

DOCUMENTING ELELE ALIMINI BLACKSMITHING FOR POSTERITY WITH INNOVATION TO ENHANCE NATION BUILDING IN THE NEW NORMAL: A HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

By

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ABSTRACT

This study examined and discussed Elele Alimini blacksmithing as an indigenous Ikwerre occupation in Nigeria. Blacksmithing, a surviving traditional source of livelihood in Elele Alimini that is much sought after in the phase of modernism is of great value to the people of Alimini and environs. Unfortunately, Western Education and consequent white-collar jobs, and other remunerative works desired by the youths have caused the decline of the art practice in Alimini Community and its environs. The objective of this study is to preserve the history of Elele Alimini blacksmithing in the reservoir of world art. The aim of the study is to establish the history of Elele Alimini Blacksmithing with the view of providing the proper and adequate information about it for posterity. The study made use of biographical survey of qualitative research methods and research questions which test the objective of the study as the basis of the investigation. This research design adopts the historical survey technique which relies on Primary and Secondary source of data collection. It was ascertained that blacksmithing is one of the indigenous Ikwerre potential occupations in Nigeria. Again, the history of the trade in Alimini should be kept for record purposes and further use. It also reveals the reasons of documenting Elele Alimini blacksmithing and suggests ways of continuing the art business in Alimini and Nigeria in general.

Keywords: Elele Alimini Blacksmithing, Posterity, Innovation, Nation Building, New Normal World, Historical Perspective.

Introduction

The absence of the history of Elele Alimini blacksmithing in the annals of history of Ikwerre and Nigerian artistic heritage, in spite of the regular public campaign by Nigerian government, institutions, co-operate bodies and individuals via mass media, book writing, seminars, conferences, symposium, and personal interactions on “protect Nigerian artistic heritage” is an important subject matter in biographical studies, and swayed the interest of this research. No doubt, many indigenes of Elele Alimini are not aware of blacksmithing as their cultural artistic heritage, and its benefits to mankind. The art form and practice in Alimini has been neglected to near extinction due to western influence on Nigerian culture – a reason for which the fear of the continuity of some Ikwerre cultural practices in modern civilization is envisaged by the Ikwerre nationality. Even the Nigerian government seems to have minute understanding of the relevance of blacksmithing to nation building. Axiomatically the

documentation of Elele Alimini blacksmithing would have shown the nature and level of the art practice in Alimini community and environs, it would have also shown the usefulness of the craft to mankind, as well as the possibility of continuing the business in Nigerian. The idea above places emphasis on job creation (self employment) rather than job seeking (other employers employment) to earn a living. This has obvious implications on the relevance of traditional Nigerian art to individuals and the government. The study concludes that Elele Alimini blacksmithing should be documented for record purposes, and further use.

Conceptual Clarification

Documenting Elele Alimini blacksmithing is a word of three merged words and convey the meaning of a concept. It simply means the act of keeping records of the practice of blacksmithing in Elele Alimini for posterity. Sassoon (1962) describes blacksmithing as the of local ores to make iron for tools and weapons. Elenwo (2021) views blacksmithing as the art of fashioning goods from metal. Goods such as agricultural implements, technological tools, house hold utensils, weapons, religious worshipping metal items, and other metal decorative objects are of blacksmithing. Forging, picking, stretching, twisting and punching among other blacksmithing activities are the processes of fashioning goods from metal. Elele Alimini is the community of the study. Posterity with innovation is regarded in this study as the up-coming youths that are expected to improve the blacksmithing technology in Elele Alimini and environs. To enhance nation building is to add to the improvement of a nation's economy. New normal world refers to the modern Nigeria, while historical perspective is a method of analyzing data in biographical analysis of qualitative research methods.

Theoretical framework

This study of documenting Elele Alimini blacksmithing for posterity with innovation to enhance nation building in new normal world is guided by two theories; psychoanalysis and diffusions. The theory of psychoanalysis proposes that creativity wells up from unconscious drive. It is a by-product of primary processes. It suggests that future artists should disassociate with real objects and fall in love with the world as a whole. Art historians should use biographical narrative approach which takes the idea of story, iconography or significant imagery to provide information on the benefits of art to mankind, (Samuels and Samuels, 1975). The theory also notes that all information about creative expressions usually comes from oral story, memoranda and other materials. The aim is to produce rich descriptions of persons or conceptualize structural types of action which means to understand the action logics or how persons and structures are interlinked. This theory enabled the researcher to make psychological enquiry about blacksmithing in Elele Alimini and environs. It also enabled him to document findings as a historic record for further academic work.

The theory of diffusion is focused on understanding the nature of culture in terms of the origin of culture traits and their spread from one society to another. It holds that civilization spread from one culture to another because humans are basically conservative and lack inventiveness, (Winthrop, 1991:83). The theory as used in art and popular culture, explains the spread of culture items such as ideas, styles, religions, technologies, etc among individuals, whether within a single culture or from one culture to another, (Wikipedia). This theory with particular reference to the theory of diffusion of innovation (DOI) of E.M Rogers, (1962) explains how, over-time, an idea or product gains momentum and diffuses or spread through a specific population or social system. The theory made the researcher to reason that

blacksmithing became a popular art form and practice in Nigeria as a result of peoples migration from one ethnic group to another. It enabled him to ascertain the origin of blacksmithing in Elele Alimini, and why it is important to document the art practice in the annals of history of Nigerian artistic heritage.

The Origin of Elele Alimini Community

The history of the origin of Elele Alimini is still obscure because of its apparent contradictory views presented by oral tradition. However it is accepted by indigenes of Alimini that the town came into existence as a result of incessant inter-tribal wars which developed between Elele Okiniali (Omeneele) and her neighboring village Ekpeye (Ahoada) in about fourteenth (14th) century (Ikpe-Elenwo and Isaiah-Ihua 2005) "Oral interview" The war, which lasted for years and took many lives and properties has been sought by many people to discover the remote and immediate cause of it, but to no avail-a reason for which there could be versions of what caused the war. Presumably it was told to have emanated from the ardent slave trade of the time. Elele Alimini- a renowned town of the Ikwerre clan of Rivers State was founded by a great and renowned hunter called Anyia Wabeeme of Omuokpirikwu village of Elele-Okini in about fifteen (15th) centuries (Ikpe-and Isaiah 2005). The discovery of Alimini by the hunter could be traced to the subjugation of the powers of the Ekpeye in the war by men of valour of the Elele Okiniali. Those men of valour were chosen from different villages of the Omeneele as representatives of each of the villages to face the Ekpeye challenges. The leader of each village representatives include: Anyia Wabeeme of Omuokpirikwu village, Ugu of Mgbuanyim village, Agnarna of Omuobiri village, Eke of Omueke village, and Dum of Omeneta village respectively. These names of the leaders were intentionally given to them to enable them effect disguise in the battle-field.

