

**THE IGBO AND BUILDING MATERIALS TRADE IN KANO METROPOLIS,  
1970 – 2015**

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**ABSTRACT**

This paper examines the Igbo trade in building materials in the Kano metropolis, from 1970 to 2015. The Igbo migration to other parts of Nigeria predates colonialism in the country. However, colonialism and colonial policies quickened the massive movement of the Igbo to Northern Nigeria, Kano in particular. Today, reputed as a historic centre of commerce, Kano hosts the largest number of Igbo commercial migrants in entire Northern Nigeria. The Igbo have been involved in a wide array of commercial activities in Kano. Although there is available literature on other areas of Igbo involvement in commercial activities, there exists none on the building materials trade in the area. It is against this background that this work employed primary and secondary sources in examining the origin, nature, and dynamics of Igbo involvement in the building materials trade in the Kano metropolis. The contributions of the Igbo building materials traders to the development of Kano were found to be enormous as they created employment and contributed to the revenue base of the state. The Igbo building materials traders in Kano are faced with challenges including insecurity, high costs, poor amenities etc. The work concludes that despite the challenges faced by the Igbo building materials traders, they contributed immensely to the economic development of Kano as a whole.

**Keywords:** Igbo Traders, Building Materials, Kano Metropolis.

**INTRODUCTION**

Trading was one of the major factors that encouraged migration among the Igbo during the pre-colonial period. Trading among themselves and their non-Igbo neighbours induced migration and inter-group relations at the time preceding colonial domination. For instance, the Aro became prominent traders and oracle agents in about the middle of the 17th Century considering their strategic location on the borderland between the Igbo, Ibibio, and the Cross River people. There was also trade between the Nsukka people and the Igala and Akpoto from whom they (Nsukka) bought goats, horses, and beads in exchange for cloths, palm oil, and slaves.<sup>1</sup> Over time, the trading network of the Igbo grew across the entire country and beyond. In Kano, Colonial policies encouraged the massive migration of the Igbo to Kano. By 1960, the Igbo became the most populous migrant ethnic group in Kano engaging and recording successes in commercial activities in the area.

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<sup>1</sup> A. E. Afigbo, "Trade and Trade Routes in 19th Century Nsukka", *Journal of Historical Society of Nigeria*, 2, 1, (1973): 87.

The literature on the commercial activities of the Igbo in Kano discusses their involvement in areas such as luxurious transport, automobile spare parts, patent medicine, school proprietorship etc. However, little or none exists on the Igbo participation in the building materials trade despite the significance of the trade and the dominance of the Igbo in the trade. For instance, out of the 226 building materials enterprises sampled and surveyed in the major areas of the trade in the Kano metropolis, only 33 (approximately 15%) were owned by nonIgbo.<sup>2</sup>

### **THE ORIGIN AND FORMATION OF THE IGBO COMMUNITY IN KANO METROPOLIS**

Kano emerged as a major Islamic trading and industrial centre as early as the 15<sup>th</sup> century. This attracted migrants from various places to Kano. Among the industrial activities that thrived in Kano at the time were leatherwork, skin tanning, weaving, dyeing, embroidery, and blacksmithing. Migrants from North Africa, Mali, Agades, Kanuri, Nupe etc. were among the people that migrated to Kano to benefit economically from the city's industrial development.<sup>3</sup> It is worth noting that the receptive and accommodative nature of the Kano people equally encouraged migrants into Kano for economic activities. This continued from the pre-colonial period into the colonial period. Hence, the cosmopolitan nature of Kano is arguably not a product of colonialism in the area. However, this is not to downplay the role of colonialism in the expansion of the cosmopolitan frontiers as colonial activities and policies gave a massive boost to the migration of the southerners (particularly the Igbo and the Yoruba) into Kano.<sup>4</sup>

For the Igbo, colonialism provided the enabling environment for their migration into Kano. Following the conquest of Kano in 1903 by the British, colonial rule was imposed in the area.<sup>5</sup> Since the already existing political institutions of Northern Nigeria conformed to the system of indirect rule, the British made no effort in changing them. It is imperative to state that the most important of the colonial policies that facilitated the migration of the Igbo to Kano was the construction of the railway. The origins of the Igbo in Kano and the north, in general, can be traced to the thousands of Igbo people who provided the labour for the construction of rail lines between the 1910s and 1920s. Following the completion of the Lagos-Kano railway line in 1911 and the Port-Harcourt-Kano line in 1926, Kano, linked to major cities like Kaduna, Jos, Ibadan, Abeokuta, Enugu, and Lokoja. This gave a boost to

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<sup>2</sup> Fieldwork by the researcher, 2019.

