Culture and Economic Development Nexus in Urhoboland with Emphasis on Urhobo Marriage and Funerals Traditions

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1. Introduction

Irrespective of cultural backgrounds, every rational human being, community, society or nation yearns for political freedoms, freedoms of opportunity and economic freedoms[2]. The latter is characterized by freedom from poverty and various forms of deprivation, decent life, economic welfare, and overall human development. Broadening economic freedom is synonymous with economic development, and it is the contention of this paper that culture can enhance economic development or retard it. To be sure, the relationship between culture and economic development is complex, intricate and multidimensional, especially in so called "traditional societies".

The twin objectives of this paper are to: a) examine the relationship between some aspects of Urhobo culture and economic development in Urhoboland with emphasis on Urhobo marriage and funeral traditions and ceremonies; and b) make recommendations for some necessary changes and adaptions to some cultural practices to enhance people's welfare and overall economic development of Urhoboland. The paper is divided into six sections. The working definitions of culture and economic development are presented in section 2. The global perspectives of the culture and economic development nexus and the growing global cultural industries are discussed in section 3. A broad overview of the relationship between some elements of Urhobo culture and economic development presented in section 4 while section 5 focuses on the impact of some aspects or elements of Urhobo marriage and funeral traditions and ceremonies of the people's welfare and overall economic development of the area. Section 6 concludes the paper with broad recommendations on some necessary actions for promoting "good" culture to enhance economic development in Urhoboland.

Two appendices are also attached showing 1) the results on an online survey conducted after the completion of the paper to assess the views of respondents to some "stylized" statements (hypotheses) on the impact of some elements of Urhobo marriage and funeral traditions and ceremonies on the welfare of the people and overall economic development of Urhoboland; and 2) an economic model or framework the author has development for more detailed empirical and evidence-based study.

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[2] In his book, "*Development and Freedom*" published in 1999, one year after he won the Nobel Prize in economics, Amartya Sen argued that development entails a set of linked freedoms, including political, opportunity and economic freedoms, and that freedom is both the end and means of human development. Thus, human activities and policies should aim at eliminating or reducing "unfreedoms" such as poverty, unemployment, poor access to education, health and social infrastructure, polluted environment, etc.

2. Working Definitions of Culture and Economic Development

The terms culture and economic development have a wide variety of definitions, and this complicates any attempt to analyze the relationship between the two concepts. For this paper, economic development is viewed as *the process of improving the quality of all human lives.* It involves four aspects: a) economic growth, i.e. the increase in production of goods and services; b) raising peoples' living standards – their income, consumption of food, access to health and education, housing, sanitation, housing, modern technology etc.'; c) creating conditions for conducive to the growth of peoples' self-esteem through appropriate social, political and economic systems/ institutions/ processes that promote human dignity and respect; and d) increasing people's freedom to choose by enlarging the range of options available to individuals including consumer goods and services as well as other social and political variables.

Culture is defined as *"the predominating attitudes, values, norms, behaviors, beliefs, art, heritage, music, letters and creative activities that characterize the functioning of a people"*. Simply put, culture is "*the way of life of a people.*"

In analyzing the relationship between culture and economic development, we must answer two basic questions, namely: Does culture affect economic development and does economic development affect culture as well? There seems to be a consensus that culture affects economic development on the one hand and economic development also impacts culture on the other hand (Fukuyama, 2001). However, since culture and economic development are multidimensional variables, it is important to discuss the impact of the various components or aspects of culture on the various components or aspects of economic development.

3. Overview of the Culture and Economic Development Nexus

Social scientists, especially development economists, have long recognized the role culture plays in economic development. Max Weber's *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, first published in 1904, is perhaps one of the first publications on this subject. Weber's central thesis was that modern economic development (in Europe) depended on a prior shift in cultural values generated by Protestantism. In 1951, he published another book, "*Confucianism and Taoism*", in which he argued that Confucianism created an environment hostile to capitalist development by emphasizing kinship as the primary source of social relatedness thereby promoting economically inefficient nepotism. In the 1950s and 1960s, the modernization theory (also known as cultural determinism) was developed which followed Weber's tradition. This theory regarded Western culture as models worthy of emulation and portrayed the "traditional" cultures of the "Third World" as partly responsible for their economic backwardness and poverty. The prevailing view then was that poor countries must emulate or duplicate the cultural institutions of the developed countries to move out of underdevelopment. However, these studies were tainted by "ethnocentrism" (eurocentrism or Europeanism) and could not explain the economic miracles in

Japan, Southeast Asia and China. Furthermore, the modernization theory lacked empirical proof and has been abandoned since the early 1970s[3].

However, in the mid-1980s, there were attempts to revive "cultural determinism". For example, Samuel Huntington (1998) divided the world into eight "cultural zones" based on what he regarded as cultural differences that had existed for centuries and predicted a future "clash of cultures or civilization" on a global scale. The late 1980s also saw the rise of "new institutional economics" which clearly recognized the role history, culture and other "path dependent" factors play in shaping economic behavior and development (Bilig, 2000) Since the early 1990s, there has also been a strong emphasis on the role "social capital" in development. Within this context, social capital is defined[4] as "*the social resources upon which people draw in pursuit of their livelihood strategies. These are developed through networks and connectedness…, membership of more formalized groups often entails adherence to mutually agreed or commonly accepted rules, norms and sanctions, and relationships of trust…*". In other words, social capital embodies aspects of the cultural traits of a society. Unlike the neo-Weberians, the proponents of "social capital" and the "new institutional" economics focus more on the positive aspects of culture, rather than using it to justify underdevelopment.

Although it is still difficult to make a general statement on the relationship between culture and development, it is safe to state that economic development is associated with shifts away from absolute norms and values toward values that are increasingly rational, tolerant, trusting, and participatory[5]. Some of the characteristics of pre-industrial societies that change with development include low level of tolerance for abortion, divorce, and homosexuality; strong emphasis on religion; male dominance in economic and political life; strong parental authority; kinship and strong family attachment; authoritarian political systems. A major challenge in analyzing the relationship between culture and economic development is that that "culture" and "economic development" are each muti-dimensional variables with several aspects or components, with each aspect having different impact on the different aspects of the other "variable". Furthermore, most of the aspects are culture and economic development are either not measurable or difficult to quantify. Furthermore, many countries are composed of several ethnic nationalities each with their own cultures. For example, in the case of Nigeria, we should be talking of the cultures of each of the almost 200 ethnic nationalities, and within each ethnic nationality we should be talking of the various aspects or components of the culture. Within each aspect of the culture there are items, for example, within the marriage culture or tradition of the Urhobos, the "items include "bride price", female circumcision, polygamy, etc., which have different impact on different aspects of economic

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[3] Wallerstein, Immanuel (1976): Modernization - Requiescat in Peace, in Coser, L.A. and Larsen, O.N. (eds.). The Uses of Controversy in Sociology. New York: Free Press, pp.131-135.

[4] Department for International Development, United Kingdom: Sustainable Livelihood Guidance Sheet. February 2001

[5] Inglehart, R and Baker, W (2000). Modernization, cultural change, and persistence of traditional values. American Sociological Review, 65(1), February. Pp.19-21

development such as education, health, and income of families and the group. H. Thompson (2001) underscored the problems and complexity of studying the relationship between culture and development when he noted that:

> "*The main problem with the debate over the causal relationship between culture and economic development is the "pathetic inadequacy of human psychology, or analytical laziness, when confronting complexity. The tendency is to avoid the difficult mental labor of identifying and analyzing the intricate historical and structural interconnections amongst a labyrinth of variables…It is not intellectually helpful to explain specific events and phenomena in terms of the macro processes or structures, and pointless to subsume anything and everything under the umbrella of a single causal agent or process…Culture presents many facets…Broad generalizations are counterproductive, bordering on racism…Though it affects economic development, culture in itself is never constant but evolves jointly with economic opportunities. While elements of culture can (and do) influence development, monolithic interpretations of culture like those of Weber and the neo-Weberians must be rejected".*[6]

Furthermore, the 2004 Human Development Report, subtitled **"Cultural Liberty in Today's Diverse World**", which focused on managing cultural diversity within the context of international development, debunked five common myths about cultural identities, including the proposition that "*some cultures are more likely to make development progress than others, and some cultures have inherent democratic values while others do not, so there is a trade-off between accommodating certain cultures and promoting development and democracy*". The report clearly rejected that "modernization" theory and noted that *"there is no evidence from statistical analysis or historical studies of a causal relationship between culture and economic progress or democracy".*[7]

The problems and complexity notwithstanding, there is a consensus that cultural variables do interact with economic development variables in significant ways, including but not limited to the following:

- Social Capital: Cultural norms and values contribute to the formation of social capital, which encompasses trust, reciprocity, and cooperation within a society. High levels of social capital can facilitate economic transactions, reduce transaction costs, and enhance the efficiency of markets, thereby fostering economic development.
- Human Capital Formation: Cultural attitudes towards education, work, and skill development affect human capital accumulation. Societies that prioritize education and

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[6] H. Thompson: Culture and Economic Development: Modernization to Globalization. Theory & Science (2001)

[7] United Nations Development Program: 2004 Human Development Report

invest in the development of human capital tend to have higher levels of productivity and innovation, leading to economic growth.

• Consumer Behavior and Preferences: Culture shapes consumer preferences, consumption patterns, and demand for goods and services. Understanding cultural preferences is essential for businesses to effectively market their products and services and expand into new markets, both domestically and internationally.

• Tourism and Cultural Industries: Cultural heritage, traditions, and attractions can be significant drivers of economic development through tourism and cultural industries. Investing in the preservation and promotion of cultural heritage can generate revenue, create jobs, and stimulate economic growth, particularly in regions with rich cultural assets

• Identity and Innovation: Culture shapes people's identities and influences their attitudes towards change and innovation. Societies with a culture that values experimentation, creativity, and risk-taking tend to be more conducive to economic development through innovation and entrepreneurship.

• Institutional Framework: Culture influences the development of institutions, including legal systems, property rights, and governance structures. Institutions play a crucial role in economic development by providing a stable environment for investment, enforcing contracts, and protecting property rights. Cultural values such as respect for the rule of law and accountability can contribute to the effectiveness of institutions and promote economic growth.

Overall, the relationship between culture and economic development is complex and dynamic, with cultural factors influencing various aspects of economic activity and development outcomes. Also, economic development can lead to changes in cultural norms and values. Recognizing the interplay between culture and economics is essential for policymakers, businesses, and communities seeking to promote sustainable and inclusive development.

Since the early 1970s, there has been much discussion on "cultural industries" which are playing an increasing role in national and international development (Hesmondhalgh, 2008). Cultural industries refer to sectors of the economy that produce goods and services that are primarily cultural or artistic in nature. These industries encompass a wide range of activities that involve the creation, production, distribution, and consumption of cultural products. Cultural industries contribute to economic growth, job creation, and social development while also promoting cultural diversity and identity. Some common examples of cultural industries include:

• Visual Arts: This includes activities such as painting, sculpture, photography, and graphic design.

• Performing Arts: This encompasses theater, dance, music, opera, and other live performances.

• Crafts: Crafts include handmade and artisanal products such as pottery, textiles, jewelry, and woodworking.

