

## Movable Artifacts in Akwa Ibom State and National Development

Victor Sunday Umanah, PhD, Prof. Malachy Ikechukwu Okwueze, PhD

Coal City University, Enugu, Nigeria

*\*Corresponding Authors: Victor Sunday Umanah, Coal City University, Enugu, Nigeria*

### ABSTRACT

*Artifacts are works of arts produced by indigenous people for a usable aim in daily chores. Quite a number of them are immovable whereas a greater number are movable for commercial purposes to meet their functional obligations as small and medium scale enterprise or informal sector carried out by indigenous people which contributed to national development. However, the inability of the government to effectively harness and support the potentials of these entrepreneurs and link them to the real sector has continued to foster poverty and undermine the potentials of economic growth that is inherent in this sector. The objective of the study was to examine the importance of movable artifacts as produced and understood by indigenous people, access its relevance to national development. The phenomenology method was employed in the study. It was concluded from the findings that indigenous artists were proven entrepreneurs in the society that contributed immensely to the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) of the state and Nigeria. There is need for support and encouragement for such individual entrepreneurs by individuals, corporate bodies and government at all levels.*

**Keywords:** Artifacts, Entrepreneur, GDP, Moveable

### INTRODUCTION

Artifacts are part of the components that make up the culture of aboriginal people. Obviously, the culture of a society was encapsulated in the arts of that society both artifacts and religious objects, and had remained a veritable tool in unveiling past civilization and achievement. Throughout the history of mankind, culture has been the fulcrum upon which society rests, it provides and takes various forms including traditional festivals, the social, religious, intellectual and artistic manifestations that characterize a society (Adeyeri, 2012). Most of the movable artifacts produced by indigenous society was for commercial purposes and belonged to what is now known as the informal sector as seen in the later part of the study. This however, is corroborated by Osamwonyi (2008:5) who notes that:

The informal sector has been described by the International Finance Corporation as a vibrant sector which accounts for one-third of GDP, creating 90% new jobs. In Nigeria, the Federal office of statistics shows that

the sector is responsible for 70% of Nigerian economic activity and 60% of total employment.

By implication, this means that a majority of Nigerians work and own business in this sector and the production of movable artifacts for commercial purposes are also part of this sector. Thus, both young and old people were fully integrated into the society by their skills thereby not becoming a social burden on the society and nation. This also goes to divulge that indigenous people knew that being resourceful is paramount for their sustenance than waiting on anyone or group and Ononogbu (2006:181) has observed that “government efforts alone cannot suffice to address all the problems in the society; hence the all-hands-on-deck approach is solicited”.

The problem is that there are arguments on whether inanimate physical objects are part of the material culture in a society and how meanings are attached to such objects like: forests, grooves, hills and caves. To most people the importance and reasons for the production of such artifacts may not be known. Government on their part is unable to support these indigenous artists and this contributes to

dwindling economic growth as a bane to national development.

It is in line with this view that the objective of the study was to examine the importance of movable artifacts as produced and understood by indigenous people, and to access its relevance to national development.

The study unraveled the importance of some of the practices of indigenous people which was practiced over a long period of time and still extant in contemporary Nigerian society. It is germane to note that the content of the culture of the people should not to be underestimated or undermined. It would also make explicit the idea behind such production of artifacts which the people hold in high esteem and a collective appreciation of such by the society.

Phenomenological method was used for this research work. The phenomenology method is a scientific method of knowledge pursuit relying on collection of data, observation, replication in a bid to arriving at the result and possibly making predictions for future control of events. The research instruments used in the study were primary and secondary sources of information and observation. The primary sources included data obtained from the field through oral interviews and personal observation by the researchers. The secondary sources included: published and unpublished books, seminar papers, journals, intelligence reports, archival and internet materials, and government publications.

Cultural Identity theory in cultural studies was used in this work because it refers to a person's sense of belonging to a particular culture or group. This process of identity involves learning about and accepting traditions, heritage, language, religion, ancestry, aesthetics, thinking patterns, and social structures of a culture (Lustig, 2013). This means that culture is a part of people's self- concept as people internalize the beliefs, values, norms, and social practices of their culture and identify themselves with the said culture.

