

# **The role of kinsmen in the socio-economic and political development of Igboland: A case study of Nsukka metropolis**

Jumoke Frances **Oloidi**<sup>1</sup>, \*Akintunde John **Oloidi**<sup>2</sup>, Emeka Simon **Ejim**<sup>1</sup>, Oluwafemi  
**Oloidi**<sup>1</sup>, Ubaka Cosmas **Molokwu**<sup>3</sup> & Samuel O. **Odoh**<sup>3</sup>

University of Nigeria, Nsukka

<sup>1</sup>School of General Studies, Humanities Unit,

<sup>2</sup>Department of Tourism Studies,

<sup>3</sup>Department of History & International Studies,

\*Corresponding Author: *akintunde.oloidi@unn.edu.ng*

## **Abstract**

Development is a multi-dimensional process that involves growth and the mastery of the environment and its entire social, economic, and political systems, which improve the quality of life of the inhabitants of an area. Interestingly, while kinsmen have been identified as agents of socio-economic and political development in Igboland during the pre-colonial era, their roles in contemporary Igbo society seem under-studied and perhaps even underestimated. This study examined the roles of kinsmen in the socio-economic and political development of Igboland using Nsukka as a study area. A mixed research design was adopted in which both qualitative and quantitative data are found relevant to generate verifiable, unbiased and wider descriptive and analytical data set capable of achieving the purposes of this study. Methods of data collection were through surveys, in-depth interviews, and Focus Group Discussions (FGDs). The findings revealed that kinsmen contribute to the economic and political development of Nsukka. The study

concludes that it is pertinent to sustain the activities of this traditional institution in a bid to ensure sustainable social, economic, cultural and political development in Nsukka and Igboland in general.

**Keywords:** Kinsmen, economic, political institutions, development, Nsukka

## Introduction

The Igbo people are located in the southeastern part of Nigeria, and it is believed that they originated from Nri cultural group due to available strong social, historical, religious, and cultural evidence (Ezenwa et al., 2023). The traditional Igbo society is characterised by a communal mind-set, with people settling in clusters of small hamlets. Communal living ensures the people's security, as it makes their identity or personality known, which is highly regarded as one's root and foundation. The extended family is the social and ethical aspect of Igbo traditional life and society, consisting of the father, mother, brothers, sisters, aunties, uncles, grandfathers, cousins, nieces, and nephews. The kinsmen, or blood relations or ancestors, are connected to one's family through blood or marriage. They are made up of male relations called *Umunna*, which is a socio-cultural and political institution that make up a village. Before the intrusion of the Europeans, there were several powerful

socio-cultural and political institutions in Igboland, such as the kinsmen (*Umunna*), that helped the Igbos to govern and organise their activities in their various villages. Presently, the people still select or appoint someone, usually the oldest man in the village (mostly called *Onyishi*) who coordinates their political and administrative activities. Within the villages, there is also a man who heads the affairs of each "lineage" or kinsmen (*Umunna*) called *Okonye Umunna*, which means "the oldest kinsman".

All the kinsmen constitute the work force which the oldest kinsman uses to carry out his political and administrative activities. Village heads meet and discuss any case that affects their community as part of their political responsibilities to the community. They meet as equals, though reverence is given to the overall village head. One of their uniqueness is that they must all agree on a particular issue before making any decision. After the decision, each village head goes home to discuss the decisions with their respective communities. The kinsmen are

entitled to attend the village-level meetings, which are normally held in the village square called *Mbaara*. After taking a decision at the village level, the matter retires to the lineage or kinsmen level, where almost all adults, both men and women, are allowed to attend. Decisions here are quick, as most people present must have heard of the issue at the village level and saw themselves as very intimate relations that must accept the opinions of the old person in the kindred known as *Okenye Umunna*. From the kindred level, the next unit is the family, called *ezinaulo*, within which each man heads the decision-making process of his family unit. His wife and children normally take orders from him, and they could be influenced by him to carry out a village decision or refuse it. In the same way, decisions could be transmitted from the family to town assemblies. The quest for development has been the desire of the average Igbo man or woman from the pre-colonial to the colonial, and post-colonial eras. The kinsmen are motivated to initiate ways of achieving socio-economic and political development in a bid to better the lives of the people. This research aims to study the contributions of kinsmen to the socio-economic and political development in Igboland from the pre-colonial to the present.

### Justification and objectives

Historically, the institution of kinsmen is a vigorous social and political unit among the Igbos. The oldest kinsman, *Onyishi*, is considered as a great judge, who has internalized traditional values and acts as a social custodian. The kinsmen maintained social order and political cohesion in the traditional Igbo society as they are in possession of the *Ofo*, which symbolizes authority, justice, and fairness. All kinsmen support the general administration of their kindred. Unfortunately, despite the effective roles of the kinsmen in the Igbo society, there is still a dearth of research on the socio-economic and political impacts of kinsmen in Igboland, specifically in Nsukka. The concentration has been more on the Igbo socio-political organisations leaving a gap in the detailed study of kinsmen. Now, the question is, what are the contributions of the kinsmen to the socio-economic and political development of Igboland? Also, in what ways do they boost the livelihoods of their people? Answering these questions would help to create a deep knowledge about the efforts of kinsmen in the Igbo society. It will also help to preserve the knowledge of this old custom or belief/practice, and make it relevant in the present era. This study is a response

to the warning in Basden's (1966), book, *Niger Ibos*, that:

In a few years, the old generation would have completely disappeared and their tradition and custom will vanish with them. From what I gather, many young boys will welcome a record of their ancestors. They will criticize it, but will receive it as English. School boy accepts the account of the progenitors, the ancient Britons. It is sad to relate, yet it is none the less true, that many modern Ibo (Igbo) youths know more of English history than that of his own country and people (p. 7).

