

# Perspectives on Cultural and National Development as Reflected in Two Igbo Poems

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## Abstract

*Some of the challenges of development in Nigeria are leadership and citizenship based. Much has been written on national development and leadership in literature in English, especially by Nigerian writers, but very little and inadequate attention has been paid to the issues by writers employing Igbo language medium. This study examines the question of national development by two Igbo poets with a view to identify the attributes of a good citizen, the portrayal of leadership, and the literary style used to buttress the claims. Two poems - Maduekwe's "Ezi onye obodo" and Ekechukwu's "Obodo anyi" - purposively selected from Akpa Uche: an anthology of Igbo poems (Ekechukwu, 1979) are used as samples for the analysis with guidance from the theory of inference and implication. The study shows that much is expected from both the citizens and leaders (for instance in "Ezi onye obodo", Maduekwe uses simple language and repetition to depict the citizen as one who is rich in African culture exemplified in the promotion of green environment and peace, which is a forerunner of national development. Other needed virtues are respect for the rule of law, restraining from spreading fake news, and tampering with public funds. All of these engender unity and progress in the polity. Also in "Obodo anyi", Ekechukwu employs mainly proverbs, idioms, and symbols to subtly depict Nigerian leaders as inept, wasteful, and uncultured. These attitudes result in poverty despite the rich natural endowments of the land). The paper, therefore, concludes that the attainment of national unity and progress is the outcome of a mutual sacrifice consciously undertaken by cultured citizens and leaders.*

**Keywords:** *Igbo poetry, good citizen, inept leaders, Nigeria, national development*

## **Introduction**

Contemporary African poetry has been utilised to express different feelings such as love, culture, nature, religion, politics, amongst others; however, politics seems to be a major preoccupation of many contemporary African poets. This is to be expected as writers often reflect their environment in their works. The prevailing social and political condition at the time is usually exploited as theme. Onuigbo (2006:1) states that,

poetry represents a poet's insight, perception or vision of people and of society through a careful, conscious and deliberate presentation of the figurative language.

To African writers, art is not for art's sake; there is always a purpose for every work of art. Achebe (1975: 19) avers that,

art is, and was always in the service of man. Our ancestors created their myth and legends and told their stories for a human purpose (including, no doubt, the excitement of wonder and pure delight); they made their sculptures in wood and terracotta, stone and bronze to serve the needs of their times. Their artists lived and moved and had their being in society, and created their works for the good of that society.

Art is not for aesthetics or a piece of work meant to delight the senses alone; art is targeted at serving a particular purpose in life. In literature, the purpose of art may be to: showcase leadership failure, expose corruption among leaders/citizens and the quest for power among politicians, show military adventure into politics, etc. Citizens are daily grappling with existential needs occasioned mainly by gross mismanagement of resources by those entrusted with power. It is undisputed that the success or failure of any society largely depends on the quality of its leadership. Good leadership is seen as a precursor to national development and transformation; and bad leadership is reflected in political upheavals, mass unrest and poverty, unemployment, and insecurity of life and property. A positive economic development puts the state in a pole position to cater for the interests and welfare of the entire citizenry. It means that there is a dynamic bureaucracy that guarantees smooth running of

government administrative machinery, infrastructure and social amenities such as power and good roads to drive the business of the private sector. Others include provision of hospitals to take care of the health of citizens, good academic institutions that groom both present and future work force, jobs for skilled and qualified people, and a robust national and international trade. Not least in this list is making requisite investments in security and ensuring a selfless political class that works for the interest of all with no prejudice to any ethnic group, social class, or religious group. In such a state where poverty is alleviated or reduced to a minimum, there is bound to be peace; youth restiveness and protests that characterizes a failed and backward state may be outrightly inexistent and there will be social cohesion and harmony that further entrenches, advances, and sustains already achieved goals. As a result, contemporary African poetry is heavily concerned with socio-political matters that affect the life of the masses. Contemporary African writers such as Soyinka, Rubadiri, Ngugi, Brutus are driven by the quest, not just to express their creative energies, but to bring about change desired by the people. Igbo literary writers that write in the Igbo language medium, such as Nzeako, Akoma, Ubesie, Ogunjiofor, have maintained the tradition of spreading their concerns to cover the Igbo experience with respect to culture, natural phenomenon, the beauty of nature, philosophy etc.; however, they have also traversed the space of politics to expose the nuanced realities of life in their societies.