This theory is very important because it elucidates the content of value as guiding principles, to meaningful symbols, and to lifestyles that people share together in a group which the people of Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria is not an exception. It further shows how the concept of self- concept becomes dynamic and multifaceted within a changing social society. Therefore, immovable artifacts are an identity,

picture easily identified with the place and people that they are found. Therefore, some of these immovable artifacts in Akwa Ibom State are representations of the people, their belief, arts, aesthetics, value and culture.

The layout of the study are as follows: Introduction, Historical Background of the People of Akwa Ibom State, Movable Artifacts in the areas of crafts and weaving are: traditional bamboo chairs, different sizes of pots, and diverse colours of beads, conclusion and recommendations.

### HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF THE PEOPLE OF AKWA IBOM STATE

#### People: Origin and Structure

Ukpong (2007, p.2) notes that "the original homeland of the people of Akwa Ibom State before settling in Nigeria was Usak Edet, where they lived along with the Oron and perhaps also the Efut at the Nigeria/ Cameroon border". Prior to the present time the people of Akwa Ibom as well as Cross River States were generally classified as Ibibio into sub-groups comprising of Eket, Oron, Ibeno, Efik, and Annang (Forde & Jones, 1950). On leaving the Cameroons, they migrated to their present homeland through different routes and it appears that the people's languages and some of their customs evolved while they lived in Usak Edet in the Cameroon (Ukpong, 2007). Ukpong (2007, p.2) also notes that "the people of Akwa Ibom and Cross River States were among the 70million people speaking 700 Bantu languages/ dialects stretching approximately from Duala on the Atlantic Coast to the mouth of the Tana River in the Indian Ocean".

The people of Akwa Ibom are culturally homogenous with a common identity and linguistic heritage and this homogeneity are considered a set of potentially unifying factor (Akpabot, 1994).

#### Components

Akwa Ibom State is called the "*Land of Promise*" and occupies a total landmass of 7,249 square kilometers of Nigeria's wealth basin, the South-South Zone or the Delta Region, and a coastline of 129 km long, lying between latitudes 4<sup>0</sup> 32<sup>1</sup> and 5<sup>0</sup> 33<sup>1</sup> N and longitudes 7<sup>0</sup> 35<sup>1</sup> and 8<sup>0</sup> 25<sup>1</sup> E (Government of Akwa Ibom State, 2014). The State is bounded on the East by Rivers State, the West by Cross River, the North by Abia State and the South by the Gulf of Guinea (Government of Akwa Ibom State,

2014). Akwa Ibom State was created on 23<sup>rd</sup> September, 1987 out of Cross River State, one of the pioneer 12 States created by Gowon's military administration in 1967, following the military intervention of January, 1966 (Government of Akwa Ibom State, 2008). Sitting astride the seemingly interminable sand bank of the Bight of Bonny, the state according to NPC has a population of 3.92 million with a total of 2,044,510 males and 1,875,698 females (NPC, 2006) spread into 31 Local Government Areas.

### Seasons

The State has basically two distinct seasons: the rainy season which lasts from May to October, with a slight break in August, usually called "August break" while the duration of the dry season is November to April (Udoh, 1970). Due to climate change there are alterations in these seasons as they neither start nor stop when they should. However, in the coastal areas, rain falls almost all year round and the Atlantic coastline stretches from Oron in the East to Ikot Abasi in the West. The harmattan accompanied by the North-East Winds occurs in December and early January.

Akwa Ibom State falls within the tropical zone with a dominant vegetation of green foliage of trees, and shrubs. It constitutes a major chunk of the nation's oil palm belt. The physical relief of the State is basically flat. However, there are places in Itu and Ibiono Ibom Local Government Areas where the topography is undulating with some areas as high as 200 feet above sea level. There are in some areas, valleys, creeks and swamps due to the influence of the Atlantic Ocean, the Qua Iboe and the Cross Rivers which traverse the length and breadth of the State.

