the overall programme of the reorganisation which advocates creation of divisions only along ethnic lines. This Native Administration would consist of all the Itsekiri and five Urhobo clans territorially close to Itsekiriland.

But this was not supposed to result in any controversy or conflict as the overall idea of creation of division along ethnic lines as the main focus of the reorganisation was not rigidly adhered to in some other parts of the province. For one thing, the Isoko were still merged with the Urhobo in the same division, though this may not be taken seriously as Isoko was designated a sub-group of the Urhobo until 1963.⁶² But the Abraka and Orogun clans of Urhoboland came under the jurisdiction of the Aboh Division. Agbon clan was excised from the Kwale Division to be merged with the proposed *Jekri-Sobo* Division.

The failure of these to attract any conflict or criticisms even though they were contrary to the original principles of the reorganisation implies that the origin of the controversies and conflicts that trailed the proposed *Jekri-Sobo* Division lies elsewhere. The simple answer is to be found in the previous grassroots policies of the colonial government, particularly the appointment of a paramount chief whose activities compounded the nature of inter-group relations.⁶³ As he was of Itsekiri origin, other groups, especially the Urhobo, Isoko, and Western Ijaw came to loath any grassroots policy placing them and the Itsekiri under the jurisdiction of the same local government authority. With such unfavourable atmosphere, the Itsekiri themselves were also not comfortable with such arrangements though they knew that they could not avoid it because of their relatively small population in addition to the interlocking nature of their settlements with those of the urhobo and Ijaw inhabitants of Warri.

Colonial officials themselves knew what was at stake and they had to mark out strategies that could convince the affected groups to accept the proposed Jekri-Sobo Division. Therefore, in his effort to justify what was apparently a contradiction to the original principles of the reorganisation coupled with the tension surrounding the proposed Jekri-Sobo division, the Resident argued that Itsekiri was a dying race and that it was possible to envisage the emergence of a “Jekri-Sobo sub-tribe” through a fusion of the Itsekiri with their immediate Urhobo neighbour.⁶⁴ He contended that the rate of inter-marriage between the two groups is comfortably high enough to achieve this.⁶⁵

The affected groups saw this as a pretext. First, if the concept of the Itsekiri as a “dying race” made any sense to the British colonial officials, it was meaningless to the Urhobo and Itsekiri since this was never true. Their identity as a separate and distinct people was not in any way erased or subdued by inter-marriage with the Urhobo.⁶⁶ Second, as mentioned above, British colonial policies during the operation of the native courts and warrant chief system had constantly made the Urhobo protest against being forced into the same political association with their Itsekiri neighbours, while the latter were themselves no more quite comfortable with such arrangements. Moreover, the Resident himself was quite aware that the privilege which the Itsekiri enjoyed over the Urhobo and Isoko before the reorganisation period had developed in the former an attitude that led to allegation of superiority complex and racial arrogance against them.⁶⁷

It is also claimed that the Resident “realized that in the meantime, the two peoples though socially intermixed were politically distinct” and that:

He hoped to preserve, out of respect for the feelings of the people and in keeping with the fundamentals of the new policy, a measure of this political distinctness, by giving the Urhobo separate local administrations while bringing them together with the Itsekiri under a common Native Administration. In this way the two peoples would learn

to co-operate in various activities and eventually develop into a single 'sub-tribe'.⁶⁸

The response of tradition to this was also disapproving.⁶⁹ In the first place, about thirty years of sharing the same legal and political institutions (the warrant chief era) had only compounded rather than improve the nature of inter-group relations. Secondly, this arrangement itself was believed to be one-sided since the recognition of "political distinctness" did not involve excision of some of the Itsekiri into a separate division.⁷⁰ Finally, tradition believes that sharing the same grassroots political institutions would not result in ethnic fusion if the affected groups considered such fusion anti-thetical to their individual group interest.

For one thing, even if the principle of reorganisation along ethnic lines jettisoned in some other parts of the province was to be strictly applied to pacify the affected groups of the Jekri-Sobo Division, it must be admitted that, practically its provision was not without limitations. For instance, it was almost practically impossible for the Ijaw aborigines of Warri to be merged with the Western Ijaw Division because of the weak nature of geographical contiguity between the two. At the same time, from the perspective of economic viability and funding, it was never pragmatic to constitute the Itsekiri into a separate Native Authority without the Urhobo and Ijaw aborigines of Warri as the entire former Warri Division was to be split into only two local governments. As mentioned earlier, by the 1952 census the Itsekiri were less than one-tenth of the combined Urhobo and Isoko population (Isoko was designated a sub-tribe of Urhobo until 1963). In fact, the Urhobo clan of Okpe alone (though the largest of the twenty-two clans) had exactly the same population with the Itsekiri.⁷¹ Moreover, by the 1963 census the entire population of the Ijaw and Urhobo aborigines of Warri combined with all the Itsekiri was just only about one-sixth of the population of the rest of the Urhobo clans merged with the Isoko.⁷²

Despite the inclusion of two Urhobo clans in Aboh Division, It automatically follows or implies that the problem of population imbalance between the proposed *Sobo* and *Jekri-Sobo* Divisions coupled with that of viability was hardly solved if one of them was to consist of just the Itsekiri combined with the Ijaw and Urhobo indigenous inhabitants of Warri. The implication was that the other would have, at least, three-quarters of the entire population that ought to be roughly shared into two equal parts partly because of the need to address the question of economic viability of each local government. Most colonial officials must have, therefore, conceived the Warri Division situation as a unique one that must be handled differently. There appeared to be a puzzle in the effort to resolve the population imbalance vis-à-vis the demand of each ethnic group.

It was concluded that with only two local governments for the entire former Warri Division, the demand of individual groups would never be met. There was at least the need to pay more attention to the problems of viability of each local government coupled with population imbalance by merging the Itsekiri and the Ijaw-Urhobo aborigines of Warri with some other Urhobo communities. In other words, since none of the groups could have its demand accommodated, to avoid addressing the problem from this perspective would amount to losing from both ends.

Before the 1930s ignorance of the terrain was among the factors why the colonial government could not respond to the prevailing trend in inter-group relations. For instance, the predominance of Itsekiri indigenes in the early Warri Native Court of Appeal and District Council was partly due to poor knowledge of the terrain and ethnic composition of the area.⁷³ By the 1930s the issue of ignorance was out of the question. To portray the Itsekiri as a “dying race”

was akin to ignorance. The only obvious reason for creating a *Jekri-Sobo* Division amidst a tense inter-ethnic relation prone to conflicts was financial over-cautiousness.

In this situation the best option would have been to create three divisions so that the three groups, Isoko, Itsekiri, and Urhobo would each be entitled to one. However, considering the relative small size of the Itsekiri at that time, the Ijaw and Urhobo aborigenes of Warri must be merged with them to form a single division. It was even prudent to create four so that the Urhobo could have two since their population was over three times that of the Isoko and over five times that of the Itsekiri.⁷⁴

Since the colonial government did not find it feasible to alter the original arrangement of creating just two divisions – *Sobo* (Urhobo) Division and *Jekri-Sobo* Division –in spite of the protest it attracted, the native authority system of the reorganisation era in Urhoboland gradually degenerated into tensions accompanied with some conflicts. This is because by 1934, the year both divisions were formally approved, tension and conflicts were not only recorded in the Jekri-Sobo Division, they also had noticeable effect on the Urhobo Division. As mentioned in the last page of Chapter Three, the Urhobo Division consisted of majority of the Urhobo and the entire Isoko people, while the *Jekri-Sobo* Division consisted of the Itsekiri in addition to the Ijaw and Urhobo indigenes of Warri and the neighbouring Urhobo clans of Uvbie, Agbon, Udu, Okpe and Oghara.⁷⁵

Colonial records on the former Warri Province up to the 1940s are replete with reports of these conflicts. But since the primary focus of this work is on local government administration, only those relevant to the development of grassroots institution will be analysed. The Native Administration system commenced peacefully in both divisions notwithstanding the earlier protest against the proposed *Jekri-Sobo* Division. In any case, the inclusion of the Abraka and

Orogun clans in the Aboh Division meant that the original principle of the reorganisation must not be over emphasised. But the approach of colonial officials, notably the Resident of the Warri province, to disparity in the rate of progress recorded in both divisions was literally, though indirectly, responsible for the revival of conflict.

Perhaps, some groups were occasionally harangued by comparing them with those whose rate of progress was faster in terms of responding to the demands of the colonial master. This was the case of the Urhobo versus their Itsekiri neighbours. As mentioned above, the Urhobo were commended by colonial officials for excelling in collection of taxes, the key yardstick for measuring the success of each group in the new system. But the Itsekiri were rather slow in this regard. Reacting to this, the Resident not only accused them of slowing down the pace of progress in Jekri-Sobo Division during this era,⁷⁶ he also created an aura of puzzle among Itsekiri leaders and elders in 1931 by criticising them and drawing their attention to the commendable rate of progress, especially in collection of tax, among not only the Urhobo of the Urhobo Division but even those of the Jekri-Sobo Division.⁷⁷

This approach was first adopted in March 1931 during a visit of the Lieutenant Governor to Warri partly to have a talk with each of the major groups. In a meeting held that month with Itsekiri Chiefs and Elders, the Resident, apparently speaking with unplaced anger, warned the Itsekiri and accused them of factiousness at council meetings and their inability to work together and maintain a firm hold over their people. While comparing their rate of progress in the new native authority system with that of the Urhobo and Isoko, he contended that the outstanding progress recorded by these latter two groups was solely through their own effort and that “the Jekris must realize that being in the minority they cannot hope to take the lead in a combined Jekri-Sobo Native Administration except on the score of merit.”⁷⁸

The Lieutenant Governor's short speech on the situation was more or less a reappraisal of the Resident's talk. After recalling the period of relative isolation of the Urhobo from Western influence which placed them in a disadvantageous position and gave the Itsekiri an edge, he said:

...Now times have changed and the Sobos have come forward. However hard it is to realize, the Jekris must understand that Sobos cannot be kept back.⁷⁹

Yet, British colonial policies were primarily responsible for the slow response of the Itsekiri to the reorganisation. As mentioned above, the appointment of Chief Dogho Numa as the paramount chief of the Itsekiri and the entire Warri Division up to 1932 apparently made him a replacement for the *Olu* of Itsekiri. After ten years, the Itsekiri became restless and impatient about the situation and were split into rival groups on account of this. Only a minority group supported Chief Dogho Numa. The two dominant groups, one led by Eda Etuadon and the other by William Moore and Chief Denedo, were not only in support of the appointment of *Olu*, but were ready to do everything they could to antagonise Chief Dogho. In June 1922, the group led by William Moore and Chief Denedo liased with members of the Itsekiri Royal Dynasty (Olu Akengbuwa family) to charge Chief Dogho Numa to court, challenging his right to lease out the land in Warri to the British and receive the rent.⁸⁰ Though Chief Dogho Numa won the case in 1923, the circumstances surrounding it compelled the British to grant some concessions to the rival groups which seriously eroded his power.⁸¹

What is mostly significant here is that these rivalries and dissensions reached their peak during the first phase of the reorganisation period 1930-1934 when the Itsekiri mostly needed a central figure they could rally around to compete effectively with other groups. Obviously Chief Dogho Numa could not fill this position even before his death in September 1932 because he did not enjoy majority support from the Itsekiri. The Itsekiri only managed to start sinking their differences after the death of Chief Dogho. But it took over three years from that date for the

rival groups to reach a concensus on the appointment of a new monarch. Consequently, the new *Olu* was not appointed until 1936.

Therefore, the Itsekiri response to the reorganisation was bound to be slow. It is not surprising, for instance, that in 1933 the colonial government still had to think of how to make the proposed Jekri-Sobo Divisional Council function effectively as the Itsekiri response to government policies, especially collection of taxes was still rather slow compared to the Urhobo.⁸²

Meanwhile, citing the rate of progress in the operation of the native authority system among the Urhobo in assessment of the “stagnancy” of the system in Itsekiriland constituted a serious challenge to the Itsekiri. Moreover, the concluding remarks of both the Resident and Lieutenant Governor gave the Itsekiri much food for thought. This is because since the Urhobo had already got a separate division, the Itsekiri expected to take the lead in the Jekri-Sobo Division. In fact, it is obvious from both tradition and colonial records that the Itsekiri would only accept the new arrangement on such grounds. Thus, in one of the D.O.’s Reports to the secretary to the Government, in 1932, he wrote:

The Jekri desire such a Native Administration but upon the old basis of Jekri predominance. The Sobos at present do not.⁸³

In the explosive and compounded inter-group relations scene of the post-native court period, the Resident concluding remarks proved too delicate for the political situation vis-à-vis the newly constituted grassroots institution as the Itsekiri read deep meaning into it and were also absolutely conscious of the fact that their “rivals” would be quite excited at the remarks and even use it against them in later development. One of their reactions during and after the meeting was to recall their past achievement and “glories” in their effort to demonstrate that they were still a

vigorous progressive people, trying to convince the Resident that with time they would live up to expectation in the Native Administration system.

But they over-bloated it by making exaggerated claims which almost involved an assertion of dominion over some other groups, particularly the Urhobo, in times past.⁸⁴ In this way, the meeting sowed seeds of tension and conflict in the Jekri-Sobo Division, with far reaching consequences on the new system of grassroots administration. Despite the apparent efforts made to placate offended groups by the end of the exercise, the five Urhobo clans in the Jekri-Sobo Division reacted, though diplomatically, by demanding for a break-up of the Division.⁸⁵ The other Urhobo communities decided to study the situation more carefully before deciding on the next line of action partly because they could not have access to the written copy of the speech delivered by the Itsekiri chiefs to make it legally tenable.

The situation was, therefore, within control until 1934 when an article was published in the *Daily Times* of Wednesday June 13 that year. It was an anonymous article which analysed rumours about a proposal to install the “Olu of Jekriland.”⁸⁶ But it contained some statements on the Urhobo, most of which lacked any element of historical credibility. It is, therefore, not surprising when the Urhobo declared them as objectionable and defamatory. Among others, the writer claimed that along the borders of the Itsekiri people “lived the Sobos, a hardy people, who served for several years in the capacity of slaves to their Itsekiri and Benin Masters.” As if that was not enough, the article described Chief Dogho Numa as a recognised “Ruler of the Itsekiris and Sobos” with a portrait trying to give the impression of the existence of an Itsekiri empire during the career of Dogho that colonised Urhoboland.⁸⁷ In a seemingly effort to commend the rate of progress made in Urhoboland, he added that relatively within “few years of their emancipation” the Urhobo had not only gained conspicuous recognition in the affairs of this

country but has also made themselves a force to reckon with in commercial circles and local government administration through their inclination to hardwork. According to the article, the Itsekiri's plan to resuscitate the office of their King was due to the progress recorded by the Urhobo.

The Urhobo, however, concluded that the article was inspired and sponsored by an Itsekiri faction or agency as it tends to confirm the undocumented speech of 1931.⁸⁸ Whether this conclusion was true or not the article was rather undiplomatic and erratic considering the fact that all key players, including the newspaper management were aware of the explosive nature of inter-group relations in the area. The Urhobo were bound to resent the implication of a number of statements in the article.

The Urhobo reacted immediately in two ways. In the first place, the validity of a number of the issues discussed in the article was challenged in the same newspaper on June 19 under the name "Pro Patria". This was accompanied by sending a copy of the article to the Resident coupled with an arrangement to charge the newspaper to court partly with the aim of identifying both the writer and the actual sponsor of the article.⁸⁹

The Resident intervened to appease the Urhobo. The Resident tried to resolve the issue in his office and persuaded Urhobo leaders and elders not to go further, in particular to leave out the proposed legal action. According to E.K. Bork, the position of the Resident as the head of the province and the power attached to this office were among the key factors that made the Urhobo accept the suggestion.

But this final decision has its own implication. The claim among the Urhobo that the article was sponsored by the Itsekiri is at best an allegation. Only the *Daily Times* could be held responsible for this since any other individual or group could have sponsored it depending on

what the sponsor intended to achieve through it. It must be recalled that it was the colonial period when *divide and rule* was a major instrument of government and politics. Even the government could sponsor such an article if it was felt that unity between the affected groups was likely to produce results antithetical to overall interests of government in the area.

But naturally, neither the Urhobo nor the Itsekiri, who denied the allegation, could perceive the issue from this perspective. However, the Itsekiri could be said to be somehow intransigent in their approach to the situation. As we shall see below, the Itsekiri repeated statements akin to the content of this article during the installation of their Olu in 1936,⁹⁰ a factor that opened up healed wounds and made the Urhobo even in later years to contend that the article was sponsored by an Itsekiri faction.

Meanwhile, following the newspaper saga each side formed a united front with confrontational attitudes. For the first time, the five Urhobo clans (Okpe, Oghara, Agbon, Uvbie and Udu) belonging to the Jekri-Sobo Division formed what became known as the Urhobo General Council, with the support of other Urhobo, following a meeting at Orerokpe on July 17, 1934. This Council which pledged to uphold the rights and pride of the Urhobo people⁹¹ held regular meetings and later metamorphosed into what is today known as the Urhobo Progressive Union (UPU).

Before 1934, there were only pockets of resistance against the proposed Jekri-Sobo Division expressed by individual sub-groups or clans. For instance, in 1932, the D.O. in charge of Sapele recorded the reluctance of the Okpe and Oghara people to support the creation of this division.⁹² This was intensified by a series of land disputes between the Okpe and Itsekiri over the ownership of Sapele land which the D.O. felt could hardly be resolved without the law

court.⁹³ In the same year, the Urhobo of Udu clan expressed their resentment against being placed under the jurisdiction of the Jekri-Sobo Division.⁹⁴

Such pockets of protests were easy to address and might even be ignored. But the character and dimension of the situation after 1934 compelled policy formulators to give the issue of Jekri-Sobo Division a second thought. The Urhobo demand for separation became more insistent. This time around, the five clans requested that while the government was looking at the drawing board to sort out the required formula for splitting up the division, an independent native treasury should be established for them. In other words, there would be two native treasuries of the same status in the division, one to finance their projects and the other to take care of the rest of the division.⁹⁵ Reporting the magnitude of tension and state of events in 1935, the Resident wrote that “relations between the Sobos and the Jekris” were deteriorating rather than improving, while “the Sobos are growing more insistent in their requests for control of their own funds, and for the establishment of a native treasury on their own land.”⁹⁶

For one thing, an independent treasury at the headquarters of these groups, Oorerokpe, would compel the D.O. to interact more closely with the leaders of the area. In this way, he would have a better understanding of the problem and character of the group. Apart from this, three other probable reasons account for the demand for an independent treasury by these Urhobo clans. Firstly, it would enable them run their grassroots affairs without too much involvement of other groups. Secondly, much of the fund realised was used to develop Warri, the headquarters. Moreover, the revenue they realised through tax could be more than what was realised from the rest part of the division since, as mentioned above, the Itsekiri were not organised enough to achieve efficient collection of tax compared to the Urhobo.

In a petition written by these clans to the Chief Commissioner in 1936, they stated categorically that the creation of such a treasury was the only means of ensuring that their money was not used to pay the *Olu* and finance projects outside their communities,⁹⁷ particularly those in Itsekiriland. When an Itsekiri Native Treasury was to be created in 1937, the D.O in charge could not recommend the Itsekiri Council to handle it because he felt that since 1928 the Itsekiri had neither been able to demonstrate enough financial discipline nor record commendable progress in revenue generation through tax collection to be entrusted with control of part of their own revenue.⁹⁸

Therefore, the issue of separation was raised in 1935 when the Acting Lieutenant-Governor, W.E. Hunt visited Orerokpe, on a tour of inspection, to hold meeting with the Okpe people. The Lieutenant-Governor said that he had no objection to the demand but the government was still looking at the drawing board in order to come out with a scheme acceptable to both the Urhobo and Itsekiri.⁹⁹

Paradoxically, however, the Itsekiri were not in support of separation. Thus when the Acting Lieutenant-Governor held meeting with Itsekiri chiefs in the same year, 1935 and raised the issue of splitting the Jekri-Sobo Division into two, explaining that he had received a petition from the Okpe people demanding for such separation, the Itsekiri reaction was contrary to the theme of this petition. Even the colonial officials could only speculate in their effort to explain this contradiction. Thus commenting on this, Mr Hunt said:

The objection is more sentimental than anything else as the two sub tribes are to nearly all intents and purposes separate already. But the Jekris seem still to entertain the idea that with the appointment of an *Olu* they will regain such suzerainty over the Sobo as they claim to have exercised ... over many of the Sobos on the river banks in the halcyon days of Benin supremacy some 50 years ago.¹⁰⁰

One writer rejects this explanation arguing that:

The Itsekiri objection to separation had become one of very real practical politics. Various developments consequent on the British penetration of the Urhobo hinterland had already begun to undermine that predominance which they had enjoyed during an earlier period. Reorganization had brought about a considerable dwindling of their area of activity. The Urhobo agitation for the break up of the 'Jekri-Sobo' Division threatened to further reduce their sphere of activity.¹⁰¹

Whatever the relevance of these two explanations, it must be pointed out that even in contemporary Nigerian government and politics, the Itsekiri have often proven to be very alert in responding to strategic issues affecting their interests. As such they must have understood from the outset that creation of divisions along ethnic lines would not apply to them considering their relative small population size¹⁰² and the fact that Warri was being rapidly dominated by the Urhobo in addition to the intricate interlocking settlements between the Itsekiri and Ijaw-Urhobo aborigenes of the town. For instance, by the 1952 population census, Warri had a total population of 22,500 of which 38% were Urhobo, 28% were Igbo, 15% were Itsekiri, while all other ethnic groups constituted 19%.¹⁰³ The Urhobo were also rapidly dominating the town in terms of property ownership, employment into the public services, annual income bracket and self employment as revealed by statistical data of the early 1950s.¹⁰⁴

Based on these data and personal fieldwork in Warri, P.C. Lloyd wrote:

The Itsekiri look upon Warri as their own capital city. Yet they now form a numerical minority; they no longer hold a majority of the more prestigious occupational positions; nor do they own most of the residential property. From a position of dominance in local government they have been displaced by the Urhobo. Increasingly Warri seems, to the outsider, to be an Urhobo town.¹⁰⁵

Therefore, agitating for separation was immaterial at this point in time to the Itsekiri since what would emerge as Itsekiri Division after the excision of the five Urhobo clans must consist of the Urhobo aborigenes of Warri, already dominating the town, apart from the Ijaw of Ogbe-Ijaw. It is difficult to assess the level of co-operation or otherwise after the Lieutenant

Governor's visit though the situation was still within the atmosphere of what is sometimes described as *low intensity conflict*.

However, to some extent, the Itsekiri only added fuel to a burning fire after the installation of their monarch in 1936. Firstly, the Itsekiri conception of the importance of their *Olu* was done with some exaggeration following the resuscitation of this office after almost one century of interregnum (1848-1936).¹⁰⁶ The first thing that annoyed the Urhobo was a sentimental claim that the *Olu* had full political powers over the Urhobo and Ijaw.¹⁰⁷ The *Olu* himself was said to have made statements which the Urhobo regarded as confrontational. He was reported to have said while addressing Itsekiri chiefs and elders that he recognised no boundaries except with the Benin monarch.¹⁰⁸

New plans to achieve some measure of reconciliation were crippled, while the rate of tension escalated. It was not surprising the Resident reported that there was increased bitterness and the situation looked threatening.¹⁰⁹ What blew up issues was the Itsekiri demand for their monarch to be styled the *Olu* of Warri instead of *Olu* of Itsekiri. This would have resulted in crisis because the Urhobo were ready to go any length. Mr W.E. Hunt who had at the time become the Chief Commissioner, Southern Provinces carefully handled the situation and the Itsekiri request was not granted.¹¹⁰

But the title of *Olu* immediately raised the issue of the ownership of Warri land. Until then, it had been left for the Urhobo settlement of Warri town to handle. But this new move by the Itsekiri made all the Urhobo to see it as their "national" problem as they felt that the Itsekiri demand was calculated to buttress their claim that Warri land belonged to them.

Therefore, starting from 1936, a new element was added to the complexities surrounding grassroots politics and administration. Apart from the demand of the five clans for separation

from the Jekri-Sobo Division, the issue of ownership of Warri land became an equally serious determinant of the nature of inter-group relations between the Itsekiri and other sub-groups of the Urhobo Division and this had its own effect on grassroots administration. Meanwhile, faced with the precarious nature of inter-group relations, the colonial government came up with a new plan in 1937 to reduce tension in the two divisions. This plan allowed partial separation between the Itsekiri and the five Urhobo clans under the Jekri-Sobo Division.¹¹¹

Based on instruction from the Chief Commissioner through the Resident of the Warri Province, the D.O. of the Jekri-Sobo Division drew a proposal. It made provision for the creation of two local government authorities within the division each with its own Native Treasury—one for the five Urhobo clans and the other for the rest part of the division. The one for the Urhobo clans was named Western Urhobo Native Administration to have its headquarters in Orerokpe, while the other was to have its headquarters in Warri and was named Itsekiri Native Administration.

For the Western Urhobo Native Administration, the proposal allowed each clan to be represented by two delegates, preferably traditional chiefs, to form a Financial Council. A defined percentage of the total fund of the Native Treasury would be kept under the custody of this council which must account for all expenses incurred.¹¹² On the other hand, the D.O recommended that the control of funds of the Itsekiri Native Treasury be vested in the presiding D.O. alone, that is, the Itsekiri Council was to be excluded from its control.¹¹³ There were two apparent reasons for this recommendation. In the first place, the D.O. felt that since the anti-tax riots of 1927-28 coinciding with the transition from native courts to Native Administration local government system, the Itsekiri had had neither been able to excel in the collection of tax nor demonstrate the type financial discipline required to be entrusted with control of part of their

own fund.¹¹⁴ Moreover, the Ijaw-Urhobo aborigines of Warri were also under the jurisdiction of this Native Treasury. Therefore, there was need to work out a modality to give them appropriate representation in the Financial Council.

The formal approval of this proposal by the Chief Commissioner, Southern Provinces, took place in June 1937. It was approved with a significant modification as it allowed the Itsekiri Council to be involved in the running of the Itsekiri Native Treasury and was granted the same financial responsibility as its counterpart in charge of the Western Urhobo Native Treasury.¹¹⁵ However, there was no provision for the representation of the Ijaw-Urhobo aborigines of Warri in the Financial Council of the Itsekiri Native Treasury. It was an issue which the D.O. wanted the Chief Commissioner and Resident to decide partly because of the tensed atmosphere and partly because the designation of that Native Treasury made the Itsekiri conceive it as solely representing their interest.

The Ijaw and Urhobo settlements were, therefore, sidelined and in the second half of the 1940s the situation was politicised with unsuccessful attempts made to designate them as Urhobo and Ijaw enclaves in Itsekiriland. There may be need to point out here that the Ijaw indigenous inhabitants of Warri failed to protest against marginalisation emanating from the grassroots policies of the colonial government in the then Warri Division because of the awareness that they were faced with three major disadvantages compared to their Urhobo and Itsekiri counterparts. Firstly, they constituted a very small population occupying a settlement which as at that time colonial officials merely conceived as Ijaw enclave within the border of Urhobo and Itsekiriland. Secondly, unlike their Urhobo and Itsekiri counterparts the then Warri Division did not embrace other Ijaw communities that could support them in time of grievances. Moreover, ethnic nationalism was still at its infancy in the Western Niger Delta and the Ijaw aborigines of Warri

Division could hardly count on the support of their kinsmen in Western Ijaw Division in case of serious conflict with large groups.

Even among the Urhobo and Isoko most protests were embarked upon by affected clans with little or no support from other clans. For the same reason during the slave trade era most clans allowed their indigenes to enslave natives of other clans.¹¹⁶ The Itsekiri were no exception. What kept the latter more united than other ethnic groups in the area was their considerably small population.¹¹⁷

Overall, in what looked like exploiting the disadvantageous situation of the Ijaw group, the local government authorities felt they could be ignored and even sidelined. In the second half of the 1920s the Ijaw refused to take legal actions against the authorities of the Warri Division over irregularities surrounding the rent realised from their land, even when the Itsekiri and Urhobo people of Agbassah reacted by charging the Paramount Chief to court.¹¹⁸ With the introduction of a new grassroots institution, the Native Administration system, which purported to be more liberal in addressing the grievances and demand of each group the Ijaw presented their case to the local government authorities in 1933 with proper legal evidence and petitioned the Resident stating clearly that Ogbe-Ijaw in Warri Township belonged to their fathers.¹¹⁹

As an evidence of the claim that the land originally belonged to them, they attached to the petition a copy of a notice signed by P.E. Crawford and dated October 21, 1895 formally incorporating Ogbe-Ijaw into territories under British protection. According to the petition, the Provincial Commissioner, Seton James, requested the Ijaw to accept government acquisition of the land for some key public projects. This acquisition is said to have taken place some time after the fall of Chief Nana Olomu and the Ijaw were said to have lost complete control of the land as a result of this incident.¹²⁰ They, therefore, demanded for a return of their land or entitlement to

the rents accruing from it. In spite of the historical and legal significance of this petition, neither at the local government level nor at the provincial level was it given any official notice.

After this event, the Ijaw decided to wait for the appropriate time. They refused to respond to tussles of the 1950s over the ownership of Warri Town which emanated from the revival of Itsekiri demand that their monarch be styled the *Olu* of Warri.¹²¹ But as we shall see in subsequent chapters, this form of suppression and marginalisation suffered by the group in grassroots administration has a far-reaching repercussion even on neighbouring ethnic groups.¹²²

Looking at the 1937 proposal discussed above, it was therefore meant to create two native administrations within the same division, both with equal power and financial and administrative functions. Despite the approval of the proposal by the Chief Commissioner, its implementation was delayed until 1938. Thus, both native authorities—the Western Urhobo Native Administration and Itsekiri Native Administration—started functioning on April 1 1938.¹²³ Both of them were accountable to a single District Officer. This was a fair decision and from the available records, it appeared all affected groups were momentarily pacified. The major reason for the revival of dissension in 1941 was the discernible element of insincerity on the part of the colonial master and some of the aggrieved groups. As we shall see below, this manifested itself in other events of the 1940s.

Among the major conflicts generated by the nature of inter-group relations involving the Jekri-Sobo Division and the Urhobo Division was the Sapele Land Case of 1941.¹²⁴ This was one major factor which compelled the colonial government to modify its programme on local government in the area during the 1940s. Another factor was the problem of the Urhobo indigenous inhabitants of Warri coupled with that of Itsekiri enclaves in some Urhobo clans.

To understand the Sapele land case, there is need to emphasise that it has nothing to do with the problem of Itsekiri enclaves in Urhoboland and vice-versa. In addition, there is need to be briefly exposed to the historical background of this land. In 1908, the British acquired 510 acres of land in Sapele. Chief Dogho Numa, who was then a British political agent, acted as an intermediary between the owners of the land and the government when the lease was signed. The annual rent of the land was 100. Of this, Chief Dogho Numa received 40, while the Sapele elders got 60.¹²⁵ Until the creation of the Jekri-Sobo Division in 1934 and the appointment of *Olu* for the Itsekiri in 1936, the issue of the legal ownership of Sapele land created no element of dispute.

Immediately the *Olu* was appointed in 1936, the Itsekiri, represented by him, claimed this 510 acres of land belonged to them, emphasising that the payment of rent to the Sapele elders had been illegal. Meanwhile, British Administrative officials stepped in to prevent the outbreak of an impending crisis and the *Olu* gave up the demand. It was also discovered in the process that Chief Dogho Numa instructed the Itsekiri resident in Sapele in 1932 just before his death not to pay rent to their Urhobo landlords claiming that Sapele land belonged to the *Olu* of Itsekiri and that he, Chief Dogho Numa, merely represented the *Olu* in the land lease of 1908.¹²⁶ On the other hand, the Urhobo felt Sapele was too far from Warri for the *Olu* to make such claim. Therefore, the impression created was that the *Olu* had arrogated to himself, through the support of the Itsekiri “nation”, the position of a paramount chief over the Jekri-Sobo Division which Chief Dogho Numa enjoyed over the entire former Warri Division from 1917 to 1932. This was another source of tension.

In 1941, the Itsekiri revived the matter again and for reasons not quite clear British colonial officials could not intervene early enough. The Urhobo Division supported the five

Urhobo clans in the Jekri-Sobo Division to settle the issue once and for all by filing a suit in the law court. The Urhobo won the case leading to greater acrimony between the two groups. The Itsekiri were not satisfied with the outcome of the case though the reason for this is not clear. They appealed to the West African Court of Appeal, but also lost the Appeal in 1943.¹²⁷The tension generated by the court action continued to linger on even after 1943.

The colonial government was able to discover through this case that any loophole in the system could be selfishly exploited by any group for its personal gain. With the nature of the historical antecedents of the two divisions, many such loopholes abound and it became clear there was need to review some aspects of local government administration in the area in order to avoid conflicts.

But as if that was not enough, between 1943 and 1948 the colonial government was faced with new conflicts created by the problem of the Urhobo inhabitants of Warri including that of Itsekiri enclaves in Urhoboland. The major ones were Itsekiri enclaves in Okpe, Ogharefe and Agbon under the jurisdiction of the Western Urhobo Native Authority established in 1938. On the other hand, Agbassa in Warri was an Urhobocommunity under the control of the Itsekiri Native Administration. While relations at the personal level did not constitute any source of conflict for these communities, the issue of taxation was a source of problem.

However, this also exposed some insincerity on the part of the colonial government. The Agbassa people in Warri paid their tax to their Itsekiri Native Authority.¹²⁸But the Itsekiri in Urhoboland continued to pay their tax to the Itsekiri Native Authority. The Urhobo protested in vain against this arrangement. In the process, the Agbassa people requested they should be transferred to the Western Urhobo Native Authority.¹²⁹ New tensions developed because of the government vacillation on the issue.

Thus, by the beginning of 1948 the colonial government was fed up with the “experiment” of evolving a Jekri-Sobo sub-group while the Urhobo Division had become involved in the conflicts, sometimes trying to resolve such conflicts and sometimes supporting the affected Urhobo clans.

But in spite of the relative virtues credited to the Native Administration system, compared to the native courts period, the need to bring together the entire people of the province was felt even as early as 1930. This was considered relevant for the purposes of consultation and joint planning of some common services. It was not until 1948 that efforts were made to actualise this. The system of provincial Native Authorities Conference was inaugurated that year at the national level to address this requirement. In 1949, this Conference was conceived as the body best qualified to effectively tackle the problem of revising the Richards constitution when each province was invited to discuss the constitution for the purpose of reviewing it.¹³⁰ One reason for this concensus was the *fact* that the constitution introduced regionalism into Nigerian government and politics with significant emphasis on effective management of grassroots institutions. The Conference was finally convened to review the constitution in May 1949.¹³¹

Key players in policy formulation in both *Jekri-Sobo* Division and Urhobo Division were expected to derive new impetus from this development and come out with something useful from the drawing board because Mr Arthur Prest of *Jekri-Sobo* Division (a lawyer with the Itsekiri Native Authority Council) was elected chairman of the Conference. It is, however, not certain how much benefit these two native authorities were able to derive from the role of Arthur Prest in the Conference as some sources claim that the administrative officers enlisted for the Conference were not particularly impressed by its deliberations.¹³² In any case, it has been observed that, “it was difficult for men whose participation in the political development of their

country had been limited to clan and village affairs to apply themselves effectively to national issues as complex as the drawing up of a new constitution.”¹³³

What is certain is that part of the outcome of the inauguration of the Native Authorities Conference was the apparent desire to realign grassroots policies with prevailing trends in inter-group relations among the ethnic groups of the former Warri Division. Hence, in the second half of 1949 the Western Urhobo Native Administration, consisting of the five Urhobo clans, was merged with the Urhobo Division. What was left of *Jekri-Sobo* Division became known as the Warri Division. This consisted of the Itsekiri including the Ijaw and Urhobo aborigenes of Warri Town apart from the Urhobo town of Effurun.

Overall, the colonial government achieved a fair measure of success in addressing the peculiarities of the Urhobo and other groups of the former Warri Division. The degree of success in this respect was commensurate with how much the government was able and willing to put into the system in terms of funding, logistics, and strategic planning. One of the key principles of the reorganisation, namely, that of creation of divisions along ethnic lines was helpful, but too expensive for the government to fund. Consequently, it was not thoroughly implemented. It was the problem of funding that made the government to propose only two local government authorities for the former Warri Division when three were hardly enough to meet the demand of the respective groups. Despite the financial consideration, one of the two local governments, the *Jekri-Sobo* Division, was, however, allowed to run two independent Native Authority Councils in 1938.

Yet, the partial implementation of the creation of divisions along ethnic lines constituted an improvement on the previous system as both the Urhobo and other groups benefited from it,

even though some sources have identified one bias or the other in favour of the Itsekiri by British officials in the creation of the Jekri-Sobo Division.¹³⁴

The government performed better in the implementation of policies that required little or no funding. For instance, in response to information gathered by administrative officers, the government cancelled the office of the artificially created paramount chief. Moreover, partly based on the same data, the Itsekiri demand for their monarch to be styled the *Olu* of Warri was rejected by the colonial government three consecutive times—1936, 1944 and 1946.¹³⁵

The native courts period was an experimental one, while the reorganisation was an era when the lessons learnt from this experiment were put into practice. Thus, no native authority could henceforth complain that its courts and office were being staffed by non-indigenes. The key avenues through which the members of other ethnic groups could make inroads into Urhobo local council and vice-versa were blocked. It must, however, be admitted that apart from the reorganization, the spread of education provided the personnel needed by each group to make this a reality. As mentioned earlier, colonial officials had recognised by 1925 that, “it was a mistake” to allow Itsekiri warrant chiefs in Urhobo courts. Reorganisation provided the opportunity for rectifying this error and one major source of Urhobo grievance was eliminated.

There was also significant improvement in political participation as both village and clan councils mobilised people at the grassroots level for social development and political activities. Compared to the native courts era, grassroots democracy received a boost. This was the beginning of the evolution of a new local government system based on Western models and in the light of the challenges facing the key players in policy formulation, the level of local government autonomy was at least satisfactory. It was hardly realistic at this maiden stage to expect a local government system that was not controlled by higher levels of government. The

only yard-stick for assessing the level of democracy and autonomy was the rate of progress and improvement – and the records of these during the reorganisation were fair enough.

Some of the grassroots policies of the reorganisation can only be understood within the context of what is sometimes termed relative efficiency theory. The theory contends that the number of public services and policies placed under the jurisdiction of local government authorities should depend on how much administrative efficiency they have been able to exhibit. Thus, local councils with creditable record of tax collection were granted the privilege of keeping certain percentage of total proceeds from tax and court fees to themselves. This is because revenue generation constituted the most crucial index for assessing the administrative efficiency of each council in the system.

Some of these new grassroots policies were partly meant to correct the compounded nature of inter-group relations. As mentioned earlier, the native courts system coupled with the appointment of an artificial paramount chief had created a major rupture in inter-group relations. To some extent, the grassroots policies of the reorganisation era helped to pacify the affected groups as fresh mistakes were avoided. However, one error in grassroots administration which was to affect the Urhobo and other groups in later development continued to linger on—the Ijaw factor.¹³⁶ The Ijaw aborigenes of Warri had benefited from the reorganisation. But unlike the Urhobo and Itsekiri, British colonial grassroots policies neither entitled them to their due share in the rent accruing from Warri land nor officially recognised them as indigenous inhabitants in their records.¹³⁷

In addition to the above factors, there was also the need to build on the foundation of the reorganisation apart from consistency in policy formulation. What was the reaction of policy

makers of the 1950s to the 1990s to these? The answer to this and other key questions on grassroots administration in Urhoboland form the theme of the next two chapters.

ENDNOTES

1. Obaro Ikime, *Niger Delta Rivalry: Itsekiri-Urhobo Relations and the Establishment of British Rule, 1884-1936* (London: Longman, 1969), 225
2. See chapter 3
3. Ughelle Papers, File 41/1920, Murphy to Resident, Memo of September 25, 1925.
Ughelle Papers, File 25/1919, Shelton (D.O. Warri) to Resident, Memo No 230/1919, 16 April, 1919.
4. Ughelle Papers, File S.D. 41/1928, Annual Report, Ase Sub-District, 1927, 3-4
5. Ibid.;
C.S.O. 26/2 File 11857 Vol. V, Annual Report, Warri Province, 1927, 8-9
6. Ibid.
7. Obaro Ikime, "The Anti-Tax Riots in Warri Province, 1927-28", *J.H.S.N.* III, no. 3 (June 196), 550-565.
8. See pages 140-141
9. Ughelle Papers, File S.D. 41/1928, Annual Report, AseSub-District, 1927.
10. Sir Graeme Thomson, "Some Problems of Administration and Development in Nigeria", *Journal of the African Society*, Vol. XXVI, 1926-27, 306-307.
11. See page 106
12. Obaro Ikime, *Niger Delta Rivalry: Itsekiri-Urhobo Relations and the Establishment of British Rule, 1884-1936* (London: Longman Publishers, 1969), 237-38.
13. Unlike the Alkali courts of Northern Nigeria there were no courts of A Grade in the Warri Province;
War Prof. 3/15 File 48/1932, Quarterly Report, Warri Division March 1932;
Obaro Ikime, *Niger Delta Rivalry* 1969, 237.
14. Obaro Ikime, *Niger Delta Rivalry*, 1969, 239.
15. Ibid., 238-39.
16. Ibid.

17. Ughelle Papers, File S.D. 12/1931, Quarterly Reports, Ase Sub-District, September, 1931, 4; C.S.O. 26/2 File 11857 Vol. IX, Annual Report, Warri Province, 1931, 29-30.
18. Ughelle Papers, Ughelle Dist. 3. File 591, Annual Report, Sobo Division, 1937.
19. As we shall below the Urhobo Division including its Divisional Council was created in 1934
20. Sir Graeme Thomson, "Some Problems of Administration and Development in Nigeria", *Journal of the African Society* XXVI (1926-27), 306.
21. Ibid.; Obaro Ikime "The Anti-Tax Riots in the Warri Province" 1967.
22. Otite (ed.), *The Urhobo People* (Ibadan: Shaneson C.I. Ltd, 2003), 50
23. Ughelle Papers, File 64/1928, Quarterly Report, Warri Division, June Quarter, 1929, 2; Ughelle Papers, File S.D. 12/1931, Quarterly Report, Ase Sub-District, June Quarter, 1931, 16-17
24. War Prof, File 48/1932, Quarterly Report, Warri Division, March 1932.
25. Ibid.
26. Ibid.
27. In the 1900s this approach was perceived as forced labour. Onigu Otite, 2003, 50
28. Ughelle Paper, File 112/26, Annual Report, Warri Division, 1926; Oral Interview: P.O. Ovwurhuru (65 yrs) Spokesman of Okpare Town, Olomu Clan. Jan. 3, 2007.
29. Ibid.
30. Ughelle Papers, Ughelle District, 3 File 591, Annual Report, Sobo Division, 1937
31. Ibid.
32. Ibid.
33. Ibid.; Ughelle Papers, File 107/1931, Current Matters, Warri Division (March 4, 1932)
34. Ibid.
35. P.C. Lloyd, "Ethnicity and the Structure of Inequality in a Nigerian Town in the Mid-1950s" in *Urban Ethnicity* edited by Abner Cohen (London: Tavistock Publications, 1974), 231-232.

36. Ibid.
37. See page 146-147
38. Ughelle Papers, File 59/1930, Quarterly Reports, Warri Division, Sept Quarter, 1930, 4-5.
39. Ibid.
40. C.S.O. 26/2 File 11857 Vol. IX, Annual Report, Warri Province, 1931, 28-30.
41. Sir Graeme Thomson, "Some Problems of Administration and Development in Nigeria", *Journal of the African Society* XXVI (1926-27), 306-307.
42. See page 115.
43. Ughelle Papers, Ughelle District 3, File 445, Annual Report, Sobo Division, 1935
Ughelli Papers, File 118/1930: Proposed Scheme of Education C.M.S. Isoko District.
44. C.S.O. 26/2 File 11857 Vol. XII, Annual Report, Warri Province, 1934, 23-24.
45. Markin J. Bane, *Catholic Pioneers in West Africa* (Dublin: Longman Publishers, 1956), 166-67.
46. C.S.O. 26/2 File 11857 Vol. VII, Annual Report, Warri Province, 1929, 65.
47. Ughelle Papers, Ughelle District 3 File 445, Annual Report, Sobo Division, 1935, 1-3.
48. Obaro Ikime, *Niger Delta Rivalry*, 1969, 243.
49. Ibid.
50. By the 1952 census data, the Urhobo (including Isoko) numbered 340, 000 (excluding about 100,000 elsewhere in Nigeria) while the Itsekiri numbered 33,000. Isoko was designated a sub-tribe of Urhobo until 1963. Source: P.C. Lloyd, "Ethnicity and the structure of Inequality in a Nigerian Town in the Mid-1950s" in *Urban Ethnicity* edited by Abner Cohen (London: Tavistock Publications, 1974), 229.
51. P.C. Lloyd, "Ethnicity and the Structure of Inequality in a Nigerian Town in the Mid-1950s" in *Urban Ethnicity* edited by Abner Cohen (London: Tavistock Publications, 1974), 231-232.
52. Ibid.
53. Ibid.

54. Ughelle Papers, Ughelle District 8/1/6, Handing-Over Notes, 'Sobo' Division – Chadwick (D.O.) to Miller (D.O.) 18 November 1932.
55. Ibid.; Some of the members of staff of the 1932 Divisional Treasury were W.E. Otobo (who later became *Otota* in his hometown), E.A.A. Eghujovwe and F.U. Jarikre.
56. See page 119.
57. C.S.O. 26/2 File 11857 Vol. X, Annual Report, Warri Province, 1932, 18-19. War. Prof. 3/15 File 48/1932, Quarterly Reports, Warri Division, March 1932.
58. C.S.O 26/2 File 11857 Vol. XIV, Annual Report, Warri Province, 1939, 9-10.
59. Ibid., 9.
60. Ughelle Papers, File 119/1930, A.D.O, Ase to Resident, Warri Province , Memo No. A.N.A. 21/1930/5 of 5 November 1930; The names of some of those selected for training could be found in: A.D.O, Ase to Resident, Warri Province, Memo No. A.N.A. 21/1930/18 of 12 February 1931.
61. Ughelle Papers, Ughelle District 8/1/8, Handing-Over Notes-Jekri-Sobo Division: Pender (D.O.) to Lambert (D.O.) 24 February 1936, 12.
62. The Isoko Division (Establishment) Order 1963, Midwestern Nigeria Legal Notice, No. 11 of 1964, Benin-City.
63. See page 197
64. C.S.O. 26, File 26767, A Broad Scheme for the Reorganization of Warri Province on tribal lines, 1930, 7-8.
65. Ibid.
66. Also see, Obaro Ikime, 1969, 235.
67. P.C. Lloyd, "Ethnicity and the Structure of Inequality in a Nigerian Town in the Mid-1950s" 232; A common racial slogan in colonial Itsekiri community is, "The Whiteman is god to the Itsekiri, the Itsekiri is god to the Sobo" – Ibid.
68. Obaro Ikime, *Niger Delta Rivalry*, 1969, 234.
69. Oral Interview:Kpebo Marere, the *Odede* (Head) of the Ade Chieftaincy and Traditional Court of Justice, Otughienvwe, Jeremi Clan. April, 2008.
70. Ibid.

71. P.C. Lloyd, 1974, 230.
72. By the 1963 population census, the Isoko had a total population of 134,157, the Itsekiri including the Ijaw-Urhobo aborigenes of Warri Town numbered 145,060 while the Urhobo clans had a total population of 491,736 – *Quarterly Abstract of Statistics* (1st Quarter, January to March 1976), Ministry of Economic Development, Statistics Division, Benin-City, 4-5
73. Obaro Ikime, *Niger Delta Rivalry*, 1969, 170.
74. See page 133 & 137
75. C.S.O. 26 File 51642 111: Progress Report of the Jekri Sub-tribe and the Sobo clans in the Jekri-Sobo Division, 1932, 3; Ughelle Papers, Ughelle District 8/1/4, Handing-over Notes, Sapele District-Pender (D.O.) to Kerr (D.O.), 9th March 1932, 2-3; NB: Before the reorganization, Agbon was under Kwale Division.
76. Ughelle Papers, File 35/1931, Interview between Jekri Notables and His Honour the Lieutenant-Governor, Southern Provinces, at the Resident's Office, Warri, on 31 March, 1931, 6-9
77. Ibid.
78. Ibid.
79. Ibid.
80. See pages 98-99
81. Ibid.
82. Obaro Ikime, 1969, 247
83. C.S.O. 26, File 26767, Report on Proposed New Jekri-Sobo Division – Enclosure in Secretary Southern Provinces to Chief Secretary to the Government, No. 6925/238 of 10th February 1932, 5.
84. Obaro Ikime, 1969, 237; As we shall see below a similar incident occurred in 1934. These were apparently some of the reasons for allegation of superiority complex and racial arrogance against the Itsekiri by other groups in the area. See page 140.
85. War. Prof. Papers: File 48/1932, Quarterly Reports, Warri Division, 19 March 1932. C.S.O. 26/2 File 11857 Vol. X, Annual Report, Warri Province, 1932, 9-10.

86. Documents of late Mr Ezekiel Kalamuka Bork, retired chairman of the Education Committee, former Ughelli Local Government Council (including oral information with his son, Oghenerume Bork, 2010), Also cited in Obaro Ikime, *Niger Delta Rivalry*, 1969, 248
87. Ibid.; Like the previous statement this is never tenable since Dogho was only a chief appointed by the colonial government for the purpose of grassroots administration in the Warri Province in general and Warri Division in particular (See chapter 3).
88. E.K. Bork's Documents.
89. Ibid.
90. See p. 145.
91. C.S.O. 26 File 51642 111: Progress Report of the Jekri Sub-tribe and the Sobo Clans in the Jekri-Sobo Division, 3.
92. Ughelle Papers, Ughelle District 8/1/4, Handling-Over Notes, Sapele District-Pender (D.O.) to Kerr (D.O.), 9 March 1932, 2-3.
93. Ughelle Papers, Ughelle District 8/1/4, Handling-Over Notes, Sapele District-Pender (D.O.) to Kerr (D.O.), 29 August 1932, 1-2.
94. War. Prof. Papers: File 48/1932, Quarterly Reports, Warri Division, 19 March 1932, 3.
95. C.S.O. 26/2, File 11857, Vol. XIII, Annual Report, Warri Province, 1935, 4-5.
96. Ibid., 5.
C.S.O. 26 File 51642 111, Progress Report on the Jekri Sub-tribe and the Sobo clans in the Jekri-Sobo Division with special reference to the separation of the Native Treasury, 1936.
97. Ibid., 7-8.
98. C.S.O. 26 File 51642 XII Progress Report on the Jekri Sub-tribe and the Sobo clans in the Jekri – Sobo Division, 1937, 7-13.
99. C.S.O. 26, File 09098, Vol. VIII, Lieutenant-Governor's Inspection Notes, Warri Province, 1935, 9-10.
100. Ibid., 7.
101. Obaro Ikime, *Niger Delta Rivalry*, 1969, 252.
102. See page 133

103. See appendices VIIa, VIIb, VIIc, VIId, VIIe and VIIf including P.C. Lloyd, 1974.(NB: The data are for Warri town alone.)
104. Ibid.
105. P.C. Lloyd, "Ethnicity and the Structure of Inequality in a Nigerian Town in the Mid-1950s" in *Urban Ethnicity* edited by Abner Cohen (London: Tavistock Publications, 1974), 240.
106. In 1848, following the death of the reigning *Olu*, the Itsekiri were unable to get a successor due to dynastic struggle coupled with the need to be part of prevailing trend in political innovations and liberalism in the Western Niger Delta; Obaro Ikime, *Merchant Prince of the Niger Delta*, (London: Heinemann Books Ltd, 1968), 6-9; also see page 48 of this study.
107. C.S.O. 26, File 54176, Edema Arubi to His Excellency, Sir Bernard Bourdillon, No. D248/5/20 of March 10, 1936, 1-2.
108. Ibid, C.S.O. 26/2 File 11857, Vol. XIV, Annual Report, Warri Province, 1936, 6-7.
109. Ibid.
110. Obaro Ikime, *Niger Delta Rivalry* 1969, 253-54.
111. C.S.O. 26 File 51642 XII, Progress Report on the Jekri sub-tribe and the Sobo clans in the Jekri-Sobo Division, 7 & 13; C.S.O. 26 File 51642 III, Secretary, Southern Provinces, to Chief Secretary to the Government, No. S.P. 12951/34 of July 6, 1937.
112. Ibid.
113. Ibid; The Itsekiri council consisted of the heads of leading families and similar other personalities representing each sub-group or settlement. Majority of these heads or representatives were title holders.
114. Also see Obaro Ikime, *Niger Delta Rivalry*, 1969, 258.
115. C.S.O. 26 File 51642 III, Secretary, Southern Provinces, to Chief Secretary to the Government, No. S.P. 12951/34 of July 6, 1937.
116. Obaro Ikime, *Niger Delta Rivalry*, 1969, 51-52.
117. For instance, by the 1952 population census, the Itsekiri were less than one-tenth of the Urhobo combined with the Isoko and had the smallest population among the ethnic groups in the Western Niger Delta. See page 133.

