

THE PLACE OF EKIOBA MARKET IN THE ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT OF BENIN CITY

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Abstract

The history of every town in Nigeria, whether in Yoruba land, Hausa land, or Igbo land is inextricably connected with the founding of the main market. Aptly, market was the hub of the economic activities of the people. This paper examined the place of Ekioba market in the economic development of Benin city. It depicts the importance attached to the economic, socio-cultural and political life of the Benin people. The study shows that markets are used for nearly every conceivable purpose that requires a large number of people gathering, together under controlled conditions. This work identified challenges facing market men and women, the likely causes of conflicts and its possible solutions. The study concludes that it is important for the government to improve the infrastructural facilities of the Ekioba market, the traders should be orientated on how to avert conflicts among themselves.

Key Words: Benin, Market, Development, Ekioba, Economy.

Introduction

Market centre in spatial planning represents a geographical space for the distribution of commodities and services. The different roles of the market in the development of a nation and among nations are not something to be ignored. Meillassoux depict that market acts as a meeting place for the perpetuation of lineage rights and obligations (Meillassou, 1971)

Market centre as described by Sada and Oguntoyinbo (1978) are special man-made features in Nigerian settlements and that every town has at least one large daily market depending on the status of the town. They note that Lagos has at least seven daily markets, Ibadan has ten, Kano two, Onitsha two and Aba two. Villages on the other hands have majorities of the periodic markets which usually held on every four or eight days. In some cases, town spirits (ghost) are still believed to meet and live in trees and around the market places. Just as the Yoruba markets are associated with one ritual or the other, so the early Christian and Islamic missionaries recognised the value of the market as a place for the propagation of the gospel. For instance, market places are found to be useful for the preaching of gospel messages. In the present day, many churches or mosques are located or established close to or adjacent to the market place (Olorunfemi A.O. 1999). For example, is Badagry in Nigeria, where the first church was built between two public markets. Also, in Akure, the central mosque is opposite the popular King's market called Oja – Oba (Omole, F.K. 2003: 69-84). Similarly, in Ibo land in Nigeria, a person who had sworn an oath of innocence at a shrine and had survived a year without dying or becoming seriously ill had the right to parade himself through the market to celebrate his freedom (Olorunfemi, 1999).

Aptly, works in Nigeria shows that there is a need for policymakers to have information on trade-related conflicts, particularly in the market arena.

In Benin society, market play a vital role in the economic, socio-cultural and political life of the people. Economically, they serve as centres for collection and local exchange of products originating in the immediate hinterland of a market. Also, the markets are not only economic institutions but serve socio-cultural and political functions. Therefore, it is not surprising that markets can be and are used for nearly every conceivable purpose that requires a large number of people gathering, together under controlled conditions.

Moreover, market places are associated with religious activities. Markets serve as avenues for the performance of public rituals. Sacrifices are made to the market spirits for the peace and

tranquillity of a town or community. Handling the market spirits with disdain or levity could spell doom. In the words of Bohannon, markets were consecrated with shrines associated with them. The consecration emanated primarily from the need for peace at the market place. 'It was believed such consecration would guarantee that supernatural sanctions would back up the political authorities in the maintenance of peace in the market place (Bohannon, P. 1964:215).

BEIDE,, the Benin indigenous markets are always under the watchful eye of officials. These are usually appointed authorities, especially the market chief and assistants appointed by the traditional rulers with the duties of keeping the peace and order, enforcing regulations, preventing dishonest dealing and maintaining the cleanliness and repair of the market. Some are in charge of levying a fee on goods entering the market and charging rents on stalls (Crowder, M. 1968:314.)