All the men of valour were led to the battlefield by Anyia Wabeeme (the great hunter cum war-lord). In the battlefield; they became thirsty and needed water to drink. Incidentally they discovered a stream and drank from it. In the process, they noticed that the stream was large and deep enough than they could cross easily. They decided to provide two boats to cross the stream. To achieve this goal, they cut down six sizeable light dried white wood called "Oru" in Omeneele language, tied it together in the ratio of 3 to 1, sat on it, used paddles and crossed the water, and continued the war.

In the war, one of them named Wosa Womah used his magical gun to locate the source of power of the Ekpeye. The source of power was a shrine decorated with demonic items so awful to look at. The shrine was invaded and the power neutralized. This singular act weakened the strength of the Ekpeye and they surrendered. The men of Omeneele therefore chased them out and inhabited the area. To stop the Ekpeye from further encroachment on Omeneele land, Anyia Wabeeme stationed the five leaders of the Omeneele men of valour and their men including him at different points of entry into Omeneele territory and they settled permanently in the areas. The availability of the stream in the area was an added advantage to their victory and settlement. All this marked the cradle of the town Omeneele Alimini-meaning people of the land of water. To this end therefore, the name Omeneele-Alimini gradually changed to Elele Alimini following the pronunciation of the early Europeans Missionaries that had contact with the people of Omeneele and Ekpeye. Other migrants into the Elele Alimini Community who lived as tenants followed such pronunciation and the name "Elele" stocked as the name of the community.

This history reveals why there are two communities called Elele. One addressed as Elele Okiniali (Big Elele) and the other addressed as Elele Alimini (Small Elele). The two communities see themselves as one but are individually autonomous. They have similar culture including language; though they inter-marry. This history also shows that Elele Alimini is an offshoot of Elele-Okiniali. No community ever separates from her parent community without a cause. No cause of action is easily forgotten. No action is taken without an event, and events constitute a factor for the survival of history.

Geographical Location of Elele Alimini

Elele Alimini is an Ikwerre Community that is located in Emohua Local Government Area of Rivers State of Nigeria. The Local Government Area has her headquarters in Emohua, a town that measures about 21 kilometers to Port Harcourt and about the same measurement to Alimini Town. It lies along East West and South West border of Rivers State. At the East West border, it lies between Ndele and Ahoada town, and between Ahoada and Elele Okiniali in the South. The town is bounded by other towns in Rivers State such as Ndele, Obelle, Rumuekpe, Ahoada, Akpabu, and Elele Okiniali respectively. 343 Artillery Brigade Regiment of Nigerian Army is located in the community. The position of Alimini is strategic for business transactions. The 1991 National Population Census of Nigeria shows that the Community accommodates a minimum of 10,383 indigenes. In this number, 5,353 are male while 5,030 are female. At present, this population however may have increased due to the high birth rate occasioned by the imposed Healthcare Sciences sponsored by Nigerian government (Elenwo 2007). Elele Alimini consists of fourteen villages shown below in the order of seniority; (1) Omuokpirikwu, (2) Omuorihuru, (3) Mgbuanyim, Omuagnara (Omuobiri), (3) Omuohiaa (Omuobiri), (6) Omuohia (Omuobiri) (7) Omuadni (Omuobiri), (8) Omeke, (9) Omuigbuom (Omeke), (10) Omuordu (Omeneta), (11) Mgbuajahwiyee (Omeneta) that comprises Omumbnere, Omuezechi and Omunmaah, (12) Omusne, (13) Mgbuolelu (Omusne), and (14) Omueti respectively.

Alimini enjoys a good climatic condition such as a suitable temperature that conforms to the health of the inhabitants, minimized natural disasters like thunderstorms, destructive flood, hills, mountains, and others. Also to her advantage of the gift of nature are adequate rainfall and expanse of agricultural rich soil, etc. The indigenes of Alimini are predominantly farmers of subsistence level. They also engage themselves in other economic activities such as art and craft works including blacksmithing, trading, technicians, and civil service. A number of streams are found in the area and are good for drinking. Alimini is blessed with mineral resources. The community is gradually assuming an urban status. She has electricity supply from National Electrical Power Authority (NEPA), a post office, a daily market, and a large but substandard local market for the sale of her farm products. Nigerian government state schools ranging from Primary to Secondary levels and a number of religious worshipping centers is located in the community. Elele Alimini is autonomous and has community boundaries with her neighboring communities. She is a peace loving community. The Nigerian government knows the indigenes of Alimini for their support. The indigenes speak the Ikwerre dialect, Elele specifically. Alimini indigenes are good at maintaining the rich diverse cultural heritage of the Africans but the influence of Western Christianity on African culture has reduced their interest in those activities. New Yam Festival (Hnozuzu), Wrestling Competition (Ogba-Ute), and Dancing Competition (Ohnihio-eri), are good examples of the Alimini cultural activities influenced by Western Culture. (Elenwo, 2007)

The map of Elele Alimini showing all the villages in it, map of Rivers State showing Emohua Local Government Area, map of Nigeria showing the location of Rivers State, and map of Africa showing the location of Nigeria are employed in this study to show the geographical location of Elele Alimini in Nigeria. In the maps, the locations are indicated in shading for easy identification and understanding as shown in plates 1-4.

