

## An Assessment of the Economic Transformation of Ughoton (Old Sea Port of Benin Kingdom) From 1440-1897

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### **Abstract:**

*The study examines the economic transformation of Ughoton from 1440-1897. First, it assesses the agricultural activities, trade and crafts before 1440 in Ughoton. It discusses the changes that took place in agricultural activities including farming, fishing and hunting. It also analyzed development of Ughoton as a Benin port during the period of Benin-European trade relations. The study relied on both the secondary and primary sources of data. The primary sources consisted of oral interview and documentary data. The documentary data were sourced from intelligence reports, divisional annual reports, colonial letters, dispatches, government reports and correspondences. These data were obtained from State Archives and Record Services, Benin City and National Archives, Ibadan. The secondary sources includes books, newspaper, articles and periodicals. The study found that the introduction of maize, cassava and tree crops such as oranges, coconuts, tangerine, mangoes after the fifteenth century by the Portuguese boosted economic activity in Ughoton in particular and Benin Kingdom in general. The study also found that the introduction of fishing nets and hooks from the sixteenth century boosted the fishing activities in Ughoton. The study shows that the strategic location of Ughoton on the Benin river enabled it to serve as a Benin port for 4 centuries, which brought much wealth and fame to the kingdom and its monarchy.*

### **Keywords:**

*transformation; agriculture; trade; craft; challenges*

## **I. Introduction**

Ughoton also known to the Europeans as Gwatto lies about 42 kilometres Southeast of Benin. It was probably founded in about the eleventh century by Prince Ekaladerhan, the only child of Ogiso Owodo, the last Ogiso of Ogiso dynasty of the Benin kingdom (Oronsaye, 1995:44). Ughoton has common boundaries with Ekenwan to the East and Gelegele to the West. Other neighbouring communities are Urhokhokho, Ikpako, Uduna, Igo and Ugbine. In the traditional Ughoton society, there existed four major streets or “Idumwun” namely Idumwun Ode-Edo, Idumwun Elase, Idumwun Ukpo called (Gelegele Road) and Idumwun Okeagor (Ediagbonya, 2023:77).

The Benin- Ughoton road links Ughoton with the other neighbouring villages. The road was of socio-political and economic relevance to the affected communities that border Ughoton as its facilitated trade with the Europeans from the fifteenth century.

Ughoton witnessed rapid social, political and economic transformation from the fifteenth century. This was because of its vantage position as market which was the hub of trading activities before and after the coming of the Europeans. Its strategic location on the

Benin River enabled it served as the Benin Port during the period of trade and diplomatic relations between Benin and Portuguese, French. British and the Dutch.

As part of the transformation processes, the Portuguese established warehouses and factories at Ughoton. Ughoton thus experienced a considerable economic prosperity, and development. The trade in Ughoton was greatly enhanced as traders from Europe brought new item into Benin especially during the period of slave trade. These items include maize and cassava which contributed immensely to the diet and wealth of individuals.

## **II. Review of Literature**

### **2.1 Concept of Transformation**

Before discussing the issue of economic transformation of Ughoton, it is necessary at this point to examine the concept of “Transformation”. Such an examination will give us a clear understanding of the economic transformation of Ughoton from 1440-1897. Transformation connotes change as it relates to society or an organization. It implies a positive movement from one stage to another. The occurrence propelled by the presence of certain indicators hitherto unknown in the society.

In this sense transformation is change brought about as a result of response to some influences. Hence R.W Cox in his theory of transformation focuses on change which emanates from the bottom-up (Cox, 1987:111). He argues that we should expect pressure for social change to take the form of political backlash like protest from those who are economically marginalized (Ibid, 113). Aligning with this view, Maclean argues that “Inequalities has become a threat to human security... people whose needs are not met are less likely to be productive economically and they are more likely to become militarily aggressive in protesting their condition (Maclean, 2004). One may accept change because of the obvious advantages or benefits derivable. Change can also be resisted if it goes against one’s tradition or norms or ethos of the society. That is why Sheldon says that, although during the colonial era, most Mozambican urban spaces were male dominated, women who migrated from country side helped transform cities by crossing spatial economic and social boundaries and reducing notions of gender particularly through work (Kathleen, 1996). Stressing the benefits derived from change, A.M. Howard contends that it was residents themselves who have formed and transformed each city by building physical infrastructure and by co-operating through a multitude of network and associations in work and leisure (Howard, 2003: 198).