However, the main objective of this study is to examine whether or not the activities of the kinsmen contribute to the socio-economic and political development of Igboland from the pre-colonial to post-colonial periods, using Nsukka as a study area.

### **Literature review**

Social development is about putting people at the centre of development and focusing on improving the well-being of individuals in society to help them to reach their full potentials (Wang et al., 2022). It also involves investing in people and removing barriers that could hinder

their journey towards self-sufficiency. According to Lopez (2019), social development is about refusing to accept that people who live in poverty will remain poor, and helping people to move forward on their path to self-sufficiency. The focus of social development is the improvement of the lives of average citizens, especially the poor, to make society a better place for everyone (Ferguson, 2016). Likewise, it promotes social inclusion of the poor and vulnerable, by empowering people, building cohesive and resilient societies, and making institutions accessible and accountable to citizens (Ferguson, 2016; Lopez, 2019). According to Lopez (2019), economic development is the development of economic wealth of countries, regions, or communities for the comfort of their inhabitants. From a policy perspective, it involves efforts to improve the economic well-being and the quality of life in a community by creating and/or retaining jobs, supporting or growing incomes and tax base, and improving indicators such as literacy rates, life expectancy, poverty rates, and level of employment (Mahdavi, 2019). Socio-economic development is a process that seeks to identify both the social and economic needs of a community and to create strategies that address those needs in practical ways and in the best interests

of the community, over the long run (Ferguson, 2016).

Political development is the general performance of the entire system as an integrated society, including administrative and legal developments, with bureaucracy being the main point of political enhancement (Mahdavi, 2019).

According to Lukpata and Asha (2014), political development facilitates the economic growth and industrial development necessary for realizing a higher economic performance. It consists of a large number of changes in different layers of society, such as state performance, people's welfare, activities of the elites, socio-economic tendencies and progressive political culture as well as government's performance. Some scholars have written on the political institutions in Igboland. For instance, Egwuenu (1998) and Onah (1992) dealt primarily with the cultural history of the Utagba-Uno people. They examined the economic, religious, and social interactions between the people of Utagba-Uno and the British during the colonial period. They also emphasized the duties of *Okpala-Ukwu* at the clan level in bringing peace and stability among the people in Utagba-Uno from the colonial to the post-colonial period. Egodi (2007) examined the political organization of the Aniocha Ukwuani and Ika people of

Anioma from the late nineteenth century up to the first two decades of the twentieth century. She revealed the identical nature of the kinship or lineage system in Ika and Ukwuani and concurred that they have laudable impacts on the social, economic, cultural and political activities of the people.

Isichei (1973) examined the traditional government in Igboland before colonial rule, noting that the Igbo people had no single centralized government before the 1900s. She identified gerontocracy as the form of government practiced by the Igbo. Afigbo (1981) and Ijoma (1984) both examined the political and cultural influences of the Edo on the western Igbos. They revealed that Benin's cultural influence impacted the systems of title taking and monarchical government of the western Igbo. Nzimiro (1972) examined the kingship system in Onitsha, Aboh, Oguta, and Osomari, focusing on cultural evolution as against the traditional political system. Olisa (2002) focused on kinship relationships in various societies in Igboland, stressing the importance of *Okpara* in a kindred, as one who holds the *ofo* of a family and performs all duties attached to the leadership position of a first son. The importance of the *ofo* as a symbol of the binding ritual of the kindred, and consequently, the strongest bond of unity

within the kindred is also highlighted in the study. Okoli (2022) explained that *Umunna* is a powerful and well-organized institution headed by *Okpara*, who is saddled with the responsibility and mandate of representing his people in the governing council of the community. *Umunna* has political responsibilities (legislative and judicial roles) to settle disputes by reconciling disagreeing members through dialogue (*Igba Ajuju*). The study revealed that *Umunna* organizes meetings, makes decisions, settles disputes, enforces laws, promotes peace and unity, represents its people, and punishes offenders. However, the study focused on the social and political attributes of *Umunna* as against their socio-economic characteristics as pursued in the current study. There is a need to unravel the socio-political activities of *Umunna* in relation to community development. This is an attempt to bridge the knowledge gap with respect to the kinsmen institution in Nsukka.

### **The study area**

This study specifically focuses on the role of kinsmen in the socio-economic and political development of the Nsukka metropolis. According to Urama (2012), the three major communities that make up Nsukka are Nkpunano, Nru, and

Ihe/Owerre. Nkpunano is made up of Nguru, Isiakpu, Echara and Umakashi; Nru is made up of Iheagu, Ezema/Edem and Umuoyo, while Ihe/Owerre is made up of Owerre and Ihe. This means that there are nine communities that make up the Nsukka metropolis; and culturally, they are collectively known as *Ishi-Aya-Nategna*. Both qualitative and quantitative designs were applied in the investigations carried out across all these communities.