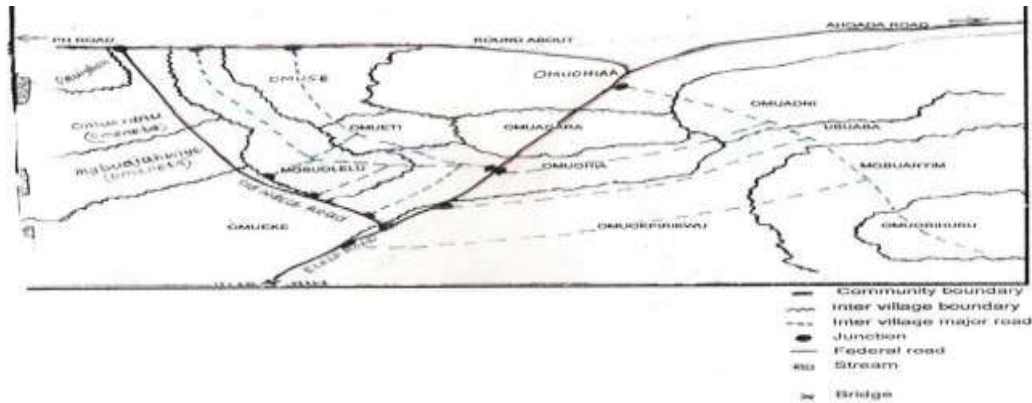


Plate 1: Map of Elele Alimini showing inter-village boundaries and Federal Roads



*Plate 2: Map of Rivers State showing
its Local Government Areas*

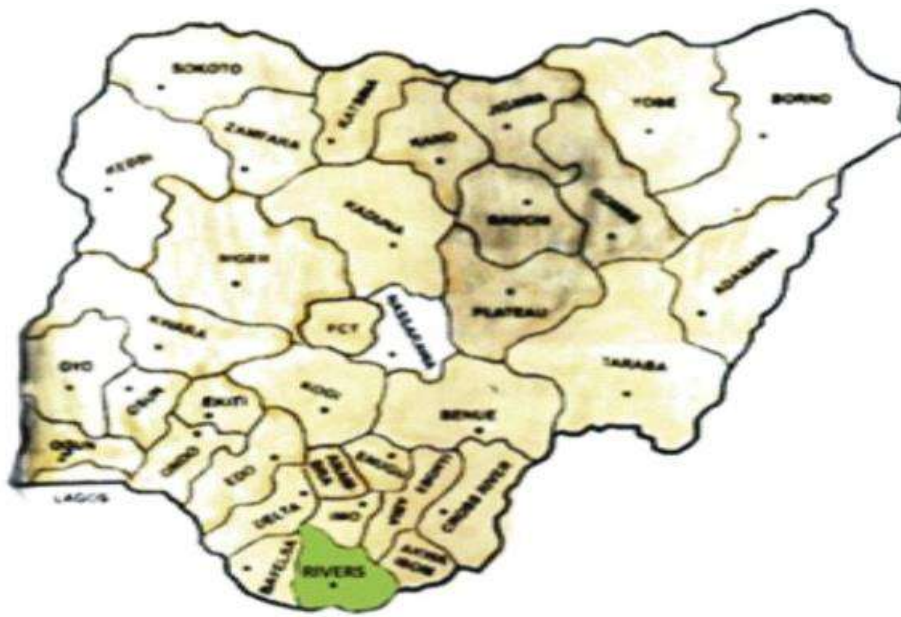


Plate 3: Map of Nigeria showing all the states of the Federation



Elele Alimini Blacksmithing: Origin and Practice

Origin:

Blacksmithing has been described as a traditional method of binding or joining metal materials like pieces of iron, steel, copper or lead by tying, gluing or welding to form a utilitarian object. In Elele Alimini, it is an old art form and practice that started in about late 1940, and early 1950s. History has it that its origin in Alimini is traced to the Awka indigenes

of the Igbo tribe. (Wodah, 2020) The early indigenes of Alimini prior to the beginning of the craft had a little or no idea of blacksmithing until the Awka introduced the technology to them. The introduction of the craft was the consequent upon the migration of the Awka blacksmiths into Alimini town as tenants. The Awka being skillful and famous in the trade began to produce crude farming implements needed by the people of Alimini for their farming, hunting, and protection. Soon after the introduction of the technology in Alimini, it flourished. Notable among the early Awka blacksmiths in Alimini are Mr. Mark Okonye, Obi Okafor, James Chidokwe Nwonye, Journey Elukora, Onitsha Wosu, Fortunatus Anyanwu and others. These men had to train other Alimini indigenes interested in the craft by making them undergo apprenticeship training of five or six years depending on the trainee's ability to cope.

Among other early qualified Alimini blacksmiths are Mr. John Dimkpa Okwukwu (Dimkpa-Nwodanda), and Mr. Isaac Wodah (Akpura). Others with partial training who later became bicycle repairers and sporadically use their residual knowledge of blacksmithing to weld broken bicycle parts and produced minor metal works such as kitchen and fishing spear, javelin, short-put, and many other objects are Lazarus Nyekwere (Ndah-Nwuoakah), Mr. John Enyigbede Woke (Alete), Mr. Woka Okneh (Odiiche), Mr. Hillary Chianuka (Dulla), Mr. Peter Nwezenwo (Abel), Mr. James Dike (Acid), Mr. Christopher Chimara (Azubuikne), and many others of the time. The people of Alimini in different names of the Alimini dialect acclaim those Alimini blacksmiths for their fantastic metal products. The trade names include: "Oji-igweh eme-eriri" meaning one who converts iron into rope, "Oji-akah eme-okah" one who beautifies things by hands, among other sorts of accolade.

In addition to those early Alimini blacksmiths is another set of Alimini indigenous bicycle repairers who emerged between 1990 and 2007 and work to the present day in similar methods and styles of their Alimini masters. These blacksmiths include Mr. Innocent Wosa (Lobo), London Ofuru (Londor), Silas Assor (Ogbordor), Smart Chukwu, Chukwuemeka W. Amadi (Emeka), and Saturday Johnson of Delta State, among others. The materials, tools, and equipment used for the artwork are named in Igbo language following the orientation of the Awka masters. Blacksmithing among other traditional art forms is an important and lucrative venture because as many as learnt and practice the craft are at least average Nigerians today. Again, the products possess the essential link between art and nation building. Okpara (2005) notes that those essential links include: creativity, aesthetics, utility and technology. The available photographs of the Awka and Alimini blacksmiths showing them at work with some of their products are as shown over-leaf.

The available photographs of the Awka and Alimini blacksmiths showing them at work with some of their products are as shown over-leaf. A few pictures of the bicycle repairers are also shown. The map of Nigeria showing the states in metalwork is shown and shaded. So also are the states in metal work arranged in their ethnic groups are shown in the table below.