Functions of Market

The market enables a particular place to emerge as a distinct nucleus. This eventually, allows for speedy economic growth. It is believed in many quarters that markets row anywhere, there are goods to sell and where buyers are available for such goods. Markets are man-made features established for the use of man (Omole F. K 2002: 163-176). There are two basic classes of market places which are daily and periodic market which can be further sub-classified as; morning, full-day, night, periodic, provincial and inter-kingdom markets. A daily market requires the existence of many full-time traders and that is a more convenient type of market which provides daily needs to the people on daily. Generally, the market is classified based on place, time and competition (Okosun, S.E & S.E. Ehisuoria, e.tal: 2016).

In colonial Nigeria's ethnic groups, the market was the engine of commerce and the soul of people's economic activities and growth. This role of the market has not changed until today (Ogunremi, G. O. & Faluyi, E.K.,1967: 132-147). A market is a regular convocation of people with different social, political, religious and economic background whose main mission or objective in the market is to either buy or sell products; that is, commerce (Ibid). A colonial Nigeria market was made up of people with different age levels and populated mainly by people in its immediate environment and by those from neighbouring towns. However, in the context of this discussion, the market should be seen as a specially designated site where selling and buying, or exchange of goods, take place between traders and the consumers. It can also be any location where buying and selling usually take place.

A market could also be an entertaining arena where local musicians, singers and jesters perform for gifts. And of course, it was generally believed that a market could be a therapeutic place for those who needed healing or spiritual ablution. This implies that in a situation woman looking for the fruits of the womb could be directed by traditional doctors to secretly sweep any area of the market as part of spiritual cleansing. The leaves that dropped from any market tree, as well as market pebbles or sand, were of medicinal significance to the traditional doctors. Hodder and Ukwu(1969:9) corroborated that "most Yoruba markets are associated with some fetish" since spirits were "believed to meet and even to live in trees in or around the market places" and sacrifices were also made to "these market spirits for the peace and tranquility of the town"(Ibid). A market was used for unusual town meetings that required large or community attendance; particularly meetings on child kidnapping, controversial death or incursion of another town on the community's land. Besides, "offenders were punished or executed" in the market. It was "believed that a madman could be cured if he had not wandered through the market" (Oguntuvi. A.O, 2007

(www.wikipedia.com). Similarly, markets were used by Christians and Muslims for preaching, while festivals or masquerade activities equally took place inside the market or market premises.

Each town had its periodic markets on the days that were different from those of other towns to avoid clashes and to allow traders to participate fully in the neighbouring periodic markets. Occasionally, periodic markets could clash, but this situation occurred only between periodic markets or towns that were not close to, therefore distant from, one and other. Depending on the commodities that the sellers and the consumers wanted to sell and buy, respectively, where there was this overlap, the alternative was to attend markets that were closest to them and where their trade interests could be best satisfied. What the above discussion shows is that, like in some other Nigerian groups, "within a market ring, the markets nearest to each other would not hold on the same or consecutive days", facilitate commerce (Njoku, O.N; 2001:28).

Types of Market

There are various types of markets most especially in South-West Nigeria. Based on the place, the market is classified into the local market, National markets and International markets. the basis on Time, the market is classified into a very short period market, short period market, very long period market and long-period market. Based on competition, the market is classified into perfect and imperfectly competitive markets (Okosun, S.E & S.E. Ehisuoria, e.tal: 2016).

Njoku. (2001:28), classified the pre-colonial Nigerian market system into four types of a market which include open-air, premises, shops and roadside markets. The open-air market also had two types: the major and minor or support market. The major markets were usually big and found near the kings' palaces. Early in colonial Nigeria, many churches and mosques were located near major markets to allow easier propagation of their doctrines. Major markets were those that attracted the neighbouring and distant towns to them because of their rich or greater varieties of consumer good. Mainly made up of women, the population of the major markets, depending also on the population of the towns, ranged from about two thousand to ten thousand, and about one-third of each market population coming from their towns. The major markets, also known in many towns as king's markets, were the ones most attractive to both local and distant trade. They were the main arenas for commercial activities (Oloidi, J. 2011: 40-45).