<sup>3</sup> A. Bako, *Sabon Gari Kano, A History of Immigrants and Inter-Group Relations in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century* (Sokoto: Usmanu Danfodio University Press, 2006), 21.

<sup>4</sup> E. E. Osaghae, *Trends in Migrant Political Organization in Nigeria: The Igbo in Kano* (Nigeria: Institut français de recherche en Afrique IFRA, 1994), 27.

<sup>5</sup> K. Maier, *This House has Fallen: Nigeria in Crisis* (London: Penguin Books, 2000), 11. <sup>6</sup> Osaghae, *Trends in Migrant Political Organizations in Nigeria: The Igbo in Kano*, 30.

rural-urban and urban-urban migration, stimulating a good number of Southerners to move to the north and Kano particularly.<sup>6</sup>

Besides the completion of the railway lines, the expansion of road networks that served as feeders to the railway lines from about 1917 also contributed largely to the mass movement of the Igbo to the north and Kano in particular. Also important among the factors that facilitated the movement of the Igbo to the north and Kano in particular was the development of more advanced means of communication from the 1920s. These include the telegraphic, telephone and a wide array of postal communication mechanisms.<sup>6</sup>

From the above, it is evident that colonialism facilitated the migration of the Igbo to Kano. However, it is pertinent to stress that the primary motive for their migration was economic. The Igbo migrated to Kano for the sake of employment opportunities in the colonial government and to engage in commercial activities for which Kano has been known. In other words, in addition to their active participation in the construction of the south-north railway network, the Igbo also became relevant in the service of the colonial administration. They worked as clerks, and in other capacities in the government. This was possible as a result of their early contact and reception of the European missionaries and western education.<sup>7</sup> On the other hand, Kano provided a suitable environment for trade and commerce which is an inherent part of the Igbo.

The 1930s marked the massive migration and settlement of the Igbo in Kano.<sup>8</sup> Most of the Igbo migrants before 1930 were workers who were involved in the construction of the railway lines. A good number of these initial migrants returned home on the completion of the railway lines. However, from 1930, the completion of the railway lines, the completion of the Makurdi Bridge in 1932 and several other factors gave impetus to the mass immigration of the Igbo into Kano. Among the motivations for Igbo migration at this time were opportunities for employment and favourable commercial activities. As previously stated, the earlier reception of the Christian missionaries in Igboland and the concomitant propagation of western education in the area gave the Igbo the opportunity to acquire western education which became relevant to the service of the colonial administration. The situation was different in the north and Kano inclusive where the colonial administration reached and upheld an agreement with the northern Muslim leaders not to grant Christian missionaries access to the north where Islam was the dominant religion.<sup>9</sup> This situation made it necessary for the colonial administration to seek the services

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<sup>6</sup> Osaghae, *Trends in Migrant Political Organizations in Nigeria: The Igbo in Kano*, 30.

<sup>7</sup> E. Isichei, *A History of Igbo People* (London: Macmillan Press, 1976), 3 – 18.

<sup>8</sup> Usman, "Implications of Colonial Settlements on Inter-Ethnic Relations: Case Study of Sabon Gari Kano", 165.

<sup>9</sup> S. Abubakar, "The Northern Provinces under Colonial Rule: 1900 – 1959" in *Groundwork of Nigerian History*, 474.

of low cadre assistants from southern Nigeria and which the Igbo migrants readily provided.<sup>10</sup> Besides the colonial administration, other European commercial outfits required the services the Igbo offered. The receptive nature of the *Kanawa* also contributed to a large extent to the immigration of the Igbo to Kano, particularly after the Nigerian Civil War.<sup>11</sup> Considering the Push and Pull model, the factors discussed above were some of the pull factors that enticed the Igbo to migrate and settle in Kano.