Premised on the above construct, this paper aims at examining the roles citizens and leaders play in a society towards the economic development of the state, as reflected in the poems of two writers in the Igbo medium. The poets are J.C Maduekwe and R.M Ekechukwu.

It is noteworthy that little or nothing has been done by researchers on the subject of politics as reflected in poems written in Igbo. As a result, the literature review will be based on studies carried out by researchers on politics as seen in poems written in English. Okon (2013) examined modern African poetry as written by several African poets from East, West, and South African regions. One of the poets examined is Kwesi Brew, a renowned Ghanaian poet. In Kwesi's "A Plea for Mercy", the poet addresses the politician who, after gaining political power, dashed the hopes and dreams of his people after having promised them so much. Okon's treatment of Okigbo, was based on the political situation of his time

in Africa. Precisely, soon after Nigeria's independence, the political crisis that ensued provided the foundation for many of Okigbo's poems. In the poem, "Lament of the Silent Sisters II", in *Labyrinths*, Okigbo (1979) condemns the political chaos in Africa and uses the Congo crisis to illustrate the state of the African continent which he described as 'this shadow of carrion'. The analysis of Okot p'Bitek's poem by Okon (2013) shows concern for the welfare of the suffering citizens in his "Song of Lawino". He uses Lawino to showcase the irresponsibility of the political leaders whom he describes as 'pythons of sickness' that swallow children, and 'buffaloes of poverty' that trample on the mass poor. Okon (2013) sees the leaders as oppressive and mindless of the plight of the masses; such symbolic metaphors as "python" and "buffaloes" are used to depict them as dangerous predators who trod on the peoples interest with a reckless abandon and impunity.

Akingbe (2014) examined contemporary Nigerian poets who used satire to address the country's social and political problems to expose the disease killing their society. One of the poets that made this exposure through his work is Odi Ofeimun in his poem "The Poet Lied", Ofeimun used this satire to overtly indict and lampoon the military administration for being incapable of managing waste disposal. He personified the streets as grunting under rank garbage, 'under the weight of decay, of night soil' which he saw as worse than ever, 'more than ever before'. The picture painted by Ofeimun is that the country is worst now despite all the hope of a better life promised by the soldiers. The question is, if they could not do something as simple as refuse disposal, what can they really do in terms of economic management. Thus the poem views the military rulers as deceptive and unreliable.

Awuzie and Okiche (2017) evaluate the causes of corruption among Nigerian politicians through the vista of Chukwuma Ibezute's poetry. One of Ibezute's poems titled "Cries of the Downtrodden" is a collection of poems about the abject condition of life of Africans who are challenged by exploitation in the hands of oppressive and corrupt politicians. In one of the poems titled "Songs of October" the persona questions Nigeria's independence and the corrupt and greedy lifestyle of her politicians, who are not interested in the welfare of the common man. In the poem, the politicians are exposed as greedy people who are only interested in the proceeds from oil "liquid gold" instead of utilizing the resource for the common good. Their only

quest is to pillage the commonwealth exemplified as “national cake” for themselves alone and not for the masses. In another poem titled “The Voters Burden”, the persona chronicles the myriads of bogus promises made by corrupt politicians during political campaigns just to woo voters, described as ‘his million promises to repair and rebuild’ and ‘with promise of life in abundance for all citizens’. The poem reveals that these are empty promises and that the sole interest of politicians is to assume power, and once they do, they forget the masses that voted them into power.

In this review, the common man is seen as downtrodden and impoverished as a direct consequence of mismanagement or embezzlement of resources by corrupt leaders. In the present study, attention will be focused on how the common man is seen in Igbo society, as well as the image of leaders in contemporary Nigerian society.

