



# The Causes and Effects of Rural Poverty in Rivers State: Ikwerre Communities' Perspective

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**Abstract:** The study examined the basic characteristics of the rural poor as well as the causes and effects of rural poverty in rural Ikwerre communities of Rivers State, Nigeria within the period of 2000-2018. Primary and secondary sources of data were used for this study. Social exclusion theory was adopted as the theoretical framework of analysis on the causes and effects of rural poverty. The study classified the rural Ikwerre poor as cultivators and non-cultivators in the society and characterized rural Ikwerre poor as peasant farmers, hunger prone people, less educated, cheap labour, vulnerable people among others. The study identified the activities of oil multinationals; cult groups and gangs; over dependence on the family heads; gender inequality; discriminating state economic policies; poor orientation and education of the youths among others as the causes of rural poverty in rural Ikwerre communities with its attendant effects on the rural poor and the communities. The study made some recommendations on how to alleviate poverty in rural Ikwerre communities of Rivers State, Nigeria.

**Keywords:** Poverty, rural poor, rural areas, Ikwerre communities

## Introduction

Rural poverty is a typical poverty usually found in the rural areas, which expresses inability of the rural poor within the context of socio-cultural, political and economic inequality. Khan (2001) states that rural poverty accounts for about 63% of poverty in

communities of the developing states, including Ikwerre communities of Rivers State in Nigeria. Rural Ikwerre communities are characterized by the indices of poverty as observed in the lack of basic infrastructure, inaccessible earth road with poor network, inadequate market for their farm

products, poor health and educational facilities, constant conflict arising from struggle for the few available resources, poor drinking water, and absence of security leading to human insecurity in such communities. The indices of poverty in the rural communities convey the inability and relative deprivation, which they suffer and which classify them as the rural poor. Hence, in this research, the rural poor are those living in rural Ikwerre communities, who are predominantly farmers and classified as cultivators and non-cultivators, and migrant labourers, who lack the basic needs necessary to live well in the communities. Mosely & Miller (2004) see the rural poor as the class of rural people who are largely deprived and disadvantaged relatively to their counterparts in the urban communities. The deprivation and disadvantage of the rural poor affects their condition of living and by extension the development of the community. Incidentally, rural poverty is not the wholesome creation of the rural Ikwerre poor, but can be attributed to the forces of social inequality, capitalist market structure, and inadequate state policies. This prompts the rural Ikwerre poor to persistently search for a better condition of living, either through migration to the urban Ikwerre communities or demand for state intervention programmes, as every Ikwerre person desires to live and survive, without the fear of hunger, scarcity, and human insecurity prevalent in the communities. The prevalence of poverty in rural Ikwerre communities has placed the rural poor as helpless class of people in Ikwerre communities. This motivated our research to examine the basic characteristics of the rural Ikwerre poor as well as the causes and effects of the rural poverty on rural

Ikwerre poor and communities of Rivers State, Nigeria.

### **Scope of the study**

This research was carried out within the period of 2000-2018 in rural Ikwerre communities. The study conceptualized rural poverty, and covers the issues of the causes and effects of rural poverty in rural Ikwerre communities of the four Ikwerre ethnic local government areas in Rivers State

### **Methodology**

In our study on the causes and effects of rural poverty in Rivers State : Ikwerre communities' perspective, we used primary and secondary data. We used interview and observation methods to collect primary data, and documented facts from journals, books, newspapers, reports etc., as secondary data on the subject matter, and content analysis as a tool to analyse the study data. The study population consisted of the people of the rural communities in Ikwerre ethnic nationality, covering four (4) local government areas in Rivers State, namely Port Harcourt City Council; Ikwerre Local Government Area; Obio Akpor Local Government Area; and Emohua Local Government Area.