- Heritage and Museums: This encompasses activities related to the preservation, interpretation, and promotion of cultural heritage sites, museums, and historic landmarks.
- Publishing: This involves the production and distribution of books, newspapers, magazines, and other printed materials
- Film and Television: This includes the production, distribution, and exhibition of films, television shows, documentaries, and other audiovisual content.
- Music Industry: This includes the creation, production, distribution, and promotion of music recordings, concerts, and live performances.
- Design: Design industries encompass various fields such as fashion design, industrial design, interior design, and architectural design.
- Digital and New Media: This includes video games, digital art, online publishing, and social media platforms.
- Cultural Tourism: This involves travel and leisure activities that focus on experiencing cultural attractions, events, festivals, and heritage sites.

Cultural industries play a crucial role in economic development by generating revenue, creating jobs, attracting investments, and stimulating tourism. Additionally, they contribute to social cohesion, cultural exchange, and the preservation of cultural heritage. Governments often support cultural industries through policies and programs aimed at promoting creativity, innovation, and cultural expression while also fostering economic growth and sustainability[8].

During the past 30 years, cultural industries have grown exponentially, both in terms of employment creation and contribution to GNP. However, there is a high concentration of exports and imports of cultural goods among a few countries. For instance, in 1996 cultural products (films, music, television programs, books, journals and computer software) became the largest US export, surpassing, for the first time, all other traditional industries, including automobiles, agriculture, or aerospace and defense. Throughout the 1990s the structure of cultural industries worldwide was dramatically reorganized with the development of new digital technologies and the arrival of national, regional, and international (de)regulatory policies. Cultural industries have also undergone a process of internationalization, realignment, and progressive concentration, resulting in the formation of a few big conglomerates.

To ensure that African countries benefit from the growing trade in cultural goods and services, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) organized a Regional Consultation meeting in Cotonou (Benin) on 5-9 September 2000 to review the situation of cultural industries in Africa. The meeting examined the problems facing the cultural industries in Africa and suggested ways of overcoming some of the problems, including the following[9]:

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[8] Van der Pol, H. (2007). Key role of cultural and creative industries in the economy. *UNESCO Institute for Statistics, Canada*.

[9] For details see "Regional Consultation on Cultural Industries in Africa, 5-9 September 2000, Cotonou, Benin at www.unesco.org/culture/industries

- Large-scale production of works of cultural goods and increased professionalism in marketing.
- Holding regular exhibitions and workshops on the criteria and aesthetics of African art.
- Encouraging the establishment of professional associations or national unions.
- Reproducing works of art digitally on the Internet to facilitate their distribution and promotion.
- Encouraging local production of books and developing regional market; raising reading habit/rates; and promoting regional book salons and fairs.
- Combating piracy and ensuring surveillance of the electronic market.
- Training or local artists in specialized schools as well as in creative workshops.
- Identification of cultural operators and production structures and development of networks to ensure rational returns on current efforts.
- Ensuring that cultural goods relate to African reality (to ensure that people relate to them) while at the same time adapting to modernity. Modernity requires adequate infrastructure.
- Expanding programs aimed at the identification of sites and monuments of historic importance.

With the growth of cultural industries, the theory of cultural industries (also known as the cultural industries thesis) was also developed. It was originally proposed by the French sociologist and philosopher Pierre Bourdieu in the 1970s. However, it gained significant attention and elaboration through the work of scholars such as Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer from the Frankfurt School, as well as Richard Hoggart and Raymond Williams from the Birmingham School. The theory posits that cultural production has become increasingly industrialized and commercialized, resembling other sectors of the economy in terms of its organization, production processes, and distribution mechanisms. Key elements of this theory are as follows:

- Commodification of Culture: Cultural products and activities are treated as commodities to be bought and sold in the marketplace. This process of commodification involves the transformation of cultural goods into marketable products with exchange value.
- Mass Production and Consumption: Cultural industries engage in mass production and mass distribution of standardized cultural products to cater to large and diverse audiences. This mass production is driven by profit motives and relies on economies of scale.
- Homogenization and Standardization: Cultural industries tend to produce homogeneous and standardized cultural products that appeal to mass audiences, often resulting in the proliferation of formulaic or mainstream content.
- Cultural Hegemony: The concentration of ownership and control within cultural industries leads to the dominance of certain ideologies, values, and worldviews that reflect the interests of powerful elites. This can result in the marginalization or exclusion of alternative voices and perspectives.
- Cultural Imperialism: Cultural industries from economically dominant countries exert influence and dominance over cultural production and consumption worldwide, leading to

the spread of Western-centric cultural values and norms at the expense of local or indigenous cultures.

- Effects on Cultural Diversity: The commercialization and industrialization of cultural production can pose challenges to cultural diversity by marginalizing minority cultures, languages, and traditions in favor of mainstream or commercialized content.

- There have been some criticisms of the theory of cultural industries. For example, critics argue that the theory tends to overlook the creativity of producers and consumers of cultural products, and the complexities of cultural production and consumption in a globalized, digital age where new technologies and platforms have disrupted traditional models of cultural production and distribution.

4. Overview of Culture and Economic Development in Urhoboland

The Urhobo people are the 6th largest ethnic group in Nigeria with a population of between 2 million and 3.5 million[10]. The Urhobo ethnic nationality consists of twenty-two autonomous sub-national groups or "subcultures: (sometimes erroneously referred to "clans")[11]. The Urhobo people made up of these subcultures, generally have common ancestry language, value system, traditions, beliefs, art, music, dress code, food, artwork, festivals, beliefs, dance, music, marriage and burial ceremonies, etc, with some variations across the subcultures. Over the past 50 years, there have been significant changes in the economy of Urhoboland[12]. These changes have impacted the culture of the people. On the other hand, some of the cultural elements of the Urhobo people have either facilitated or impeded economic development.

Below is a brief description of some aspects of Urhobo culture and how they have impacted economic development and vice versa.

Urhobo Language

Language is perhaps the most important and distinguishing aspect of any culture. According to the Centre for Endangered Languages[13], *"Language is the key to the heart of a people. If we lose the*

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[10] The are approximately 250 ethnic groups in Nigeria, the largest being Hausa, Yoruba, Igbo and Fulani in that order. However, most of the ethnic groups are less than 1 million people. The exact population of each ethnic group, including the Urhobo people, is unknown because since the early 1970s, Nigeria census data have not been disaggregated by ethnicity. However, in the 1960s, Urhobo people were believed to be the 5th or 6th largest ethnic group in the country, and we have reasons to believe that this ranking has not changed, although several groups are "competing" for the 5th, 6th and 7th place including the Kanuri, Ibibio, Tiv, Ijaw, Urhobo, Edo, etc.

[11] Although these sub-national groups of Urhobo are sometimes called "clans", it is important to stress that the words clan and tribe are both derogatory. The word clan comes from the Scottish Gaelic word "clan" meaning family or the Old Irish word "*cland*" meaning offspring. It is used to refer to i) "a traditional social unit in the Scottish Highlands, consisting of a number of families claiming a common ancestor and following the same hereditary chieftain"; ii) "division of a tribe tracing descent from a common ancestor, and iii) a large group of relatives, friends, or associates". Thus, to the extent that it refers to a division of a "tribe" and the word "tribe" is derogatory, the word "clan" can also be regarded as "derogatory:

[12] For a detailed description of the economy of Urhoboland and changes that have taken place over the past 50 years, see Ojameruaye, e (2005): "Towards Sustainable Development in Urhoboland and Ojameruaye, E. (2005) Strategies for Self-Reliant Development in Urhoboland.

[13] Taken from Mowarin (2004)

key, we lose the people. A lost language is a lost tribe, a lost tribe is a lost culture, a lost culture is a lost civilization. A lost civilization is invaluable knowledge lost… the whole vast archives of knowledge and experience in them will be consigned to oblivion."

Contrary to what some people think, Indigenous languages have no adverse effect on most economic development variables. On the contrary, the promotion of Indigenous languages has positive impact on some of the development variables such as education, books production, health, human dignity, etc. Economic development has adversely affected many Indigenous languages including Urhobo language. In fact, Urhobo language may in the not-too-distant future make the list of languages at the risk of extinction.[14] An increasing percentage of young Urhobo people at home and in the Diaspora are unable to speak the language. If the current trend continues, the language is likely to disappear as early as within the next five generations. Today, Urhobo language is not taught or widely spoken in most schools in Urhoboland.

Studies in the US have shown that children who learn in their mother tongues for the first six years of school perform much better than those immediately immersed in other English and there is reason to believe that the process of learning follows the same pattern in other countries including Nigeria.[15] Thus, there is a strong case to be made for promoting the use of Urhobo language for instruction at the primary levels in Urhoboland. In fact, UNESCO has recommended that multicultural societies like Nigeria should adopt 3 "official" languages, viz.: a) one international language (English in the case of Nigeria); b) one lingua franca – a local link language that facilitates communication between different linguistic groups in an area such as Swahili in East Africa or Hausa in Northern Nigeria; and c) mother tongue – when it is neither the lingua franca nor international language, e.g. Urhobo language in Urhoboland. Countries are required to recognize all three as official languages or at least recognize their use and relevance in different circumstances, such as in court or schools. There are many versions of the 3-language formulas in several countries.[16] Examples abound in various parts of the world where people have taken concrete actions to save their language from extinction. We must ensure that Urhobo language should be taught at primary, secondary and tertiary levels. Promoting Urhobo language will have significant positive economic and social impacts including but not limited to increase in publications in Urhobo language, employment of graduates of Urhobo language, and social capital.

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[14] Of the 10,000 languages that have existed world-wide over time, only 6,000 are spoken today and the number is projected to drop by 50-60% over the next 100 years (see HDR 2004 and SIL International 2004). On the endangerment of Urhobo language see M. Mowarin "Language Endangerment in Urhoboland", Paper presented at the 5th Annual Conference of the Urhobo Historical Society, Oct. 29-31, 2004.

[15] See HDR 2004 and SIL 2004.There are about 2,500 languages in sub-Saharan Africa and only about 13% of the children in the region receive primary education in their mother tongues compared to 66% in South Asia, 91% in Latin America and 87% in high income OECD countries. Could the lack of education in mother tongue in Africa be partly responsible for puzzle of Africa's relative under-development? Probably yes!

[16] In fact, Nigeria's National Policy on Education (1977), revised in (1981), requires that children should be taught either in the mother tongue or the language of immediate community (LIC) from pre-primary to primary 3 but this policy is not being implemented. See Mowarin (200$) and Bamghose (1992)

Arts & Crafts
Arts and crafts, as part of the cultural industry, positively impact on the economic development of the people, particularly in terms of employment and income generation. Apart from the work of some prominent Urhobo artists such as Bruce Onobrakpeya, much of Urhobo arts and crafts are still seen as "exotic", "primitive", and sometimes, frightful and unappealing. Many European who admire some of our works of art seem to do so out of curiosity. Compared to the works of art of the Bins, Urhobo arts are far less competitive in the marketplace. Clearly, we can modernize our arts and crafts by using modern technology", more durable materials, training of our local artists, mounting or participating in art exhibitions within and outside Urhoboland.