118. See pages 93-96
119. Ughelle Papers, File S.240, Jiebideh, Yobogha and Oloye to the D.O., Warri, 13 January, 1933.
120. Ibid.;
Oral Interview: Barrister S.T. Borlokor 75yrs, 3rd January 2013.
121. This is discussed in chapter 5.
122. Also see page95.
123. C.S.O. 26/2 11857 Vol. XV, Annual Report, Warri Province, 1938, 5-6.
124. T. E. A. Salubi, "The Origins of Sapele Township" *J.H.S.N*, Vol. 2, No. 1, December 1960, 115-134.
125. Ibid.
126. Ibid.
127. Ibid.
128. C.S.O. 26/2, File 11857 Vol. XVIII, Annual Report, Warri Province, 1949
129. Ibid.
130. Ibid.
131. Ibid.
132. Ibid.
133. Obaro Ikime, *Niger Delta Rivalry*, 1969, 267-68
134. See for example, P.C. Lloyd, 1974, 237
135. See chapter 5
136. See pages 148-149.
137. Ibid.

CHAPTER FIVE

REFORM EFFORTS AND GRASSROOTS ADMINISTRATION, 1950-1983

Local government administration in Urhoboland witnessed series of changes between 1950 and 1983. Among the tasks of this chapter is an assessment of how much innovation or dynamism emanated from these changes. The factors which played the most remarkable role in the modification of existing local government structure and creation of new local government units during this period were the:

- i. policies of the Action Group on grassroots administration in the Western Niger Delta,
- ii. local government reforms of the 1950s,
- iii. quest for recognition of sub-ethnic identity by a number of sub-groups in Urhoboland,
- iv. creation of the Mid-West Local Government Loans Board in 1973,
- v. question of the ownership of Warri land,
- vi. 1976 Local Government reforms coupled with other policies of the military in grassroots administration from 1976 to 1979.

The existence of a social structure with complex interlocking relationships and yet consisting of numerous autonomous groups and sub-groups implies that a key instrument required for sustenance of peace and promotion of development at the grassroots level is the adoption of local government structures and policies that give due recognition to the identity and status of each group. The interlocking nature of settlement pattern among the Urhobo, Itsekiri and Western Ijaw, especially in Warri and its immediate environs explained in chapter two of this study compounded the situation. For this reason there were also Ijaw communities in the

riverine area of the Eastern Urhobo Division, while Itsekiri enclaves existed in Western Urhobo Division, especially around Sapele and Oghara.

Therefore, there was need for a grassroots system not susceptible to policies that give some groups the impression that their traditional institutions were being subordinated to those of other groups or sacrificed for the interest of others. This is more so as competition for resources was such that a group once recognised would do everything possible to prevent those under its jurisdiction from achieving autonomous status.

The colonial government had tried to evolve this since the beginning of the reorganisation and by 1950 only little effort was required to perfect it. In particular only the demands of the Ijaw aborigines of Warri were yet to be accommodated by the new approach. In fact, by the end of 1949, the colonial government could confidently point to some records of achievement in this direction and was convinced that it had been able to obtain some form of magic wands to address the issues through the fieldworks that produced the reorganisation.

The government had demonstrated its apparent determination to make the outcome of these fieldworks a guiding principle in the formulation and implementation of subsequent local government policies as revealed in the last chapter. However, it was bent on obtaining more information and relevant data useful for successful operation of the local government system in the area. Apart from the Ijaw factor, other issues were under consideration. In this grassroots system, granting the demand of one group may have adverse effect on others depending on the nature of the demand.

Thus, though to the Urhobo, Isoko was only a sub-groups and if given the opportunity would accept no other arrangement, there was a decision to look into the genuineness of the Isoko demand for a recognition of their ethnic identity in addition to the viability of constituting

them into a separate division. The Urhobo were made to understand at the beginning of the reorganisation (in 1936) that linguistic similarity was not enough to regard Isoko as one of their sub-groups. The creation of an appeal court to sit peripatetically in Oleh and Ughelli was among the instruments used to demonstrate this.¹The reaction of the colonial government to the demand for a change of the official title of the Itsekiri monarch was also employed to demonstrate clearly that gone were the days when any group could exploit the ignorance of the government to achieve its selfish ends.

In the early years of the 1950s, however, the colonial government was gradually disengaging from political leadership even at the grassroots level. The leading political parties and their elites in each region had virtually joined the rank of the key players in decision making and policy formulation, at least, in grassroots administration. The Action Group (AG) was the dominant political party in the Western Region.

The experience of the Urhobo and their immediate neighbours indicate that the party was not ready to continue with the local government policies of the reorganisation. Yet, as we shall see below, apparently the AG deliberately refused to look into the lapses in the area unaddressed by the local government policies of the reorganisation. For instance, the grievances of the Ijaw were not given a thought. Similarly, nothing was done to build upon the colonial effort with regard to the Isoko demand for a recognition of their ethnic identity. As we shall see later Isoko was even designated Eastern Urhobo District Council during the local government reforms of 1950s.

Before the AG came up with its local government policies in 1952, grassroots issues of the newly constituted Warri Division were still a source of tension among all stakeholders. The fact is that the Urhobo and Ijaw were hardly represented in the local government council. The

Ijaw were on the look out for the right time to protest, while controversies surrounding the ownership of Warri land had made the Urhobo to conceive any challenge faced by the Urhobo indigenes of the town as a problem of the entire ethnic group. This was enough for any policy maker to look at the drawing board thoroughly, if not meticulously before any modification in existing structures and policies if such changes were meant to enhance the development of the area.

There were even other traces of tension and conflicts. Obviously, the boundary adjustment of 1949 had to some extent rectified the lapses in the local government system by minimising the sources of inter-group friction, especially between the Urhobo and Itsekiri. But their participation in provincial and national affairs was producing new sources of conflict at the grassroots level. Crisis was narrowly avoided in 1949 following the election of two Urhobo, Jessa Ogboru of Abraka and W.E Mowarin of Agbarho to represent the Warri Province in the Western House of Assembly.²

Following the implementation of the Richards Constitution, an Urhobo, Mukoro Mowoe was first elected in 1946 to represent the Warri Province. But he died in 1948 and a by-election was held the same year and this led to the election of Jessa Ogboru. In 1949, a second seat was granted to the Warri Province.³The result of the poll also favoured the Urhobo due to their numerical advantage leading to the election of W.E. Mowarin. The Itsekiri were very incensed at the result of the poll and the “constitutional loopholes” that gave the two seats of the entire province to a single ethnic group. The resident reported that there was a frightening “recrudescence of ill-feeling and bitterness between the Itsekiri and the Urhobo”.⁴Apparently the historical antecedents of inter-group relations between the two ethnic groups was responsible for

the Itsekiri reaction. This is because other groups of the Warri Province – Western Ijaw, Kwale, Aboh and Isoko-reacted differently and refused to support the Itsekiri in their protest.

It was practical that the AG commenced its local government policies in the Western Niger Delta by first looking at the situation of Warri and its immediate environs because as we shall see later Warri had gradually become a proxy or actual “battle ground” for aggrieved ethnic groups or sub-tribes to vent their anger, embark on retaliatory measure or create outright crisis in their demand for equity, justice and fair play. The party was expected to improve on the local government policies of the reorganisation or, at least, continue with them. This is because as explained in the previous chapter, the colonial government had been able to identify most of its past mistakes and come out with practical and realistic local government policies acceptable to majority of the people in the area.

Up to 1952, the AG apparently saw nothing wrong with the local government policies of the reorganisation. But it is obvious from the available facts and figures that when it decided to make modification the motive was neither for the preservation of peace nor for the development of the area.

In May 1952, the AG controlled Western Region Government came up with a maiden policy purportedly meant to review the grassroots programmes of the reorganisation era in this part of the Western Niger Delta. In that very month, the Western Region Gazette on Local Government⁵ changed the official title of Itsekiri monarch from *Olu* of Itsekiri to *Olu* of Warri. Yet, the government was aware of the historical background and the crucial reasons why the colonial government rejected Itsekiri application for a change of the title three consecutive times. The Action Group government was also quite aware of the explosive nature of inter-group relations in the area.

Before a detailed examination of this, it must be emphasised that as late as 1997 and even 2003, following the relocation of a local government headquarters vis-à-vis the eruption of crisis, most groups in the area contended that there can be no peace in Warri until this title is reversed.⁶ In the light of this, it would be objective to conclude that this AG decision of 1952 constitutes another crucial mistake in the history of local government administration in the area—a mistake equivalent to that of the appointment of a paramount chief for the old Warri Division in the person of Chief Dogho Numa from 1917 to 1928.

Looking at the detail more closely, in 1936 the Itsekiri demanded for a change of the title of their monarch from the *Olu* of Itsekiri to *Olu* of Warri. But the colonial government refused to grant the request on the grounds that the Itsekiri were only one of the aboriginal groups in Warri, though other groups also protested.⁷ In 1944, the Itsekiri revived their demand in a petition to the Chief Commissioner, Western Provinces. But the demand was also rejected by the Commissioner based on a careful examination of the political implication of restyling the official title of this monarch and the historical background of the title itself.⁸ The Commissioner contended that this was likely to result in political upheaval in the Warri Province and that the government could change the title to “*Olu* of Iwere”⁹ never “*Olu* of Warri”.

In February 1945, the Itsekiri Native Authority Council decided after a meeting that the Itsekiri monarch be styled “*Olu* of Warri” with a resolution challenging anyone who objected to the title to take legal action against the Itsekiri “nation”¹⁰ But considering the veto power enjoyed by the Commissioner and even the Resident of the province and the likely unpredictable outcome of such unilateral decision vis-à-vis allegations of a self-styled monarch, both the Itsekiri ruler and notable chiefs in the Council were not bold enough to give the decision a total support.¹¹

Meanwhile, Mr Edema Arubi, a prolific letter writer of Itsekiri origin whose influence over the *Olu* had irritated both British officials and some notable Itsekiri indigenes had emotional and fanatic support for a change of the title. He, therefore, sent a petition to the British Colonial Secretary on the issue in March 1946 accusing the British political officers of being biased in favour of some groups in the Western Niger Delta, particularly the Urhobo, by rejecting the designation of their monarch as *Olu* of Warri.¹²

It must be pointed out that there was no element of objectivity in the content of the petition because all the groups in the Warri Province utterly resented the Itsekiri demand since to them it was like placing all other monarchs in the province under the jurisdiction of the Itsekiri traditional ruler. However, the Urhobo aborigines of Warri and their Ijaw counterpart felt more affected and considered it oppressive, more so as they were yet to be well represented in the Warri Divisional Council. Apparently, Mr Arubi did not make any mention of the Ijaw because it was a time when the Ijaw dwellers in Warri decided to keep silent over development in the town while marking out appropriate plans and strategies to achieve their demands. As mentioned in the previous chapter, this was due to the biased attitude of colonial officials to their earlier demands.

Not surprisingly when a copy of the petition was sent to the Governor in Lagos for his comments, it took him little or no effort to convince the British colonial authority that the allegations therein were not in any way tenable.¹³ The Governor traced the history of the Itsekiri demand with facts and figures to demonstrate that the request was selfish for two reasons.

In the first place, Warri is not only founded by three aboriginal groups, census data demonstrated that the Itsekiri settlers in the town were in fact below half of the Urhobo in the same town.¹⁴ Secondly, as mentioned above, Warri was the name of the entire Province, a factor

that made the Itsekiri demand absolutely irritating to other monarchs in the Province. Finally, the economic implication of the policy was another consideration because colonial officials had become aware of the land factor in the pattern of inter-group relations in Warri and its immediate environs. It appeared the Itsekiri were convinced thereafter to drop the agitation for a change of the *Olu's* title.¹⁵

In 1951, the Action Group succeeded in forming the government of the Western Region following the first elections held throughout the country under the Macpherson Constitution. But apart from the Itsekiri, other groups in this part of the Western Niger Delta were hardly represented in the party. For instance, the six successful Urhobo candidates belonged to the National Council of Nigeria and the Cameroons (NCNC). One of the Itsekiri two representatives, Chief Festus Sam Edah (later known as Chief Festus Okotie Eboh) also belonged to NCNC.¹⁶ However, the other, Chief Arthur Prest declared for Action Group (A.G.). He was later elected to the central legislature by the Western House of Assembly and became a minister. Relatively the Itsekiri, therefore, had immense influence in the ruling party of the Western Region.¹⁷

Since Isoko was yet to be granted the status of an ethnic group, they had no other representatives in the Western House of Assembly apart from those representing the Urhobo. Similarly, the Ijaw aborigines of Warri had no representatives apart from those representing the entire Western Ijaw. The Urhobo also had no minister, not even at the regional level, though on account of population advantage their representatives in the Western House of Assembly were thrice the Itsekiri representatives.

In 1952, the Itsekiri once again revived their demand for a change of the official title of their monarch. The Action Group leader, Chief Obafemi Awolowo who was also the Western Regional Minister of Local Government visited Warri about a month or two after the Itsekiri

request was made. The Urhobo and other groups in the area protested giving solid facts and figures to demonstrate that the demand was neither legally nor historically tenable. Among others, the Minister was referred to the documents of 1936, 1944 and 1946. The Action Group leader was also made to understand that the Itsekiri only revived the demand because they felt that they had some influence in the ruling party. Meanwhile, the rising profile of Chief Festus Okotie Eboh proved to be a liability in an effort to address the situation objectively because according to some sources, “he was often seen as using his position to fight for the ... Itsekiri and to prevent the emergence of responsible leadership” among other groups in the area “by ensuring that only his lackeys won elections in the Warri Province.”¹⁸

Despite the protest from other groups, the government granted the Itsekiri request. In May 1952, the *Olu* became known as *Olu* of Warri. The initial reaction of other groups was not violent. Initially, it was felt that through constitutional means like taking the matter up for debate in the Western House of Assembly the government might be made to reconsider its decision. Some members of the Western House of Assembly from the Western Niger Delta suggested that the Warri Province should be renamed Delta Province. However, this was not enough to placate the Ijaw and Urhobo aborigines of Warri though it helped to reduce tensions among other groups. Invariably, only a reverse of the title would pacify all groups in the former Urhobo and *Jekri-Sobo* Divisions of the then Warri Province.

It was amid such tensions that Chief Arthur Prest, later designated central minister of communications,¹⁹ proposed to visit Warri on September 8, 1952. All the groups in the area had concluded that he was largely responsible for the official approval of the change of title of the Itsekiri monarch. For this reason, the Itsekiri were determined to give him an enthusiastic welcome. As explained above, the Ijaw aborigines of Warri had crucial grievances yet to be

addressed by the local government authority. Though they felt quite affected by the present development like the Urhobo (supported by the Isoko) they did not really plan to come out violently to attack the reception organised by the Itsekiri to welcome Arthur Prest. But before the visit of the Minister, they had already boycotted Itsekiri markets in Warri and forbade their people having any trading activities with the Itsekiri.²⁰

The Urhobo on the other hand were determined to prevent the entry of Chief Arthur Prest into Warri. This resulted in a major civil disturbance in Warri and its environs. The crisis spread to Sapele and a few other places.²¹ Meanwhile, the Minister's visit was postponed on the advice of the Resident of the Province and he was thus saved from getting involved in the fracas. The crisis started with an Urhobo attack on an Itsekiri procession of welcome and within a short period of time, Warri was engulfed in one of the most severe crisis in its history. As the conflict spread to Sapele and few other places, severe injuries and extensive damage to property were recorded. It is, however, believed that no lives were lost due to prompt intervention by the police. But "Itsekiri settlements in Urhobo country were sacked and many Itsekiri men who had lived for many years in such settlements lost a vast amount of property."²²

At this point, it must be made clear that some Itsekiri belonged to the NCNC, while some Urhobo were also members of the AG. In fact not all the Itsekiri were in complete support of the *Olu*²³ as a faction of them joined the Urhobo to vote for Chief Festus Okotie-Eboh, a wealthy Sapele businessman of Itsekiri origin later appointed Federal Minister of Finance during the First Republic. The *Olu* and Chief Okotie-Eboh were leaders of two rival Itsekiri factions.

This split was a reflection of a long-standing division in Itsekiri society between the people living on the Benin River (where Okotie-Eboh was born) and those of Warri area. In fact, the Benin River Itsekiri looked more to Sapele as their commercial centre and were less

interested in the stratagems and paraphernalia of the restyling of the title of *Olu* and the benefits thereof as these were only reaped by few Itsekiri chiefs in Warri area.²⁴ The Okotie-Eboh faction, therefore, joined the Urhobo to vote him into power. He enjoyed this support primarily because he did not appeal to ethnic sentiments until the question of the *Olu* title of 1952 compounded the problem of inter-ethnic friction.²⁵ Even the Igbo migrants in Sapele in addition to its environs and Warri gave him overwhelming support for the same reason.

As a member of the NCNC, AG propaganda tended to vilify him as a traitor to the Itsekiri.²⁶ At the time, the AG political interests completely polarised the pattern of inter-group co-operation, neither the Urhobo nor this Itsekiri faction could easily recall the time when they came together under the umbrella of a single leader, that is, the NCNC candidate, Chief Festus Okotie-Eboh. As mentioned above, Okotie-Eboh himself was not able to bring to play his true character and liberal principles that made the people single him out as the right candidate for leadership in such a heterogenous society.²⁷

This also implies that leadership is a key problem. A liberal minded leader whose thoughts transcend the conservative euphoria of political parties and ethnic sentiments would be of valuable help. It must be pointed out here that the election of Chief Mukoro Mowoe of the Urhobo town of Evwreni into the Western House of Assembly to represent the Warri Province in 1946 received unanimous support from all the groups in the province because apart from his liberal approach to issues of common interest, “he worked hard to bring together the Isoko, Ijaw, Itsekiri, Ukwuani and Urhobo”.²⁸ The two Urhobo candidates who replaced him after his death in 1949 are believed to have lacked these qualities.

As the crisis subsided, both the Urhobo and Isoko also joined the Ijaw to boycott Itsekiri markets in Warri and placed a ban on any trading activities with the Itsekiri. However, the police

managed to restore law and order by October 1952.²⁹ The government decided to change the name of the Province to Delta Province as demanded by some groups. A number of Urhobo sub-groups and few representatives of the Delta Province in the Western House of Assembly requested that a commission of inquiry be set up to investigate the right of the Itsekiri to the title now accorded their ruler. But all such demands were completely ignored by the government. As the police managed to restore order by the last quarter of the year, the accumulated grievances and bitterness produced by the events of 1952 have continued to linger on. As we shall see later in this chapter, this development has ever since complicated the challenges of local government administration in the area by compounding the controversy surrounding the ownership of Warri land.

The Local Government Reforms of the 1950s

The local government reforms which commenced in the second half of 1952 involved the entire Western Region. Therefore, among the Urhobo, the implementation of the reforms started amidst the crisis explained above. In theory, the 1952 and 1957 local government reforms were embarked upon by the Chief Obafemi Awolowo Action Group to rectify the lapses in the local government machinery of the entire region. The pre-existing local government structure was a frequent object of attack by the educated elite led by Obafemi Awolowo.³⁰

They claimed that the system had a number of defects, but whether they were able to identify the actual shortcomings and address them in order of importance is another issue entirely. Meanwhile, a clause in section 3 of the local government laws of 1952 stated clearly that before the establishment of any council and any intervention in traditional chieftaincy

matters, the Regional Authority was to make inquiries in order to ascertain the wishes of “the inhabitants of the area concerned.”³¹

Meanwhile, the local government decision of May 1952 was regarded by the Urhobo and most other groups in the Western Niger Delta as a major flaw and a rupture in the local government structure of the area. Therefore, to them if the above clause was of any relevance then it must be used to correct the mistake of May 1952. Thus, all the affected groups watched the implementation of the reforms with absolute reservation as the response of the reforms to the mistake of May was to be used as the most crucial instrument of assessing their genuineness.

The general provisions of the reforms were, however, implemented in the area. But to the people, the reforms only constituted a mere change of structure without addressing the actual need of the society, especially in terms of creation of frameworks antithetical to crisis and inter-group conflicts in an ethnically heterogeneous society polarised by election politics that was rooted in sectionalism and individual sentiments. While it is true that they were already prejudiced against the government, it must be emphasised that the local government gazette of May 1952 is a major factor in the land disputes of the 1960s and 1970s and the local government crisis of 1997 – 1999, which was revived in 2003 among the groups in the former Urhobo and *Jekri Sobo* Divisions.³²

Looking at the reforms more closely, the Local Government Law of 1952 made provision for the setting up of one to three types of councils in each division as the authority may consider necessary or expedient.³³ This could be divisional council, district council or local councils. Section 6 of the law stated that once established, each council was a corporate body having power to hold land. As corporate bodies, they could be sued as they were considered legally

responsible for their actions which automatically also granted them the power to take legal actions against individuals and organisations whenever necessary.

Section 187 of the same law allowed Divisional and District Councils to acquire land which was within the Council jurisdiction though the owner had to be paid compensation.³⁴ But no council in the Western Region was to enter into a contract to the value of two thousand pounds or more without the prior approval of the Regional Authority. Moreover the principle of election was introduced. This implies that members of each local government council were to be elected. Sections 20, 21 and 23 of Part Four of the law also allowed the appointment of traditional rulers as members of the council.³⁵ Finally, with the 1952 reform, the councils were allowed to collect much of their revenue through rates.

The 1957 local government reform was practically a general revision of the 1952 reform and therefore only introduced few significant changes. It made provision for the establishment of Local Government Service Board to act as a buffer between the senior members of the staff of the council and the council authorities. It was the first local government reform in the country to give some attention to the issue of gender discrimination in the operation of the local government system and therefore made provision for the inclusion of women in the local government council. Finally, the 1957 reform also had a second look at the issue of income tax and collection of revenue through rates, but without any modification of the 1952 arrangement.³⁶

One effect of these reforms was the creation of a number of District Councils in Urhoboland. Thus, the old Urhobo Divisional Council was broken up into four district councils, namely, Western Urhobo District Council, Sapele Urban District Council, Central Urhobo District Council and Eastern Urhobo(Isoko) District Council. The Urhobo clan of Abraka formerly in the Aboh Division was excised from that division and merged with the Western

Urhobo District Council,³⁷ while Orogun was merged with central Urhobo District Council. Orerokpe was the headquarters of the Western Urhobo District Council, while Sapele was the headquarters of Sapele Urban District Council. On the other hand, Central Urhobo District Council and Eastern Urhobo District Council had their headquarters in Ughelli and Oleh respectively.

But apparently it was not pragmatic to merge the Urhobo of Warri and its immediate environs with any of the above district councils. Therefore, they came under the umbrella of the Warri Urban District Council which also had a section of the Itsekiri under its jurisdiction. The remnant of Itsekiriland was merged with the Ijaw aborigenes of Warri and its immediate environs to form the Warri Divisional Council.

In accordance with section 30 of the 1952 local government law, the four district councils had a three year tenure.³⁸ Also, as stipulated in the law each of them was to be headed by the paramount chief of the area over which the council had jurisdiction. Thus, the *Orodje* (King) of Okpe was the President of the Sapele Urban District Council. The implementation of this provision was easy in this district council because it had jurisdiction over the indigenes of only the Okpe clan. But each of the other district councils consisted of a good number of clans. In these cases, the head of each clan was given due recognition, while they were allowed to appoint a paramount chief among themselves either permanently or on rotational basis.

The conflict over the change of *Olu*'s title, however, compounded the issue of paramount chief for Warri Urban District Council which had the Urhobo of Igbudu and Okere under its jurisdiction. The *Olu* was the paramount chief of this Council though without the support of the Urhobo. Similar tensions developed in the Warri Divisional Council where the Ijaw and Itsekiri found it difficult to reconcile their interests.

On the other hand, with the introduction of election about three quarters of the members of each council in Urhoboland were elected. The Western Urhobo District Council, Central Urhobo District Council and Eastern Urhobo District Council had sixty-one members each in their respective councils. Out of this, sixteen were traditional chiefs, while forty-five were elected.³⁹ Only the Sapele Urban District Council consisted of thirty-five members and only the *Orodje* of Okpe was the traditional chief among them, and of course the paramount chief.⁴⁰

Each council was also empowered to elect its chairman and vice-chairman for the running of its affairs.⁴¹ Consequently, the 1952 and 1957 local government reforms considerably reduced the control of the District Officer on the council. For one thing, the District Officer ceased to be the executive head of the Council. This position was now occupied by the chairman. Again, his power to ultimately determine policies for the council was withdrawn. Rather, he was redesignated local government adviser. However, he had the right of access to all council committee meetings. He could also inspect all books, accounts and records of the council and advise the staff on performance of their functions.

Moreover, there was reorganisation of wards to make them function more effectively as subsidiary units of each local government council in the area. These wards were not organised on clan basis. In fact, a clan could be made up of two or more wards. In the system, each ward was entitled to a minimum of one councillor. The essence was for the councillor to bring the people's ideas to the government through the District Council and also inform the people about the activities of the government. Consequently, each councillor toured his ward whenever he could and when this was necessitated by new developments in the political terrain. During such tours, he interacted with the council of elders, village assemblies and village councils of the respective villages in his ward.

There were two measures adopted to improve the financial strength of the local government councils in Urhoboland in 1957. In the first place, under the auspices of the reform, new systems were employed by each local government in the collection of tax based on the discretion of the council's authority. Compared to previous systems, the councillors of the new system liaised more closely with traditional chiefs and town rulers to assist in tax assessment and collection because the latter knew more about the taxable members of their towns and villages and could most easily obtain accurate nominal roll and trace tax defaulters.⁴²

The second was the fact that in 1957 the local government law of 1952 was comprehensively reviewed and one of the factors taken into consideration was the issue of finance for local authorities.⁴³ This led to the introduction of the Income Tax Law by which Councils were allowed to collect more of their revenue themselves in form of rates.⁴⁴ Before then the Councils relied on finance from the Regional Authority.

Finally, the local government reforms modified the existing local government structure in Urhoboland with regard to administration of justice. The period 1958-1960 saw the creation of customary courts to replace the legal institution of the Native Administration era. This started in 1958 when the Western Region Government decided to implement the customary court section of the 1957 Local Government Reform.⁴⁵ The key players in the system emphasized that the institution could hardly be integrated into the new system of customary courts and that no form of reform could permanently rectify it.

In particular, past reforms of the institution were used to buttress this view. The most important of these reforms was the one that followed the anti-tax riots of 1927-28.⁴⁶ This took place in 1928-34 and actually did much in overhauling the warrant chief institution. The protagonists of the 1950s grassroots politics in Urhoboland were actually looking forward to a

sweeping reform comparable to that of the reorganisation era. Therefore, they conceived the scraping of the legal institutions of the Native Administration era as inevitable. Though the customary courts in the Urhobo District Councils were also graded A, B, C and D,⁴⁷ they differed from the preceding native courts in various ways. Firstly, while legal practitioners were not allowed in the native courts, they were introduced into the customary courts. However, only the Grades A and B customary courts were entitled to one legal practitioner each. For instance, the Sapele Grade B Customary Court had a legal practitioner in February 1960.⁴⁸ On the other hand, a Grade C customary court at Agbarho had no legal practitioner.

Both the Western Urhobo and Sapele Urban District Councils had a total of twelve customary courts, while the actual figure of Central Urhobo District Council and Eastern Urhobo District Council is not certain. Again, unlike the previous legal system, members of customary courts must attain a stipulated level of education. Thus, each customary court consisted of a president and two other members, each of whom must be literate in English and have a primary six certificate or reach an equivalent educational standard. The president of the court was also the judge.⁴⁹

Finally, unlike members of the Native Administration legal system and those of its precursor, the native court system, who were appointed by the District Officer and Resident, the power to appoint the presidents and other members of customary courts was vested in the Chief Justice of the Region, acting on the recommendations of the Judicial Committee of the Division.⁵⁰

The Customary Court judges dealt with offences arising from their area and against a background of their knowledge of the local tradition. But they tried only specified offences. The Courts handled issues relating to land disputes and custody of children under customary

marriage. They also settled matters relating to inheritance upon intestacy. Magistrates in their original jurisdiction were precluded from hearing or determining these matters unless on appeal from a customary court.

Moreover, the courts did not hear appeals from one another. In Urhoboland, such appeals went to the magistrate court only. A Chief Magistrate supervised all the customary courts within the area and the Chief Justice had the authority to make rules regulating the practice and procedure of these courts.⁵¹

However, the impact of customary courts on administration of justice in Urhoboland during this period was hardly significant. This was due to four main reasons. Firstly, majority of the Urhobo preferred to take their cases to their local towns men and town courts rather than customary or magistrate courts which involved bureaucratic delays and greater expenses. It has been estimated with reference to the Urhobo country that for every one case taken to the customary courts, there were one hundred cases settled through the town courts.⁵² The second was the fact that the courts were far from many communities. Moreover, no preference was given to traditional chiefs and kings in the appointment of presidents; a factor which made them appear foreign to the people. Finally, between 1960 and 1966, there was abuse of customary courts in the Delta Province.⁵³

Overall, the 1950s local government reforms introduced some novelties into the local government system, which to some extent were in one way or the other beneficial to the Urhobo. But to them, these were only palliatives because the crucial grassroots problem of the riverine Western Niger Delta, that is, the issue of traditional leadership and chieftaincy affairs with regard to Warri and its immediate environs compounded by the AG government itself was completely unaddressed. In other words, though the Urhobo benefitted from the 1950s local government

reforms, the structure provided through the reforms could not effectively address the lapses created by the 1952 local government gazette.

Even when there was peace, it was always fragile while tension was hardly far from the surface. Such peace itself was only a product of time and not by any administrative prowess or designed strategic grassroots machinery put in place by the government. Such a fragile structure was prone to sporadic crises and reverberation of unresolved problems at the grassroots level. Not surprisingly, as we shall see later, the grassroots conflicts of 1968 and 1973 and the crises of 1997 to 1999 and 2003 were largely connected to this previous arrangement.

The Abuse of Local Government Functionaries coupled with the Quest for Recognition of Sub-Ethnic identity, 1961-1966.

Grassroots administration was accompanied with some tension and socio-political friction during the period under consideration. Though this was also the experience of most other parts of the country,⁵⁴ in the case of Urhoboland, the quest for recognition of sub-ethnic identity added some complexity to the situation. As explained in the previous chapters, the colonial government had subordinated some groups to the authority of others. With the achievement of independence in 1960, each group felt the time was ripe enough to correct such errors. Hence, one of their main pre-occupations was how to get their various sub-group identities recognised at the national level.

Isoko and Okpe were the most vibrant among these sub-groups. The Isoko demand for official recognition of their ethnic identity started in the 1930s, but gathered new momentum after 1960. Even though this study is on the Urhobo, development in Isokoland, at least, up to the 1960s affected those in Urhoboland and vice-versa. Therefore, one or two things must be said here especially on the quest for the recognition of Isoko ethnic identity up to the 1960s.

Apparently, there were two obstacles to their demand. Firstly, Urhobo leaders and elders classified them as just one of the Urhobo clans. Secondly, a 1938 gazette of the colonial government which gave official recognition to the Urhobo language and ethnic identity classified them as a sub-group of Urhoboland.⁵⁵ The situation was such that Isoko was designated Eastern Urhobo even after the 1950s local government reforms which allowed the creation of new district and divisional councils.

The Isoko demand actually started during the reorganisation era. Thus, during the creation of the Urhobo division in the 1930s they rejected a court of appeal that would have its seat at Ughelli, the headquarters of the division. In a partial effort to grant their demand, the court of appeal was made to have its seat in both Oleh and Ughelli and compelled to sit at Oleh and Ughelli on rotational basis.⁵⁶ The Urhobo were, however, not comfortable with this and other steps taken by the Isoko in this direction. This is because as mentioned above, competition for resources was such that a group, once recognised, would do everything possible to prevent those under its jurisdiction from gaining “autonomous” status.

Up to the 1960s, the constitution of an area into a local government unit was conceived as a step forward in the actualisation of local autonomy and recognition of sub-group identity. Since Isoko was a local government unit before 1960, that is, Eastern Urhobo District Council, apparently what they were demanding for was an official change of the name to Isoko District Council to reflect their ethnic identity. These agitations were going on when the government decided to create the Midwestern Region in 1963. One of the issues considered side-by-side with this was a review of the entire grassroots system in the new region with regard to chieftaincy affairs, ethnic identities and the size and structure of local government areas. The new development favoured the Isoko though it must be admitted that they were focused enough to

exploit the situation by drawing the attention of key players in the system to their demand.⁵⁷ Thus, Isoko was not only legally recognised as an ethnic group on August 9 1963, the former Eastern Urhobo District Council was restructured, up-graded and renamed Isoko Division.⁵⁸

On the other hand, the Urhobo clan of Okpe has the largest population among the Urhobo sub-groups (almost 30% of the entire Urhobo by the 1963 census) and this is sometimes used to justify its right to leadership. The Okpe, however, never demanded for a recognition of the clan as an ethnic group, but they felt that on account of their population their dialect ought to feature as the standard dialect of the Urhobo. In other words, there was that feeling among them that the Urhobo language should have been modelled around the Okpe dialect. They were, however, cautious in their demand because they were aware that unlike the Okpe dialect, the Agbarho dialect which is the standard dialect and therefore stands as the Urhobo language is understood and spoken by all Urhobo.⁵⁹ In the 1960s they only demanded for a recognition of their dialect side-by-side with the Urhobo language.⁶⁰ However, not much was achieved in this regard until the 1980s. But the emotional feeling of this sub-group was apparently among the reasons why its district council was up-graded to a divisional council, that is, Western Urhobo Divisional Council in 1967.

Meanwhile, amidst these agitations was the abuse of local government functionaries during the first half of the 1960s in most parts of the country primarily due to acute rivalries between political opponents of the existing political parties at a time when acquisition of political power and winning of election were conceived as a do or die affair.⁶¹ The most formidable weapon in this respect was the local government police who were engaged by party politicians to harass political opponents through arbitrary arrests and detentions. The atrocities committed by the local government police force were so much that the Midwestern Region Government was

forced to abolish its use in all the local government councils of the state as from 1st April, 1964.⁶² Again, customary courts were used as instruments of putting political opponents behind the bar without due process of law as known to civil courts. This led to the suspension of customary courts in the Midwestern Region in 1962 and 1963-64.⁶³ Similarly, sanitary inspectors of the local government councils were quick to arrest opponents, or even personal enemies of councillors of the ruling party for spurious offences relating to environmental sanitation. Finally, the district councils were instruments of all manners of political intimidation.

The situation was such that a number of district councils were dissolved in September 1962. Among them were those in Urhoboland. In each case, a sole administrator was appointed immediately. He was in turn replaced with management committees in 1964.⁶⁴ As a result of this, traditional rulers in the Central Urhobo District Council, Western Urhobo District Council and Sapele Urban District Council were among the local government functionaries suspended in 1964. As from 1965, therefore, there were widespread feelings both on the part of the government and people of the Midwestern Region to review the overall local government system. But this was still under serious consideration when the country had its first military coup in January 1966. However, the Military Governor of the Midwestern State, Lt. Col. David Akpode Ejoor decided to review the structure and sizes of local government areas in the region in 1967. The first step taken was to restore some measure of sanity and stability in the system. This started with the reorganisation of customary courts.

The customary courts were, in the next few months, reconstituted and integrated into the state judicial system. Firstly, wherever it was possible, a trained lawyer was made president of the court. Secondly, the courts were brought under close supervision of the Chief Justice of the Region. Though he might act through an intermediary, he was empowered to establish the courts

and appoint the president and other members. He was also to set out rules and regulations to guide their operation.⁶⁵

On the other hand, the management committees which had replaced the former elected councillors in 1964 were found inefficient and wrought in partisan politics in the execution of their policies.⁶⁶ Inevitably, the Governor revoked their appointment and replaced them temporarily with sole administrators. It was after this initial reorganisation that a panel was set up to consider the sizes and administrative structure of the local government areas in the whole Midwestern Region. One of the panel's recommendations was the overhaul of the system and the upgrade of the status of some local government units. In the event, the communities under the jurisdiction of the former Eastern Urhobo District Council were constituted into the Eastern Urhobo Division in April 1967. Similarly, the Western Urhobo District Council was upgraded and renamed Western Urhobo Division.⁶⁷

However, despite the spirited efforts of the military administration, not much improvement was made in the development of the local authority system in Urhoboland from 1967 to 1972. Obviously, the local government crisis of the 1960s was haulted by the coups d'état of 1966 and the subsequent outbreak of the Nigerian Civil War. The consequent occupation of the Midwestern State by "Biafran" forces from 9 August to September 20, 1967 only replaced this with another crisis in the area, though a general one. The situation was such that the government of the day had to continue with the Sole Administrator system as an inevitable emergency measure of mobilising people to sustain the war effort.⁶⁸

In spite of this, in Urhoboland, an attempt was made to restore the lost confidence of the people in the local government system through the Sole Administrator. For this reason, he was empowered to make use of local advisers whenever he felt this was necessary. It was felt the use

of local advisers would restore the image of impartiality, integrity, and efficiency expected of the local government authorities, though not much was achieved through it.⁶⁹

Immediately the pressure from the 'Biafran' forces was checked, two major factors played significant role in grassroots administration in Urhoboland. These arose from the policies taken by the new Governor of the Midwestern State, Lt. Col. S.O. Ogbemudia who replaced David Ejoor in September 1967. The first was the appointment of bodies known as Local Committees for each and every local government area in 1968.⁷⁰ For instance, the Local Committee for each of the two divisions in Urhoboland consisted of the Senior Divisional Officer in Charge of the Division (as the Chairman), the Medical officer, the Engineer and the Forest Officer.⁷¹ The main function of the Committee was the appointment, promotion, discipline, and transfer of junior local government staff. It is said that until then, the recruitment of junior staff was poorly handled since the Local Government Service Board only employed Senior Staff.⁷² It was, therefore, considered an improvement in the operation of the local government system in Urhoboland.

The next factor was the inauguration of Advisory Committees on 21st May, 1969 to aid and advise the Sole Administrator. The Edict which established this committee provided for a minimum of one meeting every three months and empowered it to deliberate on matters relating to the development of the Division.⁷³ To some extent, this constituted an improvement in the management of local the government system in Urhoboland. This is because the Advisory Committee acted as a check on the power of the Sole Administrator and also furnished him with local opinion. But the Committee was precluded from considering some matters such as the award of contracts, for which a special Tender Board was established. Besides, the committee

was regarded as a temporary body, a negotiating mechanism, pending thorough investigations to determine appropriate measures of reforms.⁷⁴

In 1970 traditional rulers were encouraged to co-operate with members of the Advisory Committee.⁷⁵ The traditional rulers were also requested to make local arrangements for the efficient collection of taxes, especially as the era (1967-70) witnessed the attempt of some people in the Western, Midwestern and Eastern Regions to evade taxes.⁷⁶ This was the state of local government administration in Urhoboland when the civil war ended in 1970.

However, at the end of the war, few other steps were taken to modify the existing local government structure. The Sole Administrator system was abolished in Urhoboland and full management committee were appointed to take control of the affairs of the Division. This took place in February 1971 and was the result of a new edict enacted by the State Government on local government administration.⁷⁷ There was, however, no significant change in the system until the 1973 attempt to address the financial crisis of local government authorities in the then Midwestern State.

The Creation of the Midwest Local Government Loans Board, 1973

In 1973, the Federal Government gave a specific grant of N12 million each to a good number of states in the country including the Midwestern State for the purpose of establishing a local government loans board.⁷⁸ But the recipient states failed to utilise the funds judiciously and the irregularities surrounding their utilisation were such that macro-studies on local government finance in Nigeria concluded that none of the states which received the fund set up a local government loans board.⁷⁹

The establishment of the Midwest Local Government Loans Board was a grassroots initiative which commenced after the Report of the Third National Conference on Local

Government held in Benin-City, 9-11th December 1970. The data and fieldwork reports compiled during the conference exposed the pathetic financial predicament of local government councils in Midwest State and the fact that financially they existed at the mercy of higher levels of government. In a blueprint assessment of this, I.M. OKonjo, the then permanent secretary, Ministry of Local Government and Chieftaincy Affairs wrote:

Given a situation in which capital road development grants are no longer paid, in which the government is heavily in arrears in respect of the medical and health grants and in which the general education grant has not only disappeared but in which also councils are now required to “subsidise” school boards, it is difficult to be optimistic about the future prospects for grants-in-aid in the Midwest. The Ministry of Local Government and Chieftaincy Affairs has not, however, given up fighting and one trusts that the experience of other states will strengthen our hands in securing a just treatment for local authorities in the State.⁸⁰

The table on the next page provides some insight into the financial situation of local government councils in Urhoboland and some of its immediate neighbours with regard to the federal government response to its financial obligations to the local government.

There were different approaches to the payment of grants and it was difficult, therefore, to decide which of them should be given premium. From the example of the Midwestern State, however, it is clear that the problem did not lie with the grants themselves. The real problem was the unwillingness on the part of the government to meet its financial commitments to the councils. There is no doubt that if the government had paid the outstanding sums of money to the councils, the situation might have been different. It was suggested that some of the grants should be paid in advance instead of in arrears though this had its own shortcomings. Apart from the fact that it would be difficult to predetermine the likely financial involvement in some council projects, the advance payment might reduce the zeal of councils to generate revenue internally.⁸¹

Grants Due to Local Government Councils in Respect of Education, Medical and Health Services in Pounds

Names of Council	1967/68		1968/69		1969/70	
	Amount Budgeted £	Amount not paid £	Amount Budgeted £	Amount not paid £	Amount Budgeted £	Amount not paid £
1. Central Urhobo District Council	(A) 1,230:--	1,230:--	1,170:--	1,170:--	1,110:--	1,110:--
	(B) 266:--	226:--	200:--	—:--	70:--	70:--
	(C) 54,130:--	9,292:--	47,000:--	—:--	59,830:--	59,830:--
	(D) 2,640:--	1,357:--	1,700:--	—:--	2,850:--	2,850:--
2. Western Urhobo District Council	(A) 12,230:--	1,230:--	1,230:--	1,230:--	—:5:--	—:--
	(B) 200:--	124:6:8	200:--	—:--	70:--	70:--
	(C) 46,020:--	—:--	59,830:--	4,952:5:1	59,830:--	59,830:--
	(D) 2,640:--	—:--	2,940:--	—:--	2,850:--	2,850:--
3. Sapele Urban District Council	(A) 3,015:--	3,015:--	3,025:--	3,025:--	3,025:--	3,025:--
	(B) —:--	—:--	—:--	—:--	—:--	—:--
	(C) 8,200:--	—:--	10,580:--	1,025:15:--	11,415:--	11,415:--
	(D) —:--	—:--	—:--	—:--	—:--	—:--
4. Isoko District Council	(A) 605:--	605:--	605:--	605:--	605:--	605:--
	(B) 500:--	293:17:8	500:--	61:3:--	500:--	500:--
	(C) 16,365:--	209:7:3	28,030:--	9,196:11:6	28,030:--	28,030:--
	(D) 1,390:--	30:--	1,390:--	—:--	1,390:--	1,390:--
5. Warri Urban District Council	(A) 260:--	260:--	260:--	260:--	260:--	260:--
	(B) 200:--	200:--	200:--	200:--	200:--	200:--
	(C) —:--	—:--	—:--	—:--	—:--	—:--
	(D) —:--	—:--	—:--	—:--	—:--	—:--
6. Warri Divisional Council	(A) 640:--	640:--	640:--	640:--	640:--	640:--
	(B) 80:--	—:--	100:--	100:--	100:--	100:--
	(C) 38,025:--	8,264:15:--	27,845:--	5,165:16:11	28,730:--	28,730:--
	(D) 1,775:--	863:15:--	1,360:--	441:15:--	1,360:--	1,360:--
7. W. Ijaw Northern District Council	(A) 375:--	375:--	375:--	42:19:4	375:--	375:--
	(B) 200:--	190:8:11	200:--	200:--	200:--	200:--
	(C) 16,675:--	15,447:--	22,305:--	5,462:2:4	20,235:--	20,235:--
	(D) 775:--	460:11:8	820:--	63:13:3	5:--	5:--
8. W. Ijaw Central District Council	(A) 600:--	600:--	500:--	500:--	600:--	600:--
	(B) 200:--	177:15:--	200:--	—:--	200:--	200:--
	(C) 29,980:--	16,940:5:--	39,460:--	6,937:7:4	—:--	—:--
	(D) 1,875:--	1,255:2:7	1,725:--	315:3:5	—:--	—:--
9. W. Ijaw Southern District Council	(A) 270:--	270:--	270:--	270:--	270:--	270:--
	(B) 50:--	50:--	50:--	50:--	50:--	50:--
	(C) —:--	—:--	10,745:--	1,885:18:4	11,745:--	11,745:--
	(D) 395:--	337:3:4	670:--	49:3:4	860:--	860:--
10. Ukwuani District Council	(A) 1,010:--	1,010:--	1,160:--	1,160:--	1,710:--	1,710:--
	(B) 500:--	427:10:--	500:--	229:3:8	500:--	500:--
	(C) 51,365:--	6,509:16:8	50,585:--	1,680:15:--	50,585:--	50,585:--
	(D) 1,300:--	—:--	1,450:--	51:2:--	1,450:--	1,450:--

Keys: (A) Medical and Health Grant
 (B) Free Medical Treatment Grant
 (C) Primary School Grant
 (D) Education Administration and Supervision Grant.

Source:- Adebayo Adedeji & L. Rowland(eds.), *Local Government Finance in Nigeria: Problems and Prospects*, Reports of the Third National Conference on Local Government held in Benin-City 9th – 11th Dec. 1970 (Ile-Ife: University of Ife Press, 1970), 186-187 & 190

It was also suggested that the state's financial aids to councils should be tied to a formula which measures local efforts, e.g. the volume of tax collected. The only possible objection to this suggestion was that it would require accurate information on actual local assessment levels.

Moreover, the grassroots system had a built-in tendency to promote uneven development at the expense of the comparatively less favoured and backward rural areas. This is because, apart from Government's unwillingness or inability to pay these grants to local government councils, there are other problems inherent in some of the grants themselves. In the case of percentage grants it is obvious that a council which was unable to finance a very essential service might not receive any grants at all. The consequence of this is that the richer and wealthier councils were able to get more, while financially weak councils which needed essential services more badly could not get them due to lack of funds.⁸² In addition, as grants were paid in arrears, a council planning to provide a grant-aided service would first have to source for fund elsewhere to meet the total cost of the project before submitting a claim for partial re-imburement. This, again, contains a built-in difficulty for financially weak councils. These objections equally applied to the graduated block grant which was, however, not adopted in the Midwestern State. Block grants, as was commonly assumed, constituted some impediment to the smooth control of local authority expenditure because they were not usually given for any specific purpose. The fact, however, is that its management and the nature of its operation were such that only a few councils had the competent staff to ensure the detailed accounting involved.⁸³

It was this epileptic financial situation of the councils that made Mr T. M. Eruaga (later appointed Commissioner for Local Government and Chieftaincy Affairs in Midwestern State) and some other key players in local government administration in the area to suggest the need for local councils to look beyond funds from the federal government even for the implementation of

capital projects. They, therefore, suggested the creation of a local government loans board that would only give out loans for specific capital projects.

Since expected funding from the federal government was irregular if not erratic while internally generated revenue of each council might not come in bulk, a local government council would be entitled to a loan for capital project if there was enough evidence to demonstrate that its internally generated revenue would be enough to pay the loan instalmentally over a period of time in case the federal government failed to honour its grants. Local government councils were encouraged to revert to their “traditional do it yourself policy which in the past had fulfilled its role splendidly”⁸⁴ and it was believed that in the case of the Midwestern State the existence of such a loan board would be an asset in this direction.

It was a project that required federal government support and its architects were still looking at the drawing board on how to actualise it when the Midwestern State held its Third Conference of Management Committees in January 1973, also attended by S.O. Ogbemudia, the State Governor.⁸⁵ In that meeting, J.M. Eruaga, the then Midwestern Commissioner for Local Government and Chieftaincy Affairs presented the matter for final discussion and it became clear that the federal government had agreed to support it financially and many other states were also thinking of a similar board if supported by the federal government.

A body was, therefore, constituted during the meeting to frame a constitution and *modus operandi* of the Midwest Local Government Loans Board. It started operating on September 6 1973. Its operation was facilitated by a release of the N12 million grant in 1973 as promised by the federal government for the establishment of the Board. Constitutionally, the Board was to grant loans to local authorities for the purpose of capital projects only. It was also empowered to

inspect from time to time whether the loan given out was used for the purpose for which it was granted.

The members of the Midwestern Local Government loans Board were the Commissioner for Local Government and Chieftaincy Affairs (as Chairman), the Chairman of the Local Government Service Board, the Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Local Government and Chieftaincy Affairs, the Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Finance, the Accountant-General of the State and all Divisional Officers. The Board was later renamed the Bendel Development Authorities Loans Board in 1976 without change of membership and administrative structure.⁸⁶

After the establishment of the Loans Board, a number of local government councils obtained loans for capital projects though it is difficult to know the exact amount given to those which applied.⁸⁷ Mr J.W.S. Ilavbare could still recall that apart from the local government councils in Urhoboland, where he worked as a senior member of staff in their respective Human and Personnel Management units from 1965 to 1980, other local government authorities in the Western Niger Delta benefited from these loans.⁸⁸

The Question of the Ownership of Warri Land

The controversy surrounding the ownership of Warri land constitutes a major theme in grassroots politics and administration among the sub-groups of the former Urhobo and *Jekri-Sobo* Divisions. It is, therefore, an explosive issue that can not be exhausted in this study. The conflict over the ownership of Warri land, however, started before 1950. This was primarily in connection with the operation of the local government system. It originated from poorly coordinated local government policies of the 1930s and the leasing of land to the British government by the local government authority without compensating the owners of such lands.