### **Conceptual Framework**

#### **Rural Poverty.**

To understand rural poverty, it is important to firstly explain rural area and poverty separately, and later rural poverty as a concept. Rural area within the context of community existence is explained as the area geographically located outside the frontiers of the urban areas/cities. Ojukwu (2013) explains rural area as the area that is prominently a natural environment with basic characteristics of low population density, low income, and lack of basic social infrastructure, with the indigenes predominantly farmers. The above

characteristics apply in Ikwerre communities located outside the urban area/cities of Ikwerre ethnic nationality of Rivers State. Many scholars, including Khan (2001) state that a large population of people in developing states, including Nigeria, are living in rural areas with its attendant development challenges. In rural Ikwerre communities for instance, large population of the people live in conditions where they lack basic infrastructure, access to basic needs of life, have low income and consumption rate, and are predominantly peasant farmers, who employ crude farm tools in their farming. Indeed, these are the rural poor in rural Ikwerre communities. The rural Ikwerre communities include Rumu-Odogo 1, Rumu-Odogo 2, Evekwu, Ovogo, Agba-Ndele, Egamini-Ndele, Akpabu, Ozuaha, Omademe, Omudioga, Ubimini, Egbeda, Odoha-Emohua, Ibaa, Rumuekpe etc., and are more located in Emohua and Ikwerre Local Government Areas than Obio Akpor Local Government Area and Port Harcourt City of Ikwerre ethnic nationality in Rivers State.

In this research, poverty is explained from different perspectives. Fields (1994) sees poverty as the inability of an individual or family to sufficiently possess resources to satisfy his or her basic needs of life. This proves that poverty is the inability of both individual and groups, and is basically in area of poor standard of living. The above view explains poverty within the context of socio-economic inability in the society, and is more of absolute terms. Similarly, Engelama and Bamidele (1997) state that poverty is all about the individual not being able to cater properly for his/her basic needs such as food, shelter, clothing, as well as

not meeting his social and economic objectives, lacks gainful employment and is deprived of the social, health and educational infrastructure. Poverty deprives people, usually the poor, the opportunity of participation and advancement in life, and reduces their dignity in the society. Ekpo (2000) in Wilson (2011:67) adds that poverty is a situation of inability characterized with low income and low consumption in the society. The above views explain the prevailing conditions of the rural poor in Ikwerre communities, as they are often classified as people with low socio-economic, political, and technological ability, who suffer low income and consumption rate, and are not gainfully employed, and lack basic needs of life in their communities. The poverty creates a wide gap of socio-economic and political inequality between the rural poor and urban people.

Sequel to the above, rural poverty is explained as the poverty commonly found in rural areas, including rural Ikwerre communities, occasioned by such factors as rural economy, and rural political system, with the victims classified as the rural poor. Rural poverty is further explained within the context of low income capacity, and low production and consumption rate of the rural people and accounts for their inequality. Rural poverty in rural communities reflect in such areas as inaccessibility to good drinking water, poor health care and sanitation, poor housing facility, poor educational facility leading to high illiteracy rate, large number of inaccessible earth road, poor communication facility, and absence of good market. Mashika, Haan & Baden (1997) add that the social indicators of rural poverty include low life expectancy, high infant mortality,

poor nutrition, low household budget on food, high illiteracy, poor access to health care etc., and see the above indicators as common index of social and material welfare associated with the rural poor. Rural poverty accounts for the high incidence of rural-urban migration in Ikwerre communities. The rural poor in rural Ikwerre communities in search of improved standard of living, basic infrastructure and basic needs of life, migrate to urban Ikwerre communities such as Eneka, Woji, Choba, Port Harcourt City, Rumuodumaya, Rumueme, Rumuigbo, Rumuola, Ozuoba etc., and create urban challenges in the state. Although the government has made several attempts to alleviate rural poverty in rural Ikwerre communities. However, it appears the attempts were inadequate, as the indicators of rural poverty are still high.