### **Method**

Two poems written by two different Igbo poets in the Igbo language medium were purposively sampled from the Anthology of modern Igbo verse edited by Ekechukwu (1979). These poems are “Ezi onye obodo” written by Maduekwe, and “Obodo Anyi” written by Ekechukwu. Both poems are classified under poems on politics and society in the anthology containing a total of seven poems. The reason for the choice of the two poems is because they are both on the same subject of socio-politics but with varied foci concerning the subject matter. Maduekwe’s “Ezo onye obodo is a poem of five stanzas of equal lines, while Ekechukwu’s poem “Obodo anyi” consists of four stanzas of equal lines. Each poem will be analysed systematically based on the content; the analysis will follow the sequence of ideas from the introductory stanza to the concluding stanza. Inference and implication are analytical tools used to relate the poets’ submissions to concrete realities. For instance, if a subject P wins a lottery, then P is happy. If a subject Q fails an examination, then Q is sad. Inference and implication will be utilized in this study, based on the poets’ choice of words in the two poems.

### **Data and analysis**

In this section, the two poems will be presented and analysed. First, Maduekwe’s poem will be presented and analysed, followed by Ekechukwu’s poem. The data is presented below.

***Ezi Onye Obodo “Good citizen” (J. C. Maduekwe)***

*Ezi onye obodo-*

*O nwere ọrụ ọ na-arụ onwe ya.  
Ọ na-agbata tinye aka n'ọrụ obodo  
Ọ na-edowe gburugburu ya ọcha.*

Good citizen-

There is a job he does for himself.  
He hurries, joins hand in community work  
He keeps his surroundings neat

*Ezi onye obodo-*

*O zuru ire, kwụsị ya ịkụ asịrị.  
O gbochiri aka, nọchie ya iwe nke mmadu;  
Ya na ụkwụ, ka ọ na-aga etu a chọrọ.*

Good citizen-

He trains tongue, stops it from gossiping.  
He stops hand, prevents it from taking another person's belongings;  
And the legs, to walk as expected.

*Ezi onye obodo-*

*O too, ọ chọwa udo obodo,  
Were akụ ya chọọ ọganihu obodo.  
Aha ya ga-abụ aha ebube.*

Good citizen-

When he grows, he looks for peace in the community,  
And uses his wealth for the progress of the community.  
His name will be glorious.

*Ezi onye obodo-*

*Ọ na-ehulata isi nye iwu obodo,  
Na-echeta, udo di, o weta ọdị mma,  
Mana ọkpọ ọghara, ntumuri adighi.*

Good citizen-

He bows to the laws of the land,  
And remembers, if there is peace, there will be progress,  
But conflict and cold war will not be.

*Ezi onye obodo-*  
*O fuwe, obodo achọwa ya;*  
*Ọ nwuwa, obodo a na-akwa ya.*  
*'Ezigbo' bụ aha a na-etu ya.*

Good citizen-

When he is lost, the community will search for him.

When dying, the community will mourn him.

“Good” is the nickname given to him.

Maduekwe’s *Ezi Onye Obodo* “Good citizen” is divided into five stanzas of equal length; aside from the concluding stanza, each stanza highlights the role played by the good citizen in the society. In stanza one, there are three vital roles identified; first, the good citizen is self-employed, *O nwere ọrụ ọ na-arụrụ onwe ya* “there is a job he does for himself”. The use of the reflective pronoun *onwe ya* “himself” is to underline the fact that he is self-made and self-sufficient. In other words, he is not a salary earner employed by the government or a private establishment. Although the job or business of this citizen is not mentioned in the poem, it could be inferred, given the natural propensity of the Igbo, that they are either traders or artisans; no mean entrepreneurs. In the third line, the poet states that the persona is involved in community work, *Ọ na-agbata tinye aka n’ọrụ obodo*, “He hurries in and join in community work”. The essence of this line is not just that the persona is involved in community work, but the spirit with which they do it. The clause *Ọ na-agbata*, “He hurries in” suggests that the persona is excited and passionate about community work which implies that he loves and is interested in their community’s economic development. He is not the type that drags his feet but this is the quintessential private sector that contributes his quota in community civic duties towards the social transformation of the community. These community works *oru obodo* are not enumerated in the poem, but in traditional Igbo society, they include, and not limited to *ịsụ ụzọ* “road clearing”, undertaken mainly by young men, *ịrụ ahịa* market construction, *ịza ahịa* “market sweeping” undertaken mainly by women, *igbu ọwa mmiri* “ gutter construction”, etc. The third role which is an extension of the civic duties expressed in line 3, is that the persona keeps their environment clean, *ọ na-edowe gburugburu ya ọcha*. The maintenance of a clean environment implies that the persona cleans their house, sweeps their

compound, and disposes refuse properly and promptly, thus contributing to a green environment.