It was in the major market that unlimited varieties of local foodstuffs were, sold. These were in addition to all products of local industries. Women, particularly, travelled to various town major weekly markets to purchase these products. For example, mat traders travelled to the mat weaving centres to buy, in large quantity, which they sold in other markets. Some mat weavers sometimes sold their products in other towns by themselves. Pottery wares which were very common trade commodities in colonial Nigeria were also sold the same way. Pottery wares produced mainly in Ara among other towns across Nigeria and few other towns were also sold in some markets. These pottery products were bought at the production locations and then carried by head carriers to other locations for sale (Ibid).

Oloidi noted that the pottery products were very indispensable to domestic and other needs, trade-in them prospered greatly in the pre-colonial era, particularly when foreign and competing products, like aluminium pots, plates, bowls and buckets were not yet common.

Similarly, woven textiles, which were very handy to carry and transport were commonly produced in every town, were very important articles of internal trade in the colonial time. These were cloths produced with both narrow and broad looms. Those produced with narrow looms were

usually sold by men, while those woven on the broad looms were sold by women. These woven textiles were carried on market days to various towns for sale.

In the market premises, items sold there were salt, matches, palm oil, pepper, dry fish or crayfish as well as soap and other domestic items. The colonial market emerged “shop market” where several goods, including stationeries, were sold. This innovation began around the 1920s when several imported European goods, and educational materials, were becoming part of the people's essential needs. With this type of shop market, particularly in big towns like Ado – Ekiti, Akure, Ilesha, Ibadan, and Benin City, many landlords converted some rooms, directly facing major streets, in their buildings into shops for rent and commercial purpose.

Oloidi opined that another popular type of market in the pre-colonial era was the roadside market which took place on the roads, farm roads that linked one community to the other. On these routes, goods could be spread on the ground for sale. They could be bought directly on the roads from the sellers who were yet to get to their designated market compartments. Such buyers used to resell in the main markets the products bought this way; since the products were generally cheaper when bought on the road. However, in the colonial era, a town could have up to ten markets, both major and minor, depending on the size of the town. The more strategically located a town was, the more commercially viable it was, therefore, the more markets it was likely to have. Towards the end of colonization, and with an increase in population, many weekly markets became daily, especially in the highly urban towns (Ibid).

Historical Overview of Benin City

Benin was known to the Europeans as early as the second half of the fifteenth century. It remained independent until the punitive expedition of 1897. Through early trading contacts with various European nations, the stiff resistance to later European encroachment, and through the discovery of the exquisite pieces of artwork, Benin art became widely known throughout the world (Aghontaen, K.A;1983).

There are two "Benin's" in West Africa. Both straddle the coastline area known as the Bight of Benin that encompasses, among other nations, Nigeria and the Republic of Benin. One is the former Kingdom of Benin in present-day Nigeria; the other a successor state of the former Kingdom of Dahomey, now called the Republic of Benin. These kingdoms were the products of two significant waves of social change that dominated Africa's history from the earliest times to the 19th century: migration and state formation (Konde, E;2014).

Migration and state formation trends in Africa's pre-colonial history often intersected and interwove. As John Lamphear observes, these trends involved internal population movements "that typically led to the formation of new societies, linguistic groups, and states". (L, 1973:83). It was said that it was under the aegis of guilds of craftsmen that the Benin art grew, developed and continued over a long period. Under this system, various professionals and craftsmen were organized under royal patronage to produce. Standardized and market their products under a monopoly. This guaranteed a tight market as well as high-quality production.

The origin of these guilds' dates back to the earnest foundation of the Benin kingdom referred to as the Oghiso era (Egharevba, J.U. 1966). The guilds remained a formal institution until the fall of Benin in the nineteenth century. The guilds can, therefore, be looked at as one of the longest surviving institutions, in the Benin Kingdom with a longer history than the present dynasty. Since their creation during the Oghiso era, the guilds increased in number and complexity as the

Benin economic and political organization increased in strength. The institution has been described as a contributing factor to the survival of the economy (Ananwa, J.A, 2014:41-53).