### **Theoretical Framework**

#### **Social Exclusion Theory**

Social exclusion theory became prominent in poverty studies in 1990s after the economic crisis that affected France and subsequent European policy agenda on social exclusion. Ever since, different scholars have giving different perspectives on social exclusion. Hillary (1994) sees social exclusion as the process whereby some set of persons are “systematically” prevented from having access to their desired rights and privileges that are normally available to every member of the community. Such rights and privileges are seen from the point of right to good accommodation, health care and services, access to education, employment opportunity, democratic participation etc. The deprivation is made possible due to the inherent social class structure and inequality in the society. Young (2000)

states that those who are often socially excluded are classified as the poor, and are denied access to participate fully in socio-economic and political activities in the society. Vroom & Hoff (2013) identified the major areas where the exclusion occurs as “insufficient access to social rights; material deprivation; limited social participation; and lack of normative integration”. In most cases, those deprived carry out collective actions to resist their deprivation, but always loss due to their inability. In their study, Haralambos & Heald (1980) corroborate with the above perspective on the cause of poverty, and adds that the social exclusion of people in activities of the society results to poverty of the people, and identifies social exclusion as the main cause of poverty. This study adopts the above explanation on the causes and effects of rural poverty, and notes that the root cause of rural poverty in Ikwerre is the social exclusion of some people from active political, social, and economic activities leading to the emergence of the rural poor in the community.

#### **Area of the study: Background information on Ikwerre Ethnic Nationality.**

Ikwerre is one of the prominent ethnic groups in Rivers State within the Niger Delta region of Nigeria. Ikwerre is the single largest tribe in Rivers State, but one of the minority ethnic groups in Nigeria. The ethnic group is strategically located in the heart of Nigerian economy as one of the oil and gas producing ethnic groups in Nigeria. Geographically, Ikwerre as a tribe is made up of four (4) Local Government Areas (LGAs), namely Emohua, Ikwerre, Obio Akpor, and part of Port Harcourt City Council, and is located within the Rivers East Senatorial

District of Rivers State ( See Appendix 1). National Population Commission (2006) holds that the Ikwerre ethnic group has a total population of 1,390,895 people, with Emohua LGA - 210,057 people, Ikwerre LGA -188,930 people, Obio Akpor LGA - 460, 350 people, and Port Harcourt City - 538,588 people, having different villages and clans. The Ikwerre ethnic group houses the capital city of Rivers State (Port Harcourt), and many higher educational institutions in the state, such as University of Port Harcourt, Rivers State University, Ignatius Ajuru University of Education, Elele Campus of Madonna University, Elechi Amadi Polytechnic, Rivers State School of Nursing, Rivers State School of Midwifery, and Rivers State School of Health Science and Technology. The ethnic group shares boundary at the East with Etche, Eleme, Okirika and Oyigbo Local Government Areas of Rivers State, at the West with Ahoada - East and Abual Local Government Areas of Rivers State, at the North with Ogba/Egbema Local Government Area of Rivers State and Egbeme/Ohaji Local Government Area of Imo State, and at the South with Asari-Toru, and Degema Local Government Areas of Rivers State. See Appendix 1.. The River Sambrayo demarcates the Ikwerre people and their neighbours at the western and southern parts. Ikwerre is blessed with large farm lands, mangroves, forests and rivers.

Economically, the combination of large forest, mangrove, river and farmlands in Ikwerre provide opportunity for the people to be fishermen, farmers, herbalists, and traders. With the advent of the western education, some of the people are now engaged in public service, jobs and other economic

activities (Wilson, 2016). As a tribe with several communities in the Niger Delta region, some Ikwerre communities are oil and gas producing. Ikwerre ethnic group is the economic hub of Rivers State, as the area house several oil multinationals, oil servicing companies, and other industrial concerns. With the high presence of the companies in the area, the area accommodates the highest number of migrant workers in Rivers State, seeking for greener pasture and better economic living, thereby leading to population explosion, particularly in Obio Akpor Local Government Area and Port Harcourt City Council of the state. The increase in population also provides market for both small and large scale traders. With the oil and gas exploration and exploitation activities, the Ikwerre people like other Niger Delta people are facing environmental and economic challenges in their communities.