Music
Some people think that the music and dance of indigenous people are not supportive of modern economic development. They contend that the people spend too much time singing and dancing rather than producing commodities. There is no empirical evidence to support such claims. Today, we know that music and dance are essential elements of all human societies, and part of the growing "cultural industry" that should be promoted. The Urhobo people have a vibrant local music industry which has limited success outside Urhoboland. However, we have produced notable national musicians such as Mike Okri, Chris Okotie, and Christian gospel singers. In recent years, "Urhobo disco" and "Urhobo Christian music" are becoming very popular outside Urhoboland, but there is still more to do to modernize Urhobo music using modern technology and to increase its appeal to both national and international audiences.

Clothing and Dress Culture
The Urhobo people have their own unique clothing and mode of dressing most of which they share with their neighbors -Isoko, Ukwani, Itsekiri and Ijaw neighbors- and which are very different from those of the countries from where they import the materials. It can be argued that in general, Urhobo dress culture does not negatively impact of economic development other than the fact that the absence of local textile industry means that Urhobo people spend considerable amount of their money on importing clothing materials (to make Urhobo dress) from elsewhere in Nigeria and overseas. Furthermore, some forms of Urhobo traditional dressing (wrapper) are not quite conducive for modern industrial and office work. Some of them are not quite comfortable and non-Urhobo have difficulty in wearing them. This limits their appeal and use by non-Urhobos. There is an urgent look to look at the designs of some of clothing design to make   less complex and more appealing to Urhobos and non-Urhobos alike to increase the demand for them. There is also a need to develop local textile industries to support the growing dress culture in Urhoboland. This will no doubt create more jobs.

Organizational & Political Culture
The political culture of an entity such as a country or ethnic nationality impacts the economic development of that entity. By political culture we mean the set of shared views and normative

judgments held by a population regarding its political system, including how people view the political system as a whole and their belief in its legitimacy. Gabriel Almond defines it as "the particular pattern of orientations toward political actions in which every political system is embedded", while Lucian Pye defines political culture as the "set of attitudes, beliefs, and sentiments, which give order and meaning to a political process, and which provide the underlying assumptions and rules that govern behavior in the political system"[17].

Traditionally, most Urhobo societies practice gerontocracy, i.e. "government by elders", based on age-grade system.[18] Generally, the men are organized into 4 age grades, viz: *Ekpako* (from about 60 years and above), *Ivwraghwa* (from about 30 to 60 years), *Otuorere* (from about 50 years to 30years) and *Imitete* (from about 5 years to 15 years); the women are organized into 3 age grades, viz: *Ekwokweya* (women passed child-bearing age, i.e. from about 50 years and above), *Eghweya* (married women in the child-bearing age, i.e. from about 15 to 50), and *Emete* (unmarried girls, usually below 15 years). The *Ekpako* (i.e. elderly men) are usually in charge of the government of their society, and they govern under their unwritten laws. They are also the custodians of the culture of the people. On the other hand, the *Ivwraghwa* (i.e. adult men) were the warriors during the pre-colonial times; they engaged in production, supervised the younger age-grades and execute/enforce orders of the village/town/state councils and courts. The *Otuorere* (the young men or youth) helped in defending the society and do heavy (public) work such as clearing of bushes, building of wooden bridges and earth roads. The *Imitete* (young boys) help to keep the village clean and are sent on errands. In some Urhobo societies, however, gerontocracy was combined with plutocracy, i.e. government by the rich and the wealthy (e.g. Agbarho and Olomu)[19] with the plutocrats given titles such as Osuivie of Agbarho and Ohworode (the "big man") of Olomu. In such gerontocratic-plutocratic societies, political leadership was entrusted to the "elderly rich". Of course, traditional Urhobo societies were not democratic in the sense that leadership position was not decided by general election.

Political developments in Urhoboland since colonial times and post Nigeria's independence have brought about significant changes in Urhobo traditional political culture. In particular, "democratic governance" based on elections and money politics has led to the denudation of gerontocracy and triumph of plutocracy and "militancy". Increasingly, it is the rich and most militant individuals who capture political power in Urhoboland. It can be argued that some of the consequences of this include growing disrespect for elders, growing militancy and thuggery in politics, growing corruption (as the young men want to make more money to last them for the rest of their lives), poor governance caused by lack of political and management experience by some of the "young" political leaders. In fact, politics has become the "booming industry" in Urhoboland with many young men (including badly needed professionals) abandoning productive work for politics

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[17] Morlino, Leonardo (2017). *Political science: a global perspective*. Berg-Schlosser, Dirk., Badie, Bertrand. London, England. pp. 64–74. ISBN 978-1-5264-1303-1. OCLC 1124515503
[18] See Otite (2003), pp. 329-343
[19] Op cit

because of its "spoils". All these have had a negative impact on the overall economic development of Urhoboland. An aspect of Urhobo political culture that is worth studying is the multiplicity of kings (*Ivies*) and kingdoms and its impact on development vis-à-vis a situation of having one king for the who of Urhoboland.

5. Urhobo Marriage and Funeral Traditions and Economic Development

We now focus on Urhobo marriage and funeral traditions in some detail. In doing so, we will examine the impact of some elements of Urhobo marriage and funeral traditions on the economic welfare of the people and economic development of Urhoboland.

5.1 Marriage Traditions

The Urhobo people have some of the best marriage traditions in the world. Marriage is a very important institution for the Urhobo people and the traditional marriage rites are important. These rites embody the unique customs and values handed down from generations. All Urhobo sons and daughters are required to go through the Urhobo traditional marriage process before they can be considered as married. The customs and values involved in the traditional marriage practices are fairly standardized across the kingdoms that make up the Urhobo nation, with minor variations in some aspects of the process.

Development in Urhoboland has also brought about some changes in Urhobo marriage traditions and institutions but most of the traditions continue to endure. So, we have continuity and changes in Urhobo marriage traditions. We'll now discuss some elements of Urhobo marriage traditions and the impact of economic welfare of couples, extended families and Urhoboland.

a) **Concept of Marriage**: In "Western" culture, marriage is defined as the "union of a man and a woman to live together and often to have children"[20], but the Urhobo people regard marriage as a union, not just between a man (*Oshare*) and a woman (*Aye*), but very importantly, as a union of two families (*Ekru*). In Urhobo worldview, marriage is an enduring and sacred institution that ties two independent families together forever. When blessed with offsprings, especially male offsprings, marriage cord is never broken by death nor divorce which is rare compared to Western societies. In fact, Urhobo traditional marriage outlives the husband, which is why upon the death of the husband, the wife is passed on to a member of the husband's family for continued marriage. This custom provides emotional and financial stability, and continuity of the marriage. The families are also expected to intervene or mediate when there are problems or conflicts between husband and wife, and when the marriage relationship is threatened in any way – this is in total contrast to the western marriage system where family intervention is seen as interference. While this expanded concept of marriage often entails a high economic burden for some families, thus reducing their overall welfare, it no doubt has

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[20] The Concise Oxford English Dictionary

some positive spinoffs such as low divorce rates and related issues, enhanced extended family bond, social capital, and reduction in rate of destitution. The only aspect that requires modification is the passing of the wife a diseased man to a member of his family as a wife.

b) **Forms/Type of Marriage**: Urhobo traditional marriage takes various forms, including: (i) *Esavwijotor* (a form of Betrothal) which occurs when parents propose marriage on behalf of their son or daughter at an early age, for a variety of reasons. The actual marriage then takes place when the child comes of age. Normally, with this type of marriage, love develops between the couple only after marriage has been officially contracted; (ii) *Ose* (Concubine): This is a form of marriage in which the traditional dowry has not been paid and accepted as prescribed. Couples may live together or apart, but enjoy full de facto conjugal rights and exclusiveness but limited customary (legal) rights of husband and wife, for example, the husband will not be allowed to bury and mourn his the parents-in-law, like a fully married man, and the children may not have the same inheritance rights as the children of women whose bride price was paid, and may even be regarded as children of a concubine (*emo r'ose*); (iii) *Arranged marriage in absentia*: This is the case where the man who is abroad or outside Urhoboland, would request his parents or family to marry a wife of their choice for him. Both potential husband and wife may not have seen or met each other previously. During the marriage ceremony, the man's brother or a nominated relative would represent him as husband of the bride. The wife may be required to spend some time with the absent husband's family before being despatched to her new husband. They may love each other when they meet for the first time, or the love may develop gradually. In some cases, either party may refuse to go ahead with the marriage and call it off; iv) "Modern Courtship": This is a situation when the man/boy meets the woman/girls, likes her, and proposes to marry her. In most cases, the parents may not know of the initial courtship until their child informs them. Both families then get involved. If both girl and her parents agree to the proposal, then the traditional marriage process commences. If the parents do not, the traditional marriage may not hold.

c) **The Marriage Process**: Urhobo traditional process is long, tortuous and typified by nuance, oratory and protocol. Whichever the form or type of marriage parental approval/consent is necessary before the marriage process can start. There are several steps or stages in traditional marriage rites and ceremony process. Before the traditional marriage ceremony day, some background work would have been done. This includes investigation of the family histories of the would-be couple by both families, visits and introductions to both parents, and some family members, agreement on the date of the ceremony, bride price and other requirements during the ceremony. On the day of the ceremony, usually at the bride's parents' home, the process begins with the traditional welcome of the groom's family and guests by the bride's family. Drinks and kola nuts supported with some money will be offered to the visiting family. Usually, a spokesperson for the bride's family will make the presentation of the drinks and kola nuts with the money to the visiting family. The visitor's spokesperson will accept the

presentation on behalf of the groom's family. After this initial customary entertainment, the visitors are asked the purpose of their visit. The visitors would inform the bride's family that they have come to marry their daughter for their son, who may or may not be present at this protocol. If the bride's family accepts this explanation, they would go through a process of the identification of the bride they wish to marry. The visitors would be told that the family has many daughters; as such, its members do not know which of their daughters their son would like to marry. The bride's family would then bring out a girl who is not the bride and parade this girl in front of the groom's family. The groom would reject this girl saying that she was not the one he wants. This formality would be repeated about three times. Each time a girl is paraded and rejected; the groom's family would be asked to pay the rejected girl some money. Finally, the bride is presented to the groom to confirm the identity of his chosen bride. Once this process is concluded, the bride's consent would then be obtained. That is, she will be asked if she is willing to marry the groom. The family of the bride can only receive the dowry (bride price) if she consents to marry the groom. This process is only a formality on the day because in most cases, the dowry amount and all arrangements would normally have been agreed upon.

The groom or his family would pay a dowry to the bride's family. The bride price is the money paid to the bride's family on account of the bride. The bride price would be negotiated and agreed beforehand. The bride's father and mother would be bought several gift items, such as walking stick and hat, etc, for the bride's father: wrapper, tobacco, etc., for her mother, and other items for her uncles, aunts, and other relatives. Upon acceptance of the dowry, the bride's father pours a libation. The libation is poured using a **native gin** (*ogogoro*) or may be represented by Gordon gin or Schnapps and *kola nuts*. The bride's father offers a prayer/blessing for the couple. At this point, the bride sits on the husband's lap. The blessed drink is handed to the husband who drinks first; he then hands it to his wife to drink. The wife would drink and pass it back to her husband to finish, as a sign of respect. Then only are they declared spouses. Both family members present at the ceremony, would then shower the couple with money as gifts. After this, entertainment of guests and dancing will follow. The final stage is called *"Esuo"* which escorting of the bride by her family with her properties to the head of the husband's family and handing her over until death of the bride as wife to the groom's family. A special ceremony is usually performed to invoke the husband's ancestors to also receive her and bind her over in fidelity to their son – the husband. The entire women receive the bride, eat and dance in the special room prepared for her till dawn of the following day.