Transformation could be gradual which in this case involves phases and it could also be sudden depending on the circumstances or the forces at the top or centre dictating or influencing the change. What is also critical about transformation is that there is response to change. Based on the above analysis, the economic transformation of Ughoton from 1440 to 1897 can now be examined. First, Ughoton was the Benin port in the trade relations between Benin-Portuguese which started in the fifteen century. The Portuguese established factories and warehouses at Ughoton which brought prosperity to the people. The Portuguese brought to Benin copper and cowries which were used as currency at Ughoton which replaced trade by barter. Other items introduced into Ughoton were textile, iron rods, silver, red velvets, red caps, spirit, neck lace, beads, umbrella which added value to the people.

## 2.2 Economic Activities Before 1440

For proper understanding of the economic transformation that took place in Ughoton, it may be necessary to examine the economic activities which took place in Ughoton before 1440. This will enable us to know if there was a transformation after 1440. The main economic activities in the earliest period at Ughoton were agriculture, trade and local crafts.

## 2.3 Agriculture

The agricultural activities in Ughoton include farming, fishing and hunting. According to J.U. Anyaele, agriculture can be defined as the production of animals, fishes, crops and forest resources for the consumption and other benefits of man (Anyaele, 1987:103). In the ancient time in Ughoton, agriculture was the dominant occupation employing more than 70 percent of the total population of the people. Agriculture facilitates the storage of food, the accumulation of wealth and an increase in population.

The main occupation of the people was farming. The farmers engaged in subsistence farming to provide food for their families. The Benins were farmers who mainly planted yams. Farming operations were done on the basis of shifting cultivation and mixed cropping. This system was operated on a piece of land being cultivated for a period after which it was abandoned to lie fallow for natural regeneration for a period ranging from five to ten years before it was again put to cultivation. This was because, as P. Duignam and L.H. Gann put it, Benin soil is light, low in plant nutrients and easily leached by heavy rain (Duignam and Gann, 1975:248-250).

Mixed cropping is the system of farming where different crops are planted in a single farm at the same time or period. In Ughoton, land was communally owned with individuals and families enjoying usufructuary tenure. However, all land belonged to the Oba. The idea of land belonging to the Oba was very strong before 1440 in Benin. It was the same opinion in all villages in Benin kingdom, with Ughoton inclusive. Hence, it was not surprising that Ughoton could not be an exemption. This becomes clearer from the argument of P.A. Igbafe when he opines that: "Theoretically, all land belonged to the Oba in the sense that he was a trustee of the land on behalf of the community" (Igbafe, 1980:3). In the real sense, the village regulated the operations of individual farmers who were free to farm anywhere provided that the land having be left for specified years was fertile enough for cultivation.

The farming season began with each farmer choosing a piece of land which would be known to other farmers in the village to avoid trespass. The months of December to February were used to clear the plot, fell the trees and burn the clearings. Hoeing began in March and April which usually would be completed in May every year. Then the planting of yams would follow. The planting of yam was usually in the small heaps arranged in rows or it could be planted in mounds. After the planting of yams, other crops like melon, pepper, cocoyam, etc., were planted.

In Ughoton, like other villages in Benin, the next major activities were tending of the yam tendrils and weeding of the farms which would take the next few months. Such other crops as melon, pepper and cocoyam were classified as "subsidiary" or female" because they were usually cultivated by women whereas yam, the "male" or "main crop" was by men (Afigbo, 1980:3).