Precisely, the paramount chief of the local government authority, Chief Dogho Numa, illegally appropriated such fund for his personal use.⁸⁹ The fund realised was not used for the provision of public utility. Yet, the owners of such lands were not compensated. As explained in chapter three, the Itsekiri and the Urhobo charged the local government authority and the paramount chief, Dogho Numa, to court in 1923 and 1926 respectively asking the latter to account for the utilisation of this fund. The desire to benefit from subsequent funds through this source was a major impetus for inter-group land disputes in Warri and its immediate environs.

The first of these land disputes occurred between the Itsekiri and the Urhobo people of Abgassa in 1931.⁹⁰ It originated from the fact that the presiding judge of the 1926 case, Mr Justice Maxwell based his judgement on the premise that Agbassa land belonged to the Itsekiri. It was followed in 1934 by another one between the Urhobo community of Aladja and its Ijaw counterpart, Saba. Though the pre-1950s land disputes generated crisis, they produced no significant violence, not even the Sapele land case of 1941-1943 which proved to be the most explosive among them.⁹¹ However, the tension which accompanied the latter contributed to the revival of the Agbassa-Itsekiri land dispute in 1949.

But the situation was within control until the local government gazette of May 1952. It compounded the entire structure and introduced new dimensions and some element of violence into inter-group land disputes, making them to be more confrontational. This is because it created the Itsekiri Communal Land Trust (ICLT) without corresponding bodies for the Urhobo and Western Ijaw. In an apparent effort to pacify other groups, Cap 19 of the Chiefs Law Act of 1959 stated that the gazette of 1952 was not meant to place the Urhobo and Ijaw aborigines of Warri under the jurisdiction of the Itsekiri monarch.⁹² In spite of this, for two reasons the Urhobo conceived the development of 1952 as a plot to deprive them of the land they inherited from their

ancestors in Warri and its immediate environs. In the first place, the failure to create similar land trusts for the other two groups made the Urhobo to perceive the content of Cap 19 of the Chiefs Law Act of 1959 as a ruse. Secondly, as we shall see below, the Itsekiri added fuel to a burning fire by concluding that the new development implies that the Ijaw-Urhobo aborigines of Warri are no longer entitled to the land they inherited from their ancestors.⁹³

As mentioned above, the people of the area expected the 1950s local government reform to be a sweeping one like that of the reorganisation era. As such, they attached little or no significance to it when it failed to correct what has been described as “political mistake for expediency by the Awolowo government”,⁹⁴ that is, the restyling of the title of the Itsekiri monarch in 1952. While a non-indigene might conceive it as a mere change of title, the natives of the area could foresee the sinister long-term implication surrounding it because the economic implication of the policy was their primary consideration. On the part of the government, there was hardly any effort to consider the economic implication because the political economy of the entire policy framework for the local government institution was hardly given a thought. The preceding colonial officials, on the other hand, were interested in the political economy of the total policy framework for grassroots administration and therefore considered the economic implication of the request when it came up earlier.⁹⁵ It was the economic consideration that made the Agbassa people to revive their land dispute with the Itsekiri in 1957. This case was later declared in favour of the Itsekiri by the Supreme Court.

Not surprisingly, before 1960 the new development had already introduced new complexities into the question of the ownership of Warri land. The main reason for this is that the Itsekiri believed that it gave them an edge over the Urhobo and Ijaw in the acquisition of asset in Warri and even its immediate environs. The 1957 legal verdict combined with the event

of 1952 made the Itsekiri feel, at least in practice, that they had been able to establish their claim over Warri at the expense of the other groups. Consequently, they embarked on new measures to fortify their “gains” by thinking of how to legalise their claim over the entire Warri land. Though the Urhobo and Ijaw would no more take anything for granted with regard to the Warri situation, it was the determination of the Itsekiri to fortify their “victory” of 1952 that engulfed them in what turned out to be the most explosive land dispute in post-colonial Warri history which, until date, remains the most accepted point of reference in the analysis of land disputes in Warri and its environs.

This land case which lasted for five years (1968-1973) was between the Okere-Urhobo Clan of Warri (represented by the ruling family, Olodi-Oki with Daniel Okumagba as the secretary) and the Itsekiri, represented by the officials of the 1952 Land Trust among whom were D.O. Idundun, F.O.N. Rewane and Chief E.N. Begho.⁹⁶ In the suit filed by D.O. Idundun and six other Itsekiri on behalf of the ICLT in the High Court of Warri presided over by Justice E.A. Ekereuche in 1968, the Itsekiri asked among other things “that in accordance with the Itsekiri customary law all that piece or parcel of land at Okere, Warri, is the property of the Ogitsi family at Okere subject only to the overlordship of *Olu* of Warri now vested and exercisable by the Itsekiri Communal Land Trustees by virtue of the communal land rights...”⁹⁷

The legal implication of this is that the present-day Okere-Urhobo clan in Warri, including the whole of Okumagba Layout, about half of the entire present-day Warri South Local Government Area, at best only acquired land from the Itsekiri and had no aboriginal claim to the land. At this point, some sentiment had crept in. When other Urhobo got wind of the development, it was therefore natural that they conceived it as a dispute between the Itsekiri and the entire Urhobo people. To the Urhobo, by extension, the entire Esi Layout (Igbudu) and

Ikolokolo layout would also be regarded, with time, as having no aboriginal claim/right over the land they inherited from their ancestors.⁹⁸

To understand the entire scene, there is need to look at some precursors of the 1968 court action. As mentioned above, in 1952, the then leader of the Action Group and Minister in the defunct Western Region Government, Chief Obafemi Awolowo established the ICLT with the *Olu* of Warri as Chairman. Since 1950, the ICLT had also acted as an advisory body to the Governing Council of Hussey College, Warri.⁹⁹

The officials of ICLT, F.O.N. Rewane and Chief E.N.A Begho, applied to the secretary of the Okere-Urhobo Clan, Mr Daniel Okumagba, for land. The *Orosuen* or *Ovie* (king) of the clan granted the request on the advice of Daniel Okumagba because it was meant for the expansion of Hussey College. For the *Orosuen* to grant the request, the officials of the ICLT had to sign an agreement stating categorically that the land could only be used for the expansion of Hussey College.

Early in 1961, the ICLT tried to expand beyond what was stated in the agreement. It was issued a warning through Daniel Okumagba which compelled them to withdraw. Ironically after withdrawing the body charged the ruling Okere-Urhobo family to a Customary Court at Ajamogha-Warri presided over by Chief P. O. Awani, an Itsekiri of the Ogitsi sub-group. This was the precursor of what turned out to be another source of conflict in 1968. The Okere-Urhobo ruling family applied to the High Court Warri to have the case transferred there. But it was not transferred on the condition that the Warri Divisional Council was taking steps to acquire the land in question under section 228 of the Local Government Law Cap 68, Volume 3 of the laws of the Western Region.¹⁰⁰ The Warri High Court, however, ordered that the council must do this

before the 26th of March 1961. In other words, if the council failed to acquire the land before that day, then the application of the *Orosuen* must come up for hearing and determination.

Consequently, upon that order by John A Kester, Judge of the Warri High Court, the Warri Divisional Council published a notice of acquisition to acquire an area of the Okere-Urhobo which was the same size with the area already acquired for the extension of Hussey College. As soon as the Okere-Urhobo family got the notice of intention to acquire the land, the secretary instituted a claim to the Warri Divisional Council for compensation. The Council did not meet the claims of the family for compensation. The Council later wrote to say that they had abandoned the acquisition proposal.¹⁰¹

In paragraph two of that letter, it was stated that the matter has been taken over by the Warri Divisional Council Town Planning Authority and that all further actions and correspondence should be addressed to the Secretary of the Town Planning Authority. Later the Warri Divisional Town Planning Authority published a notice of intention to acquire the land in question. Again, the Okere-Urhobo through D.E. Okumagba and Pa Amoforishe submitted their claims for compensation to the Authority. The Authority did not eventually acquire the land. Even though the Authority did not acquire the land, the ICLT claimed that a portion was given to it by the same Town Planning Authority.¹⁰²

Apparently, the effort of the Warri Divisional Council acting through its Town Planning Authority to avoid the creation of legal loopholes that could be exploited by any group at the expense of others was marred with some irregularities. In fact, the Urhobo perspective on the issue claims that the council actually allowed the ICLT to acquire the land and only denied this when it was becoming a source of conflict.¹⁰³ The inadequate representation of non-Itsekiri in the council probably contributed to this. Before the local government reforms of the 1950s, the

failure to have adequate representation of Urhobo and Ijaw in the Warri Divisional Council was seriously a source of tension.¹⁰⁴ One reason why the Urhobo refused to take the reform seriously was that it failed to address even this issue.

But when the ruling family was certain that the land was not acquired, they instituted Suit No W/28/65 against the Itsekiri Land Trust claiming damages for trespass to the Land.¹⁰⁵ In 1968, partly due to this legal action and partly due to the reaction of the Okere-Urhobo people, the acquisition notices by the Warri Divisional Council Town Planning Authority relating to the land were revoked.¹⁰⁶

After this revocation, Daniel Okumagba on behalf of the ruling family drafted a scheme for the development of the land submitted to the Warri Town Planning Authority for approval. It was approved and the development of the land by the ruling family continued from early 1968. But rather than withdraw, the ICLT challenged the Okere-Urhobo ruling family right over any portion of the entire land they had inhabited since time immemorial. This was what led to the 1968 court action against the Okere-Urhobo people.

The case came up for hearing on a number of times between 1968 and 1973 with O.N. Rewane, N. Akporiaye and three other legal practitioners as lawyers for the plaintiffs, while the defendants engaged the service of three legal practitioners among whom were Dr. Mudiaga Odje and Giwa Amu. In 1973, the case was decided in favour of the Okere-Urhobo clan at the Warri High Court presided over by Justice E.A. Ekereuche.¹⁰⁷

But the Itsekiri rejected the court verdict and appealed to the Supreme Court in Lagos where Justice Atanda Fatayi- Williams and two others again declared the case in favour of the defendants, also in 1973.¹⁰⁸ Since the dispute had taken the character of a contest between the two ethnic groups, tension mounted in Warri when a number of Urhobo took to the street to celebrate

their “victory”. The Urhobo procession organised to welcome Daniel Okumagba and those who accompanied him to Lagos was so lengthy that it paralysed the entire traffic system in Warri for that day. The procession covered a distance of about four kilometers, stretching from Sapele road by the outskirts of Effurun to Enerhen Junction and consisting of people in vehicles and motorcycle riders.

The new development had noticeable impact on the local government system. The Urhobo felt the case could also serve as a point of reference in their demand for appropriate representation in the Warri Divisional Council and Warri Urban District Council. The judges of both the Supreme Court and the Warri High Court had based their verdict largely on historical evidence whose veracity had stood the test of time. As such, they became point of reference for the various groups after 1973.

For instance, on the question of whether Okere was part of the *Olu* Kingdom, the trial judge of the Supreme Court said:

I do not believe that any kingdom founded by Ginuwa I extended to Okere. Plaintiffs’ evidence and also evidence in the whole case do not prove such extent of any kingdom founded by Ginuwa I. I am satisfied and I find as a fact on the evidence before me that Okere was never part of the Kingdom founded by Ginuwa I. I am also satisfied that Ginuwa I never exercised overlordship rights over Okere, And that the overlordship rights of the subsequent Olus did not extend to Okere... I accept and believe the evidence of the defendants that three persons, namely Idama, Owhotemu and Sowhoruvwe, first came to Okere and founded various tracts of land as they said.¹⁰⁹

On the question whether or not the *Olu* of Itsekiri has overlordship right over the Urhobo of Okere, the judge stated:

a point which plaintiffs and their counsel here tried to urge on this court is that because the land in dispute is in Warri

and so in Warri division, the Olu of Warri has rights of overlordship over it because as Olu of Warri, he has rights of overlordship over all lands in Warri Division. The whole argument or view is erroneous. The Olu by title is Olu of Warri, but his rights of overlordship relate only to lands of Itsekiri people and even then there is ground for saying that it does not relate to the lands of all Itsekiri people.¹¹⁰

Obviously, the new development had a number of repercussions. Immediately after the Supreme Court verdict in 1973, as if trying to consolidate their “victory” the Urhobo people of Agbassa revived their land dispute with the Itsekiri. It was again legally resolved in favour of the Itsekiri. In spite of this, the Okere-Urhobo case made much difference partly because the verdict reiterated the government resolution of 1959 that the change of the official title of the Itsekiri monarch does not in any way imply that Warri land belongs to the Itsekiri.¹¹¹

Therefore, after 1973 the demand by the Urhobo for appropriate representation of the Okere-Urhobo Clan, Agbassa Clan, Igbudu (Esi Layout) and Ikolokolo in the Warri local government councils started to gather more momentum. The 1976 local government reform was conceived as an opportunity to give the issue significant attention. Though the number of wards for the Urhobo settlements (former Warri Urban) were increased during the 1976 local government elections, the Urhobo queried the allocation of more wards to the riverine Itsekiri area which according to them had less population.¹¹² By the 1952 population data for Warri metropolis, the Itsekiri dwellers in the town were less than 50% of their Urhobo counterpart.¹¹³ The efforts of the respective governments to address the imbalance in the representation of all aboriginal groups in the local government councils of the town were tagged by the Itsekiri as “the desire of the Ijaws and Urhobos to have ethnic local government councils in ... Itsekiri homeland”.¹¹⁴

This manner of response from the Itsekiri only inflated the aura of violence and crisis and was a major factor in a bloody clash in August 1977 over land dispute which turned out to be the most violent of its type in the area until date. This clash resulted in the loss of many lives and was between the Urhobo community of Ekpan and its Itsekiri counterpart, Ubeji. But the Urhobo did not relent in their demand and one outcome of this and the court action of 1968-1973 was the creation of an atmosphere in the operation of the local government system which made every sub-group demand for appropriate representation in the formulation of grassroots policies in Warri and its immediate environs up to the 1990s.¹¹⁵

However, there is also need to point out here that by accelerating the rate of land dispute and compounding the pattern of inter-group relations, local government policies added fuel to the crisis of petroleum exploitation and therefore contributed to what became known as the “Niger Delta Question” in this part of the Western Niger Delta. Just as the local government policies of the 1950s compounded the question of the ownership of Warri land so they inflated and amplified the tussle over the sharing of peanuts and crumbs left behind by agents of petroleum exploitation. Thus, the Ekpan-Ubeji land dispute of 1977 completely defied the effort of both the Ethiope and Warri Local Government Councils and proved to be the most violent of its type in the area up till date in terms of blood-shedding because the land in question is “strategically” located near the refinery and factories of the Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation (NNPC).¹¹⁶

The 1976 Local Government Reform

The 1976 local government reform embarked upon by the general Obasanjo led-military administration has been commended for its role in the development of modern local government

in Nigeria.¹¹⁷ This is tenable because relatively the reform constituted a major improvement upon previous systems. Its most outstanding achievement was the creation of a uniform local government structure in the entire country as contained in the *National Guidelines for Local Government Reform* published in August 1976.¹¹⁸

One implication of this uniformity is that the chairman and supervisory councillors were made full-time employees in all local governments. Another implication was that both federal and state governments were constitutionally compelled to recognise local government as a third-tier level of government as contained in part II, section 7 of the 1979 constitution. Before the reform, some local authorities were conceived by the regions and later state governments as mere instruments of deconcentration of power only acting as annex of federal or state governments functionaries. This uniform system replaced the previous numerous structures of Native Authority (in the north), Local Councils, City Councils, All Purpose District Councils and Divisional Councils in the south. In other words, the 1976 reform replaced all these numerous designations with a single one “local government area”.¹¹⁹

Overall the 1976 reform was meant to address the entire local government system at a macro-level. To that extent, every section of the country derived some benefits from the reform. Generally, the following were the benefits:

- i. The reform harmonised the condition of service of local government staff with that of the staff of state and federal governments.
- ii. It stipulated the conditions for the creation of new local governments. With few exceptions, for an area to be constituted into a local government it must have a population range of 800,000 to 150,000.

- iii. All previous debts owned by local government councils to federal or state government functionaries were written off.
- iv. Special grants were made available to new local government areas to enable them build their secretariats and take off effectively.
- v. Both federal and state governments were mandated to give relevant grants to all local governments.
- vi. All state governments were also asked to establish local government service boards to improve the quality and remuneration of staff of local governments. The aim was to create dedicated members of staff in the local government system.
- vii. The control of state and federal governments over local governments was reduced though they were not granted complete local autonomy.
- viii. In order to shield local governments from partisan politics, local government councillors were elected on individual merit during the 1976 local government elections rather than on party basis.
- ix. Local government authorities were assigned more functions as agencies for promoting grassroots development.

For effective analysis of the working of the 1976 local government reform in Urhoboland, there is need to briefly explain its immediate precursor in Bendel State. Following the establishment of the Midwest Local Government Loans Board in 1973, the state government introduced a new local government system designated Development Administration system.¹²⁰ The system was in operation for over eighteen months before

the national local government reform launched on Thursday, 19 August, 1976. Under the system, development councils were set up to manage the fourteen divisions in the state. Committees were created to handle the affairs of urban local government areas. In Urhoboland, such committees and development councils were based on clans.

In all, there were a total of 220 development committees in the state. A good number of them were unable to undertake meaningful development projects without regular government subventions and grants. But this was not in line with the spirit of the new system “which places a high premium on self-help with minimum financial assistance from the government.”¹²¹ Another major weakness of Development Administration was the principle of “100% matching grants to councils and committees” based on the amount they were able to contribute. This only made the poor ones poorer, while the rich ones got richer. In the light of these shortcomings, a panel was set up in December 1975 to review the system. The panel submitted its report about two months later. The state government was still looking at the drawing board to see how this could be implemented when the Federal Military Government commenced its plan to review the entire local government system in the country.

The government is said to have marked out strategies to accommodate flexibility and local variations with the aim of addressing the peculiarities of individual communities.¹²² For this reason, the country was divided into zones – Northern zone, Eastern zone and Western zone. Several meetings and discussions were held at the zonal levels by local government officials, traditional rulers and some other members of the public with proven knowledge of the management of the local government system. One of the meetings of the Western zone was held in Benin-City from January 19 to 22, 1976.

Bendel State was also well represented in the Lagos inter-zonal meeting of 11-12 May, 1976 where summaries of the various agreements reached at the zonal level were compared and where necessary reconciled by a body consisting of commissioners for local government from all over the country.¹²³ On May 13, 1976, the National Council of States considered the proposals of the commissioners for local government reforms and based on this the Supreme Military Council issued guidelines to be followed by all the states in reforming their local government system.

On the basis of this, Governor Husaini Abdullahi of Bendel State drew a new local government structure for the state which was made public during his broadcast of August 21, 1976. By this arrangement, the state was divided into nineteen local government areas as follows:

Serial No.	Old Divisions	New Local Governments	Population	Headquarters
1.	Aboh (excluding the Ndoni area in the meantime)	Ndokwa	253,500	Kwale
2.	Akoko-Edo	Akoko-Edo	154,500	Igara
3.	Aniocha	Aniocha	168,380	Ogwashi-Uku
4.	Aniocha	Oshimili	119,080	Asaba
5.	Benin City Development Committee Area	Oredo	243,900	Benin City
6.	Benin East	Orhionwon	244,500	Abudu
7.	Benin West	Ovia	169,800	Iguobazuwa
8.	Etsako	Etsako	187,970	Auchi
9.	Ika	Ika	189,470	Agbor

Serial No.	Old Divisions	New Local Governments	Population	Headquarters
10.	Ishan	Agbazilo	189,790	Ubraja
11.	Ishan	Okpebho	183,620	Ekpoma
12.	Isoko	Isoko	184,800	Oleh
13.	Owan	Owan	126,380	Afuze
14.	Eastern Urhobo	Ughelli	239,110	Ughelli
15.	Western Urhobo (Sapele Urban Development Committee)	Okpe	157,180	Sapele
16.	Western Urhobo	Ethiope	319,850	Orerokpe
17.	Warri	Warri	227,900	Warri
18.	Western Ijaw	Bomadi	172,280	Bomadi
19.	Western Ijaw	Burutu	150,070	Burutu

SOURCE: *Governor Husaini Abdullahi Broadcast on the New System of Local Government in Bendel State, August 21st 1976* (Benin-City: Information Dept, 1976); Geoffrey Umeh (ed.). *Nigeria: 25 Years of Local Government Reforms and Democratization, 1976-2001* (Lagos: Manson & Company, 2003), 86

In the case of Urhoboland, Ughelli local government was made up of thirteen clans. These were Agbarha, Arhavwarien, Effuruntor, Ewvreni, Ewu, Ughievwen (Jeremi), Ogor, Okparebe, Olomu, Ughelli, Uwherun, Orogun and Agbarho. Ethiope

local government consisted of seven clans, namely, Jesse, Uvwie, Oghara, Agbon, Abraka, Udu and a section of Okpe clan. Okpe local government consisted only of communities from Okpe clan. The major ones were Sapele, Amukpe, Elume and Okokporo. Urhobo communities under the jurisdiction of Warri local government were Okere-Urhobo clan, Agbassa clan, Igbudu (Esi Layout) and part of Udu Road (Ikolokolo Layout).

The federal government had already demonstrated the need for a system flexible enough to accommodate local variations in order to address the peculiarities of individual areas by requesting each zone to identify the shortcomings of the local government system in their various communities. But it was not practical for the federal government to go beyond this. Rather, it was left for the state governors and other key players closer to the grassroots level to extend this to their various communities in the implementation of the new structure.

The Urhobo and other groups in this part of the Western Niger Delta identified some structures peculiar to their socio-political institutions that must be addressed from this perspective. Chief among these was the controversy surrounding the *Olu* title which was again revived by the land dispute of 1963 to 1973. To the Urhobo, if the question of addressing the peculiarities of each area was not just a formality then there was need to look at the drawing board again with regard to the complexities surrounding chieftaincy issues and traditional leadership in Warri and its immediate environs.

As mentioned above, on account of this reform, the Urhobo area of Warri was granted more wards during the local government elections of December 1976. But to them, the issue of traditional leadership and chieftaincy affairs in Warri was completely

ignored. Whether or not this is true, it must be admitted that the response of the reform to the Warri situation was too late and too little. Based on existing census data, the Urhobo contended that, the issue of *Olu* aside, they were supposed to be allocated more wards in Warri than the riverine area inhabited by the Itsekiri.¹²⁴

Nevertheless, it must be admitted, that the fruits of the reform were reaped in Urhoboland except that in the long run the crisis created by the failure to address what they considered most crucial tended to wipe out or drown the benefits.¹²⁵ In the first place, the Urhobo perspective conceived the successful organisation of the 1976 local government elections as a major achievement of the reform. Though only about 17% of the Urhobo participated in the election,¹²⁶ it was conceived as an effort to actualise genuine democracy. Apparently, this was because the elections were not based on party system and hence the fear of one political party exploiting the ethnic heterogeneity of the area to achieve its selfish ends at the expense of some groups was completely eliminated.

Both the chairmen and councillors were elected on non-party basis through direct election, but 25% of membership of each council was nominated by the governor. Moreover, each local government council nominated three candidates from its own membership through election and from these the local government chairman was appointed by the governor. Once appointed, the chairman would hold office for three years. Each department of the local government was under the political direction of a committee, but in some cases a committee may have jurisdiction over two or more departments. The chairmen of such committees were also on full time appointment like the local government chairman. Members of such committees including their respective

chairmen were also elected from the council by the councillors themselves. Each local government had a minimum of six departments, viz:

- (a) Administration and General
- (b) Finance and Treasury
- (c) Works
- (d) Education
- (e) Medical and Health
- (f) Agriculture and Natural Resources

However, there was hardly any element of local autonomy because the governor reserved the right to dissolve any “council at any time if after due enquiry it was found that the council was incapable of discharging its functions effectively.”¹²⁷ Once dissolved, there was no definite date for the election of another set of councillors since according to the edict this could be done “as soon as may be practicable”.¹²⁸ Perhaps, the governors of the military regime up to 1979 were faithful enough not to abuse this clause, but the reverse was the case during the Second Republic, 1979-1983.¹²⁹

But the funding of local government was improved. Apart from the collection of rates and taxes, up to N100 million annual budget was released to local government by the federal government through the state governments in 1976. Bendel State received its share of N4.6 million, which was distributed among its local governments on the basis of 75% on population and 25% on equality. As we shall see later, these funds were fairly utilised in Urhoboland.¹³⁰

Moreover, the era boosted the morale of the senior staff of local government council in Urhoboland as it provided a bulwark against their arbitrary dismissal and other forms of victimisation by the Council Authority. This was due to the revival of the Bendel State Local

Government Service Commission (or Board) under the auspices of the 1976 reforms. This Board had been suspended in 1974.¹³¹ But in 1976 it was felt that its suspension was contrary to the spirit of the Reforms and that for the latter to be meaningful at all, the Board had to be revived. Consequently, the Board was re-established under the provisions of the Bendel State Local Government Edict No. 13 of 1976 to take effect from 1st April, 1977. Among the key members of the Board were B. O. Odiase, B.A.O. Iyemifokae, J. Iyaha, C. N. Ogwu and H. O. Ifuya¹³² The revival of the Board was considered an important achievement of the 1976 Reform in Urhoboland because in the past it had rendered invaluable help in the protection of local government staff.¹³³ For instance, from September 1963 to August 1972 only four senior staff in the Midwestern Region lost their appointment out of a total of seventy-seven and none of these was on ground of political victimization. Two of them were involved in mismanagement of council funds. The other two were involved in malpractices, which made their respective councils to lose confidence in them.¹³⁴

Again, the Reforms attracted more qualified staff into the service of the Local Government Council in Urhoboland, while relatively sound committees were set up to see to the development of the area. The former was made possible by the revival of the Local Government Commission and the fact that the condition of service for Local Government employees after the reform was improved.¹³⁵ In fact, the Local Government Commission received delegations from Local Governments from time to time to discuss staff problems affecting their local government areas.¹³⁶ On the other hand, the general overhauling provided by the Reforms gave room for the appointment of more reliable committees in the area. Each Council in Urhoboland had six Committees by 1979. These included the General Purpose Committee, Finance Committee,

Education Committee, Medical and Health Committee, Local Project and Works Committee and Chieftaincy Committee.

Finally, the 1976 Reform revived the full recognition of traditional rulers in Urhoboland. The abolition of the elected council in the second half of the 1960s due to the civil war threw out traditional rulers from the local government councils in Urhoboland. When they were required to co-operate with the Advisory Committee to the Sole Administrator in 1970 they were not given complete statutory recognition.¹³⁷ But the Reforms led to the legal recognition of one traditional ruler from each of the clans in Urhoboland. A list of these traditional rulers and their annual subventions were contained in a 1976 circular letter of the Ministry of Chieftaincy Affairs and Culture, Benin-City.¹³⁸

The Governor emphasized that in view of their positions it was important that traditional rulers continued to enjoy the respect and co-operation of their people. According to him, the traditional rulers should “be seen and acknowledged as impartial arbiters in all matters that affect their subjects”. The membership of the existing Council of Traditional Rulers was enlarged to accommodate traditional rulers from every local government area.

In addition, each local government area had its own council of traditional rulers. Officially, each of these bodies was to provide a suitable forum for discussion of opinions and exchange of ideas on issues affecting its local government and the entire state. According to Governor Husaini Abdullahi, the traditional rulers had “almost limitless” functions to perform in the interest of the government. The traditional rulers were to be seen as the “embodiment of the social, cultural and traditional heritage” of their respective communities. The government was to rely on them to explain and interpret some of its policies to the people, among which were issues bordering on collection of taxes.¹³⁹

The state's modality for classification of chiefs was based on recent reports of the period, the most important of which was the Partridge Report on the role and remuneration for chiefs in the state.¹⁴⁰ There was a clear official distinction between traditional rulers and their subordinate chiefs and this was partly derived from the Chiefs Law (Cap 19) of 1957. By the new structure, traditional rulers were made up of heads of clans or ethnic groups. On the other hand, traditional chiefs consisted of the following:

- (i) sub-clan heads, village heads and holders of chieftaincy titles to which traditional functions were attached.
- (ii) honorary chiefs comprised of holders of chieftaincy titles to which traditional functions were not attached.

The *Oba* of Benin was the President of the Bendel State Council of Traditional Rulers, while a maximum of forty members was allowed in the council of traditional rulers for each local government.¹⁴¹

But in respect of this, some crucial issues were left unaddressed in Urhoboland. The traditional rulers of the Urhobo clans in Warri were not granted any statutory recognition in 1976 even though the Warri local government to which they belonged was entitled to up to forty members in its council of traditional rulers like any other local government in the state. The state government policies on grassroots administration in the area was blurred by the lingering impact of the party politics of the 1950s and the 1960s coupled with the complexities and tensions generated by ethnic politics in the area. Thus, commenting on why these monarchs including their Ijaw counterparts in Warri were not recognised until the crisis of the 1990s, the Urhobo contended that "the *Olu* had unsuccessfully gone to court to stop the installation" of the *Orosuen* and that this is an extension of the Itsekiri belief "that no traditional ruler should exist side-by-

side with the *Olu*".¹⁴² They attribute this to the restyling of the *Olu*'s title in 1952. Apart from charging the *Orosuen* to court over the issue, the Itsekiri described the Urhobo demands and protests as "the desire of the Ijaws and Urhobos to have ethnic local government councils in Itsekiri homeland".¹⁴³

Actually, the crisis which accompanied the Local Government Gazette of May 1952 had generated enormous tensions and sentiments among all groups that no attempt was made by analysts and key players in the political development of the area to address what would be regarded as one of the most central questions on the issue, namely, what was the level of power conferred on the *Olu* by this change of title, e.g., did it make him a Prescribed Authority over all other traditional rulers of the then Warri Province (like what the Chiefs Law of 1957 conferred upon some traditional rulers)?¹⁴⁴ For the entire Warri Province, the answer is obviously no. It is partly for this reason that the government easily accepted to rename the area Delta Province. Yet, for Warri town and its immediate environs the answer is also hardly in the affirmative. This is because, as explained earlier, in an apparent effort to pacify other groups, Cap 19 of the Chiefs Law Act of 1959 stated that the gazette of 1952 was not meant to place the Urhobo and Ijaw aborigines of Warri under the jurisdiction of the Itsekiri monarch.

However, this did not seem to have manifested in practice until the local government crisis of the 1990s. The *Orosuen* of Okere-Urhobo and *Ovie* of Agbassa were not granted any statutory recognition in 1976 even though, as mentioned above, the Warri local government to which they belonged was entitled to up to forty members in its council of traditional rulers like any other local government in the state. The *Olu* and other traditional leaders in Itsekiriland, mainly the Ugbague of Jakpa and Jakpa of Jakpa, as well as some prominent Itsekiri chiefs, were the only members of this council. To the Urhobo, this is contrary to the spirit of the reform and is

among the reasons why they felt that the 1976 local government reform failed to address the peculiarities of this part of the Western Niger Delta.

It would, therefore, appear that despite the Cap 19 of the Chiefs Law Act of 1959, the *Olu* of Warri was given a Prescribed Authority over all other traditional rulers in Warri and its immediate environs which he exploited to deny non-Itsekiri traditional leaders of such recognition as well as the annual subvention paid to such leaders following the 1976 local government reform. In fact, the Urhobo perspective contends that in spite of the aforementioned Cap 19 of the Chiefs Law, only “the Olu of Warri was recognised as the prescribing authority in respect of chieftaincy in the whole of the...Warri Local Government Area”¹⁴⁵ after the 1976 local government reform. The protest against this arrangement continued till 1977 when the Bendel State government approved the recognition of the two traditional rulers of Agbassa and Okere-Urhobo clans. But this recognition was not well formalized because due to some irregularities the proposal of the government to gazette it in the Bendel State Traditional Rulers and Chiefs Edict No. 16 of 1979 failed to materialise. The Urhobo accused two Itsekiri, Mr J. T. L. Boyo, the Secretary to the State Government, and Mr J. O. S. Ayomike, the Commissioner for Local Government and Chieftaincy Affairs of being responsible for the flaw.¹⁴⁶

Moreover, in its protest letter of July 28, 1972 to the then Military Governor of the State, the Urhobo community of Okere, represented by the Otota (spokesman) of Okere-Urhobo, Chief B. O. Okumagba (J.P.) reminded the the Governor of the Urhobo demand on the issue since the 1950s. According to this letter, the recognition of the Urhobo traditional rulers must go hand-in-hand with a rotational presidency of the Warri Council of Traditional Rulers. It explains further that the Urhobo “have no traditional connection with the *Olu* of Warri and that the itsekiri

kingdom in Warri Council area over which the *Olu* of Warri reigns does not extend to Okere-Urhobo.”¹⁴⁷

But the decision of the Okere-Urhobo to install their monarch in the 1990s was done without seeking the *Olu*'s consent. When he reacted, the legal action which accompanied it favoured the Okere-Urhobo. He was also antagonistic to the installation of the traditional rulers of the Ijaw communities in the area during the period.

There is need to recall here that the installation of these traditional rulers commenced following the eruption of crises and the recommendations of the two commissions of inquiry set up in 1993 and 1997 respectively to identify the lapses in the local government structure of the area. The first, Nnaemeka Agu Commission of Enquiry of 1993, was constituted as a result of the conflict which accompanied the installation of a new Itsekiri monarch, Attuwase II, while the second, Alhassan Idoko Commission of Enquiry of 1997 was part of the government response to the revival of local government crisis in the area in that year.¹⁴⁸ Among the recommendations of these commissions of inquiry was a liberalized grassroots structure that gives due recognition to the traditional rulers of all the groups. It would appear, therefore, that the new development compelled the government to grant some concessions to the Urhobo and Ijaw with regard to chieftaincy issues in Warri and its immediate environs as well as their demand for a restructuring of the local government structure of the area.

The Trend from 1979 – 1983

Commenting on the impact of the Second Republic on Local Government administration all over the country, *The Guardian* Editorial noted:

...the politicians of the Second Republic made sure that the constitutional provisions for a democratically elected

local government as well as the first section of the fourth schedule of the constitution— where local government functions were listed remained a dead letter throughout their tenure. State administration not only dissolved councils at will... they also appropriated their constitutional functions and sources of income. As if that was not enough, funds sent to local governments by Federal Government were intercepted and literally stolen by state administrations.¹⁴⁹

This was also largely the experience of local government administration in Urhoboland during the period.

The major events in the development of the local government system in the area during the Second Republic can hardly be discussed in isolation from what happened in other parts of Bendel State. This is because the policies of the Bendel State government and the politics of the era were the main determinants of the changes that took place. When the civilian government took off on 1st October, 1979 in the State, it claimed to have glorious plans for the development of local government administration.¹⁵⁰ By the beginning of 1983, however, it was realised in Urhoboland that these plans were not only on paper, but were also instruments of politics carefully framed to subvert what was achieved by 1979 in the development of local government administration in the area.

The first of these purported plans, announced in October 1979 by the Governor of the State, Professor Ambrose F. Alli, was the reform and “overhauling” of local government councils in order to make them efficient.¹⁵¹ But quite contrary to this, the government went on to dissolve the elected local government councils in the state on October 29, 1979 and replaced them with its own appointed management committees, claiming that the action was necessary to make the reform a reality. As the State Governor put it:

“in keeping with the ... promise that local government councils would be overhauled in order to make them efficient the present administration issued an order suspending all local government

councils in the state and appointed in their places management committees.¹⁵²

Before long, however, it was realised that the government was not serious with these plans.

The reform did not take place nor were the former elected councils called back. This was a serious breach of the democratic system set in motion by the 1976 reform. The management committee became the permanent instrument of local government administration in Urhoboland throughout the period under discussion, while the principle of local government election provided by the 1976 reform, and later spelt out in the 1979 constitution, became a thing of the past. Commenting on this attitude during the Second Republic, B.O. Nwabueze noted:

The conduct of local government through care taker or management committee for such a long and indefinite period of time is clearly subversive of the constitutional guarantee of local government by democratically elected local government councils. It is a blatant violation of it.¹⁵³

The next issue relates to socio-economic development of Urhoboland at the grassroots level. The government claimed that the state had decided to “establish a new town” in each local government area through the Ministry of Integrated Urban and Rural Development and Housing.¹⁵⁴ These new towns accordingly were to be model towns having all basic social amenities found in any modern town. Again, to aid the economic development of rural local government areas (to which most Urhobo communities belonged) the government also decided to stop the drift of people from rural to urban areas by the establishment of an “industrial estate” in each local government area.¹⁵⁵ For the same reason, the Ministry of Integrated Urban and Rural Development and Housing was expected to construct a minimum of forty low cost houses in each local government area including staff quarters for teachers in rural areas.¹⁵⁶ None of these high sounding plans came into reality.

Moreover, the government did not give any consideration to the issue of local government finance and development in its 1982 and 1983 budgets.¹⁵⁷ Indeed, there was virtually no state grant to local government authorities in the two years,¹⁵⁸ while in 1981 only very little grant was made to local governments by the state government. This constituted just 1.4% of the total local government revenue for the year, 1981.¹⁵⁹ In fact, with the advent of the Second Republic in 1979, the total state grant to local governments in Bendel State fell from 46.2% of total local government revenue (in that year) to 1.4% in 1981.¹⁶⁰ Furthermore, the State Government during the era withheld grants made to the 19 local government authorities by the Federal Government and only a fraction of this was actually released on instalmental basis.¹⁶¹

Consequently, by 1983, it was obvious in Urhoboland that like the issue of local government councils, the “socio-economic development plans” for the local government areas were mere instruments of politics meant to cajole the masses. Not surprisingly, during the era, the Ughelli Local Government and some other local government councils in Urhoboland experienced financial problems and in fact ran into debts.¹⁶²

The final issue was the creation of more local government areas.¹⁶³ This, however, came very late in November 1982 when the government of the state unexpectedly announced the creation of six more local government areas. By this order, the Ughelli Local Government Area was to be split into two. The Southern communities of the area which included Ughienvwe, Ewu, Okparabe, Olomu, Aravwarien and Uwherun were to be constituted into a separate local government area. Again, this never came into reality. This was the nature of local government administration in Urhoboland when the Military took over power in December 1983.

Thus, apart from the 1950s local government reform and the creation of the Midwest Local Government Loans Board in 1973, the 1976 local government reform constituted another

major milestone in grassroots administration. The Urhobo benefited from these reforms. But the crisis associated with the failure to address what they considered most crucial tended to wipe out or drown the benefits. The local government structures put in place by the 1950s local government reforms and the fresh efforts to build upon them after independence were truncated by the civil war of 1967-1970. On the other hand, the new efforts set in motion during the 1970s, the most important of which was the 1976 local government reforms, were halted by the policies of the Second Republic.

ENDNOTES

1. However, the Isoko demand was not actualised until 1963. Also see pages 183-185.
2. C.S.O. 26/2, File 11857 Vol. XVIII, Annual Report, Warri Province, 1949. (The Warri Province consisted of the Aboh, Itsekiri, Kwale, Urhobo and Western Ijaw.)
3. Ibid
4. Ibid
5. P.C. Lloyd, 'Ethnicity and the Structure of Inequality in a Nigerian Town in the Mid-1950s' in *Urban Ethnicity* ed. by Abner Cohen (London, New York: Tavistock Publications, 1974), 244.
Western Region Local Government Gazette, 1952 (Government Printer, Ibadan), 68.
6. John Emomine & Veeky Okies, "Obasanjo Advices against Separate Local Governments in Warri" *The Urhobo Voice*, Vol. 6, No. 216, Sept. 29 2003, 1 & 19.
Also see the following:
V.F. Peretomode, "Warri Crisis Survey Report – Ijaw Perspective" in *Conflict and Instability in the Niger Delta: The Warri Case* ed. by T.A. Imobighe, C.O. Basse & J.B. Asuni (Ibadan: Spectrum Books, 2002), 133-155.
A.S. Akpotor, "Warri Crisis Survey Report – Urhobo Perspective" in Ibid, 156-185.
7. See Chapter 3, page 144; P.C. Lloyd 1974, 244; Peter P. Ekeh (ed.), *Warri City & British Colonial Rule in Western Niger Delta* (Buffalo, New York: Urhobo Historical Society, 2004), 98-101.
8. Obaro Ikime, *The Niger Delta Rivalry*. (London: Longman Publication, 1969), 269.
War Prof. File W.P. 86, Vol. 1, H.F. Marshal, Acting Sectary, Western Provinces to the Senior Resident, Warri Province, No. 1132-1343 of October 9, 1944.
9. Obaro Ikime, *The Niger Delta Rivalry*. (London: Longman Publication, 1969), 269. An early nineteenth-century contemporary evidence described the *Olu* of Itsekiri as *Oba* of Warri. [M. d'Avezac-Macaya, *Notice sur le Pays et le Peuple des Yebous en Afrique*, Paris, 1845, 95]; P.C. Lloyd, "Osifekunde of Ijebu," in *Africa Remembered: Narratives by West Africans from the Era of the Slave Trade*, ed. P.D. Curtin (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1967), 281. Also see the local government crisis of 1997-2003 in Chapter Six.
10. C.S.O. 26 File 54176, Minutes of Itsekiri Native Authority, Ode Itsekiri, February 2, 1945.
11. This veto power was dreaded by all groups in the Western Niger Delta such that in 1934 even the Urhobo genuine case of a defamatory article against their race could not be handled legally just in an effort to please the Resident (see chapter 4, pp 139-141).

Actually the colonial government was likely to be high handed in this situation because to the government there was no historical or legal evidence to back up the Itsekiri demand. Oral Interview: James Mrakpo(80yrs), Retired Chairman Ughelli Local Government Council; Solomon Terhere Borlokor(70yrs), legal practitioner.

12. C.S.O. 26 File 54176, Edema Arubi to Secretary of state for the Colonies No. P55/32/D28, 25 March 1946.
13. C.S.O. 26 File 54176, Secretary of State for the Colonies to the Officer Administering the Government of Nigeria, Sept. 4 1946.
14. Apart from previous statistical data, the 1952 population census demonstrated this beyond all reasonable doubt. See appendix viia
15. Also see Obaro Ikime, *The Niger Delta Rivalry*, 1969, 269-217.
16. C.S.O. 26/2 File 11857, Vol. XVIII, Annual Report, Warri Province, 1951.
17. Also see Obaro Ikime, *The Niger Delta Rivalry*, 1969, 269-27.
18. Obaro Ikime, *The Niger Delta Rivalry*, 1969, 272.
19. The Ministers of the Macpherson Constitution initially had no portfolio.
20. As we shall see in the next chapter, they were actually waiting for the support of other Western Ijaw from Burutu and Bomadi to add more legitimacy and ferocity to their protests like their Urhobo counterpart in Warri who enjoyed similar support. But this was not fully attained until the 1980s.
21. Obaro Ikime, 1969, 217.
C.S.O. 26/2, File 11857/S.I, Annual Report, Delta Province.
22. Obaro Ikime, 1969, 217.
23. P.C. Lloyd, 1974, 248 – 249
24. Ibid
25. Ibid
26. Ibid
27. See page 173
28. Peter P. Ekeh, *Warri City under British Colonial Rule* (New York:Urhobo Historical Society, 2002), 295

29. C.S.O. 26/2, File 11857/S.I, Annual Report, Delta Province, 1952.
30. Royal Institute of International Affairs, *Nigeria: The Political and Economic Background*, (London, Ibadan: OUP, 1960), 66; Alex Gboyega, *Political Values and Local Governments in Nigeria*(Lagos: Malthouse Press, 1987), 30-33 & 44; For Awolowo's criticism of the pre-1952 Local Government Structure see:Obafemi Awolowo, "The Native Administration of Nigeria", *West Africa*, July, 9, 1945, 631. *West Africa*, March 3 1945, 183.
31. *Western Region Local Government Law, 1953*, (Ibadan: Government Printer 1953), Part 1, Section 187.
32. See the next chapter, pages 245-269.
Mudiaga Ofuoku, 'Federal Government Declares State of Emergency in Warri, Delta State, as Ethnic Violence Escalates', *Newswatch*, June 21 1999, Vol. 20, No. 15, 18-22.
33. *Western Region Local Government Law, 1953*, (Ibadan: Government Printer 1953), Part II, Section 3; *Western Regional Gazette, Supplement*, Vol. 2, No. 7 of February 26 1953 (Ibadan: Government Printer, 1953).
34. *Western Region Local Government Law, 1953* Part 1, Section 187.
35. The instrument creating each council had to stipulate its composition and hence the number of traditional rulers to be allowed in the Council.
36. Oral Interview: Alibo Frederick (75 yrs), Retired Councillor,UghelliLocal Government,Dec 15, 2013; *Local Government Law, 1957: A Law to make provision for Local Government Legislation of Western Region of Nigeria* (Ibadan: Government Printer, 1957); Eastern Urhobo Division: *Officers in Charge of Urhobo (Former Sobo Division) 1934-1976* (Secretary Office, 1976). P. 15.
37. *Western Region Legal Notice* No. 219 of 1955.
Western Region Legal Notices, No. 218 of 1955 and No. 448 of 1958.
38. *Local Government Law 1952*, Part IV, Section 30.
39. *Western Region Legal Notices*, No. 218 of 1955 and No. 448 of 1958.
40. Ibid
41. *Western Region Legal Notice*, No. 219 of 1955
42. Oral Interviews: Alibo Frederick (75yrs), Retired Councillor;
James Mrakpo (80yrs) Retired Chairman of Ughelli Local Government

- Onigu Otite, *Autonomy and Dependence: The Urhobo Kingdom of Okpe in Modern Nigeria* (Ibadan: University Press, 1973), 138-139.
43. *Local Government Law, 1957* (Ibadan: Government Printer, 1957).
 44. Ibid
 45. See (a) *The Customary Courts Law, No. 26 of 1957*
 (b) "The Customary Courts Law, 1957" in *Annual Volume of the Laws of Western Nigeria, 1960*, P.B. 82
 (c) *Local Government Law 1957*
 46. See chapter 3, pages 96-101
 47. For more detail see, Mudiaga Odje, *Laws of succession in Southern Nigeria with Special Reference to the Midwestern Region* (Ph.D Thesis, London, 1965) Chapters 1 & 2.
 48. *Western Region Legal Notice, No. 44 of 1960.*
 49. *Midwestern Nigeria Gazette, No. 52, Vol. 3, Sept. 23, 1966.*
 50. Ibid
Customary Court Law, No. 26 of 1957.
 51. Ibid
 52. Onigu Otite, *Autonomy and Dependence: The Urhobo Kingdom of Okpe in Modern Nigeria* (Ibadan: University Press, 1973), 166 and 173
 53. *Local Government Circular, 1965*, Issued by Ministry of Local Government, Benin-City, 10.
 54. See, for instance, Alex Gboyega, *Political Values and Local Government in Nigeria* (Lagos: Malthouse Press, 1987), 28-29.
 55. *Nigeria Gazette, No. 49, Vol. XXV, Notice No 1228 of Sept. 8 1938.*
 56. See chapter 4, page 127
 57. Oral Interview: James Mrakpo (80yrs). Retired Chairman, Ughelli Local Government
 58. *The Isoko Division (Establishment) Order, 1963* Midwestern Nigeria Legal Notice, No. 11 of 1964, Benin-City.
 59. Also see chapter two, pages 34-37

60. Even as late as 1982 when the Bendel Television Authority (BTV) was established, the Okpe demanded for a separate column for their dialect. They got this approved in 1983 even though some ethnic groups were not granted this opportunity.
61. Also see, Gboyega, *Political Values and Local Government in Nigeria*, 28-29.
62. *Local Government Circulars, 1964*, issued by the Ministry of Local Government, Benin-City, 10.
63. Ibid, 15
Local Government Circular, 1963, Benin-City, 12.
64. *Midwestern Nigeria Legal Notice*, Nos. 30, 49 and 50 of 1964.
65. See the following:
Midwestern Nigeria Customary Courts Edict, No. 38 of 1966.
Midwestern Nigeria Customary Courts Rules, 1966 (Government Printer, Benin-City, 1971), B. 81 – B. 90.
Midwestern Nigeria Gazette, No. 52, Vol. 3 of Sept 23 1966 and No. 17, Vol. 4 of April 4, 1967.
66. *Midwestern Nigeria Gazette*, No. 8, Vol. 3 of February 11, 1966.
67. Ibid; New divisions also emerged in other parts of the Midwestern Region. These were Western Benin Division, Eastern Benin Division, Ika Division, Asaba Division, Etsako Division and Afenmai Division.
68. *Midwest State One Year After Liberation* (Information Dept., Benin-City), 3-4.
The Nigerian Crisis and Midwest Decision, (Ministry of Internal Affairs and Information Dept, Benin-City).
69. Eastern Urhobo Division, *Officers in Charge of Urhobo (Former Sobo Division 1934-1976)* (Secretary Office, Ughelli, 1976).
70. *Annual Volume of the Laws of Midwestern State, 1968*, A. 99.
Midwestern Nigeria Edict No. 41 of 1968, Information Dept., Benin-City.
71. Ibid
72. G.O. Orewa, “Unified Local Government Service – Lessons of Experience”, *Journal of Local Government Administration*, Vol. 3, No. V Jan- June, 1974, (Ministry of Local Government and Chieftaincy Affairs, Benin-City), 3-6.
73. *Midwest Region of Nigeria, First in Our Local Government History: Advisory Committees* (Benin-City: Dept of Internal Affairs & Information, 1969), 7.

74. Ibid.
75. *Midwestern Nigeria Handbook: Tenth Independence Anniversary Celebrations, 1970* (Benin-City: Information Dept., 1970), 15.
76. *Morning Post*, (Lagos) May 6 1966, 10; Gboyega, *Political Values and Local Government in Nigeria*, 91.
77. G.O. Orewa, 'Local Government and Development', *Journal of Local Government Administration* Vol. 2, No. 2, June 1973 (Benin-City: Ministry of Local Government and Chieftaincy Affairs), 4.
78. *Annual Volume of the Laws of Midwestern Nigeria, 1974* A.13 – A.16
Edict No. 7 of 1974 (Benin-City: Information Dept. 1974).
79. Ladipo Adamolekun, "The Idea of Local Government as a Third Tier of Government Revisited", *The Quarterly Journal of Administration* XVIII, nos. 3 and 4, 1984, 114.
80. I.M. Okonjo, "The Objectives of Government Grants-in-Aid to Local Authorities" in *Local Government Finance in Nigeria: Problems and Prospects* ed. By Adebayo Adedeji & L. Rowland (Ile – Ife: University of Ife Press, 1972), 185.
81. Ibid., 184
82. Ibid.
83. Ibid.
84. Adebayo Adedeji and L. Rowland(eds.), *Local Government Finance in Nigeria: Problems and Prospects*, Reports of the Third National Conference on Local Government held in Benin-City 9th – 11th Dec. 1970 (Ile-Ife: University of Ife Press, 1970), 168.
85. *Annual Volume of the Laws of Midwestern Nigeria, 1974*, A.13 – A.16
Edict No. 7 of 1974 (Benin-City, Information Dept., 1974)
86. *The Laws of the Bendel State of Nigeria, 1976*, Vol. 1, 281-285.
87. Oral Interview: J.W.S. Ilavbare (80 yrs) Retired Sectary, Ughelli Local Government Council, Oct. 15 2010.
88. Oral Interview: J.W.S. Ilavbare (80 yrs) Retired Sectary, Ughelli Local Government Council, Oct. 15 2010.
89. See Chapter 3, pages 97-98.