### **Methodology**

The study utilized a mixed research design, combining qualitative and quantitative data to gather comprehensive information. Data collection methods used included surveys, interviews, and Focus Group Discussions (FGDs). The surveys involved 900 questionnaires distributed across nine communities; that is, 100 copies for each community. Respondents and discussants were chosen using purposive and convenience sampling methods to ensure that interactions are done with knowledgeable persons. Notably, the respondents in Ezema/Edem, Owerre and Ihe communities properly filled and returned the whole copies distributed among them. In Nguru, Echara, Umakashi, and Umuoyo, 98 copies were retrieved, while 96 and 97 copies were retrieved in Isiakpu and Iheagu respectively. The total

number of copies of questionnaires properly filled and returned were 885, accounting for 98.3% of the sampled population size. In-depth interviews were conducted with 90 knowledgeable key informants; that is, 10 persons from each community, while 20 kinsmen were selected as discussants for the FGDs in each community. The key informants for the interviews and kinsmen for FGDs were selected through simple random and purposive (deliberate) sampling techniques to ensure that those who are knowledgeable about the topic were chosen. The instruments for data collection included a camcorder, tape recorder, questionnaires, a semi-structured interview guide, notebooks,

pens, and a camera. The data were presented using deductive-simultaneous design and analysed using a triangulation method. The distribution and retrieval of questionnaires, in-depth interviews, and FGDs were conducted between March and June 2023 with the help of six indigenous research assistants.

### **Presentation of findings**

#### **Kinsmen and the socio-economic development of Nsukka**

Survey data presented in Table 1 below revealed how kinsmen helped in the socio-economic development of local residents across the nine communities investigated in Nsukka.

**Table 1. Socio-Economic Contributions of the Kinsmen (sampled size = 885 respondents)**

S/n	VARIABLES	Nguru (F=98)	Isiakpu (F=96)	Echara (F=98)	Umakashi (F=98)	Iheagu (F=97)	Ezema/Edem	Umuoyo (F=98)	Owerre (F=100)	Ihe (F=100)	Total (F= 885)	Percentage (%)
1	Financial contributions	98	96	98	98	97	100	98	100	100	885	100
2	Distribution of food items	92	83	96	88	94	96	96	91	94	830	94

<b>3</b>	Thrift contribution	96	93	97	97	96	97	95	98	96	<b>865</b>	<b>98</b>
<b>4</b>	Allocation of land	97	95	96	98	97	98	97	97	91	<b>866</b>	<b>98</b>
<b>5</b>	Supporting during cultivation and harvest	71	82	93	86	88	90	87	91	94	<b>785</b>	<b>89</b>
<b>6</b>	Help in trading	66	54	71	69	77	81	81	78	70	<b>647</b>	<b>73</b>
<b>7</b>	Empowerment	95	93	89	91	88	79	83	80	87	<b>785</b>	<b>89</b>
	<b>MEAN SCORE (MS)</b>										<b>809</b>	<b>91.4 %</b>

Source: Authors' Field Survey

### Financial contributions among kinsmen

The quantitative data above showed that all 885 respondents (100%) across the nine communities in Nsukka concurred that kinsmen help in the socio-economic development of their communities through financial contributions. This indicates that from the pre-colonial to the post-colonial periods, the kinsmen (*Umunna*) have played key and indelible roles in the financial upliftment of their various families, and the entire community at large. In-depth interviews revealed that financial contribution is a vital and obligatory assistance that the kinsmen render to family members. According to oral traditions, it was a

major phenomenon embarked upon by the forefathers to assist family members. The kinsmen also organize families for consistent pecuniary contributions for the upkeep of their aged people and those who urgently need assistance (Ekeokpala, personal communication, June 12, 2023). Also, they are responsible for communicating with and encouraging those in the diaspora to contribute money to cater for their aged parents and other relatives (W. Agu, personal communication, June 12, 2023).

The interviews further disclosed that kinsmen in Nsukka have a significant role in traditional ceremonies, such as naming and marriage ceremonies, chieftaincy,

coronation, festivals, and career progression ceremony. They often contribute money to ease the financial difficulties of individuals or families during these events. The FGDs across the nine communities studied revealed that, kinsmen task themselves to raise money based on their capabilities, groups, and ranks, from which a percentage is given to celebrants or the penurious according to their collective agreement. During an event, it was revealed that some kinsmen divert some parts of the contributions to entertain themselves and assist the celebrant with the remaining part. Failure to contribute to this kind of levy attracts penalties. The kinsmen believe that it is crucial to assist others financially as a sign of love and cooperation, and this gesture has been present from the colonial to the post-colonial period. In-depth interviews and FGDs revealed that kinsmen in Nsukka occasionally distribute food items to their relatives as part of their economic enhancement activities. Wealthy members of the family occasionally assist those with little income with food items like rice, cocoyam, meat, Bambara groundnut (*okpa*), black beans (*achicha*), cassava (*akpu*), maize (*oka*), yam (*iji*), etc. to minimize their feeding expenses. A respondent added that every household must have access to food and shelter,

which are parts of the care and support attributed to kinsmen from the pre-colonial to the post-colonial period (F. Agwu, personal communication, June 12, 2023).

