

Community Development in Iwo and Environs

Professor Akanmu G. Adebayo, PhD
Professor of History
Kennesaw State University, Georgia, USA

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Chairman
The Oluwo of Iwoland
Distinguished ladies and gentlemen
Sons and daughters of Iwo and environs
All protocols observed

I am delighted to send this address to you on this important occasion. I say “Kabiyesi” to all our royal fathers in Iwo and its environs, beginning with His Royal Majesty, the Oluwo of Iwoland, Oba Abdulrasheed Adewale Akanbi Ilufemiloye Telu I. K’ade kope lori, ki bata pe lese. Also, I say “Eid Mukarak” to all our Muslim brothers and sisters. May this special day bring peace, happiness, and prosperity to everyone.

I thank the organizers of this program, the Iwoland Development Coalition (IDC) for their love and commitment to Iwoland. I also congratulate members of the IDC in celebrating their second anniversary, and for staying strong in the struggle to “ensure the development of Iwoland.” They represent a new generation of Iwoland sons and daughters committed to planning and working together to ensure that the city and its outlying communities achieve real progress. They are the true sons and daughters of Iwoland and its surrounding communities. They deserve our praises for their efforts to ensure that our progress is commensurate with our stature and history, and that our communities do not lag behind.

Our efforts must bring the city and its environs into the 21st century, with modern amenities, and without losing our people’s traditions and customs. I would have loved to be present to give this address personally and to interact with the community. Unfortunately, I could not make the trip at this time. Many thanks to Hon. Oguntola Togun for contacting me, and to Mr. Adisa Kabiru Kulukulu for following up with an invitation.

While many people can point out what we are lacking in Iwo, I want to change the tune here by pointing out what God has blessed us with. Firstly, we now have a king in Iwo. For two years the throne was vacant after the passing of the late King Olatubosun Tadese. Before that, there was a ten-year interregnum in Iwo during the 1980s until Oba Tadese was enthroned in 1992. In those ten years, the throne was vacant and the palace was emptied of most of its sacred objects of kingship. All of us can

remember the kind of embarrassment that we suffered, when smaller cities in Oyo and Osun States ridiculed us. I believe all that is over now. Secondly, traditional rulers are installed in all Iwoland's cities and towns.

This may be the first time in a long time that all traditional authorities are in place. Of personal interest to me is that the "iwuye" for the Oloke of Obamoro (my township) will be held at the end of this month (September). Thirdly, statistically Iwoland is the largest in Osun State, and our population keeps growing—many thanks to the fertility of our women. Our numbers are increasing in Nigeria and in the Diaspora. And those of us in the Diaspora are happy that we are represented at the highest levels—the Oluwo of Iwoland was one of us, from Canada. Finally, Iwo and its environs are among the most peaceful places in Nigeria.

As a result of that peace, the people also are enjoying a thriving economy. Sometimes we think development is a matter of economic laws of demand and supply. But in fact development is a function of the enabling environment of peace and stability. Elites are returning home to establish businesses and educational institutions. Hotels and the service industries are growing. Higher educational institutions are thriving. In addition to Bowen University, we will soon have Skyward University through my good friend, Professor Lai Oluode. We continue to pray to God to continue to strengthen our leaders, traditional rulers, politicians, educators, healthcare professionals, business men and women, and industrialists. Their roles in the development of Iwo cannot be overemphasized.

Mr. Chairman, allow me to take the audience down memory lane. Every generation has made its contribution to the development of Iwoland and its surrounding kingdoms and townships. Whether they went to school or not, every youth and adult men and women played their role. Teachers and butchers, farmers and doctors, engineers and battery chargers, everyone played a role. In this speech I will focus on the educated elite for a moment. I belong to the second generation of Iwoland's educated elite.

The first generation were those who had their entire elementary and possibly secondary education under colonial rule, people like the late Prince Lamuye, Baba Sanni, Professor Ladipo, Lawyer Atanda, Ekerin Ogunwale, Ekerin Olumoye Ajao, Otunba Aremu, Professor Fawole, Professor Wale Adebayo, and many more. They served as mentors to the next generation and beyond. Members of the second generation, my group, were brought up and educated in an independent Nigeria, although many of us were born in the dying years of colonialism. There are advantages and burdens of being "second" generation. Many feats had been performed by members of the first generation. They had produced the first doctors, first lawyers, first professors, first veterinarians, etc.