Socio-culturally, Ikwerre people speak Ikwerre language, although with some minor dialectical differences, but easily understood among them. Due to the high presence of strangers in the area, English language is used as the second and official language for communication, and a good number of the Ikwerre people speak their neighbouring tribes languages' such as Igbo, Eleme, Kalagbari, Okirika, Ekpeye, and Etche. The Ikwerre people are peaceful and accommodating, thereby accounting for the high migration of people to the Ikwerre communities of the state. The people have rich cultural heritage and respect for their elders. Some of the Ikwerre cultures include new yam festival holding every August and September of the year in their respective communities, traditional marriage ceremony, burial

rites, age grade initiation, wrestling competition within and between the communities, etc. Some of the people carry out different ancestral worship, thereby making them to be African religion worshipers, while many are Christians, with few Muslims among them. There are mix sources of origin of the Ikwerre people. A popular source has it that the Ikwerre people migrated from the Old Benin Kingdom and has the Ekpeye and Ogba ethnic groups as relations (Nyegonum, 2016). Another source has it that the Ikwerre people migrated from the Igbo land (Chigere, 2001) and (Udeani, 2007). However, whatever the source, the fact remains that Ikwerre is an independent ethnic group with some cultural relativities with both the Igbo, Ekpeye, Benin and Ogba ethnic groups in Nigeria.

Traditionally, the Ikwerre people have well respected traditional administrative institutions for ease of political and administrative activities at all units. Such institutions are family, village and clan youth forum, women association, men association, age grade, general assembly, council of chiefs, and council of village heads (Owho holders). These institutions oversea the affairs of people in their communities, settle disputes where necessary, and carry out development projects. Wilson (2016:52) holds that each of the institution is charged with specific responsibility to ensure political and administrative stability, peaceful co-existence, and development of their communities. Unfortunately, there is no central head, traditionally controlling the affairs of the Ikwerre people as obtainable in other tribes like the Eze Ekpeye of Ekpeye Kingdom, Oba of Ogba land, Gbeneme of Ogoni land etc., but for convenient purposes, there is Ikwerre General

Assembly called Ogbakor Ikwerre, where every adult Ikwerre son and daughter assemble to discuss Ikwerre development, and thereafter, policy decisions reached in the assembly is implemented by the constituent units.

Politically, Ikwerre communities have traditional political and administrative system and structures with the families, villages and clans serving as the constituent units for administrative convenience, and each headed by the oldest man as the traditional Prime Minister in charge of the unit. The chief in each of the unit serves as the administrative head of the unit. There is a separation of power between the chief and traditional Prime Minister in administration of their areas. The traditional Prime Minister is the Oha (Owhor holder) and is in charge of traditional and ancestral matters including libation and sacrifices to the ancestors, and mediates between the people and their ancestors. He serves as the Supreme Court in judgment of disputes between individuals, families, villages, and clans. The chief is the administrative head in charge of daily affairs of the people and liaises between the people and government for development purposes in the area. Chiefs in most cases serve as the paramount ruler in their communities, as they are usually younger and more educated. However, there is a strong synergy and administrative collaboration between the chief and traditional Prime Minister in Ikwerre land.

### **The Characteristics of Rural Poor in Rural Ikwerre Communities**

The rural poor in Ikwerre communities are those residing in rural Ikwerre villages, who have limited access to the basic needs of life. They are mostly

women, elderly ones and children (usually fatherless, motherless or orphan), and are predominantly farmers, fishermen/women, small scale traders, herbalists, and others who provide cheap labour services in the communities. They are classified as the poor on account of their inability to afford their basic socio-economic and political needs. Generally, the rural poor in Ikwerre communities are broadly classified as Cultivators and Non-cultivators. The Cultivators are the group of rural poor who are directly involved in crops and livestock production and management, although in small quantity. The cultivators have limited access to the farmland, either as land owners or tenants (rented) to enable them farm and earn a living. Farmlands in Ikwerre community are owned and controlled by the families, and therefore are shared to the adult family members annually, usually in small quantity while the surplus is sold to others. Due to inadequate farmland shared to the family members and inability of the poor to acquire the desired quantity of farmland, they resort to provide their labour for others to hire.

Non-cultivators form the largest part of the rural poor in Ikwerre communities, and are considered as the poorest of them all. The Non-cultivators are those without access to farm lands, either as farmland owners or as tenants, and therefore depend solely on their labour power (usually on dry season demand for their labour in farming) and other domestic activities for a living. Many of them are not financial members of the family and therefore are not given farmlands due them. Non-cultivators become victims of fluctuation or change in labour demand, change in wage rate and food price in the communities.