Harvesting of yam started from September each year. Little wonder why the Benins call the month of September "Uki-eho." The joy of first fruits was expressed in the early harvest after showing that what was prayed for in January (Uki-ague) had yield the desired results in

the products of the farm (Omoregie, 2003:23). The white yam was always the first to be harvested while the red yams would follow in the months of October and November. At Ughoton, the white, red and water yams were the varieties of yams cultivated. Other crops like, melon, pepper and cocoyam were harvested as they matured. Although farming is usually regarded as man's activity. At Ughoton, women assisted their husbands to ensure proper harvest. Children were not left out as they fully assisted their parents in the day-to-day farming operation. Every able-bodied person was actively engaged in farm work and the result was that most families, male and female, did their own farm work. In Ughoton, trade and craft were seen as secondary to agriculture because adequate food production made it possible for people to engage in other economic activities.

The climate of the area is stable with two clearly defined seasons in the year, the rainy season lasts from April to October while the dry season lasts from November to March every year, with seasonal harmattan. Human activities are affected by climate and certain crops can only be obtained where the climate is stable. Climate helps to determine food, clothing, shelter and general mode of life and it plays a great part in promoting mental and physical vigour as well as preventing the spread of diseases and pests. In the same vein, climate determines the kinds of crops that can be grown in certain regions and, therefore, affects the local production of food. Hence, the suitable climatic conditions of Ughoton has contributed immensely to the large production of different food stuffs both for local consumption and the surplus sold to the neighbouring villages or communities.

Other agricultural activities in Ughoton which had boosted economic activities in Ughoton were fishing and hunting. Majority of the people of Ughoton were farmers. However, some of them were hunters while some were also engaged in fishing because of the riverine nature of the environment, especially, the Ughoton water side (Oral Interview with Pa Frank Iyangbe, 3-4-2013).

Fishing constitutes major occupation of riverine people and a main source of protein. In fact, fish is a vital food item and a major product of the people of the area. With fishing went other economic activities such as net-making, fish processing, storing and distribution to non-fishing producers. A sizeable number of the people in Ughoton also engaged in hunting which provided meat for diet, a source of protein. Hunting in Ughoton was relatively limited in scope, but it met the immediate needs of individuals and the community at large. The earliest hunting weapons were bows, traps and spears. Various bush traps were used by the people of Ughoton for hunting. Hunting was mainly for subsistence or home consumption but any surplus was sold to meet other needs.

## **2.4 Trade**

The pursuit of trade is an important aspect of economic activity in Ughoton. The market at Ughoton in the pre-colonial period was the centre of attraction to traders from neighbouring communities like Ekenwan, Igo, Urhurokhokho, Egbetan, Oduna, Ugbineh and Ikpako. During this period, Ughoton market was held every four days. The villages on the outskirts of Benin City and in the kingdom organized periodic markets which were usually held every four days.

As Ughoton market was patronized by traders from other neighbouring communities, so too were traders from Ughoton patronizing other markets in the nearby villages. Just as the markets in Benin City attracted a large number of traders from adjoining towns and villages, so also did the markets in outskirts of Benin, most especially the ones in the riverine areas

The market opened early in the morning and ended in the evening. The market afforded the people the opportunity to sell and buy goods or items that were found in the market, including: yams, potatoes, all sorts of vegetables, the green and red peppers, pumpkins, bitter leaf, coco-yams, okro, palm kernels, palm oil, kola nuts and other items including tiny deer, bush pigs, porcupine, snails, tortoises, etc. The issue of market is not new in Benin Kingdom. It is as old as man. The old Agbado market was founded by Ogiso Ere, the second Ogiso of the Ogiso dynasty. Again the Oba's market (Eki-Oba) presently located in Ring Road or Oba Ovoramwen's Square in Benin City was established by Oba Ewedo (c.1255). Ekiadolor (market of Oba Adolor) is a suggestive name for a market founded by Oba Adolor (1840) (Igbafe, 1980:28).