Table 1: The states in metal work and their ethnic groups

States	Ethnic Groups
Oyo, Osun, Ogun, Lagos, Ondo, Ekiti, Kwara	Yoruba
Niger	Nupe
Kebbi	Borgana, Bariba
Kaduna	Gwari
Sokoto, Zamfara, Katsina, Kanu, Jigawa, Bauchi,	Hausa and Fulani
Gombe	
Yobe, Borno	Kanuri
Adamawa	Bura, Marghi, Longuda, Bata and Mumuye
Plateau	Birom, Katab, Jukun
FCT	Bassa
Kogi	Igbirra, Igala
Taraba	Chamba
Benue	Tiv, & Idoma
Edo	Bini
Enugu, Imo, Abia, Ebonyi, Anambra	Igbo
Cross River	Ekoi
Akwa Ibom	Efik, Ibibio
Rivers	Ikwerre, Mgbom, Ogoni, Ogba, Ekpeye
Bayelsa	Ijaw
Delta	Urhobo, Itsekiri



Plate 5: Map of Nigeria Showing the States in Metal Work

The Practice

Blacksmithing is a three dimensional art work. The products possess height, length and breadth and are seen in the round. The materials used for the art production include; Brass, flux powder, wire, rod, pipe, discarded bicycle and vehicle spare parts, among others. According to Nwonye (2005) blacksmithing in Elele Alimini is a traditional art work that is associated with some mystical powers. In blacksmithing tradition, any apprentice who completes his course of training and owns a smithy must undergo some rituals for self-fortification before commencing production. The fortification is usually made at the smithy of the blacksmith a reason for which the Alimini blacksmiths forbid women on menstruation entering into their smithy when at work, and a non-blacksmith touching their anvil when at work, among other prohibitions.

The smithy is spaced and built to accommodate the needed materials, tools and equipment of production. The size of a smithy is usually as desired by the owner. At a corner of the smithy is positioned an equipment called “Forge” for heating of iron. The forge is made of a low mud wall of about 4ft high, 3ft wide and 1ft thick. The wall is perforated at one end of the ground level for fire making. At the fire space is connected two clay tubes or two pieces of metal pipe of about 3ft long, 2 inches wide, and 4mm thick. At one end of each of the pipes is tied a small drum of about 9 inches high, with animal skin or rubber as the cover tied also to a long wooden handle. This device is referred to as bellows. Charcoal is usually piled at the fire space, and a fire is kindled with it as the readiness for production. The bellows are used for blowing air into the fire.

During production, a desired number of irons are put into the fire to heat to the degree of changing the colour of the iron into red. Blowing air into the fire through bellows produces the heat that changes the colour of the iron. The heat softens the iron to be easily shaped into a desired shape. The hot iron is picked out of the fire with a tongs and placed on anvil for shaping. The shaping is done through a process of striking and smoothing with hammer referred to as forging. In the process of forging, the object produced may further be decorated to satisfy the creative consciousness of the blacksmith. The items produced vary in style and size to suit the purpose for which they are made. The above processes of blacksmithing in Alimini are similar to those of other communities in Nigeria. The products are numerous and are on daily demand in Nigeria. Some products of the Alimini blacksmiths and their purpose of production are as shown in the table below. The picture of a local forge and those of the blacksmiths at work and their products are shown. So also the blacksmithing tools and equipment named in English, Igbo, and Ikwerre (Elele) languages with their specific functions are shown below:

Table 2: The Blacksmiths Products and Their Purpose of Production

S/N	PURPOSE	PRODUCTS
1	Agricultural implements	Hoe, machete, mattack, shovel, axe, iron-trap, head- pan, palm wine tapping chisel, rubber tapping knife, fishing spear etc
2	Household Conveniences	Hinches, nail, traditional iron pots, griddle, cloth pressing iron, bucket, bicycle frame, bicycle carriage, bicycle standing, kitchen pin etc
3	Ceremonial/ religious Worshipping instruments	Staff, metal gong, bell, flute, cannon, hunting, gong, jingling pipe etc
4	Sports equipment	Shot-put, javelin, etc
5	Engineering and architectural tools	Hammer, chisel, pliers, hand trowel, tools box, chain, punches, saw, nail bar, etc
6	War Equipments	Dane gun, bows and arrow, knife and some explosives, etc

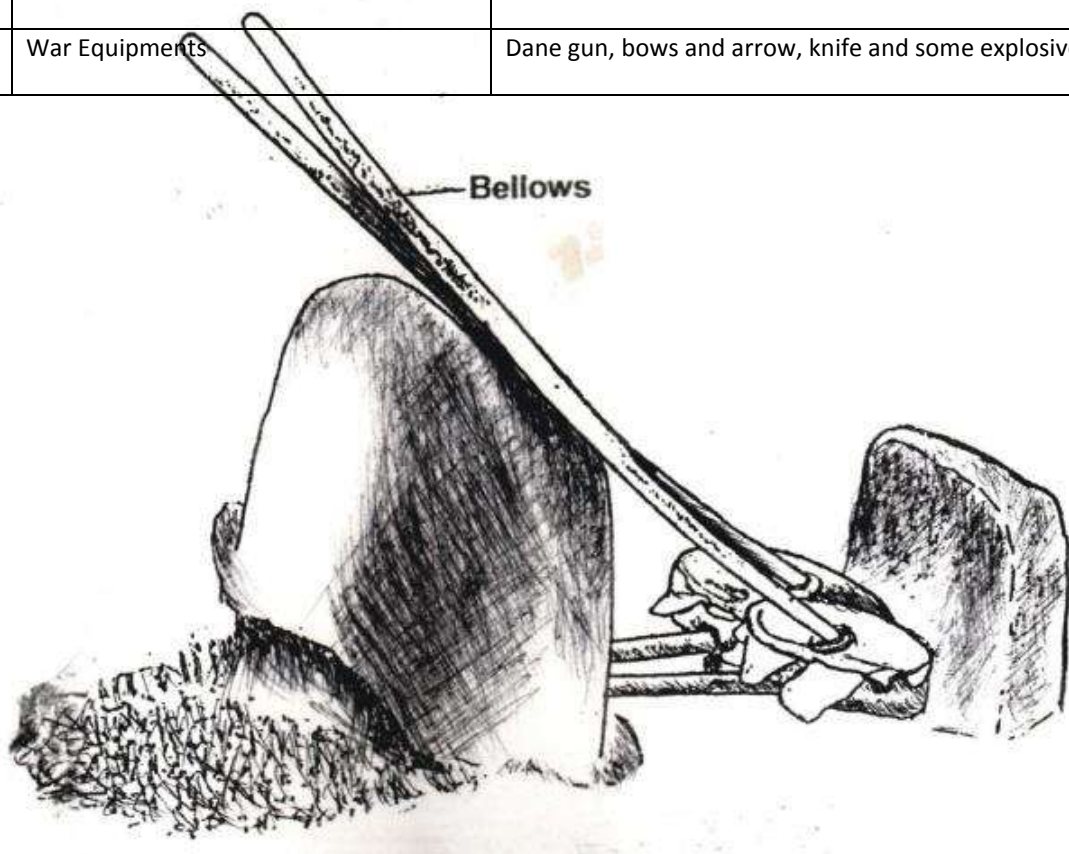


Plate 6: Local Forge
Drawing: By Elenwo Morrison
Awka and Alimini Blacksmiths at work