The innate value of these materials within Benin, the time and skill that were invested in working them reflect the earthly and worldly influence of the Oba and the great wealth of his kingdom. Benin's royal arts belong to a tradition that favours convention even as it promotes creativity and innovation, especially as a reflection of royal prerogative. Through time, rulers have used the arts to interpret the history of the kingdom and to orient themselves with the past to support their initiatives and define their images for posterity. The royal court arts of Benin were produced by groups of workers divided into guilds that worked solely for the Oba who also had the monopoly of the gold, brass/bronze and other materials used in the production of the artefacts (Konde, E, nd.p.14.).

The royal court art of Benin would have a longer time and different path to get to the notice of the international community if not for the activities of the Portuguese and other European travellers. But most remarkably the Benin Punitive Expenditure of 1897 ordered by the British government to punish Oba Ovonramwen and his subjects while the subsequent looting of Benin relics serves as a watershed ("Benin". www.ijebu.org/benin/).

The origins of the Benin kingdom, and despite the controversy surrounding its founding, some sources maintain that the indigenous people were known as the "Benins", from whom the kingdom got its name. Other sources suggest that the ethnonym "Bini" is perhaps derived from the groups that inhabit central and north-central Nigeria, where the word "binin" is said to mean "gated" or "walled area". And yet another version proffers that the indigenes of Benin are more properly called the Edo; that the words "Binin" and "Bini" do not feature in Edo language; and that these are non-Edo words of dubious origin used by Europeans to describe the dominant people of the Edo Kingdom and their language ("Benin", Encyclopedia Britannica. 8 Nov. 2006).

Whether the word "Benin" or "Bini" is derived from the Yoruba phrase Ile-ibinu ("land of vexation"), a word probably uttered by Prince Oranmiyan in declaring that "only an Edo prince can rule over Edo land," is also contested. Osamuyimen Stewart argues that the Yoruba-based etymology of "Benin- or "Bini" is doubtful since ample evidence suggests the existence of these words in Portuguese narratives about Edo dating back to the Fifteenth Century". Nevertheless, traditional accounts of the kingdom maintain that Benin was initially ruled by the Ogiso ("Kings of the Sky") and 36 of these were accounted for (Benin", www.ijebu.org/benin/).

During the early stages of the kingdom, power was located in a council of chiefs known as the Uzama, headed by Chief Oliha. In the late 13th century during the reign of Ewedo, however, a new balance of power was set in motion. Political power began to gradually shift to the favour of the Oba. By the 15th century, when Oba Ewuare Neogidigan (Ewuare the Great) was a ruler of Benin, power had become firmly centralized in the court and the Oba had emerged paramount in the realm. Oba Ewuare accordingly initiated certain measures to consolidate his power. He instituted a hereditary system of succession to the throne; undermined the power of the Uzama by creating more chieftaincies; and transformed the capital of the kingdom, Benin City, into a military fortress by erecting moats and defensive walls. From this base of power, Oba Ewuare undertook the expansion of his kingdom outward from its Edo-speaking heartland.

History of Ekioba Market

Benin, the capital city of Edo State, has its fair share of markets scattered across the city. The Eki Oba otherwise known as Eki Osa Market is prominent among them. This haven of commerce lies along the busy Saponba Road by Second East Circular. It's a long-standing history, especially concerning its origin and the circumstances surrounding its name leaves room for public curiosity (Interview with Hannah Igbinovia, 2018).

The etymology of the name is not farfetched. In native Benin language, the word "Eki" means market and "Oba" is a shortened form of the word used to refer to a king. Eki Oba, therefore, means "king's market". At first thought, one is tempted to conclude that the market is for the king, and perhaps the reason for the name. That would be rather prematurely conclusive. The area now occupied by the traders served as a crusade ground for early Christians. It was first used by Missionaries wishing to expand the Christian faith. This location was used extensively by these early preachers to spread the gospel. As the missionaries and new converts trooped in, local traders saw an opportunity to make some money from worshippers by bringing their wares to the crusade. Thus, the name "Eki Oba" (Interview with Hannah Igbinovia, 2018).