In pre-colonial period in Ughoton, the earliest means of exchange was by barter. Barter means exchange of goods for goods. This system was also applicable in the whole of Benin kingdom. In Ughoton, trade by barter was the earliest means of exchange. Nigeria had adopted the barter system of exchange long ago and that it suited the predominantly subsistence economy of the country, before the advent of foreign traders. These early exchanges were the results of surplus production over and above the subsistence need and the amount of produce a family could offer and the goods it required in exchange were often small in quantity and value (Ekundare, 1973:48).

The increase in the volume of trade and the expansion of the economy made barter obsolete, hence, there was need for a form of currency which would enhance exchange (Osagie, 2002:192).

## 2.5 Craft

Local crafts or manufacture was an important economic activity in Ughoton especially in the pre-colonial period. In the pre-colonial period, no Benin village was left out in the local crafts, like making local brooms to sweep inside the house and those for sweeping outside. Some villages were engaged in making sponge for washing plates and for bathing. The people of Ughoton were engaged in weaving which made it possible to produce their local clothes and baskets to meet local needs. Some of the products woven mostly by women were mats (ewa). Infact, cloth weaving was one of the most viable economic activities. The people of Ughoton were also engaged in making black soap. This was done by mixing palm kernel oil with ash. This soap was believed to be of high medical value.

From the view of S.B. Omoriegic, Ikaladerhan as Enogie organized the people of Ughoton into guilds according to the varieties of the craft industry. Thus, according to him, there developed groups of wood workers, iron workers, fishermen, hunters, leather workers, weavers and farmers who gave the artisans agrarian support (Omoriegic, 1997:22-24). That meant the various craftsmen in Ughoton were encouraged to form associations with monopoly rights to produce, standardise, market and attend to their products. The guild system became an integral part of the economic structure of Ughoton.

Pottery was a major industry in Ughoton and most Benin villages. Women were engaged in producing a variety of pots which were used for commercial and utilitarian purposes. The major raw material was clay. The small pots were used for making sacrifices to the spirits of the ancestors and appeasing witches and wizards. The large pots were kept in ancestral shrines or used by traditional doctors for mixing and storing liquid medicines extracted from herbs. Others were cooking pots, dishes for serving food and large jars for the storage of water. Infact, most Benin village's pottery producers obtained their raw materials from the villages on the bank of the Ovia river where Ughoton was said to be situated.

### III. Discussion

#### 3.1 Economic Activities After 1440

The main economic activities in Ughoton after 1440 were agriculture, trade and local crafts. The agricultural activities were farming, fishing and hunting.

#### 3.2 Agriculture

Agricultural sector attracted more people at Ughoton because of the introduction of vital crops like maize and cassava by the Portuguese during era of slave trade. The production of pepper from 1440 became much profitable as more people were actively involved in its cultivation and production. Apart from these crops which came to Ughoton after fifteenth century, certain species of tree crops as oranges, coconuts, tangerine, and mangoes were introduced into the economic life of the people. Fishing and hunting also attracted more people at Ughoton because of the improvement in those areas from the sixteenth century. Farming was the dominant occupation of Ughoton people. Melon, pepper, cassava, maize, yams, cocoyam were cultivated as compared to the earliest time when maize and cassava were not cultivated in Ughoton. Farming facilitated the storage of food, accumulation of wealth and an increase in population in the village.

The cultivation of yam was at first the main activity of the farmers at Ughoton because the Benins were farmers who planted mainly yams. However, towards the end of the nineteenth century, water yam cultivation reduced drastically as more attention was devoted to red and white yam cultivation. While in the earliest time the white, red and water yams were cultivated after 1440, water yam cultivation reduced drastically.