Stanza two is a juxtaposition of stanza one in terms of structure; whereas in stanza one, the poet highlights three positive contributions made by the persona, in stanza two, the poet identifies three negative things which the persona does not do. In line 6, the persona is described as one who has a trained and guarded tongue that does not gossip, *O zuru ire, kwusi ya iku asiri*. The use of the verb *zuru* “trained” means that the persona consciously and intentionally disciplined their tongue to prevent it from gossiping or spreading false news. Gossip is the peddling of false or unsubstantiated news about someone or something, and undue interference in other peoples’ affairs. Societies, ancient and modern, frown at gossip or hearsay as a result of its debilitating effects; gossip can upset and dislocate the social order, leading to confusion, conflict and even to war, depending on the scale and magnitude. In Igbo society, gossip is seen as a major personality flaw so much that a young man intending to marry a lady would, from the onset, try to find out if the lady in question has such an unethical trait, among other things. If it is confirmed that she is a gossip *onye asiri*, the young man may proceed no further and look elsewhere. It is believed that, if a young man marries a gossip, peace will cease to exist in his family and compound as she will use her unbridled tongue to engage one person or group against another and disaster will ensue. The Igbo belief that *onu bu ogu* “mouth is war” underscores the disastrous effect of gossip in a family and community. The second thing the persona does not do is stealing *O gbochiri aka, nochie ya iwe nke mmadu* “They stop their hand, prevents it from taking another person’s (thing)”. In traditional and contemporary societies around the world, stealing is considered a capital crime; it is known as *aru* “abomination” in Igbo society. A man or woman caught stealing is usually publicly disgraced and ostracized from the community not only because they have offended the earth goddess *O meruola ala*, but they have also negated the ethos of camaraderie which makes each individual an integral part of the community. Driving the culprit out of the community is a means of appeasing and placating the earth goddess, otherwise she will rise against the community by way of famine, drought or other ecological disasters. But the persona is described as an honest and disciplined member of the community who forbids stealing. The clause *O gbochiri aka* “He stops hand”



means that he consciously beat the urge to steal. Put differently, he is tempted to steal like everyone else but he does not succumb to the temptation. It is not sufficient to conclude that a self-employed and self-sufficient person, as seen in stanza one, cannot steal; the fact of kleptomania means that greed or other psycho-social factors can compel someone to steal, even if the person is not poor. The fact is, for reasons of culture, the persona forbids stealing, in all ramifications, due to its negative implications. The third thing the persona does not do is that they respect their natural limits and boundaries as seen in line 8 *ya na ukwu ka o na-aga etu a choro* “and also legs, so that they will walk as expected”. The use of the words *ukwu* “legs” and *na-aga* “will walk” implies that the persona does not encroach into other people’s territory. He minds their business and limits operations in their own natural space. In Igbo society, the law of trespass includes stepping into another person’s land or economic trees, or taking another person’s wife. Such trespass, especially on land matters usually leads to conflict between the contending parties, and if not properly handled may lead to grave consequences.

In stanza three, the poet articulates the desires and aspirations of the persona; his prime objectives are peace and progress of their community. In line 10, the poet identifies the first quest, *O too o chowa udo obodo* “when he grows, he seeks the peace of the community”. The fact that the persona seeks peace is proof that he is committed to peace, lover of peace, and peace maker or keeper. It is also an indication that the persona understands the value of peace in the community or society; social cohesion, cultural maintenance and economic development are all dependent on peace. As a matter of fact, in the absence of peace, there is no real community. The pursuit of peace implies that the persona is involved in community peace initiatives, reconciling parties in dispute, conflict resolution, and intercessions for peace through invocations and other rituals. The second aspiration of the persona is progress and development of the community, as shown in line 11, *were akụ ya choo oganihu obodo* “uses his wealth to seek progress of the community”. It is apparent that the persona does not just wish or pray for development, but he sacrifices his wealth towards achieving the objective. The act of committing their resources towards community development portrays the persona as selfless and altruistic. His philanthropic activities may include participating or sole funding of community development projects such as building roads, clinics, boreholes, granting