### **Distribution of food items among kinsmen**

The survey revealed that kinsmen occasionally distribute food items among their relatives. According to the data in Table 1 above, 92 respondents supported this variable in Nguru while only six respondents disagreed. In Isiakpu, 83 respondents agreed while 13 respondents disagreed. In Echara, 96 respondents concurred while two respondents disagreed. In Umakashi, 88 respondents agreed while 10 respondents disagreed. In Iheagu, 94 respondents answered in affirmation while three respondents disagreed. In Ezema/Edem, 96 respondents agreed while four respondents disagreed. In Umuoyo, 96 respondents concurred while two respondents disagreed. Also, 91 respondents agreed in Owerre while nine respondents disagreed. Lastly, in Ihe, 94 respondents agreed while four respondents disagreed. In sum, 830 respondents (94%) agreed that the kinsmen donate food items to their relatives as part of economic enhancement across Nsukka, while 55 respondents (6%) disagreed. In-depth

interviews and FGDs revealed that the economic sustenance of people is one of the priorities of kinsmen in Nsukka communities. The respondents explained that the wealthy members among the kinsmen occasionally assist economically, those with little income by providing food items like rice, yam, cocoyam, meat, *achicha, okpa, akpu, oka, iji*, etc. to them to minimise their feeding expenses (F. Agwu, personal communication, June 12, 2023). Kinsmen in Ezema/Edem, who assist others during cultivation and harvest periods, are rewarded with farm produce. Those with bountiful harvests distribute items to fellow kinsmen, especially the aged, their parents, and siblings. FGDs in Isiakpu, Umakachi, Iheagu, Ezema/Edem, and Owerre revealed that sharing foodstuffs among kinsmen does not amount to an act of beggary but instead, strengthens love and magnanimity among kinsmen. Foods and drinks are shared according to rank during traditional events or ordinary occasions.

#### **Thrift contribution among kinsmen**

The survey revealed that the kinsmen assist themselves through individual and collective contributions like thrift. As presented in Table 1, 96 respondents supported this variable in Nぐru and two respondents disagreed. In Isiakpu, 93

respondents agreed while three respondents disagreed. In Echara, 97 respondents concurred while one respondent disagreed. In Umakashi, 98 respondents agreed while one respondent disagreed with this. In Iheagu, 96 respondents affirmed this while one respondent disagreed. In Ezema/Edem, 97 respondents agreed while three respondents disagreed. In Umuoyo, 95 respondents concurred while three respondents disagreed. Further, 98 respondents agreed to this variable in Owerre while two respondents disagreed. Lastly, in Ihe, 96 respondents agreed with this assertion, while four respondents disagreed. In sum, 865 respondents (98%) agreed that thrift contribution is part of the economic enhancers among kinsmen across Nsukka, while the remaining 20 respondents (6%) disagreed. In-depth interviews and FGDs revealed that kinsmen across Nsukka habitually contribute money on daily, weekly, monthly, and even yearly basis. It was revealed that *Isusu* practice among the Igbo people, involves regular contributions based on financial capacities of family members. This practice has been prevalent in Nsukka for centuries and has helped many family members to escape poverty. *Isusu* is widespread among both men and women groups in Igbo land, and in some areas, it

has been expanded into modern cooperative societies. Members of a group can contribute as little as fifty naira, depending on their income and capability. However, few respondents believe that *Isusu* is now a matter of choice due to some unfortunate experiences with deceptive individuals.

### **Allocation of family land for economic purposes**

On the allocation of land as a measure to enhance the economic productivity of the people by the kinsmen, the survey revealed that 97 respondents concurred with this variable in Nguru and three respondents disagreed. In Isiakpu, 95 respondents agreed while one respondent disagreed. In Echara, 96 respondents concurred while two respondents disagreed. In Umakashi, all the 98 respondents agreed with this. In Iheagu, all the 97 respondents confirmed it. In Ezema/Edem, 98 respondents agreed while two respondents disagreed. In Umuoyo, 97 respondents concurred while one respondent disagreed. Likewise, 97 respondents agreed on this variable in Owerre while three respondents disagreed. Lastly, in Ihe, 91 respondents agreed with this assertion, while nine respondents disagreed. In total, 866 respondents (98%) believed that kinsmen allocate or lease some portions of their

land to relatives for economic purposes across Nsukka, while the remaining 19 respondents (2%) disagreed. The respondents through interviews and FGDs disclosed that, in the pre-colonial period, land was communally owned, as there was no private or individual land ownership. Hence, at the beginning of a farming season, the kinsmen would decide on the area of land they were to cultivate. On an appointed day, members of the kindred would troop to the chosen area of land, and each member will receive a portion of land for farming (I. Eneh, personal communication, 2023).

In another way, members of the kinsmen are allowed to cultivate food crops on family lands, which they can sell after harvesting as sources of income. Respondents explained that the principal occupations of the Nsukka people are farming and trading of farm produce, and each family in a kindred is allocated a farmland as an inheritance. To boost their economic activities, the portions of land allocated to each family are used for both subsistence and commercial systems of farming. Family lands are often used for various farming activities, such as cultivation of rice, maize, cassava, and other crops. Some lands are also leased out to investors to generate income, which is shared among family heads.

However, it was noted that some members of families often outsmart others on communal inheritance issues. Onah Cecilia explains that some family heads enrich themselves by forcefully selling family lands for selfish gain, while others are impoverished (C. Onah, personal communication, June 12, 2023). Similarly, Opata Ambrose asserts that elders in some families hijack family inheritances and sell or lease them to businessmen, leading to economic growth for some while others are impoverishing (A. Opata, personal communication, June 12, 2023). FGDs across the communities also revealed that some leaders and elites among the kinsmen often cheat others regarding communal lands by singlehandedly buying them for the purpose of making profits in the future when the price appreciates.