Their inability is expressed in their lack of basic needs of life and inaccessibility to basic infrastructure. In their quest for better living, they often migrate to other parts of Ikwerre and neighbouring communities, usually urban communities where their labour will be hired and paid for. This accounts for high indices of rural -urban migration in the state. The rural poor in Ikwerre communities are further characterized as follows:

**Peasant Farmers :** The rural Ikwerre poor in Ikwerre communities are predominantly farmers, who largely farm for household consumption, and less for the market. Our field finding proved that over 90% of the rural Ikwerre poor are peasant farmers, who have less access to both private and family farmlands, and therefore lack capacity to achieve high productivity, thereby leading to low income and consumption.

**Cheap Labour and hunger prone people :** The rural poor provide cheap manual labour services in the communities. They work longer than the normal working hours, yet are paid peanuts. They carry out all sorts of farming activities for others, and yet have no access to the products, and remain dependent on others for survival. This results in low income which they spend largely on household food items, yet cannot afford the needed food for the household and therefore they remain always hungry.

**Own less physical properties and lack access to infrastructure.** The Ikwerre rural poor, particularly, the non-cultivators have little or no property to their credit in the communities. All they own as property is their manual labour, which they hire as services to others at a cheap rate. The study noted that over

70% of the Ikwerre rural poor lack sufficient property to attend to their daily needs. Due to this inability, they are easily manipulated by others during political and socio-cultural activities in the community. They lack good accommodation, good drinking water, have no access to electricity, lack basic needs of life and access to social infrastructure.

**Limited participation in community decision making:** The rural poor are not given equal opportunity to participate accordingly in Ikwerre community decision making process. They are often excluded in the process on account of poor education, inferiority complex and other disabilities. In the community general assembly, they are neither recognized nor identified to participate in political activities other than using them for manual labour works. All they participate in is their immediate household decision affairs. This limitation creates more inability in them, thereby increasing the socio-cultural inequality of the rural poor in Ikwerre.

**Depend largely on charity and public facilities:** Our interview with some of the rural Ikwerre people indicates that the Ikwerre rural poor have a unique poverty character of high dependence on free donation and support from the multinationals and can only access those facilities provided by charity individuals, organisations, and the state such as public schools, health centers, water, etc. This is on account of their inability to afford such facility privately.

**Less educated:** The rural Ikwerre poor and their children face the risk of less educational opportunity due to high cost of education in the state. The rural Ikwerre poor have no access to quality education. They only attend the ill equipped public schools in their rural

communities and are often deprived access to educational opportunities from oil multinationals and state scholarship programmes, due to their inability to access information concerning the scholarship. In most cases, their children are not even admitted to certain public schools on account of inability to pay fees/levies. The study noted that 62% of the rural poor children have no access to equipped schools in the state

**Have no access to bank facilities :** The rural poor have no access to bank facilities, due to their inability to afford bank collateral. Physically, no bank is situated within the rural Ikwerre areas, indicating 100% absence of banking facility in rural Ikwerre communities, and therefore accessing information about bank facility becomes a problem. This makes the rural poor in Ikwerre communities to operate on limited economic infrastructure leading to their low productivity.

**More vulnerable to risk :** The rural poor in Ikwerre communities are exposed to all kinds of risk in the communities arising from their inability. The rural poor, particularly the women and children become victims of trafficking and in most cases get involve in prostitution for a living. Their children abandon school for casual labour to earn income to support the family for a living, and in return are exploited by their masters. The rural poor are usually the first to suffer any epidemic and disease in rural Ikwerre communities. They are the worst hit in event of any communal violence and exposed to hazardous economic and political challenges in Rivers State. They suffer intimidations and all forms of discriminations from others in the communities.



## **The Causes and Effects of Rural Poverty in Rural Ikwerre Communities**

This section of the study analyses the causes and effects of rural poverty on rural Ikwerre communities of Rivers State.