90. Obaro Ikime, *The Niger Delta Rivalry*. (London: Longman Publication, 1969), 215-216; T.A. Imobighe, “Earlier Attempts at Managing the Warri Crisis” in *Conflict and Instability in the Niger Delta: The Warri Case* edited by T.A. Imobighe, C.O. Bassey & J.B. Asuni,(Ibadan: Spectrum Books, 2002),57-58.
91. T. E. A. Salubi, “The Origins of Sapele Township”, *Journal of Historical Society of Nigeria(J.H.S.N.)* 2, no.1 (December 1960): 115-134.
92. Also see Prof. V. F. Peretomode, “Warri Crisis Survey Report–Ijaw Perspective” in *Conflict and Instability in the Niger Delta: The Warri Case* edited by T.A. Imobighe, C.O. Bassey & J.B. Asuni,(Ibadan: Spectrum Books, 2002), 136.
93. This is what the Itsekiri meant by “non-acceptance of settler status by Ijaws and Urhobos.”—See Dr. D. A. Tonwe, “Warri Crisis Survey Report–Itsekiri Perspective” in *Conflict and Instability in the Niger Delta: The Warri Case* edited by T.A. Imobighe, C.O. Bassey & J.B. Asuni,(Ibadan: Spectrum Books, 2002), 86; Daniel Obiomah, “British Treaties and Ownership of Warri: A Response to J.O.S. Ayomike’s Claims” in *Warri City & British Colonial Rule in Western Niger Delta* edited by Peter P. Ekeh, (New York, Lagos: Published by Urhobo Historical Society, 2004), 163-190.
94. T.A. Imobighe, C.O. Bassey & J.B. Asuni, (eds.), *Conflict and Instability in the Niger Delta: The Warri Case* (Ibadan: Spectrum Books, 2002), 158.
95. Also see page 177.
96. Among the Officials of this Land Trust were the *Olu* (Chairman), D.O. Idundun, F.O.N. Rewane and E.N. Begho. Also see Bright Onovughakpo Okumagba, *The Okere-Urhobo People* (Warri: Ovwis Printers, 2013), 11-12.
97. Ibid, 11-15
98. *Midwestern State Legal Notice*, Suit No. W/48/68 in Warri High Court, Warri, 1973. Also see, T.A. Imobighe, C.O. Bassey & J.B. Asuni (eds.), 2002, 161-163. (Ogitshi is a subgroup among the Itsekiri).
99. Bright Onovughakpo Okumagba, *The Okere-Urhobo People* (Warri: Ovwis Printers, 2013), 11-12.
100. Ibid.
101. Ibid, 12
Oral Interviews: Bright O. Okumagba (60 yrs) and other members of the Olodi – Oki Royal Family, Okere, Aug 1, 2014.
Daniel A. Obofukoro(50yrs),Principal Administrative Officer, Uvwie Local Government Council, Effurun. Aug 2, 2014.

102. Ibid.
103. Bright O. OKumagba, *The Okere-Urhobo People*, 2013, 12
104. Ibid.; Oral Interview: Bright O. Okumagba and other members of Olodi – Oki Royal Family.
105. Ibid.
106. Also see OKumagba, *The Okere-Urhobo People*, 14-15
107. Ibid
108. OKumagba, *The Okere-Urhobo People*, 5 & 15
Warri High Court in Case No. W/48/68 (decided on 17th July 1973).
109. Ibid
110. *Warri High Court in Case No. W/48/68* (decided on 17th July 1973), page 24, paragraph 3 of Certified Copy.
111. In 1959 the government passed a law recognising the right of each of the three groups over their respective aboriginal settlements while categorically excluding the Urhobo and Ijaw aborigines of Warri from the jurisdiction and overlordship of the *Olu*.—*The Laws of the Western Region of Nigeria*, Chief Law of 1959, Cap 19; also contained in *Laws of Bendel State of Nigeria 1976*, Cap 37.
112. A.S. Akpotor, “Warri Crisis Survey Report – Urhobo Perspective” in *Conflict and Instability in the Niger Delta: The Warri Case* ed. by T.A. Imobighe, C.O. Bassey & J.B. Asuni (Ibadan: Spectrum Books, 2002), 166-167.
113. See Appendix IVA
114. D. A. Tonwe, “Warri Crisis Survey Report – Itsekiri Perspective” in *Conflict and Instability in the Niger Delta: The Warri Case*, ed. by T.A. Imobighe, C.O. Bassey & J.B. Asuni (Ibadan: Spectrum Books, 2002), 187.
115. A.S. Akpotor, “Warri Crisis Survey Report – Urhobo Perspective” in *Conflict and Instability in the Niger Delta: The Warri Case* ed. by T.A. Imobighe, C.O. Bassey & J.B. Asuni (Ibadan: Spectrum Books, 2002), 166-167.
116. Ibid.
117. C. E. Emezi, “The Changing Patterns of Local Government in Nigeria”. *The Nigerian Journal of Local Government Studies*, Vol. 1, No. 1, June 1983, 13.

118. *Governor Husaini Abdullahi Broadcast on the New System of Local Government in Bended State, August 21st 1976* (Benin-City: Information Dept, 1976); Geoffrey Umeh (ed.).*Nigeria: 25 Years of Local Government Reforms and Democratization, 1976-2001*(Lagos: Manson & Company,2003),86
119. Ibid; *National Guidelines for Local Government Reform* published in August 1976.
120. *Governor Husaini Abdullahi Broadcast on the New System of Local Government in Bended State, August 21st 1976* (Benin-City: Information Dept, 1976).
121. Ibid.
122. Ibid; Geoffrey Umeh (ed.).*Nigeria: 25 Years of Local Government Reforms and Democratization, 1976-2001*(Lagos: Manson & Company,2003),86
123. Ibid
124. See chapter 7, pages 324-325
125. The detail of this crisis is discussed in the next chapter.
126. *Quarterly Abstract of Statistics*,1st Quarter, January to March, 1976, (Ministry of Economic Development, Statistics Division, Benin-City), 4.
Also see Appendix IX.
127. Geoffery Umeh (ed.), 2003, 89.
128. Ibid
129. See pages 222-226 of this chapter
130. This is discussed in chapter 7.
131. *Maiden Annual Report of the Local Government Service Board, 1st April, 1977 to 31st March 1978* (Official Document No. 11 of 1978, Benin-City), 9 & 12.
132. *Bendel State Local Government Edict No. 13 of 1976* (Benin-City: Information Dept).
133. *Unified Local Government Service, Midwestern State of Nigeria Staff List revised up to 1st October, 1972, 5*; G.O. Orewa, “United Local Government Service – Lesson of Experience”, *Journal of Local Government Administration*, V. 3, No. 1, January to June, 1974, Ministry of Local Government and Chieftaincy Affairs, Benin-City, 3 – 6.
134. Ibid.

135. *Maiden Annual Report of the Local Government Service Board, 1st April, 1977 to 31st March 1978* (Official Document No. 11 of 1978, Benin-City), 9 & 12.
136. Ibid.
137. *Midwestern Nigeria Handbook: Tenth Independence Anniversary Celebrations. 1970* (Benin-City, Information Dept), 15.
138. *Ministry of Chieftaincy Affairs and Culture's Circular Letter No. S.28, Vol. 111/660 of 28/7/76: Government Decisions on the Report of an Investigation into the Role of Chiefs in Bendel State*(Official Document No. 14 of 1976, Government Printer, Benin-City), 7 – 25.
139. *Governor Husaini Abdullahi Broadcast on the New System of Local Government in Bended State, August 21st 1976* (Benin-City: Information Dept, 1976).
140. Ibid.
141. Ibid.
142. A.S. Akpotor, “Warri Crisis Survey Report – Urhobo Perspective” in *Conflict and Instability in the Niger Delta: The Warri Case* ed. by T.A. Imobighe, C.O. Bassey & J.B. Asuni (Ibadan: Spectrum Books, 2002), 166-167.
143. D. A. Tonwe, “Warri Crisis Survey Report – Itsekiri Perspective” in *Conflict and Instability in the Niger Delta: The Warri Case*, 2002, 187.
144. For a concise analysis of the Chiefs Law Act of 1957 and the principle of “Prescribed Authority” as it applied to this law, see Tunde Oduwobi, *Post-Independence Chieftaincy Politics in Ogbomoso*, Monograph Series, University of Lagos No. 9, June 2009, 10-12.
145. A.S. Akpotor, “Warri Crisis Survey Report – Urhobo Perspective” in *Conflict and Instability in the Niger Delta: The Warri Case* ed. by T.A. Imobighe, C.O. Bassey & J.B. Asuni (Ibadan: Spectrum Books, 2002), 166-167.
146. Ibid.
147. Bright Onovughakpo Okumagba, *The Okere-Urhobo People* (Warri: Ovwis Printers, 2013), 17.
148. See chapter six for more on the commissions of enquiry and the local government crisis.
149. “Editorial”, *The Guardian*, October 13, 1988, 10.

150. *First 100 Days of the Administration of Ambrose Folorunso Ali* (Ministry of Information, Culture and Sports, Benin-City), 19-20.
151. Ibid.
152. Ibid.
153. B.O. Nwabueze, *Nigeria's Presidential Constitution 1979-1983* (London: Longman, 1985), 268.
154. *Meeting of the Nine Progressive Governors, Jan. 16-18, 1981* (Benin-City: Department of Information, Governor's Office), 10.
155. Ibid.
156. Ibid.
157. See the following:
Bendel State Budget, 1982 (Benin-City: Bendel Newspapers Corporation), 1 – 20.
Bendel State Budget, 1983, Ibid
158. *Digest of Finance Statistics in Bendel State, 1987*, No. 4 (Benin-City: Ministry of Finance and Economic Planning, Statistics Office, 1987), 41.
Also see Appendix VII.
159. Ibid.
160. Ibid. Thus while a total of ₦9,283,704 was given to Local Governments by the Bendel State Government in 1979/80, only ₦670,201 was given in 1981.
161. Oral Interview: J.W.S. Ilavbare (80 yrs) Retired Secretary of Ughelli Local Government Secretariat, Oct 15, 2010.
162. Ughelli Local Government Council: *Annual Financial Report, 1981 and 1983* respectively.
163. This was also proposed by the governors of some other states in the federation. See: Minutes of the 6th *Bi-Annual Conference of Commissioners of Local Governments Held at Oguta Motel: Imo State 23-25, Nov 1982* (Annexure 2)

CHAPTER SIX

FROM DASUKI COMMITTEE TO THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT CRISIS, 1984 – 1999

Fresh Challenges

In spite of the intricacies of some of the issues at play in grassroots administration up to 1983 in Urhoboland, the explosive nature of a good number of the events of 1984 to 1999 demonstrates that they were even more complex in their own context. Obviously, local government policies and programmes at the national level during the era can never be left out in explication of the trend from 1984 to 1999.

In 1984, a twenty-one member committee was set up by the military government to review the operation of the local government system with emphasis on its policies and structure.¹ This committee headed by Alhaji Ibrahim Dasuki was to recommend, among other things, what it considered relevant for the improvement of local government administration in the country. The only significant result of this committee in Urhoboland was the creation of Sapele Local Government from the former Okpe Local Government in 1989. The Sapele Local Government consisted of Sapele metropolis and its immediate environs.

Sapele Local Government Area was among the 149 local governments created all over the country on May 3, 1989 as a result of the recommendation of the twenty-one member committee headed by Alhaji Ibrahim Dasuki.² It was the only local government created in the whole of Bendel State as a result of the exercise. According to the recommendation of the Dasuki Committee, the requirement for constituting an area into a local government of its own was evidence of a minimum population of 250,000, ethnic homogeneity and economic viability.³

Sapele itself did not meet this requirement with regard to population. Very likely this recommendation was not strictly followed in some parts of the country. The population figures of Sapele by census data of 1991 and 2006 were 142,657 and 149,603 respectively.⁴ Apparently, the 250,000 minimum population recommended by the Dasuki committee was not proving practical enough in the course of implementation and the population requirement for the creation of new local governments laid down by the 1976 reforms was later taken into consideration for pragmatic reasons.

The Ibrahim Dasuki Local Government Review Committee of 1984 was inaugurated by the General Muhammadu Buhariled administration and later inherited by the Babangida regime in 1985. Its impact transcends the creation of local governments. For instance, the Committee recommended “the scrapping of the Ministry of Local Governments at the state level as part of measures to guarantee the autonomy of the local governments” and it is contended that this “was a landmark in local government reforms and grassroots administration.”⁵ It is also established that the Commission was instrumental in the increase in local government revenue allocation (from the federation account) from 10% to 15% in 1989 and 20% in 1992.

On the issue of autonomy, what can be precisely said with reference to Urhoboland is that the military helped to introduce some degree of sanity into what was bastardised by the politicians of the Second Republic. In other words, it might not be objective to talk of local government autonomy. But policy makers at the grassroots level were allowed to have some say in the formulation of policies and implementation of local government programmes up to 1999 while the state and federal governments still reserved the right to dissolve any local government council.⁶

In any case, the autonomy clause of this reform was betrayed by events in some other parts of the country between 1988 and 1992. This has been described as “the reckless and undemocratic removal of elected officers of the councils by the military leadership.”⁷ Thus, the elected chairman of Enugu Local Government (Enugu State) was removed by the presidency on September 1, 1988, while that of Balewa Local Government (Bauchi State) was removed in the same way on April 22, 1992. On the other hand, that of Zangon Katal Local Government (Kaduna State) was dismissed on May 21, 1992 on the orders of the state’s elected governor.⁸

Exponents of local government reform and autonomy in the country insist that unless the constitution defines local governments, especially the security of office of elected officers, the governors could abuse the situation by exploiting any constitutional loophole to remove elected officers of an opposing political party on the pretext of exercising constitutional rights or protecting the state or national security. Therefore, the dismissal of the three local government chief executives raised serious controversy over the security of the elected officers of local government as well as the stability of the local government administration in the Third Republic.⁹

In any case whatever effort was made by the Dasuki Committee to rectify grassroots administration in the country, especially with regard to the question of autonomy, was probably too late and too little. This is because it was grossly below the recommendation of the African Leadership Forum (ALF), a non-governmental body which has shown serious interest in local government in Nigeria and which specified during its meeting at the Farm House Dialogue in Otta, Ogun State in 1999 that the following measures must be adopted in order to rectify grassroots administration in the country:

- (i) Ministries of local government would need to be drastically reformed if not abolished. At present, they are a hindrance to the evaluation of responsible leadership at the local level.

- (ii) Local government should be free from state government control just as State governments are free from federal government control, except for consultation and cooperation on concurrent activities.
- (iii) Secretaries to local government should not be appointed by state governments.
- (iv) In order that local government may be meaningful, viable and capable of acting like a proper third tier of government, fragmentation should be avoided. Each local government should, however, be allowed to create community development committees on the basis of affinity and contiguity of the people within its area of jurisdiction.
- (v) Local governments should be the main instruments of rural development¹⁰

According to an ex-chairman of Ughelli Local Government Council, Mr. James Mrakpo, a number of local government councils in Urhoboland and other parts of the Western Niger Delta initially took the local government guidelines issued by the Ibrahim Babangida's regime in 1991 seriously because they conceived it as a step forward in the much talked about local government autonomy.¹¹ This guideline emanated from one of the reports of the Ibrahim Dasuki Local Government Commission and it was an attempt to plant the presidential system of government at the grassroots level.

The guidelines granted the legislative council of each local government the constitutional right to impeach a local government chairman in accordance with the 1989 constitution. But what first introduced scepticism into the new arrangement was the clause that local government councils could still be "assigned other functions from time to time by the state House of Assembly."¹² This, according to James Mrakpo, could be abused because it was interpreted by some to mean that the local governments were still in one way or the other subject to the control of state governments. Moreover, it was not certain whether the list of functions granted to the legislative councils of the local governments automatically implied that they were immune from dissolution by any state government. Below is an extract of these functions:

- (a) Law-making – debating and passing of local government legislation.
- (b) Debating, appraising and possibly amending local government yearly budget, subject to chairman's veto which could be overridden by a two-thirds majority of the councilors.
- (c) Vetting and monitoring the implementation of projects and programmes in the council's yearly budget
- (d) Examining and debating monthly statements of income and expenditure rendered to it by the executive arm

- (e) Impeaching the council chairman who has committed an impeachable offence in accordance with the 1989 constitution
- (f) Advising, consulting and liaising with the chairman who is the head of the executive arm of the local government
- (g) Apart from these functions, a local government legislative council can also be assigned other functions from time to time by the State House of Assembly¹³

Yet, the implementation of some other items in this guideline introduced new contradictions and complexities antithetical to the entire issue of local autonomy. The exercise started with the dissolution of the Local Government Service Commission by the Babangida administration. In theory, the responsibility of staff matters was now left in the hands of local governments, but in practice, state governments were in total control of the appointment, discipline and transfer of certain grades of staff in the local government service. A major outcome of this was political victimization and unprecedented indiscipline in grassroots governance.¹⁴

Actually neither the 1989 constitution nor the 1999 constitution was able to discredit the supervisory role of Local Government Service Commission in spite of the crucial issue of local government autonomy. As a regulatory body that monitors the activities of the local government, the Commission ensures uniformity in appointments, promotion, and discipline of all local government staff apart from acting as an appellate court for all petitions from aggrieved staff. In other words, the authors of these constitutions did not conceive the existence of this body as contradictory to the search for local government autonomy. Rather, it was felt that through some constitutional amendment in later years it could serve as one instrument for the practice of local government autonomy.

Therefore, the dissolution of the Local Government Service Commission and the crisis which it generated created loopholes which were exploited by some in the local government functionaries to criticise the reform. According to these critics, the passage of bye-laws was very

poor because legislators became idle as they met only once or twice in a month. They also claimed that most local government councils neither had credible legal information to guide them in the preparation of bye-laws nor standard procedure to guide their general deliberations.¹⁵ Most local government chairmen also contended that the functions delegated to the legislative councils of the local governments were inconsistent with the practice of the presidential system and that some aspects of these functions created role conflict within the system.¹⁶

Local government funding was increased at the federal level. In spite of this, local governments in Urhoboland, that is, Ethiope, Okpe, Sapele, Ughelli and Warri local councils were among those in the then Bendel State that owed primary school teachers arrears of salaries up to three months in 1993 even though management of primary schools was a priority policy for local governments during this period. This has been attributed to extra responsibilities imposed on local governments, which actually outweighed the additional allocation of fund.¹⁷ Among them were the provision of logistics support and materials for a number of federal and Bendel State Government agencies. These included Mass Mobilisation for Social Economic Recovery, Better Life for Rural Women, National Electoral Commission, forestry staff and police officers at the grassroots level.

This was also the experience of some other parts of the country.¹⁸ In fact, the local government authorities foresaw this impending danger before 1993 and this compelled the chairmen of local governments of the federation to pass a resolution in September 1991 during a meeting in Jos demanding that the 20% proposed by the federal government was never enough for the local governments to fund these extra-responsibilities. They, therefore, requested for 30%.¹⁹

Meanwhile, new developments in the local government system vis-a-vis states creation had introduced more complexities into the management of grassroots administration in Urhoboland, particularly with regard to funding. The creation of Delta State in August 27 1991 led to the creation of three more local governments in Urhoboland.²⁰ Ughelli, Ethiope and Warri local governments were each split into two leading to the emergence of Ughelli North and Ughelli South, Ethiope East and Ethiope West, and Warri North and Warri South Local Governments.

In the process, majority of the Urhobo in Warri and its immediate environs came under Warri South Local Government. The creation of new local governments increased the financial demand of local government councils in the area at a time when the government was still looking at the drawing board in search of a solution to the financial crisis in local government in most parts of the country.

According to some key players in grassroots leadership and administration in Urhoboland, local government funding in the area was inconsistent and sometimes epileptic up to 1999.²¹ If this was also the experience of most other parts of the country then it is not surprising that the agitation for equitable revenue allocation between local governments and the other two levels of government dates back to the late 1960s when the country was first constituted into twelve states.²² The role of equitable budgetary allocation to each of the three tiers of government in the search for national unity and stability was emphasized by a number of people. According to Nnamdi Azikiwe, for example, the only means of ensuring stability, national unity, justice, equity, and fair play in the distribution of amenities in Nigeria is to guarantee “all regional ... governments as well as all local governments, equity of treatment in the distribution of revenue allocation for local government purposes on the basis of even development.”²³

The Mass Mobilization for Social and Economic Recovery (MAMSER), the Directorate of Food, Roads and Rural Infrastructures (DFRRI), and other similar federal agencies of the Babangida regime which became a source of financial burden to the local governments were themselves meant to promote grassroots development. It has been observed that “Nigeria’s problem is not to marshal out good ideas or formulate well-articulated policies, but that of implementation”.²⁴ Therefore, the organisation of individual communities in each local government area for increased productivity and development was fundamental in the creation of these agencies, particularly DFRRI which was established in 1986.

DFRRI was structured to complement the efforts of the local governments in rural development. The agency was to operate as a facilitator and mobiliser in rural developments. It was also given the responsibility of formulating and implementing a national rural development strategy. This placed emphasis on stemming rural-urban migration, eradication of rural poverty and disease, and mobilisation of the enormous human and material resources in rural communities for economic, social, cultural and political development in collaboration with MAMSER.

Through the initiatives of these agencies, fresh ideas on the development of rural communities emerged. For instance, DFRRI suggested the creation of elected community development associations at the local government level. It has been observed that among the legacies of the organisation was the identification of 100,000 communities from 453 local government areas to be transformed into model communities through effective utilisation of their resources. These agencies are said to have been designed as people-oriented ones aimed at upgrading the standard of human development based on the new modalities of the United Nations Development Programme UNDP, which states:

All the targets of growth will be meaningless if their attainment do not lead to the improvement in the quality of life for the teeming population of a country measured in terms of such factors as food availability and affordability, water supply, shelter, health, clothing, literacy and employment.²⁵

All these are said to have been truncated by political instability arising from frequent changes in government and inconsistencies in policy formulation and implementation.²⁶ At the general or macro-level, it is believed that “the development outlook of local governments became very worrisome as the provision of social amenities and healthcare delivery services degenerated into unfulfilled election promises”²⁷ by 1993.

Narrowing this down to Urhoboland, MAMSER had one of its agents attached to every local government council in the area. But the organisation was financially handicapped and, therefore, had no fund to implement its programmes in Urhoboland.²⁸ The same was true of DFRRI and similar agencies of the period. According to Mr. J. A. Okpibuluku, the MAMSER officer in charge of Ughelli Local Government, the creation of these agencies, however, helped to provide jobs for a few youths. But the provision of primary healthcare by local government councils in Urhoboland during the 1990s was moderate.²⁹ Their effort in the educational sector was also fair considering financial and other limitations.

Towards the end of 1993, there were fresh efforts to review some aspects of the local government system nationwide. This was in connection with the local government policies of General Sani Abacha who assumed the leadership of the country on November 17, 1993. The inauguration of the Arthur Mbanefo Panel on States and Local Governments creation was among his priority programmes. In an effort to convince the nation on the need to create more states and local governments, the government explained:

Government has noted that states and local governments are agencies of political autonomy, economic development, cultural self-determination, and their creation, a stabilizing factor in our polity. It has further noted the yearnings and aspirations of communities for more states and local governments to be created.

This issue of the final structure of our federation was an ongoing matter, vigorously canvassed at the Constitutional Conference. It is consistent with government policy of having a balanced federation that the aspirations of our people for self-determination which have been expressed in the demands for new states and local governments be considered on their individual merit. Government understands, and sympathizes with these because state and local governments help spread rapid development nationwide; and gives stability to our three tiers system of government. Government will soon set up a panel that will visit the various sections of our country on this matter and they will be required to submit a report of their findings within three months consideration. States and local governments will be created during the second quarter of 1996.³⁰

Thus on October 1, 1996, based on the recommendation of the Arthur Mbanefo Panel, the government created 183 new local governments in addition to one state from each of the six geopolitical zones. This increased the total number of local governments in the country from 591 to 774.

As a result of this development, two more local governments were created in Urhoboland. They were Udu and Uvwie local government areas. They have their headquarters in Otor-Udu and Effurun respectively. Population data are crucial indices in the creation of local governments. But the local governments of the Babangida regime were created before the national census of 1991. Therefore, apparently in 1996 the census figures of 1991 were among the guiding variables in the creation of new local governments. The table on the next page provides the census data of Delta State in 1991 and 2006 by local governments, in addition to identifying the new local governments created in Urhoboland in 1991 and 1996.

The Urhobo sub-groups of Warri expected some of their past aspirations to be fulfilled through the new development because the section of Warri South Local Government consisting largely of Ijaw and a few Itsekiri was excised and constituted into Warri South-West Local Government. As a result of this, Warri South Local Government now consisted of only the Urhobo apart from the Itsekiri settlement of Okere. But as we shall see later, the scene only

Table 6.1: Population of Delta State by Local Government Area, 1991 and 2006

1991				2006			
Local Government Area	Male	Female	Total	Local Government Area	Male	Female	Total
Aniocha North	29,862	31,136	60,998	Aniocha North	52,634	52,077	104,711
Aniocha South	53,020	54,014	107,034	Aniocha South	69,632	70,972	140,604
Bomadi	53,132	55,362	108,494	Bomadi	43,083	43,561	86,644
Burutu	82,191	85,457	167,648	Burutu	110,416	99,250	209,792
*Ethiope East	54,715	59,214	113,929	Ethiope East	100,257	100,535	200,792
*Ethiope West	51,916	53,945	105,861	Ethiope West	102,445	101,147	203,592
Ika North East	61,305	65,255	126,560	Ika North East	91,414	92,243	183,657
Ika South	53,204	56,000	109,204	Ika South	79,628	82,966	162,594
Isoko North	54,173	57,746	111,919	Isoko North	71,820	72,335	144,155
Isoko South	73,223	77,613	150,836	Isoko South	114,391	113,321	227,712
Ndakwa East	36,467	39,111	75,578	Ndakwa East	52,350	50,821	103,171
Ndakwa West	88,373	94,452	182,827	Ndakwa West	79,018	70,307	149,325
Okpe	134,536	133,952	268,488	Okpe	67,995	62,034	130,029
Oshimili	63,082	62,961	126,043	Oshimili North	56,405	58,911	115,316
Sapele	71,286	71,386	142,652	Oshimili South	80,274	69,329	149,603
*Ughelli North	79,960	86,080	166,029	Patani	34,046	33,661	67,707
*Ughelli South	66,567	73,181	139,748	Sapele	85,305	86,583	171,888
Warri north	45,568	45,325	90,893	**Udu	71,242	72,119	143,361
*Warri South	119,341	116,409	235,750	Ughelli North	159,192	161,836	321,028
				Ughelli South	109,376	104,197	213,576
				Ukwuani	59,162	61,228	120,390
				**Uvwie	95,051	96,421	191,472
				Warri North	95,754	67,546	137,300
				Warri South	156,098	147,319	303,417
				Warri South west	63,315	53,366	116,681
Total	1,271,930	1,318,559	2,590,491	Total	2,074,306	2,024,085	4,098,391

NB:-*Local governments created in Urhoboland in 1991(As already explained elsewhere, apart from the Urhobo, Warri also consists of the Itsekiri and Western Ijaw)

** Local governments created in Urhoboland in 1996(asterisks are mine)

Source: National Population commission, *Annual Abstract of Statistics, 2008*, published by National Bureau of Statistics(NBS) Plot 762, Independence Avenue, Central Business District, Abuja. www.nigerianstat.gov.ng

provided another occasion for the three groups in the area to violently address unresolved issues of the past. This crisis was yet to be completely resolved when General Abdulsalami Abubakar replaced Sani Abacha as the head of state on June 8, 1998 following the death of the latter.

The military organised another local government election on political party basis in December 1998. Apart from other parts of Urhoboland, the organisers of the election in Delta State managed to conduct it even in Warri and its immediate environs. Two factors account for their success. Firstly, the crisis had subsided by then, though this turned out to be tentative as it later escalated in 1999. Secondly, the massive involvement of law enforcement agents was helpful. The major challenge of the local government in the area as the military prepared to hand over power to civilian government in 1999 was how to resolve this crisis.

Origin of the Local Government Crisis of 1997 – 2003

What became known as the local government crisis of 1997 – 2003 erupted after the initial relocation of the Warri South-West Local government headquarters from the Ijaw town of Ogbe-Ijoh to an Itsekiri town, Ogidigben.³¹ The Urhobo were later drawn into the crisis even though only few Urhobo settlements in form of enclaves in Ijawland and Itsekiriland are in that local government area. The crisis which commenced in 1997 subsided in 1998 only to be revived in 1999. Through the massive intervention of the army and police force, it was suppressed by 2000 but only to resurface in 2003.³² Though the crisis of 2003 is outside the scope of this study, a holistic analysis of the entire scene up to that year would enhance an indepth understanding of the trend from 1997-1999.

The nature of local government administration in the area actually played the most crucial role in the outbreak of the crisis. Before 1997, the inter-group relations had been explosive

largely due to lapses in the operation of the local government system. As pointed out earlier in Chapter Five, even when there was peace, it was often fragile while tension was hardly far from the surface. The Urhobo and Western Ijaw felt marginalized because their aboriginal sub-groups in Warri were not adequately represented in the Warri Divisional Council. This was further compounded by the recognition of the Itsekiri monarch as the only prescribed authority of the Warri Division following the gazette of May 1952 discussed in Chapter Five. But it would be a fallacy to trace its origin to the 1997 relocation of the local government headquarters. Rather, the event of 1997 only provided the “favourable” scene the three groups in the area (the Itsekiri, Urhobo and Western Ijaw) had been waiting for to react to three crucial interwoven issues that national policies on local government in the area had failed to address from their proper perspectives since the colonial period.

In the first place, what has been described as the Action Group mistake of May 1952 creates an indelible impression among the Ijaw and Urhobo aborigines of Warri that they were being subordinated to the jurisdiction of the Itsekiri monarchy partly because it was somehow abused by the Itsekiri. Moreover, local government policies had compounded the nature of Warri land disputes from historical and contemporary perspectives. It became mandatory or imperative to resolve the acute controversy surrounding its ownership, either peacefully or violently. Finally, the Ijaw had decided to go to any extent to resolve what is referred to as the Ijaw factor in the early chapters of this study. It is simply the disadvantageous position they found themselves in the distribution of resources of Warri town due to the hostility of early colonial local government officials to their demand. This was compounded by their inability to get the support of other Western Ijaw until recently compared to their Itsekiri and Urhobo counterparts who enjoyed such support from their kinsmen from the onset.³³

The first point above, which is the Action Group decision of 1952 considerably compounded the other two factors and apparently made them irresolvable. On the other hand, the question of the ownership of Warri land has various appendages that must be explained, at least briefly, to understand the intricacies surrounding the local government crisis of 1997 to 2003.

From the outset, only the Western Ijaw admit that Warri land belongs to the three aboriginal groups, the Itsekiri, Urhobo and Western Ijaw. The Itsekiri have been very blunt and apt in their claim that Warriland belongs solely to them.³⁴ The situation is such that Itsekiri perspective refers to other groups as settlers and that they must accept this status for peace to reign.³⁵

They advanced two reasons in their effort to establish the veracity of this claim. In the first place, they contend that the name, Warri is the anglicised or corrupted form of Iwere which they claim is another name for Ode-Itsekiri, headquarters of precolonial Itsekiriland. Yet, the origin of the name, Warri, has three versions, none of which has been empirically established. Even Obaro Ikime who explained only the Iwere version accepted to the Itsekiri and apparently had no access to the other versions, categorically stated that it does not in any way justify that Warri land belongs only to the Itsekiri. In his words:

The name [Warri] appeared for the first time in the records in the nineteenth century... The identity of name, therefore, cannot be used as conclusive argument about origins. Nor can geographical proximity, for Obodo is just as near to Warri as is Ode-Itsekiri and yet unquestionably Urhobo.³⁶

The second version claims that Warri is completely a corruption of a foreign word of Portuguese origin, “aveiro.”³⁷ According to this version, the “v” in “aveiro” would be “w” sound in Portuguese and this was gradually corrupted to Warri in contact with the indigenous languages of the Western Niger Delta. However, it must be pointed out therefore that these claims are not without their own contradictions. But like the other two versions, this version cannot be left out

in a theme of this nature since its exponents believe that it provides a guide to identifying the origin of the name, Warri. Based on his fieldworks, Peter Ekeh, a scholar with conspicuous record of fieldworks and publications on this part of the Western Niger Delta accepts this as the authentic version. According to him,

The origin of the name Warri does not belong to the Itsekiri, Urhobo, or Ijaw. It is a foreign name just as Lagos, Calabar, Escravos and Forcados are Portuguese names. Warri is a corruption from the name of a Portuguese sailor who explored the creeks of the Western Niger Delta, just as the word Kalabari in the Eastern Niger Delta is said to be a corruption from the Portuguese name of Calabar.³⁸

The exponents of the version claim that Warri as a name was first used by explorers to refer to a locality embracing the mouth of the Escravos and Forcados rivers and their surrounding creeks and not Itsekiri or Urhoboland. Commenting on the conflict between the two versions Daniel A. Obioma writes:

Iwere, which Itsekiri adopted as part of the politics of the 1950s and 1960s, designating Itsekiri, is very likely Portuguese, a mispronunciation of Aveiro, Afonso de' Aveiro, the Portuguese earliest explorer of 1485 in the Escravos area; de Aveiro set up trade in Benin River between the Oba of Benin and the Portuguese.³⁹

The third version, which is yet to appear in the record but very popular among some groups in the Western Niger Delta, especially among the Urhobo and Western Ijaw is that Warri is a corruption of the Ijaw word, "wari"⁴⁰ which means home, household or settlement. According to a popular oral tradition among the Urhobo and Western Ijaw, the Ijaw aborigines of Warri would always use the word, "wari" to refer to any settlement, quarters or home in the present day Warri town. With time, other groups including the Europeans corrupted and copied it as the name for the present-day oil city mainly because it was easier to pronounce compared to the alternatives used by other groups.⁴¹ Among these alternatives are Ode-Itsekiri, Ogbe-Sobo, Obodo, Asagba, and Iwere. Apparently, this is why some records claim that the name "Warri",

was initially used to refer to a locality embracing the mouth of the Escravos and forcados rivers and their surrounding creeks. This is indeed part of the heart of Ijawland.

With these three different versions, none of which can be given pre-eminence over the others and all of which are still subjects of historical controversy, it is obviously mere sentiments for any group to claim sole ownership of Warri by citing one version as a legal or historical evidence.

The second reason advanced by the Itsekiri in trying to justify their sole ownership of Warri land is the fact that all the legal verdicts on the issue up to 1936 favoured them.⁴² Yet, this is just one side of the coin. In the first place, the same records also established that “the fact that it was Dogho, an Itsekiri, who signed the legal documents which conveyed the land to government, has remained a key factor favouring the Itsekiri claim in the celebrated Warri land case.”⁴³ Secondly, a good number of the court verdicts since the 1940s also favoured the Urhobo and Ijaw. Indeed the legal verdict of 1973 explained in the previous chapter constitutes a landslide victory for the Urhobo and remains a key reference point in analysis of land disputes in the area from both historical and contemporary perspectives. From these two facts, it is obvious that even if the court verdicts are the only criteria for determining the aboriginal inhabitants of the area, the Urhobo and Western Ijaw are equally entitled to the ownership of Warri land.

Before looking at the other two perspectives, a good analysis of some other features of the Itsekiri perspective would be relevant to the understanding of their plight and approach to the conflict, especially as the other perspectives are also not completely devoid of such features. Writing in the 1960s on the Western Niger Delta, Obaro Ikime categorically stated that “no detailed study has yet been made on the origin of Warri township”.⁴⁴ However, with the increasing fieldwork leading to the publication of some works on this theme since 1970, it must

be pointed out that none of the three aboriginal groups can any longer distort historical facts and cite scholarly studies out of context in order to justify their respective perspectives.

Thus, in an effort to justify the claim that Warri belongs only to them, the Itsekiri cited Obaro Ikime thus:

The Itsekiri inhabit the North-western extremity of the Niger Delta in an area bounded approximately by latitudes 5° 20' North. Their neighbours are the Binin to the North, the Ijo to the South; the Urhobo to the East and the Yoruba of Ondo Province to the Northwest⁴⁵

But in the process, they deliberately ignored the most crucial facts and figures about Warri township illustrated by the same writer in the same book and other of his key publications because the inclusion of such facts and figures would produce the accurate picture of the scene.

For instance, Ikime has provided some facts and figures to demonstrate in his book, *Niger Delta Rivalry* that the change of the official title of the Itsekiri monarch from *Olu* of Itsekiri to *Olu* of Warri in 1952 was strictly political and cannot be justified historically or legally.⁴⁶ As mentioned above, he also made it categorically clear that the appointment of an Itsekiri, Chief Dogho, as a British political agent who signed the legal documents leasing portions of Warriland to the British largely gave the Itsekiri an edge over the other two groups in early land disputes up to 1936. But all these and similar facts and figures were completely ignored by the Itsekiri, while referencing those that favour them.

In the same way, the Itsekiri often cite P.C. Lloyd in search of facts and figures to justify their perspective on the question of the ownership of Warriland.⁴⁷ But the data provided by P.C. Lloyd that favoured the other two groups at their own expense are always completely ignored. One of the chief, if not fanatic, exponents of Itsekiri perspective, J. O. S. Ayomike gleefully cites P.C. Lloyd but always out of context.⁴⁸

The Urhobo perspective on the issue is also sentimental, though relatively not as blunt as the Itsekiri approach. Scholars like T.E.A. Salubi and Peter Ekeh have in one way or the other tried to demonstrate that the Urhobo differ in their approach. This, however, has not been able to hide the sentiments in the approach of this group. Looking carefully at the entire scene what can be precisely said is that perhaps some Urhobo sub-groups do not subscribe to the claim that Warri belong to only the Urhobo. For instance, in an explosive interview on topical issues in the Western Niger Delta, Barrister Solomon T. Borlokor rejected Itsekiri majority status in any of the three local governments in Warri. According to him, the Urhobo are the majority in Warri South, while the Ijaw constitute the majority group in both Warri South-West and Warri North local governments. With reference to Warri South, he contended:

The Itsekiri do not own any land there. The ones they lay claim to, were bought from the Urhobo. They cannot lay claim to any inch of land there which they inherited from their forefathers.⁴⁹

This is, of course, contrary to empirically established data which certify Itsekiri as the majority group in Warri North Local Government. Such reactions or response must have, at least, given non-indigenes of the area the impression that the Urhobo are not without their own sentiment on the issue. Therefore, in a key summary of the dispute over the ownership of Warri land, Akindele Aiyetan wrote:

So, who owns Warri? The Itsekiri claim that Ginuwa I founded Warri in the 16th century; The Urhobo claim that they had founded and lived in Warri before the 16th century. To a dispassionate observer, the former claim would sound implausible because the Itsekiri king (known as Olu of Itsekiri until 1952) did not move into the present Warri until 1952, when the late Chief Obafemi Awolowo rewarded the Itsekiri for their votes in the 1952 general elections by changing the title of the Olu of Itsekiri to Olu of Warri and establishing an Itsekiri Communal Land Trust over Warri, with the Olu as the president or Chairman.

The Urhobo went wild with rage and as lover of peace, went straight to the court to cause the Olu to revert to his original title and/or at least to change the name of the Province from Warri to Delta. They failed and won: failed to get the title of Olu of Warri to revert to Olu of Itsekiri but succeeded in getting the name of the Province to change from Warri to Delta Province. But the seed of inter-tribal conflicts had been sown, I dare say, by the South-West.⁵⁰

Nevertheless, from an objective point of view, it must be admitted, as mentioned above, that the Urhobo are not as blunt as the Itsekiri in their response to the situation. In the first place, an opinion poll conducted in 2001, by the Academic Associates Peace Works (AAPW), in assessment of the Warri situation, sponsored by the United States Institute of Peace, Washington, D.C. and the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) also shed some light on the entire scene. Out of a total of 300 Itsekiri asked, “who owns Warri”, 295 (98.3%) response is that Itsekiri alone owns Warri, while only 5 (1.7%) accepted it belongs to the three ethnic groups. Out of 500 Urhobo who responded to the same question, 400 (80%) claim it belongs only to the Urhobo, while 100 (20%) admitted Ijaw and Itsekiri part ownership.⁵¹

Secondly, the Urhobo official perspective accepted that Warri belongs to the three ethnic groups.⁵² Their grievances centre primarily on the overlordship of the Olu over traditional institutions in Warri coupled with marginalisation of the Urhobo sub-groups in Warri in local government administration and alleged Itsekiri aggression with regard to acquisition of land. All the 500 Urhobo respondents regarded the restyling of the official title of the Itsekiri monarch as the primary cause of the local government crisis.⁵³ This is almost the opposite of the Itsekiri official perspective, which regards the other two groups as mere settlers in Warri and that the “non-acceptance of settler status by Ijaws and Urhobos coupled with their desire to have ethnic local government councils in Itsekiri homeland” is bound to keep the oil city in a state of perpetual or sporadic crisis.⁵⁴

Similarly the Ijaw are not without their own pitfalls as belligerents in the tussle for the resources of the oil city. But from the outset, they accepted that Warri was founded by the three aboriginal groups. Even in the opinion poll conducted by AAPW, explained above, out of 120 Ijaw, 115 (95.8%) accepted that Warriland belongs to the three groups. Only 5(4.2%) claimed

that it is solely a property of the Ijaw compared to Itsekiri's 98.3% and Urhobo's 80%! However, like the others, the Ijaw perspective only selected and illustrated the scenes that favoured them. For instance, in its portrait of the 1997 local government crisis, only the version that held the Itsekiri responsible for its outbreak is illustrated. This version claims that the Itsekiri first struck and this was on March 25, 1997.⁵⁵ Nevertheless, they are apparently the most considerate of the three groups, at least, with regard to the controversy surrounding the ownership of Warriland.

On the other hand, since the last quarter of the 20th century the Western Ijaw have come to regard their historical and contemporary marginalisation in Warri initially by colonial officials and later by other groups as a "jinx" and are prepared to go to any extent to break it. This posture has added to the complexity of the Warri scene and amplified the aura for crisis. The Ijaw actually became the most militant and explosive group in the area starting from the last quarter of the 20th century— giving the Ijaw factor a new character and dimension.

The reason for the new approach is obvious. The Ijaw were the worst victims of the errors or oversight of colonial officials in the area, though each of the groups had found one fault or the other against the colonial administration. In the 1920s, the government granted some concessions to the Itsekiri after a court verdict that even favoured the local government headed by Chief Dogho Numa as the paramount chief. This had to do with the rents derived from Itsekiriland.⁵⁶

The Urhobo people of Agbassa also charged the local government to court and though they also lost, it would appear that they were also granted some concessions even if in overall the Itsekiri probably benefitted more. This is because Chief Dogho Numa was only compelled to cough out a good percentage of the funds realised through leasing of land in the area to the British while, his power was considerably curtailed. The money he paid was, however, set aside for the provision of public utility and nothing was given to the owners of the land. But the

penalty he received made both groups, especially the Itsekiri, to feel that, at least, they had scored a point and that in later years the true owners of such lands would be allowed to share in the funds.

But the Ijaw were hardly accommodated. The fact is that the Warri Division of 1914 to 1934 consisted of all the Itsekiri and the entire Urhobo with the latter even supported by the Isoko in times of rivalries, protests or conflicts. But only a small fraction of the Western Ijaw was included in this division, that is the Ijaw aborigines of Warri town and its immediate waterside. In the process, both the Itsekiri and Urhobo/Isoko enjoyed a major advantage at the expense of the Ijaw.

In other words, the implication of this arrangement is that though only few sub-groups of the Itsekiri were natives of what became known as Warri main town, they had the support of all other sub-groups of the ethnic group in times of protests and conflicts over distribution of resources. The same was true of the Urhobo; and since this was the only advantage this latter group had, it exploited it to the full in the rivalries for recognition and distribution of resources. The Itsekiri had a second advantage which they even utilised more than the first. It was their earlier contact with Western ideas and education as they were the first group in the area to interact with the Europeans. This single factor made them to dominate the Western Niger Delta until the 1930s.⁵⁷

On the other hand, the Ijaw aborigines of Warri were handicapped because majority of the Western Ijaw were in another division, the Western Ijaw Division. In addition, in those early years the geographical contiguity between them and those in Warri was affected by the presence of wide expanse of uninhabited creeks and swamps. Moreover, the other Western Ijaw were yet to develop any significant interest in the affairs of Warri. Besides, colonial officials even

sidelined the Ijaw and handled their demands with levity because of this disadvantage. For instance, most data compiled on Warri town up to the 1950s by colonial officials only gave columns to the Urhobo and Itsekiri, but classified the Ijaw with non-indigenes as “others”.⁵⁸

Following the restructuring of the local government system and injection of some dynamism into grassroots administration in what became known as the reorganisation era, the Ijaw attempted in 1937 to do what the Itsekiri and Urhobo people of Agbassa did in the 1920s. The two latter groups charged the local government authority to court in 1923 and 1925 respectively demanding for appropriate compensation in connection with portions of their land leased to the colonial government. But even though the petition prepared by the Ijaw was objective enough for the government to look into their plight, it was ignored.⁵⁹

Unable to influence the situation, they decided to wait for the “appropriate time,” though this appropriate time never came until the last quarter of the 20th century. Looking at the entire scene carefully one would feel that they had no better option. By the last quarter of the 20th century, apart from the numerous years of relative marginalisation of the Ijaw of Warri and its immediate environs, ethnic nationalism among the groups in the Western Niger Delta had taken a new dimension. Other Western Ijaw had come to understand the plight of their kinsmen in Warri vis-à-vis the numerical advantage enjoyed by the Itsekiri and Urhobo in the distribution of resources and the tussle for the ownership of Warriland.

This was more so as Warri had by then acquired more recognition as the largest and most prosperous commercial centre in the Western Niger Delta recording the highest annual growth rate of 9.84% in socio-economic development in the area.⁶⁰ It is significant to note, therefore, that the most explosive militancy in Warri was organised and prosecuted by the Western Ijaw that were neither indigenes of Warri nor fully resident in the town.⁶¹ There is evidence to suggest

that by 1997 even the Ijaw of the Eastern Niger Delta had become seriously concerned with the plight of their kinsmen in Warri and that a few of them were even among the ranks and file of militant organisations in Warri and its immediate environs.⁶²

The key leadership figures of the Ijaw Youth Council (IYC) that were actively involved in the fight for the recognition of Ijaw aboriginal status in Warri through collaboration with the Concerned Citizens of Warri Ijaws(CCWI) were mostly from Burutu, Bomadi, Okerenkoko and the Eastern Niger Delta. Joseph Evah, the president of IYC until recently, has demonstrated that he places the interest of the Niger Delta as an entity above that of any individual group in the area.⁶³ However, there is no doubt that he sympathises with the plight of the Ijaw in Warri.

Overall since 1975, the Ijaw of Warri could be said to have enjoyed the type of advantage both their Itsekiri and Urhobo counterparts enjoyed from the outset. The fact that Ijaw militant groups in the Eastern Niger Delta became interested in the Warri scene coupled with the ferocity with which the Western Ijaw approached the situation to correct the imbalance in inter-group structure and regain what they believed to have lost over the years made them to become dreaded by other groups in the area.

As explained above and in Chapters Four and Five, this imbalance in inter-group structure was created by the colonial masters and was not fully corrected before the Action Group controlled Western Region government took over the local government scene in the 1950s —only for this to be compounded by the 1952 mistake of restyling the title of the Itsekiri monarch as Olu of Warri. The role played by the 1952 Action Group decision in the local government crisis of 1997 – 2003 can hardly be over-emphasised. For instance, the field survey report of the AAPW on the nature of the crisis explained above also shed some light on this. On

the average, the 500 Urhobo respondents in an opinion poll regarded this as the primary cause of the crisis. Even 48% of the Itsekiri respondents subscribed to this.⁶⁴

When this is combined with the acute controversy surrounding the ownership of Warriland, it becomes obvious that the relocation of a local government headquarters in 1997 only played a negligible role. For instance, to the Ijaw respondents, apart from the traditional claim of ownership of Warriland by the three ethnic groups, the primary cause of the conflict is the “overlordship of one ethnic group (the Itsekiri) ...” in addition to its “arrogance and claim of superiority ... and ... habit of treating other aborigines (Ijaw and Urhobo) as customary tenants.”⁶⁵

Yet the question of the ownership of Warri land requires a second assessment. As explained above, the origin of the name, Warri has three versions, none of which has been historically and empirically established. There is also the need to make it clear that the nature and content of British treaties with the indigenes only compounded the controversy surrounding the ownership of Warriland rather than make it simple. For instance, as mentioned above, the Itsekiri have been very blunt in their claim that all other groups in Warri are mere settlers and this has been a major cause of violence and conflict in the area.

But surprisingly and ironically enough, none of the colonial treaties entered into by the British with them designated them as inhabitants of Warri. It must be pointed out that these treaties are at best source materials and never historical documents. But the issue is that they all refer to the Itsekiri as people of “the Benin river,” while those entered into with the Urhobo described them as inhabitants of “Warri Distiret”.⁶⁶ The following is an extract from the treaty signed with the Itsekiri in 1851:

At a Conference held this day, the 4th of April 1851, on board Her Majesty's Steamer 'Jackal', present John Beecroft Esqr Her Britannic Majesty's consul for the Bights of Benin and Biafra, Lieut. Commander Bedinfield, Her Majesty's

Steamer, 'Jackal', Lieutenant Lombard..., Mr. Pendlebery, Agent for Messr. Horsfall and Sons, W. Day, Harrison and Col., W. Stowe, Reuben Hemmingway Esqr, and Mr. Briden Demean gibb, Jerruy of Jacqua, the chief duly elected, with Jubuffaa and the principals of their town, Odessa of Yellow Town, Offalicoo of Fish Town and Tomah of Ullibah, the following laws and regulations were made and enacted.

ARTICLE 1ST

That the Chief of the River Benin with the chiefs and people of the above mentioned towns, pledge themselves that no British subject from this date shall be detained on shore or molested in any way under any pretence whatever.

ARTICLE 2ND

That in case of any misunderstanding between the Resident Agents Supercargoes and Masters of any of the vessels and the Chief and people of the River Benin all and every such Resident, Agent, Supercargoes and Masters of the British Vessel shall be at full liberty to go on shore free of molestation, and will with the chief and Gentlemen of the River Benin peacefully settle any dispute between the Parties.⁶⁷

The headlines and extracts from the treaties between the British and the Itsekiri in 1884 and 1894 are as follows:

(ii) Treaty with Chiefs of Jakri (River Benin), July 16, 1884

Her Majesty the Queen of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland, Empress of India, & c., and the chiefs of Jakri being desirous of maintaining and strengthening the relations of peace and friendship which have for so long existed between them

Her Britannic Majesty has named and appointed E.H. Hewett, Esq., Her Consul for the Bights of Benin and Biafra, to conclude a Treaty for this purpose.

The said E.H. Hewett, Esq., and the said Chiefs of Jarki have agreed upon and concluded the following Articles:-

ARTICLE IX

This Treaty shall come into operation, so far as may be practicable, from the date of its signature, except as regards Articles VI and VII which are to be left for negotiation on a future occasion.

Done in duplicate on board H.B. M.S. 'Flirts' anchored in Benin River this sixteenth day of July, 1884.

(iii) Treaty with Chiefs of Benin River and Jekeri Country, August 2, 1894

ARTICLE I

Her Majesty the Queen of Great Britain and Ireland, Empress of India, in compliance with the request of the Chiefs, and people of Benin River and Jekeri Country, hereby undertakes to extend to them, and to the territory under their authority and jurisdiction, Her gracious favour and protection.