Plate 7: (Awka) James Chidokwe Nwonye at work in Elele Alimini (Oct, 2005) Born 1927



Plate 8: Nwonye J.C. Blowing air into the charcoal with bellows to heat a piece of iron into red colour in his smithy at Elele-Alimini (Oct, 2005)



Plate 9: Emeka Nwonye displaying the available metal products of his father Mr. J.C Nwonye



Plate 10: Isaac Wodah (Akpura) Beating and shaping a heated iron into a desired shaped of a hoe on the anvil.

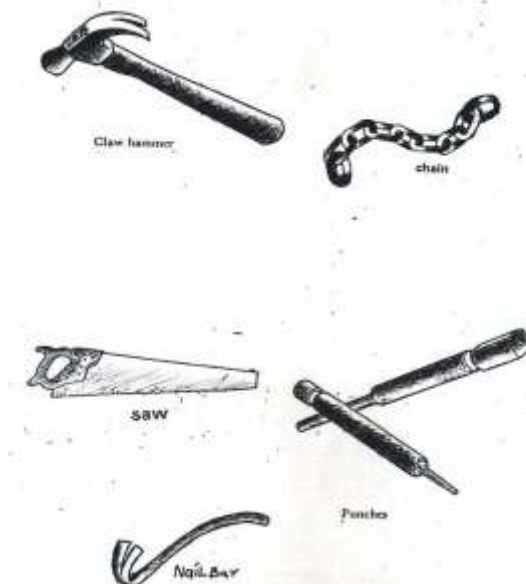


Plate 11: Isaac Wodah (Akpura) in his smithy pumping air into the charcoal fire with bellows to heat iron into reddish colour (Oct, 2005) born 1953



**Plate 12: John Dimkpa Okwukwu Alimini blacksmith (2005)
Born 1927 – Dec, 23rd 2003**

Elele Alimini Blacksmith Products



**Plate13: Engineering and Architectural Tools
(Elenwo M. 2020)**

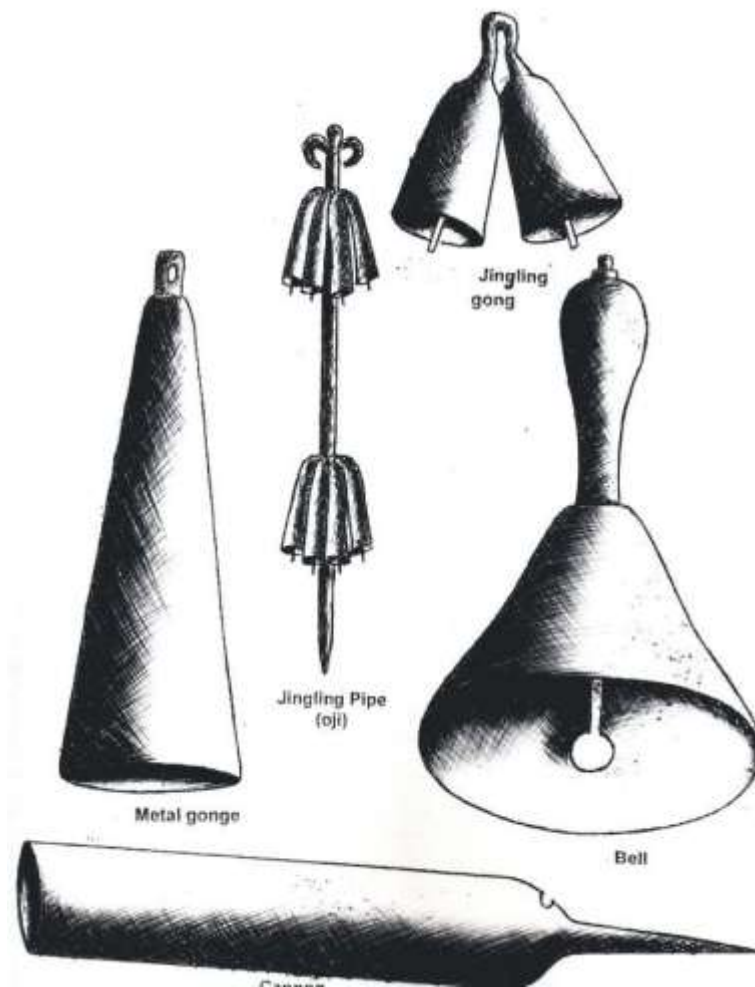


Plate 14: Ceremonial and Religious Instruments (Drawing: By Elenwo, Morrison 2020)

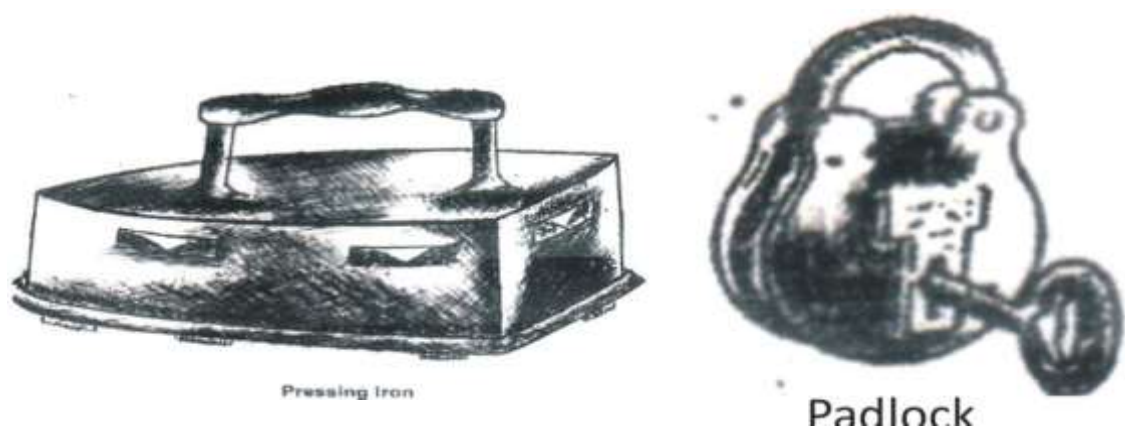


Plate 15: Household conveniences (Elenwo, M 2020)