**The activities of oil multinationals in the communities.** Wilson (2013) stated that on several occasions, the inability of oil and gas multinationals - Shell BP and Agip Oil companies to manage its oil installations led to the oil pipe line explosion and pollution of River Sambrayo, which affected the riverine Ikwerre communities such as Agba-Ndele, Rumuekpe, Ogbakiri, Emohua, Rumuodgo 2, Rumuewhor etc. Wilson (2013) sees the activities of the oil and gas multinationals in Ikwerre communities as the cause of environmental pollution in the area with its attendant implications on both the people and the communities. Nsirim-Worlu (2012) adds that the operation of the multinationals in the area have negative impact on the environment of the area. The upland communities such as Ibaa, Omudioga, Iguruta, Elele etc were not excluded from the oil pollution of their farmlands. As a result, fishing and farming activities are cut short in these communities, leading to low food production, low income, and hunger and scarcity in the Ikwerre communities and culminating in the poverty for the rural Ikwerre people.

**The activities of cult groups, gangs and militants in Ikwerre communities.** Rural Ikwerre communities, like other Niger Delta communities, are not devoid of cult groups, street gangs and militancy activities. Wilson (2017) classified the cult groups, gangs and militants as Non-State Security Actors in Niger Delta

communities. These groups carry out several activities and operations that are inimical to community development, particularly rural communities. They facilitate communal crisis and violence, rape women, kidnap people for ransom, and in the process, the rural Ikwerre people run away from their communities to other communities in search of peace and security. In their new settlement, due to inadequate farmlands and poor economic resources, the people are neither opportune to farm adequately to cater for their family food needs nor are they able to carry out trading activities to earn income. Even when they are willing and able to hire out their labour as services to others, they are hired at a price not commensurate to their labour input, and therefore cannot earn adequate income to afford their basic needs. The people of Rumuekpe, Ibaa, Omudioga, Ogbakiri, Rumuji, Obelle, Elele Alimini communities, etc were casualties of the such groups' activities in their communities, and suffered food scarcity and human insecurity at several times.

### **Large family system and dependency for livelihood on the head of the family.**

Ikwerre culture encourages the man to marry as many wives as he desires, and attribute the wives as the man's assets. The man (father) becomes the head of the family and is saddled with the responsibility of feeding the wives and children and providing their basic needs. This makes the large family to depend solely on him for survival. In most cases, due to the large capacity of the family, the man hardly can afford to provide the basic needs of all the family members, including some children, thereby depriving such children access to basic education, good food, good accommodation, health care, etc and this

is responsible for the poverty in the family, and by extension the communities.

**Gender inequality in enforcement of right of inheritance and possession of farmlands and other properties.**

Ikwerrebo (2015) holds that Ikwerre people have rich cultural heritage, with some harmful practices. In Ikwerre culture, all farmlands are owned and controlled by the families. In the family, the men are considered first in farmlands allocation during farming season. However, the women may be given small portion if the farmland remains after extensive sharing to the men. In most cases, the women are not considered at all, despite the available quantity of farmlands for the season. On event of death of the head of the family (husband), only the male children are recognized and considered to inherit the farmlands and other properties of their father, with the first son possessing the largest portion of the farmlands and the highest properties. The female children, irrespective of their number and age are landless members of the family. This traditional inequality accounts for the deprivation of the women and female children in rural Ikwerre communities. They are deprived access to adequate farmlands even when they are willing and able to farm in large quantities. This results in poverty, as they cannot afford to provide the needed food for their families, particularly the widows in rural Ikwerre communities.

**Discriminating State Economic Policies.**

Some of the State economic policies are against the rural Ikwerre poor and account for their poverty. The bank policy on obtaining bank loan with collateral is against the rural poor, who have no collateral to present. Their inability to afford the bank collateral

deprives them access to bank loan to enhance their farming and other economic activities. This contributes to poor agricultural productivity and low economic activities in rural Ikwerre communities, and increases the list of the poverty of the rural Ikwerre poor.

