

Enugwu-Agidi History - Administrative Structure

Pre-Warrant Chieftaincy Administration

Before the advent of the British in Igbo land in the first decade of this 20th century, Enugwu-Agidi was under the external control of Eze Nri. This control was in the form of ritual sanctions through many codes of abomination. The interpretation of these codes, detection of their violation and their application, were done internally by traditional religious priests and Nze na Ozo society. Since there was no chieftaincy system as in the North and West, internal administration was in the hands of Nze-na-Ozo society of titled men. Oral accounts of the last period of the Pre-Warrant Chieftaincy administration confirmed that whenever there was a need to summon the town to a meeting, the town crier (Osu-ekpe), Okaforocha Nwudu from Normu village, would sound the wooden gong (Ikolo). The instrument was beaten to sound different notes for different types of meetings; whether it was for an exclusive class of elders, (Nze-na-Ozo) or for all adults. The venue of the meetings was invariably Agaba Dile's Compound at Eke market square.

Until the advent of colonial administration, Agaba Dile was the leader of the town both in war and in peace. He was said to be a strong and courageous man who so committed to the traditional system that he carried out his vow not to see a white man in his lifetime. He in fact died the very day Europeans came to Enugwu-Agidi for the first time. Meetings were also held at Ebe-akpaka at Normu for the execution of decisions that were connected with rituals; and at Ezi Okolo at Irunnebo village when such meetings were to deal with secret matters.

Acknowledged spokesmen at such meetings were said to be Onunkwo, Nwabude, Onuora Isona, Muo-Ebene from Etiti village; Nwuzoka and Ilozo Echebu from Iruobiaeli village Nwokafor-Nwanuta from Achalla village; Muokwuo from Normu; Okoye Mba from Ogwugwu village; Okeke Nwanyazo and Nwokafor Chiemegwo from Ifite village and Nwokoye Okonkwo Ucheke (Okoye Nwagboye's father) from Igbolo village. Everybody strictly complied with any decisions reached at such meetings in the town. Certain age grades were used in the implementation of some decisions.

Warrant Chieftaincy Period

Written account stated that the British took over the whole of Southern Nigeria around 1905 and banned Nri ritual system of external control of the neighboring towns in 1911. This was done, as stated earlier, by forcing Eze Nri Obalike who reigned from 1889 – 1935 to openly abrogate all codes of abomination and taboos in the presence of Igbo leaders. To put another structure of administration in place of the Eze Nri ritual system, the Warrant Chief system which had been in operation in Igbo land in 1911/1912. In his paper on "The New Structure of Local Government In The East Central State", Dr. G.A. ODENIGWE holds that the "Native Courts Proclamation of 1900 consolidated the new system of local government on proper statutory basis and provided for two institutions; namely, the Native Courts and the Minor Courts". The Native Courts, according to him, became Native Councils only when they were presided over by the District Commissioners. And as Native Councils, they functioned as the Native Authority Councils of the Northern Nigeria. It was in the Native Courts that the Warrant Chiefs, the Native Courts "had developed into omni-purpose organs of local government". He added that shortly before the end of the Warrant

Chieftaincy System, some warrant chiefs were in the process of being elevated into Paramount Chiefs. This was designed to consolidate Indirect Rule through the Native authorities similar to the system, which had been developed in the non-Moslem areas of the Northern Nigeria.

Chief Eric Okam thinks that appointment of Warrant Chiefs in Enugwu-Agidi took place in about 1912 and one would consider this correct, judging from the above written account. It is said that the first demand on Enugwu-Agidi to present a candidate for appointment as warrant chief was made when white men came to Enugwu-Agidi for the first time in connection with the dispute between Muofunanya Emegwo and Chinwuba Anago of Awka as reported earlier.