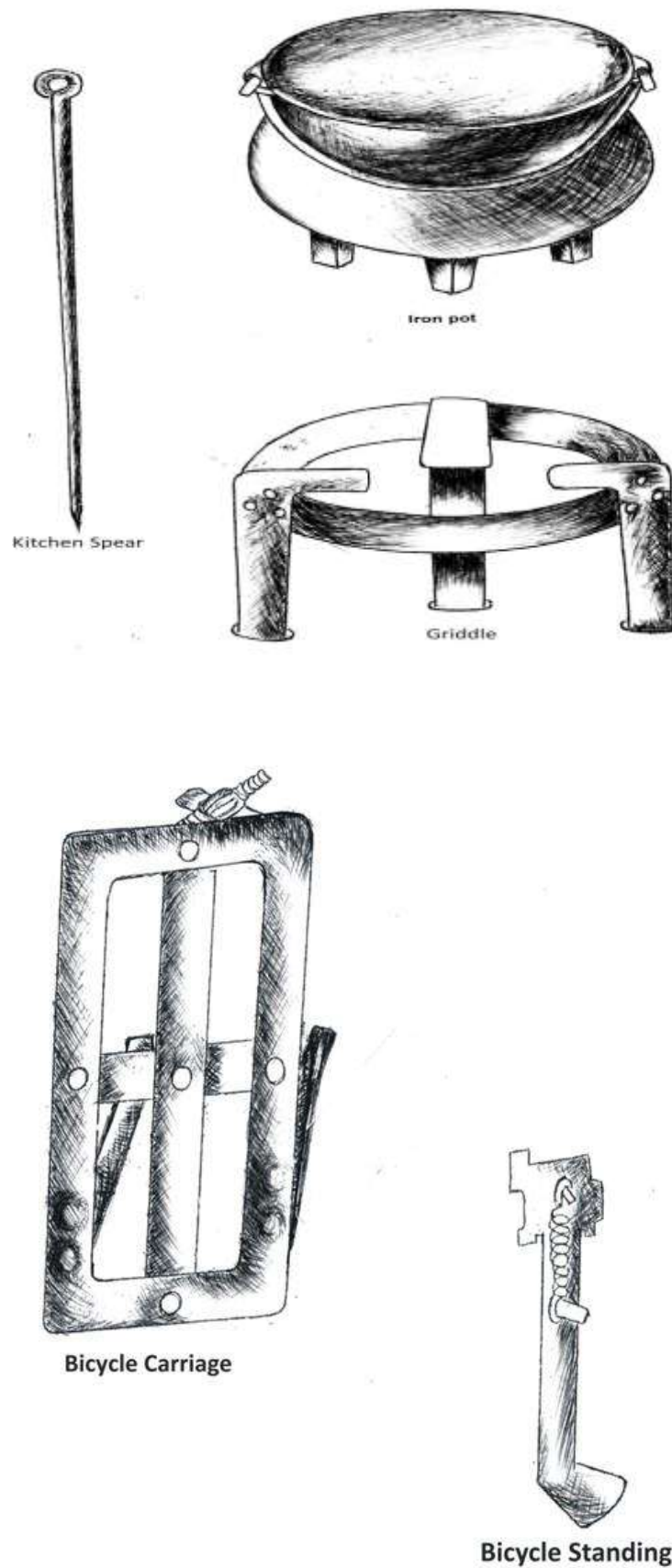


Plate 16: Bicycle Parts (Elenwo, M. 2020)

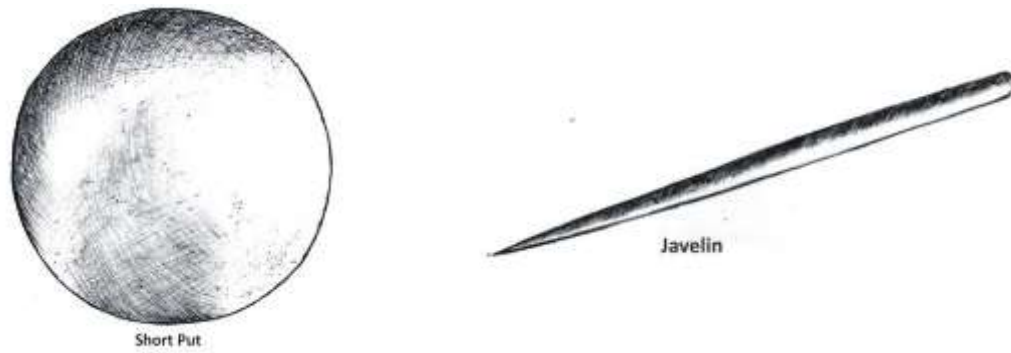


Plate 17: Sports equipment (Elenwo, M.2020)