ARTICLE II

The Chiefs of Benin River and Jekeri country agree and promise to refrain from entering into any Correspondence, Agreement, or Treaty with any foreign Nation or Power, except with the knowledge and sanction of Her Britannic Majesty's.⁶⁸

On the other hand, the headlines and extracts from similar treaties between the British and a number of Urhobo communities are as follows:

- (i) **British Colonial “Treaty of Protection” with Asagba in Warri District, December 6, 1892**

ARTICLE I

Her Majesty the Queen of Great Britain and Ireland Empress of India, in compliance with the request of the Chiefs, and people of Asagba, hereby undertakes to extend to them, and to the territory under their authority and jurisdiction, Her gracious favour and protection.

- (ii) **British Colonial “Treaty of Protection” with Toree (Ekpan) in Warri District February 26, 1893**

Her Majesty the Queen of Great Britain and Ireland, Empress of India, in compliance with the request of the Chiefs, and people of Toree, hereby undertakes to extend to them, and to the territory under their authority and jurisdiction, Her gracious favour and protection.

- (iii) **British Colonial “Treaty of Protection” with Ajebha (Ejeba) in Warri District, March 7, 1893.**

Her Majesty the Queen of Great Britain and Ireland, Empress of India, in compliance with the request of the Chiefs, and people of Ajebha, hereby undertakes to extend to them, and to the territory under their authority and jurisdiction, Her gracious favour and protection.

- (iv) **British Colonial “Treaty of Protection” with Agbassa in Warri District, March 14, 1893.**

Her Majesty the Queen of Great Britain and Ireland, Empress of India, in compliance with the request of the Chiefs, and people of Agbassa, hereby undertakes to extend to them, and to the territory under their authority and jurisdiction, Her gracious favour and protection.

- (v) **British Colonial “Treaty of Protection” with Ogonu (Ogoolu) in Warri District, March 30, 1893.**

Her Majesty the Queen of Great Britain and Ireland, Empress of India, in compliance with the request of the Chiefs, and people of Ogoolu, hereby undertakes to extend to them, and to the territory under their authority and jurisdiction, Her gracious favour and protection.

- (vi) **British Colonial “Treaty of Protection” with Igbudu (“Oboodo”) in Warri District, March 30, 1893.**

Her Majesty the Queen of Great Britain and Ireland, Empress of India, in compliance with the request of the Chiefs, and people of Oboodoo, hereby undertakes to extend to them, and to the territory under their authority and jurisdiction, Her gracious favour and protection.

- (vii) **British Colonial “Treaty of Protection” with Oagbi (“Sobo”) in Warri District, March 26, 1893.**

Her Majesty the Queen of Great Britain and Ireland, Empress of India, in compliance with the request of the Chiefs, and people of Oagbi Sobo, hereby undertakes to extend to them, and to the territory under their authority and jurisdiction, Her gracious favour and protection.⁶⁹

The question of the ownership of Warriland was, therefore, compounded by many factors and played a crucial role in the crisis. Indeed, key players in the three groups admit that apart from the demand for the change of the official title of the Itsekiri monarch, it is the next explosive issue that must be addressed by the local government system.⁷⁰

Major Stages in the Conflict and its Impact

This chapter will be incomplete without a brief description and analysis of major stages in the crisis. When the conflict exploded into a mini-war in 1997, both the Ijaw and Itsekiri accused each other of being responsible for its outbreak. According to the Ijaw, “on 25/3/97, some Itsekiri youths under the cover of darkness lauched a pre-planned and most dastardly attack on the Ijaws, destroying property belonging to prominent Ijaws and lives were lost.”⁷¹ On the other hand, the Itsekiri accused the then military administrator of Delta State, Col. J. D. Dung of conniving with the Ijaw to gain access into Itsekiri communities, setting many houses ablaze between March 22nd and May, 1997.⁷²

The Urhobo were not involved in the crisis in 1997 even though their sub-groups in Warri had consistently complained of being marginalised by the Itsekiri in local government administration since 1952. Peace was restored after enormous destruction of property and loss of lives, but the atmosphere remained tense throughout 1998. By the beginning of 1999 it was getting worse. It is not surprising, therefore, that at the dawn of June 1999, Warri was in crisis again and by June 21 about 300 lives had been lost and many houses burnt down.⁷³ This increased the total number of lives lost since 1997 to over 3,000. Among those killed were soldiers, policemen and oil company personnel.

The June 1999 scene began with the Itsekiri well marked out plan to involve the Urhobo in the internecine war even though the former were no match for the dreaded Ijaw “warlords”.⁷⁴ Consequently they stormed the palace of *Orosuen* of Okere-Urhobo, newly installed traditional ruler of the area, on June 3 and burnt it into ashes killing five people. They proceeded that same day to the home of Victor Okumagba, a member of the well known Okumagba family, dragged him out and shot him dead. According to *Newswatch*, “in the six hours that followed,... the Itsekiri youths unleashed an orgy of violence on Dumusobo, an Urhobo area and razed many homes amidst war songs.”⁷⁵

According to Chief Benjamin O. Okumagba, the Itsekiri again resumed the attack in the early hours of June 6, 1999. They were allegedly supported by military officers in Warri, while some of them were airlifted with a helicopter from the Itsekiri town of Aruton to Warri. The five dynamites and grenades launched at the Eboh’s compound of late Chief Daniel Okumagba were released from the helicopter, allegedly belonging to Chevron Oil Company.⁷⁶

This time around the Itsekiri were better armed than even their Ijaw counterparts. Military sources in Warri said they launched their arson with bazookas and did most of their shootings with M16 rifles which could fire 20 bullets in less than 10 seconds. They also used AK 47 assault rifle which can release a burst of more than 60 shots in 10 seconds, as well as butt-folded police rifle.⁷⁷ The Itsekiri attack continued. By the middle of the second week of June, the Urhobo had lost many lives and over 20 houses in Dumusobo, Okumagba Estate and Okumagba Layout. An Elf station belonging to an Urhobo man was burnt down with his car. Idama Hotel, belonging to Benjamin Okumagba, the *Otota*(Spokesman) of Okere-Urhobo was also torched.⁷⁸

But to borrow the words of *Newswatch* magazine, “why they should be the target of Itsekiri attacks in a war that had never involved them was a shock for the Urhobo who were most unprepared.”⁷⁹ In other words, one question that should be answered here is what account for this unscrupulous aggression against the Urhobo? Commenting on this, Hon. Bright O. Okumagba writes, “the remote cause was not unrelated to the Warri problem but the immediate cause would be very difficult to ascertain”⁸⁰ According to Gideon Okumagba, a little conflict between some youths at the front of the *Orosuen* of Okere-Urhobo palace provided the excuse for the Itsekiri to launch their attack on the Urhobo on Thursday June 3, 1999.⁸¹

The motive behind the Itsekiri attack on the Urhobo communities, therefore, remained a subject of controversy even after 1999. For one thing even observers in Warri who are non-indigenes of the Western Niger Delta believed the Itsekiri attack on the Urhobo was a tactical blunder. They argued that the Itsekiri were already fighting a losing battle with the Ijaw and should not have dragged the Urhobo into the fray.⁸²

Some sources claim that the Itsekiri perceived that the Ijaw were planning to launch attacks on Itsekiri settlements from the Urhobo settlements of Otor-Orere and Okumagba-layout. According to these sources, there were also rumours that many Itsekiri kidnapped by the Ijaw were being kept at Otor-Orere.⁸³

Reliable sources from the Itsekiri, however, claim that there were other reasons for the attack on the Urhobo communities. According to them, it was meant to move the Warri war from the riverine areas, where it was mostly confined, to land and raise it to a more explosive level to attract the full attention of the federal government thereby causing the federal government to declare a state-of-emergency on the city and finally make it a federal territory, a demand which Ogiame Atuwatse II, the Itsekiri traditional ruler, had passionately clamoured for.⁸⁴

The Itsekiri allegedly spent months acquiring arms for the purpose believing that the Urhobo, not well armed, might not be able to fight back as the Ijaw were doing.⁸⁵ They also allegedly reckoned that the Urhobo are essentially disinclined to violence. This calculation is said to be based on the reasoning that unlike the Ijaw who are “extremely vengeful and slaughterous” against the Itsekiri., the Urhobo, ruled by a “survival complex”, prefer to limit their war on the Itsekiri to newspaper articles and advertorials. It is, however, established that in this stage of the conflict, the Itsekiri were prepared for the Urhobo and no longer the Ijaw, even in the face of interminable provocations from the latter.⁸⁶

This is in spite of the fact that before then, Benjamin Okumagba, the *Otota* of Okere-Urhobo, had warned both sides not to involve the Urhobo of Warri in the violent crisis for fear of escalation and lawlessness.⁸⁷ With the Urhobo of Warri pitching into battle against the Itsekiri, the Warri crisis took a new dimension and moved to a more explosive level with the Itsekiri hemmed in between two “enemies”-- one in the river, the other on land.

Moreover, in spite of the Itsekiri aggression, probably due to the possession of more sophisticated weapons, they were the worst hit in the over half a million displaced residents of Warri due to the crisis. The refugees of the group had nowhere to go.⁸⁸ They could not go to most of their riverine homes because the Ijaw youths had chased them from there in the previous weeks. But some headed for Agbarho, Aladja, Sapele, Osubi, Abraka and Eku, all Urhobo hinterland towns. As they moved in droves to these areas with the state-of-emergency in force, the traditional ruler of Agbarho and residents of Sapele were threatening to turn them back.⁸⁹

At the peak of the crisis, the Ovie of Agbarho warned that any house found to be sheltering an Itsekiri would be sanctioned. As explained in Chapter Two, of the three groups the Urhobo and the Itsekiri have the highest rate of inter-marriages. According to *Newswatch*

magazine, “some of the Itsekiri women, in Agbarho, broke down in tears and muttered curses against some of their youths for the attack which had caused them to become refugees.”⁹⁰ This aspect of the character of the conflict tends to portray that in some cases those propelling the crisis constitute only the leadership class, a minute percentage of the total population of the group.

But the Itsekiri partially achieved their objective through the attack. A state-of-emergency was declared on the area. But they failed to get their demand of making Warri a federal territory actualised, partly because the Ijaw and Urhobo were vehemently against it.⁹¹ The other two groups were of the view that it would intensify Itsekiri domination of the area. It is alleged that the Itsekiri made the demand because their monarch, Atuwase II, was very influential and connected at the federal level and would use this against the Urhobo and Ijaw.⁹²

For instance, the two groups argue that Atuwase II, used his influence to get Jeremiah Useni, military Governor of old Bendel State to relocate the headquarters of the local government from Ogbe-Ijoh to Ogidigben. The Urhobo and Ijaw leaders also strongly believe that the monarch lobbied Mike Akhigbe, former Chief of General Staff, to scuttle plans by the Abdulsalami Abubakar government to create additional local government councils in Warri. The Itsekiri, however, denied both allegations.⁹³ Rather, they argue that Warri as a federal territory would guarantee their safety because they are threatened with extinction.⁹⁴

Another reason why the two groups objected to the idea of a federal territory plan is that it would introduce more complexities into the problem of “Land Use Act” because the indigenes of Warri and its environs would no longer be entitled to the resources that would consequently belong to the federal government, its agencies and its personnel who may come in from other

parts of the country. Analysts are of the view that such a situation has the potential of making the local government crisis infinitely worse.⁹⁵

Though the crisis of 2003 is outside the scope of this study, a brief look at it will throw more light on the entire scene. Peace was finally restored before the end of 1999. Despite the activities of militant organisations in the Niger Delta, tension was minimised in Warri and its environs from 2000 to 2002. But in the second week of March 2003, the local government crisis erupted again.⁹⁶ This time around, the Urhobo managed to avoid being drawn into the conflict.

This later one had its origin in the refusal of the Itsekiri to accept the demand of the Ijaw for a re-drawn of local government boundaries to make sure that Warri South-West Local Government consists only of the Ijaw. “A dispute which ordinarily could have been amicably resolved through dialogue ... degenerated into a full-blown war with the deployment of over a thousand soldiers to the waterways to ensure peace”.⁹⁷

This later conflict actually demonstrated that by the last decade of the 20th century, the Ijaw aborigines of Warri had resolved to go to any extent in order to put an end to their perceived age-long marginalisation in the area.⁹⁸ It was equally as devastating as the previous ones as major oil prospecting companies in the locality were forced to shut down operations. This translated to daily production loss of 760,000 barrels of oil from both Shell and Chevron. In value terms, the country’s loss was put at \$20.3 million daily.⁹⁹

The Ijaw first made this demand as far back as December 20, 1975 in a joint petition signed by the headchiefs of Ogbe-Ijoh, Gbaramatu and Egbeoma. In that petition they contended:

We want to make it crystal clear that we are opposed to any form of merger with the Itsekiris in Warri Division ... in the best interest of peace, stability and justice ... we want a separate administrative division ... any (continued) merger will only succeed on our dead body.¹⁰⁰

The crisis of 2003 came as a surprise even to the government. This, coupled with the fact that ten soldiers were among those killed before the end of March, prompted the chief of Army Staff, Lieutenant General Alexander Ogomudia himself to take charge of peace operations in the town and its environs.

But what was the impact of the crisis on the local government system and how much lesson was learnt? It must be pointed out here that this crisis does not seem to have impacted much on local government policies in the area. At the same time, neither the key players among the belligerent groups nor the government seemed to have learnt any lesson from the entire scene. Considering the bloodshed, massive destruction of property, and resources exhausted in terms of time and energy, the local government crisis of 1997 to 2003 could, therefore, be conceived as largely an approach in futility.

That is why B. O. Okumagba contends that unfortunately the reports of the commissions set up to look into the crisis “had been thrown into the dustbin as if some persons in and outside Delta State benefitted from all these unfortunate crises.”¹⁰¹ It is for the same reason that Celestine O. Bassey describes it as a crisis that assumes “a zero-sum dimension in which the pay-offs ... add up to $x + (-x) = 0$ ”¹⁰²

However, each of the groups felt they were able to derive some benefit from the crisis. To the Urhobo, the crisis enabled them to have due recognition in the Warri South Local Government Council. This is because the Urhobo were granted more councillorship positions on the grounds that they constitute the largest group in this local government though they were not satisfied with the criterion for distribution of wards in the area.¹⁰³ Out of 268,734 census figure of 1991 in Warri metropolis, the Urhobo constituted 250,000.¹⁰⁴ Moreover, it has helped to ensure the recognition of traditional rulers from all the groups. In other words, the Itsekiri

attempt to stop the installation of traditional rulers among the Urhobo and Ijaw sub-groups in Warri is now a thing of the past.¹⁰⁵ The recognition of Ogbе-Ijoh as the headquarters of Warri South-West Local Government was a benefit to the Ijaw.

The Itsekiri also feel they have been able to make both the government and other groups understand their perspective on the issue. In spite of the existence of some Ijaw and Urhobo enclaves in Warri North Local Government that local government has been recognised as an Itsekiri's abode since the end of the crisis.

Even if these are considered benefits they are not enough to compensate the area or the entire nation in terms of resources lost. Yet neither the government nor the affected groups had learnt enough lesson from the crisis as to make it impact positively on grassroots administration. Analysts are of the view that the creation of more local governments to accommodate the interest of each group and enable them to enjoy the type of local autonomy they are demanding for is the best answer to the situation. Thus, the commission of enquiry set up by the federal government in 1997 headed by Alhassan Idoko, late Chief Judge of Benue State, recommended the creation of three local government councils, each for the Urhobo, the Ijaw and the Itsekiri ethnic groups.¹⁰⁶

Before then, a judicial commission of inquiry set up in 1993 by the government to investigate a three-day clash between the Urhobo and the Itsekiri headed by Nnaemeka Agu, a retired justice of the Supreme Court, also recommended "that as soon as possible, three local governments be created in place of the present two with major adjustments where necessary for the Itsekiri, the Urhobo and the Ijaw clans".¹⁰⁷ It is significant to note that public opinion among eyewitnesses of the crisis in Warri is in line with these two recommendations. It emphasizes that only a local government structure granting all the three groups in Warri equal status can guarantee permanent peace in the area.¹⁰⁸

It is observed that the lack of political will by the government to implement these recommendations has been a major source of tension and violence since 1997. S. Y. Mamamu, one of the Ijaw representatives during a meeting between President Olusegun Obasanjo and leaders of the three ethnic groups in September 2003, contended that only a thorough implementation of the above two recommendations would restore permanent peace in the area. In his words, “anybody who is saying that they should not create new local government councils for the three tribes is a ‘Chief Devil’.”¹⁰⁹

There is need to point out here that, to a large extent, before the 1997 commission headed by the late Alhassan Idoko, the government had already put in place, either consciously or unconsciously, what was required to implement the recommendation. This was simply the creation of Warri North Local Government, dominated by the Itsekiri, Warri South Local Government, having the Urhobo as majority and Warri South-West Local Government where the Ijaw constitute the major group. They were among the local governments created in 1996 following the decision of the federal government to create more states and local governments. What was left was to adapt or re-align this structure in line with the recommendations of the commission.

This implies that the council for each of the three local governments should consist largely of members of its majority group. At the same time, only the traditional ruler of the dominant group should be recognised by the local government authority and must be the one whose palace is located in that local government area. Apparently, this was the demand of the Ijaw, which led to the escalation of the crisis in 2003. The issue is that in spite of the crisis and the official recognition of traditional rulers of Ijaw and Urhobo aborigines of Warri, the Itsekiri monarch was still recognised as having jurisdiction over the three local government areas.¹¹⁰ The Urhobo

and Western Ijaw are not comfortable with this, though in practice, it does not give the *Olu* control over traditional rulers of other groups. At the same time there was no evidence to demonstrate that the composition of each council corresponded with the recommendations of the Idoko Commission.

Some of the sub-groups demanded for the creation of over three local government councils. But since such local governments might not be viable, the best option was to implement the recommendations of the Agu and Idoko's commissions. Rather than take these recommendations seriously, the government merely advised the "warring groups to accommodate one another."¹¹¹ Gradually, the entire scene was being politicised with each of the groups pointing accusing fingers at the others for being responsible for the new position of the government. It was alleged that "in the face of ...disagreement between the three warring ethnic nationalities in Warri, President Olusegun Obasanjo seems to have aligned with the position of the Itsekiri that separate local government councils should not be created for the three ethnic groups in the area."¹¹² Therefore, the tension continued because the government had learnt nothing from the past with regard to crisis in the Western Niger Delta.

Similarly, most of the key players or leaders of each of the three ethnic groups have neither forgotten nor learnt anything from the past. Since the eve of colonialism, the Western Niger Delta, like some other parts of the country has attracted the attention of government, multinational companies, and non-indigenes alike because of its abundant resources in terms of palm oil later replaced by crude oil.¹¹³ But these external bodies had only intervened in crisis in the area to protect their own interest rather than the interest of the indigenes. It is this consideration that made one of the key players in the area to say that during the local government

crisis, there were many who were watching and expecting the Niger Delta people to exterminate themselves so that the region could be occupied by other people.¹¹⁴

This implies that amidst such crises like the case of 1997–2003, the external bodies first define their interest and identify what would facilitate the actualisation of such interest. Unity among the indigenes is only encouraged and crisis resolved if this would aid the realisation of such interest. At least, disunity is encouraged if it allows external bodies to exploit the resources of the area without giving the indigenes their due share.¹¹⁵

These are the lessons all the key players of the three groups are expected to learn from the last crisis. With this they would be able to base their decisions on empirically established facts and figures rather than politics and the perspective of individual groups. For instance, in spite of the last crisis, simple issues involving the teaching of indigenous languages in Warri primary and secondary schools were not amicably resolved.¹¹⁶

Grassroots Development and Petroleum Exploitation

As explained in Chapter Two, Urhoboland is among the ethnic groups in the Niger Delta. The major occupations of these groups are farming and fishing. Beneath the alluvial plain of the Niger Delta are large deposits of crude oil. This was first discovered in 1956 in a remote village called Oloibiri in Bayelsa State.

Until recently, it would be mere fantasy to think of any connection between grassroots development and petroleum exploitation in any Niger Delta community. This is because it is believed that “in terms of development the deprivation of the area is very enormous” even though it “produces the bulk of the nations wealth”.¹¹⁷ In fact, rather than act as an asset to

grassroots development, petroleum exploitation was rather an instrument of grassroots underdevelopment due to oil spillage, pollution of land and water, and gas flaring for which affected communities were hardly compensated.

The gas flaring sites in Otu-Jeremy, Eruemukowharien and some other parts of Urhoboland render some expanses of land completely uninhabitable by any living thing. Yet, its general adverse effects are felt even far beyond the nearby habitable areas of land. An environmental development strategy for the Niger Delta in 1995 estimated that as much as 76 percent of all associated natural gas from oil production in Nigeria is flared compared to 0.6 percent in the United States of America, 4.3 percent in the United Kingdom and 21 percent in Libya. It is the equivalent of France's total annual natural gas demand. According to the 1995 World Bank Report, Nigeria flares more gas than any other country in the world.¹¹⁸

It is in the light of this that experts in the sector conclude that, "gas flaring is another oil activity that is bringing life to an end in the Niger Delta."¹¹⁹ The consequences are now manifesting across the Niger Delta. Urhoboland is among the least victims compared to other parts of the region like the Kolo Creek oilfield being operated by Shell in Bayelsa State, which experienced earth tremor in 1991, 1992 and 1994.¹²⁰

Before the establishment of the Niger Delta Development Commission (NDDC) on December 21, 2000 by the Federal Government under the leadership of Olusegun Obasanjo, some other efforts were made to utilise petroleum exploitation for grassroots development. Some writers have tried to draw a link between the effort of the Federal Government to utilise petroleum exploitation for grassroots development in Niger Delta communities and the establishment of the Niger Delta Development Board (NDDB) in 1961 and that of the Niger Delta Basin and Rural Development Authority (NDBRDA) in 1976.¹²¹

While the veracity of such claims are quite doubtful, it must be admitted that the establishment of the Presidential Task Force (PTF) in 1981, which allowed 1.5 percent of the federation account for the development of the region and the formation of the Oil Mineral Producing Areas Development Commission (OMPADEC) in 1992 were partly attempts to promote grassroots development through petroleum exploitation.¹²² These initial efforts contributed to national consciousness on the need to address the problem of grassroots development in the Niger Delta. To some extent, NDDC was a product of this initial consciousness.

Between 1992 and 1999, OMPADEC made some effort to contribute to grassroots development in the area. During the Governorship of Chief James Ibori, the Delta State Oil Producing Areas Development Commission (DESOPADEC) was set up for the purpose of grassroots development. It had its branches in a number of local government areas in Urhoboland, though there were no major records of achievement. But it contributed to the construction of few drainage and culverts and gave some assistance to the local government councils in the area in the provision of health centres and dispensaries.¹²³

Oil companies also reluctantly became involved in contributing a token to the grassroots development of their host communities due to three basic reasons. The first was the national and international clamour about the general neglect of the area vis-a-vis the resources derived from it. The second was the little effort made by OMPADEC and the Nigeria National Petroleum Corporation (NNPC) to encourage grassroots development of the area. Finally was the change in attitude of the host communities from hospitality to hostility in relating with the oil companies.

The Oil companies, especially the multinationals like Shell Petroleum Development Company (SPDC) and Chevron, therefore, assisted some local government councils in

Urhoboland in the provision of few standard health centres, some of which even had facilities for in-patients. Among them is the Otu-Jeremi Health Centre already mentioned above. They also made little effort to cooperate with traditional rulers for the purpose of community development.¹²⁴

These were among the projects cited by the external relations manager of SPDC, Don Boham, in 2003 in his monumental book when he contended that he personally visited 1000 projects being executed by SPDC in 1997 in Warri and its environ and that “I know we have done a lot of infrastructures.”¹²⁵ He added that “Shell is community friendly” and that this has been the trend since its operation in 1958. According to him:

This big book here is a development blueprint... where the oil companies, not just Shell, had a partnership with the Rivers State government to travel through the 23 local government areas in the state and determine exactly what the people need... Now we have replicated that in Delta State,...and we want to do that in all the oil-producing states. We work very closely with the state government and from there to the local government because this is where we operate. Before we carry out community development projects, we have an appraisal of the community needs, where our people go down to the village and spend weeks and sometimes months and talk to the various groups.”¹²⁶

Based on this, Shell claims that it spends 16 million annually, on community development projects. Chevron on its part claims to spend as much as \$20 million annually on community development initiatives in the areas in which it operates. Mobil also claims it spends about \$10 million annually on grassroots development, but only within the communities in which it has its ventures.¹²⁷ However, International agencies have confirmed the allegations that none of the oil companies “publish regular comprehensive reports of... environmental damage, sabotage, claims for compensation, protest actions, or police or military action carried out on or near their facilities.”¹²⁸

Until 1999, the local oil companies among which were Addax, Amni, Brass, Cavendish, Consolidated, Continental, Dubri, Express, Famfa, Montcrief, Peak and Summit made no impact

on grassroots development. But since then, these set of oil companies have evolved new modes of relations with their host communities to enable them have some positive impact on grassroots development.¹²⁹ Eleme Petrochemicals Company Limited (EPCL) in Port Harcourt is said to have made noticeable effort with regard to this.¹³⁰

The former Governor of Rivers State, Peter Odili and some other key players in the Niger Delta are of the view that all these and other assumed interventionist efforts of the past were mere “lip service”. According to Peter Odili, “quantify these efforts, translate them to what they would amount to in terms of physical development, you will find that you are just scratching the surface.”¹³¹

Overall, the oil was controlled by the Oil Multinationals and one must agree with Victor Dabor–Fuludu that these Multinationals would contribute little or nothing to development at the grassroots level except compelled by government policies to do so.¹³² However, it will be contradictory and unethical for the federal government to attempt doing this since by the 1990s the companies paid 20 percent royalty before tax to the federal government.

According to Don Boham, in other countries, especially those of North America, royalties are paid to the communities directly and that for this reason SPDC suggested to the government the need to put some of the royalty back into the communities directly.¹³³ Between 1995 and 2000, Shell paid \$2,084 billion in royalties to the federal government. In addition to royalties, the oil companies also pay an 85 percent petroleum profit tax, value added tax of five percent, education tax, withholding tax of between five and ten percent and in many cases customs duties on imports. They also claim to pay some statutory levies to federal, state and local governments, although some state governors say that it is an uphill task to get any payments from the companies.¹³⁴

Despite the limitations explained above, the effort of the companies to reduce the degree of discord between them and their host communities, though reluctant, gradually enabled them to gain inroads into the affairs of traditional rulers associations and the local government councils. In Urhoboland, this contributed to grassroots development. At the same time, it was a volatile instrument of conflict. Where inter and intra-group relations were peaceful, the assistance from OMPADEC, NNPC and oil companies impacted positively on communal development and the activities of local government councils.

Thus, as mentioned above, they assisted the councils in setting up health centres and construction of feeder roads. Ekakpamre town in Jeremi clan, Ughelli South Local Government Area had all its feeder roads tarred by Shell in the second half of the 1990s. The company also contributed to the upgrading of the standard of feeder roads in Eruemukohwarien in Ughelli North Local Government area and a few places in Sapele local government, Udu Local Government, and Ethiope West Local Government Areas. However, with the exception of few cases, notably Ekakpamre, one must agree with Victor Dabor-Faludu that agents of oil exploration were only interested in improving the quality of feeder roads if such roads acted as access routes for their operation.¹³⁵

Where intra and inter-group relations were not harmonious, proceeds from petroleum exploitation and attempts by its agents to contribute to communal development constituted a noticeable factor in local government crisis partly because the so-called contributions were at best peanuts in relation to the need of the area. Thus, the Urhobo claim that the desire of the Itsekiri monarch to have sole control over oil proceeds from both the government and oil multinationals is the only reason why he was vehemently against the recognition and installation of the *Oro-suen* of Okere-Urhobo and other traditional rulers in Warri. As explained in Chapter

Five, the local government gazette of 1952 gave the *Olu* preponderant influence over other traditional rulers. This could be interpreted in different ways when it comes to sharing of resources, while the *Olu* could also exploit it in different ways to his own advantage. Apart from this, there is no other evidence to substantiate for the claim.

They attributed the unsuccessful court action against the installation of the *Oro-suen* by the *Olu* before the crisis of 1997 and the subsequent setting ablaze of the *Oro-suen's* palace during the crisis, by Itsekiri youths, even when the Urhobo were yet to be involved, to this phenomenon.¹³⁶ At the same time, the Itsekiri claim that the “greed” for oil proceeds was primarily responsible for the “antagonistic attitude” of the Ijaw to their interest.¹³⁷

ENDNOTES

1. Federal Military Government: *Local Government (Report by the Committee on Review of Local Government Administration in Nigeria)* Lagos, September, 1984.
2. For the 149 Local government created during the era also see Geoffrey Umeh, ed. *25 Years of Local Government Reforms and Democratization, 1976- 2001* (Lagos: Manson and Company Publishers, 2003) 125-127.
3. Ibid,128; Federal Military Government: *Local Government Report by the Committee on Review of Local Government Administration in Nigeria)* Lagos, September, 1984.
4. See population data, page 251.
5. Geoffrey Umeh, *25 Years of Local Government Reforms and Democratization, 1976- 2001*, 128
6. *Uvwie Local Government Leaders*, Compiled by NYSC & SERVICOM UNIT, Uvwie L.G., 2003. Oral Interview: James Mrakpo (80), Retired Chairman, Ughelli Local Government Council,Dec.15,2013
7. Geoffrey Umeh, *25 Years of Local Government Reforms and Democratization, 1976- 2001*, 131
8. Ibid, 131-132
9. Ibid.
10. African Leadership Forum, *Elements of Development*, 1999, 7
11. Oral Interview: James Mrakpo (80), Retired Chairman, Ughelli Local Government Council,Dec.15,2013
12. *White Paper on New Guidelines on Local Government Reform*, Lagos. June 1991.
13. Geoffrey Umeh, *25 Years of Local Government Reforms and Democratization, 1976- 2001*, 131
14. Ibid, 132
15. Oral Interview: J.W.S. Ilavware (80), Retired Secretary of Ughelli Local Government Council, Dec, 20, 2013. Also see, Geoffrey Umeh, 2003, 132-133
16. Ibid

17. *Uvwie Local Government Leaders* Compiled by NYSC & SERVICOM UNIT, Uvwie Local Government, 2003. Oral Interview: James Mrakpo (80), Retired Chairman, Ughelli Local Government Council, Dec. 15, 2013
18. Geoffrey Umeh, *25 Years of Local Government Reforms and Democratization, 1976- 2001*, 129
19. Ibid
20. Similarly Isoko Local Government was split into two, Isoko North and Isoko south while former Aniocha Local Government was reconstituted into Aniocha North and Aniocha South. At the same time Ndokwa Local Government became Ndokwa East and Ndokwa West Local Governments. Also see “Population of Delta State by Local Government Area, 1991 and 2006”, table 6.1
21. Jimitota Onoyume & Bamidele Ighototuya, “Don’t Write off LGS, says Udju”, *Urhobo Voice*, Vol. 6, No. 216, Sept 29 2003, 18; *Uvwie Local Government Leaders* Compiled by NYSC & SERVICOM UNIT, Uvwie Local Government, 2003. Oral Interview: James Mrakpo (80), Retired Chairman, Ughelli Local Government Council, Dec. 15, 2013.
22. Geoffrey Umeh, *25 Years of Local Government Reforms and Democratization, 1976- 2001*, 130
23. *Zikism: The Political Philosophy of Nnamdi Azikiwe*, 192 (cited in Geoffery Umeh, 2003, 130)
24. Geoffrey Umeh, *25 Years of Local Government Reforms and Democratization, 1976- 2001*, 130
25. Ibid, 134
26. Ibid.
27. Ibid.
28. Oral Interview: J.A. Okpibuluku(80), former MAMSER Senior Officer in charge of Ughelli Local Government Area; also a retired Secretary of Ughelli local government Council, 15 Oct, 2012.
29. See chapter 7 for detail analysis of this.
30. Walter Ofonagoro “Abacha-Building a New Nigeria”, *Daily Times*, October 11, 1995, 19
31. Dr D.A. Tonwe, “Warri Crisis Survey Report – Itsekiri perspective” in *Conflict and Instability in the Niger Delta: The Warri case* edited by T.A. Imobighe, Celestine O. Bassey

& J.B. Asuni (Ibadan: Spectrum Books, 2002), 206-207; B.O. Okumagba, *The Okere-Urhobo People* (Warri: Ovwis Printers, 2013), 15

32. Ibid.
33. Also see chapter 3, pp. 151-152
34. Peter P. Ekeh (ed.) *Warri City & British Colonial Rule in Western Niger Delta*, (New York, Lagos: Published by Urhobo Historical Society, 2004), 140.
35. Dr D.A. Tonwe, 2002, 187-223; Hon. Eugene Ebisin (55), Secretary, Warri South Local Government Council, March 3, 2014.
36. Obaro Ikime, *Niger Delta Rivalry* (London: Longman, 1969), 254; “Iwere” was the name of an early Itsekiri community. It was also another name for their headquarters, often known as Ode-Itsekiri. It is for this reason that a 19th century French traveller also referred to the *Olu* as *Oba Iwere*. An English translation of his work in 1967 changed it to *Oba Warri*, i.e., after the gazette of 1952 that restyled it *Olu* of Warri. See endnote 9 of Chapter Five.
37. Ekeh (ed.) *Warri City & British Colonial Rule in Western Niger Delta*, 168 – 169.
38. Ibid., 197.
39. Daniel A. Obioma, “British Treaties and Ownership of Warri: A Response to J. O. S Ayomikes Claims”, in *Warri City & British Colonial Rule in Western Niger Delta*, edited by Peter P. Ekeh (New York, Lagos: Published by Urhobo Historical Society, 2004), 168.
40. Oral Interviews: David Eba(58). A Lagos-based building contractor from the Urhobo clan of Effuruntor; Joseph O. Akpokere (55), A Seaman and Warri-based businessman brought up among the Ijaw and Itsekiri, August 20, 2014. For the meaning of “wari” also see E.J.Alagoa, “The Niger Delta States and their Neighbours to c. 1800” in *History of West Africa* Vol. 1, 3rd Edition, edited by J. F. A. Ajayi and Micheal Crowder(London: Longman Publishers, 1985), chapter 9
41. Ibid.
42. Obaro Ikime, *Niger Delta Rivalry*, 1969, 254.
43. Ibid., 255
44. Ibid., 254
45. Dr D.A. Tonwe, “Warri Crisis Survey Report – Itsekiri perspective” in *Conflict and Instability in the Niger Delta: The Warri case* edited by T.A. Imobighe, Celestine O. Bassey & J.B. Asuni (Ibadan: Spectrum Books, 2002), 188.

46. Obaro Ikime, *Niger Delta Rivalry*, 1969, Epilogue
47. Dr D.A. Tonwe, “Warri Crisis Survey Report – Itsekiri Perspective”, 2002, 188.
48. Also see Ekeh (ed.) *Warri City & British Colonial Rule in Western Niger Delta*, 168-169
49. Mevayen Obire, “Urhobo are Warri Landlords, says Borlokor”, *The Urhobo Voice*, Vol. 7, No. 223, Nov. 17 2003, 13.
50. Ekeh (ed.) *Warri City & British Colonial Rule in Western Niger Delta*, 134
51. T.A. Imobighe, Celestine O. Bassey & J.B. Asuni(eds.), *Conflict and Instability in the Niger Delta: The Warri case* (Ibadan: Spectrum Books, 2002), 80
52. Dr A.S. Akpotor, “Warri Crisis Survey – Urhobo perspective” in *Conflict and Instability in the Niger Delta: The Warri case* edited by T.A. Imobighe, Celestine O. Bassey & J.B. Asuni (Ibadan: Spectrum Books, 2002), 156 – 185
53. Ibid., 158
54. Tonwe, “Warri Crisis Survey Report – Itsekiri perspective” 186 – 187
55. Prof. V.F. Peretomode, “Warri crisis Survey Report – Ijaw Perspective” in *Conflict and Instability in the Niger Delta: The Warri case* edited by T.A. Imobighe, Celestine O. Bassey & J.B. Asuni (Ibadan: Spectrum Books, 2002), 134.
56. Also see chapter 3 of this study.
57. See chapter 4, p. 132
58. Even Professor Peter C. Lloyd’s data on Warri followed this pattern. See Appendices vii(a)-vii(e)
59. Also see chapter 4, pages 147-148, for detailed discussion of this.
60. For the growth rate of Warri see, N.O. Imoroa, “Delta state” in *Nigeria: A People United, A future Assured* Vol. 2, Survey of States, edited by A.B. Mamman (Federal Ministry of Information, 2000) 138.
61. “Asari Dokubo’s Diary”, *National Standard*, Vol. 2, Nov. 15, 2007, 14-21.
62. Ibid
63. Responding to the local government crisis, for instance, he said “the entire Niger Delta was fighting over a single local government instead of uniting to demand for 100 local

governments for the region”. Silverbird Television, Friday August 24, 2012, 4.00 – 4.30pm Nigerian Time.

64. Celestine O. Bassey, “Crisis Intervention Survey: Data Analysis and Evaluation” in *Conflict and Instability in the Niger Delta: The Warri case*, edited by T.A. Imobighe, Celestine O. Bassey & J.B. Asuni (Ibadan: Spectrum Books, 2002), 68-69
65. Ibid; out of 120 respondents, 115 subscribed to this.
66. The British entered into three of such treaties with the Itsekiri. Verbatim texts of the first (apart from its headline) could be found in Obaro Ikime’s *Niger Delta Rivalry*, 1969, 278-283; while verbatim texts of the second and third including those entered into with the Urhobo are contained in Peter P. Ekeh’s *Warri City & British Colonial Rule in Western Niger Delta*, 2004, chapters two and three.
67. Obaro Ikime, *Niger Delta Rivalry*, 1969, 278-280.
68. Peter P. Ekeh, *Warri City & British Colonial Rule in Western Niger Delta*, (New York, Lagos: Published by Urhobo Historical Society, 2004), chapters two and three.
69. Ibid.
70. T.A. Imobighe, Celestine O. Bassey & J.B. Asuni(eds.), *Conflict and Instability in the Niger Delta: The Warri case* (Ibadan: Spectrum Books, 2002), 68 -69.
71. Prof. V.F. Peretomode, “Warri crisis Survey Report – Ijaw Perspective”, 134-135.
72. Dr D.A. Tonwe, “Warri Crisis Survey Report – Itsekiri Perspective”, 2002, 210-211.
73. Mudiaga Ofuoku, “War Without: Federal Government Declares a state of Emergency in Warri, Delta State as Ethnic Violence Escalates”, *Newswatch*, Vol. 20, No.15, June 21, 1999, 18-22
74. Ibid, 20
75. B.O. Okumagba, *The Okere-Urhobo people* (Warri: Ovwis Printers, 2013), 18
76. Mudiaga Ofuoku, “War Without: Federal Government Declares a state of Emergency in Warri, Delta State as Ethnic Violence Escalates”, *Newswatch*, Vol. 20, No.15, June 21, 1999, 20; Oral Interview: M. O. Akpokere(50), Warri based businessman and Daniel A. Obofukoro(50) of Uvwie Local Government Council Effurun gave eyewitness account of this.
77. Ibid.
78. Mudiaga Ofuoku, *Newswatch*, Vol. 20, No.15, June 21, 1999, 20

79. Ibid.
80. B.O. Okumagba, *The Okere-Urhobo people* (Warri: Ovwis Printers, 2013), 18
81. Ibid.
82. Mudiaga Ofuoku, *Newswatch*, Vol. 20, No.15, June 21, 1999, 21
83. B.O. Okumagba, *The Okere-Urhobo people* (Warri: Ovwis Printers, 2013), 18; Oral Interview: Bright Onovughakpo Okumagba (60) and other members of the Olodi, Oki & Ighogbadu Royal Family, Okere-Urhobo Kingdom. Aug. 1, 2014.
84. Mudiagha Ofuoku, *Newswatch*, 1999, 21
85. Ibid.
86. Ibid.
87. Ibid.; Oral Interview: Bright Onovughakpo Okumagba (60) and other members of the Olodi, Oki & Ighogbadu Royal Family, Okere-Urhobo Kingdom. Aug. 1, 2014.
88. Ibid.
89. Mudiaga Ofuoku, *Newswatch*, Vol. 20, No.15, June 21, 1999, 20-21; Oral Interview: Daniel A. Obofukoro(50) of Uvwie Local Government Council, Effurun gave eyewitness account of this.
90. Mudiaga Ofuoku, *Newswatch*, Vol. 20, No.15, June 21, 1999, 21.
91. Ibid.
92. Ibid.
93. Mudiaga Ofuoku, *Newswatch*, June 21, 1999, 21-22; Oral Interview: Hon. Eugene Ebinin (55), Secretary, Warri South Local Government Council, March 3, 2014.
94. Ibid, 22
95. Ibid.
96. Lucky Fiakpa, "On a Keg of Gun-Powder", *TELL*, No. 14, April 7, 2003, 42-43
97. Ibid.
98. Also see chapters 3 and chapter 4, pages 94& 146-147 of this work.

99. Lucky Fiakpa, *TELL*, April 7, 2003, 44
100. Prof. V.F. Peretomode, “Warri crisis Survey Report – Ijaw Perspective” in *Conflict and Instability in the Niger Delta: The Warri case* edited by T.A. Imobighe, Celestine O. Bassey & J.B. Asuni (Ibadan: Spectrum Books, 2002), 135.
101. B.O. Okumagba, *The Okere-Urhobo People* (Warri: Ovwis Printers, 2013), 17
102. Celestine O. Bassey, “Crisis Intervention Survey: Data Analysis and Evaluation” in *Conflict and Instability in the Niger Delta: The Warri case*, edited by T.A. Imobighe, Celestine O. Bassey & J.B. Asuni (Ibadan: Spectrum Books, 2002), 79-80
103. Dr A.S. Akpotor, “Warri Crisis Survey – Urhobo perspective” in *Conflict and Instability in the Niger Delta: The Warri case* edited by T.A. Imobighe, Celestine O. Bassey & J.B. Asuni (Ibadan: Spectrum Books, 2002), 166-167
104. Bassey, “Crisis Intervention Survey: Data Analysis and Evaluation”, 80
105. See Chapter Five, pages 217-220
106. Mudiaga Ofuoku, *Newswatch*, June 21, 1999, 22
B.O. Okumagba, *the Okere-Urhobo people* (Warri: Ovwis Printers, 2013), 18-20
107. Ibid. Emomine John and Okies Veeky, “Obasanjo Advices Against Separate Local Governments in Warri”, *Urhobo Voice* sept. 29, 2003, Vol. 6, No. 216, 1, 11 & 19
108. Mudiaga Ofuoku, *Newswatch*, June 21, 1999, 21
109. Emomine John & Okies Veeky, “Obasanjo Advices Against Separate Local Governments in Warri”, *The Urhobo Voice*, Vol. 6, No. 216, Sept. 29, 2003, Vol. 6, No. 216, 1, 11 & 19
110. This is still the structure up till date. See: *Traditional Rulers of Delta State*, published by Directorate of Chieftaincy Affairs, Office of the Deputy Governor, Asaba, 2008.
111. Emomine John and Okies Veeky, “Obasanjo Advices Against Separate Local Governments in Warri”, *The Urhobo Voice*, Vol. 6, No. 216, Sept. 29, 2003, 1,
112. Ibid.
113. T.N. Tamuno, *Oil Wars in the Niger Delta* (Ibadan: Stirling-Horden Publishers Ltd, 2011)
114. *Traditional Rulers of Delta State*, published by Directorate of Chieftaincy Affairs, Office of the Deputy Governor, Asaba, 2008.

115. This is among the reasons why some studies contend that the Niger Delta provides an excellent example as a victim of “domestic recolonisation” within the Nigerian state. Ikechukwu J.D. Nwosu, “marginality and the Niger Delta Crises: Ogoni, Ijaw and Warri Crises in Perspective” in *Peace Studies and Conflicts Resolution in Nigeria: A Reader* edited by Miriam Ikejiani - Clark (Abuja: Spectrum Books Ltd, 2009), 544 – 545.
116. For instance, in 2008 the Itsekiri acting through the governor of Delta state Emmanuel Uduaghan, an Itsekiri, have insisted that only Itsekiri language should be thought in Warri North Local Government. Within a short time this was even extended to Warri South Local Government dominated by the Urhobo. But the reaction of the Ijaw to the Warri situation since 1997 compels them to allow Ijaw language in some schools but strictly restricted to just a section of Warri South-West Local Government.
117. Onyema Ugochukwu, “The Deprivation of the Area is Enormous”, *TELL*, No. 14, April 7, 2003, 3
118. Anayochukwu Agbo, “The Dying Delta,” *TELL*, No 14, April, 2003, 57-59.
119. Ibid.
120. Ibid.
121. “Moving the Niger Delta Forward”, *TELL*, No. 14, April 7, 2003, 2
122. Ibid.
123. Both councillors and members of staff of a number of local government councils made mention of such projects. Hon. Dave Akporiaye (55), a councilor in Warri South Local Government Council representing Olodi/Okpeki ward in Okumagba Layout listed some of such projects which dated back to the 1990s. the most recent among them is the Phase 1 of Edukugho street Drainage in Warri South Local Government Area constructed by OMPADEC in 2002. Mercy Okomeyin (35), Assistant Matron with the Otu-Jeremi Heath Centre said Shell Petroleum development Company furnished the centre with better facilities and expanded the premises, providing new structures. The present writer is also an eye-witness of the fact that some of these efforts dated to the 1990s.
124. Oral Interview: Victor Dabur – Fuludu (51), Head, Community Relation and Protocol Dept., NNPC, Warri, Aug. 18, 2014; Mercy Okomeyin, Mrs (35), Assistant Matron, Otu-Jeremi Health Centre. Aug. 19, 2014.
125. Ibim Sementary, “Shell is Community-Friendly”, *TELL*, No.14, April 7, 2003, 64. According to Don Boham, by 1997, Shell was also constructing a road network in Bayelsa State for \$100 million that would extend to Oloibiri, a road from Yenagoa to Nembe crossing eight bridges,
126. Ibid

127. Ibim Sementary, "Of Victims and Villains", *TELL*, No.14, April 7, 2003, 60-62.
128. Ibid, 62
129. Sir Jossy Nkwuocha, "A Paradigm Shift in Community Relations to Sustain Emerging Peace in the Niger Delta: A case Study of EPCL and its Host Communities", *Public Relations Journal: The Biannual Journal of the Nigerian Institute of Public Relations*, Vol. 7, No.2, 2011, 140-147
130. Ibid
131. Stephen Ubanna, "Crumbs for the Goose", *TELL*, No.14, April 7, 2003, 56.
132. Oral Interview: Victor Dabur-Fuludu (51), Head, Community Relations and Protocol Dept., NNPC, Warri, Aug. 18, 2014.
133. Ibim Sementary, "Of Victims and Villains", *TELL*, No.14, April 7, 2003, 60-62.
134. Ibid, 62
135. Oral Interview: Victor Dabur-Fuludu (51), Head, Community Relations and protocol Dept., NNPC, Warri, Aug. 18, 2014.
136. Dr A.S. Akpotor, "Warri Crisis Survey – Urhobo perspective" in *Conflict and Instability in the Niger Delta: The Warri case* edited by T.A. Imobighe, Celestine O. Bassey & J.B. Asuni (Ibadan: Spectrum Books, 2002), 165
137. Dr D.A. Tonwe, "Warri Crisis Survey Report – Itsekiri perspective" in *Conflict and Instability in the Niger Delta: The Warri case* edited by T.A. Imobighe, Celestine O. Bassey & J.B. Asuni (Ibadan: Spectrum Books, 2002), 212

CHAPTER SEVEN

CHALLENGES AND IMPACT OF THE SYSTEM

During the pre-colonial era, local authorities, as explained in Chapter Two, performed certain functions in Urhoboland. Likewise, the local government system has been assigned various functions since the colonial period. Indeed, most of the documents on local government administration in Nigeria are replete with a list of these functions.¹ These functions were well spelt out during the 1952 and 1976 local government reforms. Suffice it to say that their overall objective is to accelerate the pace of socio-economic and political development in the society. The task of this chapter is to examine the extent to which these functions were carried out in Urhoboland up to 1999 vis-à-vis the challenges faced by the local councils and the extent to which their impact was felt by the people.

Much has been said about the challenges of local government councils in Urhoboland in the previous chapters. In spite of this, there is need to summarise the major ones here in order to have a proper understanding of the impact of local government administration on the area. There is also need to point out that the challenges of local councils in the area may differ within their own context. Nevertheless, some of them fall within the framework of what has been recorded in some other parts of the country.

A major one is that of crises which stemmed from communal conflicts. This took a dimension hardly experienced in any other part of the country². As already explained in Chapter Five, such conflicts trailed the local government system in Urhoboland since the 1950s local government gazette on traditional leadership in Warri.³ There were also occasional intra-group conflicts. Few of the latter were settled without involving the local government councils. For instance, the Oguname-Agbarho age-long dispute which started in the 1980s was finally resolved

by 1999 without involving the local council in charge of the area.⁴ But in the case of Udu-Uvwie conflict over local government boundaries in 1996, peace was not restored until the intervention of the local government councils and even the law court⁵. The same was true of Eketete dispute which commenced in 1995 over the election of community leaders.⁶

Whether or not local government councils were involved in resolution of such conflicts, they often acted as impediments to smooth implementation of local government programmes. Occasionally, there were conflicts between representatives of each community or ward in the local councils over revenue allocation. This could be fuelled by intra-group disputes between two or more communities in the local government. For instance, the former Ughelli Local Government Council had such experience from 1980-1981 and 1987 to 1989 and the law court was involved in both cases. So serious was the dispute of 1980-81 that the state government had to set up a judicial commission of inquiry headed by the commissioner for local government, Mr Justice I.O. Ajuyi, to look into it. On the other hand, it was the dissolution of local government councils by the Federal Government in preparation for the local government election of 1990 that terminated the court case of 1987-1989⁷.

Financial limitation was also a major challenge. One of the most comprehensive financial reports on local government councils in Urhoboland was that of the Third National Conference on Local Government held in Benin-City, December 9 – 11, 1970. This report covered 1967 to 1970 and revealed that the disbursement of local government grants to the area by higher levels of government was rather slow and sometimes epileptic. This is said to have constituted a serious impediment to the implementation of viable projects and programmes of the local councils⁸.

According to I.M. Okonjo, permanent secretary, Ministry of Local Government and Chieftaincy Affairs in the then Midwestern State, the financial situation of local councils in the area was pathetic, while it was “difficult to be optimistic about the future prospects for grant-in-aid in the Midwest”. It is also obvious that the introduction of the unified local government system in 1976 and subsequent reforms only minimised this problem in the area.⁹ It is not surprising that as we shall see below, poor funding dwarfed the adult education programme organised by the local governments.

Corruption and administrative ineptitude in the system started even before the appointment of a paramount chief in the person of Chief Dogho Numa in 1917. His career only amplified and compounded these lapses.¹⁰ Yet, they were not completely eliminated from the local government system after his exit. For instance, in the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s, a number of local government employees in the area received one penalty or the other due to administrative ineptitude or involvement in embezzlement or misappropriation of public funds. These ranged from suspension to termination of appointment.¹¹

This trend continued and one of the worse experiences occurred in the 1980s, first spotted at the state level, which obviously affected all local government councils in Urhoboland. Precisely, in 1985, the account branch of the Ministry of Local Government and Chieftaincy Affairs, Benin-City was mysteriously gutted by fire following the setting up of a panel headed by Dr. I.M. Okonjo to investigate allegations of serious misappropriation of funds.¹² It was discovered before the fire incident that this fraud had been on since 1980, but was not exposed until 1985 because the arrangement was a network one having at least a few members from each local council in the state. Local councils in Urhoboland were of course not exempted. With the

fire incidence of June 1985 it was, however, not possible for the government to pick out the actual culprits in the financial mess.¹³

In the light of such problems and challenges, the local government councils really had to work hard to realise their objectives. Nevertheless, the available facts and figures demonstrate that their impact was noticeable in certain spheres of life in Urhoboland. Among these was the provision of health institutions.