After this elaborate and laborious traditional marriage process/ceremony, the couple may decide to proceed to do a church wedding and/or court wedding which involve lavish reception and followed by thanksgiving service in the church. While they will not be issued a traditional marriage certificate, they will usually be issued a church marriage and registry marriage certificate/license. Hence, most young men and women these days perform all three types of

marriage ceremonies – traditional, church and court – thus marriage process has become very expensive and time-consuming.

Clearly, the marriage process as described above is time-consuming, expensive and appears inefficient from the prism of economic development. A lot of man-hours and resources are wasted that can be deployed more productively. The process and requirements can be abridged whilst retaining some of the key elements and essence of the tradition. For example, both the traditional and church or court wedding ceremonies can be abridged and held on one day with just one reception as most Urhobo families now do the United States.

In recent years, there has been a booming "marriage industry" in Urhoboland, involving music groups and entertainers, event planners, renting chairs, tables, canopies and tents; caterers, cameramen, videographers, event centers. While this industry has been creating jobs (and income) for the youth on the one hand, the marriage ceremonies have become so expensive that many young men and women borrow or beg for money to meet the required expenses. Those who cannot afford the high cost of marriage ceremonies decide to do without formal marriage and co-habit with their would-be wives. Thus, there has been an increase in the number of young men and women who live together and have children without formal marriage. This has led to an increase in the number of unmarried couples and children born out of wedlock, with significant legal, social and economic implications and which may explain part of the social problems facing the area.

d) **Bride Price**: An important element of Urhobo traditional marriage is the payment of a bride price by the groom or groom's family to the bride's family[21]. Traditionally, Urhobo "bride price" was fixed at twenty British pounds *(Akpun Uje)* but those days have since passed. These days, families are free to fix their bride price, and this is always negotiated during the traditional marriage ceremony until a pre-agreed amount is arrived at. In most cases, bride prices are more than the traditional twenty pounds (i.e. approximately $25 or N38,001 at the exchange rate of N1,510 = $1 as of the time of writing this paper). In addition to the bride price, there are many other "prices" or costs that the groom or his family must pay such buying of wrappers and other clothing materials for the parents of the bride, salt for *Eghweya*, "greeting" uncles and brothers of the bride, "spraying" of money, etc., which will more than

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[21] In Nigeria, the terms "bride price" and "dowry" are used, interchangeably to refer to the payments made by the groom or his family to the family of the bride. This is incorrect as there is a distinction. According to Encyclopeadia.com (and many other sources), "*Bride price* and *dowry* are terms that refer to payments made at the time of marriage in many cultures, primarily in Asia and Africa. Bride price is typically paid by the groom or the groom's family to the bride's family. Dowry is typically paid by the bride's family to the bride or to the wedded couple. Thus, bride price and dowry are not necessarily the converse of each other. However, in the twentieth century, dowry payments in South Asia have increasingly been demanded by and paid to the groom's family (and not just to the bride or the wedded couple). This suggests a usage of the term dowry to mean a *groom price*, the reverse of a bride price. Bride price and dowry need not be mutually exclusive, and marriage transfers in both directions can occur simultaneously (https://www.encyclopedia.com/social-sciences/applied-and-social-sciences-magazines/dowry-and-bride-price)

quadruple the bride price. Whatever the justification for bride price and other "prices" in Urhobo traditional marriage, I think this practice has outlived its usefulness from the prism of modern economic development. If it must be continued, let us go back to the naira equivalent of traditional twenty pounds without the additional "prices".

e) **Polygamy**: Another aspect of Urhobo marriage tradition is that polygamy is allowed. A man can marry as many wives as he can afford. Generally, Polygamous families are usually very large with a high dependency ratio, and consequently lower capacity for savings and investment and lower access to education and health. Polygamy has been on the decline and polygamous families are increasingly becoming more acrimonious and divided than in the past thus resulting in a diminution of social capital. Whatever the justification for polygamy in the past, there can no longer be any justification from a social and economic development prism. It should therefore not only be discouraged but should be delegitimized in Urhoboland.

f) **Female Circumcision:** Female circumcision.[22] is a cultural practice shared by many ethnic nationalities in Africa, the Middle East and Far East. It is an element of Urhobo marriage tradition as girls are expected to be circumcised just before marriage. In fact, it was almost an abomination for a girl not to be circumcised and there are festivals or ceremonies tied to female circumcision. This practice has come under severe criticisms because of its health and "human rights" implications. Some of the criticisms can however be deflected if circumcision is done under hygienic conditions and medical supervision. Today, a growing number of Urhobo girls are no longer circumcised. It is difficult to see any economic benefits of female circumcision just as the economic costs and impact on economic development appear minimal. Like polygamy, it an aspect of "unfreedom" with respect to women. Therefore, it must be delegitimized in Urhoboland.

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[22] Opponents of this practice use the term "female genital mutilation" (FGM) or "female genital cutting" (FGC). It is a social custom, not a religious practice. The Bible (Old and New Testaments) and the Qur'an are silent on the subject, but the *Sunnah* (the words and actions of the Prophet Mohammed) contain several references to female circumcision such as "*Cut slightly without exaggeration, because it is more pleasant for your husbands*" which appears to be related to the least intrusive method of circumcision. The United Nations has supported the right of member states to grant refugee status to women who fear being mutilated if they are returned to their country of origin. A judge of a Canadian Federal Court once declared MGM as a *"cruel and barbaric practice."* In the West, the procedure is outlawed in Britain, Canada, France, Sweden, Switzerland and the United States. In 1989, the *Regional Committee of the WHO for Africa* passed a resolution urging participating governments "*to adopt appropriate policies and strategies in order to eradicate female circumcision*" and "*to forbid medicalization of female circumcision and to discourage health professionals from performing such surgery."* In 1980, UNICEF announced that its anti-FGM program is "*based on the belief that the best way to handle the problem is to trigger awareness through education of the public, members of the medical profession and practitioners of traditional health care with the help of local collectives and their leaders.*" The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child is ambiguous about FGM. On one hand, Article 24, paragraph 3 states: "*States Parties shall take all effective and appropriate measures with a view to abolishing traditional practices prejudicial to the health of children.*". But Article 29 paragraph 1.c calls for: "*The development of respect for the child's parents, his or her own cultural identity, language and values, for the national values of the country in which the child is living, the country from which he or she may originate, and for civilizations different from his or her own*". For more details visit www.religioustolereance.org/fem_cirm.htm

5.2 Funeral Traditions

The Urhobo traditional funeral/burial rites are complex, time-consuming, generally expensive, and have significant implications for the welfare of the families left behind as well as the socio-economic development of Urhoboland. When an Urhobo person dies, there are lots of rites that need to be performed before the person is finally laid to rest. Under normal circumstances, if a young person dies with or without children, it is a sad story and does not attract too much fanfare. But when an elderly man, chief, king, or queen dies it is given all the trappings of traditional grandeur[23]. The Urhobo people believe in "good and bad death". Bad death includes those who died with bloated lips, legs and stomach; during childbirth; through drowning and suicide. Good death refers to those who died at a ripe age, usually 70 years and over. Those who experienced "bad death" were traditional buried in the bush or dep forest (*Aghwarode)* without a fanfare or ceremony while those who experienced "good death" were given "befitting" burial with fanfare and proper funeral ceremony. In what follows, we discuss some elements of Urhobo traditional burial ceremony and their impact on the economic welfare of families and economic development of Urhoboland.

a) **Funeral Ceremony**: Urhobo traditional funeral ceremony is very elaborate, time- and-manhours consuming, and expensive. Traditionally, when an Urhobo person dies at old or relatively old age, the funeral rites occur in two stages. During the first stage, the body of the deceased is buried in a grave in his/her house or near the house (home burial). If the person died in the morning or early afternoon, the first burial takes place usually in the evening of the same day, but if the person died in the evening, it is buried the next day. The first burial is somber. Women line up and dance-round the corpse cyclically, singing praises of the deceased using the *ekpagha* musical instruments. The first daughter of the deceased seats beside the corpse fanning it with traditional hand-fan (*adjuju)* and showers praises on the deceased. While doing this every other member of the family and guest spray them money. One or two goats are slaughtered. One to rinse the deceased of dirt before commencing the journey to join his ancestors, and another called *Evwe-Ewun (*goat for waist) to honor the deceased for utilizing his waist in his lifetime. The second burial known as *erhurhe*, is an opportunity for the family to celebrate the life of their deceased and to prepare his/her soul (*erhi)* him to be accepted or received by the ancestors in the world of the dead (*erhivwin).* There is no stipulated time between the first and the second burial. The financial status of the children of the deceased usually determines the timing of the second burial and how elaborate it is. It is more of a ceremony than an actual burial because the body has already been buried, and it can take place many months after the first stage. Traditionally, children, the wife(s), and other family members of a deceased man are expected to shave their heads. In the case of a man, after the funeral ceremony the wife is inherited by the family member

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[23] For a detailed description of Urhobo rites, including kinds of burials, burial roles and practices and the religious context and implications, see Ajagbe, S.O.T (2012).

the deceased man. If the man had more than one wife, the youngest wife is typically inherited by the man's eldest son.

Since the mid-1960s, there have been significant changes in the funeral tradition painted above. For example, with the advent of improved transportation, refrigeration, embalming and other modern mortuary services, bodies of the dead and now preserved for months and the first burials are now delayed or merged with the second burial. In effect, most families now have only one burial ceremony which is largely celebratory and devoid of the somberness and wailing that characterize the first burials of the "olden days". Rich families may use the burial as an opportunity to flaunt their wealth, while families who are less well-off may borrow, sell their property or seek help from extended family members and friends in their struggle to give the deceased a "befitting burial".

Furthermore, while it was traditional to bury people (except those who did not have children) inside a room in their house/home, these days many people are buried outside the house in specially built small houses or "mausoleums" near the house. Burial ceremonies have also become very expensive and occasions for display of wealth or achievements. Most families have also abandoned overnight wake-keeping ceremony and have replaced it with "service of songs" usually held for a few hours in late afternoon/ evening on the day before the burial or a few days before the burial. Also, the long periods of in-law greetings have collapsed into one or two days, immediately after the interment and during the reception/entertainment of guests or on Sundays after the thanksgiving service at the church.