Among the ‘push’ factors is the fact that there was a neglect of the palm produce in the colonial period. The palm produces that the colonial administration neglected was one of the major crops the Igbo produced. When compared to the boost given to the production of crops like cotton and groundnut by the British, it becomes evident that the colonial economy was more favourable to the north than any other part of Nigeria. This neglect and its attendant hardship in Igboland compelled the Igbo to move to the north and Kano in particular.<sup>12</sup> Hunger for land as a result of growing population density and land infertility also compelled the Igbo to move to Kano. The declining economy experienced in Igboland also forced the Igbo to migrate to Kano. Most people in Igboland suffered economic hardship resulting from the great depression of the late 1920s and early 1930s. The period saw a severe dwindling of the palm oil market. The returns for export crops plummeted while prices of imported products increased. The situation was exacerbated by the harsh colonial policy of taxation.<sup>13</sup> This made the living conditions in Igboland harsh and unbearable for many, hence pushing them out to the north and Kano where they hoped to experience better economic conditions. Since the early times of their migration to Kano, the Igbo settled majorly in Sabon Gari.

### **THE ORIGIN OF BUILDING MATERIALS TRADE IN KANO**

It is not known when the building materials trade began in Kano or who started it. However, the fact that Kano had developed into a cosmopolitan city since the 15<sup>th</sup> Century suggests that there were relatively large-scale building activities to meet the shelter needs of migrants in the area. Hence, the building materials trade may have started before this time. Over time, with the advent of colonialism and the influx of migrants occasioned by colonial policies, the demand for building materials increased. This resulted in the expansion of the building materials trade.

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<sup>10</sup> E. T. Eyeh “History of Igbo Enterprises in Kano, Nigeria, 1960 – 2007” (PhD Thesis, Department of History and International Studies, University of Nigeria Nsukka, 2015), 20.

<sup>11</sup> Osaghae, *Trends in Migrant Political Organization in Nigeria: The Igbo in Kano*, 40.

<sup>12</sup> Usman, “Implications of Colonial Settlements on Inter Ethnic Relations: Case Study of Sabon Gari Kano”, 166.

<sup>13</sup> J. E. Agaba, “The Nigerian Civil War and the Changing Migration Patterns of the Igbo into Idomaland: 1967 – 2007” in *The Nigerian Civil War, Forty Years After: What Lessons* ed. A. M. Adejo (Makurdi: Aboki Publishers, 2008), 191.

The Igbo were among the foremost traders of building materials in the Kano metropolis.<sup>14</sup> They engaged in the sales of a wide array of building materials which include: roofing sheets, ceiling sheets, electric cables, fittings and appliances, water pumps, electricity generating sets, plumbing materials, tiles, iron rods, barbed wire, welding equipment, cattle wire, agric. generator, water hose, water tanks, paint, casing pipes, G.I. pipes, D.I pipes, and PVC pipes. Also among their articles of trade are cement, doors, windows, door locks, Sumo pumps, hand pumps, solar panels, and steel products ranging from square pipes, sheets, bars, angle iron, seamless pipes, chequered plates etc.<sup>15</sup>

B. C. Unije, S.O. Ndidigwe, Unison Ubason, Gobison Electricals, Amaefuna & Sons Building Materials, F.A. Ofaraka were believed to be among the first group of Igbo traders and enterprises to be involved in the building materials trade in Kano. The 1970s marked the beginning of the Igbo domination in the building materials trade in the Kano metropolis.<sup>16</sup> Following the end of the Nigerian Civil War in 1970, there was a second wave of Igbo migration back to Kano.<sup>17</sup> Being a period of reconstruction, the building materials business thrived. The Igbo came with a renewed vigour and determination to recoup all they lost during the war. They rapidly recovered and dominated the building materials trade in Kano metropolis.

## **ORGANIZATION OF BUILDING MATERIALS TRADE IN KANO METROPOLIS**

The building materials business is capital-intensive. Hence, the place of capital in the factors to be considered in setting up the business is core. Prince Livinus O. Okoye, a dealer in plumbing materials and assorted iron products in the Kofar Ruwa market confirms this by his comparison of the building materials business with the patent medicine trade. He affirmed that the minimum capital needed for the take-off of the former is much more than the minimum capital requirement for the latter.<sup>18</sup> Sir Francis Eburnoha reveals that the majority rely on capital gotten from their masters after an apprenticeship in setting up their businesses. He explained that he established his business in 1991 with the grant given by his master as a "settlement". Eburnoha further revealed that even though the grant (₦100,000) was not sufficient to set up the business in a "big way", persistent hard work, patience, determination,

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<sup>14</sup> Vincent Nwachinemere Agbalusi, 57 years, President, Kano Electrical Dealers Association (KEDA), in an interview with the researcher in his office (No. 56 Church Road, Sabon Gari, Kano) on 15<sup>th</sup> November 2019.