#### **Assistance during cultivation and harvesting**

The surveys revealed that, in Nguru, 71 respondents concurred that the kinsmen one another in farming activities while 17 respondents disagreed. In Isiakpu, 82 respondents agreed while 14 respondents disagreed. In Echara, 93 respondents concurred while five respondents disagreed. In Umakashi, 86 respondents agreed while 13 respondents disagreed with this. In Iheagu, 88 respondents

agreed while nine respondents did not. In Ezema/Edem, 90 respondents agreed while 10 respondents disagreed. In Umuoyo, 87 respondents concurred while 11 respondents disagreed. Also, 91 respondents agreed to the variable in Owerre while nine respondents disagreed. Lastly, in Ihe, 94 respondents agreed, while six respondents disagreed. In total, 785 respondents (89%) out of the sample size believed that the kinsmen supported themselves in farming activities, which helped in their economic improvements across Nsukka, while the remaining 100 respondents (11%) disagreed.

The key informants revealed that relatives render some assistance to themselves during cultivation and harvesting seasons. They assist themselves to cultivate during the rainy season and harvest when the crops are mature and these are done most especially among those who are truthful and trustworthy with mutual agreement. It was revealed that most of these activities are only done among kinsmen; this means that they do not render such service to outsiders. Respondents explained that many young and old people make money from helping their fellow family members to harvest cassava, corn, rice, potatoes, pepper, okro, etc. They also clear bushes and make ridges to earn money. On the

other hand, members of the kindred help themselves in farm activities on a rotational basis to improve crop production, and this mostly happens among age grades. From the FGDs it was revealed that turn-by-turn assistance on farm work is an ancient supportive measure that is still relevant today. Discussants explained that, a man who cannot make beyond 100 ridges alone, could achieve up to 500 ridges with the assistance of another of his age grade who is usually a member of the same kindred with him. This would increase his income for that year. This is a volunteer way for kinsmen to assist themselves, but at times, some members might not be sincere enough to work diligently for others.

### **Help in trading**

In Nguru, 66 respondents agreed that the kinsmen assist others in their businesses while 32 respondents disagreed. In Isiakpu, 54 respondents agreed while 42 disagreed. In Echara, 71 respondents concurred while 27 respondents disagreed. In Umakashi, 69 respondents agreed while 29 respondents disagreed. In Iheagu, 77 respondents agreed and 20 respondents disagreed. In Ezema/Edem, 81 respondents agreed while 19 respondents disagreed. In Umuoyo, 81 respondents concurred while 19

disagreed. Furthermore, 78 respondents agreed with this variable in Owerre while 22 respondents disagreed. Lastly, 70 respondents agreed with the variable in Ihe, while 30 respondents disagreed. In total, 647 respondents (73%) of the sampled size believed that the kinsmen support others in business activities across various communities in Nsukka, while the remaining 283 respondents (27%) disagreed. The responses revealed that the kinsmen help themselves in trading activities. Also, the interviews and FGDs revealed that members of the same kindred help themselves in trading activities. Respondents explained that the daughters and sons of extended family members could help older family members to sell some goods around the streets and the money realised would be delivered without any problem. Those who have many perishable goods to sell solicit help from other members of the extended family free of charge or pay a token for the services received. Hence, it is believed that people make enough money from the services rendered to them by family members. Hawking is a traditional practice among the kinsmen to sell farm produce for income generation. Among the *Umunna*, parents often encourage their children to hawk for their relatives to earn money and support their immediate family. Despite

this, some parents also view hawking as a form of slavery and child labour, which leads to the dissociation of children from hawking across the streets.

### **Empowerment of family members**

The surveys revealed that, in Nguru, 95 respondents agreed that, the kinsmen assist their members through empowerment while three respondents disagreed with that. In Isiakpu, 93 respondents agreed while three respondents disagreed. In Echara, 89 respondents concurred while eight respondents disagreed. In Umakashi, 91 respondents agreed while seven respondents disagreed. In Iheagu, 88 respondents agreed and nine respondents disagreed. In Ezema/Edem, 79 respondents agreed while 21 respondents disagreed. In Umuoyo, 83 respondents concurred while 15 respondents disagreed. Further, 80 respondents agreed with this variable in Owerre while 20 respondents disagreed. Lastly, in Ihe, 87 respondents agreed with this assertion, while 13 respondents disagreed. In all, 785 respondents (89%) of the sampled size believed that the kinsmen support others in business activities across various communities in Nsukka, while the

remaining 100 respondents (11%) disagreed. The responses indicate that the kinsmen empower themselves in boosting economic activities. The responses from interviews and FGDs revealed that kinsmen engage different measures to empower themselves in the community. Respondents said that some of the best ways the kinsmen help to promote their family's economic activity and prestige include the training of their younger ones in school or raising money for them to start a business. Family members and wealthy groups are increasingly utilizing apprenticeships and scholarships to empower the youths and reduce poverty. These schemes provide financial support and equipment for apprentices and students to start their own businesses or pursue higher education. Such efforts not only benefit the family unit but also contribute to the broader community's economic growth, as well as the reduction of poverty.

### **Kinsmen and socio-political development in Nsukka**

The outcomes of the quantitative survey among the 885 sampled population size from the nine communities in Nsukka are presented in Table 2 below.

Table 2: *Responses on the Socio-political Development of Kinsmen in Nsukka (F=885)*

S/ n	VARIABLES	Nguru (F=98)	Isiakpu (F=96)	Echara (F=98)	Umakashi (F=98)	Iheagu (F=97)	Ezema/Edem	Umuoyo (F=98)	Owerre (F=100)	Ihe (F=100)	Total (F= 885)	Percentage (%)
1	Formation of Political Structure	97	96	98	97	97	100	98	96	100	879	99.3
2	Make & Enforce Laws	95	94	97	95	93	98	97	97	98	864	97.6
3	Security of Lives & Properties	73	90	95	93	90	97	93	91	98	820	92.7
4	Sustainability & Promotion of Culture & Traditions	98	96	98	98	97	100	98	100	100	885	100
5	Coordination & Implementation of Social and Traditional Events	98	96	98	98	97	100	98	100	100	885	100
6	Serves as People's Representatives	98	96	98	98	97	100	98	100	100	885	100
7	Promotion of Peace & Justice	78	81	89	86	75	91	84	80	88	752	85.0
<b>MEAN SCORE</b>											<b>853</b>	<b>96.4</b>

Source: Authors' Field Survey.