An amazing discovery, however, is that years after Christianity was planted on that soil, it was not be living to the expectation of those who gave it that identity. There are sections of the market where spiritual objects and items used by native doctors and are herbalists are sold. The question that arises from this observation is "how can a market which sells such items be called "God's market?" the items include animal bones and skulls, dead rats, bird feathers, live tortoise and its shells, native chalk, coins, cowries, red pieces of rags etc. Weekend Observer recently visited Eki Oba to uncover the mystery behind the paradox and find answers to frequently asked questions (interview with Eghaghe, 2019).

Madam Eghaghe Ifueko, (2019) the woman leader of traders of spiritual items, a dealer in all manner of ritual items, revealed that the name came from the missionary work of Christians who used the area as a ground for evangelical crusades and attracted traders in the process. According to the woman, the Jehovah's witnesses were the ones who used the once bushy area for evangelical crusades at the time. She claimed it was long before independence. She stated that she has been a trader there for about 70 years and was a teenager when the missionary work was on-going. Madam Eghaghe Ifueko also deals in spiritual items such as native chalk, cowries, coins, red pieces of cloth, bird feathers, dried animal skulls and bones, eggs of different colours and sizes, alligator pepper, and so on (interview with Hannah Igbinovia, 2018).

When asked about the level of patronage and her target customers, she responded that her customers include ordinary individuals who have problems they need to solve and come there to get the items as recommended by those who have tested their efficacy. Madam Eghaghe Ifueko is just one of many traders, mostly women who have found a means of livelihood by trading in such spiritual items in Eki Osa Market. The foul stench that greeted one on the entrance to that section of the market as a result of rotting animal parts on display, is enough to make one sick as if you are walking into a shrine.

It is interesting to note that despite the proliferation of Christianity with the establishment of countless denominations across the state, a lot of its people, even those who publicly profess Christianity still engage in the worship of deities, and offering of sacrifices to gods. The controversy, however, lies on the fact that there is no rationale in the act of confessing Christ as

one's only Lord and saviour and such person's continuous participation in the worship of idols (see Hannah Igbinovia, 2018).

Away from the spiritual items section, most of the traders decried the practice of some shop owners taking their wares and displaying the same on the road, as this prevents buyers from going into the main market. They complained that this has affected them. She also said that apart from the environmental implications of this practice, those who choose to remain in their stores no longer get patronage, as buyers can now get all they wanted by the road. They called on the state government to ensure that all traders return to their stores to protect the environment and ensure that all traders operate on a level-playing ground.

Market Associations in Ekioba Market

The colonial Ekioba, as regards physical layout, were demarcated and allocated according to commercial commodities. Commodities had separate locations which allowed easy location by the consumers. These commodities could be sold on bare ground without shade, but traditionally, market goods were sold under shades of either tree, thatched roofs, tents or stalls supported with stakes, bamboo trees or other wooden materials. Each stall or allotted space for a particular product was known as iso (interview with Madam Janet Osagie, 2018) There was, therefore, different iso for yam, cassava, palm oil, vegetables, meat, goat, fowls and cloths, for instance. In the early colonial period, the Ekioba market had no tradition of modern stall system, "apart from some thatched and easily fragile sheds" (National Archive, Ibadan (NAI) Administrative Report, 1947:28).