Those of us in the second generation have to fill in the gaps. Fortunately, there were many gaps. We also saw the need for the continuous improvement of Iwoland. In my undergraduate years at the University of Ife (now Obafemi Awolowo University) we established Iwo Descendants Union (IDU). Almost every undergraduate sons and daughters of Iwo and environs was a member. I was the secretary. There was no distinction between our colleagues from Iwo, Kuta, Oluponna, Ile-Ogbo, and Telemu. During long vacation, we provided free tutoring in secondary schools in Iwo, teaching Mathematics and English, the two subjects required of everyone in the School Certificate Examination.

We volunteered for street and house numbering. We dug and cleaned drainages. We fought injustices and disrespect when one of the doctors at the State Hospital was developing his private practice at the expense of our people. Activism and advocacy provided us with a cause; in time, we found many more issues that needed to be addressed.

There are many more things to do. Not just filling gaps and fighting injustices, but also creating new trajectories for political and economic development. This is where we can use the next generation of activists, the members of the IDC. I describe the IDC as the millennials. Majority of them reached adulthood around the year 2000. They are technology-oriented and civic-minded. I wholeheartedly encourage the IDC in carrying on the goals of civic social responsibility. In order to be successful, we must pool our resources together, bind ourselves together, and proactively address issues that potentially can divide us.

To succeed in our development efforts, we must be mindful of several things. They include our individual and collective memories, our attitude to conflict, and our entrepreneurial spirit.

Our Individual and Collective Memories

Our memories are the product of our history and experiences. Some of them are positive, but others may be bitter. Each of the cities that make up Iwoland has its history. Oral traditions are not in agreement on many of the points in those histories. Even within each city, family histories conflict and it would take the wisest elders to sort through them. Indeed, the history of princely families in Iwo has been so convoluted, with so many different versions, that it has delayed the choice of Oluwo each time the throne is vacant. If Iwo cannot get its act together historically, how is the Oluwo to provide leadership for all of the components parts of Iwoland?

There are many questions that have generated controversy. I will cite a few. Who got here first? Who gave whom the right to settle where they did? Does size represent seniority? Were certain obas brothers? Who is older, who is younger? Who is senior who is junior? Who is descended from a female side of the ruling house? Who has the right to wear a beaded crown and who doesn't? Which oba or chief insulted another? What acts constituted an insult or disrespect? Every township and families think they know the answer, but every answer is contradicted by another. Power over land and property, and traditional rights to hereditary chieftaincies are often mentioned in these answers. These questions may never be resolved, but we know we must live and work together in the same space.

While the antiquities of the Yoruba kingdoms, cities, and townships are not in doubt, the relationship among the cities have long been in dispute. At the heart of those disputes is the question of seniority of kings, which can be summed up in one question: Who has the right to wear a beaded crown (ade nla). In many attempts to answer this question, a series of administrative missteps and overreaches occurred, starting from the colonial era. Olufemi Vaughan, in his book entitled *Nigerian Chiefs*, devoted some space to this problem. In one of the earliest examples, the colonial government in 1903 consulted the Oni of Ife over the claim by the Elepe of Sagamu to a beaded crown. The Oni reportedly gave the colonial government a list of twenty-one kings who had the right to wear an ade. The Elepe of Sagamu was not on that list. The dispute did not end there. Fast forward to 1976, during the time of Brig. David

Jemibewon as military governor of Oyo State. With the backing of the Federal Military Government under Gen. Olusegun Obasanjo, the state government inserted itself into chieftaincy affairs. In the pretext that chieftaincy disputes were intractable and draining the time of the executive council, Brig. Jemibewon introduced far-reaching chieftaincy reform measures. By the end of Jemibewon's time as governor, as many as 67 Oyo State obas had become oba alade, hailed or derided as ade Jemibewon (Jemibewon's crowns). Even so, the controversy has not gone away and has been inherited by the government of the State of Osun after it was carved out of Oyo State in 1991.

Many obas in Aiyedire and Ola Oluwa Local Governments were beneficiaries of the 1976-78 chieftaincy reforms (the so-called Jemibewon's crown). More changes introduced subsequently in the State of Osun brought crowns to more obas in the state. Some have argued that these reforms cheapened the crowns, with many oba alakete becoming oba alade. But I have a slightly different view on the issue.

Recognizing that nothing stays the same forever, I want to propose that change can be a good thing. Those of us who love our histories must also acknowledge the need to be master of history and not slave of history. Even in the olden days there were changes in our traditions, rules of interpersonal relationships, and rules of etiquettes governing interactions between one oba (and one township) and another. The same perception of change must be understood in the contemporary times. Many of the townships whose obas saw an elevation in their position have been growing rapidly. Their obas were being saddled with greater responsibilities; military governments were relying on them for legitimacy; state and local governments were calling on them to fulfil new tasks; and political party bigwigs were wooing them in unprecedented ways. Imagine this also: many of the townships were becoming larger in size and population than the mother cities of about fifty years ago. Perhaps they deserve the elevation in their status and we should be happy for them.