### Establishments

Akwa Ibom State has more than 47 hospitals and allied health institutions like "Immanuel Hospital, Eket; Psychiatric Hospital, Eket; Mercy Hospital, Abak; St. Luke's Hospital, Anua- Uyo; Dental Care, Ikot Ekpene; Infectious Disease Hospital, Ikot Ekpene; Leprosy Hospital, Ekpene Obom; Vaginal-Vesico Fistula (VVF), Mbribrit Itam" (Government of Akwa Ibom State, 2014, p.18). Ukpe (2012) also notes that some educational institutions in Akwa Ibom State include:

University of Uyo, Uyo; Maritime Academy, Oron; College of Education, Afaha Nsit;

Akwa Ibom State Polytechnic, Ikot Osurua, Ikot Ekpene. A total of about 229 Secondary Institutions are found in the State like: Methodist Boys' High School, Oron (1905); Etinan Institute, Etinan (1915); Holy Family College, Abak (1942); Cornelia Connelly College, Afaha Oku- Uyo (1944); Union Secondary School, Ibiaku- Itu (1948). (p.4).

Further, at present, there are no fewer than 1,110 (One thousand, one hundred and ten) public primary schools in the State (Government of Akwa Ibom State, 2014).

### Governments

The people of Akwa Ibom State had an established system of governance and administration before the British colonial masters arrived in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. Udodata (2014) notes that:

The entire society of Akwa Ibom State was a cohesive entity under the Chieftaincy government of a highly organized structure arrangement in a hierarchy from the linear family to the mega structure of the "Local" government. There were Primary Chiefs, Higher Chiefs and Honorary Chiefs. Primary chiefs were of three types: Ete Idung or Ete Ufok (Leader of the household), Obong Ekpuk (Family Head), and Obong Isong (Village Head). The Higher Chiefs were of two types: Akuku (Clan Head) and the Paramount Ruler. The Honourary Chiefs were members of the community who had distinguished themselves in one area of prominence or the other and they enjoyed every right and privilege of the Chieftaincy institution. (p.29).

The arrangement of the different category of chiefs in their hierarchy was for the facilitation of administrative duties within their households, family, village and clans. The village head had Council of Chiefs that dispensed justice to the people. The Clan head in turn, worked with the village heads out of whom he constituted his council.

In this 21<sup>st</sup> century, Akwa Ibom State is one of the 36 States in the Nigerian Federation. The State is divided into 31 Local Government Areas and Uyo is the State capital. Other major towns include: Eket, Ikot Ekpene, Ikot Abasi,

Oron, Abak, Itu, Etinan and Ibiaku Ntok Okpo. The State has the presence of Federal, State and Local government administration. In view of this, and in contemporary political platform, the State has been governed by the following Governors since its creation:

- Tunde Ogbeha - (Sept. 28, 1987- Aug. 1, 1988)
- Godwin Abbe - (Aug. 1, 1988- Sept. 9, 1990)
- Idongesit Nkanga - (Sept. 5, 1990- Jan. 2, 1992)
- Akpan Isemin (Late) - (Jan. 2, 1992- Nov. 17, 1993)
- Yakubu Bako - (Dec. 15, 1993- Aug. 21, 1996)
- Joseph A. Adeusi - (Aug. 21, 1996- Aug. 10, 1998)
- Eyepeiyah John Ebiye -(Aug. 10, 1998- May 29, 1999)
- Victor Attah - (May 29, 1999- May 29, 2007)
- Godswill Akpabio - (May 29, 2007- May 29, 2015)
- Udom Gabriel Emmanuel - (May 29, 2015- ??????)

### Occupation

The three major intra- ethnic groups are Ibibio, Annang and Oron, other sub- groups include: Eket, Ibeno, Itu Mbonuso and the Andonis, while English is the language of government and business (K. Ekpo, Personal Communication, September 17, 2013). Akwa Ibom people are as industrious and resourceful as they are hospitable. A majority of the rural populace engaged in farming. Akwa Ibom falls within the tropical zone with a dominant vegetation of green foliage trees, shrubs and oil-palm tree belt which holds the highest density of the cash crops in the world including rubber, cocoa and rice (Ministry of Information and Culture, 1995). Other dominant crops are coconut, citrus, cassava, yam, maize, cowpeas, plantain, banana, pineapple and kolanut. Other traditional occupations of the people are fishing, trading, wood-carving, raffia works, blacksmithing, pottery, iron works, tailoring, arts and craft creations (Ministry of Information and Culture, 1995). The State is also endowed with rich deposits of limestone, gravel, sand, salt, silver nitrate, silica sand and kaolin that can be commercially exploited.