Data presented in Table 2 above showed that kinsmen contribute to the socio-political development of their communities as the foundations of political institutions and structure in the African traditional society. This was affirmed by 97 respondents in Nguru, 96 respondents in Isiakpu, 98 respondents in Echara, 97 respondents each in Umakashi and Iheagu, 100 respondents in Ezema/Edem, 98 respondents in Umuoyo, 96 respondents in Owerre and 100 respondents in Ihe community. Hence, out of the 885 sampled population size, 879 respondents, which amounted to 99.3%, concurred with this variable while the remaining 6 respondents amounting to 0.7%, were neutral. The interviews and FGDs revealed that kinsmen are famous traditional institutions that promote socio-political development across the nine communities in Nsukka. The respondents and discussants believed that a community would move forward and achieve a lot through the intervention, active cooperation and participation of the kinsmen in individual and communal activities. As explained by Amadi Francis, all the traditional institutions as cultural groups, from the *Igwe-in-Council* to the family level have their foundations from the various *Umunnas* in the community (F. Amadi, personal communication, June 12, 2023).

Also, people in various political hierarchies across the Nsukka cultural zone and Igboland in general have their roots in a particular kindred as indigenous, generic cultural identity. The *Okpara*, *Onyishi* (oldest male), *Umuada*, *Umuikorobia*, *Ozor* cabinet, and *Ndishi* (Council of Elders) are strong institutions that control the social, economic, political, cultural and legal aspects of people's activities. The FGDs revealed that kinsmen control the behaviour of local residents, maintain hierarchical status in the community, and ensure sustainability despite the impact of colonial administration and Westernization. They maintain their roles in sustaining community's socio-political structure, ensuring that their ideas and contributions to local traditions remain relevant.

The survey also revealed that kinsmen make and enforce customary and formal laws for the socio-political development of the nine communities studied in Nsukka. This was affirmed by 95 respondents in Nguru, 94 respondents in Isiakpu, 97 respondents in Echara, 95 respondents in Umakashi, 93 respondents in Iheagu, 98 respondents in Ezema/Edem, 97 respondents each in Umuoyo and Owerre respectively and 98 respondents in Ihe. Out of the 885-sampled population size, 864

respondents, which accounted for 97.6%, concurred with this variable while the remaining 21 respondents accounting for 2.4% remained neutral. The responses from informants and discussants disclosed that kinsmen groups, including *Onyishi*, *Ndishi*, *Umuada*, *Okorobia*, and *Ozor*, actively enforce norms, laws, rules, and regulations in families, clans, villages, and towns. They enforce laws in areas such as respecting of taboos and maintenance of disciplines, value systems, religion, culture, traditions, taxation, local markets, and trading relationships. The *Onyishi* who is the custodian of the lineage *Ofo*, by virtue of his age and office is both the spiritual and political head of the village, and also has enormous responsibilities among his *Umunna*. Kinsmen in traditional African communities use various methods of law enforcement, such as fines, strikes, boycotts, ostracism, banishment, curses, and masquerades. They enforce laws enacted by their families, kindred, villages, and towns, as well as community norms. Instead of physical force, kinsmen use moral and spiritual forces to punish offenders, to ensure the safety and well-being of women and the entire community.

Further, the survey indicated that security of lives and property is a fundamental socio-political role of the kinsmen in

Nsukka. On this, 73 respondents in Nguru, 90 respondents in Isiakpu, 95 respondents in Echara, 93 respondents in Umakashi, 90 respondents in Iheagu, 97 respondents in Ezema/Edem, 93 respondents in Umuoyo, 91 respondents in Owerre and 98 respondents in Ihe all responded in affirmative. Therefore, out of 885 sample population size, 820 respondents, which accounted for 92.7%, concurred with the variable while the remaining 65 respondents that accounted for 7.3% disagreed. Interviews and FGDs confirmed that, as the representatives of the people, the kinsmen make efforts to protect lives and property in the community. The informants and discussants explained that one of the fundamental responsibilities of the kinsmen is to ensure that their family members and the community at large are safe from invaders. In this case, groups of kinsmen, especially the young ones, would form vigilante groups to ensure that the environment was protected day and night. FGDs revealed that, in pre-colonial times, kinsmen are trained as warriors to protect their clans, villages, and communal inheritance. Ezea Emmanuel, a kinsman from Iheagu, highlighted the importance of kinsmen's involvement in decision-making and their responsibility to ensure the safety of fellow kinsmen. He emphasized the importance of

kinsmen's mutual support in fighting against internal and external forces (E. Ezea, personal communication, June 12, 2023). However, some respondents and discussants in Nguru, Iheagu, and Owerre noted that the kinsmen's major political responsibilities of safeguarding lives and properties are now been partly handled by government agencies to avoid jungle justice.