Many of us can remember the rift between Oba Oyewumi, the Shoun of Ogbomosho, and Oba Adeyemi, the Alaafin of Oyo, over the former's claim to a beaded crown, which was eventually granted by the Oyo State government. The strategy of the military government was to use political expediency where historical claims cannot be fully justified. This strategy continued to be used in the civilian era.

Another major factor that contributed to these disputes is the history of Local Governments in the State of Osun. State creation itself contributed to the controversy. The smaller the states, the smaller the local governments, and the more visible the traditional rulers. That visibility elevated the status (or the perception of the status) of the rulers. A struggle for status and power soon emerged in the process of constituting the traditional councils for governance, influence, and the sharing of federal allocations. Old disputes re-emerged, and many educated elites from the affected townships contributed financially and used their influences to fan the flame of discord.

Having said that, the elders say "odo kii san ko gbagbe orisun re" (a river that wants to keep flowing should not forget its source). This leads me to a major recommendation: we must get our histories absolutely correct. Our historians must define the relationship between Iwo and Oluponna, Iwo and Ile-Ogbo, Iwo and Kuta, etc. beyond reasonable doubts. In those days when we had a good postal system, many in Ile-Ogbo who disdained placing the town under Iwo would write their return address as "Ile-

Ogbo, via Ibadan.” The same went for many elites in Oluponna and Kuta. The irony of the situation must not be lost; there was a possibility that the letter may not arrive on time, or may be completely lost. In 1979, for my study of the history of Iwo, I interviewed the rulers and elders of many surrounding townships. A few of them did not refer to the Oluwo, or to Iwo, in narrating their traditions of origin. But Iwo’s traditions of origin mentioned the arrival of the various migrants who peopled the surrounding townships and communities in the 18th and 19th centuries, and stated clearly that they settled at the permission of the Oluwo and his chiefs. All of us historians have a job to do; we must harmonize these separate histories for posterity. The relationship between Iwo and the townships in Aiyedire and Ola Oluwa LGs need to be clarified once and for all.

Lessons from Our Past

Another impediment to development in Iwo is political violence. Historically, Iwo had often shown its political disagreements violently. Our leadership elite must set a good example. The most violent conflicts were over the results of elections and over state creation, and the most destructive conflicts were recorded after the 1964 elections (Operation Wetie), after the 1983 elections, and over the question of whether Iwo should be in Oyo or Osun State. As a result of these crises, many people lost their lives, property was damaged, homes were destroyed, and relationships were permanently damaged. Some families fled Iwo and vowed never to return. As in other parts of Nigeria that experienced similar crises, no one has been punished for these horrific acts.

Like Nigeria in general, there are many lessons we in Iwo and environs should learn from these violent conflicts. First, no one should lose their lives over elections. In fact, elections should be a way for individuals to exercise their rights to choose who should represent them in government, and as a necessary first step in the implementation of democratic governance. Secondly, in democracy we are likely to disagree, but we must not be disagreeable. Thirdly, when elephants fight the grass under them suffers; the aftermath of electoral violence hurts everyone, but hurts the poor people more. Political violence is also a disincentive for economic development. We need unity in Iwo, and we must handle our disagreements peacefully.

Leadership requires that we mobilize the people and resources towards a clearly defined future. While I support looking into the future, I am a staunch believer in doing so with the benefit of our history. We must draw several important lessons from our past. There are many steps we can take in Iwo to ensure a faster pace of economic, political, and infrastructural development. Three of them are high priority. They are unity, mutual respect, and conflict management. I will say a few words on each of these.

First, unity. Unity does not mean we must all belong to the same party, or agree on every issue. I have to reflect on the statement credited to the Olowu of Kuta, His Majesty, Hammed Adekunle Makama Oyelude, about his role as a traditional monarch. He was asked “Specifically, what are your roles [as a traditional ruler].” He responded clearly that “My roles include but [are not] limited to uniting and to harness and formulate policies and identify directions we should go as a group of people.” There is no doubt, therefore, that unity is the first priority for obas and chiefs of Iwoland, and for all elected and

appointed leaders of our people. I recommend that all our leaders sign a declaration to pursue unity in Iwo, wherever they live and whatever their political party or religious affiliation may be.