Akwa Ibom is often described as a uni-cultural State where norms, taboos, customs and traditions are the same. Folkways may vary from one ethnic grouping to another, but the operational norms of the culture are basically the same all over the State. The people of Akwa Ibom State have a common ancestral antecedence having an unparallel impact on the people through traditional songs, dances and beliefs (Umanah, 2012). This cultural commonality is epitomized in the similarities in cuisines, dressing, dances, songs, rituals, folklores, beliefs and myth (Government of Akwa Ibom State, 2008). Almost all aspects of its culture had potentials to provide fascinating experiences for tourists and for investment opportunities. The social unit consists of the *Ufok* (family), *Irib Ete* (household/patrilineal relatives), *Ekpuk* (groups of patrilineal relatives tracing their genealogy to a common ancestor or fore-father), *Awio* (village), *Imaan* (clan) (Meek, 1937 and Ekanem, 2006).

Like other Africans, religion cuts through the whole life of the people of Akwa Ibom State. Thus, the people believe in a Supreme Deity called *Awasi*, *Nnem* (intermediary deities and spirits), Ancestors (*Mme Ete-Ete*), *Aruru* (invisible and unidentifiable force) (Parrinder, 1969; Idowu, 1973; Enang, 1975; Enang, 1979). Therefore, social and religious concern is seen in a single oneness in Akwa Ibom State.

Traditional system of communication refers to modes of meaning exchange that are rooted in a people's culture, and which began from the era of pre-literate and pre-modern man (Ukonu & Wogu, 2008). Diverse ways were seen in this regards like: folktales, proverbs and fables, masquerades, masks, technology, etc. It is a means by which indigenous people communicate with one another and which survive to the present, despite the passage of time and the smothering influence of the modernity (Edeogu & Nnaji, 2012). These systems of communication were passed from one generation to another and were as such derived from society's experience and thoughts over a long period of years. Dobb (1961, p.95) describing indigenous communication media notes that "it ranges from conscious activities like dancing and drama, speech, non involuntary ones such as belching and even growing". It was a totality of what was obtained in the culture of a people which are still very necessary in the society today.



## Movable Artifacts in Akwa Ibom State and National Development

The African sense of religion entering all areas of life made people to feel that many objects and places had a religious significance. Some of these natural objects and places, and others were made by people themselves. Artifacts as already stated in the work were works of art and crafts. They were also physical and cultural life of a people as found in Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria. Some of the artifacts were set aside as religious symbols and they provided insight into the customs, preferences, styles special occasions, work and play of the culture in which it was created.

### MOVABLE ARTIFACTS

#### Rafts and Weaving

Raffia craft was indigenous to the State and has been put into different use namely; raffia belts, hats, shoes, handbags, lawyers' wigs, toys and furnishings. The raffia sandals produced by Ikot Ekpene people of Akwa Ibom State in different styles and sizes is as shown in **figure 1** below.



**Figure1.** Sandals made of raffia.

**Source:** Raffia and Traders' Association market, Ikot Ekpene.

These sandals were made from raffia as the raw materials and used by the people in their daily endeavours. Eboh and Inyang (2004, p.108) note that "raffia, leather, straw materials and beads used in making decorative bags, mats, hats and caps".

The raw materials was extracted from raffia palm fronds, dyed as may be desired and weaving is done manually by the use of a simple loom (Ekanem, 1994). This means that weaving and dyeing of raffia and other fibers for the production of apparels were popular among the people. The local weavers had demonstrated great skill in the execution of wide ranging woven design motifs. Mat making were specially made for use as floor mats and ceilings. They were also made to be used for

sleeping and are slightly different from the frond mats for roofing. The raw material was from *aja* stems through which the mats were beautifully made. The stiffer material was used to produce ceilings called *Iboto*.

In view of this fact, Udo (1983) states that:

The presence of screwpine along the Cross River banks afforded an opportunity for the weaving of sleeping mats from their leaves. Western Nsit Clan, especially Edebom and the neighbouring villages made sleeping mats from *aja*, a plant with a single simple leaf. The bark of the fleshy stem was used for the sleeping mats, which were durable than mats made from the raffia palm leaves, collection of thatch for the making of the roofing mats, cloths, bags and *ntinya* for abong members were also woven from raffia. (p.227).

Though, raffia remains largely untapped, the potentials for export were really vast. These works were made for local use by artisans but today, it has been produced and called "tourists craft".