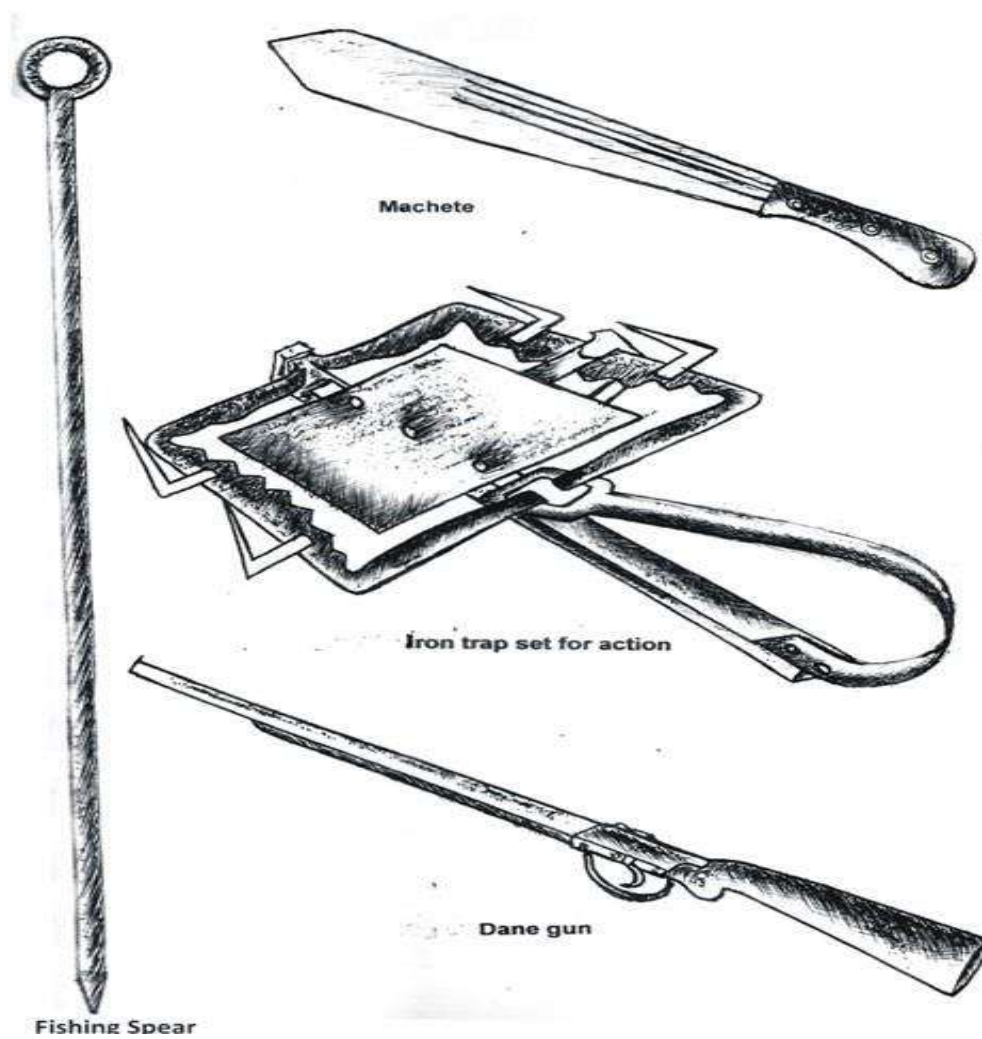


Plate 18: War Equipment (Elenwo, M. 2020)

Table 3: Tools and Equipment

English	Igbo	Ikwerre	Functions
Anvil	Osiama	Usisi-Nkpor	Used for placing hot metal as to hit and shape it into a desired shape.
Sledge hammer with wooden handle	Otiti	Akni-igwebe	Used for hitting and shaping a hot metal into a desired shaped.
Sledge hammer with metal handle	Anyonka	Amu	For leaning and smoothing a fashioned shape.
Tongs.	Mkpa	Mkpa	For picking up hot metal from the forge
Chisel	Aku-koi-koi	Dinkwu Igwe	For cutting iron when hot or cold
Punch	Ndudu	Agiga	For bowing holes
Light hammer	Hama or Otiti-Obereh	Amala or otiti- ogbede	Used for hitting the punch when bowing a hole on a metal. Also used for driving in nails, and tapping edges into shapes.
Smithy	Mbari-orzu	Obiri-orzu	The workroom or workshop of a blacksmith.
Forge	Eki-orzu	Ogidi-orzu	Used for firing or heating of metal.
Bellows	Ekno	Epupe-orzu	Used for blowing air into the fire in the local forge
Large shaft surface	Igweoche	Igwe-orzu	Used for placing thin bits of iron when cutting it with chisel.
Table	Oche	Ngodongokwu	Used for displaying the blacksmith products at the front of the smithy for sales.
Adze	Egbu	Egbugbu	Used for trimming protruding bits of hot metal

The blacksmith's tools and equipment named in English, Igbo and Ikwerre (Elele) Languages and their functions.

Blacksmithing as a Traditional Art

Egonwa (2005) defines traditional art as the original art form and cultural practice of the Africans before contact of foreign culture or with other people of the world. Art forms and styles persist in Africa but the peculiarity in African style of expressing blacksmithing has not completely broken rather forces of modernization have had serious influence on it.

Blacksmithing in Elele Alimini is one of the original art forms and cultural practices of the Nigerians prior to the severe Western influence on Nigerian culture. The art is associated with the moral and philosophical beliefs of the Alimini people. Okpara (2005) points that blacksmithing is one of the art forms and cultural practices of the Africans that have blazed the trail of indigenous Nigerian art nationally and internationally because of the Bronze and Brass cast objects excavated in Igbo-Ukwu by Thustan Shaw in about the middle of the 9th Century AD. The Elele Alimini blacksmiths practice the craft without the use of the conventional guiding principles of works of art. The working materials, tools, and equipment are mostly obtained from found objects of nature such as wood, animal skin, clay, charcoal, water, among others. The products look crude and are mostly used for traditional activities. Studying the trade is through apprenticeship training which does not require one to possess formal education. A newly trained blacksmith who has owned a smithy and is about to start production must perform some rituals for self fortification before commencing. Those blacksmiths have a little or no idea of expanding their business through art exhibitions, or other public enlightenment programmes. All of this classifies blacksmithing as a traditional art.

Blacksmithing as an Occupation

Occupation in BBC Dictionary of the English Language (1992) is defined as one's job or profession. Anyaele (2003) also defines occupation as legitimate activities in which people engage themselves in order to earn a living. Blacksmithing has been identified as one of the self-employed occupations that could contribute to confronting the issue of unemployment in Nigeria and elsewhere. It is an occupation because it possesses the qualities of occupation. It requires adequate skill or mental training to become a blacksmith. The job requires the blacksmiths to relate with their customers as well as show adequate commitment to it to be successful. Good attitude of the blacksmith to customers and commitment to be successful. So also does the practice require physical fitness of the blacksmith to undertake the responsibilities of the job. In Nigeria for example, blacksmithing is associated with the ethical conduct of moral and philosophical beliefs of the people. The products are capable of surviving whoever that associates with the trade. This implies that the non blacksmiths can trade on blacksmith products to earn a living. Joyce (2002:2) notes that in African Civilizations, iron had become the key to their development and survival. Sassoon (1962:27) concurs with the ideas above that blacksmithing-a craft that yields money has contributed to the growth of many families in Nigeria. Those who embraced the trade are able to live a comfortable life with their families. The family of Djang Dung Rwangs in Birom village of Zawan in Jos among other communities in Nigeria is a living example.