It is clear from the above that while some elements of Urhobo traditional funeral rites/ceremonies continue, there have been remarkable changes in response to modernization and Christianity. For example, the funeral period and process have been significantly abridged, this reducing direct and opportunity cost to the families in terms on manpower spent on funerals. However, a new phenomenon has emerged whereby bodies are kept in mortuaries for long periods of time until the children of the deceased are financial ready to give their deceased parents a befitting burial, which in some cases entails building a house where the deceased will be interred. This has increased the cost and burden of funerals to children and families. In fact, funeral ceremonies are now associated with many "bad things". According to Chief Bobson Gbinigie, a social critic [24],

> "*wantonness, waste, mutant immorality and splendiferous theatrics that have in recent times become fashionable in most Urhobo burials and being disguised as tradition. We have seen corpses lined up and decorated with beads and gold rings. Some buy caskets lined with gold rings. Most burials in Urhoboland are carnivals of immorality and bazaar of Babel. Divorcees (Omotogbes) and social nitwits have taken burials as a rendezvous for*

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[24] "Burial Ceremonies in Urhoboland" by Chief Bobson Gbinije, The Nigerian Observer, March 12, 2016.

grandiose debauchery… Nobody is saying that the dead do not deserve a good burial, but must we Urhobos kill the living to bury the dead? All types of demonic levies are stamped on unemployed children

Clearly, there is need for an in-depth study of the impact of the old and recent changes in Urhobo funeral traditions not only the affected families but also the overall economic development in Urhoboland. For example, how do they affect savings, investment, production, health, etc. One can only guess that on average, these changes have encouraged ostentation consumption. On the other hand, some of the changes has led to the emergence of a funeral industry in Urhoboland which include mortuary services, undertakers, entertainers, renting of tents/canopies/chairs, clothing, builders, which has some employment and income-generating benefits. But these benefits must be weighed against the social and economic costs.

b) **Home Burial**: Traditionally, if an Urhobo person dies of natural causes and lives a long life, the body must be taken to his ancestral village for burial, and he/she cannot be buried outside in an open field or public cemetery but in a house. It is believed that burying an Urhobo outside leads to damning consequences on their children as this means they have left their dead parent outside in the rain. This means that the deceased must be buried in a house they built in their village or if they do not have any of such, the children must build a house where their dead parent can be buried. For those who do not have money to build houses for burial, they call on their family members and friends to assist them or even borrow. In some very rare cases where a person dies outside the country and there are no means to bring the person back home, the family is asked to cut the fingernails of the deceased and bring it back home to be buried the same way the corpse was supposed to be buried. This practice of home burial has not only led to significant delays in burials but has increased the cost of funerals, and in some cases caused rifts in families. Furthermore, burying the dead in home or near homes poses health hazards because of the low water level in much of Urhoboland and the fact that the major sources of water supply are shallow wells and boreholes located near homes, usually not far from the graves of the dead.

I think it is high time for the Urhobo people to imbibe the culture of burying the dead in well-maintained cemeteries as opposed to burying people at home or near home. In this regard, there is a need for the various local government councils to set up beautiful and well-maintained cemeteries. Churches can have cemeteries close to their premises where they can bury their dead members or other persons from the village at reduced cost. There is also the need to establish Urhobo national cemeteries where notable Urhobo people can be buried. All these will reduce the cost of funerals.

c) **Return of a Woman's Corpse to her Village for Burial**: Traditionally, when a married woman dies, her corpse is returned to the homestead of her family. This means that they are

buried apart from their husbands. No matter the number of years the woman spent in her marriage, no matter how much she loved her husband and no matter the investments she had in the marriage, whenever she dies, it is mandatory. that she be taken to her father's homestead for burial. The rationale for this practice is anchored on the tradition that the traditional marriage always takes place in the bride's ancestral home and when the man pays the bride price, a little amount is usually left unpaid signaling the bride has not been given fully to the groom, and that she can always return home. Only the physical body that is sent to the husband in the marriage, the spirit (*Erhi*), remains in the family house, where it is thought that the ancestors saw the marriage. This explains why a deceased woman is transported back to her family's residence for burial. This tradition no doubt is clear indication of the people's belief in the supremacy of paternity over maternity

Arguments in favor of this practice include the following:
- That women are not slaves, and they are not sold out during marriage; therefore, they must be returned home at death.
- Since women know that upon their death, they will be brought home; they develop their communities and bring their children to their father's hometown for visits or residence.
- To avoid or minimize abuse by their husbands and in their husband's houses, and in case of any marital challenges, women would have a home where they can claim, and they will not be treated

To many people, this funeral custom is strange, repugnant and disgusting. The arguments against the practice include the following:
- This custom promotes patriarchal dominance.
- Women should be buried at their husbands' homes close to their husbands because at marriage they are joined together, and death should not separate them.
- Both the husband and wife lived and labored together so they should be buried in the same place.
- It reduces the cost of burial for the children as both the husband and the wife will be buried in one house, rather than having the children buy land or build a house just the mother's burial in her homestead which amounts to sheer waste of money.
- To avoid undue financial exploitation of the children by the maternal family.
- Since women are generally discriminated against in the sharing of their fathers' heritage, it does not make sense to return their corpses there.
- There is usually no pledge or binding prayer to return the women to the families during payment of bride price.
- It can cause intergroup discord for Urhobo women who are married to non-Urhobo men, especially from ethnic groups that have the custom of burying women in their husband's homestead, e.g. the Ibos. According to Okpeva (2023), the practice is *"posing a serious*

threat to peaceful and harmonious intergroup relations among families that indulged in inter-tribal marriage".

Overall, the economic costs of the practice (such as burden on the children and increased funeral cost) far outweighs the benefits such as property development in the woman's homestead.

In summary, the economic costs of the various traditions associated with Urhobo funerals and recent changes in some of these traditions far outweigh the benefits even if you factor in the growth of the "funeral industry" in Urhoboland. Writing on this issue, Agbamu (2021) observed that
noted that:

> *"Due to response to new technology, innovative ideas and evolving values from home and abroad, special traditional passage rite for the dead have given way to mega parties for celebrations and show of affluence to friends and social clubs members. It is now difficult to see the tears of children and family members at interment venue, rather they are more concerned about entertaining their friends and associates in reception venues. Some problems generated by this modern trend are highlighted include financial crises, stress and ill health, marital problem/divorce, drunkenness and high crime rate among others. ...this trend is posing serious threat to the unity, economic growth and development of the Urhobo Nation"*

I agree with this observation. It is therefore important to evaluate these traditions and recent trends and changes to ensure that funeral traditions promote and do not hinder economic development of the area.

6. Conclusions and Recommendations

In this paper, we have discussed the relationship between some aspects of Urhobo culture and economic development of Urhoboland with emphasis on Urhobo marriage and funeral traditions. We noted that the culture of any ethnic group or nation can be likened to a double-edged sword in the sense some aspects or elements of the culture ("good culture") can support or promote the economic welfare of the people and the overall economic development of the territory. ON the other hand, some aspects or elements of the culture (" bad culture") can do the opposite. We also noted that culture is dynamic, and in a fast-changing world, ethnic groups and nations must modify or adapt some of their cultural practices to changing times or in response to modernity while retaining some of the positive elements to ensure continuity. At the same time, those aspects or elements of the culture that are anachronistic, outmoded and retard economic development must be discarded. What can we do as Urhobo people to ensure that our culture is supportive of rapid economic development and lifts our people from multi-dimensional poverty? To address this question, I would like to make the following broad recommendation:

1. **Urhobo "Superstructure"**

Whatever recommendations we proffer may come to naught if there is no institution with legislative, executive and law enforcement powers to see to the implementation of such recommendations. This is why we need a pan-Urhobo "superstructure" to lead the effort to transform the culture of Urhobo people in a way that meaningfully supports economic development of the area and enhances economic welfare of the people. In fact, most recommendations that have been made in the past to improve the culture and overall development of Urhoboland have not been implemented due to a lack of an Urhobo "superstructure". This superstructure is an Urhobo state! For example, we need a state government to pass legislation to ban polygamy and polyandry as well as the payment of bride price (dowry) or to ban home burials, ban the shooting of cannons and other fetish practices during funeral ceremonies or to build and maintain public cemeteries, museums, and to approve the teaching and learning of Urhobo language in all institutions and the use of Urhobo language as a second "official" language in the area. In other words, to fully implement needed changes and harness our culture to propel economic development of Urhoboland, we need to have a state of our own.

Although, the Urhobo people were regarded as the fifth largest ethnic group in Nigeria in the 1960s, it is today one of the largest ethnic groups in the country without a state of its own. Some other ethnic groups of comparable population and land area now have states of their own, while the Urhobo people are still lumped together with other ethnic groups. A multiethnic state cannot adequately promote or support the culture of all the ethnic groups in the state equally. Therefore, in the ongoing plan to restructure the Nigerian federation, the Urhobo people must intensify their agitation for an Urhobo state. Given that there are approximately 200 ethnic nationalities in the country, it is impossible for each ethnic group to have its own state, so we suggest that any ethnic nationality that has a population of at least 3 million people should be allowed to have a state of their own, while contingent ethnic nationalities with populations of less than 3 million should be allowed to willingly agree (through plebiscites) to merge to form multi-ethnic states, with each ethnic group having its own local government area(s).

2. **Urhobo National Assembly:** Given the difficulty and uncertainty in creating an Urhobo state by the powers that be, until then we must have a "Plan B". In this regard, the Urhobo Progress Union (UPU) should form an Urhobo National Assembly that can serve as a "quasi-government" of the Urhobo people. We need charismatic and well-respected leaders for the UPU in the mold of Chief Mukoro Mowoe and Chief Adogbeji Salubi to achieve this. The leaders of UPU should be elected for a single term on 5 years, and they should constitute the Urhobo Assembly to comprise of the executive members of the UPU, the traditional rulers (*ivies*), all Urhobo members of the National Assembly and Delta State Assembly, Chairmen of all Urhobo Local Government Councils and Representative of some leading Urhobo

associations such as Urhobo Social Club, Atamu Club and Urhobo Historical Society. The Chairmanship of the UNA will rotate among the Urhobo Senator, Chairman of Urhobo Traditional Council, and the Governor or Deputy Governor (if Urhobo) or the highest Urhobo member of the Delta State House of Assembly. The UNA will have quarterly meetings to discuss Urhobo matters and make decisions affecting Urhoboland, including review of cultural practices that affect people's welfare and economic development of the area. The UNA will put in place mechanisms and provide resources for the implementation of its decisions through Urhoboland.

3. **Enhancing the Urhobo Cultural Center**: I congratulate the Urhobo Progressive Union (UPU) for the construction of Urhobo Cultural Center (UCC) at Uvwiamughe. However, the center needs to upgrade and expanded to become a multi-purpose center, to include the Urhobo Museum, a Craft Center, Library, Playground, Hotel and other tourist attractions. We can learn from other income-generating, self-sustaining and well-managed cultural centers around the world such as the "Smithsonian Institution"[25].

4. **Endowed Chair or Institute of Urhobo Studies at DELSU:** I also wish to call on the UPU, other social organizations in Urhoboland as well as wealthy individuals to work together to establish an Institute of Urhobo Studies at the Delta State University, Abraka (DELSU). Although the Institute will be physically located at the university, it should receive a significant portion of its funding from private sources and managed independently. The Institute will be charged with the following responsibilities: a) Promote and conduct research into various areas of Urhobo history, culture and development; b) House a library and documentation resource center on Urhobo issues; b) House a "mini" Urhobo museum; c) Encourage and supervise final year and postgraduate students undertaking research projects in various aspects of Urhobo studies; d) Offer postgraduate degrees and certificates in Urhobo studies; e) Provide intellectual support to the Urhobo National Assembly and Urhobo Cultural Center; and f) Secure for grants from local and international donors to support research and development activities in Urhoboland.