However, with the effort of the craftsmen co-operative society, raffia products have gained patronage in the Nigerian society as souvenirs (J. Useh, Personal Communication, September 18, 2013). Bamboo from the raffia palm provided an easy to use but aesthetically satisfactory and strong furniture wood. Bamboo chairs were produced in different parts of Akwa Ibom state as shown in **figure 2**.



**Figure2.** Traditional bamboo chairs.

**Source:** The Palace of His Highness (Obong) Dr. E. U. Ekpo, The Clan Head of Abak Village, Abak Local Government Area, No. 23 Ebom Avenue, Abak, Akwa Ibom State.

These bamboo chairs shows the technological know- how of the people and it also come in bed

forms as well. So, local craftsmen in the state exploit the fronds and bamboos for the purpose of producing building accessories and furniture. In the traditional society, the process of mat making for roofing and ceilings was an art and some of the mats were styled and decorated to meet up the patronage of the people (Leuzinger, 1976). This could be seen in the different products that indigenous artists made in the community. The fronds are used for the production of traditional umbrella, bamboo beds, chairs, stools of assorted designs, racks and blinds (Price, 1989). Exotic furniture and wooden utensils such as the bamboo chairs showed the knowledge and technique the people used in enriching their welfare and culture.

Basket craft came in different shapes and sizes depending on how it was to be put in use namely; for storage, kitchen, packaging and transportation of goods (A. Mfon, Personal Communication, May 20, 2014). In recent times, it has shown that baskets that are properly styled are more elegant, cheaper and more resilient than plastic buckets and paper cartons (Ossom, 1994). Their function was also felt in interior decoration as ornamental lamp shades and flower vases. Eboh and Inyang (2004, p.113) observe that “basket and mat making for both domestic and commercial use is common among the people of Akwa Ibom State”. This has attracted a lot of patronage from members of the society and neighboring states.

NCMM (2006) note that:

Pottery is the art of making earthen ware containers from wet clay through beating, kneading, rolling and coiling processes. The tools used include bean pods, shells, calabash rind, corn cobs, pebbles, potsherds, wood stables etc and different patterns are made on the body of the pot which comes in various shapes and sizes. (p.59).

It is worthy of note that these pottery containers were used for domestic, ritual/ medicinal, ceremonial and musical purposes and the majority of the potters were women. Pottery was carried on in various parts of the State as pots of various sizes and designs were made and sold to people inside and outside of the State.

Pottery craft was also practiced by women in many parts of the State and according to Ekanem (1994, p.100) “the most peculiar centres include Itak and Mbiafin villages in Ini Local Government Area though, there are other

centres at Etinan, Ikot Ebom Itam, Ekpene Ukim, Etoi and Ikot Uboh in Nsit Ubium Local Government Area”. Interestingly, pottery products included a wide range of beautifully unglazed earthen-ware pots for storage of water and palm wine, cooking, musical drum, table wares, flower pots, tea sets, drinking mugs and lamp stands. These pots were made in different sizes and served purposes like storage of water (*Abang Mmon*), table wares, and palmwine pot (*Ikum Ukot*) as shown in **figure 3**.



**Figure3.** Different sizes of pots for different purposes.

**Source:** National Museum, Oron.

Potting was almost exclusively a female activity, from winning the clay to setting pots, but a few men participate in the pottery trade which served as water and drink storage.

It is worthy to note that the first cottage ceramics industry in Nigeria was sited at Mbiafin by the then Eastern Nigeria Government in the 1950's that was pioneered by Adam Joshua Udo-Ema (Ekanem, 1994). Cooking pots, jars for collecting water and drinking mugs are heavily decorated and made of pottery crafts for use in the society (Eboh & Inyang, 2004). Indeed, pottery trade provided the people with market economy that men and women drew income to sustain their respective families.

Cane craft has enjoyed modern patronage as major showrooms now routinely showcase cane crafted furniture and accessories. This craft was indigenous to the state and the major producers were indigenes of Ikot Andem Itam in Itu Local Government Area. It was from this village that cane craftsmen had spread to nooks and crannies of the neighboring Cross River State as well as other parts of the country. Their products included settees, room dividers, bar stools, garden seats, baby's cots and beds.