The two white men who came to Enugwu-Agidi in the company of Chinwuba finally set Muofunanya's house on fire as a punishment for his crime of seducing Chinwuba's wife. They later demanded to be taken to the leader of the town. They were told that the leader, Dile had died and were shown the body. On their demand that the town should produce one person to be made a chief, the town hesitated a bit, requesting to be allowed a few days. Seeing the punishment meted to Muofunanya and remembering what happened to Eze Nri Obalike, and the general unfriendly attitude of the 'toeless' white men, the town feared that anybody given to the foreigners would not come back to the town alive. The leading families therefore refused to produce anybody, thus making a way for Udegbune from Igbolo village to offer himself. It is said that Udegbune was encouraged by his earlier knowledge of Awka, which he had during his period of apprenticeship to an Awka man.

When Udegbune went to Awka in response to the Whiteman's request, it was thought that would be the end of him. But he came back after a while, conferred with an official authority to rule the whole town as a warrant chief: A sharp development that surprised the town, especially the big families who in the uncivilized tradition of that period, considered leadership of the town by a small lineage an aberration. Chief Udegbune from then, started representing Enugwu-Agidi at the Native Court Awka, until Okam, through the joint influences of his brother-in-law Onwurah Usoku of Awka and Chief Udegbune, gained recognition as a warrant chief to represent Iruokpalenyi village. That was followed by the recognition of Onubiyi through his relation to Usoku, Onwurah's mother. Chief Onubuiyi represented Umuakwuelo, Anofia, Irunnebo and Iruobieli villages.

These three were followed by the recognition of Nwankwo Akunede through the influence of his in-law, late Ojiako of Adazi. He represented Achalla village. With three additional warrant chiefs, Udegbune was restricted to Igbolo, Ifite and Ogwugwu and Normu. At the death of Udegbune, Okoli Ekwughe who belonged to the same Umu-Sinyandu lineage with Udegbune was installed. Thus he was the last to receive recognition as warrant chief in Enugwu-Agidi. There are conflicting reports about Igboanugo's effort to gain recognition as a warrant chief. A version of the oral account states that he was given recognition and that he in fact represented Iruobieli village. Another version, which appeared much stronger, holds that his effort to gain certificate of recognition failed to yield a positive result; and that he was therefore not recognized. Whatever happens to be the correct position, it is an acknowledged fact that Igboanugo was one of the candidates from established families in the town, sponsored for appointment as warrant chief.

Post-Warrant Chieftaincy Period

Aba women riot of 1929 brought to an end the system of Warrant Chiefs in the Southern Nigeria. The problem started as a result of illegal taxing of women at Abaja and Abak in the present Awka Ibom State. Protesting the action, the women started by demonstrating against the Warrant Chiefs in the above towns. As the District Officer, Mr. Claude Wrightwick intervened, the protest spread to Aba, resulting in enormous damages and some deaths. The immediate effect of this was the withdrawal of warrant from the Chiefs in Eastern Nigeria.

As Dr. Odenigwe rightly observed in the aforementioned paper, the women riots demonstrated the failure of this system, not because the Ibo communities had no chiefs or leaders of comparable ability with those of the North or that the people lacked respect for traditional authorities. The failure, according to him, was due to some of these factors: -