Different Lines within the Market

The EkiOba market of Benin City is divided into several sections labelled as "Lines". These include Rose Line; a place where baby's wears are sold; Umbrella line; a line majorly for clothes; Hot landline; the place where lace is sold; love line; known for kitchen utensils and Success line where foodstuff is sold. From 1948, therefore, because the government realized that a lot of money could be generated from stall rent, many stalls were built by the government in many towns, particularly those with a large population. (Nigerianobservernews.com)

Though not all the other towns within Benin province enjoyed this modern market system, the stalls suddenly became a productive and well-cherished market culture for domestic trade. For example, goods, particularly perishable ones, that were earlier spread on the ground were more appropriately shaded by or accommodated installs, thereby making the goods retain their freshness for a longer period. Also, traders who used to vacate the market early because of the blazing sun during the dry season and the soaking rain during the rainy season could stay longer in the market to sell their goods ((National Archive, Ibadan (NAI) Administrative Report, 1947:28).

This was very promising, because those who would not have been able to go to market, for one reason or the other to purchase their needs, could easily take advantage of the longer time made possible by the stall system. Also, important, the stall system saved many Ekioba traders the burden of carrying their goods home at the close of each market or, in the case of the daily market, every day. Such goods were left in the stalls guarded by market security guards or night watchmen (Ibid).

However, since markets were predominantly populated by women, the leadership of every market was under a woman chief known as Iyaloja or Iya Oloja (the Mother or leader of the Market (interview with Janet Osagie, 2018).

In some towns, she was called Iya Alaje. She supervised over the affairs of the market which included price control, settling of dispute, security and sanitation. Under the Iyaloja, there were supposed to be peace, material prosperity, order and market security through the services of night watchmen. She must also see to the keeping of the market's sanitary law which made it mandatory for all sellers to clean up their sheds or stalls before vacating market. Her position was so powerful that all trade associations that generally made up each market respected and obeyed her instructions which were also supported by the king who conferred on her the chieftaincy title of Iyaloja (interview with Janet Osagie, 2018).

Contributions of Ekioba Market to the Economic Development of Benin City

Agriculture was the first form of economic activities witnessed in Benin City. This led to trade as the surplus produced from the farms had to be sold for the people to be able to purchase other things they required. Right from this period, the market square had been an important aspect of the city development; the market did not only provide an avenue for the distribution of these agriculture goods, but it also provided another means of livelihood for the people, as traders who were in charge of the distribution of agricultural goods emerged. It was the development of this trade (both internally and externally) by the traders, encouraged by the provision of good markets, coupled with the good leadership of the obas, that the Benin Kingdom became a very powerful empire. Outside agricultural practice and trading, the other means of livelihood in Benin City at this period was craftwork. But it was not everybody that could be involved in craftwork, as it was meant for specific families who were trained in such artworks (interview with Janet Osagie, 2018).

One can conveniently say that the market was a major source of employment generation for the people as many people were involved in trading activities. The colonial influence introduced wage-earning, white-collar job referred to as the formal sector of the urban economy by the educated active population in the city. This wage-earning white-collar job employs a very little percentage of the people in Benin City like in any other town in Nigerian due to inadequate employment opportunities in this sector. As stated above, unemployment has assumed an alarming and disturbing dimension in Nigeria, with millions of able-bodied persons who are qualified and willing to accept jobs yet unable to find a placement. Consequently, the bulk of the labour force in Benin City is engaged in the informal sector (Ikelegbe. O.O; 2005: 118.). A sub-group of this set consists of market traders and non-traders who operate in the urban market places. The urban markets, therefore, provide avenues for means of livelihood for thousands of traders and other market operators (both educated and uneducated) in Benin City (interview with Madam Janet Osagie, 2018).

The Ekioba market does not segregate. They are opened to anybody who wants to trade or carry out any form of activities like hairdressing, tailoring, public transport service, among others. From the interviewees, it was depicted that the market serves as a source of livelihood for the majority of the traders most especially the women. Mrs Osagie said that she has been using the money she realized from the market to send her children to universities and polytechnic. She was also of the opinion that the majority of the traders realized more than eighteen thousand naira which is a minimum wage in a month (Ibid).