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Iron was smelted and worked by most ethnic groups in Nigeria for couple of centuries and continues till date (NCMM, 2006). Smithing and metal craft workers abound in many parts of Akwa Ibom State. The services of the local blacksmith were and still become/are indispensable in the socio-cultural life of the people of Akwa Ibom State and they use iron to produce tools, ornaments, household implements, weapons, sculptures and musical instruments (NCMM, 2006). In Ikot Ekpene axis, brass designers turn out ornamental swords, ceremonial staffs and candle stands.

Others were engaged in the production of metal boxes, pan pots, hoes, machetes, chisels, beds, metal furniture, gates and designed railings. Some of them have now graduated into the production of machinery and foremost among them are Uso Metal Works-Ikot Ekpene, Major Works Limited-Abak, Ekiko Welding Works-Abak. In most villages in Ibibio land, there were indigenous smiths, tinkers and bicycle repairers, but recently, fancy metal work has developed as a form of commercial art to advertise the wares of smith or tinker (Nickline, n.d). They produce beds, metal furniture, gates and designed railings.

Body decoration was one of the arts practiced in the State. Ekanem (1994) observes that:

Okukin and Udohaya decoration technique were common in Akwa Ibom traditional society. The Okukin approach has a black indelible ink used to draw design motifs on the desired part of the body. In the Udohaya type, a deep penetrating brown dye in paste form, made from roots and herbs is used. When eventually the paste is washed off, the dye leaves a dark stain that could last for as long as three years before fading off. (p.101).

This means that body decoration was an artistic statement as well as a means of communication. The decoration was done for the purpose of achieving personal beauty and it was either permanent or temporary.

NCMM (2006) observe that:

Permanent decoration includes tooth filing, cicatrisation, scarification, tattoos and sharp objects such as needles, knives or razors are used to achieve this purpose. Also fluids from certain insects like glowing worms and sap from plants like cashew are also used in tattooing, and temporary decoration also includes earrings,

cosmetics, necklace (*Nkwa itong*), crown (*ntinya*) and bangles (*nkwa ubok*). (p.44).

Therefore, traditionally, women and others used vegetable, mineral and animal materials within their environment to decorate their bodies. Temporary body decoration involved the use of white clay, camwood, red oxides to mark/draw motifs on the body, tattooing is in practice and until recently some very old citizens could still be found with tattooed body and facial designs (Ekanem, 1994). This clearly shows how women valued and took care of their bodies.

Necklaces (*Nkwa Itong*) which were made in different colours were also used for decoration and hung round the neck by male, female, traditional title holders as shown in **figure 4**.



**Figure4.** Different colours of beads used as necklace.

**Source:** Raffia and Traders' Association market, Ikot Ekpene.

These were traditionally made beads used as necklace, bangles and bracelets to enhance one's beauty and that of the attire one puts on.

## CONCLUSION

Inanimate physical objects are part of material culture that aid in the production of artifacts by indigenous people. Every product in a society in the context of this study largely depends on the availability of such physical raw materials in the society. For instance, the production of cutlasses, wooden hoe, sticks, and arrow would have the presence and deposits of iron, woods and trees as the raw materials. This is rightly observed by Onwubiko (2010: n.p) who states that "Nigeria is a country with numerous business and investment potentials due to the abundant, vibrant and dynamic human resources it possesses". Therefore, moveable artifacts in Akwa Ibom state was viewed in the area of crafts and weaving such as, traditional bamboo chairs, different sizes of pots, and different types



of beads. They were productions done by indigenous artists/ entrepreneurs which contributed tremendously to the growth of the society.

### RECOMMENDATIONS

- There is need for support of individual entrepreneurs in the area of production of artifacts by individuals and government at all levels.
- Individual, NGO's and other bodies should be encouraged for more scholarly research on this area of study.
- Every work of arts is not fetish and should not be frowned at by members of the society.
- Openness to the truth to researchers should be the key objective of indigenous people because it will help in projecting more of the core values of material culture.

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### AUTHORS' BIOGRAPHY

**Dr. Victor Sunday Umanah**, is a Lecturer in the General Studies Unit of Coal City University, Enugu.

**Prof. Malachy Ikechukwu Okwueze**, is a Professor of Religion (Hebrew, Old Testament, and Religion & Society) and currently the Pioneer Vice-Chancellor, Coal City University, Enugu.