5. **Promoting Cultural Tourism:** Cultural tourism is almost non-existent in Urhoboland, and there are very few cultural attractions in the area. Cultural attractions are the areas that should be identified and developed. Urhobo sociologists, anthropologists, archeologists and historians should work together to identify such attractions. It is a shame that out of the 816

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[25] The Smithsonian Institution is a museum complex with most of its facilities in Washington, D.C. It consists of 19 museums and seven research centers, and has 142 million items in its collections. A monthly magazine published by the Smithsonian Institution is also named Smithsonian. The Smithsonian Institution was founded for the promotion and dissemination of knowledge by a bequest to the United States by the British scientist James Smithson (1765–1829). It is established as a trust administered by a secretary and board of regents

world heritage sites/properties identified by UNESCO [26], only two are in Nigeria, namely the relatively unknown Sukur Cultural Landscape in the Mandara Mountains in Adamawa State approved in 1999, and the Osun-Oshogbo Sacred Grove in Osun State, approved in 2005. Homes of former Urhobo leaders, abandoned or collapsed factories and sites, shrines, river beaches, old churches and other religious sites can be renovated to become cultural attractions. School children can be taken on excursions to such sites, and Urhobos living outside Urhoboland and in the Diaspora as well as non-Urhobos should be encouraged to visit these sites.

6. **Recognition and Promotion of Urhobo Cultural Icons:** Finally, we need to recognize and support intellectuals, artists and other people who have promoted and made significant contributions to Urhobo culture and development, such as Bruce Onobrakeya, Perkin Foss, "Okpan", Omokomoko, Sally Young, Ogute, etc. Monuments or statues of some of these people should be erected at public places such as road junctions, schools, market laces, local government headquarters, etc., throughout Urhoboland.

7. **Empirical Studies of the Culture and Development Nexus**: Our discussion in this paper has been basically descriptive, and at best qualitative in nature, due to lack of the necessary data for analytical analysis. To make more informed and evidence-based recommendations, it is necessary to generate both qualitative and quantitative data on various aspects of Urhobo culture and economic development of Urhoboland. In appendix 1 to this paper, I present an economic model or framework which I have developed to form the basis for data generation for empirical analysis of this relationship. Our next stage in this ongoing study is to generate the data to operationalize the model. In appendix 2, I present some the results of a quick online survey using a Google Form of respondents to some statements (hypothesis) on the impact of some elements of Urhobo marriage and funeral traditions on the people's welfare and overall economic development of Urhoboland using a 3-point Likert scale (Disagree, Neutral/Don't Know and Agree). The survey was sent out on July 16, 2024, via email and WhatsApp to some Urhobo groups and my contacts. As of 1:00pm ET on July 20, 2024, when I decided to do the preliminary analysis, 125 people had completed the survey, indicating a great interest in the subject matter. The survey has generated a trove of data that I will use to validate some of the assumptions (hypothesis) made in this study and for subsequent empirical studies on this subsequent. The survey shows that we can generate some of the data we need to make more informed decisions on Urhobo culture and other matters affecting Urhoboland.

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[26] Out of the 812 properties identified/approved by UNESCO in 137 countries, 628 are cultural, 168 are natural and 24 are mixed.

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Appendix 1: A Survey of the Impact of Urhobo Marriage and Funeral Traditions on Economic Welfare of the People and Economic Development of Urhoboland

Date of Survey: July 12- 20, 2024
Method: A survey instrument consisting of 7 demographic questions, and 15 statements - seven statements of marriage tradition, seven statements on funeral traditions/practices and one general statement on Urhobo culture – that were carefully designed to ensure that the assessment tool has good psychometric properties[27]. On a 3-point Likert scale, respondents are required to state whether they Agree, Disagree or Do Not Know/Neutral with each of the 15 statements. The survey questionnaire was designed in Google form and sent on July 16, 2024, by email and social media (WhatsApp) to my Urhobo contacts and some Urhobo WhatsApp groups who were also asked to forward it to their contacts and other WhatsApp groups. As of Saturday, July 20, 2024, 125 persons had responded. Below are some of the results of the 125 responses/

A. Demographics of Respondents

1. Are you Urhobo?	Frequency	%
Yes	123	98%
No	2	2%
Grand Total	125	100%

3. Gender	Frequency	%
Female	33	26%
Male	92	74%
Grand Total	125	100%

5. What is your age group?	Frequency	%
30 to less than 60 years old	58	46%
60 years and over	66	53%
(blank)	1	1%
Grand Total	125	100%

2. If you are Urhobo, what is the name of your Local	Frequency	%
Uvwie	1	1%
Ehiope-East	37	30%
Ethiope West	9	7%
Okpe	4	3%
Udu	5	4%
Ughelli South	7	6%
Ughelli North	44	35%
Warri South	2	2%
Others/Blank/Wrong Name	16	13%
Grand Total	125	100%

Q. 4: What is Your Marital Status?	Female 30 to less than 60 years old	Female 60 years and over	Male 30 to less than 60 years old	Male 60 years and over	Total
Divorced	1			1	2
Married	10	9	38	50	107
Single	6	1	2		9
Widow(er)		5			5
(blank)	1				1
Grand Total	18	15	40	51	125

	Q. 5: What is Your Age Group?		
Q.6 What is Your Place of Residence?	30 to less than 60 years old	60 years and over	Total
In Europe	12	21	33
In Nigeria outside Urhobo	11	11	22
In the USA	15	19	34
In Urhobo land	16	10	26
London UK	2	1	3
South Africa	1		1
Blank/Combinati	1	5	6
Grand Total	58	67	125

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[27] The properties are reliability, validity and norming. See Monticone, et al (2021) and https://www.hipeople.io/glossary/psychometric-properties

B. General Statement on Urhobo Culture and Economic Development

7. Generally, Urhobo cultural practices/traditions have positive economic impact on Urhobo people in terms of increasing income, job creation, investment and production of goods and service
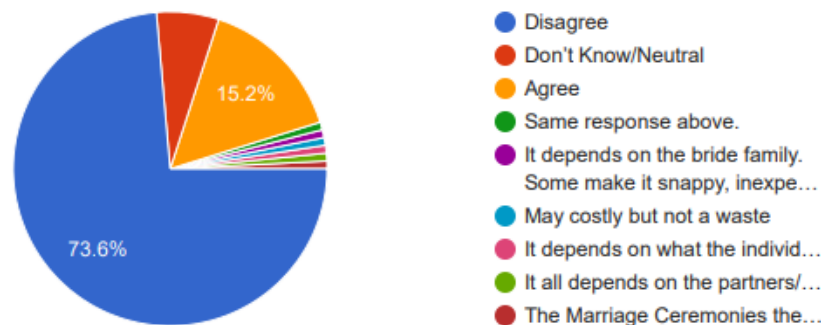
125 responses

- Disagree
- Do not know/Neutral
- Agree
- Generally Urhobo Culture will include means of livelihood s...
- I think that we have cultural practices that could serve our...
- our customs don't require goo...
- For those on the receiving en...
- There are costumary tradition...
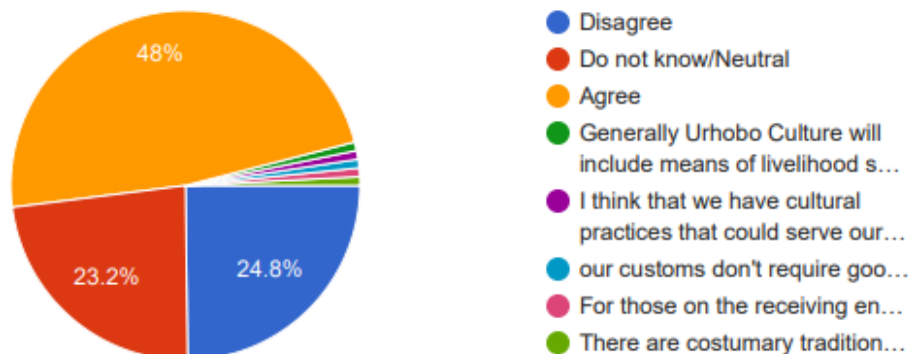
C. Statements on Urhobo Marriage Traditions

8. Urhobo traditional marriage ceremonies consume too much time, are costly and wasteful.

125 responses

- Disagree
- Don't Know/Neutral
- Agree
- Same response above.
- It depends on the bride family. Some make it snappy, inexpe...
- May costly but not a waste
- It depends on what the individ...
- It all depends on the partners/...
- The Marriage Ceremonies the...

Responses by Gender and Age Group

Frequency (No of Respondents)

Statement 8: Urhobotraditional marriage ceremonies consume too much time, and are costly and wasteful	30 to less than 60 years old	30 to less than 60 years old	30 to less than 60 years old Total	60 years and over	60 years and over	60 years and over Total	Grand Total
	Female	Male		Female	Male		
Agree	6	3	9	3	7	10	19
Disagree	12	31	43	11	37	48	92
Don't Know/Neutral		3	3		5	5	8

9. Urhobo tradition marriage should be reformed to make it less expensive and less time consuming

124 responses

- Disagree
- Don't Know/Neutral
- Agree
- See above
- Reformed to make sense, the tradition in general is barbaric and to oppress women and children
- It is time consuming but not expensive

26.6%

63.7%
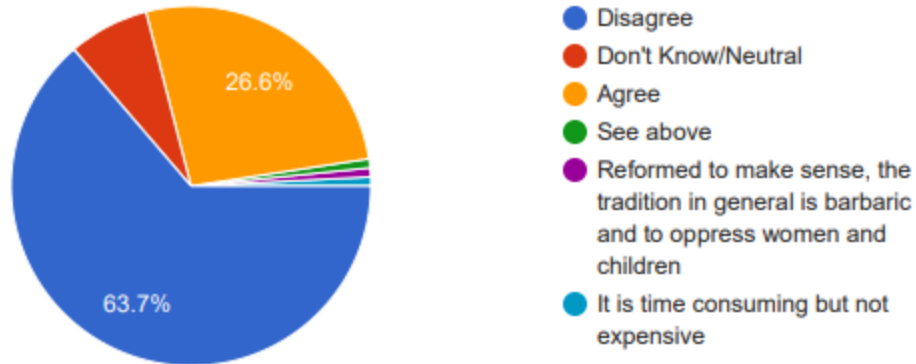
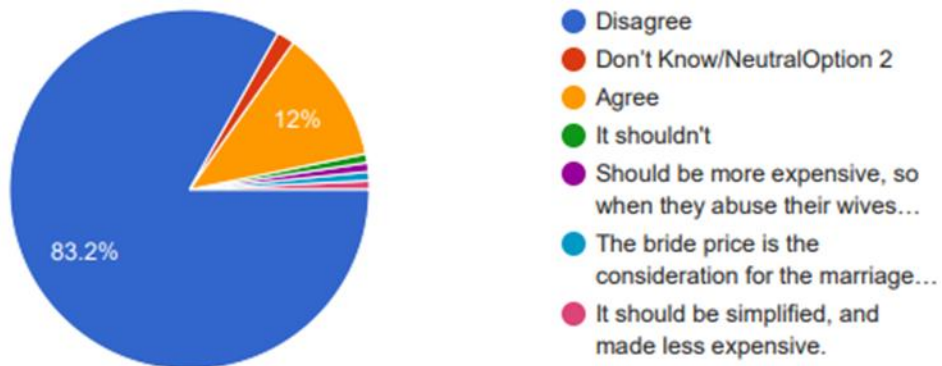## 10. Bride price should be abolished because it no longer serves any useful purpose and is counterproductive

125 responses

- Disagree
- Don't Know/NeutralOption 2
- Agree
- It shouldn't
- Should be more expensive, so when they abuse their wives…
- The bride price is the consideration for the marriage…
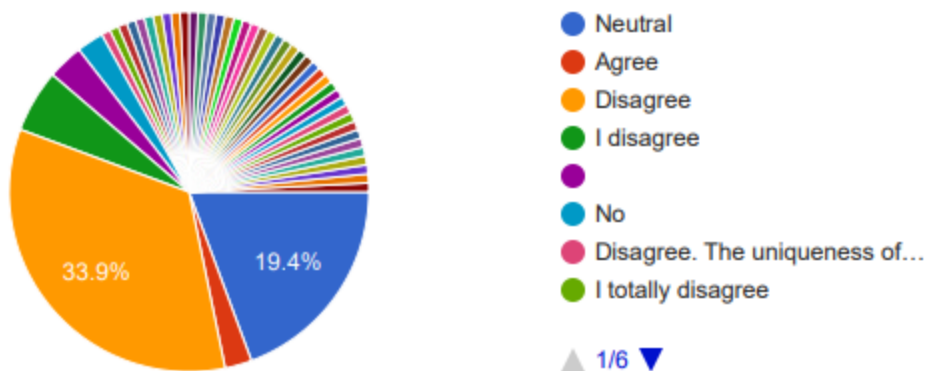- It should be simplified, and made less expensive.