Urhoboland had two health institutions established by local councils as early as the second half of the 1940s. These were Ogharefe Health Centre in Ethiope West Local Government and Pessu Dispensary (now Pesu Primary Healthcare) in Warri South Local Government. The former is said to have acted as a maternity home as early as 1950.¹⁴ Apart from Ughelli North Local Government, no other local council in Urhoboland has proper record of the dates each of its health institutions was established. Obviously, the fact that Ughelli has been a local government headquarters since the creation of the Urhobo Division in 1934 inspires the keeping of records.

This record conspicuously demonstrates that apart from the two mentioned above, there were other health centres and maternity homes run by local government councils in Urhoboland during the 1950s.¹⁵ One of them was a maternity centre in Ewu in present-day Ughelli South Local Government Area opened in 1952. This maternity metamorphosed into the present-day Government Hospital Ewu. Oorerokpe in present-day Okpe local government also had a good health centre by the standard of those days. In 1956, the Eastern Urhobo District Council also set up a health centre at Ughelli. This health centre was sponsored by both the Regional Government and the Eastern Urhobo District Council.¹⁶ Two dispensaries were also opened, one at Orogun and the other at Ovwawha in Jeremi clan. Also, in 1956, three maternity centres were

commissioned by the local councils, one at Orogun, another at Edjophe and a third at Oginibo. Gradually, more health institutions were provided and by 1963, apart from a few health centres, the Western Urhobo District Council had a total of four maternity homes and nine dispensaries, while Eastern Urhobo District Council had six maternity homes and three dispensaries. The Urhobo of Warri, on the other hand, shared a total of four maternity centres and nine dispensaries with their Ijaw and Itsekiri counterparts.¹⁷

Health Institutions Owned by Individual Local Government Authorities in the Mid-Western State 1963-1966

Divisions	1963		1964		1965		1966	
	M	D	M	D	M	D	M	D
Aboh	8	17	8	17	9	17	9	17
Akoko Edo	8	8	8	8	8	9	9	9
Aniocha	8	22	8	22	8	22	8	22
Eastern Benin	12	14	12	14	12	15	13	18
Eastern Urhobo	6	3	6	4	6	5	6	6
Etsako	9	15	9	15	9	15	9	15
Ika	7	14	7	14	7	14	7	14
Ishan	14	23	14	23	16	25	17	25
Isoko	2	6	2	6	2	7	2	7
Owan	6	8	6	9	6	9	6	9
Warri	4	9	4	9	4	11	5	11
Western Benin	8	9	9	9	8	9	8	9
Western Ijaw	8	14	8	13	8	13	8	13
Western Urhobo	4	9	4	9	4	9	4	9
Total	104	171	105	172	107	180	111	184

Key: M --Maternity D--Dispensary Aniocha—also known as Asaba Division

See Appendix XI for data of 1967-1971. Source: *Mid-Western State of Nigeria Abstract of Statistics*, (Benin-City:Ministry of Economic Development, Statistics Division, 1976), 51

From the standard of the time and considering the challenges facing the local government councils, this would appear commendable. What can be precisely said from the available data is that the local councils did their best even if this was not enough to meet the need of the society with respect to provision of health facilities.

These health facilities, however, proved inadequate for a population of 171,901 for Eastern Urhobo and 319,835 for Western Urhobo by the 1963 census, with an average population density of 211 persons per square kilometre for the entire Urhoboland. For instance, the Ewu Maternity Home in Jeremi clan was the only health institution in the entire Eastern Urhobo District until 1956. It was obviously inadequate for the area, with a population record of 90,883 persons in 1952 and an average population density of 142 persons per square mile.¹⁸ Moreover, transportation problems prevented many communities from deriving any benefit from it.¹⁹ On account of distance, virtually all the clans in the northern part of the area like Orogun, Agbarho and Ogor derived little or no benefit from it. Similarly, the Ogharefe Health Centre and Orerokpe Health Centre were grossly inadequate for the Western Urhobo District, with a population that was almost two times that of Eastern Urhobo District.²⁰ On account of distance, many communities in the area also hardly benefitted from them.

In some cases, not even all the communities in the clan where a particular health institution was sited had access to it. For instance, the Ovworigbala and Gbaregolor communities of the Jeremi Clan derived little or no benefit from the only dispensary sited in the clan due to transport problems.²¹ The Okpe clan with only one health institution in Orerokpe, its headquarters, until 1956 was among the worse victims of this because it is the largest in terms

population and geographical size. As explained in Chapter Five, the population of this clan is about one-third of the entire Urhobo.

Between 1963 and 1983, more maternity centres and dispensaries were established by the local government councils. The table below itemizes those in Ughelli Local Government (former Eastern Urhobo Division).²²

Maternity/Dispensary	Clan	Date Founded
Oviri-Olomu Dispensary	Olomu	1964
Oviri-Olomu Maternity	Olomu	1964
Ekrokpe Dispensary	Jeremi	1966
Aravwarien Dispensary	Aravwarien	1970
Aravwarien Maternity	Aravwarien	1970
Agbarho Maternity	Agbarho	1970
Ewu Dispensary	Ewu	1975
Evwreni Dispensary	Evwreni	1976
Gbaregolor Dispensary	Jeremi	1982

Source: Primary Health Care Programme for Ughelli Local Government Area, Bendel State, 1982, (Director of Health Office, Ughelli Local Government Secretariat).

In the former Western Urhobo Division,²³ there were similar health institutions in the same period in Isiokolo, Okpara, Abraka, Otor-Udu, Ugbokodo, Effurun, Enerhen, Oghareki, Jesse, Osubi and Egborode.²⁴ Few health institutions were built with funds contributed by the communities and placed under the management of the local government authority. A few communities which tried to manage their own health institutions could not cope with the

overhead expenses. Thus, a maternity centre managed by the Usiefrun town of Jeremi clan after official accreditation by the health unit of the Eastern Urhobo District Council finally folded up during the 1970s largely due to this reason.²⁵

The establishment of more health institutions between 1963 and 1983 did not, however, constitute any significant improvement on the provision of health services because the population of the area had more than doubled by then.²⁶ Added to this is the fact that there were still a number of clans without any health establishment. Among them were Okparabe, Ogor, Idjerhe, Effuruntor and Agbon clans. On the other hand, these various health institutions could neither cater for the whole clans in which they existed nor even the number of towns or villages they were officially expected to serve within the clan.

As mentioned above, this was due mainly to the fact that many of such communities were too far from them. For instance, the Ekrokpe Dispensary in Jeremi Clan was meant to cater for eight villages. These included Egbo, Urhievwron (Usiefrun), Ekakpamre, Edjovwe, Otokutu, Otu-Jeremi, Iwhre'kan and Ekrokpe itself. But it was only accessible to the nearby villages of Ekakpamre, Usiefrun and Egbo. The rest derived little or no benefit from it. Similarly, the Orerokpe Health Centre was only accessible to the natives of Orerokpe main town and few nearby villages like Mogba. However, one thing to be commended in these dispensaries and maternity centres is that they had sufficient staff and drugs for the patients they were expected to treat.²⁷

In fact, most pregnant women took pain to attend the nearest maternity centre to their town even when it involved travelling long distances. This was in order to make sure they enjoyed the services of qualified nurses and similar health officers during labour simply because these health institutions were considered better than the local midwives in many ways. The

maternity homes also provided simple paediatric and prophylactic treatments in addition to health education. Health centres were rated below maternity homes, but those with the required facilities were approved to render maternity services. Dispensaries were the least in the hierarchy.

Before 1950, most communities were already convinced about the need to combine the services of these health institutions with traditional medicine. Traditional medicine was more effective in the treatment of various illnesses, but it was no match for the prophylactic services rendered through immunization and Disease Surveillance and Notification (DSN) technique by these health institutions. It was for these reasons that a number of communities decided during the 1960s to contribute financially to the establishment of more of these health institutions. Their DSN service largely relied on information received from international bodies like World Health Organisation(WHO). Simple DSN service involves identification of new diseases and finding out whether or not the existing ones are reducing. As international agencies supported some of their programme, they also assisted WHO and United Nations International Children Emergency Fund (UNICEF) in collection, collation and compilation of health data in their respective localities.²⁸

The establishment of hospitals by missionary bodies complemented the effort of local councils in the health sector in some parts of the country. However, Urhoboland only had one of such hospitals. It was Baptist Hospital Eku established in the 1960s. It rendered redoubtable specialist services to patients of different categories. A number of public hospitals set up by the state government also helped to reduce the pressure on health facilities provided by local government councils. There were three of such hospitals by 1980 sited in Sapele, Ughelli, and Warri respectively. But more health institutions were provided by the local government councils between 1983 and 1999 because the missionary and state owned hospitals, though better and

rendered specialist services, were few and too far from many communities. They were, therefore, reserved for patients whose cases were too complex to be handled by the health facilities provided by local councils. The table below is a list of health institutions owned by each local government council in Urhoboland by 1999.

Health Centres Owned by Each Local Government Council in Urhoboland by 1999

Local Government	Headquarters	No of Health Centres
Ethiope East	Isiokolo	13
Ethiope West	Oghara	12
Okpe	Orerokpe	14
Sapele	Sapele	9
Udu	Otor-Udu	12
Ughelli North	Ughelli	9
Ughelli South	Otu-Jeremi	22
Uvwie	Effurun	11
Warri South	Warri	12

See Appendix IX for details.

The creation of more local governments in 1991 and 1996 was a key factor in the setting up of more health institutions. Apart from the effort made by the local authorities to justify the demand for the creation of more local governments, the joy of having new councils and therefore bringing local government headquarters very close to each town encouraged a number of communities to contribute to the cost of providing them with a health centre. In Ughelli South Local Government, in particular, almost every town contributed to the cost of establishing one. This accounted for the wide gap between it and other local councils in the provision of health facilities by 1999. The creation of more local councils also led to a complete restructuring of the existing health institutions. In the first place, all the dispensaries were upgraded to the status of health centres, while each local government had a uniform name for its health institutions.

Primary healthcare or health centre was the designation used by majority, while a few simply adopted healthcare (see Appendix IX for detail). Those with facilities for admitting a few inpatients and running a maternity home were allowed to continue rendering such services. Those in this category are as follows:

HEALTH CENTRES	LOCAL GOVERNMENTS
Isiokolo Primary Healthcare	Ethiope East local government
Oghareki Model Healthcare	Ethiope West Local Government
Ogharefe Healthcare	Ethiope West Local Government
Otu-Jeremi Primary Healthcare	Ughelli South Local Government
Ughelli Health Centre	Ughelli North Local Government.
Urban Health Centre, Orhorho	Sapele Local Government.

Cued from the data on health institutions provided by each local council.

Moreover, as a result of the impressive contribution a number of communities made to the establishment of more health institutions, some health centres developed interest in the modernization of traditional medicine in their respective communities through collaboration with the traditional medical practitioners (*ebọ*). According to a specialist in the field, the management of these health institutions came to acknowledge the crucial role of the *ebọ* in the health sector due to communal strong belief in the curative potency of traditional medicine.²⁹ For the same reason, Okpe Local Government Council tried to address the deficiencies of traditional medicine in the 1990s by organising seminars and workshops for the *ebọ*. During such seminars and workshops, the issue of dosage attracted significant attention. The *ebọ* were also “taught referral procedures and its need, improved sanitary conditions and ... related issues.”³⁰ While accepting the fact that the impact of the health institutions was not uniform, as some communities benefitted more than others, it must be admitted that local government authorities in the area had other important commitments in the field of socio-economic development.

In particular, they also featured prominently in the educational sector. As explained in Chapter Four, their involvement in education started during the reorganisation era (1930-1949) when they embarked on enlightenment campaign that increased the enrolment of pupils in primary schools and even the number of Urhobo students in Urhobo College, Effurun. They raised fund for the building of a Teachers Training College at Warri which considerably reduced the problem of inadequate qualified teachers. This was followed by the establishment of what became known as Native Administration schools by some local councils, e.g. in Ughelli, Agbarho and Otu-Ughienvwe (Otu-Jeremi) to complement the effort of the early Christian Missions in the educational sector.³¹

The local authorities in Urhoboland actually featured in the educational sector in different capacities and with varying impact up to the 1990s. In the 1950s and 1960s, apart from shouldering the responsibilities of primary school education, they were also involved in adult literacy programme. During these decades, the local councils in the area made valuable effort in the sector and their impact would have been significant if the Midwestern State Government had encouraged them by paying their complete grants-in-aid as and when due. The non-payment of grants was regarded as the primary obstacle to the actualisation of the aims and objectives of local councils in the educational and most other sectors.³²

This actually dwarfed their impact in the educational sector. For instance, both the Eastern and Western Urhobo District Councils approved a number of adult literacy centres in 1967 when local government councils were requested to administer the state sponsored Adult Literacy Programme.³³ Partly due to improvement in local government funding through the 1976 local government reform, the sponsorship and execution of the programme was completely left for the local government councils in 1977.³⁴ By 1983, there were already twenty-six centres for

this programme spread over few communities in the Ughelli Local Government Area (former Eastern Urhobo District). In fact, some branches started producing primary six students in 1979.³⁵

However, it was only functioning in twenty-six of the one hundred and seventy-nine towns and villages in the local government area³⁶. Similarly, Ethiope West and Okpe Local Governments (former Western Urhobo District) had some centres spread over only thirty of its three hundred and fifty-seven towns and villages. Based on such data, its impact on the society would therefore appear insignificant. Indeed, most people were not even aware of its existence. Worse still, in those places where it existed, its organisation was virtually poor. This is because teachers could not give it any significant attention – a problem arising from the fact that each teacher was entitled to a meagre monthly pay of N20.00 out of which he still had to buy chalk.

It was in May 1989 that the payment was increased to N100.00. This followed new regulations from the Federal Government which accompanied the creation of Sapele Local Government from Okpe Local Government.³⁷ Nevertheless, it contributed to general literacy in a number of rural communities. Retired teachers and community leaders who were observant of the programme are confident that it was an asset to the promotion of adult literacy in rural communities.³⁸ With the challenges facing the local councils it was better for their educational unit/department to start from somewhere before working towards perfection as was done in the health sector. See the table on the next page for figures of adult literacy centres run by each local council as at 1999.

The local government councils were also required to help in the administration and finance of primary schools in the area. In 1953, apart from the general administration and repair of school buildings, and posting of teachers, the Western and Eastern Urhobo Local Government

ADULT LITERACY PROGRAMME

L. G.A	No of Centres	Locations
Ethiope East	27	Attached to a number of primary schools and churches
Ethiope West	1	Adult Education Centre Oghara
Okpe	1999 figures not available	---
Sapele	10	Attached to a number of primary schools
Udu	23	Attached to a number of primary schools and churches
Ughelli North	20	Attached to a number of primary schools
Ughelli South	5	Attached to a number of primary schools
Uvwie	6	Attached to a number of primary schools
Warri South	3	Attached to selected primary schools

Compiled from the data provided by each local council.

Authorities were required to pay thirteen per cent of the salaries of primary school teachers.³⁹ But in a few years later, not only were they unable to bear the thirteen per cent of the teachers salaries, they also failed to meet the cost of maintaining and renovating the school buildings.⁴⁰

However, in 1959, the government of the Western Region decided to take over fully the payment of the salaries of all primary school teachers in the region.⁴¹ As from that year, the local government authorities in the area were left with the posting of primary school teachers. They were, however, also assigned the maintenance and renovation of primary and secondary school buildings. They performed creditably in the posting of teachers but could not effectively cope with the second responsibility. With the establishment of the State and Local Schools Board in the Midwestern State in 1968, the general administration of all primary and post-primary schools

became the responsibility of the Board.⁴² This tended to reduce the duties assigned to local councils in the educational sector. However, they were still expected to assist the Board and Ministry of Education financially and otherwise in the maintenance of schools in their respective areas.⁴³

Consequently, as from 1970, the Eastern and Western Urhobo Local Authorities were used by the State and Local Schools Board and the Ministry of Education as an agent for distributing primary schools equipment, posting of primary school teachers as well as the repairing of buildings in primary and post-primary institutions. These functions were carried out through the Education Committee of the Local government Authority. For instance, Mr. E. K. Bork could recall his experience in office from 1972-1975 when the Local Government Authority was used to distribute chairs and tables to all primary schools in the local government area, particularly in 1972 and 1973.⁴⁴

The Education Committee also made some improvements in the posting of teachers. In 1973, the overall system of posting teachers was overhauled so as to have enough teachers posted to riverine areas since many teachers including even indigenes of riverine areas were against being posted there.⁴⁵ In that year, the Education Committee decided that teachers should be posted to their towns of origin. Hence, a teacher could only escape being posted to his home town if the school there was already adequately staffed. The result was that most indigenes of riverine towns were posted there and this provided enough teachers for the area. However, the actual impact this had on the quality of education in the area is another question entirely. Though there are no statistical data to make an indept assessment of this, there is evidence that it contributed to improvement in the standard of education in the area.⁴⁶

But on issues like the repairing of school buildings, nothing significant was achieved. Out of the eleven secondary schools in the Eastern Urhobo District only two of them had their compounds fenced. Little or nothing was done in the primary schools.⁴⁷ In the Western Urhobo District, schools in Sapele and the local government headquarters, Orerokpe were given some attention, while others were hardly cared for. The situation was not better in Warri and its immediate environs. Financial constraint was mainly responsible for this poor performance. It would appear the local councils did their best. The financial handicap was such that secondary school students were required to contribute money for the repair of their school buildings. However, the system failed to work for two reasons. In the first place, the local government councils were not given any authority over the administration of the secondary schools and hence the success of such ventures depended on the co-operation of the principals. Secondly, it is alleged that the principals refused to co-operate, while many exploited it as a tool for collecting money from students to enrich themselves.⁴⁸ In this case, many principals collected the money but refused to hand it over to the local authorities under the pretext of undertaking the repair themselves. But in actual fact, majority refused to repair their school buildings, while those who decided to do so only used a fraction of the money.

In the field of education, therefore, the local governments could be credited with some positive impact despite the enormous challenges. In the posting of teachers, there was some improvement which enhanced the standard of education in the riverine areas. The adult literacy programme could not function effectively. But a number of people benefited from it. In the renovation of schools, it must be admitted that the local government councils made significant impact in spite of the constraints. By 1999, almost every local government council in the area

had at least one nursery or primary school of its own. The oldest among them is the Ughelli Local Government Nursery School set up in October 1979.⁴⁹ Below is a list of these schools:

1. Ethiope West Nursery and Primary School, Oghara
2. Ethiope East Nursery School, Okpara
3. Ethiope East Nursery School, Kokori
4. Ethiope East Nursery and Primary School, Eku
5. Sapele local government Nursery and Primary School, Cruger Road., Sapele
6. Udu Local Government Nursery and Primary School, Otor-Udu
7. Ughelli North Local Government Nursery and Primary School, Ughelli
8. Ughelli South Local Government Nursery and Primary School, Otu-Jeremi

The maintenance of law and order was another social pre-occupation of the local government authorities in Urhoboland. This was a major function of local government in the area during the native court and reorganisation eras, c1900-1930 and c 1930-1949 respectively. As explained in Chapters Three and Four, local authorities were saddled with a lot of responsibilities. At the beginning of the native court system it was, however, reported that considerable difficulty was experienced in getting the natives to attend the courts in Urhoboland. But with the provision which rendered traditional tribunals illegal, the people had no option than to take their cases to the native courts.⁵⁰

During the period, the native courts handled both minor and major cases. For instance, in 1921, even a woman found guilty of adultery in Otu-Jeremi under the customs and tradition of the area still had to be charged to the native court of the town before the case could be resolved. However, it could be said to be poorly resolved as she was declared discharged and acquitted on the grounds that the law was yet to be registered in the native court.⁵¹ Noticeable effort was made

to reach out to remote communities by operators of the native courts. For instance, in 1911 based on their reports, troops had to visit some Urhobo and Isoko communities. According to these reports, some Urhobo and Isoko communities were yet to give up their custom of blinding thieves. In particular, this was even done without due process of law through the native courts.⁵²The impact of these courts on administration of justice was, therefore, noticeable.

As explained in Chapter Four, the reorganisation era led to a restructuring of these courts and with considerable increase in their numbers. At the same time, the name native court was replaced with “clan council” and “village council” in Urhoboland, while they were graded ‘B’ ‘C’ and ‘D’. They were said to be better organised apart from their numerous number. Their impact was obviously more pronounced than the preceding native courts. One major advantage they had and which aided their operations was the policy of not allowing a non-native in any local council. But each council had a large number of people and this tended to make a court sitting rather rowdy. Moreover, like the native court period, a litigant could rake up false evidence to win a case if there was no means to expose him. But in the traditional system, the fear of trial by ordeal made people absolutely scared about raking up false evidence.⁵³

A number of clan and village councils metamorphosed into customary courts following the local government reforms of the 1950s, while others were scrapped. Laws regulating the sale of alcoholic drinks, slaughtering of animals and vehicle licensing were major issues in law enforcement and administration of justice among local councils during the 1950s and 1960s. To some extent the enforcement of these laws practically received the attention of local government councils before their *modus operandi* was officially defined by the 1957 Local Government Law.⁵⁴ It was not until 1959 that their enforcement received significant attention in Urhoboland.⁵⁵

By the Law regulating the preparation and sale of liquor, everyone engaged in this business had to obtain a licence from the Council after payment of certain fees.⁵⁶ The Preparation and Sale of Palm Wine Adoption Bye-Laws in Urhoboland stated that:

No person shall engage in wine tapping or in the sale of palm wine unless he obtains from the Council a palm wine dealers license... A Health Officer shall have power to examine the wine and pronounce order... Any person who contravenes or fails to comply with the provisions of these bye-laws... shall be liable to a fine not exceeding four shillings or imprisonment not exceeding 14 days...⁵⁷

The Slaughtering of Animals Bye-Laws Order of 1960 in Urhoboland required those engaged in this business (for the purpose of public health) to pay an annual registration fee of £1.5s each. In addition, they were to pay five shillings for every cattle slaughtered and three shillings for every goat, sheep or swine slaughtered.⁵⁸ By the Vehicle Licensing Adoptive bye-Laws of 1959, the following fees were charged by the local government authorities in Urhoboland.

Vehicle	Fees
Bicycle or tricycle and other pedalled vehicles	5 shillings
Hand-cart or barrow	7s.6d
Bath-chair, rickshaw or go-kart	7s.6d
Two-wheeled cart or trolley	£1.-.-d
Four-wheeled Carriage, cart or trolley	£1.10.-d

Sources: “Western and Eastern Urhobo District Councils”, Western Region Legal Notice: No.41 of 1960; Annual Volume of the Laws of Western Nigeria 1960, B. 80

However, the number of communities that actually felt the impact of these adoptive bye-laws is another issue for consideration. The fact is that these laws were only enforced at the headquarters, Ughelli, Orerokpe and Warri and urban and semi-urban centres like Sapele, Agbarho and Effurun. However, this appeared inevitable considering the challenges of funding.

Initially, the local authorities used to keep officers in selected stations in rural communities to collect license fees from bicycle owners. But by 1975, this policy had to stop because it was found that the cost of engaging such officers was more than the revenue being collected.⁵⁹ But their enforcement in the headquarters and urban centres received more attention.

Since 1980 the co-ordination of vigilante groups in rural communities by local government councils while liaising with police authorities was among issues of utmost priority in the area.⁶⁰ It was an asset to law enforcement and security of lives and property. With the gradual development of pockets of conflicts and crises in the Western Niger Delta, this role became imperative. Most rural communities started their vigilante groups after merely notifying the local councils. By 1990, the local government councils had become more involved because of the fear that its organisation could be abused. For instance, on one occasion, a non-indigene, Mrs. Joy Akwa, was unlawfully beaten almost to a state of comma and abandoned with a bleeding pregnancy by the vigilante group of a town in Jeremy clan.⁶¹ The family of the victim lodged a report at the nearest police station, Otu-Jeremy and the Legal Unit of the Ughelli South Local Government Secretariat. The committee set up by the local government council had to involve the Area Command Police Office in Ughelli because the veracity of the report given by the local police unit on the issue was in doubt. The Area Command Office unveiled the truth of the matter and all members of the vigilante group and the chairman of the town were arrested and later compelled to pay compensation to the victim.⁶² Overall, local government councils recorded noticeable impact in the area with regard to law enforcement and administration of justice.

Moreover, as explained in Chapter Four, local councils' involvement in the construction and maintenance of feeder roads in Urhoboland started as early as the 1930s. In the evolution of the local government administration in this part of the Western Niger Delta, they satisfactorily

complemented the colonial government vision of a local network of roads in the area, particularly during the reorganisation era. It was a period when local councils in the area had to liaise with provincial and federal government in the construction of major roads.⁶³ As the reorganisation gradually lost its momentum towards the end of the 1940s, this role of the local councils became diminished. But it managed to linger on as the 1950s local government reforms and subsequent ones gave it some focus. For instance, between 1977 and 1981, the total capital expenditure of councils in Urhoboland (excluding Urhobo communities in Warri) on motor parks and similar projects amounted to N4,406,480 as shown in the table below:

Local Government Area	Cost of Market Stalls	Cost of Motor Parks	Cost of Abattoirs	Cost of other Infrastructural Projects	Total Cost in Naira
ETHIOPE	1,332,220	163,910	213,000	520,000	2,229,130
OKPE	398,950	384,596	102,490	520,000	1,406,036
UGHELLI	533,620	237,694	---	---	771,314
Grand Total					4,406,480

Source: *Bendel State Digest of local government Statistics, No. 1,* (Benin-City:Ministry of Finance and Economic Planning, Statistics Office, 1985), 37; also see Appendix X

During the same period, the capital expenditure on infrastructural projects by the multi-ethnic Warri Local Government amounted to N1,355,000. This was invested primarily on building of market stalls, motor parks and abattoirs.⁶⁴ However, with the exception of some simple bridges and culverts, the few amenities were concentrated in the headquarters and urban and semi-urban centres. The major ones were Sapele, Orerokpe, Isiokolo, Ughelli, Warri, Abraka, and Agbarho, a town which started to expand since 1960. Sapele and Warri got motor

parks by the second half of the 1960s. The first motor park in Ughelli was said to be built in 1975, while another was built in 1981.⁶⁵ The first Agbarho motor park was built in 1977. Though the surrounding villages were left out, it must be admitted that they were not viable for the utilisation of motor parks and abattoirs.

By the second half of the 1980s and the 1990s these local councils became involved in the construction of more feeder roads and drainage including provision of portable water and rural electricity. Among them were water supply schemes at Sapele and Igbudu Market, Warri.⁶⁶ Also included was rural electrification projects in a number of communities in Ethiope and Ughelli Local Governments.⁶⁷ The available data are not comprehensive enough to provide us the cost of these projects in Urhoboland. However, between September 1985 and September 1987 the total fund invested on such projects including roads and drainage by the 19 local government councils in Bendel State was N12,548,521.⁶⁸ This was partly through the support of the state government. The total number of projects embarked upon by all the local government councils in the state are as follows:

Projects	No. Proposed in 1985	No. Completed in 1987	On-Going Projects	No. not Executed
Water Supply	108	73	30	5
Roads and Drainage	78	69	7	2
Rural Electrification Scheme	60	26	31	3
Others	2	2	---	---

Source: *Two Years in Office of Col. John Mark Inienger Military Governor of Bendel State: 3 Sept., 1985-- 2 Sept. 1987* (Benin-City: Government Printer, 1987), 33

There were also a few investments on economic projects like poultry farms and piggery among others in rural communities. One of such projects in the 1980s was the Ekakpamre

poultry and piggery farm set up by Frederick Elue Alibo, a councilor who represented his community in Ughelli Local Government Council during this period.⁶⁹ Rural communities were, however, also viable enough to be considered in the provision of simple market centres or market stalls. But it was not until the 1990s that the local government councils started to extend the provision of market stalls to a few rural communities partly through collaboration with the Better Life for Women Society.⁷⁰ In spite of these lapses, the impact of the local councils in this sector was felt. As mentioned above, insufficient funding was a major challenge to the local councils in the area. This was compounded by corruption or maladministration in some councils. In addition, as explained above, conflicts and emergence of antagonistic factions in some local councils in the 1980s were an impediment to communal development.

Cultural Integration and Involvement of Traditional Rulers

The attempt to use local government as instrument of cultural integration started as early as 1900 in the Western Niger Delta when the Urhobo and some other groups were merged together in what was then known as the Warri District.⁷¹ Some British Colonial officials, including even the Resident of the Warri Province felt that the Itsekiri, in particular, were a “dying race” and that by merging them with the Urhobo they would be completely absorbed by the latter through a process of cultural fusion.⁷²

Consequently, when later developments in inter-group relations proved unfavourable to this arrangement, the then Resident of the Warri Province who became a chief exponent of this idea, still hoped to realise this objective by leaving a reasonable proportion of the Urhobo with the Itsekiri in what became known as the “Jekri-Sobo” Division.⁷³ By 1938, however, the experiment had proved a fiasco as the antagonism created in the “Jekri-Sobo” Division was too

much for the government to bear and the Urhobo clans included in the Division were formed into a separate Native Authority which was in turn merged with the Urhobo Division in 1949.⁷⁴

Its failure was due to the resentment created among most groups and sub-groups through the subordination of some groups to the jurisdiction of others in the colonial local government system. This subordination which was demonstrated in two ways turned out to be a very significant determinant of the nature of cultural integration among the Urhobo and their immediate neighbours. The first was the appointment of non-natives as members of the native courts of most sub-groups between 1905 and 1917. This policy so much annoyed the Urhobo that some communities expelled such warrant chiefs from their clans.⁷⁵ The second which was even worse was the appointment of Chief Dogho as a paramount chief in 1917. The determination among the groups in the old Warri Division to sever any socio-cultural tie with one another actually started with the career of Dogho.⁷⁶

The Urhobo people did not leave any doubt about their dislike of the abused Warri Native Court of Appeal presided over by Chief Dogho. The unpopularity of the court is mentioned in almost every intelligence report on the Urhobo clans during the 1920s.⁷⁷ In addition to this, all the native courts in the Warri Division were placed under the control of Dogho until 1926. Finally, a Native Court of Appeal by its nature demanded proportionate representation from each of the ethnic groups it was meant to serve. Instead of such an arrangement, Dogho made sure that the Court was dominated by Itsekiri Chiefs. Thus, most of the intelligence reports described it as “predominantly Jekri” in composition while some portray it as “virtually an Itsekiri court.” Yet, the sectionalist nature of Dogho’s administration created more factions among the Itsekiri than it did to other groups. This is because he conceived himself

as representing the interest of the Itsekiri sub-group of the Benin River before other Itsekiri and the non-Itsekiri sub-groups of the old Warri Division.⁷⁸

The main impact of this development on the local authority system was to create an indelible impression among these various sub-groups that cultural/ethnic integration meant, in reality, the perpetual subordination of some social groups to the authority of others and the forceful imposition of the culture of one group on others. Worse still, this impression was further reinforced in the 1950s local government gazette on traditional leadership in Warri already explained in Chapter Five.⁷⁹ In this way, the policy sowed the seeds of perpetual ethnic and sub-ethnic fission which dominated the history of this part of the Western Niger Delta up to the late 1960s. This foundation has been a major factor in the inter-group conflicts, land disputes and crises that trailed the local government system in the area up to 1999. Therefore, the Urhobo situation is among the cases which portray that local government administration in Nigeria has not been quite successful in cementing unity and promoting peaceful co-existence of rural communities.

The utilisation of traditional rulers was, however, better. From 1900 to 1929, the British made some efforts to recognise traditional rulers in Urhoboland to act as members of the native courts. In spite of this, it was only in few clans like the Agbarho, Ughelli and Jeremi that traditional rulers actually acted as members of the native courts. On the other hand, majority of the Urhobo clans had their native courts staffed with people who were no traditional rulers or chiefs. The reasons for this are obvious enough. Firstly, as explained in Chapter Three, the institution of “warrant chief” which sought to recognise these traditional chiefs was seriously abused. Secondly, the British officials were interested in appointing sycophants of the colonial government as members of the native courts before any other candidates. This partly accounts

for the use of non-indigenes as members of some native courts in Urhoboland and its immediate neighbours.

But by the reorganisation of the 1930s the colonial government had fully learnt its lesson and this error was genuinely corrected. Therefore, from the 1930s to the end of the reorganisation by 1949, traditional rulers featured prominently in the system and were well utilised.⁸⁰ The fact that the reorganisation proved to be one of the most successful periods of local government administration in the area up to 1999 underscores the relevance of traditional rulers in the system.

As explained in Chapter Five, the 1950s local government reforms encouraged some dialogue between traditional rulers and local government councils in grassroots administration by making the former act as paramount chief of each council. As a result of this, the *Orodje* of Okpe was the President of the 35-member Sapele Urban District Council.⁸¹ At the same time, about one-quarter of the 61-member Western Urhobo District Council were traditional rulers selected from the various clans in the area. The same was true of the Eastern Urhobo District Council.⁸²

But no preference was given to traditional rulers in the appointment of members of customary courts which now replaced the previous clan and village councils in administration of justice. This made the customary courts to appear foreign to the people apart from their conventional bureaucracy and the fact that they were relatively expensive.⁸³ As pointed out in chapter five, it has been estimated that for every single case taken to customary courts in Urhoboland there were a hundred taken to local courts and town meetings. Even though the impact of the activities of traditional rulers was not felt in the management of customary courts

their involvement in the local government system was fair. They also made their own little contributions within the limit of the duties assigned to them.

In spite of irregularities in the system, this arrangement continued until the early years of the 1960s when the structure became marred with frequent suspension of councils and traditional rulers. A major example was the suspension of traditional rulers and the councils in September 1962 among the Urhobo and their immediate neighbours.⁸⁴ This was the situation until the creation of the Midwestern Region in 1963. But the government of the Midwestern Region also continued to make use of Management Committee and Sole Administrators interchangeably from 1963 to 1976.⁸⁵ This was partly due to the outbreak of the Nigeria Civil War in 1967.

The involvement of traditional rulers in the local government system was, therefore, not revived in Urhoboland until the 1976 local government reform. As a result of this recognition, most of the traditional rulers from the twenty-three clans of the area were entitled to an annual subvention paid to them through the Ministry of Local Government and Chieftaincy Affairs as shown in the table on the next page.

They were also entitled to sitting, transport and entertainment/hospitality allowances. Traditional rulers were to receive 30k/km travelled by road for attending meetings of State or Divisional Council of Traditional Rulers. Chiefs appointed into the Divisional Council of Traditional Rulers were entitled to 10k/km. Traditional rulers in divisional headquarters or urban centres received entertainment allowance of 50 per month, while others got 25 per month. A sitting allowance of 30 per session was approved for the chairman of Divisional Council of Traditional Rulers, while other members got 20.⁸⁶

**Approved Annual Salaries of Traditional Rulers in Urhoboland following the 1976 Investigation
into the Role of Chiefs**

Urhobo East Division				
	Clan	Traditional Ruler	Tax Collected	Salary(N)
1	Ughievwen (Jeremi)	The Okobaro of Jeremi	19,229.00	1,400.00
2	Ewu	The Ovie of Ewu	10,435.00	1,308.00
3	Ughelli	The Ovie of Ughelli	12,404.00	2,400.00
4	Orogun	The Okpara-Uku of Orogun	9,188.00	1,296.00
5	Agbarho	The Osuivie of Agbarho	7,235.00	1,272.00
6	Olomu	The Ohworode of Olomu	5,551.00	1,260.00
7	Uwherun	The Odion of Uwherun	4,683.00	1,248.00
8	Agbarha	The Ovie of Agbarha	5,199.00	1,260.00
9	Evwreni	Ovie/Odion of Evwreni	2,833.00	1,236.00
10	Ogor	The Ovie of Ogor	2,612.00	1,236.00
11	Okparabe	The Ovie of Okparabe	1,270.00	1,224.00
12	Arhavwarien	The Ovie of Arhavwarien	1,667.00	1,224.00
13	Effuruntor	The Orovworere of Effuruntor	517.00	1,212.00
Urhobo West Division				
1	Okpe	The Orodje of Okpe	89,544.00	2,318.40
2	Agbon	The Ovie of Agbon	12,580.00	2,318.40
3	Udu	The Ovie of Udu	9,268.00	1,296.00
4	Oghara	The Ovie of Oghara	6,613.00	2,318.40
5	Jesse	The Ovie of Jesse	6,534.00	2,318.40
6	Abraka	Omorovie of Urhuarivie/Okarorho of Umiawha	5,253.00	1,260.00
7	Uvwie	The Ovie of Uvwie	3,630.00	1,834.56

The Urhobo of Warri Division

No	Clan	Traditional Ruler	Tax Collected	Salary(in Naira)
1	Agbassa(Agbarra-Ame)	Ovie of Agbassa	Not Available	Not Available
2	Okere-Urhobo	Orosuen of Okere-Urhobo	Not Available	Not Available

Source: *Government Decisions on the Report of an Investigation into the Role of Chiefs in the Bendel State*(Benin-City: Ministry of Chieftaincy Affairs and Culture, 1976), 21-22.

See the same source for figures on the whole of Bendel State.

The Divisional Council of Traditional Rulers in each local government was allowed maximum membership of 40 (including the chairman). Among the Urhobo and other ethnic groups in the Western Niger Delta with socio-political structure based on clans, the council was to elect its chairman from among its members every two years. Each clan was represented by its traditional ruler. The instrument creating the councils also added that “where the Traditional Ruler is incapacitated by old age or unable to participate effectively for other reasons, the...Ruler concerned shall be allowed to nominate a Traditional Chief of his clan to take his place and should he fail to do so within seven days, the government shall appoint a chief to replace him”⁸⁷

This council was to hold occasional meetings with the Local Government Authority. Paragraph eight of the same instrument states that “the appointment to the Divisional Councils of Traditional Rulers shall be made by the Governor-in-Council.” For this reason, the council of chiefs of each clan was to forward the name and other particulars of its traditional ruler to the Ministry of Chieftaincy Affairs and Culture, Benin-City within a stipulated period of time.⁸⁸ This, however, implies that a clan could also send two or more names for the Governor to choose one. But no Urhobo clan sent more than one name partly because the headship of each clan was well defined and partly because this has the danger of creating disputes and conflicts at the grassroots level among the sub-groups in a clan. However, the names of few traditional chiefs were also included, but this did not constitute a source of conflict as they were subordinated to the headchief.

The Divisional Councils of Traditional Rulers were to “deal with all traditional matters arising in their areas” and also handle duties hitherto assigned to previous chieftaincy

committees. Finally, they were not to participate in party politics since by virtue of their position they had to act as symbols and repositories of traditional institutions.⁸⁹ However, the Divisional Council of Traditional Rulers had no say in the affairs of the local government authority. Rather, it could only act as advisers to the local government councils. Again, while the reform did not allow them to participate in elections organised on party basis, it failed to make any provision for the inclusion of selected traditional rulers in the local government council during such elections.

The reason given for this was that the appointment of traditional rulers was hereditary and based on ascription and hence, antithetical to the type of democracy intended for the local government system itself.⁹⁰ This view is a generalisation and does not apply to majority of the Urhobo communities. Only four of the twenty-two Urhobo clans adopted hereditary monarchs to represent them in 1976. These included Agbarha, Ogor, Okpe and Ughelli.⁹¹ The remaining clans adopted their pre-colonial republican political system. Following its tenets, they based the selection of their traditional leaders on personal achievement, contribution to community development and possession of some charismatic leadership qualities.

Consequently, there are no dynastic privileges and all interested candidates for the office were given equal chance. Such candidates could come from any town apart from the headquarters. In a clan like Abgarho, the traditional leader is the holder of the highest chieftaincy title. In a number of clans the successful candidate must be able to win the unanimous approval of the representative of every town/village and the traditional chieftaincy council that had to gather at the headquarters for this purpose.⁹² In Jeremy and some other clans, this body constitutes an electoral college to elect the right candidate at the headquarters. This made the system democratic, non-hereditary and devoid of every element of ascription.⁹³

Nevertheless, whatever the shortcomings of the 1976 local government reform, it gave a measure of recognition to traditional rulers of the area. Therefore, it provides a channel through which traditional rulers could, at least, humbly draw the attention of their respective local government councils to the gaps in their respective communities in terms of grassroots development.

However, this trend was not quite sustained during the Second Republic, 1979 to 1983, largely due to the appointment of management committees by the Bendel State Government in 1979.⁹⁴ It was also partly due to new developments in grassroots administration in the country, particularly the view that the structural procedure for appointment of traditional rulers was not liberal enough for a democratic local government system. In fact, during the period the traditional rulers in Urhoboland were not meaningfully linked with the local government system. The general impression created was that the government would soon stop recognising some of the traditional rulers in the state. However, the plan was shelved apparently as a result of the series of unfavourable comments in the mass media, against politicians who wanted to embark on such policies.⁹⁵ Thus, during this brief period traditional rulers in Urhoboland were hardly integrated into the local government system or given any significant incentive to enable them function effectively in the promotion of grassroots development.

But traditional rulers do not have to be members of the local government councils before they can be integrated into the local government system and the entire process of grassroots development. This is what informed the decision of the 21-member Alhaji Dasuki Committee of 1984 when it tried to restore back the original relationship between these two grassroots institutions. This trend managed to linger on in subsequent local government policies up to 1999. Thus, by 1999, a comprehensive list of all traditional rulers in Urhoboland and their names and

modes of succession was compiled by the Delta State Department of local government. The instrument granting them recognition also defined their role and the nature of their relationship with local councils.⁹⁶

Overall, in Urhoboland the involvement of traditional rulers in the system up to 1960 was fair. But their involvement in grassroots administration since then has been minimal in spite of the 1976 local government reforms. On the other hand, the traditional rulers in the area had been able to make some meaningful contributions to grassroots development and the entire system. For instance, traditional rulers are often pointblank in drawing the attention of local councils to crucial developmental issues in their area. But councillors from the same area often have hidden agenda because of personal interest in the fund generated by each local government council.

The situation is even worse when the councils are run by sole administrators and management committees. Yet, the Urhobo experience has demonstrated the dominance of sole administrators and management committees in the system since 1960.⁹⁷ Local government councils in this part of the Western Niger Delta strive to demonstrate their relevance to communal development by embarking on some useful projects within the headquarters. But in rural communities like most of Urhoboland, the headquarters constitute at most just five percent of the entire area under the jurisdiction of the local government council. Hence, there is need for vibrant traditional rulers, especially those granted legal recognition, to draw the attention of the council to the developmental need of their respective communities.⁹⁸

The Question of Democracy

Since the 1950s, local government institutions have been conceived as instruments of enhancing democracy at the grassroots level.⁹⁹ For this reason, the principles of election at the grassroots level were entrenched in the 1952 and 1957 local government law as well as the 1976 guidelines for local government reform and 1979 and 1999 constitutions.

From the available data and information, it is clear that not much was achieved in Urhoboland from 1952 to 1983. Though accurate data of the 1950s local government elections are no more available for analysis,¹⁰⁰ it is alleged that what obtained in the local councils of Urhoboland was an adulterated picture of what was intended. Some candidates got themselves returned unopposed through manipulation and bribery, while the elections were marred by rigging and intimidation of voters.¹⁰¹ Consequently, the election figures and other issues associated with them were seriously controvertible.

The period 1960-1976 did not see much improvement. For one thing, as a result of the abuse of local government councils and functionaries during the first half of the 1960s the elected councils in Urhobo communities were dissolved in 1962. But the Military that gained power in January 1966 equally made use of the sole administrators and management committees interchangeably until 1976. In this period, therefore, the people of the area had no say whatsoever, even in the running of their local government councils.

Though the 1976 reform must be commended as the hallmark of the Military to improve the image of local government all over the country, in Urhoboland it did not produce the type of democracy anticipated by the people and its architects. This is clear from the statistics of the total votes cast throughout Bendel State as a percentage of the total population of the state in 1963 and the 1976 estimated population; and from the statistics of the total votes cast among the Urhobo in

relation to their total population in 1963 and 1976. In the whole of Bendel State, only 780,007 votes were recorded out of a total estimated population of 3,527,276 (by 1976) and a total population of 2,535,839 by the 1963 census.¹⁰²

This implies that only about twenty-two per cent of the 1976 estimated population voted, while for the 1963 census it was just 30.76%. The case of Urhoboland taken in isolation is even worse. Out of an estimated population of 683,990 (by 1976), only 116,290 persons actually voted. This is roughly 17% of the 1976 estimated population and less than 25% of the 1963 population census.¹⁰³ Even if the percentage of youths below the age of eighteen is removed from the total population, it is still clear from the available data that over half of those who were eligible to vote in Urhoboland never participated in the election.

For instance, by the 1976 estimated population 47% of the Urhobo fell between the ages of twenty and ninety.¹⁰⁴ But, as stated above, only about 17% of the people in the area participated in the election. On the other hand, the total votes cast in the whole of Bendel State was only 48.88% of its registered electors.¹⁰⁵

The failure to get people participate in the election has been attributed to its poor organisation and insufficient measures to enlighten the rural people about it. However, key players in grassroots administration in the area conceive this as a secondary reason. According to them, the major reason for low turn out is that until the introduction of a unified local government system in 1976, there was hardly any consistency in the formulation of local government policies, while the entire issue of local democracy was rather spasmodic. For instance, after the local government election of the 1950s there was no other one until about two decades later, 1976. Therefore, it is believed the grassroots populace would respond better in later years when the exercise becomes regular.¹⁰⁶

In addition to this, of the 186 seats for the whole State, twenty-four of them (eight of which were from Urhoboland) had their candidates returned unopposed.¹⁰⁷ Significantly enough, the available evidence tend to indicate that in places where this occurred, the circumstances surrounding it were not genuine.¹⁰⁸ In other words, many of those who got themselves returned unopposed did so through manipulation and bribery. This was actually a caricature of what was expected and of what is obtainable in normal circumstances.

Moreover, in Warri, there were allegations of election manipulations by the Itsekiri in order to sideline the Urhobo.¹⁰⁹ The allegation accused all electoral officers in charge of Warri of colluding with the Itsekiri to marginalise the Urhobo. It also queried the allocation of only six wards to Warri Urban with a large population consisting of majority of the Urhobo, while the riverine Itsekiri settlement with less population even got seven wards. There were also allegations of gerrymandering particularly in the chairmanship election which was said to have prevented D. E. Okumagba, the Urhobo candidate from winning the election. The following piece gives some illustration of this:

In the chairmanship election the Urhobo candidate, Chief D. E. Okumagba, won 5wards in Warri Urban, the Ijaw candidate Mr Oseme won two in the riverine, while the Itsekiri candidate, Chief Eliot Begho, won 5 riverine wards and one in the Urban. Because it was a collegiate with the Ijaw candidate teaming up with Okumagba(the Urhobo candidate), to win the election, the Itsekiri through their son then Secretary to the State Government J.T.L. Boyo, stopped the election. Egbeoma ward, which Mr Oseme won was later excluded and transferred to Ondo State. It therefore remains 6 seats apiece for the Urhobo and Itsekiri candidates. Because both candidates now had six seats each they were told that they could not recontest and that they were going to appoint an independent candidate. Eventually it was an Itsekiri man, Mr Sunny Skin(the respondent called this ‘‘Cabinet magic’’).¹¹⁰

Though the Federal Government endorsed the protest letter of the Urhobo on the issue with promise of intervention to ensure justice, nothing was done at the end of the day.¹¹¹

This experiment was completely halted in 1979 when the Bendel State Government suspended the election clause, abolished all the elected local government councils in the State

and replaced them with management committees. Consequently, like the era 1962 to 1976, the period of 1980 – 83 negated all democratic experiments at grassroots level initiated by previous administrations. Apart from the fact that the management committees for the area were appointed without the consent of the people, they had to dance to the tune of the authority that appointed them.

Despite the setting up of the 21-member Alhaji Dasuki Committee of 1984 to review the local government structure, the military continued without elected local councils until 1988. In March that year, local government elections were also held on non-party basis, as in 1976, to elect chairmen and councilors for local councils. In Urhoboland, there was improvement in terms of participation of the people. In spite of the absence of data for empirical assessment of this claim, it is obvious that no candidate was returned unopposed.¹¹²

Nine years later, that is, 1997, another local government election was organised. Despite the local government crisis of that year in Warri and its immediate environs, the organisation of this election in Urhoboland was successful. No candidate was returned unopposed and whatever irregularities experienced were believed to be negligible except in Warri and its immediate environs.

At the commencement of the election, the Urhobo protested against the modality for distribution of wards in Warri.¹¹³ The major issue was the creation of one ward each for Ode-Itsekiri, Obodo and Ubeji, all of which had a total population of 11000 based on 1991 population figures. The Urhobo were against this because the entire Warri Urban area (where they are in majority) with a Population of 268000 by 1991 only had seven wards—Avenue, Esi, Ekurede, Igbudu, Okere, Bowen and Pessu.¹¹⁴

The Urhobo also accused the Itsekiri of gross election malpractices. These range from election rigging to gerrymandering in addition to colluding with electoral officials to deny the Urhobo and Ijaw aborigines of Warri their right to registration. Therefore, it is alleged that even some prominent Urhobo in Warri like Chief B. O. Okumagba, Dr Daniel Urhobo and Dr D.D. Mowoe were unable to register due to this development. For reasons difficult to understand, out of the 85 polling agents engaged by the National Electoral Commission of Nigeria (NECON) in the area, 65 were Itsekiri, while the remaining 20 were Ishan and Igbo. It is also alleged that none of the Urhobo in wards where Itsekiri were in majority was allowed to register. The Urhobo were against the inclusion of Edjeba village in the Itsekiri dominated ward of Esiri. The reason for this objection is that it is a form of gerrymandering to prevent all Edjeba people from being registered.¹¹⁵ They demanded for inclusion of the village in Ekurede and Ogunu wards where the Urhobo were in majority.

In a nutshell, these and other irregularities and protests led to the re-scheduled Warri South Local Government election held in December 5, 1998. It was marred with similar irregularities and malpractices though a winner emerged in the chairmanship election.

The democratic theory of local government discussed in Chapter One, however, states that there can be no functional local government system in the absence of a genuine or well structured democracy. This implies that since the local government scene in this part of the Western Niger Delta was only able to sustain a little element of democracy, it can hardly be accommodated within the structure and horizon of this theory. Nevertheless, the challenges facing the system need to be taken into consideration. To some extent, such theories are based on ideal situations which are not always practicable. Thus, while we can not rule out the need to go

back to the drawing board, the system has recorded a little impact with regard to the practice of democracy.

Gender Equality

In spite of the absence of figures or accurate data on gender issues in the local councils until recently it is certain that consideration for gender equality in local councils started as early as the 1950s in Urhoboland.¹¹⁶ This was inspired by the local government reforms of the period in the Western Region which made special provision for inclusion of women in local government councils due to gross gender imbalance among members of staff and councillors of the local councils.¹¹⁷ Over the years, this has helped to create some awareness on the issue though its impact on gender equality in the general society could be said to be minimal.