<sup>15</sup> Researcher's fieldwork, 2019.

<sup>16</sup> Vincent Nwachinemere Agbalusi, 57 years, President, Kano Electrical Dealers Association (KEDA), in an interview with the researcher in his office (No. 56 Church Road, Sabon Gari, Kano) on 15<sup>th</sup> November 2019.

<sup>17</sup> Osaghae, *Trends in Migrant Political Organization in Nigeria: The Igbo in Kano*, 34.

<sup>18</sup> Prince Livinus O. Okoye, 50 years, building materials dealer in an interview with the researcher in his shop (DL/430 Kofar Ruwa Market) on 23<sup>rd</sup> October 2018.

and God's blessings have transformed his humble beginning into what it is today.<sup>19</sup> It was also observed that some of the traders were able to accumulate the capital to set up their businesses from involving in other trades that are less capital-intensive. Some even accumulated their capital through savings from commissions earned from 'market runs' (*Oso ahia*).<sup>20</sup> This is a situation where young men who are neither shop owners nor apprentices welcome and persuade prospective buyers into making purchases from particular shops within a market. In such cases, these marketers usually have the consent of the shop owners to pay them commissions for sales made through their effort. Another means of capital acquisition was through loans and donations from relations and friends. Some also augmented their capital through credit supplies from suppliers,<sup>21</sup> as well as loans from banks and other financial institutions. In other words, with the trust of the supplier, supplies are made and payment is made after sales.

Also important in the establishment of the building materials trade is the location of the business. The location of the business largely determines the level of patronage. Certain areas in Kano metropolis are known for the localization of the building materials trade. Hence, shops located in such places are bound to enjoy more sales than those located in other areas. Such areas are Sabon Gari, Kofar Ruwa and Kofar Wambai. Apart from patronage, these areas enjoy some other benefits associated with the localization of such businesses to an area. For example, building materials businesses located in these areas enjoy collective security, minimal cost of transportation<sup>22</sup> and other economic advantages of scale. Hence, it was observed that most of the Igbo building materials dealers in Kano gave great priority to the location of their shops. Despite the high cost of renting shops in places like Kofar Ruwa Market and France Road in Sabon Gari for instance, these areas which are the hub of building materials trade in Kano are largely dominated by the Igbo.

The source of supply is also a crucial factor considered in establishing the building materials business. It is important because the source of supply determines the cost, quality, and frequency of the supply. Unfortunately, most building materials are imported. In fact, according to the Nigerian Building and Road Research Institute (NIBRRI), about 90 percent of building materials are being imported into the

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<sup>19</sup> Sir Francis Ebinoha, 58 years, building materials dealer in an interview with the researcher in his shop (France Road, Kano) on 20<sup>th</sup> August 2018.

<sup>20</sup> Michael Azugo, 43 years, Building materials trader in an interview with the researcher in his shop (No. 2 Russel Avenue, Sabon Gari, Kano) on 20<sup>th</sup> August 2018.

<sup>21</sup> Prince Livinus O. Okoye, 50 years, building materials dealer in an interview with the researcher in his shop (DL/430 Kofar Ruwa Market) on 23<sup>rd</sup> October 2018.

<sup>22</sup> Traders in the same line of business, the iron rod dealers for example do jointly charter trailers to convey their products from Lagos thereby reducing the cost of transportation for individual businesses.

country.<sup>23</sup> The cost of supply to the trader determines his selling price and by extension his turnover. Hence, most informants interviewed are mindful of their sources of supply. The source of their supply depends on the commodities they specialized on. For instance, a dealer of electrical conduit pipes, wires, etc., U. C. Moore Electricals revealed that they get their stock from Kano as Nigerian-made wires are known to be of higher quality than foreign wires. The same applies to dealers of plumbing materials as most plastic products like PVC pipes, water tanks, and fittings are gotten from Kano plastic-producing industries.<sup>24</sup>

On the other hand, some dealers of electric fittings and plumbing materials disclosed that most of their products are imported from China, Dubai, Japan, etc. Some traders who are not able to import their goods from these countries due to the financial implications of importation resort to purchasing from wholesalers around them in Kano, Lagos, or Onitsha.<sup>26</sup>