scholarships to brilliant but indigent members of the community, and soft loans to small-scale businesses. Consequent upon his noble acts, his is crowned with a good name as shown in line 12, *aha ya ga-abu aha ebube* “his name will be a glorious one”. His selfless service to the community earns him a good name on which the Igbo takes pride. The Igbo believe that *ezi aha ka ego* “a good name is better than money”. Thus, the persona here is one who has earned double honour for himself by possessing both wealth and a good name.

In stanza four, the poet describes the position of the persona concerning the law of the land and the reason behind it. In line 14, the persona is portrayed as one who adheres to the laws and customs of the community, *O na-ehulata isi nye iwu obodo* “He bows his head to the laws of the community”. The act of bowing of the head entails total submission to the laws guiding the community. Judging from the point of view that the Igbo do not bow to people, it is estimated that the persona really regards and values laws and customs of the land. This is to say that the persona promotes the rule of law due to their understanding that the law is made for the overall good of the community as shown in lines 15 and 16, *na-echeta, udo di, o weta odi mma, mana okpo aghara, ntumiri adighi* “remembers that, if there is peace, it will bring progress, but conflict and cold war will not be”. Thus, the persona is aware and conscious of the positive derivable from abiding by laid down rules and customs. One outcome of keeping the law is goodwill among people; in contrast, where laws are not respected, there are strife and all manner of conflicts that upset the order in the community.

In the final stanza, the poet paints a picture of what happens in a community where the persona is confronted with personal challenges. In lines 18 and 19, it is stated that when he is lost, the community will search for him, *O fuwe, obodo achowa ya*, and when he is sick and dying, the community will wail and mourn, *O nwuwa, obodo a na-akwa*. The community panics when the persona is indisposed due to his contribution to peace and progress of the community and the direct positive impact in their lives. This is why they are referred to as ‘good’ as expressed in line 20 *ezigbo bu aha a na-etu ya* “good is his nickname”. In Igbo culture, every adult man or woman adopts, or is given a nickname or title name. The nick/title name is the name that appropriately defines and describes the bearer’s personality, and eventually pushes the personal name to the background. Traditionally, the nick/title name is a praise name used

to eulogize the bearer in private, but especially in public. In this poem, the title name given the persona is *Ezigbo* “good” which holistically captures his personality. Undoubtedly, the persona in Maduekwe’s poem is an all-round positive person who is an asset to their community. In sum, the poet presents a symbolic good citizen as one that contributes to community efforts, that does not contribute to societal distress, who epitomizes peace and makes sacrifices for progress of the community and who kowtows to the laws and customs of the land.

On the whole, Maduekwe presents a model of an ideal citizen or the archetypal citizen. The main point stressed is that the good citizen explores and exploits his traditional culture for the benefit of his society. Some of the virtues promoted by Igbo culture, as highlighted in the poem include industry and self-reliance, environmental sanitation, peaceful co-existence, and contribution to community development. In traditional Igbo society, citizens are conscious of their civic duties in the community; from childhood, people are socialized and acquainted with the customs of the land. Through membership and initiation into various societies such as *umuada* “daughters of the land”, age-grade societies, *umunna* “kinsmen guild”, and others, citizens are groomed into becoming responsible members of the society. Although the world is currently globalized, traditional African cultures should be harnessed for the purpose of re-sensitizing the young to be abreast of their primary duties to themselves and their community. This would systematically put paid to the dependency syndrome among young people who are always expecting the government to provide all their needs such as food, job, shelter, etc. It is worthy of note that, in traditional Igbo society, no young man grows up with the mindset that the society will offer him a job or skill; such psychological disposition is a fallout of the type of western education bequeathed to Africans by the colonial masters which has not changed. Traditionally, the Igbo operate an apprenticeship system that enables the apprentices to start trading on their own immediately after graduation. It is such a system that produces self-employed and self-sufficient achievers who recycle their wealth in the community and who are adjudged to be responsible and responsive members of the society, hence *ezi onye obodo*. This citizenship concept of the Igbo is the reason why they have made a more meaningful contribution to the development of Nigeria’s economy than any other ethnic group in the country. They