Nevertheless, with education and the consciousness created by this legislation, gender imbalance in the local councils in Urhoboland was reduced with regard to employees and councillors. The situation is such that Daniel Obofukoro of Uvwie Local Government Council contends that by 1990 it was obvious that in the next few decades from that year the problem of policy makers would be how to have enough men and not women in the staff of local councils in the area.¹¹⁸

Therefore, awareness campaign through the local government councils had combined with education to promote gender equality. Though education was a factor, it must be emphasised that the local councils had been instrumental in the enlightenment campaign that increased the number of children enrolled in schools in Urhoboland from the 1930s to the 1960s¹¹⁹

In the 1990s, new developments in the local government system enhanced gender equality in local councils in Urhoboland. In 1998 in particular, the International Union of Local Authorities (IULA) came up with a policy on “women in local government.”¹²⁰ This policy document contains relevant information on the current gender status and programmes that could correct the problem of gender imbalance in local governments. As a result of this policy, local governments are enjoined to collect, collate and analyse data on gender participation among members of staff and councillors including chairmen.

For instance, compilation of data on gender affairs in the Local Government Service Commission, Asaba received some impetus from this new development.¹²¹ Such statistics are considered important on policy development with regard to gender issues in local government. This has contributed to general awareness on gender issues in the various local government councils in Urhoboland with noticeable impact on the general society.

Conflict Resolution

Local government administration impacted adversely on conflict resolution. To a reasonable extent, local government in Urhoboland since the appointment of a paramount chief for the Warri Division in 1917 could be described as an instrument of conflict rather than a tool for conflict resolution. Chief Dogho Numa, the paramount chief of the Warri Division from 1917 to 1932 conceived himself as representing just a faction among the Itsekiri rather than the entire groups in the division.

Local government administration in the area was, therefore, contentious even before the 1950s. To the Itsekiri, Dogho only represented the interest of the Benin River sub-group among them. Therefore, they did more than any other ethnic group to bring him down. Since other

ethnic groups in the division did not know the disparities between the various Itsekiri sub-groups and factions they merely conceived Chief Dogho as representing Itsekiri interest.¹²²

For instance, as explained in Chapter Three, he was so biased in the appointment and posting of warrant chiefs and the running of the Warri Native Court of Appeal that almost every intelligence report on the Urhobo during the 1920s described this court as predominantly Jekri in composition. With such development, local government administration in the division was trailed by conflict.

The creation of the Sobo (Urhobo) Division and Jekri-Sobo Division from the Old Warri Division in 1934 did not minimise the conflict because the primordial sentiments and administrative ineptitude, in addition to corruption, associated with Dogho's career were such that no group was prepared to accept an arrangement that placed it under the jurisdiction of the same local government with other groups.

Before 1950, the colonial government took some steps to minimise the conflicts. Thus, the five Urhobo clans under the jurisdiction of the Jekri-Sobo Division were first constituted into the Western Urhobo Native Administration in 1937, while the rest of the division was designated Itsekiri Native Administration. But neither of them was upgraded to the status of a division. Rather, both of them acted as subsidiary councils under the Jekri-Sobo Division answerable to a single District Officer (D.O).

In the long-run, conflict was, however, not completely averted. Consequently, the five clans were later merged with the Urhobo Division in 1949. What remained of the Jekri-Sobo Division became less than one-quarter of the Urhobo Division in terms of population and was renamed Warri Division. It now consisted of the Urhobo and Ijaw aborigines of Warri apart

from the Itsekiri. Before then, precisely in 1936, the Isoko also had to be pacified through the setting up of an appeal court which had to sit in Ughelli and Oleh on rotational basis.

To some extent, apart from the mistake made during the career of Dogho (1917 – 1932), the colonial government tried to evolve a grassroots structure that would minimise crisis and act as a tool for conflict resolution. Also for this reason the Itsekiri demand for their monarch to be styled the *Olu* of Warri was completely rejected in 1936, 1944 and 1946 as colonial officials discovered that the demand was neither historically nor legally tenable.

The colonial government largely won the confidence of all the groups in the area due to the new arrangement even though there were other two issues that still had to be addressed. The first was the demand of the Ijaw aborigines of Warri for appropriate entitlement to the rents accruing from Ogbe-Ijo land in Warri Township. The second was appropriate recognition of the Ijaw – Urhobo aborigines of Warri in the Warri Divisional Council.¹²³

This confidence was, however, eroded in May 1952 when the Western Regional Government under the control of the Action Group Party issued a local government gazette that changed the status of the Itsekiri monarch from Olu of Itsekiri to Olu of Warri against the protest of most other groups in the Warri Province. The most important demand of the Urhobo and Western Ijaw from the various local government authorities since then has been the request for a reversal of this arrangement. It exploded into a major crisis in 1952 and has been a key factor in other crises, conflicts and land disputes apart from another major one in 1997 to 2003.¹²⁴

Local government administration was, therefore, a source of conflicts and crises in the area because the local government reforms of the 1950s to the 1980s were not comprehensive enough to identify the peculiarity of the various communities with regard to their social structure and ethno-linguistic composition. Moreover, the actors at the national and regional/state levels

lacked the sincerity and conscience-driven approach required for the formulation of grassroots policies that could sustain peace and promote development in the area. The local government gazette of May 1952 was of course a product of these lapses. It is also obvious that local government policies framed by higher levels of government were often meant to project the interest of some political parties and individuals rather than promotion of grassroots development.

Overall, looking at the Urhobo situation, the local councils operated amidst enormous challenges and this prevented them from achieving their objectives in certain spheres of life. Nevertheless, their impact on grassroots development in the area is noticeable. A number of communities benefitted from the health institutions established by the local government councils between the 1940s and 1999. The organisation of adult literacy programme could be said to be inadequate. But in the long-run it was a plus to general literacy and the educational development of a few communities. Also, in the field of education, there were eight nursery and primary schools established and run by the local government councils.

The impact of the enforcement of bye-laws was felt in a few towns before the 1980s. By 1985 the rural communities became beneficiaries because local government councils saw the need to regulate the activities of community leaders and vigilantes in each village. The impact of economic investments like motor parks, abattoirs and market stalls was largely felt in the urban and semi-urban areas where they were sited. In the 1990s, some of such projects were also sited in rural communities. It must be admitted that until then most rural communities were not viable enough for the utilisation of such ventures. On the other hand, piggery and poultry farms set up by some local councils in rural communities impacted positively on the nutritious value of food

in both rural and urban centres. Their activities also impacted positively on the promotion of gender equality in addition to projecting a modicum of grassroots democracy.

ENDNOTES

1. See, *Western Region Local Government Law 1952*, Government Printer, Ibadan (Sections 57 – 76); *Supplement to Midwestern State of Nigeria Extraordinary Gazette*, Vol. 11, No. 27, 1st Dec. 1975, A. 83 – 87; *Bendel State of Nigeria Gazette*, Vol. 13, No. 59, 13th Dec. 1976, A. 81 – 82.
2. Some other parts of the country where local government administration attracts conflicts are neighbouring communities in Odukpa Local Government Area of Cross River State and Itu Local Government Area of Akwa-Ibom State. Also included are Ife-Modakeke in Osun State as well as Jama'a Local Government, Kaduna North and Kaduna South Local Governments all in Kaduna State.see Geoffrey Umeh, ed. *25 Years of Local Government Reforms and Democratization, 1976- 2001* (Lagos: Manson and Company Publishers, 2003), 124
3. See Chapter Four of this study
4. Vincent Oboairori Douglas, "Oguname-Agbarho resolves age-long disputes" *The Urhobo Voice*, Vol. 7, No. 223, Nov. 17, 2003.
5. Fidelis Adjeke, "Re: Udu/Uvwie dispute", *The Urhobo Voice*, Vol. 6, No. 216, Sept. 29, 2003, 11
6. Justice Iyasere, "Ekete leaders shift battle to court", *The Urhobo Voice*, Vol. 7, No. 223, Nov. 17, 2003, 19
7. "Views of the Government of the Bendel State of Nigeria on the Report of the Judicial Commission of Inquiry into Ughelli Local Government" *Official Document No. 3 of 1981* (Benin City: Government Printer, 1981); Oral Interviews: Frederrick Elue Alibo (75 yrs), ex-councillor, Dec. 15, 2013; J.W.S. Ilavbare, (80yrs), Retired Secretary of Ughelli Local Government Council, Dec. 20, 2013.
8. I.M. Okonjo, "Grants Payable in the Midwestern State" in *Local Government Finance in Nigeria* edited by Adebayo Adedeji & L. Rowland (Ile-Ife: University of Ife Press, 1970), 183 – 185; also see Chapter 5 of this work.
9. Ibid, 185
10. See Chapter Three of this study
11. *Unified Local Government Service, Western State of Nigeria Staff List revised up to 1st October, 1972* (Mimeo), 5; G.O. Orewa, "Unified Local Government Service – Lessons of Experience", *Journal of Local Government Administration*, V. 3, No. 1, January – June 1974, Ministry of Local Government and Chieftaincy Affairs, Benin-City, 3 – 6.
12. *Conclusions of the Military Government of the Bendel State of Nigeria on the Report of the Administrative Inquiry into the Fire Incident in the account branch of the Ministry of Local Government & Chieftaincy Affairs* (Benin-City: Government Printer, 1985).
13. Ibid

14. Notes and documents on health facilities, Ethiope West Local Government, Oghara (compiled by the informants). Oral Interviews: Benjamin Oghroko(48) Administrative Officer and Mrs. C. B. Alphonsus(55) Deputy Primary Health Care Co-ordinator, Ethiope West Local Government Council, Oghara, August 11, 2014.
15. *Primary Health Care Programme for Ughelli Local Government Area*, Bendel State, 1976 (Director of Health Office, Ughelli Local Government Secretariat, 1976)
16. Ibid, 1989; between 1963 and 1983, it was sponsored by both the State and the Local Government.
17. *Mid-Western State of Nigeria Abstract of Statistics*, (Benin-City:Ministry of Economic Development, Statistics Division, 1976), 51-52.
18. *Quarterly Abstract of Statistics, 1st Quarter, Jan – March, 1976* (Benin-City: Ministry of Economic Development, Statistics Division, 1976), 3.
19. Transportation was made difficult by the network of streams and rivers which pervaded the area.
20. For population figures see *Quarterly Abstract of Statistics, 1st Quarter, Jan – March, 1976* (Benin-City: Ministry of Economic Development, Statistics Division, 1976), 3.
21. These two communities were almost completely isolated from the rest part of the clan by numerous streams and swamps.
22. In 1976 this Divisional Council was renamed Ughelli Local Government Area. In 1996, it was split into Ughelli North and Ughelli South Local Governments. Also see chapter 6.
23. This Western Urhobo Division was split into two in 1976, namely, Ethiope Local Government and Okpe Local Government. At present it consists of Ethiope East, Ethiope West, Okpe, Sapale, Uvwie and Udu Local Governments.
24. The informants provided some documentary evidence to back up their claims. For instance, Benjamin Oghroko(48), Administrative Officer, and Mrs. C.B. Alphonsus(55) Deputy Primary Health Care Co-ordinator, both of Ethiope West Local Government Council, Oghara tendered documents to this effect, August 11, 2014.
25. The structure and premises of the maternity home are yet to be converted to personal residential property. The writer is an eye-witness.
26. This is clear from the fact that the population of the Urhobo rose from 340,000 in 1952 to 491,736 in 1963 and to 683,990 in 1976 excluding the Urhobo aborigenes of Warri. See *Quarterly Abstract of Statistics, 1st Quarter, Jan – March, 1976* (Benin-City: Ministry of Economic Development, Statistics Division, 1976), 3-4.
27. Oral Interviews: J. Mordi (Mrs) (57), Director of Nursing Services, Urban Primary Health Care, Sapele Local Government, July 28, 2014; P.O. Ovwurhuru (75yrs), former Secretary of Okpare Community; B. O. Obiuevwun (80), former head of the adult literacy programme in Ughelli Local Government Secretariat. The writer is also an eye-witness

during his primary school education when he received treatment in some of these health centres.

28. Notes and documents on health facilities, Ethiope West Local Government, Oghara (compiled by the informants). Oral Interviews: Benjamin Oghroko(48yrs) Administrative Officer and Mrs. C. B. Alphonsus(55yrs) Deputy Primary Health Care Co-ordinator, Ethiope West Local Government council, Oghara, August 11, 2014.
29. J. O. Ubrurhe, *Urhobo Traditional Medicine* (Ibadan: Spectrum Books Ltd, 2003), 114-115
30. Ibid.
31. See chapter 4 of this study, page 131.
32. I.M. Okonjo, “Grants Payable in the Midwestern State” in *Local Government Finance in Nigeria* edited by Adebayo Adedeji & L. Rowland (Ile-Ife: University of Ife Press, 1970), 183-185
33. *Ughelli Local Government Adult Literacy Programme Book, 1987*. Director of Adult Literacy Programme Office; Oral Interview: B.O. Obiuevwinn(80yrs), June 15, 2013.
34. *Community Development in Bendel State, 1963–1978*.(Benin-City: Information Department), 12.
35. Saya Bork (75yrs), a former coordinator of the Adult Literacy Programme in Jeremi Clan, provided a list of candidates who received their primary six certificates through the scheme in 1979. Oral Interview: May 5, 2012.
36. For the number of towns and villages in each local government area of Bendel State see Appendix VIII
37. Oral Interviews: Saya Bork (75yrs), a former coordinator of the Adult Literacy Programme in Jeremi Clan. For the creation of Sapele Local Government see chapter six.
38. Oral Interviews: Joseph Rienbru Komuo(75yrs), retired principal of Adadja Grammar School, Emadadja and Benson Gbakeji(54yrs), ex-Chairman of Usiefrun town, August 2, 2013.
39. G.O. Orewa, “Local Government and Development,” *Journal of Local Government Administration* 2, no. 2, June 1973, (Ministry of Local Government and Chieftaincy Affairs, Benin-City), 5.
40. Ibid.
41. Ibid
42. *Education (Amendment) Edict No. 12 of 1969* (Benin-City: Government Printer) and *Midwest State of Nigeria Extraordinary Gazette*, Vol. 6, No. 26, June 6, 1969, ((Benin-City: Government Printer), A. 29 – 32.
43. Ibid.

44. Cited in *Officers in Charge of Urhobo (Former Sobo Division), 1934 – 1976*, Secretary Office, Eastern Urhobo Division, 1976, 20; Oral Interview: Saya Bork (75yrs), May 5, 2012.
45. Ibid
46. Ibid; Oral Interview: Frederick Elue Alibo (75yrs), Ex-councillor of Ughelli Local Government Council, Dec. 15, 2013.
47. *Ughelli Local Government Adult Literacy Programme Book, 1987*. Director of Adult Literacy Programme Office; Oral Interview: B.O. Obiuevwin(80yrs), June 15, 2013.
48. Ibid.
49. This date is obtained from Mrs. T. Enibe (78yrs), a retired Headmistress of the school. Oral Interview: March 16, 2012.
50. Obaro Ikime, *Niger Delta Rivalry*, (London: Longman,1969),183-184
51. Ibid; Ughelle Papers, File 43/11/1921, Case of Ebi V, Akoh and two others heard at Otu-jeremi Native Court 11 Dec. 1924.
52. C. S. O. 26 File 27898, Intelligence Report Owe Clan, 19-21; Obaro Ikime, *Niger Delta Rivalry*, (London: Longman,1969), 184
53. Also see Obaro Ikime, *Niger Delta Rivalry*, (London: Longman,1969),183 & 241-42
54. *Local Government Law, 1957* (Ibadan: Government Printer), Sections 82 and 271.
55. “Western and Eastern Urhobo District Councils”, Western Region Legal Notices: Nos. 827 of 1959, 38 of 1960 and 41 of 1960.
56. Western Region Legal Notice: No. 327 of 1959
57. Western Region Legal Notice: No. 517 of 1959; Western Region Legal Notice:No. 38 of 1960; and *Annual Volume of the Laws of Western Nigeria*, 1960, B. 76.
58. Oral Interviews: James Mrakpo(80yrs), a retired chairman of the Ughelli Local Government Council, Dec. 15, 2013; and Frederick Elue Alibo (75yrs), a retired Councillor of the Ughelli Local Government Council, Dec. 15, 2013.
59. *Two Years in Office of Col. John Mark Inienger Military Governor of Bendel State: 3 Sept., 1985-- 2 Sept. 1987* (Benin-City: Government Printer, 1987), 33-34
60. “The Chairman Report of Two Years in Office”, presented by the outgoing Chairman of Usiefrun Community, Mr. Oshekure Wanrieta, to the People of the Community in annual Conference of the Community Held on December 26, 2013.
61. Ibid.
62. Ibid.

63. See Chapter 4 of this study, pages 124-126
64. Bendel State Digest of Local Government Statistics (Benin-City: Ministry of Finance and Economic Planning, Statistics Office, 1985), 37; also see Appendix X
65. Oral Interview: Frederick Elue Alibo (75yrs), Ex-councillor of Ughelli Local Government Council, Dec. 15, 2013
66. *Two Years in Office of Col. John Mark Inienger Military Governor of Bendel State: 3 Sept., 1985-- 2 Sept. 1987* (Benin-City: Government Printer, 1987), 33-35
67. Ibid.
68. Ibid.
69. Oral Interview: Frederick Elue Alibo (75yrs), Ex-councillor of Ughelli Local Government Council, including some other members of the community, Dec. 15, 2013.
70. "The Chairman Report of Two Years in Office", presented by the outgoing Chairman of Usiefrun Community, Mr. Oshekure Wanrieta, to the People of the Community in annual Conference of the Community Held on December 26, 2013.
71. See chapter 3 of this study.
72. See chapter 4 of this study, pages 135-136
73. Ibid.
74. C.S.O. 26, File 26767, A Broad Scheme for the Reorganization of Warri Province on Tribal Lines. Also see chapter 4 of this study, pages 145-146.
75. C.S.O 26, File 27994, Intelligence Report on Iyede Clan, 10-11
76. See chapter 3 of this study, page 89.
77. Obaro Ikime, "Chief Dogho: The Lugardian system in Warri 1917-1932", *Journal of the Historical Society of Nigeria* 3, no.2 (December 1965): 314-327; also see chapter 3 of this work.
78. See chapter 3 of this study, pages 94-95.
79. See chapter 5 of this work, pages 174-180.
80. See chapter 4 of this study.
81. Onigu Otite, *Autonomy and Depedence: The Urhobo Kingdom of Okpe in Modern Nigeria*, (Ibadan: University Press, 1973), 135.
82. Western Region Legal Notices: No. 218 of 1955 and No. 448 of 1958

83. Onigu Otite, *Autonomy and Depedence: The Urhobo Kingdom of Okpe in Modern Nigeria*, (Ibadan: University Press, 1973), 166 & 173.
84. Western Region Legal Notices: Nos. 18 & 142 of 1962
85. See chapter 5 of this work, pages 194-196.
86. *Government Decisions on the Report of an Investigation into the Role of Chiefs in the Bendel State* (Benin-City: Ministry of Chieftaincy Affairs and Culture, 1976), 1-6; Ministry of Chieftaincy Affairs and Culture's Circular Letter No. S. 28/Vol. III/660 of 28/7/76, Benin-City.
87. Ibid.
88. Ibid.
89. Ibid.
90. Oral Interview: J.P. Eruohwo II (76yrs), Ovie of Effurun, 16th June 2011; and Adedokun Jagun, "Traditional Rulers and the Concepts of Democracy and Local Government: A Paradigm of Harmony or Conflict?" in *Local Government and the Traditional Rulers in Nigeria*, edited by Oladimeji Aborisade (Ile-Ife: University of Ife Press, 1985), 117
91. It should be noted that these were the clans that developed monarchical institutions in the 17th and 18th centuries (see chapter 2).
92. Where the members could not reach a general consensus, the candidate with the highest number of supporters was approved as the winner.
93. For instance, in Ughienwwe (Jeremi) Clan, Chief Dase who succeeded Chief Yagbologha in the 1980's had no kinship relationship with the latter.
94. *First 100 Days of the Administration of Ambrose Folorunso Alli* (Benin-City: Ministry of Information, Culture and Sports, 1980), 19; Also see chapter 5.
95. Few examples are *Daily Times*, February 24, 1981, 3; *Sunday Concord*, October 25, 1981, 5; *New Nigerian* (Editorial), August 22, 1981; *Daily Sketch*, March 17, 1980, 17; *Sunday Times*, December 16, 1979, 17; *Sunday Times*, February 7, 1982, 15, and *Nigerian Herald*, September 25, 1982, 6.
96. See *Traditional Rulers of Delta State*, published by Directorate of Chieftaincy Affairs, Office of the Deputy Governor, Asaba, 2008. See chapter 6 for more on Dasuki Committee.
97. The use of management committees and sole administrators continued up to 1999 and after. For instance, an illustration of the experience of Uvwie Local Government provides a precise picture of the entire Urhoboland. Thus out of a total of thirteen consecutive councils formed to run the local government from March, 1996 to November, 2012, only four were elected. See Appendix XVI, *Uvwie Local Government Leaders*, Compiled by NYSC and SERVICOM Unit, Uvwie Local Government Council Effurun, 2013.

98. Since the 1960s traditional rulers have been instrumental in the building of town halls, market stalls and health centres by mobilizing the people and involving the local councils. In fact, since 1980 this has also included rural electrification. Apart from other evidence, a historical illustration of these is found in records kept by the secretary of some communities in the area, e.g. “The Chairman Report of Two Years in Office”, presented by the outgoing Chairman of Usiefrun Community, Mr. Oshekure Wanrieta, to the People of the Community in annual Conference of the Community Held on December 26, 2013
99. Also see chapter 5
100. *Local Government Election Figures in Midwestern State 1950 – 60*, (Benin-City: Ministry of Local Government and Chieftaincy Affairs).
101. Oral Interviews: Frederick Elue Alibo (75yrs), Ex-councillor of Ughelli Local Government Council, Dec. 15, 2013; Eruohwo II, J.P.(76yrs),Ovie of Effurun, June 16, 2011.
102. *Circulars on the 1976/77 Local Government Elections in Bendel State* (Benin-City: Ministry of Local Government and Chieftaincy Affairs, 1977). Also see Appendix V
103. Ibid.
104. *Report of Rural Economic Survey Bendel State 1975/76*, Ministry of Finance and Establishments, Statistics Division Benin-City, March 1979, 10.
105. *Circulars on the 1976/77 Local Government Elections in Bendel State* (Benin-City: Ministry of Local Government and Chieftaincy Affairs, 1977); total registered electors was 1,595,839.
106. Oral Interviews: James Mrakpo(80yrs), a retired chairman of the Ughelli Local Government Council, Dec. 15, 2013; J.W.S. Ilavbare(80), Retired Secretary of Ughelli Local Government Council, Dec 20, 2013.
107. *Circulars of the 1976/77 Local Government Elections in Bendel State*, (Benin-City: Ministry of Local Government and Chieftaincy Affairs, 1977).
108. See Oyediran, Oyeleye, “Participation in the Nigeria 1976 Local Government Election, *Nigerian Journal of Economic and Social Studies* 19, no. 1 (March 1977): 25; Oral Interview: Frederick Alibo(75yrs), Ex-councillor of Ughelli Local Government.
109. Dr A.S. Akpotor, “Warri Crisis Survey – Urhobo Perspective” in *Conflict and Instability in the Niger Delta: The Warri case* edited by T.A. Imobighe, Celestine O. Bassey & J.B. Asuni (Ibadan: Spectrum Books, 2002), 166 – 169.
110. Ibid.
111. Ibid.
112. Oral Interviews: James Mrakpo(80yrs), a retired chairman of the Ughelli Local Government Council, 20th Dec. 15, 2013; J.W.S. Ilavbare(80), Retired Secretary of Ughelli Local Government Council, Dec 20, 2013; *Uvwie Local Government Leaders*, Compiled by NYSC and SERVICOM Unit, Uvwie Local Government Secretariat, 2013.

113. Dr A.S. Akpotor, “Warri Crisis Survey – Urhobo Perspective”, 166-169.
114. Ibid.
115. Ibid.
116. Oral Interview: Obofukoro, Daniel A.(50yrs) Principal Administrative Officer, Uvwie Local Government Council, Effurun, Aug 2, 2014; J.W.S. Ilavbare(80), Retired Secretary of Ughelli Local Government Council, Dec 20, 2013.
117. See Chapter Five of this study, page 177.
118. Oral Interview: Daniel A. Obofukoro(50yrs), Principal Administrative Officer, Uvwie Local Government Council, Aug 2, 2014; For instance, gender data on current staff strength of local governments in Delta State is hardly far from this view. In May 2013, this recorded a total of 6,966 male to 7056 female in the whole state, with junior staff recording 2,487 male to 2,701 female while senior staff recorded 4479 male to 4355 female – Compiled by Mr. G. Ajuebor, Assistant Director, Department of Planning, Research and Statistics, Delta State Local Government Service Commission, Asaba.
119. See Chapter Four of this work, pages 131-132.
120. Geoffrey Umeh, ed. *25 Years of Local Government Reforms and Democratization, 1976-2001* (Lagos: Manson and Company Publishers, 2003), 542.
121. Oral Interview: Raphael Okoro(51), Head of Education Unit, Udu Local Government Council, Otor-Udu, Aug. 19, 2014; Daniel A.Obofukoro(50yrs), Principal Administrative Officer. Compared to staff strength, the data however, show only little improvement in gender disparity in the composition of each present council including the appointment of chairmen. Thus in Urhoboland, the average ratio of male to female councillors in 2013 was about 10 to 3. On the other hand, out of a total of 9 chairmen appointed and 4 elected in one of the local councils, Uvwie Local Government Council, between 1996 and 2012, only one was a woman –see Appendix XII.
122. See chapter 3, pp.94-95
123. See chapter 5, pages 170-171
124. Also see chapter 6, pages 249-272

CHAPTER EIGHT

CONCLUSION

Summary and Findings

1. The evolution of the local government institution in Urhoboland up to the 1950s revolved around three elements in terms of constitutional procedures, legal concepts and political frameworks. The first were Western models of legal and constitutional approach to grassroots administration. These were reflected in the implementation of the Native Court Ordinance of 1914 and Native Authority Ordinance of 1916, both of which replaced the Native Court Proclamations of 1900, 1901 and 1906. Thus, the office of the District Officer (DO) and court clerk exhibited some good features of Western models. Also included was the introduction of customary courts and grassroots elections during the 1950s local government reforms accompanied with the engagement of few qualified legal practitioners.

The second were models of grassroots institutions successful in other parts of the country, but not compatible with Urhobo traditional political system. The major one was the appointment of a paramount chief in the person of Chief Dogho Numa for the Warri Division which consisted of the Urhobo, Isoko, Itsekiri and Western Ijaw. This was highly criticised even by colonial officials while the colonial government later discovered that it was among the errors that militated against the successful operation of the local government system in this part of the Western Niger Delta up to the 1950s. The third consisted of general rudiments of Urhobo political institutions. These were poorly inculcated into the native courts and warrant chiefs institution. It was not until the reorganisation of the 1930s that they were fine-tuned and each village became a recognised sub-unit of local government. The village courts were revived, but subordinated to superior local councils at the headquarters of each clan.

The village courts folded up during the 1950s local government reforms, while some of the clan courts metamorphosed into customary courts in addition to the recognition of some traditional rulers who had to liaise with the local government councils. It was also in response to the tenets of this element that the Chiefs Law of 1959 (Cap 19) had to re-emphasise that the official change of the title of the Itsekiri monarch in 1952 did not in any way place the Urhobo communities of Warri under his jurisdiction.

By the 1960s, only the first and third elements became the guiding principles for the operation of the local government institution in the area. This remained the trend up to 1999 but with successive modification of the character of the entire structure. For instance, as from 1962, new developments led to the replacement of elected councils with management committees and sometimes sole administrators in this part of the Western Niger Delta.¹ This was probably intended to be tentative but the political crisis of the 1960s coupled with the advent of military rule and outbreak of the Nigerian Civil War (1967-1970) led to a prolongation of this structure up to 1976. The system still had some elements of the Western model, while traditional rulers of the area were encouraged to cooperate with the local councils even though they got little or no financial motivation until the 1976 local government reforms.

The reform introduced election at the local government level and new legal and constitutional procedures in the creation of local government councils. There was also some emphasis on the concept of grassroots autonomy and democracy. The political leaders of the Second Republic dissolved these councils and reverted to the structures of 1962-1975. As the military took over power in 1983, these continued with some adjustments until the 1989 local government elections which resulted in the implementation of structures akin to those of the 1976 reforms. But they could not survive the 1993 crisis of the aborted Third Republic, often

known as June 12 crisis. A new legal and constitutional framework sustaining the operation of management committees and sole administrators was revived in Urhoboland. This continued until the 1997 local government elections accompanied in the area with the local government crisis of 1997-1999.

Overall, management committees and sole administrators featured prominently in the area while elected local government councils were only occasionally employed and for experimental purposes. However, traditional rulers played a focal role in the system until the adoption of management committees and sole administrators in the 1960s. The legacy left behind by such individuals in terms of inter-group relations remained a key issue in the local government institution up to the 1990s. Chief Dogho Numa, the paramount chief of the Warri Division from 1917 to 1928 stands out clearly in this respect. But the inclusion of traditional rulers in the local councils has attracted some scepticism since the 1980s partly due to the emergence of a school of thought which claimed that they have outlived their usefulness in the system.² However, based on the Urhobo situation, the present study demonstrates that traditional rulers are relevant to the local government system, but do not have to be members of the local councils before they can be integrated into the entire structure as instruments of grassroots development. This is because in the area of study they have made tangible contributions to the development of their respective communities by liaising harmoniously with the local government councils and secretaries. They do this by identifying the projects and programmes that can help to address the challenges of their various communities and therefore contribute to societal development. In most cases, the local government councils only provide certain percentage of the fund required for implementation of such projects. Therefore, the traditional rulers also had to mobilize their people and get in touch with corporate bodies and oil companies interested in grassroots

development to raise a good percentage of such fund.³ Thus, at least, 80 percent of the health centres were established through this means. In most cases, the beneficiary communities provided the health centre complex, while the local government council merely took over the overhead expenses.

2. The search for some consensus between local peculiarities and local government policies emanating from higher levels of government started as early as the 1920s in Urhoboland. This accompanied the introduction of warrant chiefs and later the appointment of a paramount chief in the then Warri Division. It was not until the abolition of these two institutions by 1930 and the reorganisation of the entire structure vis-a-vis the implementation of the native administration system that a measure of harmony between the two parties was attained in the area. This generated a striking enthusiasm among the Urhobo and was reflected in their massive response to payment of tax and efficiency in the organisation of their local councils and co-operation with the local government authority. As a result of this they emerged the first group in the Warri Division to enjoy the right to control their internally generated revenue.⁴

But this cordiality was punctured by the local government policies of the 1950s. The local government gazette of May 1952 created a major rupture between local peculiarities and top-down reforms that even subsequent reforms up to the 1990s could not rectify. This was primarily because of over-generalisation in the formulation of local government policies which is also sometimes reflected in existing macro-studies on the local government institution.⁵ It was the flaw of over-generalisation that made the Chief Commissioner, Southern Provinces, Mr W. E. Hunt to compare the Warri scene with that of Abeokuta in 1936. But he was made to understand that “the two cases were not really analogous.”⁶ In the first place, the Alake of Abeokuta recognised the aboriginal status of the Ilaro in the same province and did not claim to exercise

any jurisdiction over them.⁷ Moreover, in spite of the differences between the Ilaro and the Ebga, both groups are Yoruba. In the case of the Warri Province each of the groups, the Kwale, Ijaw, Isoko, Itsekiri, and Urhobo constitutes distinct ethnic group. Against the protest of other groups in the Warri Province, the aforementioned gazette approved and implemented a demand the colonial government had rejected in 1936, 1944 and 1946 on the grounds that it was neither historically nor legally tenable. This was the restyling of the title of the Itsekiri monarch as Olu of Warri. There was also the creation of the Itsekiri Communal Land Trust (ICLT) without corresponding bodies for the Urhobo and Western Ijaw.

The situation was compounded by the failure of local government policies of the 1960s-1990s to respond to the Urhobo demand for a restructuring of local councils in Warri and its immediate environs to reflect the ethno-cultural composition of the area. Thus, even though the Chiefs Law of 1959 (Cap 19) and the laws of the Bendel State of Nigeria, 1976 (Cap 37) excluded the Urhobo and Ijaw communities of Warri from the jurisdiction of the Itsekiri traditional monarch, the traditional rulers of the Urhobo and Ijaw clans of Warri were neither granted recognition nor allowed to benefit from the monthly subvention paid to each traditional ruler in the area following the 1976 reforms.⁸

It was not until the 1990s local government crises that these traditional rulers gained recognition. The inability or failure to reconcile local peculiarities with top-down reforms was a key reason why conflicts and crises constituted a major challenge in the system, at least among the Urhobo of Warri and its immediate environs. Apart from this, however, corruption, administrative ineptitude and poor funding were another set of challenges.

Another source of conflict was the selfish desire of some individuals and political parties who exploited the situation to their own advantage at the expense of grassroots development.

These lapses were first clearly demonstrated by the Action Group sponsored local government gazette of May 1952 in Warri.⁹

Finally, the interlocking nature of the settlement pattern among the groups in this part of the Western Niger Delta implies that unlike most other parts of the country, a practical solution to their situation must transcend mere creation of divisions. It compounded the efforts of the colonial government in trying to implement its policy of creation of divisions along ethnic lines during the reorganisation era (c1930-1949). Not surprisingly, the progressive creation of local governments up to the 1990s could not completely resolve the problem of interlocking settlements among the Urhobo, Ijaw and Itsekiri in this part of the Western Niger Delta. Thus, after the last creation of local government in 1996 the Ijaw town of Frukama was still placed under Ughelli South Local Government, while Itsekiri settlements still existed in Sapele and Ethiope West Local Governments. Of course this does not include the case of Warri and its immediate environs where we have the most complex form of this settlement structure and which has been a major source of conflict in the operation of the local government system since the 1920s.¹⁰

Even more important is the fact that the policy makers merely created divisions without allowing the character of the area in terms of its ethno-cultural and social structure to reflect in the composition of the local government councils. The appropriate rectification of these flaws was in essence what the Nnaemeka Agu Judicial Commission of Inquiry of 1993 and the Alhassan Idoko Commission of Inquiry of 1997 were demanding for in Warri and its immediate environs; not just the creation of more local government councils in the area. The government implemented the creation of additional local government councils in the area, but ignored the crucial one which actually constituted the bedrock of the problem.

Some of the local government policies and scholarly studies that apparently impacted on the progressive implementation of the new structures were ostensibly influenced by the emotions and perspectives of one group or the other in the area. Thus, the existing facts and figures demonstrate that the local government gazette of 1952 which implemented what the colonial government had rejected in 1936, 1942 and 1946 was influenced by the beneficiary group, the Itsekiri. On the other hand, the Itsekiri accused the Governor of Delta State, Col. Jonah D. Dung in 1997, of adopting local government policies that were largely derived from the perspectives of the Urhobo and Western Ijaw.¹¹

However, Col. J. D. Dung was only thinking of policies that could lead to the implementation of the recommendations of the Nnaemeka Agu Judicial Commission of Inquiry of 1993 and the Alhassan Idoko Commission of Inquiry of 1997, both of which were set up by the Federal Government to look into the local government structure of the area. By Decree No. 36 of 1996 issued on December 30, 1996 and Decree No. 7 of 1997 issued on March 3, 1997 the Federal Government created Warri South West Local Government from the previous Warri South Local Government.

Some sources claim that the original headquarters approved for the new local government was Ogidigben, an Itsekiri town.¹² If this is true then the Federal Government did not take into consideration the recommendation of the 1993 and 1997 Commissions of Inquiry derived from appropriate fieldworks and accepted data on the area. This is because the headquarters of Warri North Local Government, Koko is also an Itsekiri town, while that of Warri South is cited in Warri main town shared by the three aboriginal groups instead of an Urhobo town, the group with the largest population in that local government.

Therefore, in trying to respond to the recommendations of both Commissions of Inquiry, the implementation panel made the Federal Government to understand the need to choose an Ijaw town for the Warri South West Local Government since the Ijaw are in majority in the area. The Ijaw town of Ogbe-Ijaw was, therefore, made the headquarters. The government was, however, unable to implement other items in the recommendations. For instance, the Itsekiri traditional monarch was still recognised as having jurisdiction over the three local government councils. In fact, it was not until the peak of the crisis in 1999 that the traditional rulers of the Urhobo and Western Ijaw settlements in Warri were granted official recognition. In addition the recognition of the Itsekiri monarch as having jurisdiction over the three local government councils tended to give the impression that the other monarchs were being subordinated to his authority.¹³ It is not surprising, therefore, that another commission of enquiry, the General Magashi Commission, set up in 1999 to address the situation also came up with more or less the same recommendations.

As mentioned above, a number of scholarly studies on grassroots politics and administration in this part of the Western Niger Delta have relied largely on emotions and perspectives of individual groups in the area rather than established facts and figures even in addressing issues of strategic significance. For instance, a few of the topics in a work entitled *Warri City & British Colonial Rule in Western Niger Delta*, are too sympathetic with Urhobo perspectives and emotions on such issues.¹⁴ The works of the economist, J.O.S. Ayomike have largely fallen prey of this flaw in relation to his sentimental support for the interest of his group. Ayomike gleefully cites P. C. Llyod, but he deliberately ignored the population figures of Warri compiled by Lloyd based on the 1952 census because they are completely antithetical to his controversial figures for the town.¹⁵ Moreover, for the sake of peace and historical objectivity,

aborigines who regard their group as the primary owner or founder of Warri are made to understand that such claims are neither historically nor legally tenable because there are no empirical data to support them.

Yet, in a major scholarly work on this part of the Western Niger Delta, one could read statements like “the Itsekiris, the primary owners of Warri” and “the Urhobos particularly hated the Itsekiris” by T. A. Imobighe.¹⁶ With such statements, the other aboriginal groups conclude at a glance that such publication is meant to project the interest of one group at the expense of others and never represent their interest. Yet, this was a study sponsored by the United States Institute of Peace based in Washington D. C., Academic Associate of Peace Work (AAPW) and United States Agency for International Development (USAID). In other words, the contributors ought to place the aims of the sponsors above their personal interests and perspectives of individual groups in the area.

3. The reform efforts from the 1950s to 1980s in Urhoboland were relevant within the context of those decades, though in some cases they created more problems than they solved. But understanding the precursors to the 1950s reforms would be of some help in analysis of the post-1950s era. The first major instance was the inauguration of the Native Administration System in the Old Warri Division by 1928 which led to the introduction of taxation in the area during the 1930s. The constitutional reform of the era also included the restructuring of local government in the entire Warri Province. This was tagged the “reorganization era” in the entire province.

Even though the era commenced immediately after the anti-tax riot of 1928 in the province, the reform introduced some novelty into the local government system and this enabled the colonial government to correct most of the errors it made in its maiden local government

policies in the area. Two major examples was the cancellation of the office of the paramount chief and the abolition of the warrant chief institution. The impact of these reforms was felt in Urhoboland up to the 1940s.

New local government reforms were embarked upon in the Western Region during the 1950s, partly due to the adoption of the Macpherson constitution of 1951. This commenced in this part of the Western Niger Delta with the crisis of 1952 following the Action Group Local Government Gazette of May that year which did not go down well with the Urhobo and most other groups in the area. The creation of new local government councils and introduction of customary courts through these reforms, however, impacted positively on grassroots development in the area.

As a result of the crisis that accompanied the 1952 local government gazette, new efforts were made to address the grievances of the Urhobo and some other groups in the Western Niger Delta in 1959 and 1976 respectively. Among them is Cap 19 of the Chiefs Law of 1959 and its counterpart, Cap 37, in the Laws of Bendel State of Nigeria 1976, already explained above. However, the Urhobo were not appeased due to two reasons. First, the Urhobo sub-groups of Warri contended that the new official title gave the Itsekiri an edge in the distribution of resources or sharing of assets. Initially land was the only major consideration. But in the 1970s petroleum royalties became another asset attracting the attention of all groups. Secondly, the Urhobo demanded for appropriate representation in the Warri Local Government Council for them to take the legislation of 1959 and 1976 seriously.

The 1976 local government reform constituted an improvement upon previous constitutional reforms. Even though the Urhobo felt that the reform failed to address the controversy surrounding the issue of traditional leadership and chieftaincy affairs in Warri, it

constituted a new impetus in grassroots development in the area. This was at least noticeable in terms of grassroots democracy, structural uniformity and improvement in funding of local government projects in the area.

New attempts at constitutional reforms of the local government system started with the 21-member Alhaji Dasuki Committee of 1984. In 1985, the General Buhari-led administration endorsed the findings and recommendations of this Committee and accompanied it with the government official assessment of the recommendations. The Committee was inherited by the Babangida regime with some modifications and combined with his new programmes of MAMSER and DFRRRI for promotion of grassroots development. A noticeable feature of this reform was the effort made to put in place structures that could guarantee local government autonomy, though these did not yield satisfactory results. In Urhoboland, apart from the creation of Sapele Local government Area, its impact was minimal.

In spite of these, by 1990 there were obvious indications that the entire grassroots structure in the area needed a thorough review. The first indication was a communal crisis in 1993 which completely defied the efforts of the local government councils, while the second was the local government crisis of 1997-2003. The first led to the setting up of the Nnaemeka Agu Judicial Commission of inquiry of 1993, while the Alhassan Idoko Commission of inquiry was empanelled in 1997 to look into the second crisis. This was followed by the General Magashi Commission of enquiry of 1999 as peace was still elusive. The three commissions accepted that the previous structure was not relevant enough to the contemporary situation in the area and came up with two major recommendations. The first was a restructuring of local councils in Warri and its immediate environs to reflect the social structure and ethno-cultural composition of the area. The second was the creation of more local governments with special emphasis on Warri

and its immediate environs. In particular, the first two commissions specified the constitution of Warri South, where the Urhobo are in majority, into a local government. The same was recommended for Warri South West, where the Ijaw are in majority, and Warri North where the Itsekiri are in majority. The aim was to have three local government councils each representing respectively the interest of each of the three aboriginal groups.

Meanwhile, there were fresh efforts at the national level to restructure the local government system in the entire country through constitutional approach. Among them was the Arthur Mbanefo Panel set up by the Sanni Abacha regime in 1994. However, apart from the creation of more local government councils in 1996 nothing else was addressed in the local government system in Urhoboland through the recommendation of the panel. In the process, the three local governments recommended by the 1993 commission of inquiry were created without actually restructuring the local councils to reflect the ethno-cultural composition of the area. It is, therefore, not surprising that another local government crisis erupted in 1997 leading to the setting up of the second commission of inquiry and even a third one both of which arrived at the same recommendations. Overall, though all the commissions came up with the same recommendations as the only means of sustaining peaceful and functional local government system in the area, for reasons difficult to understand the federal government did not implement them.

The era ended with the framing of the 1999 constitution. It was not until February 2000 that the Federal government issued a communiqué which reviewed the 1999 constitution for the purpose of local government administration following a 3-day national workshop held in Yola.¹⁷

4. The earliest colonial local government institution in Urhoboland, the native court system, was introduced in 1900 without any consideration for the nature of inter-group relations. But before

1930, the colonial government was compelled to give some considerations to the nature of inter-group relations in its local government policies due to the numerous protests against the lapses in the system by affected groups.

Among others, the creation of new native courts and the 1930s principle of creation of divisions along ethnic lines, which accompanied the reorganisation, were adopted as a response to the nature of inter-group relations. The boundary adjustment of the 1940s between the Urhobo and *Jekri-sobo* divisions, concluded in 1949, was also primarily a response to the nature of inter-group relations. Local government policies continued to produce crises whenever they failed to accommodate the pattern of inter-group relations.

Thus, from the 1950s to 1999, local government administration in Urhoboland generated sporadic conflicts and crises because the local government policies of the period were framed with little or no consideration for inter-group relations. Apart from the controversial 1952 local government gazette, as explained in Chapter Five, the demand of the Urhobo for recognition of their traditional rulers in Warri during the 1970s and for rotational presidency of the Warri Council of Traditional Rulers fell on deaf ear. Moreover, the Urhobo demand for a restructuring of local councils in Warri and its immediate environs to reflect the ethno-cultural composition of the area was not given any significant attention. This trend lingered into the 1980s and 1990s and was reflected in the local government elections of 1988 and 1997 in terms of tension and crises, especially in Warri and its immediate environs.

5. There was some relationship between the operation of the local government system and inter-group land disputes in the area. As explained in chapter five, there is need to give significant attention to the political economy of local government policies considering the role such policies played in inter-group land disputes in the area. The precursors to such land disputes was the

Urhobo and Itsekiri demand that the local government authority headed by Chief Dogho should give account of the fund realised from land leased out to the colonial government in the Warri Division. Though Dogho actually appropriated these funds for his personal use, he won the two cases instituted against him by the Itsekiri and Urhobo in 1923 and 1926 respectively through the influence of his office. Nevertheless, through the intervention of the Resident of the Warri Province, a body was set up by the local government to act as a check on his power in the use of such fund, while he was compelled to refund a reasonable percentage of the fund already realised.

The desire to benefit from subsequent funds from this source was a major impetus for inter-group land disputes. The first of these was between the Urhobo people of Agbassa and the Itsekiri in 1931 over the ownership of Agbassa land. This case was filed by the Agbassa people against the Itsekiri in the Supreme Court because the trial judge of the 1926 law suit against Dogho, Mr. Justice Maxwell, based his judgment on the premise that Agbassa was part of Itsekiriland. This was followed in 1934 by the land dispute between the Urhobo town of Aladja and Saba community in Ijawland.

A more serious one was the Sapele land case of 1941 – 1943. Part of this land was also leased to the colonial government. It emanated from poorly coordinated local government policies of the 1930s which Itsekiri residents in a section of Sapele Town exploited to stop the payment of rent to their Urhobo landlords. Precisely, in 1932, the paramount chief of the division, Chief Dogho, assured the residents that they could live in the area without payment of rent to any landlord because the land belonged to the *Olu* of Itsekiri. The outcome of this case in 1943 led to the review of both local government policies and boundaries in the area. The explosive nature of this land dispute left behind tensions that continued to reverberate in

subsequent decades. Thus, in 1949 the demand of Agbassa people to be entitled to rent accruing to their land led to another case between them and the Itsekiri.

But the local government gazette of 1952 created the worst tension by establishing the Itsekiri Communal Land Trust (ICLT) without corresponding bodies for the Urhobo and Western Ijaw. Despite the Western Region Chief Law of 1959 (Cap 19), the Urhobo of Warri and its immediate environs conceived it as a device to deprive them of the land they inherited from their ancestors. As a result of this, inter-group land disputes became more confrontational and took new dimensions. Consequently, in 1957, the Agbassa people revived their land disputes with the Itsekiri.

The Itsekiri themselves added fuel to a burning fire by concluding that the new development gave them a legal backing to knock out the Urhobo in the tussle over the ownership of Warri land. Inspired by their previous “victories”, they were engulfed in another land dispute with Okere-Urhobo people from 1967 to 1973. The tension created by the new developments resulted in the most bloody land dispute in the area in 1977 between Ekpan (an Urhobo community) and its Itsekiri counterpart, Ubeji resulting in the loss of many lives.

All these created bad blood and dissensions whose memories lingered on up to the 1990s. For instance, the carnival procession which followed the coronation of Atuwase II as the new Olu of Warri in 1993 only reminded the Urhobo of the local government gazette of 1952, especially as the Itsekiri accompanied it with provocative songs describing the Olu as the owner of all land in Warri, while referring to the Urhobo as their slaves and errand boys and the ruling family of one of the Urhobo clans in Warri, the Okumagba family, as trouble maker.¹⁸ This exploded into a crisis that defied the effort made by the local government councils to resolve it before the local government crisis of 1997 – 1999.

By accelerating the rate of land dispute and compounding the pattern of inter-group relations, local government policies added fuel to the crisis of petroleum exploitation and therefore contributed to what became known as the “Niger Delta Question” in this part of the Western Niger Delta. Just as the local government policies of the 1950s compounded the question of the ownership of Warri land so they inflated and amplified the tussle over the sharing of peanuts and crumbs left behind by agents of petroleum exploitation. Thus, the Ekpan-Ubeji land dispute of 1977 completely defied the effort of both the Ethiope and Warri Local Government Councils and proved to be the most violent of its type in the area up till date in terms of blood-shedding because the land in question is “strategically” located near the refinery and factories of the Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation (NNPC).

6. The available facts and figures demonstrate that local government administration lived below expectation in this part of the Western Niger Delta. The entire picture indicates that it can hardly be accommodated within the structure and horizon of the three theories for an ideal situation discussed in chapter one of this work. Nevertheless, its positive impact on the area up to 1999 is noticeable. Therefore, an analysis of its achievement must be done without losing sight of the challenges the system had to contend with. The study demonstrates that in the light of the crises and squalor emanating from the Niger Delta Question, the area provides the best acid test for the local government system. It, therefore, reveals that the developmental impact and quality of resilience exemplified by the system amidst these crises justify the need for its retention and transformation. In other words, the Urhobo have benefited from the reorganisation of local government administration though the sporadic crises and conflicts in the area robbed them of some of the gains.

In terms of provision of health facilities, the establishment of 114 primary healthcare centres spread over a number of towns and villages by 1999 effectively complemented the services rendered by the major hospitals provided by federal and state governments and missionary bodies. It is significant to note that the latter were very few apart from being too far from many communities. By 1999, they were only four, established in Eku, Sapele, Ughelli and Warri respectively.¹⁹ Moreover, the establishment of a number of nursery and primary schools and a total of 95 adult education centres in different towns and villages complemented the effort of higher levels of government in the educational sector.

Still on socio-economic development, their activities impacted positively on maintenance of law and order, building of markets, construction of feeder roads and culverts, provision of rural electricity and portable water and some other spheres of life. For instance, the effective utilisation of traditional rulers in the local councils up to 1960 enabled them to make reasonable contribution to grassroots development even up to 1999. The effects of constitutional reforms were, therefore, felt in the area except that apart from the conflicts that accompanied a number of the reforms, they perpetually failed to address the most crucial grassroots demand of the people. Part of this demand is the restructuring of local councils in the area, particularly Warri and its immediate environs, to reflect the ethno-cultural composition of the society as well as the avoidance of grassroots structure that makes some groups feel that they are being subordinated to the monarchs or jurisdiction of another group.

Overall, from the nature and impact of the local government system in Urhoboland, it is obvious from the findings that its evolution witnessed series of challenges resulting in occasional lapses and setbacks. Majority of these differ in their own context, while some fall within the horizon of what is obtainable in some other parts of the country. For instance, the relationship

between local government administration and the interlocking settlement pattern explained above exhibited features that were relatively unique. The same is true of its relationship with the pattern of inter-group relations. Therefore, while accepting that the lapses and shortcomings in the system were partly a function of its operators and policy-makers, it must be admitted that local government policies at the national level could not capture the index details of some localities. The individual personalities operating in such terrain were bound to come out with relatively distinctive approaches. This is apparently why the impact of their activities on inter-group relations in this part of the Western Niger Delta lingered on up to the 1990s.

Obviously, there is need to restructure the local government system in the area to harmonise it with the ethno-linguistic and social structure of the society. Admittedly, the system lived below expectation. To the Urhobo, not even the 1976 local government reform actualised their most crucial grassroots demand which revolves around the restructuring of local councils in Warri and its immediate environs to reflect the character of the area. Nevertheless, the system left behind a noticeable track-record in some aspects of grassroots development of the area. This implies that it can be transformed to produce expected results if both its policy makers and operators play their role with conscience-driven objectivity. In the light of these and the need for functional local government councils, the study therefore makes the following recommendations.