1. The British Colonial authorities failed to discover the basic units of Ibo communities over which a Warrant Chief or Paramount Chief or a leader derived authority and inspire local and traditional support. Irregularly grouped communities were placed under the charge or control of Warrant Chief whose main source of authority and support were the official letter of appointment and recognition issued by the colonial administration.
2. The selected representatives of the lineage groups of village were regarded individually as native authorities. Some were neither the traditional heads of their communities nor the choice of their people in most cases.
3. The basis for selection fluctuated with changes in the personnel of the political officers or district commissioners: Some emphasized choice of the people; others sought for personal merit and ability, yet others regarded traditional office such as the Ofor holder as the decisive factor in the selection the Warrant Chief. The above observations, no doubt are borne out by Enugwu-Agidi experience as stated earlier. Apart from the selection of Chief Udegbuna , little or no reference was made to the town in the subsequent selection of other Warrant Chiefs. With the warrants so withdrawn from Chiefs Okam, Onubuiyi, Okoli and Nwankwo Akunede in about 1930, another administrative system had to be formed to take over their function which was mainly settlement of cases and collection taxes. That new system did not come immediately from the government. What was called an intelligence survey of the culture of the natives and their traditional social system had to be made by the colonial government before a new system was worked out. It was during such a survey that M.D.W. Jeffrey produced an intelligence Report on Awka Division in 1930. To correct the shortcomings of the warrant Chiefs system, a representative system of Native Administration was established. In this, the chiefs of leaders, as representatives of their areas, collectively became the Native Authorities. They carried out settlement of cases within the town, and where any of such cases could not be settled in the town, it was taken to the Native Court. At that time, Enugwu-Agidi was under Enugwu-Ukwu (Umunri) Court. These Chiefs or leaders took turn, village by village, in representing the town at the above court. The house of Nwegbu Ibe in Ogwugwu village was understood to be their meeting place in the town. When he died, the venue shifted to the compound of Nwakonobu Ikwele of Etiti village. This continued to be the position until the Local Government Ordinance of 1950, which recommended the introduction of County Councils. The government thereafter officially requested each town to produce its most capable group of

people to represent the town in the County Council. Thereupon, Enugwu-Agidi presented the Okachanma age grade led by Chief Aaron Okoye who resided at Gusau in the Northern Nigeria from where he was invited home. He therefore had to start from then to represent the town at the County Council, which had shifted location from Enugwu-Ukwu to Abagana.

Enugwu-Agidi Brotherly Union

As more of the town's men ventured outside the town into 'Olu—Oyibo' (Whiteman's work), education and commerce, the need to improve on the administrative structure of the town became obvious, especially to the tiny group of the town became obvious, especially to the tiny group of the town's elite. The Okachanma was already in place to take care of settlement of disputes and representation of the town at Abagana. A job we understood the group did very creditably through the able leadership of chief Aaron Okoye. Since this group was not also taking care of the overall development of the town, an organizational unit was needed to keep kinsmen together in strange and heterogeneous urban environment and to serve as a vehicle for the overall development of the town. This was the problem, which a group of Enugwu-Agidi citizens led by the late Chief Nathan Okam started to discuss at Aba in Imo State in 1937. They thought of a development – organization similar to the existing Onitsha Progressive Union or Awka District Union. As they did this, they also considered it opportune to have the name Enugwu-Osu-na Agidi changed, especially since the corrupt version of it offered some mischievous neighbors a ready instrument for taunting the town. So, in 1938, the town's Union was formed at Aba, with the name of the town also changed to Enugwu-Agidi, dropping the middle word 'OSU' with its derogatory connotation. This made the name of the town Union, 'Enugwu-Agidi Brotherly Union' (E.B.U.).

It should be noted that the Aba people did not exclusively do the discussions that preceded the above decision. They kept in touch with members of the town at other stations particularly Mr. Josiah Onubuiyi at Kaduna, Aaron Okoye at Gusau, Nwoyeocha at Idah and B.J. Morah at Onitsha. Both the formation of the town Union and the new name of the town were published in the Nigerian Observer in Port Harcourt. Mr. Gabriel Nworji confirmed, from his records, that the publication also appeared in the West African Pilot of 15th Sept. 1938. And it is understood that the person who first suggested the new name was Mr. Simon Umechume Anikpe from Iruoma village. For many years after the formation according to Chief Eric Okam, the Union continued to be run at branch units without central coordinating body: Aba branch under Chief N.C. Okam, Gusau branch under Chief Aaron Okoye, home branch run through the two church missions under the control of Mr. B.J. Morah etc. That continued to be the position until 1947 when the first conference of E.B.U. was held at Enugwu-Agidi with late Chief Aaron Okoye on the chair. From this point, the picture, as to the relation between the Community Council (Okachanma and the E.B.U. was not quite clear. One source of our information stated that Chief Aaron Okoye did not hold the office of President General of E.B.U. at any time. He was, according to the source, the Okachanma and therefore the representative of the town at Abagana Customary Court. He played a leading role in the E.B.U. but did not chairman its central body.