12%

83.2%

11. Urhobo traditional marriage no longer serves any useful purpose, and should therefore be abolished and let couples have only Church and/or Court marriage

124 responses

Legend:
- Neutral
- Agree
- Disagree
- I disagree
- (purple, no label)
- No
- Disagree. The uniqueness of...
- I totally disagree

1/6

33.9%   19.4%

12. Polygamy is outmoded and has negative economic impact on families and society

124 responses

Legend:
- Disagree
- Neutral
- Agree
- Possibly
- Polygamy was never meant for people who can't afford it. It can coexist with monogamy which by way is borrowed western culture baptized with Christianity

54.8%
12.1%   31.5%
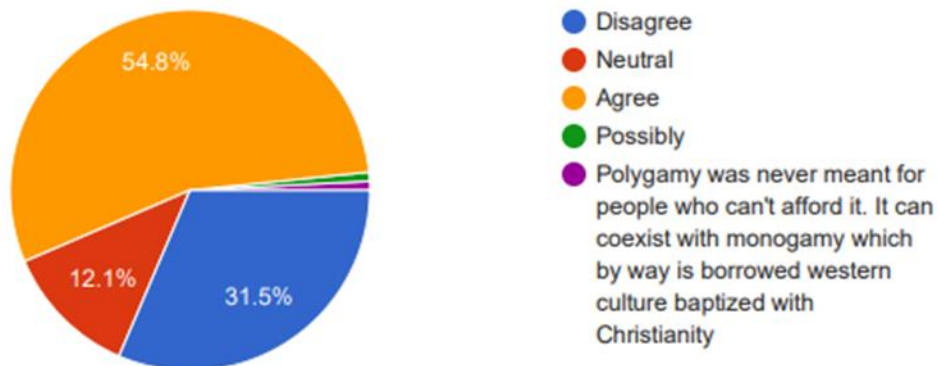
13. Female circumcision before marriage is unnecessary, wasteful and abolished

125 responses

- Neutral
- Agree
- No
- It is a cultural practice that ha…
- It is very important that a lady…
- Babaric and uncivilized
- Disagree
- For health & safety reasons it…

△ 1/2 ▼

68.8%
17.6%
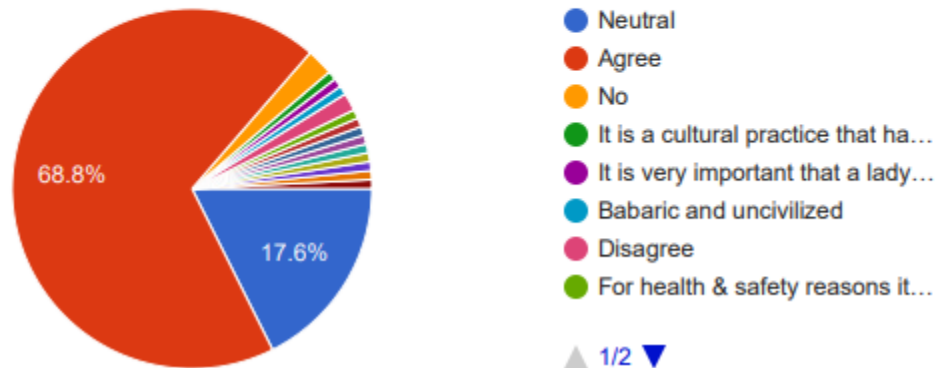
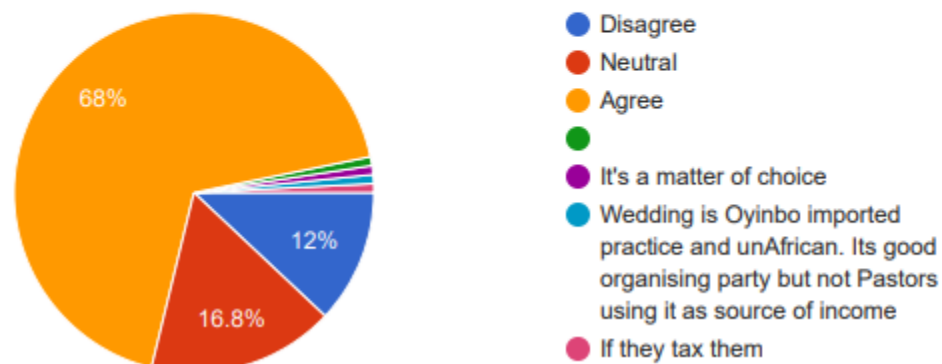## 14. The marriage industry - event centers for wedding, entertainers, planners, rentals, fashion designers, etc -, that has emerged in Urhobo land is good for the economy
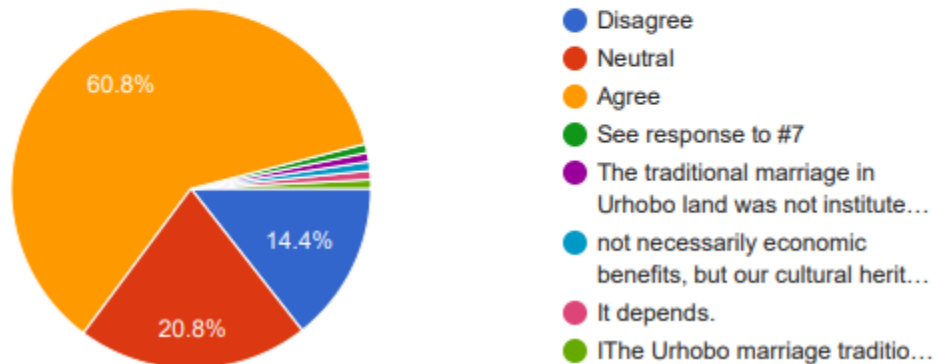
125 responses

- Disagree
- Neutral
- Agree
-
- It's a matter of choice
- Wedding is Oyinbo imported practice and unAfrican. Its good organising party but not Pastors using it as source of income
- If they tax them

68%
12%
16.8%

15. On average, Urhobo marriage traditions have positive economic benefits for couples, their families and Urhobo land

125 responses

- ● Disagree
- ● Neutral
- ● Agree
- ● See response to #7
- ● The traditional marriage in Urhobo land was not institute…
- ● not necessarily economic benefits, but our cultural herit…
- ● It depends.
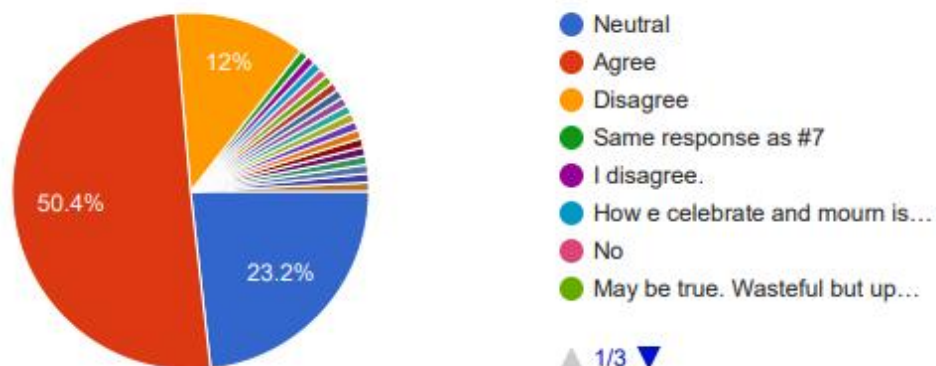- ● IThe Urhobo marriage traditio…

60.8%
14.4%
20.8%

D. Statements on Funeral Traditions

16. Urhobo funeral/burial ceremonies consume too much time, are costly and wasteful

125 responses

- ● Neutral
- ● Agree
- ● Disagree
- ● Same response as #7
- ● I disagree.
- ● How e celebrate and mourn is…
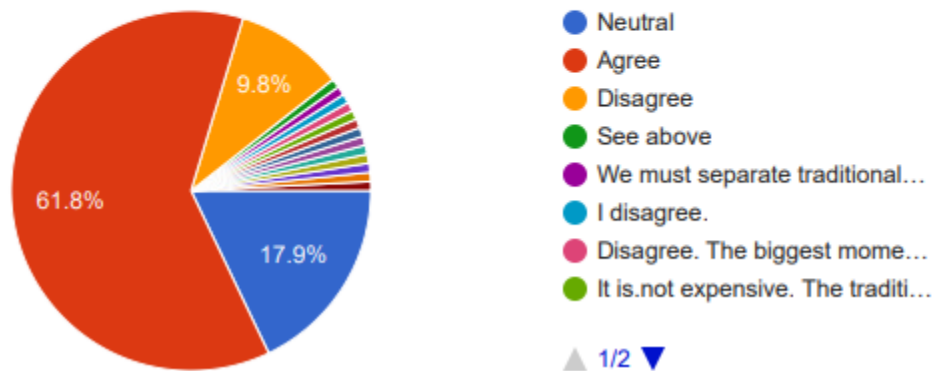- ● No
- ● May be true. Wasteful but up…

▲ 1/3 ▼

12%
50.4%
23.2%

17. Urhobo funeral/burial ceremonies should be reformed to make it less expensive and less time consuming

123 responses

- Neutral
- Agree
- Disagree
- See above
- We must separate traditional...
- I disagree.
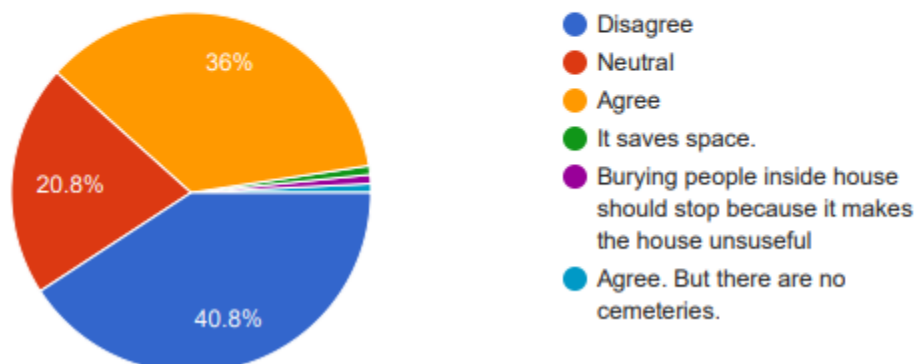- Disagree. The biggest mome...
- It is.not expensive. The traditi...