Ughoton also produced maize and cassava in large quantities to feed the teeming population of the Benins. These food items were prepared in different forms in Benin. Maize was introduced to Benin near the beginning of the slave trade while cassava appeared towards the end of the slave trade. J. E. Ajayi and E.J. Alagoa maintains that some major crops were introduced as a by-product of the slave trade, notably cassava, perhaps maize, rice and citrus fruits (Ajayi and Alagoa, 1980:234).

Cassava takes a longer time to mature usually two to three years. D.C. Ohadike argues that the spread of the cultivation and consumption of cassava became rapid because of some advantages it has over the cultivation of yams. For example, cassava farm needs little or no weeding; the plant needs no staking and can be planted anytime of the year (Ohadike, 1981:386). It is important to add that cassava can adapt itself to a wide range of soil and climate conditions. It is less vulnerable to pest attack than yam and the sticks are cheaper to procure than yam seed and cocoyams.

During the period under consideration, cassava and maize were staple food items. As for maize, Ughoton produced it in large quantities both for local consumption and for sale in neighbouring markets. Maize serves different purposes; the local food "Ekoe" in Benin usually eaten in the morning by both males and females in all Benin villages is produced from maize. This food item is highly nourishing and a source of carbohydrate to the body. Ughoton women prepare the local food from maize called "Okuoka" for local consumption and for sale to close-door neighbours. Corn cake (uloka) was also produced from maize. Maize can be roasted or cooked for consumption and fried into popcorn.

Another important crop cultivated in Ughoton as in other Benin villages was cassava. Cassava has sustained families from generation to generation in Ughoton. Women fried garri from cassava for local consumption and for sale. Cassava cultivation is very important to Ughoton people. Apart from garri, starch is also produced from cassava. The local food items called 'fufu' by the Igbos is also produced from cassava. It is a major staple food consumed or eaten by the Benins.

Although, pepper is an indigenous crop, from the fifteenth century it was the focus of the Europeans traders. It was mainly cultivated by women. The production of pepper was not restricted to any particular village. All the villages were involved in the production of pepper. This was against the background that, pepper was one of the most important articles of trade with the Europeans during the period of Benin-European trade relationship. J.W. Blake maintained that the Portuguese were seeking in particular a variety of pepper which could compete more satisfactorily with Indian pepper than could the Aframomum Malagueta which was the only spices they had so far discovered in Guinea (Blake, 1937:83-84). Benin pepper (piper guineense) provided an admirable substitute.

Some degree of centralized control may indeed have been necessary in order to organize an adequate supply of pepper, for it had to be gathered from a large area in the Benin, then transported to the Portuguese ships lying at Ughoton (Ibid; 38). Another indication of the importance of Benin pepper can be seen from the following comment: By 1539, French ships were trading with Benin and pepper was the main attraction for them (Ryder, 1969: 68). For the British, the Oba of Benin welcomed them very well knowing that their primary concern was to buy pepper and the Oba agreed to sell to them. This was however after the Oba was satisfied with the merchandise which the officials brought and he undertook to load all their vessels with pepper within thirty days. However, Ughoton was never left out in the production of pepper for local consumption and the surplus for sale in local markets. From the fifteenth century, pepper was produced in large quantities like cassava, maize and melon. According to Kit Elliot, it was a market day at one of the villages on the road and the travellers found themselves accompanied by men and women filling onto the pathway, along tiny tracks from all over the forest and they carried on their heads trays of yams, huge earthy potatoes, bunches of plantains, all sorts of vegetables tiny green and red peppers, coco-yams (Elliot, 1973:11).

It is possible to say from the foregoing that the lucrative nature of pepper trade during the period of Benin-European trade points to the fact that, the Benin villages including Ughoton were competing for pepper production in order to benefit from the trade. More especially, the people of Ughoton had first-hand information about the lucrative nature of pepper since after the gathering of the pepper from all the producing villages or areas, they were transported to the ships lying at Ughoton. The situation can again be compared to the present situation in Benin as its concerned the production of cassava. Apart from the local consumption of cassava in Nigeria today, the Federal Government was at a time exporting garri to neighbouring countries, as a source of revenue. The government is also trying to diversify the use of cassava in Nigeria. This has resulted to competition among the various cassava producing communities in the country, especially Benin villages. This explains the situation of pepper in the period of Benin-European trade why most villages in Benin Kingdom were not left out in the production of pepper.