Although that some of those who share this view could not say readily who was the first president general of the union especially from 1947's conference, others, including Mr. Jerome

Nwora Igboanugo, whom stated that late Joseph Ndupuechi was the first President General, and Jerome Igboanugo was the first general secretary. He confirmed categorically that their tenure lasted from 1947 to 1949 during which period they addressed a letter to Mr. Aaron Okoye at Gusau through the District Officer (D.O.) Awka, requesting him (Aaron Okoye) to come home to represent the town at Abagana Customary Court. Mr. Ndupuechi, according to this source, was voted out, when he suggested that the sacred Eke bush be cleared. That was in 1949 when Chief Okoye was installed the Okachanma of Enugwu-Agidi. Others held the view that Chief Aaron Okoye was the first National President of the E.B.U.; that he took the office from the conference of 1947. It should be remembered that the function of town unions then was not as heavy as it is now that they are responsible for the overall administration of rural towns. They only acted as cultural organizations then. So it was believed that, as the town's representative at the Abagana Customary Court, Chief A. Okoye also acted as the Union's first president general. The post he later relinquished to Mr. Josiah Onubuyi December 1955.

Functioning Age-Grades

It should be noted that what has over the years metamorphosed into the 'Ulo-nabo' existed then as 'Egbenugo', and acted as the main executive arm of the towns' administrative system before and after the formation of the E.B.U. This group of two age grades was formerly named Ekwueme and then Egbenugo. That was when it drew its membership from Umu-Agidi group of villages. When the membership broadened to include members of the age grades from other villages in the town, the name again changed to 'Ogbanabo'. The present name Ulo-nabo was the result of the last change of the above name Ogbanabo. Our source stated that before the formation of the E.B.U., the Community Council of Nze-na-Ozo members made use of the Egbenugo functional age grades in enforcing decisions and maintaining order.

When Aaron Okoye acted as the Okachanma, the age grade participated in settling cases. Where if they failed to resolve any case, appeal had to be made to Chief Okoye. Indeed it was understood that the Chief used his more civilized influence to make the town desist from washing its dirty linens in the public by taking cases involving community members to the Native Court at Abagana. He insisted that every case, no matter its gravity, must be settled in the town. That continued to be the position immediately after the formation of E.B.U., until the union with its more democratic base assumed greater administrative power. The age grades which now answers Ulo-nabo still constitutes a branch of the executive arm of the E.B.U. It is still being used in the implementation of certain decisions of the union and in maintaining order, especially in the market. But its judicial function is no longer as wide as it was before the formation of the town union. It settles only such cases as delegated to it by the union, or the Traditional ruler. Other people who held the posts of President and Secretary General of the Union from 1955 are as follows:

(a) Dec.1955 – Dec.1958 Mr. Josiah Onubuiyi (President)

Mr. Daniel Ilozo (Secretary)

(b) Dec.1958 – Dec.1961 Mr. B.J. Morah (President)

Mr. David Onyibor (Secretary)

(c) Dec.1961 – Dec. 1976 Mr. Daniel Ilozo (President)

Mr. E.O. Morah (Secretary)

(d) Dec.1976 – Dec. 1981 Mr. Bennett Okoye (President)

Mr. P.C.D. Obianyido (Secretary)

(e) Dec.1981—Jan.1983 Mr. Tony A. Umeano (President)

Mr. P.C.D. Obianyido (Secretary)

(f) Jan.1983 – Sept.1984 Mr. Gabriel Nworji (President)