have not only developed the South East, but they have also contributed considerably to the development of cities and communities in the South West, especially Lagos State, the North East, especially Kano State, the North West, the North Central, especially Kaduna and Plateau States, and the South-South especially Edo and Rivers States. As a matter of fact, in some cities and communities outside Igbo land, Igbo sons and daughters have made more contributions towards community development than the indigenous owners of the land.

**Obodo Anyị “Our community” (R. M. Ekechukwu)**

*Obodo anyị nwere ụba nke ukwuu.*

*Chukwu nyere ya ụba dị iche iche.*

*Ma nke a na-eweta n'ala,*

*Ma nke a na-aghọta n'ugbo.*

Our country has great wealth.  
God blessed her with different wealth.  
The ones extracted from the ground,  
The ones plucked from the farm.

*Obodo anyị nwere ụba nke ukwuu.*

*Mana a na-ahụkwa egbe anya*

*Tupu e kwuo na nwaanyị erighi ya?*

*Akụ nna m nọ n'oba, o bụ akụ?*

Our country has great wealth.  
But can you not see the kite first  
Before saying that women are forbidden from eating it?  
My father's wealth is in the barn, is it wealth?

*A na-ele ụgụ nwaanyị na mbe.*

*Ndị gara ahịa lotachaa*

*Mana nne gi alọtabeghi*

*I gaghi ekwe na ahịa alaala.*

A woman's pumpkin is tested in the sauce.  
Those who went to market returned  
But your mother did not return  
You will not agree that market is over.

*O bu eziokwu: anya di mkpa na-aso ibe ya.  
 Mana chetakwa,  
 Ihe nwa okuko metere n'okochi  
 Na-aputakari n'udu mmiri.*

It is true: an important eye avoids its mate.  
 But remember,  
 What a fowl did in the dry season  
 Is usually exposed in the rainy season.

Ekechukwu's poem "Obodo Anyi" consists of four stanzas, each having four lines. The poem is a satire or covert indictment of leadership in contemporary Nigeria. The poet subtly avoids making reference to leaders but it is obvious that he is not referring to the masses of the country. In the first stanza, the poet provides a good description of the economic status of Nigeria. In the first two lines, the poet testifies that God endowed Nigeria with abundant natural resources, *Obodo anyi nwere uba nke ukwu. Chukwu nyere ya uba di iche iche*, "Our country has great wealth. God gave her various kinds of wealth". In these preliminary lines, the poet establishes that the wealth of Nigeria is a natural gift from God, which implies that it is not the result of the industry of Nigerians. In lines 3 and 4, he further specifies the nature of the wealth, *ma nke a na-enweta n'ala, ma nke a na-aghota n'ugbo*, "the ones extracted from the ground, the ones plucked in the farm". The indication is that, the poet is apparently referring to crude oil in the ground and agricultural products harvested from farms such as palm oil, groundnuts, cotton, rubber, etc. On the surface, the use of the verb *enweta* "taken" in the poem is used to depict the manner in which crude is exploited and *aghota* 'plucked' is used to portray the manner in which agricultural products are extracted. At a deeper level, however, the use of the verbs *enweta* "taken" in relation to crude oil, and *aghota* "plucked" in relation to agricultural products denotes the ease with which these resources are extracted or harvested. It suggests that crude oil is so accessible to the extent that it requires little or no effort to extract it and agricultural products are just there waiting to be plucked. The picture painted here is that of a rich land brimming and overflowing with riches and wealth; the veritable land of milk and honey.