Recommendations

(i) There should be restructuring of local government councils to reflect the character of the area in terms of its ethno-cultural and social structure, particularly Warri and its immediate environs. This is of crucial importance since progressive creation of local government areas can not completely resolve the problem of interlocking settlements among the various groups. At this

point, it must be mentioned that an intellectual discourse and practical analysis of local government administration among the Urhobo or any other aboriginal groups in Warri and its vicinity is hardly complete and objective enough without giving relevant attention to grassroots issues in the town.

This is because as a metropolis founded by three aboriginal groups, Warri constitutes a focal point of contact and interaction, the very reason why it is often a source of conflict in local government administration in the area. It is for the same reason that it is a proxy or actual battle ground for various groups in the Western Niger Delta in their demand for justice, equity and fair play in the distribution of resources. As part of the strategies to align the structure of local councils in Warri and its immediate vicinity with the ethno-cultural composition of the area, the study suggests the adoption of either of the following two options, 'A' and 'B'.

(A). This involves declaring Warri a buffer zone in the development of indigenous culture and traditional institutions. This option has five major characteristics. Firstly, no traditional ruler would be allowed to add the name "Warri" to his title. Thus, we should simply have Ovie of Agbassa, Orosuen/Ovie of Okere-Urhobo, Olu of Itsekiri, Pere of Ogbijo, Jakpa of Jakpa, etc. Moreover, English language must be recognized as the only official language during the council meetings of each of the three local governments and traditional chieftaincy councils, except those approved for only one ethnic group. This is to prevent any conflict or controversy over the choice of language as experienced in 1977 and later years between the Ijaw and Itsekiri with regard to the Warri Council of Traditional Rulers. Thirdly, no school in Warri and its immediate environs should be allowed to teach the indigenous languages because this has been seriously politicised since the 1990s and is becoming another source of conflict.²⁰ Each of the three groups

has enough extensions outside Warri to teach their indigenous languages and develop their indigenous institutions.

Again, by the 2006 census, the Urhobo constitute over 90 percent of the population of Warri South Local Government, the Itsekiri constitute over 80 percent of Warri North Local Government, while the Western Ijaw constitute over 70 percent of Warri South-West Local Government. Therefore, appointment or election of candidates into the local government councils should be structured in such a way that no group can produce more than one chairman at a time for each of the three chairmanship positions for the three respective local government councils in Warri as this is in line with their population figures and even the principle of Federal Character. The aforementioned principle should also apply to the appointment of secretaries for each local government council. Finally, no group should be allowed to operate a communal land trust in Warri and its immediate environs. Any of the groups may operate such land trust within their localities outside Warri metropolis, but strictly without any connection with the local government council.

B. This involves developing Warri along lines of indigenous culture and institutions. First, it should exploit the emotional or practical significance attached to the appellation “Warri” in the styling of chieftaincy and traditional titles since the 1950s. For instance, after the official approval of the title of the “*Olu* of Warri” in 1952, other similar titles emerged even without any government approval. Among them are “Ugbague of Warri” (former Ugbague of Jakpa) and “Ologbosere of Warri” (former Jakpa of Jakpa), both from Itsekiri communities.

Apparently, the Urhobo and Ijaw monarchs of Warri failed to add the appellation to their titles because the *Orosuen* of Okere-Urhobo was charged to court by the Itsekiri monarch for even applying for the official recognition of his title, though the court verdict favoured

Okere-Urhobo. The Itsekiri monarch was also seriously antagonistic to the official recognition of the four clan heads of the Ijaw in present day Warri South-West Local Government.

Since the addition of the appellation “Warri” to traditional and chieftaincy titles means everything to all the groups and stake-holders, a simple solution is to issue a local government gazette at the state level like the one of 1952 granting all traditional rulers in Warri the legal right to attach the name “Warri” to their titles: Thus, *Olu* of Warri (Ode-Itsekiri), *Ologbosere* of Warri (Jakpa), *Ugbague* of Warri (Jakpa), *Orosuen* of Warri (Okere-Urhobo), *Ovie* of Warri (Agbassa), *Ovie* of Warri (Igbudu), *Pere* of Warri (Ogbe-Ijoh), *Pere* of Warri (Egbeoma), *Pere* of Warri (Isaba), *Pere* of Warri (Gbaramatu), etc.

Before oil exploration and exploitation, there was nothing to justify all the tussles and conflicts over the appellation, “Warri”, in the titles of traditional rulers. Apparently, the Itsekiri staked in so much to obtain the appellation because they felt that actualising this dream was all they needed to knock out their rivals in the acute contest over the ownership of Warri land and its immediate environs. But by the 1970s they must have discovered that it was all a ruse.

On the other hand, the Urhobo and the Western Ijaw have no reason to bother about the appellation since it has been legally established since the 1960s that the title “*Olu* of Warri” had nothing to do with the ownership of Warri land. But since the era of oil exploitation, the Urbobo sub-groups in Warri claim that the Itsekiri have an edge in the sharing of petroleum revenue allocated to the area because of the change of title. According to them, the *Olu* is antagonistic to the installation of traditional rulers in other groups in order to avoid any one sharing oil royalties with him. Therefore, since the appellation, “Warri” is what entitles one to oil royalties and other resources of the area the first solution is to tap into this emotion by allowing everybody to attach

it to his title. By so doing, the importance attached to the appellation will also be gradually de-emphasised, while sanity is being restored.

Moreover, each of the three groups should be allowed to set up its own communal land trust whether affiliated or not affiliated to the local government council. But the Council may act as a mediator during minor disagreements. Each of the three local government areas in Warri should have its council of traditional rulers with each council adopting the language of the dominant group, that is, Ijaw for Warri South-West Local Government, Itsekiri for Warri North Local Government, and Urhobo for Warri South Local Government.

In addition, schools in Warri and its immediate environs should teach the indigenous languages, i.e. Ijaw, Itsekiri, and Urhobo in their primary and junior secondary schools. But this should be left for each school to decide strictly on the basis of which ethnic group out of the three has the highest pupil population in the school except for schools that have enough facilities and staff strength to teach the three. Alternatively, based on population figures of each of the three local governments mentioned above, Ijaw language should be taught in schools in Warri South-West Local Government, Itsekiri language in Warri North Local Government, and Urhobo in Warri South Local Government.

As in the previous option, appointment or elections into the local government councils should be structured in such a way that no group can produce more than one chairman at a time for the three chairmanship positions for the three respective local government councils in Warri and its immediate environs. In this case preferably an Ijaw for Warri South-West Local Government, an Itsekiri for Warri North Local Government Council, and an Urhobo for Warri South Local Government Council.

ii. Inter-group relations should be given some consideration in local government reforms and formulation of local government policies. This is necessary to prevent a situation where the operation of local government becomes a source of conflicts and crises as has been the case in this part of the Western Niger Delta since 1952. President Olusegun Obasanjo's model of 2003 which recommended the creation of local government units cutting across ethnic boundaries in the area as a means of encouraging interaction, ethnic fusion and unity is bound to be counter-productive and there is elaborate historical evidence to demonstrate this. In the first place, one of the reasons the Urhobo gave in their objection to the creation of Jekri-Sobo Division in the 1930s is that if their stay together in a single division for about twenty years (1914 to 1934) only created more divergences than unity, there was no reason to suggest that an artificially created Jekri-Sobo Division would produce a better result. Secondly, for the same reason the colonial government started evolving a local government structure that would constitute each ethnic group in the area into a local government unit starting from the second half of the 1930s.

(iii)Based on what was explained earlier, there is need for both policy-makers and scholarly studies to transcend the perspectives and emotions of individual groups in the area in addressing topical and strategic issues affecting grassroots development. Moreover, the search for enduring peace in grassroots communities of this part of the Western Niger Delta must transcend the crisis of petroleum exploitation and therefore accommodate other issues of critical significance particularly local government administration. Again, among the communities in the former Urhobo and *Jekri-Sobo* Divisions, appropriate care must be taken to avoid the creation of local government councils and chieftaincy system that make some groups feel that they are being subordinated to the monarch or jurisdiction of another group. Finally, a local government structure that grants equal status to all the groups in the former *Jekri-Sobo* Division is a basic

requirement for the sustenance of productive councils in the area. Apart from the approaches discussed in this chapter, the implementation of the recommendations of 1993 and 1997 commissions of inquiry explained in this study would also be useful to the actualisation of functional and result-oriented local councils in this part of the Western Niger Delta.

Contributions to Knowledge

1. The study established based on the Urhobo situation that the constitutional and legal framework underpinning the local government system at the national level has not captured the key variables of some localities.
2. It demonstrated that the implementation of the reform efforts of the 1950s to 1980s without consideration for peculiarities of affected communities was the primary source of local government conflict in the area up to the 1990s.
3. It revealed that the pattern of local government administration influences the nature of intergroup relations and this created the imperative for policy makers to be sensitive to the issue of ethnic relations in policy formulation.
4. The work established that lack of consideration for the link between local government policies and economic resources of affected communities was the major source of inter-group land disputes in this part of the Western Niger Delta.
5. It demonstrated that despite the challenges faced the local government institution contributed significantly to the social and economic development of Urhoboland from 1916 to 1999 and this strengthens the argument for retention of the system in Nigeria.
6. By tracing the history of the local government institution in Urhoboland, the study has contributed to the understanding of aspects of the history of Urhoboland in particular and that of the Western Niger Delta in general.

ENDNOTES

1. This also applied to some other parts of the country. See Alex Gboyega, *Political Values and Local Government in Nigeria* (Lagos: Malthouse Press, 1987), 28-29.
2. Adedokun Jagun, "Traditional Rulers and the Concepts of Democracy and Local Government: A Paradigm of Harmony or Conflict?" in *Local Government and the Traditional Rulers in Nigeria*, edited by Oladimeji Aborisade (Ile-Ife: University of Ife Press, 1985), 117-118.
3. The Shell British Petroleum Plc assisted a number of communities in the implementation of their grassroots development projects.
4. Also see Obaro Ikime, *Niger Delta Rivalry: Itsekiri-Urhobo Relations and the European Presence, 1884-1936* (London: Longman, 1969), 239-243.
5. Also explained in chapter 1, page 16.
6. C. S.O. 26 File 09098 Vol. X, Chief Commission Inspection Notes, Warri Province, 1936; also see Obaro Ikime, 1969, 253-254.
7. Ibid.
8. Examined in chapters 5, 6 and 7 of this work.
9. This is examined in chapter 5 of this study.
10. See chapter two for detailed illustration of this settlement pattern in Warri and its immediate environs and chapter three on how it was a factor in the origin of conflict in the local government system.
11. D.A. Tonwe, "Warri Crisis Survey Report – Itsekiri perspective" in *Conflict and Instability in the Niger Delta: The Warri case* edited by T.A. Imobighe, Celestine O. Bassey & J.B. Asuni (Ibadan: Spectrum Books, 2002), 204-211.
12. T. A. Imobighe, "Warri Crisis in Historical and Contemporary Perspectives" in *Conflict And Instability in the Niger Delta: The Warri Case* edited by T.A. Imobighe, Celestine O. Bassey & J.B. Asuni (Ibadan: Spectrum Books, 2002), 44.
13. Also see pages 219-222

14. Peter P. Ekeh, (ed.) *Warri City & British Colonial rule in western Niger Delta* (New York, Lagos: Published by Urhobo Historical Society, 2004), particularly chapters 8 & 9.
15. For Ayomike's figures see J. O. S. Ayomike, *The Ijaw in Warri: A Study in Ethnography* (Benin-city: Mayomi Publishers, 1990), XI; See Appendix IVA for P. C Lloyd data. Also see Peter P. Ekeh, "The Truth about Warri City: A Response to J. O. S Ayomike's Claims" in *Warri City & British Colonial rule in western Niger Delta* edited by Peter P. Ekeh(New York, Lagos: Published by Urhobo Historical Society, 2004).
16. T. A. Imobighe, "Warri Crisis in Historical and Contemporary Perspectives" in *Conflict And Instability in the Niger Delta: The Warri Case* edited by T.A. Imobighe, Celestine O. Bassey & J.B. Asuni (Ibadan: Spectrum Books, 2002), 39.
17. Geoffrey Umeh (ed.), *25 Years of Local Government Reforms and Democratization, 1976- 2001* (Lagos: Manson and Company Publishers, 2003), 531.
18. The *Orosuen*(King) of Okere-Urhobo, one of the two Urhobo clans in Warri, including its spokesman, were members of this family.
19. Examined in chapter 7.
20. For instance, in 2008 the Itsekiri acting through the then governor of Delta state Emmanuel Uduaghan, an Itsekiri, insisted that only Itsekiri language should be taught in Warri North Local Government. By 2012 this was extended to Warri South Local Government dominated by the Urhobo. But Warri South-West Local Government with the Ijaw as majority was excluded because of the violent approach of the Ijaw militant groups to such policies.

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Abollo, P. O.(Chief)	75	Ohonvworen of Agbarho, Ughelli South Local Government	Agbarho	Sept. 14, 2013
Adagbabin, Ese (Mrs)	50	Adult Education Supervisor, Ughelli North Local Government Council.	Ughelli	Aug. 20, 2014
Akpokere, M.O.	50	A Sailor and Warri based business man brought up among the Urhobo and Western Ijaw.	Warri	Aug. 15, 2014
Akporagbare, Ogheneochuko E	36	Clerical Officer, Office of the Chairman, Okpe Local Government Council, Orerokpe,	Orerokpe	Aug. 18, 2014.
Akporiaye, Dave	56	a councilor in Warri South Local Government Council representing Olodi/Okpeki ward in Okumagba Layout	Warri	Aug. 12, 2014.
Alibo, Frederick	75	Ex-councillor of Ughelli Local Government Council native of Ekakamre Town, Jeremi clan, Dec. 15, 2013	Ekakpamre	Dec. 15, 2013
Alphonsus, C. B. (Mrs)	55	Deputy Primary Health Care Co-ordinator, Ethiope West Local Government Council, Oghara	Oghara	Aug. 11, 2014
Borlokor, Solomon Terhere (San)	73	Legal practitioner, a member of Urhobo Social Club, ex-chairman of National Union of Usiefrun Indigenes, former Presidential aspirant in General Babangida transition to civil rule in 1993 election (under the umbrella of Movement for Nationalist Advancement (MONAD),	Lagos	Jan. 3, 2013
Dabur-Fuludu, Victor	51	Head of Community Relations and Protocol Department, NNPC, Warri	Warri	Aug. 18, 2014
Djoma, Evelyn (Mrs)	42	Senior Education Officer, Education Unit, Ugehlli South Local Government Council, Otu-Jeremi	Otu-Jeremi	Aug. 19, 2014
Dukuye, Charity (Miss)	31	Confidential Secretary to the Chairman, Ughelli south Local Government Council, Otu-Jeremi	Otu-Jeremi	Aug. 19, 2014
Eba, David	58	Native of Efuruntor, Ughelli South Local Government and Lagos based	Lagos	March 20, 2013

		businessman		
Ebisin, Eugene	55	Secretary, Warri South Local Government Council, Warri	Warri	March 3, 2014
Edafiekpakor E. Joy (Mrs)	35	Higher Environmental Health Officer, Environmental Unit, Okpe Local Government Council, Orerokpe	Orerokpe	Aug. 18, 2014
Enibe, T. (Mrs.)	78	A retired Headmistress of Ughelli North Local Government Primary School, Ughelli	Ughelli	March 16, 2012.
Gbakeji, Benson	54	ex-Chairman of Usiefrun town, Ughelli South Local Government	Usiefrun	Aug. 2, 2013
Ilavbare, J.W.S	80	Retired Secretary of Ughelli Local Government Council	Ughelli	Dec. 20, 2013
Iruoromobe, Helena (Mrs)	35	chief Clerical Officer, Chariman's Office, Okpe Local Government Council, Orerokpe	Orerokpe	Aug. 8, 2014
Ishicheli Blessing (Miss)	28	Immunization Officer, Otor-Udu Health Centre, Udu Local Government Area	Otor-Udu	Aug. 16, 2014
Ivwionikipiroro, Andrew	50	Head of Treasury Department, Udu Local Government Council, Otor-Udu	Otor-Udu	Aug 20, 2014.
Komuo, Joseph Rienbru	75	retired principal of Adadja Grammar School, Emadadja	Usiefrun	June 10, 2013
Kpemuekin, Friday	30	Clerical Officer to the Chairman, Ughelli South Local Government Council, Otu-Jeremi.	Otu-Jeremi	Aug 20, 2014.
Marere, Kpebo	85	<i>Odede</i> (Head) of the Ade Chieftaincy and Traditional Court of Justice, Otu-Jeremi, Jeremi Clan	Otu-Jeremi	June 6, 2012
Mordi, J. (Mrs)	57	Director of Nursing Services, Urban Primary Health Care, Sapele Local Government Council	Sapele	July 28, 2014
Mrakpo, James	80	Retired Chairman, Ughelli Local Government Council	Ughelli	Dec. 15, 2013
Obikoko, Frederick	70	former Secretary of Otor-Udu Town in Udu Clan	Otor-Udu	Dec. 16, 2013
Obofukoro, Daniel A	50	Principal Administrative Officer, Uvwie Local Government Council	Effurun	Aug. 2, 2014
Ogboru, Samson	86	Traditional Chief and former spokesman of Otu-Jeremi, Jeremi Clan	Otu-Jeremi	July 9, 2012
Oghroko, Benjamin	48	Administrative Officer, Ethiope West Local Government Council, Oghara,	Oghara	August 11, 2014.
Oharisi, Robert	80	Traditional Chief of Ughelli, Ovie's Palace, Otovwodo Street, Ughelli Town	Ughelli	Dec. 2, 2013
Ohre, Ochuko (Mrs)	47	Assistant Chief Nursing Officer, Isiokolo Primary Healthcare, Ethiope East Local Government Council	Isiokolo	Aug 26, 2014
Okoro, Raphael	51	Head of Education Unit, Udu Local	Otor-Udu	Aug. 19, 2014

(51)		Government Council, Otor-Udu		
Okotie Ejowhomu I	86	<i>Omosivie</i> (King) of Agbarho	Agbarho	June 12 2013
Okpibuluku, J.A.	80	Ex-MAMSER Officer and retired Secretary, Ughelli Local Government Council	Ughelli	October 15, 2012
Okumagba, Bright Onovughakpo	60	Secretary to the Royal Family Okere-Urhobo Kingdom, 56 Okumagba Avenue, Warri	Warri	Aug 13, 2014
Omodu, M.T. (Mrs)	45	Education Officer, Education Department, Uvbie Local Government Council, Effurun	Effurun	Aug 11, 2014
Onovughakpor, Osasa James	55	Chief Community Immunization Officer, Primary health Care Department, Okpe Local Government Council	Orerokpe	Aug 18, 2014
Onovwigho, Bevice (Mrs)	40	Principal Secretary to the Chairman, Ughelli North Local Government Council	Ughelli	Aug 20, 2014
Ovedje, Doris (Mrs)	39	Clerical Officer, Office of the Chairman, Udu Local Government Council, Otor-Udu	Otor-Udu	Aug 19, 2014
Yembra, Pauline O. (Mrs)	53	Head of Education and Sport Department, Sapele Local Government Council	Sapele	July 28, 2014

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APPENDIX I

URHOB0 POLITIES AND THEIR LOCATIONS IN LOCAL GOVERNMENT AREAS AS AT 1999

Nos.	Polity	Headquarters	L.G.A
1.	Agbarha-Ame	Otovwodo-Agbarha	Warri South
2.	Agarha-Otor	Agharha-Otor	Ughelli North
3.	Agbarho	Orho-Agbarho	Ughelli North
4.	Agbon	Isiokoro	Ethiope East
5.	Arhavwarien	Arhavwarien	Ughelli South
6.	Abraka	Oto-Abraka	Ethiope East
7.	Effuruntor	Effuruntor	Ughelli South
8.	Evwreni	Evwreni	Ughelli North
9.	Eghwu	Otorho-Eghwe	Ughelli South
10.	Idjerhe	Idjerhe	Ethiope West
11.	Oghara	Ogharefe	Ethiope West
12.	Ogor	Otogor	Ughelli North
13.	Okere-Urhobo	Okere	Warri South
14.	Okparabe	Okparabe	Ughelli South
15.	Okpe	Orerokpe	Okpe and Sapele
16.	Olomu	Otorere-Olomu	Ughelli South
17.	Orogun	Orogun	Ughelli North
18.	Udu	Otor-Udu	Udu
19.	Ughele	Otovwodo	Ughelli North
20.	Ughievwen	Otughievwien	Ughelli South
21.	Ughwerun	Otughweru	Ughelli North
22.	Uvwie	Effurun	Uvwie

Source: (a) Authors personal fieldwork (b)Onigu Otite (ed), *The Urhobo People* (Ibadan: Chaneson C. I. Ltd, 2003), 348

APPENDIX IIA

POPULATION OF THE URHOBO BY INDIVIDUAL CLAN (1963 CENSUS)

EASTERN URHOBO

Clan	Population
Agbarha	9,346
Agbarho	14,925
Arhavwarien	1,526
Effuruntor	847
Evwreni	7,869
Evu	22,737
Jeremi (Ughienvwe)	39,616
Ogor	5,715
Okparabe	1,709
Olomu	13,372
Orogun	19,372
Ughelli	21,904
Uwherun	12,998

APPENDIX IIB
POPULATION OF THE URHOBO BY INDIVIDUAL CLAN (1963 CENSUS)
WESTERN URHOBO

Abraka	20,106
Agbassa (Agbara-Ame)
Agbon	62,064
Idjerhe	24,880
Oghara	27,559
Okere (Urhobo)
Okpe	79,519
Udu	31,287
Uvwie	13,413

Source: Bendel Bulletin, No. 16, July –September, 1976.

APPENDIX III

SOME PARTICULARS ABOUT URHOB0 SOCIO-POLITICAL UNITS

Polity	Capital	Title of Head	Other titles/age Grade Leaders	Population		
				1931	1952	1963
AGBARHA-AME	Otovwodo Agbarha	<i>Ovie</i>	Otota Olotu Oghwuvwie Akaroho Olowu-Edie	-	-	-
AGBARHA-OTO	Agbarha-Oto	<i>Ovie</i>	Ohovworen, Otota, Olotu Iyasere, Izomo, Okpako	4,400	-	9,346
AGBARHO	Orho-Agbarho	<i>Osuiwie</i>	Ohovworen. Otota, Olotu, Okpako	6,647	7,839	14,925
AGBON	Agbon-Isiokoro	<i>Ovie</i>	Otota, Ohovworen, Okakuro, Okpako, Olotu	28,400	30,675	62,064
ARHAV-WARIEN	Arhvwarien	<i>Ovie</i>	Otota, Okpako, Olotu	941	1,173	1,526
ABRAKA	Otorho-Abraka	<i>Ovie</i>	Ohovworen, Otota, Okpako, Olotu	-	11,158	20,106
EFFURUN-OTO	Effurun-Oto	<i>Ovie</i> (<i>Orovworere</i>)	Okpako, Olotu, Otota	-	517	847
EVWRENI	Evwreni	<i>Ovie</i>	Odion (Okpako) Otota, Olotu	3,036	3,116	7,869
EGHWU (EWU)	Otorho-Eghwu	<i>Ovie</i>	Ohovworen. Odion (Okpako) Otota, Olotu	9,601	11,480	22,737
IDJERHE	Idjerhe	<i>Ovie</i>	Okakuro, Odion, (Okpako) Otota, Olotu	7,000	16,084	24,880
OGHARA	Ogharafe/Oghareki	<i>Ovie</i>	Okakuro, Otota, Olotu, Okawudo Iyasere Unugbrogodo	8,367	17,359	27,559
OGOR	Otogor	<i>Ovie</i>	Ohovworen, Otota, Iyasere, Izomo, Okpako, Olotu	1,800	-	5,715
OKERE	Okere	<i>Ovie</i>	Otota, Okpako	-	-	-
OKPARABE	Okparabe	<i>Ovie</i>	Okpako, Otota, Olotu	800	1,304	1,701
OKPE	Orerokpe	<i>Orodje</i>	Otota, Okakuro, Olotu	11,588	29,638	79,519
OLOMU	Otorere-Olomu	<i>Ovie</i> (<i>Ohworode</i>)	Ohovworen, Okarevwo, Otota, Olotu	7,000	8277	13,345
OROGUN	Orogun	<i>Okpara-Uku</i>	Okpara, Onotu-Uku, Onotu,	-	10,923	19,372

			(Olotu) Otota			
UDU	Ot'udu	<i>Ovie</i>	Echagbo, Oghwuvwie (Oletu or Olowu) Oghwuvwie, Odede	14,087	16,922	31,287
UGHELE	Otovwodo	<i>Ovie</i>	Ohovworen, Otota, Iyasere, Izomo, Okpako, Olotu	5,400	17,719	21,904
UGHIEVWEN	Otu'ughievwen	<i>Okobaro</i>	Okpako, Otota, Akpile, Odede	15,520	20,207	39,616
UGHWERUN	Ot'ughwerun	<i>Odio-Ode (Ovie)</i>	Odion, Otola, Olotu Odiotu	4,873 (7,389)	8,328	12,998
UVWIE	Ephron	<i>Ovie</i>	Ohovworen, Otuokpa, Otota, Olotu, Onuevwo	4,666	5,976	13,413

Source: Onigu Otite, *The Urhobo People*, 2003, 328; and author's personal fieldwork

APPENDIX IVA

POPULATION OF WARRI BY ETHNIC GROUPS (1952 CENSUS)

Ethnic Group	Population	Percentage
Urhobo	8,550	38%
Ibo	6,300	28%
Itsekiri	2,700	15%
Others	4,275	19%
Total	22,500	100%

Source: P.C. Lloyd, 1974

APPENDIX IVB

PROPERTY OWNING (PERCENTAGES OF VALUE) IN WARRI (1952)

Area	Development	Itsekiri	Urhobo	Other	Total	Total value	
						£	
Ogbe Ijoh	Since 1910* 28	50		22		100	80,000
Old Alders Town	Since 1925	64		30	6	100	141,000
Now Alders Town	Since 1935	47		49	4	100	115,000
Old Agbassa	Since Foundation	7		92	1	100	94,000
New Agbassa	Since 1945	7		63	29	100	164,000
Okere (Itsekiri)	Since Foundation	99		0	1	100	102,000
Total							696,000

**E.g. "since 1910" means houses built in the area between 1910 and 1952*

Source: P.C. Lloyd, 1974

APPENDIX IVC

OCCUPATION OF EMPLOYEES IN WARRI (IN PERCENTAGES) (1955)

	Itsekiri	Urhobo	Ibo	Others	Total
Public Service: clerical	10	31	33	27	100
manualworkers	10	36	31	23	100
Firms: clerical	11	37	28	22	100
manual workers	9	29	42	19	100

Source: P.C. Lloyd, 1974

APPENDIX IVD

**CLASSIFICATION OF INCOME GROUPS BY ETHNIC GROUP IN
PERCENTAGES(WARRI 1955)**

Income Group	Itsekiri	Urhobo	Ibo	Others	Total
Over £300 p.a.	14	27	22	37	100
£150- £300 p.a.	10	27	30	33	100
£70- £150 p.a.	9	29	39	23	100
Below £70 p.a.	10	39	34	18	100

APPENDIX IVE

**OCCUPATION OF SELF-EMPLOYED PERSONS IN WARRI (1955)
(PERCENTAGE)**

	Itsekiri	Urhobo	Ibo	Others	Total
Craftsmen	6	36	40	18	100
Traders	10	62	22	6	100
Others (Professionals, Retired, etc.)	14	45	24	17	100
Truckpushers	7	12	77	5	100
Jobbers (casual labourers)	18	46	27	9	100

Source: P.C. Lloyd, 1974

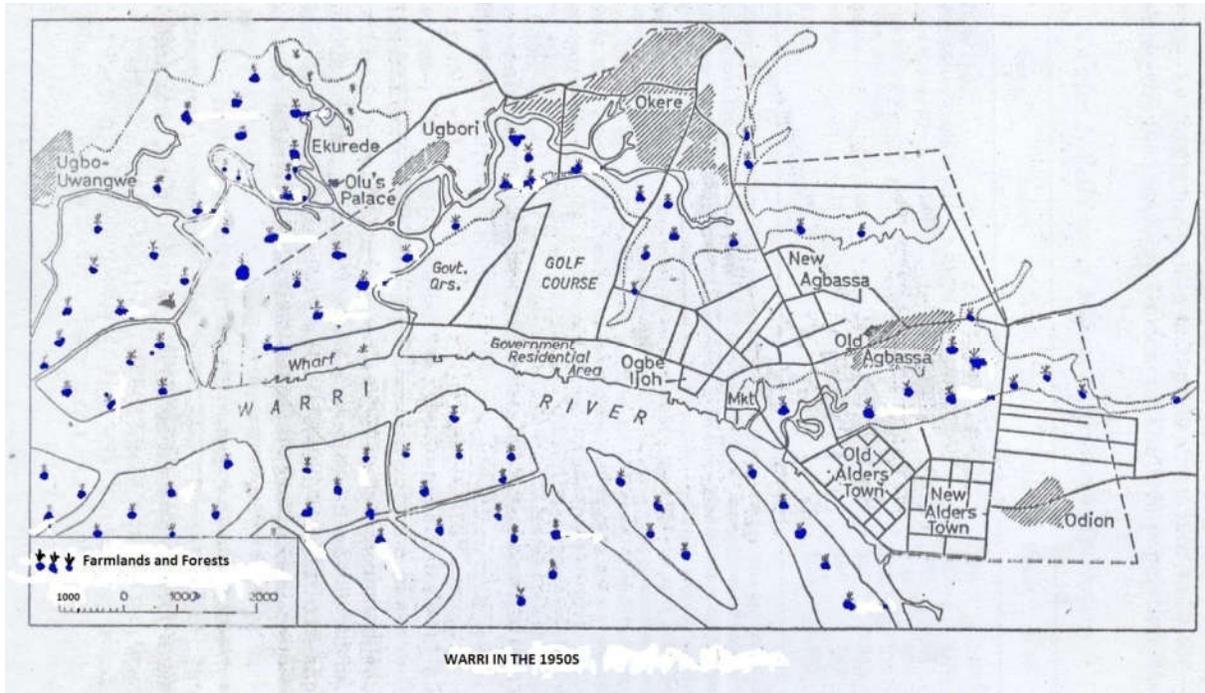
APPENDIX IVF

RESIDENCE OF SELF-EMPLOYED PERSONS IN WARRI, 1952(PERCENTAGES)

Area	Itsekiri	Urhobo	Ibo	Others	Total %
Ogbe Ijoh	12	40	30	22	100
Old Alders Town	11	26	53	11	100
New Alders Town	14	56	22	8	100
Old Agbassa	7	53	25	15	100
New Agbassa	6	45	37	14	100
Okere	27	27	36	9	100
Odion	12	71	14	4	100

Source: P.C. Lloyd, "ethnicity and the structure of inequality in a Nigerian Town in the Mid-1950s" in *Urban Ethnicity* edited by Abner Cohen (London, New York: Tavistock Publications, 1974), pages 233-238

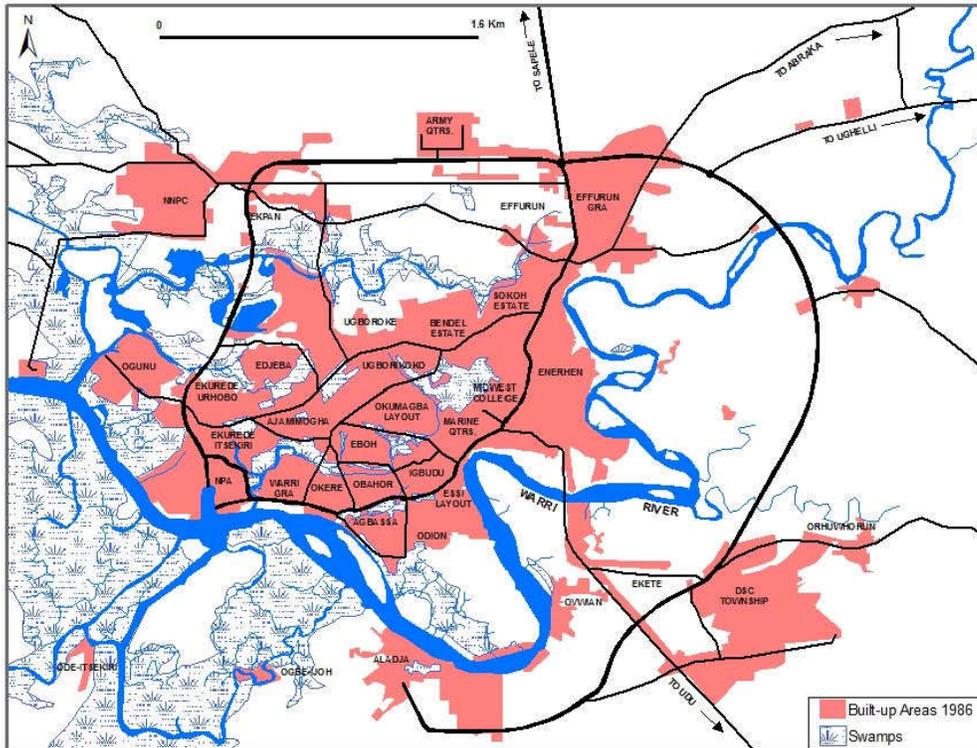
APPENDIX IVG: WARRI TOWN IN THE 1950S



Source: P.C. Lloyd, "ethnicity and the structure of inequality in a Nigerian Town in the Mid-1950s" in *Urban Ethnicity* edited by Abner Cohen (London, New York: Tavistock Publications, 1974), pages 233-238

APPENDIX IVH: EFFURUN-WARRI METROPOLITAN AREA IN THE 1980S

A Map of Effurun-Warri Metropolitan Area, 1986



Map drawn by Professor Francis Odemerho, Southern Illinois University, Edwardsville, USA

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APPENDIX V

Participation in the 1976 Local Government Election in Bendel State by Local Government

Area

Local Government Area	1976 Estimated Population	1963 Population	Total Votes Cast	As % of 1976 population	As % of 1963 population
Aboh	247,807	178,154	51,513	20.79	28.91
Akoko-Edo	156,047	112,186	20,678	13.30	18.43
Aniocha	250,575	180,144	68,360	27.28	37.95
Eastern Benin	246,782	177,417	54,807	22.21	30.89
Eastern Urhobo	239,109	171,901	49,457	20.68	28.77
Estako	187,969	135,135	74,132	39.44	54.86
Ika	188,969	135,854	46,336	24.52	34.11
Ishan	376,818	270,903	108,647	28.83	40.11
Isoko	186,608	134,157	41,152	22.05	30.67
Owan	126,379	90,857	27,498	21.76	30.27
Warri	201,774	145,060	43,240	21.43	29.81
Western Benin	351,206	252,490	81,944	23.33	32.45
Western Ijaw	322,352	231,746	35,410	10.98	15.28
Western Urhobo	444,881	319,835	66,833	15.02	20.90
Total	3,527,276	2,535,839	780,007	22.11	30.76

Sources: *Quarterly Abstract of Statistics* (1st Quarter, January to March 1976) p. 4, Ministry of Economic Development, Statistics Division, Benin-City; & *Circulars on the 1976/77 Local Government Elections in Bendel State*, Ministry of Local Government and Chieftaincy Affairs, Benin-City.

APPENDIX VI

Programme for the 1976 Local Government Elections in Bendel State

September 22, 1976 – Notification in the State Gazette of the period of registration of voters

September 30 – October 14, 1976-Registration of voters in all the registration centres in the State. Registration notices to be placed in various wards by registration officers stipulating the Form A will be received in the registration offices.

October 15-24, 1976 – Publication of the preliminary list of voters.

October 25-November 3, 1976 – Hearing of objections on the preliminary list of voters.

November 17, 1976 – Compilation of the final list of voters to be completed at the latest.

November 18, 1976 – Submission of the register of voters to Electoral Officers.

December 1, 1976 – Official announcement of the day of election.

December 1 – 11, 1976 – Nomination of candidates.

December 16, 1976 – Publication at the Local Government headquarters by the electoral officers of the names of candidates.

December 22, 1976 – Publication in the wards by the electoral officers of the names of candidates.

December 28, 1976 – Election Day.

December 28 – 30, 1976 – Counting of votes.

December 31, 1976 – Publication of the list of successful candidates.

Source:*Maiden Annual Report of the Local Government Service Board, 1st April, 1977 to 31st March 1978* (Official Document No. 11 of 1978, Benin-City).

APPENDIX VII

Sources of Bendel State Local Government Revenue 1976/77-1983

Year	Federal Grants ₦	%	State Grants ₦	%	Internally Generated Revenue ₦	%	Total
1976/77	1,494,086	30.9	1,535,556	31.7	1,809,951	37.4	4,839,593
1977/78	12,551,810	39.7	16,050,591	50.7	3,052,417	9.6	31,654,818
1978/79	6,912,573	34.4	9,283,704	46.2	3,912,968	19.4	20,109,245
1979/80	14,655,960	64.2	2,600,000	11.4	5,567,734	24.4	22,823,694
1980	14,412,195	73.7	1,950,001	10.0	3,184,101	16.3	19,546,297
1981	45,356,831	90.3	670,201	1.4	4,186,415	8.3	50,213,447
1982	55,987,023	92.2	-	-	4,754,103	7.8	60,741,126
1983	42,300,210	91.7	-	-	3,039,412	8.3	46,139,622

Source: *Digest of Finance Statistics in Bendel State No. 4*, Ministry of Finance and Economic Planning, Statistics Office, Benin-City, 1987.

APPENDIX VIII: Number of Towns and Villages in the Mid-Western State by Local Government Area (Including Size of Local Government Area)

Local Government	Area in Square Mile	Area in Square Km	No. of Towns/Villages
Aboh	1,325	2,133	240
Akoko Edo	505	813	41
Aniocha	805	1,296	115
Eastern Benin	1,693	2,726	166
Eastern Urhobo	640	1,030	179
Etsako	1,046	1,684	92
Ika	345	555	52
Ishan	1,064	1,713	987
Isoko	435	700	74
Owan	720	1,159	61
Warri	1,520	2,624	196
Western Benin	2,472	3,980	539
Western Ijaw	1,764	2,440	77
Western Urhobo	808	1,301	357

Source: *Quarterly Abstract of Statistics, 1st Quarter, Jan – March, 1976* (Benin-City: Ministry of Economic Development, Statistics Division), 31; *Bendel State Digest of Local Government Statistics, Number 1* (Benin-City: Ministry of Finance and Economic Planning, Statistics Office, 1985),34-35

APPENDIX IX

HEALTH INSTITUTIONS OWNED BY EACH LOCAL GOVERNMENT COUNCIL IN URHOBOLAND BY 1999

Ethiope East Local Government Council, Isiokolo

1. Abraka Primary Healthcare, Abraka
2. Isiokolo Primary Healthcare, Isiokolo
3. Kokori Primary Healthcare, Kokori
4. Okpara Primary Healthcare, Okpara
5. Okurekpe I Primary Healthcare, Okurekpe
6. Okurekpe II Primary Healthcare, Okurekpe
7. Orhia Primary Healthcare, Orhia
8. Orono Primary Healthcare, Orono
9. Ovorie Primary Healthcare, Ovorie
10. Ovun Primary Healthcare, Ovun
11. Samagidi Primary Healthcare, Samagidi
12. Urhovie Primary Healthcare, Urhovie
13. Urhwokpe Primary Healthcare, Urhwokpe

OTHERS, i.e. established after 1999

Igun Primary Healthcare, Igun

Orokpo Primary Healthcare, Orokpo

Compiled by: Mrs. Ochuko Ohre, Assistant Chief Nursing Officer, Isiokolo Primary Healthcare

Ethiope West Local Government Council, Oghara

1. Ejenesa Health Centre, Ejenesa
2. Ijomi Health Centre, Ijomi
3. Irhodo Model Health Centre, Irhodo
4. Jesse Health Centre, Jesse
5. Mosogar Health Centre, Mosogar
6. Ogharefe Health Centre, Ogharefe
7. Oghareki Health Centre, Oghareki
8. Oghareki Model Health Centre, Oghareki
9. Onyobru Health Centre, Onyobru
10. Otefe Health Centre, Otefe
11. Ovade Health Centre, Ovade
12. Ugbokpan Health Centre, Ugbokpan

OTHERS

Boboroku Health Centre, Boboroku

Ekroda Health Centre, Ekroda

Ugbenu Health Centre, Ugbenu

Compiled by: Benjamin Oghroko (Admin Officer) and Mrs. C.B. Alphonsus, Deputy Primary Health Education coordinator, Ethiopie West Local Government Council, Oghara

Sapele Local Government Council, Sapele

1. Adagbrassa Primary Healthcare, Adagbrassa
2. Amiemiedi Primary Healthcare, Amiemiedi
3. Amukpe Primary Healthcare, Amukpe
4. Gana Primary Healthcare, Gana
5. Ibadan Elume Primary Healthcare, Elume
6. Okuoke Primary Healthcare, Okuoke
7. Okuovu Primary Healthcare, Okuovu
8. Ugbore Primary Healthcare, Ugbore
9. Urban Health Centre, Orhorho

Compiled by: Mrs. J. Mordi, Director of Nursing Service & Miss O. Owe, Assistant Director of Nursing Service, Urban Health Centre, Orhorho

Okpe Local Government Council, Okpe

1. Primary Healthcare (PHC), Oha
2. Primary Healthcare (PHC), Okuokoko
3. Primary Healthcare (PHC), Osubi
4. Primary Healthcare (PHC), Adeje
5. Primary Healthcare (PHC), Amuokpokpo
6. Primary Healthcare (PHC), Jeddo
7. Primary Healthcare (PHC), Okuabude
8. Primary Healthcare (PHC), Orerokpe
9. Primary Healthcare (PHC), Ugbokodo
10. Primary Healthcare (PHC), Ughoton
11. Primary Healthcare (PHC), Ovirri-Okpe
12. Primary Healthcare (PHC), Adagbrassa
13. Primary Healthcare (PHC), Aghalokpe
14. Primary Healthcare (PHC), Aragba

OTHERS

Primary Healthcare (PHC), Egborode
Primary Healthcare (PHC), Ewriyen
Primary Healthcare (PHC), Jakpa-Mereje

Compiled by: Osasa James Onovughakpor, Chief Community Mobilization Officer (CCMO), PHC Department, Okpe Local Government Council, Orerokpe.

Udu Local Government Council, Otor-Udu

1. Aladja Health Centre, Aladja
2. Eginni Health Centre, Eginni
3. Eket Health Centre, Eket
4. Emadadja Health Centre, Emadadja
5. Health-Post Health Centre, Health-Post
6. Ogbe-Udu Health Centre, Ogbe-Udu
7. Opete Health Centre, Opete
8. Otor-Udu Health Centre, Otor-Udu
9. Ovwian Health Centre, Ovwian
10. Owhrode Health Centre, Owhrode
11. Ubogo Health Centre, Ubogo
12. Ujevwu Health Centre, Ujevwu

OTHERS

- Oghior Health Centre, Oghior
Orhowhurun Health Centre, Orhowhurun

Compiled by: Blessing Ishicheli (Miss), Health Immunization Officer, Otor-Udu Health Centre

Ughelli South Local Government Council, Otu-Jeremy

1. Arawvarien Primary Healthcare, Aravwarien
2. Edjophe Primary Healthcare, Edjovwe
3. Effurun-Otor Primary Healthcare, Effurun-Otor
4. Egbo-Ideh Primary Healthcare, Egbo-Ideh
5. Egbo-Uhurie Primary Healthcare, Egbo
6. Ekakpamre Primary Healthcare, Ekakpamre
7. Ekrokpe Primary Healthcare, Ekrokpe
8. Esaba Health Post, Esaba
9. Ewu Primary Healthcare, Ewu
10. Eyara Primary Healthcare, Eyara
11. Frukama Health Post, Frukama
12. Gbaregolor Primary Healthcare, Gbaregolor
13. Oginibo Primary Healthcare, Oginibo
14. Okpare Primary Health Care, Okpare
15. Okwagbe Primary Healthcare, Okwagbe
16. Orere Health Post, Orere
17. Otokutu Primary Healthcare, Otokutu
18. Otorere Primary Healthcare, Otorere
19. Otu-Jeremi Primary Healthcare, Otu-Jeremi
20. Oviri Primary Healthcare, Oviri
21. Ovwahwa Primary Healthcare, Ovwahwa
22. Ovworigbala Primary Healthcare, Ovworigbala

OTHERS

Okparabe Primary Healthcare, Okparabe
Ughevwighe Primary Healthcare, Ughevwighe
Umolo Health Post, Umolo
Usiefrun Primary Healthcare, Usiefrun

Compiled by: Mrs. Uhawhe Eunice, Health Information Officer, Ughelli South Local Government Council Otu-Jeremi

Uvwie Local Government Council, Effurun

1. Alaka Health Centre, Alaka
2. Ebrumede Health Centre, Ebrumede
3. Ekpan I Health Centre, Ekpan
4. Ekpan II Health Centre, Ekpan
5. Enerhen I Health Centre, Enerhen
6. Enerhen II Health Centre, Enerhen
7. Ohorhe Health Centre, Ohorhe
8. Ugbolokposo Health Centre, Ugbolokposo
9. Ugbomro Health Centre, Ugbomro
10. Ugborikoko Health Centre, Ugborikoko
11. Urumharho Health Centre, Urumharho

OTHERS

Ugboroke Health Centre, Ugboroke

Compiled by: Daniel A. Obofukoro, Principal Administrative Officer, Uvwie Local Government Council, Effurun.

Warri South Local Government Council, Warri

- (1) Ajamogha Primary Healthcare
- (2) Edjeba Primary Healthcare
- (3) Ekurede-Urhobo Primary Healthcare
- (4) Iffie Primary Healthcare
- (5) Igbudu Primary Healthcare
- (6) Ode-Itsekiri Primary Healthcare
- (7) Ogonu Primary Healthcare
- (8) Pessu Primary Healthcare
- (9) Ubeji Primary Healthcare
- (10) Ugbwangue Primary Healthcare
- (11) Ukpokiti Primary Healthcare
- (12) Urban Primary Healthcare

OTHERS

Central Primary Health Care

Eboh Primary Health Care

Compiled by: Mary Fregene (Mrs) Immunization Officer, Urban Primary Health Care, Warri.

Ughelli North Local Government Council, Ughelli

1. Agbarhotor Health Centre, Agbarhotor
2. Agbarho Health Centre, Agbarho
3. Eruemukowharien Health Centre, Eruemukowharien
4. Etsugbo Health Centre, Etsugbo
5. Evwreni Health Centre, Evwreni
6. Oviri-Olomu Health Centre, Oviri-Olomu
7. Ughelli Health Centre, Ughelli
8. Uwherun Health Centre, Uwherun

Source: Notes on Primary Healthcare, Ughelli Health Centre, Ughelli

APPENDIX X: Capital Expenditure on Economic Sector by Local Government Authorities in Bendel State, 1977-1981 (in Naira)

Local Government Area	Cost of Market Stalls	Cost of Motor Parks	Cost of Abattoirs	Cost of other Infrastructural Projects	Total Cost in Naira
Agbazilo	1,001,861	260,000	---	865,000	2,126,861
Akoko-Edo	244,728	18,000	---	600,950	863,678
Aniocha	496,250	180,000	66,000	1,445,000	2,187,250
Bomadi	209,800	150,000	---	535,000	894,800
Burutu	434,700	---	8,925	---	443,625
Ethiope	1,332,220	163,910	213,000	520,000	2,229,130
Etsako	170,790	70,000	---	849,950	1,090,740
Ika	892,510	245,470	---	---	1,137,980
Isoko	348,274	330,300	---	1,350,000	2,028,574
Ndokwa	1,272,235	117,636	20,000	849,950	2,259,821
Okpe	398,950	384,596	102,490	520,000	1,406,036
Okpebho	199,060	287,500	11,400	---	497,960
Oredo	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Orhionmwon	729,600	68,857	3,000	1,135,000	1,936,457
Oshimili	77,560	38,208	11,223	---	126,991
Ovia	278,415	60,340	---	849,950	1,188,705
Owan	125,771	41,600	---	1,048,000	1,215,371
Ughelli	533,620	237,694	---	---	771,314
Warri	1,248,000	78,000	29000	---	1,355,000

Source: *Bendel State Digest of Local Government Statistics, Number 1* (Benin-City: Ministry of Finance and Economic Planning, Statistics Office, 1985), 37

**APPENDIX XI: Health Institutions Owned by Individual Local Government Authorities in
the Mid-Western State 1967-1971**

Local Government	1967	1967	1968	1968	1969	1969	1970	1970	1971	1971
	M	D	M	D	M	D	M	D	M	D
Aboh	9	17	10	17	10	19	10	19	10	19
Akoko Edo	9	10	9	10	9	10	9	10	9	10
Aniocha	8	22	8	20	8	20	8	20	8	20
E/Benin	13	18	13	18	13	18	15	20	16	20
E/Urhobo	6	7	6	7	6	7	7	7	7	7
Etsako	9	15	9	15	9	15	10	15	10	15
Ika	7	14	7	14	9	14	9	14	9	14
Ishan	17	25	17	25	19	25	19	25	19	25
Isoko	2	7	2	8	2	8	2	8	3	8
Owan	6	9	6	10	6	11	6	11	6	11
Warri	5	11	5	11	5	11	5	11	5	11
W/Benin	10	11	10	11	10	11	10	11	13	16
W/Ijaw	7	13	7	13	7	13	8	13	7	13
W/Urhobo	4	9	4	9	4	9	4	9	4	9
Total	112	188	113	188	117	191	122	193	126	198

M—Maternity D—Dispensary E/—Eastern W/—Western

Source: *Mid-Western State of Nigeria Abstract of Statistics*, (Benin-City: Ministry of Economic Development, Statistics Division, 1976), 51

**APPENDIX XII:- UVWIE LOCAL GOVERNMENT: CONSTITUTED COUNCILS,
1996-2012**

NATURE OF COUNCIL	HEAD/CHAIRMAN	DATE IN OFFICE
Sole Administrator	Sir F.E. Atomatofa	March 1996-March 1997
Elected	Hon. Friday Ani(1 st Executive Chairman)	March 1997-July 1998
Sole Administrator	Mr Cletus N. Nwaodwa	July 1998-Jan. 1999
Caretaker Committee	Mr. Sheddy Agbagbara	Jan. 7-May 29, 1999
Elected	Hon. J.W. Ashubu	May 1999-May 2002
Caretaker Committee	Hon. Solomon Ighrakpata	June 2002-May 2003
Caretaker Committee	Hon. Peter Abugewa	June-Dec. 2003
Elected	Hon. (Mrs.) E.Oboro Ojakovo	Dec.2003-Oct. 2007
Transition Committee	Dr. Robert Ejifoma	Oct. 2007-May2008
Elected	Hon. Peter Abugewa	May 2008-May 2011
Acting Committee	Sir COMR. Olumani O. Oyibo	May 2011-April 2012
Acting Committee	Barr Emmanuel I. Erhisere	April -Nov. 2012
Transition Committee	Hon. Bright Edejewhro	Nov. 2012 till date

Source: *Uvwie Local Government Leaders*, Compiled by NYSC and SERVICOM Unit, Uvwie Local Government Council, Effurun, 2013.