△ 1/2 ▼

18. The custom of burying people in their house or by their house should be stopped or discouraged

125 responses

- Disagree
- Neutral
- Agree
- It saves space.
- Burying people inside house should stop because it makes the house unsuseful
- Agree. But there are no cemeteries.

19. Urhobo people should be buried in well-maintained cemeteries

125 responses

- Disagree
- Neutral
- Agree
- Personal preference
- To occupy their land and become eyesore in future?
- The should be buried in their houses or land
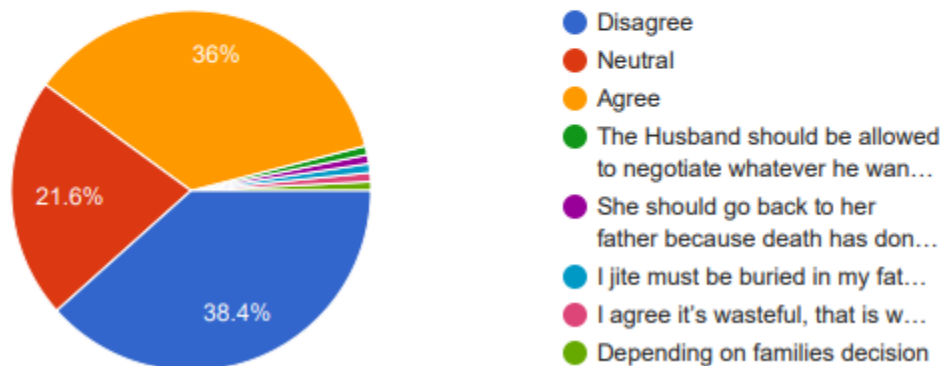- Cemetery or his or her compound in Tumb

36%
27.2%
33.6%
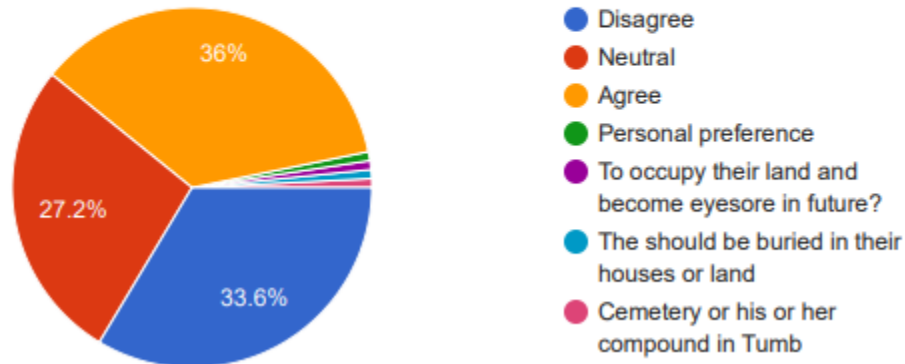
20. The custom of sending the remains/corpse of a married woman to the village of her father for burial is bad, wasteful, and should be stopped

125 responses

- Disagree
- Neutral
- Agree
- The Husband should be allowed to negotiate whatever he wan…
- She should go back to her father because death has don…
- I jite must be buried in my fat…
- I agree it's wasteful, that is w…
- Depending on families decision

36%
21.6%
38.4%

21. Married women should be buried side by side their husbands

125 responses

- Disagree
- Neutral
- Agree
- This arrangement cannot be f…
- No it .
- Not necessarily
- Death has done them part
- If it is their wish. Not everyon…

△ 1/2 ▼

Pie chart values: 41.6%, 28%, 22.4%
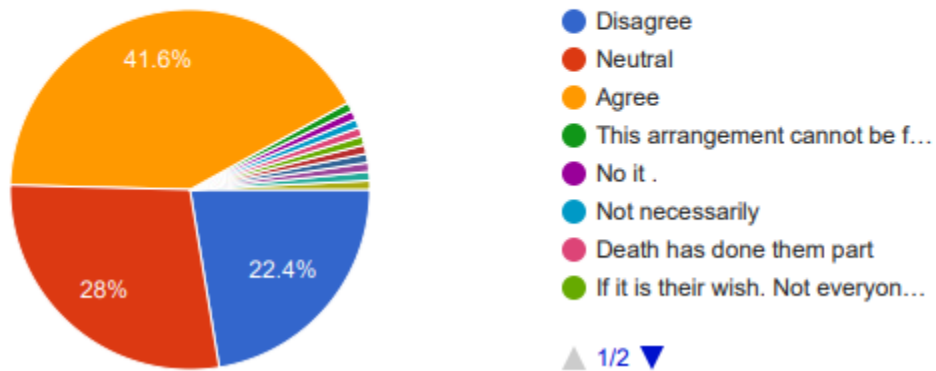
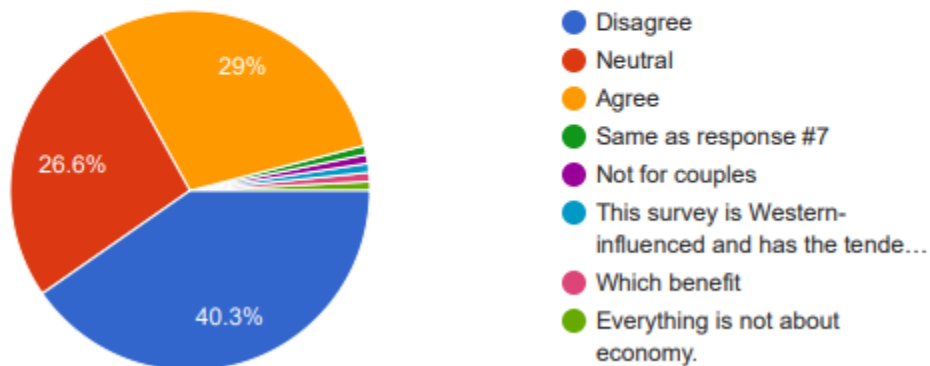## 22. On average, Urhobo funeral/burial traditions have positive economic benefits for couples, their families and Urhobo land

124 responses

- Disagree
- Neutral
- Agree
- Same as response #7
- Not for couples
- This survey is Western-influenced and has the tende…
- Which benefit
- Everything is not about economy.

Pie chart values: 29%, 26.6%, 40.3%

Appendix 2: Towards An Economic Model/Framework for Empirical Analysis of the Culture and Economic Development Nexus in Urhoboland

To analyze the relationship between culture and economic development quantitively, it is helpful to adopt an economic modeling framework (Ojameruaye, 2005) as follows:

a) The first step is to identify the key components or elements of culture and those of economic development that are of interest or subject of research. Let's call each of these elements a "variable", and use C_i (i = 1, ..n) to denote the "culture" variables and E_i (i =1….m) to denote the development variables. For example, C_i can language, dance, arts, crafts, music, burial ceremonies, female circumcision, bride price, etc. On the other hand, E_i can denote production, productivity, consumption, investment, education, health, gender equity, human dignity, etc. Some of these "variables" are in fact "composite" variables and ca be further disaggregated or may not be quantifiable or measurable directly.

b) The second step is to develop two "Impact Matrices" for C and E. The first matrix will have the C_i's as the "impacting or determining" variables and E_i's as the "impacted or determined" variables. In the second table, the roles will be reversed. In order words, we assume "bi-causality" between the C_i's and the E_i's. However, if we are interested in "one-way" causality, we can use one table only. Since some of the variables may not be easily quantified or data may be available for then, we can use a qualitative approach (e.g. the Delphi method or heuristics) to "guesstimate" the direction and strength of the relationship between the C_i's and the E_i's. We can assume two strengths – strong (S) and weak (W) - and two directions – positive (P) and negative (N). In some cases, no relationship may exist (O) or the relationship may be ambiguous (A) or simply indeterminate (I). We can then populate the impact matrix with the symbols SP (strong positive), WP (weak positive), SN (strong negative). WN (weak negative), O (none), I (indeterminate) and A (ambiguous). The following table is an example of such an impact matrix

Table 1: Impact Matrix (C = Determining Variable, E =Determined Variable)

Cultural Variables	Economic Development Variables						
	Production/ Productivity	Consumption	Investment	Education	Health	Human Dignity	Freedom to Choose
Urhobo Language	WP	IN	I	WP	O	O	WP
Arts &Crafts	WP	WP	WP	WP	O	WP	WP
Music	WP	WP	WP	WP	O	WP	WP
Clothing & Dress Culture	WP	WP	WN	O	O	WP	WP
Burial Ceremonies	SN	SN	SN	O	SN	WP	WP
Political Culture (gerontocracy-plutocracy)	SP	WP	WP	WP	O	SP	WP
Marriage Ceremonies	WN	SP	SN	I	SN	WN	WN
Festivals	WP	WP	WN	I	WN	WP	WP
Region & Beliefs	WN	WP	WN	WN	WN	I	I

(Note: The above entries are tentative and subject to change based on more rigorous reasoning and analysis)

c) The third step is to carry out quantitative analysis of the relationship between the sets of the cultural variables C_i's and the economic development variables E_i's. Depending on the available data, the type of analysis could include correction analysis, analysis of variance or covariance, regression analysis, econometric modeling using time series, survey data, cross-sectional or longitudinal data, where available and as appropriate. For instance, we can analyze the impact of Urhobo dress code, music, payment of bride price, home burials, etc. on production, family income, consumption, savings, investment, job creation, etc. using survey data. The two key challenges at this stage are: i) measurement of the variables; and ii) obtaining data for the variables. Measuring the relationship requires that the variables must be measurable. For instance, how can we measure "Urhobo music" or "dance" or "marriage" or "education", "health". To overcome the measurement problems, it may be necessary to design "proxy" variables. Since there has not been systematic collection of data on cultural and economic development variables in Urhoboland, researchers must design their own survey instruments to generate the required data.

Assuming that the variables are measurable, we can quantify relationship between an economic variable E_i and another cultural variable C_i by estimating the following function:

$E_i = f (C_i, \mathbf{C}, \mathbf{E}, \mathbf{U})$

Where $\mathbf{C}$ is a vector of other cultural variables, E is the vector of other economic variables, and U is a vector of other determinants of E_i and a stochastic term representing omitted variables and measurement errors.

d) The fourth step is to analyze the results of 2 and/or 3 above and make recommendations that will: i) ensure that the variable C_i does not have negative impact (or has positive impact) of any E_i; and ii) ensure that the variable E_i does not have negative impact (or has positive impact) of any C_i.

e) The fifth stage is the implementation of the recommendations made in stage 4.