Challenges facing the Growth and Development of Ekioba Market

i. Market Operators Financial Problems

The relatively low income of market operators is associated with the problem of inadequate capital. Inadequate capital is a problem of both the middlemen and urban retailers as it affects the number of goods they can purchase. The Non-traders in the markets also have a problem because this can limit the size of their business. For example, inadequate capital can limit the number of a sewing machine or hair drying machine, a tailor or hairdresser can possess respectively. This, in turn, will affect their business negatively. For transporters, most of them do not have the capital to purchase their vehicle, they work for people whom they give fixed returns daily. Getting loans from the banks is not an easy exercise, a majority of these people do not have collateral for the banks. The various informal credit facilities and association which tend to provide loans have limited capital to meet the people's financial demand.

ii Management Problems

One of the management problems of the markets is the allocation of stalls in the markets. The local governments determine the allocation of stalls. In principles, these stalls are to be allocated to any Nigerian citizen irrespective of his origin. This hardly ever happens, as it is only the indigenes in the council or civil servants in the state ministries who rent or hire these stalls at first, then transfer to others at a more exorbitant rate. Another management problem of the markets is the neglect of the markets by the local governments whose responsibility is the establishment and maintenance of the markets. Unfortunately, the local governments are lacking in their responsibility of maintenance of the markets as evident in the unkempt manner of these markets. According to the market operators, they pay their charges for their stalls and other charges for sanitation of the market, despite all these, the sanitation of the markets is below expectation (interview with Charles Aiyamenkhue, 2018).

iii. Physical Problem/Infrastructural Problems

One of the physical problems of the markets is the inadequate or non-availability of parking facilities within and around the markets. This is one of the causes of traffic congestion found within the markets. In theory, stalls are allocated to one person per stall by the local government. But in real life, two to four market operators share one stall. Consequently, they have limited space for their goods or whatever activity they carry out in the market. Besides, those who do not have shades referred to as squatters sell their goods on the open ground in the markets leaving their goods to the mercy of weather elements and poor hygiene. All these give the markets a congested and disorganized atmosphere Local government officers collect levies daily from these squatters. Many of these markets are lacking in infrastructural facilities such as toilets, tap water, preservation units like cold stalls, fire hydrants among others. The lack of preservation unit in the markets is a big problem for the traders as they incur losses from foodstuff, they are unable to sell before they go bad. (interview with Hannah Igbinovia, 2018)

iv. Fire Outbreak

Many urban markets in Benin City have experienced fire outbreak, for example, New Benin Market in 2006, 2007 and 2012. Edaiken market in 2003, 2005 and 2006, Oba market in 2006 and Agbado market in 2009 have all witnessed fire outbreak and several goods worth millions of naira

destroyed. The market operators suffered this loss tremendously. Unlike in many developed countries where fire hydrants are usually provided in public places such as markets, urban markets in Benin City do not have fire hydrants. Whenever there is a fire outbreak, the fire service department in most cases arrives late to the scene and in most cases come with inadequate materials for fighting the fire (interview with Hon. Efosa Igunbor, 2018).

Causes of Conflict in the Ekioba Market in the Benin Kingdom

Talking about the causes of conflict in the Ekioba market, firstly, the facilities within the market once it is overused, people will quarrel with one another. In which, if not properly managed or curtailed, it can cause riot within the market system. There are times when the public toilet within the market was mismanaged and unfit to be used, terribly stinking, and people can hardly control the diseases it attracts which has caused a lot of conflict within the market.

Light is also another conflicting issue within the market. Light is not constant in the market and the NEPA/BEDC management will also come at the end of the month to collect money for light, hence people will always fight the BEDC officials and other traders who are in support of the NEPA/BEDC. Exposure to carbon monoxide is another problem. Burning of refuse very close to a shop and placing generating set close to another person's shop also attract mixed feelings thereby causing conflict in the market.

Some youths from local government disturb traders a lot in Benin especially, Ekioba market and they referred to them as Agbero extorting money from the market men and women thereby making life unbearable for the traders (interview with Hon. Efosa Igunbor, 2018).