The second priority is mutual respect. Our traditional rulers must do things that befit their position. The Yoruba say, “agbalagba ko gbodo se langba-langba,” a respectable elder should not be engaged in frivolities. They also say, “ipo agba la aba agba,” elders must be found in respectable places. Respect is an integral part of our culture. It is one of the elements that make up the ideal of omoluabi. In Iwo, we are taught to respect our parents and elders in the community, and to people in positions of authority no matter their age—wives respect their husbands, students respect their teachers, workers respect their supervisors, etc.

Even then, while respect is automatic it must also be earned by the elders and people in authority through the way they conduct themselves and deal with situations. Elders may lose their right to respect through bullying and cheating, deceit and deception, and other acts unbecoming. Also, we have a deep and keen respect for the society’s institutions, laws, and customs. I do understand that many of our leaders are not demonstrating this respect for each other. Research shows that a major cause of conflicts in the world today is the feeling of being disrespected. Our traditional rulers, politicians, and business magnates must model this respect so that their followers, children, and supporters can learn from them.

The third priority is conflict management. Conflict is an ever present part of human society. Anytime two or more people associate, conflict is likely to arise over the sharing of resources, distribution of power, or claims to status. Conflicts cannot be eliminated in any community. The tongue and the teeth fight; members of the same family fight; and friends fight. The history of conflicts in Iwo shows our readiness to fight. But for development to take place, we must entertain restraints and find alternative ways to resolve our conflicts. For example, we must manage the sharing of inheritance so that farms, schools, and businesses are passed to the next generation amicably, and so that investments survive the demise of the founder. We must also learn to manage conflicts among our princes, chiefs, and politicians. When leaders fight dirty, the conflict spread from top to bottom. Politicians have tended to recruit their supporters (and thugs) from among the unemployed youth. The youth themselves must refuse to be used in this way.

We must also learn to manage conflicts among traditional rulers, which poison the communities. All these conflicts are a drain the community’s energy and resources that could have been used for developmental programs. Sometimes, too, when they escalate they destroy existing development efforts and prevent new ones. Research has shown that managing conflicts is far cheaper than reconstructing communities after destruction caused by a major conflict.

One of our major sources of pride as a community is our religious diversity. Iwo and environs are Muslims, Christians, traditionalists, and they have lived together peacefully for at least a hundred years. Every Iwo family sports this diversity. We celebrate with each other and we rely on each other’s teachings in times of crises. Unfortunately, a simmering religious crisis threatens to torpedo this carefully constructed tradition of religious tolerance and respect in Iwo and the State of Osun. By this I

refer to the crisis over school uniform, precisely over the right of Muslim female students to wear the hijab on their school uniforms. It is significant that while all newspapers called it “Osun hijab crisis,” almost all the stories and pictures were from Iwo, meaning that Iwo was the epicenter. That crisis has not gone away; as recently as June of this year, those of us in the Diaspora were saddened to read reports of a new round. The Vanguard captioned its report “Hijab crisis: How Osun schools turned religious war theatres.” Other newspapers reported on the crisis as well. How did we turn our educational institutions into war zones? Is it right to use our children as fodders in our low stakes disagreements? What is the state government doing to avert the crisis? Would there be another round, and would it escalate or deescalate? Can a town like Iwo survive a religious war? I call on the Governor of the State of Osun, the Oluwo in council and all our religious leaders, leaders of opinion, traditional rulers, and school administrators to take religious conflicts out of the schools to allow the schools to focus on their mission: the education of all our children.

While religious conflict is a new theater for us in Iwo, it is not so in other parts of Nigeria. We must not turn our beautiful city into a theater of religious war. Moreover, there are other local issues that the leadership elite must address before they escalate. They include the rising spate of ritual killings and kidnappings, conflicts between farmers and Fulani herders, and land disputes between various townships.

Conclusions

Let me again laud members of the IDC for the task they set before themselves. I wish them much success in the fundraising to accomplish specific projects for the political and economic wellbeing of Iwoland. There is hardly anyone in the surrounding townships that does not have a business in Iwo; and there is no one in Iwo and surrounding townships that does not have relations, farms, and businesses in the villages. Our economy is interconnected. Moreover, many of the councilors in Aiyedire and Ola Oluwa LGs live in Iwo. Just this past August I was privileged to meet one of the prominent obas of one of the surrounding townships at First Bank Iwo—he had come to transact a business. I contend that to work and do business together profitably, we must also live together peacefully. Our development may depend on it.

Once again, I congratulate all members of the IDC on your second anniversary and wish you much success in the future. Odo Oba a gbe wa o!

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Please send questions and comments to agadebayo@gmail.com