Another fact revealed by the survey in Table 2 above is that sustainability and promotion of cultural and traditional values is another socio-political role of the kinsmen in Nsukka. The survey showed that 98 respondents in Nguru, 96 respondents in Iesiakpu, 98 respondents in Echara, 98 respondents in Umakashi, 97 respondents in Iheagu, 100 respondents in Ezema/Edem, 98 respondents in Umuoyo, 100 respondents in Owerre and 100 respondents in Ihe, all agreed with this statement. Hence, all 885 respondents, amounting to 100% agreed that the kinsmen help to promote and sustain people's heritages in Nsukka. The respondents and discussants revealed that the political hierarchy in the family has the priority to protect the culture and traditional heritages of the family and the community at large. They concurred that kinsmen are strong pillars in the management of the heritage resources of the people because they are the prime

custodians of such heritages. Ezea Emmanuel stated that the *Umunna* is both a socio-cultural and political institution that anchors every traditional activity like naming, marriage, chieftaincy, burial, initiation and meetings (E. Ezea, personal communication, June 12, 2023). The FGDs revealed that the various political units of the kinsmen like the *Onyishi*, *Ndishi/Ichie*, *Okorobia*, and *Umuada* help to maintain the people's culture by performing sacrifices and rituals on their behalf and enforcing the laws or norms of the land. The *Umunna* institution helps to sustain local foods, songs, traditional costumes, local industries, traditional dances, history, proverbs, traditional events, language, and the religion of the people. The respondents made it explicit that, the kinsmen help to sustain both tangible and intangible heritage of the people. These are sustained and transferred successively from one generation to another. It was revealed that every cultural group plays a role in the promotion of the culture and traditions of the family unit and community at large. Also, the survey revealed that kinsmen help in the coordination and implementation of social and traditional events in the community as a way of deriving socio-political development. According to the survey, 98 respondents

in Nguru, 96 respondents in Isiakpu, 98 respondents in Echara, 98 respondents in Umakashi, 97 respondents in Iheagu, 100 respondents in Ezema/Edem, 98 respondents in Umuoyo, 100 respondents in Owerre and 100 respondents in Ihe communities agreed with this variable. This shows that all the 885 respondents which accounted for 100% agreed that the kinsmen coordinate and execute social and traditional events in Nsukka. Interviews and FGDs revealed that kinsmen in Nsukka are the primary coordinators and enforcers of social and traditional ceremonies in the community. They are highly recognized at all functions and are in charge of any traditional event, from the breaking of kola nut at the beginning of such events to the end of the event. One of the respondents stressed that no societal or public event is expected to hold without the consent of the kinsmen, as nobody is seen as independent in a community (D. Nkalu, personal communication, June 12, 2023). Other respondents also explained that the social and political obligations of the kinsmen include assisting fellow kinsmen in carrying out events according to the traditions of the land, such as traditional marriage, burial of the dead, chieftaincy, and initiation rites across families. For instance, during traditional marriages, they crosscheck the dowries or

pride price and other items presented to the bride's family and compare them with the list given earlier to the groom's family. Their presence makes events colourful, honourable, and entertaining, but if they did not participate, the celebrant might be penalized for disobeying the custom of the land. Thus, the survey revealed that the kinsmen serve as representatives of the people as part of their socio-political obligations.

According to the survey, a total of 98 respondents in Nguru, 96 respondents in Isiakpu, 98 respondents in Echara, 98 respondents in Umakashi, 97 respondents in Iheagu, 100 respondents in Ezema/Edem, 98 respondents in Umuoyo, 100 respondents in Owerre and 100 respondents in Ihe agreed that kinsmen act on behalf of their people in traditional ceremonies. This shows that all the 885 respondents, which accounted for 100% agreed that the kinsmen engage representatives in communal practices in Nsukka. Interviews and FGDs also revealed that kinsmen provide complementary governance structures by having representatives in the *Eze* or *Igwe's* Council, acting as advisers to the ruler, helping to check the excesses of those in authority, and helping in decision-making. These representatives are taken from each family; they are people who have been appointed by their

kinsmen to represent them in the traditional government. They are parts of the authority that look into the affairs of the people and the environment making the political structure of the community complete. Ezeah Tochukwu asserts that any kinsman can represent his lineage without a special prerequisite, as long as the culture and traditions of the people are maintained (T. Ezea, personal communication, June 12, 2023). Other respondents revealed that traditional costumes, chieftaincy titles, language, food, masquerades, occupations, and nomenclatures are symbolic representations that distinguish kinsmen from others. They also added that kinsmen supervise communal and governmental projects and events in their communities, with some acting as the representatives of the people.

The next variable in the survey showed that kinsmen help to promote peace and justice across the nine communities in Nsukka. The survey revealed that, 78 respondents in Nguru, 81 respondents in Isiakpu, 89 respondents in Echara, 86 respondents in Umakashi, 75 in Iheagu, 91 respondents in Ezema/Edem, 84 respondents in Umuoyo, 80 respondents in Owerre, and 88 respondents in Ihe responded in affirmation to this variable. Hence, out of the 885-sampled population size, 752 respondents, which

accounted for 85%, concurred with the variable while the remaining 133 respondents that accounted for 15% disagreed. The interviews and FGDs across Nsukka revealed that, kinsmen, including the *Onyishi*, the *Ichies*, and *Umuada*, serve as local judiciary, enforcing laws and promoting peace among conflicting groups. They enforce customary laws and collect fines for violating them. From pre-colonial times to present, they go to court on behalf of their people, interpreting customary laws and communal issues. The *Onyishi*, the *Ichies*, and *Umuada* maintain peace by summoning complainants and defenders, using the staff of office of *Ofo* as a symbol of justice. However, it was noted that nowadays, some of them can be biased due to personal and communal interests. Some leaders now indulge in favouritism towards the rich and corruption due to monetary incentives. This development creates disunity and injustice within the kindreds and the entire community.