Fishing and hunting were other agricultural activities which also took place during this period which also accelerated economic development in Ughoton. The fishing activity was possible because of its location in the Benin River. Fishing involves catching of fishes from the rivers as well as source of protein. With fishing went other economic activities such as net-

making, fishing curing, storing and distribution to non-fishing producers. However, there was transformation in fishing business when fishing nets and hooks were introduced in the sixteenth century to Nigeria which was also applicable to Ughoton.

The earliest hunting weapons in Ughoton were bows, traps and spear. Various bush traps were used by the people of Ughoton for hunting. However, from 1440, local guns or dane guns loaded with gun powder were later used. These guns were used to shoot animals. Guns were better used for hunting when there was improvement on firearms. Animals were killed for more than just private consumption, for their flesh was frequently smoked and exchanged for other goods. Hunting had always been practiced by the people of Ughoton but the introduction of dane gun and gun powder revolutionized it. Hides and skins got from animals such as antelopes and tigers or leopards also served as important articles of trade which were used for making leather bags and shoes. When the demand for farm labour became less, instead of remaining idle, most of the farmers often resorted to hunting to keep themselves busy as well as providing meat for home consumption.

### 3.3 Trade

Much transformation took place in the area of trade in Ughoton from 1440. During this period under consideration Ughoton market was the hub of economic activities to the neighbouring villages like, Urhurokhokho, Egbetan, Oduna, Ugbineh, Ikpako, Igo and Ekenwan and distant traders like the Itsekiri, Urhobo, Ijo, Ijebu because of its special location in the Benin River. Although the strangers such as Ijebu, Ijo, Itsekiri had traded with the people of Ughoton, at the earliest time, it was on a small scale. These strangers exchanged their produce such as fish and salt with the people. The coming of the Europeans increased the influx of these traders to Ughoton to participate in this maritime trade. Some of these traders from a neighbouring towns and villages eventually settled at Ughoton which increased the economic activities there. Ughoton transformed from a small village to a cosmopolitan town due to the influx of people from different areas

Again, in the fifteenth century, it became the main port of Benin kingdom during the period of Benin-European trade relations. This trade with the Europeans brought a lot of changes to Ughoton. The trade in Benin received serious boost from the fifteenth century and new items or articles of trade entered into Benin kingdom through Ughoton especially during the period of slave trade. Ughoton was used for the loading and unloading of Cargoes. Gwatto as Ughoton was later called by the Europeans, became the depot to handle the pepper, Ivory and slaves offered by the Oba in exchange for coral beads, Textile materials, European-manufactured articles including tools and weapons and manilas used as currency. According to L.I. Izuakor, Oba Ozolua of Benin who showed readiness to permit trade with the Europeans, allowed the Portuguese to establish a factory at the port of Ughoton (Gwatto) thus was established a long periods of regular maritime contact between European and other parts of what later came to be known as Nigeria (Izuakor, 1987:34).

In the trade between Benin and Europeans, the Benins supplied slaves, gold, Ivory, pepper, gum, ostrich feathers in exchanged for European goods like cloths beads, cowries. According to G.I. Eluwa and M.O. Ukagwu, so many trading ports and fronts developed along the West African coast among were Sao Tome, Gwatto, Principle and Fernando Po in the Niger Delta area (Eluwa, Ukagwu and Nwachukwu, 1986: 110). It can be argued that whatever benefits Benin kingdom derived from the Benin-European relation was made possible because of the strategic location of Ughoton in the Benin River. Discussing the economic significance of Ughoton in Benin History, Alagoa noted that when the Portuguese arrived in the Western Delta, they focused attention on Ughoton, the port of Benin and some



point up a left branch of the Forcados River which from internal evidence, he identifies with ode-Itsekiri (Alagoa, 1970:319-320).