Management of Conflict in the Ekioba Market

Benin as a place is a very old city, by 1440 when Ruydequira, the Portuguese explorer came to Benin during the time of Oba Ewuare, the city of Benin was already in existence and the Oba is a Centre of attraction in Benin. Nobody ever argues with the Oba; hence we have Enobaghare which means what the Oba says stands. Everything in Benin is tied to the Palace, many market names also e.g Obayuwana, Obachagbon, Obarisiagbon etc. Benin is so inclined to the wits and caprices of the Oba. Although, the market women are not left out, because the market was established as a result within the palace and named Oba Market, so day to day activities of the market must include representatives of the Palace. The Palace must be aware of a development in the place, any deviance or any unruly behaviour must be punished because of the respect everyone has for the Palace, so it is the highest ruling body as far as Benin traditional system is concerned.

So, they are strongly related to the palace. If they find it difficult to talk or relate with the government, they go to the palace and they use the palace to interact with the government in power.

Resolution of Conflict in the Ekioba

In an attempt to curb this conflict, the government should first stop the local government representatives to reduce the extortion of money from traders, in other words, the illegal and unnecessary levy should be abolished in its totality. Likewise, the government should try as much as possible to strengthen the health condition of the market men and women. The health condition of the traders should be of paramount to the government thereby providing necessary facilities that encourage healthy living within the market.

Also, government agencies or representatives that do collect levy from traders should be monitored from embezzling public fund, to reduce or minimize misappropriation of public funds. The revenue generated in the market should be used to expand the market and be used to purchase basic amenities needed in the market sector.

Conclusion

A market is a special place designated for buying and selling of goods. It can also mean a place where buyers and sellers gather to exchange their goods, such as the village square. The concept of the market gives rise to the concept of marketing; thus, marketing is a process by which individuals and groups obtain what they need and want by creating and exchanging products and value with others. Markets play a very vital role in the economic life of the people. They are essential in the chain of commodity distribution. Markets strengthen the economic base of a town and also sustain the tax base of the Local Authority. Most roads and streets are the means of transportation coverage for markets.

The Eki Oba otherwise known as EkiOba Market is prominent among the markets in Benin. This haven of commerce lies along the busy Saponba road by second east circular. Its longstanding history, especially concerning its origin and the circumstances surrounding its name leaves room for public curiosity. The etymology of the name is not farfetched. In native Benin language, the word “Eki” means market and “Oba” is a shortened form of the word used to refer to a king. Eki Oba, therefore, means “king’s market”. At first thought, one is tempted to conclude that the market is for the king, and perhaps the reason for the name. That would be rather a premature conclusion.

The outcome of this study showed that the markets employ both educated and unlettered people in the city. 80% of the respondents (market operators) were traders who sold various goods ranging from agricultural produce to provisions, and other manufactured goods, others were market non-traders such as hairdressers, tailors, transporters. Though their income from the market was not very high as the majority of them earned below N50,000 per month, they made a living out of it.

It was also revealed from the outcome of the study that virtually all the traders earned above N18,000 (eighteen thousand naira) minimum wage of government workers in Nigeria. The achievement of the traders from their income ranges from payment of house rent, family feeding allowance, and children school fees to buying of vehicles and building their houses. Though the markets have contributed to the urban economy, certain aspects of the markets have limited their performance. These include market operators’ financial problem, management, physical/infrastructural, and fire outbreak problems. In terms of financial problem, the relatively low income of market operators is associated with the problem of inadequate capital which affects the number of goods they can purchase.

It is against this background that this study finds it imperative to make recommendations that will ease trading in Ekioba market and thereby improving the economic development of Benin City. The traders should be made to have access to a loan with a low-interest rate. This is to improve their purchasing ability and improve their gains at the end of the month.

It is also important for the government to improve on the infrastructural facilities to the market, which include; pipe-borne water, waste disposal management, good road network, good toilet facility among others. The traders should be orientated on how to avert a fire outbreak in the market and conflict management mechanisms.

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