**Activities of Corrupt Politicians and Public Bureaucrats.**

Corrupt politicians and public bureaucrats in the state services use the instrumentalities of the state power to deprive the rural Ikwerre poor of infrastructure. Every year, the government at all levels make budgets for the development of the rural areas, including rural Ikwerre communities in such areas as provision of good and accessible roads, electricity, drinking water, health care facility, education for all, affordable accommodation, economic empowerment of the poor, etc. At the end of the year, the monies budgeted for these development items are expended by the politicians and bureaucrats without any development in the rural areas, as the rural poor remain the same. Despite the regular annual budget for drinking water projects, health care, affordable accommodation through state housing, electrification and construction of motorable roads in Rumuodogo 1&2, rehabilitation of Agba-Ndele road, Rumuekpe road and electricity, Akpabu road, Ibaa road, etc, these and other rural Ikwerre communities exist without good roads to transport their agricultural products to the urban markets. This denial of the basic infrastructure to the rural poor accounts for their poverty.

**State Acquisition of Rural Ikwerre Farmlands for State Projects.**

The State through its Lands Reform Policy acquired large portions of Ikwerre farmlands and converted same for its projects. Farmlands were acquired in

Choba, Aluu and Rumuekini communities for University of Port Harcourt and its allied institutions; Nkpolu Oroworukwo farmlands for Rivers State University and its allied institutions; Rundele, Rumukalagbor and Rumuorlumeni communities farmlands for Ignatius Ajuru University of Education; Ogonigba, Rumuomasi and Ogbum-N'abali communities farmlands for industrial layout (Trans-Amadi), Elele, Ipo, Ozuaha, Omademe, Omerelu, Akpabu, and Ubimini farmlands for Palm Estate (SIAT) etc. These large portions of farmlands acquired by the state deprives the rural farmers' the opportunity of farming adequately for their survival, and encourages idleness and poverty in such rural communities.

**Cultural Value, Poor orientation and Education of the Youths :** Ogoloma (2003) sees the Ikwerre culture as a rigid entity that is not dynamic enough to accommodate modernization, thereby affecting the people orientation and growth. Culturally, the strength and value of Ikwerre men/women are determined by the capacity of farmlands he/she is able to possess and farm effectively. This prompts many youths, particularly in the rural areas to engage themselves in large farming activities, although in crude farming system in order to be recognized and attain the needed cultural status, thereby keeping away from western education. The long-run effect is that most of the rural-youths are poorly oriented and educated, but highly valued culturally due to their physical strength and farming activities. This poor orientation and education of the rural youths account for their poverty of the mind, and deprives them access to greater opportunities. Indeed, it leads to their socio-economic poverty even in their communities.

**Crude Farming Equipment and System:** The rural Ikwerre poor, who are predominantly farmers still use crude farming equipment, usually knife and hoe and operate on land tenure system. These crude equipment and system limit them from carrying out farming activities in large scale for large scale productivity, and therefore account for their low productivity and low income in the community.

### **Strategies to Reduce Rural Poverty in Rural Ikwerre Communities**

This section states the strategies to alleviate the rural poverty in rural Ikwerre Communities of Rivers State.

- The state in collaboration with the affected Ikwerre communities should engage the rural youths in educational programmes and regular orientation on the need to adapt to change in the communities. This will enhance the educational capacity of the youths and their productivity in Ikwerre communities
- The rural development agencies should enforce its policy objectives for the development of the rural areas, including Ikwerre communities.
- There should be opportunity for the rural Ikwerre poor to access bank facility for farming activities without much restriction through collateral. The state should encourage the banks to establish at least a branch in rural Ikwerre community, particularly in Emohua Local Government Area of the state.
- Government at all levels should implement rural development budget for the development of

the rural areas, including Ikwerre communities to reduce rural poverty in Ikwerre communities.

- There should be a reform on Ikwerre cultural right of inheritance and access to farmland and other properties to give equal and better opportunity to both male and female children.
- The oil and gas multinationals operating in Ikwerre communities should maintain their oil facilities to avoid pollution of the host communities and seriously

involve in corporate social responsibility projects for rural Ikwerre communities' development.

- Activities of the ethnic militias and cult groups/gangs should be checked and controlled by the State Security Agents to reduce violence and suffering of the poor.
- The government should empower the rural Ikwerre poor, who are farmers with improved seedlings, farming equipment and train them on new farming skills to improve their farm yields.

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Appendix 1 : Map of Rivers State showing the Geographical location of Ikwere Ethnic Local Government Areas . Featuring Numbers 10, 11, 14, & 14.