### **Discussion of findings**

With an average percentage of 91.4% from all the variables in the surveys, the results of the interviews and FGDs across the nine communities (Nguru, Isiakpu, Echara, Umakachi, Iheagu, Ezema/Edem, Umuoyo, Owerre and Ihe) indicated that kinsmen play crucial roles in enhancing

the socio-economic activities of the communities. The kinsmen institution, as socio-structural and political unit, fosters better understanding, collective efforts and mutual interactions, which in turn, boost the socio-economic and political activities of individuals. This aligns with the view expressed by Lukpata and Asha (2014) that collective efforts create a path of self-sufficiency for individuals in traditional communities, and the welfare of every citizen is societal success. Lopez (2019) also agrees that society benefits from improving the lives of regular citizens. Continuous social development is evident across Nsukka, as people within the same clan, lineage, and community work together for the betterment of individuals and the community. This also aligns with the view of Ferguson (2016), that social development enhances people's empowerment without discrimination and makes everyone accessible and accountable for the betterment of all in the community.

The measures adopted by kinsmen to boost economic activities of individuals include financial contributions, distribution of food items, thrift contributions, allocation of land, assistance during farming activities, help in trading and empowerment. The people from Nsukka usually contribute money to

assist themselves, most especially during public ceremonies like marriage, naming, coronation, birthday, burial, anniversaries, and other activities that are financially consuming. This is done to lessen the financial burdens of individuals and ensure that all activities are done properly according to the traditions of the various communities involved. Based on the shared cultural and generic values, the kinsmen donate money, individually or as a group, to assist themselves, and this has become part of their normal obligations from one generation to another. This relates to view of Ferguson (2016) that socio-economic improvement could happen anywhere, either in the neighbourhoods in metropolitan areas, sections of smaller cities and towns, or rural settings such as clan, lineage, and local communities.

Due to common family background, interrelationships, love, and unity that exist among kinsmen, there is an avenue for individuals to share parts of their farm products with others, especially after harvest. This is in line with the view of Lopez (2019) that effective socialisation among people, in terms of sharing ideas and resources, especially among the poor, improves better understanding, love, unity and livelihood in a community. This act enhances togetherness among the people.

In Nsukka, kinsmen share their resources to ensure comfortable living conditions for everyone. Participating in thrift contributions is a core socio-economic activity among kinsmen, which helps them to plan for future needs and to be liberated from poverty. Kinsmen save money daily, weekly, and monthly through thrift contribution, based on their income status and agreements. This voluntary activity is common among trustworthy and reliable kinsmen who understand themselves and obey rules guiding the activity. The money is shared at the end of the month or year, based on the needs of individuals in the community.

Inheritance, particularly land, is a significant benefit for kinsmen, as each clan in the community is endowed with land for cultivation of both food and cash crops. Some kinsmen sell these portions of land to enrich their immediate families, while others share them among siblings to avoid conflicts within the family, clan, village, and community. Across various communities in Nsukka, the kinsmen help themselves to cultivate and harvest farm products as a way of maximizing farm productivity, though such gesture has reduced drastically in the post-colonial era due to formal education, personal interest, white collar jobs, and migration. According to Okoli

(2022), due to love, trust, and mutual understanding among the kinsmen, they also allow their siblings to sell goods for others as a way of assisting traders among them who need help. This enhances the business activities of every individual in the community. Likewise, those who are wealthier extend kind gestures to others by empowering them to become independent and have sources of income. This helps to boost the financial strength of the kinsmen and reduce the rate of poverty among them.

Based on the average percentage of 96.4% from the survey, of the positive responses of interview respondents and FGD discussants across the nine communities studied, it was revealed that the kinsmen contribute to the socio-political development of the people of Nguru, Isiakpu, Echara, Umakachi, Iheagu, Ezema/Edem, Umuoyo, Owerre and Ihe communities during the pre-colonial, colonial and post-colonial periods. The questionnaire surveys, interviews and FGDs conducted revealed that the socio-political roles of the kinsmen are invaluable in Igboland since time immemorial as earlier discovered by Nzimiro (1972), Isichei (1973, 1976), Egwuenu (1993), Olisa (2002) and Okoli (2022). These studies corroborated the findings of this research that kinsmen make up the political structure of

communities and make and enforce laws that guide human activities in their respective communities. The current research, however, buttressed the major activities via which the kinsmen enhance the political development of the nine communities studied in Nsukka, which were not emphasized in the earlier studies.

### Conclusion

In Nsukka, kinsmen have played crucial roles in the socio-economic development of communities from pre-colonial to colonial, and post-colonial eras. Their assiduous spirit and steadfastness have led to significant contributions to the socio-economic development of communities. They organize family members to contribute money and food for the alleviation of poverty, provide

some incentives for the upkeep of aged people, and motivate others through entrepreneurship and empowerment. They also contribute to their community's economic development through agricultural and non-agricultural production, and trade. During social, cultural, and political events, they donate money and gifts to strengthen relationships and love. They also enforce local laws, serve as community representatives, and sustain political hierarchies. Their traditional roles can be observed in gatherings such as meetings, naming and marriage ceremonies, chieftaincy, induction, and burial rites. It is essential for custodians to sustain the activities of this traditional institution to ensure heritage sustainability in Nsukka and Igbo land at large.

### ORCID

Akintunde John Ololdi: Orcid number: <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-3668-4611>

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