Reasons for Documenting Elele Alimini Blacksmithing

1) It is important to keep the proper and adequate record of Elele Alimini blacksmithing in the sense that; such record will serve as a preservative of blacksmithing in the history of Ikwerre and Nigeria in general. Actually a lot of people are not aware of the cultural artistic

heritage of their people owing to their places or environment of up-bringing. The documentation of the cultural activities of the ethnic groups in Nigeria and other African countries will go a long way to solving the problem of preserving them for posterity.

2) The record will serve as a source of culture identification and projection: Many ethnic groups in Nigeria are known by others through the wide spread of one form of their art or the other. Blacksmithing is one of such art forms and practices that an ethnic group and a particular community could be known for. Birom village of Zawan in Jos, Awka in Anambra, Nkwerre in Imo, and Elele Alimini in Ikwerre of Rivers State among other ethnic groups have gained this advantage over the years.

3) It could serve as a source of fund: posterity may demand that the historic record of blacksmithing be used to tackle a specific academic problem: This would become a chance of raising fund with the materials.

4) It would serve as a source of inspiration in peoples' efforts to study the art in modern society: Since blacksmithing is a self-employed business, and a lot of persons including university graduates are taking to entrepreneurship as an alternative job to the unpredictable government and other employers employment to earn a living, the awareness of the business blacksmithing through book writing may stimulate people into learning the craft or trading on metal goods to earn a living.

5) The documentation would serve as a spring board for further studies of other traditional art in modern society. Obviously the record of Elele Alimini blacksmithing will spur other researchers to be writing books on other Nigerian traditional art.

6) The documentation will create the awareness of the achievement of Niger Delta in her cultural heritage. In as much as the record will inform people about the level of technology employed by our forefathers in their arts, understanding the systematic approach or methods used by people of the past in their inventions therefore becomes a guide to modern art productions.

The Need for Blacksmithing in Elele Alimini and Nigeria in General

Despite the number of factors militating against the growth of blacksmithing in Elele Alimini and environs, the need to revitalize the art form and practice in Alimini and Nigeria in general is obviously amplifying and include;

1. *Employment Opportunity*: Blacksmithing is a self-reliant occupation. Over the years, a good number of Nigerians were known for blacksmithing in Elele Alimini and its environs. Those blacksmiths fended for themselves and their families and are rated as average Nigerians. The involvement of many Nigerians in such an occupation has helped to reduce the number of the non-working population in the country.

2. *It is a source of the availability of household conveniences*: In Nigeria, every family makes use of metal products as cooking tools such as pot, knife, spoon, griddle, axe etc, and other conveniences like bed, bucket, lamp, padlock, and cloth pressing iron among others which are of blacksmithing. Blacksmithing therefore provides enough goods that support life. The

involvement of people in the craft is actually providing supportive measure to the growth of the nation.

3. *It is a source of tools and equipment for agricultural and industrial practices:* In Elele Alimini and other parts of Nigeria, blacksmithing constitutes the highest supply of the implements needed for agricultural and industrial activities. Ogieva (1998) asserts that “about sixty percent (60%) of the Nigerian population is engaged in agriculture”. So also does a few others work in factories where other things are produced. Their most needed implements of operations such as machete, hoe, axe, spade, rake, head pan etc, and technological tools like pliers, spanner, screw driver, chisel, nail bar, saw, hammer etc are blacksmithing. Obviously, blacksmithing is the pivot on which agricultural and industrial activities rotate. No nation exists without agriculture and industry. As such, blacksmithing is playing a vital role in building our nation (Nigeria).

4. *It is a source of market for metal products:* Blacksmithing in Elele Alimini creates the opportunity of buying and selling of metal products such as iron pot, griddle, charcoal pressing iron, etc in Alimini Community rather than traveling far and wide to get the same needed products. This development brings popularity to Alimini Community and Nigeria in general in outside world. It also enhances the popularity of the Nigerian blacksmiths in metal work.

5. *It is a source of the military defense of the country:* In Nigeria, most war weapon like bows and arrows, knife, spear, gun shell, bomb and other explosives used by the military personnel to defend the country in times of war are of blacksmithing. The availability of the war equipment and government has greatly brought peace in Nigeria and other parts of the world.

6. *It is a source of knowledge:* In Nigeria, blacksmithing is a traditional art. Its art form and practice is educating. The indigenous Alimini blacksmiths are good technicians today. Their products are often needed in the country for various end use including environmental and personal beautifications. Some of the blacksmiths have had jobs with reputable co-operate and private companies, public service and other private ventures, thereby exhibiting their professional acumen in so many respects.

Recommendations

1. The youths should take advantage of this paper and develop interest in blacksmithing.
2. Other researchers should take advantage of this paper and write books on other Nigerian traditional art.
3. The government should include this documentation in the annals of history of Ikwerre and Nigerian cultural artistic heritage for posterity.
4. The government should domicile this record in a device that can be accessible to the masses, students in particular.
5. The unemployed youths including the graduates should also take advantage of this study and engage themselves in any business such as blacksmithing that would substitute for the unpredictable government or other employer's employment to earn a living.

6. The government should make blacksmithing a modern business by providing modern facilities for the blacksmiths to work with. Those facilities will enable the blacksmiths to produce their goods in large quantity and enjoy increased profit.
7. The government should include blacksmithing as a course of study in the department of Fine and Applied Arts of tertiary institutions. This strategy if met will lure students into choosing blacksmithing as school career.
8. There should be regular seminar and other public enlightenment programme on blacksmithing. Those programmes will also expose the youths to the benefits of blacksmithing to individuals, and to the government of any nation.
9. The government should provide fund via the companies, and other business establishments operating in the country to enable the blacksmiths obtain loan for their business.
10. The government should revitalize and possibly establish more skill acquisition scheme for the training of the youths for self-employment. This effort if met will go a long way in reducing the number of the non-working population in the country.

Conclusion

This paper has examined and discussed the need for documenting Elele Alimini blacksmithing in the new normal world. It concludes that the benefits of blacksmithing to individuals and government is enormous, and increases the demand of the products in modern civilization. On the contrary, the dearth of literature on blacksmithing, and the influence of western culture on Nigerian cultural heritage among other factors constitute threat to the continuity of the craft in Elele Alimini and environs. Therefore the paper submits that preserving and projecting indigenous Nigerian artistic heritage such as blacksmithing through book writing, will be helpful to the people of Alimini and Nigeria in general for self-reliance, further academic work, and sustainable development.

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