In the second stanza, a different picture is presented; the poet is full of questions concerning the wealth in the country. In line 5, the first line in the first stanza *Obodo anyị nwere ụba nke ukwu* is repeated, not for emphasis but sarcasm. The sarcasm sets and defines the tone of the second stanza; it is a mockery of the wealth of the nation; although the country is rich, there is nothing to show for it. This is a paradoxical description of the chilling reality of the country's economic status. In the next three lines, the poet uses two proverbs to explain the paradox. In lines 6 and 7, the proverb, *mana a na-ahụkwa egbe anya tupu e kwuo na nwaanyi erighi ya?* "But can you not see the kite before saying that women are forbidden from eating it" is used to indicate that the Nigerian wealth is not reflected in the lives of the masses. In Igbo culture, it is considered as a taboo for women to eat kites; but the proverb is used to question the rationality in forbidding women from eating a bird that is not easily accessible. In this proverb, *egbe* "kite", a bird of prey is a symbol of Nigeria's remote and inaccessible wealth, while *nwaanyi* "woman" symbolizes the masses who are deprived from eating it. The proverb states that the Nigerian masses do not see, not to talk of enjoying the Nigerian wealth. This implies that leaders of Nigeria deliberately hoard the wealth and keep them away from the people. The second proverb is also used to question the wisdom and rationality of keeping wealth in vaults that are not reachable by the people for whom it is meant, as seen in line 8 *Aku nna m nọ n'oba, o bụ akụ?* "My father's wealth is in the barn, is that wealth?" In traditional Igbo culture, yam is believed to be the king of all crops, and any man who has barns full of yams is regarded as a rich man. In the barn, the yams are tied and stacked in rows in multiple tiers and secured with formidable earthen walls with a locked door to ward off thieves and intruders. In this setting, until the *dibiulo* "father" gives his consent and approval, no child of his takes yam from the barn, because the yams belong to the father. The father is the owner and custodian of the barn and ensures that it is secure. However, the Igbo believe that it amounts to foolishness to store yams in barns just to massage the ego, while the children are hungry. In this proverb, *nna* "father" symbolizes the leadership of Nigeria, while the personal pronoun "*m*" meaning "*I*" in English stands for the poor and hungry masses barred from the wealth of the nation. In the context of this poem, the association of wealth to *nna* "father" means that the wealth of Nigeria belongs to the leaders who are supposed to be the custodians,

and not the people who are the real owners. This is usually the experience in a top-down hierarchical leadership structure where power is in the hands of leaders who are supposed to be servants, and not the people. The rhetorical question style adopted in these two proverbs serves to expose the corruption among the leaders who systematically distance the masses from partaking in the commonwealth of the nation. Thus, the leaders erroneously claim and assume ownership of the wealth and do with the wealth as they deem fit and the real owners are alienated.

In the third stanza, the poet uses two proverbs to underscore the leadership deficit in the country. The first proverb in line 9 states that *a na-ele ugu nwaanyi na mbe* “a woman’s pumpkin is tested in the sauce”, meaning that the quality of a woman’s cooking or soup is known when it is tasted. The *mbe* “sauce” symbolizes the quality of leadership, or what the leaders offer the masses while *nwaanyi* “woman” symbolizes the leaders of the country. The poet in the first proverb implies that, having tasted or experienced the quality of service of Nigerian leaders, they are adjudged to be bad managers of national resources. In the second proverb, the poet compares Nigerian leaders with their counterparts in other climes with respect to the welfare of the common people, as seen in lines 10 to 12, *Ndi gara ahia lotachaa mana nne gi alotabeghi, I gaghị ekwe na ahia alaala*, “If people who went to market have returned but your mother is yet to return, you would not believe that the market has dispersed”. In traditional Igbo society, when women go to market on a particular market day, the children are always expectant that their mothers would come back with things from the market called *ihe ahia*. These things from the market are local snacks such as groundnut, *akara* “moimoi”, *okpa* “soya meal”, *ugu* “cooked pumpkin seed”, etc. Children enjoy these snacks which is a depiction of maternal love and care. Incidentally, if a woman goes to the market and comes back without *ihe ahia*, the children are disappointed, and as far as they are concerned, it is either their mother did not go to market or the market is not yet over for the day. In this poem, *ahia* “market” is seen as a symbol of Nigerian or universal economy filled with all manner of resources, while *nne* “mother” symbolizes Nigerian leadership, and the second person Igbo pronoun *I* meaning “you” in English stands for the citizens. The poet is implying that, while leaders of other countries have returned from their “market” and their citizens are enjoying their resources (*ihe ahia*) provided by the leaders, Nigerian