### 3.4 Crafts

Although it was said that local crafts or manufacture was an important economic activity in Ughoton especially in the earliest time, but witnessed transformation after 1440 AD. A number of industries existed in Ughoton. The common industry was the weaving, most dominated by the women who wove such items as mat (Ewa) tray (Atete) cloth (ukpon) and clay pots (Akhe). The local crafts in Ughoton transformed with the coming of the Europeans. With more people at Ughoton as a result of the trade, craftsmen had more customers. Such crafts which witnessed increased patronages include local cloth (ukpon) and mat (ewa). The cloth and mat were very useful to the local and European traders. The European traders used the local clothe for their slaves. Since foam was not available at Ughoton at that period, the local mat served as an alternative. Apart from the Europeans, traders from Ugbine, Igo, Ekenwan, Ikpako and other neighbouring communities patronized Ughoton craftsmen. So the craftsmen at Ughoton enjoyed economic transformation, as they enjoyed high patronages with the coming of the Europeans. As S.B. Omoregie observes, Ikaladerhan organized people of Ughoton into guilds in line with the varieties of craft industry (Omoregie, 1997:22-24). Thus, there developed groups of wood workers, iron workers, fishermen, hunters, leather workers, weavers and farmers who gave the artisans agrarian support (Ibid).

Introduction of currency to Ughoton brought transformation. Although in the earliest period, in Ughoton, the means of exchange was by barter which means exchange of goods for goods, the numerous difficulties or problems associated in the system led to its replacement by other means of exchange. As a result of the contact with Europeans by the fifteenth century and sixteenth century, cowries and manila came into use in Ughoton and other Benin villages. Later, copper and brass manilas were the means of exchange. Cowries were important trading item which the Portuguese and later the Dutch shipped through Ughoton into Benin in large quantities as they were widely accepted. The introduction of foreign means of exchange such as manila, cowries or copper brought transformation to economic activities in Ughoton in particular and Benin in general. Exchange of goods and services became easier than the earliest method which was barter. Ughoton also adopted these different currencies applicable in Benin kingdom.

## IV. Conclusion

The first major economic activity of Ughoton which contributed to the economic well-being of Benin kingdom was agriculture which included farming, fishing and hunting. However, farming was by far the most important activity to the people.

The introduction of maize and cassava to Ughoton by the Portuguese during the era of the slave trade boosted economic activity from 1440 AD. The suitable climatic conditions of Ughoton contributed immensely to the large production of different food stuffs both for local consumption and exchange to the neighbouring villages or communities.

A sizeable number of the people of Ughoton were engaged in fishing and hunting. Fishing is particularly important in Benin history because most Benin villages were not involved in fishing. They relied on the supply from Ughoton or Ughoton Creek or waterside called Gelegele inhabited by the Ijaws.

However, from the sixteenth century, the introduction of fishing nets and hooks brought an improvement in fishing activities in Ughoton. Also, the introduction of dane guns and improvement in firearms in hunting business in Ughoton increased the fortune of hunters and more meat was provided for the people.

Trade was an aspect of economic activity in Ughoton which is very important in Benin history. The ancient market at Ughoton in the pre-colonial period promoted economic activities within the Ughoton group of villages and beyond to waterside communities like Itsekiri, Urhobo, Ijo because of its location in the coast. The neighbouring communities which benefited greatly from Ughoton ancient market were Ekenwua, Igo, Urhurokhokho, Egbetan, Oduna, Ugbineh, Ikpako and other traders from Benin City itself.

The exchange of goods and services between Benin and Europeans took place at Ughoton, in the process, Ughoton experienced considerable economic wealth and prosperity. Also transformation took place in Ughoton in the area of craft after 1440.

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