Mr. P.C.D. Obianyido (secretary)

(g) Sept.19884 -- Dec.1986 Prince C.C. Okam (President)

Mr. P.C.D. Obianyido (Secretary)

(h) Dec.1986 -- Dec.1989 Prince Ike Okoli (President)

Dec. 1986 – May 1987 Mr. P.C.D. Obianyido (Secretary)

May.1987 – Dec.1989 Mr. Alex Onubuiyi (Secretary)

Re-introduction of Chieftaincy

If we had a choice, this part of our history would have been skipped because of the ugly past it brings back to our minds. But we have reached a level of social development where it is no longer easy to gloss over important historical facts. It is against this circumstantial background that we have decided to briefly state only the facts of re-introduction of Chieftaincy in Enugwu-Agidi.

At the end of the Nigerian civil war, which started in July 1967 and ended in January 1970, Enugwu-Agidi, which was sacked during the war like many other communities in the former 'Biafra', got committed to a painful process of reconstruction rehabilitation and re-organization. To facilitate this process, it became necessary, as it was then in vogue, to appoint somebody who would serve as the link between the embattled community and Government. Because of his

connections with those in the corridor of power, Chief S.O.N. Okafor, was readily considered the most qualified for this position. He was therefore installed the Okpalariam I of Enugwu-Agidi in 1972. The installation owed its validation to a chieftaincy agreement signed between Chief S.O.N. Okafor on one hand and the Enugwu-Agidi community on the other, on the platform of the former Enugwu-Agidi community council. Shortly after the installation, there arose a conflict between Igwe S.O.N. Okafor and the Community Council cum E.B.U., in which Igwe Okafor was said to have violated the terms of the chieftaincy agreement. All efforts to resolve the conflict failed to yield positive result. Thereupon, with a gook support from the community, the E.B.U. and Enugwu-Agidi Community Council were obliged to determine the Chieftaincy agreement by resolving to de-stool Chief S.O.N. Okafor as the Okpalariam I of Enugwu-Agidi in 1975.

List of Enugwu-Agidi Age Grades

S/NO	NAMES	AGE RANGE
1.	EKWUEME	1895 – 1897
2.	OKACHAMMA	1898 – 1900
3.	AJILI	1901 – 1903
4.	OGBUEFI	1904 – 1906
5.	OKPATU	1907 – 1909
6.	AFULUKWE	1910 – 1912
7.	IRUGO	1912 – 1914
8.	AMULUNAMMA	1915 – 1917
9.	UDOKA	1918 – 1921
10.	IGWEBUIKE	1922 – 1925
11.	IRUKA	1926 – 1928
12.	UGOCHUKWU	1928 – 1930
13.	UZODINMA	1931 – 1934
14.	UZODILI	1935 – 1937
15.	OGANIRU	1938 – 1940
16.	OGUEJIOFOR	1941 – 1942
17.	EBEEOGU	1943 – 1945
18.	UBAKA	1946 – 1948
19.	NJIKOKA	1949 – 1952
20.	OFU-OBI	1953 – 1955
21.	ANADUNMA	1956 – 1958

We have chosen to take the above list from Enugwu-Agidi citizens who were living during the period of writing of this book. As such, the age grade (Ekwueme) to which Mr. David Okonkwo (Akaku) belonged is the starting point. Though David died in 1988 as the oldest man in the town, he was one of the many towns' elders who were kind enough to freely supply information for this book: A much more reason why his gentle soul should be disposed to rest in perfect peace. His death lives Ozo Nwannna Anuta (Ozo-nwelibe) as the oldest man in Enugwu-Agidi at the date (3/5/89) of this writing. He was the only member of Okachanma age grade alive. It should be understood that the popular former functional age-grade 'Egbenugo' was made up of Okachanma and Ajili age grades. And that the current 'Ulo-nabo' age grade installed in 1987 is made up of Udoka and Igwebuike age grades.