leaders are not yet back, indicating that the citizens are yet to enjoy the resources of their land (*ihe ahia*). Consequently, their hopes and dreams are dashed. The *ihe ahia* that citizens expect from leaders such as motorable roads, potable water, regular power supply, affording housing are not yet provided; rather, poverty reigns and pervades the land of plenty. The poet laments that it is a sad reality that, in spite of the wealth accruing to Nigeria from crude oil, the citizens are still plagued with existential hiccups.

In the last stanza, the poet uses two proverbs to make his conclusion; he presents two contrastive truths to underlie the state of the impoverished, traumatized, and ostracized masses, and the fate that awaits the ruling class. First, in line 13, the poet employs the proverb *anya dī mkpa na-asọ ibe ya* “the eye that is important avoids its mate” to delineate that the masses are helpless, emasculated, and therefore powerless against the authority wielded by the leaders. The imagery of *anya* “eye” is understood in the context of two unequal contenders sizing each other to know who will first bat an eye. Usually, it is the less powerful that first bats the eye, thereby yielding ground or capitulates. The citizens are seen as the less powerful contenders in this socio-political equation, who are too weak to contend with the oppressive leaders. Ordinarily, in an ideal and functional state, power is in the hands of the people, but in every failed state, power is in the hands of leaders, hence the people do not count. However, the poet uses the second proverb in lines 14 to 16 as a caveat to remind and warn the leaders of the fate awaiting them if they continue to take the citizens for granted, *Mana chetakwa, ihe nwa okukọ metere n’okochi, na-aputakarị n’udu mmiri*, “But remember, what the fowl did during the dry season is usually exposed in the rainy season”. The poet is simply stating that every man will some day in the future reap the consequences of their actions. The use of the two Igbo ecological seasons, *okochi* “dry season” and *udu mmiri* “rainy season, is not accidental; dry season symbolizes a period of revelry and mirth, while rainy season symbolizes judgment. Applied to the Nigerian situation, the poet maintains that corrupt and inept managers of Nigerian resources will one day be called to question and judged for their wanton and reckless misuse of the national wealth. In sum, Ekechukwu’s poem is a political satire aimed at exposing leaders of Nigeria, who have failed to use the immense natural resources of the country to better the lives of the citizens.



In sum, Ekechukwu's poem, "Obodo Anyi" is anchored on the leadership challenge in Nigeria. Although Maduekwe situates the good citizen within Igbo culture and social system, and Ekechukwu situates corrupt leaders within the Nigerian state, this study posits that a community is a community irrespective of designation or nomenclature. If citizens, designated as the private sector are expected to contribute to the progress of a state, as they do through payment of taxes and other customs as determined by the government, much more is expected of elected or appointed leaders to use natural resources that are freely given by nature to develop the state for the common good. An Igbo adage akin to the subject matter is that *anyukoo maamiri onu o gboo ufufu* "if people pass urine in the same spot, it foams", meaning that when resources are pooled it yields greater dividends or results. On the whole, it is the mutual interaction and contribution of both citizens and leaders that bring about lasting and sustainable economic development in a community or nation.

### **Conclusion**

The two poems by two different writers, analysed in this study, have raised the contentious question of leadership and citizenship in Africa vis-à-vis national development. With respect to citizenship, Maduekwe, in his poem, portrayed every citizen as having a big role to play if the community is to advance economically. A proactive citizenry who passionately discharge their civic and social responsibilities is needed in the entire Nigerian State. In terms of leadership, a paradigm shift is expected in Nigeria where power ought to be in the hands of the citizens, and not the leaders, to avoid entrenching all the negative indices of power that are detrimental to national development. Ekechukwu's poem is actually a lamentation of the situation whereby an insignificant elitist minority of the population is in control of vast, limitless resources while the poor majority wait for crumbs that fall from their table, which portends danger for the continual peace and economic development of the country. Until there is a reciprocal, collaborative, and complementary commitment to service by leaders and followers, economic development in Nigeria will continue to be a mirage.

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