No establishment thrives without proper organization. This is also true of the building materials trade and other businesses undertaken by the Igbo in Kano metropolis. Being that virtually all the building materials businesses in the area are sole proprietorships (one-man businesses), the responsibility of the organization solely rests on the shoulders of the proprietor or business owner. It is their responsibility to source capital, plan, take decisions and carry out other managerial functions that will enhance the success of their businesses. In terms of acquisition of capital, most Igbo building materials dealers in Kano got their startup capitals as "settlements" from their masters after an agreed period of apprenticeship while others got theirs through grants from relations and friends. Some also augmented their capital or expanded their businesses through bank or cooperative loans.<sup>25</sup> In cases where the proprietor has an apprentice(s) or sales boy(s) or girl(s), it remains his responsibility to take key decisions, guide his employee(s) on the operations of the business and motivate them for optimal productivity and sales. However, as is the case with most sole proprietorships, the Igbo building materials trade in Kano is prone to collapse at the death of the owner. In other words, there is usually no room for continuity in the business in the event of the death of the owner as the employees and apprentices are usually not trustworthy. As a precautionary measure against the foregoing, some Igbo building materials dealers incorporate their wives and children into the business as partners so that even in their absence, the enterprise will continue to thrive. Below are some of such building materials businesses where wives or children are involved;

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<sup>23</sup> O. Nnodim, "90% Nigerian Construction Materials Imported – Building Institute", *Punch*, 17<sup>th</sup> October 2022, <https://punchng.com/90-nigerian-construction-materials-import-ed-buildinginstitute/>

<sup>24</sup> U. C. Moore, 62 years, building materials dealer in an interview with the researcher in his shop (No. 43, France Road) on 15<sup>th</sup> November 2019. <sup>26</sup>Fieldwork by the researcher, 2019.

<sup>25</sup> Vincent Nwachinemere Agbalusi, 57 years, President, Kano Electrical Dealers Association (KEDA), in an interview with the researcher in his office (No. 56 Church Road, Sabon Gari, Kano) on 15<sup>th</sup> November 2019.



In recognition of the impact of advertising in stimulating sales, some Igbo building materials dealers in Kano metropolis advertise their businesses using various means like calendars, complimentary cards, signposts, radio jingles etc. Prince Livinus O. Okoye confirmed that advertising stimulates sales indeed. He said he printed complimentary cards which were distributed to his customers and prospective buyers. Okoye testified that many sales have been made through referrals with the aid of his complimentary cards as they contain his name, business name, the products he deals on, address, phone numbers and other vital information.<sup>26</sup> In terms of registration of business, it was observed that some building materials businesses in the area are registered with the Corporate Affairs Commission (CAC) while a good number of them are not.

In Kano metropolis, several associations coordinate the activities of building materials traders. This is perhaps so because there are a wide array of products that the traders specialize in. However, the most popular in terms of coverage and efficiency are the Building Materials Traders Association Kano and the Kano Electrical Dealers Association (KEDA). While the former's membership is drawn from dealers in plumbing materials, tiles, and other assorted products, the latter is concerned primarily with dealers of electrical and electronic products.

The Associations aim to protect the interests of their members and promote cordial relations between the traders, their neighbours, and the government. Membership of the associations is optional but the gains of being a member of the associations entice most traders to register as members. The associations coordinate the collection of government revenues and taxes from their members and remit the same to the government. They also collect other dues and levies like sanitation, security, wedding and burial levies etc. By so doing, the association ensures that the market environment is kept clean and secure.

These associations also played vital roles in maintaining cordial relations among members by enforcing their rules and regulations. For example, fighting was prohibited among members of the associations. Any member seen fighting with another member or a customer was fined. In the case of the Building Materials Traders Association, for instance, defaulters were fined the sum of Ten Thousand Naira (₦10,000.00). Where a defaulter failed to pay the fine, goods worth the amount were taken from his shop and sold to pay his debt. When this reoccurs, such a member was suspended from the association. Such suspensions had grave implications. Members of the association were not allowed to transact business with suspended members. This attracted fines also. It was also prohibited for a member of these associations to walk into another trader's shop to prospect or persuade a prospective buyer. The associations also discouraged members from trading in substandard, contraband or stolen goods. Any member found to be dealing in such

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<sup>26</sup> Prince Livinus O. Okoye, 50 years, building materials dealer in an interview with the researcher in his shop (DL/430 Kofar Ruwa Market) on 23<sup>rd</sup> October 2018.



goods was fined or/and reported to the appropriate security agency. Disputes between customers and Traders were also resolved by the associations if such cases were reported. Cases beyond the powers of the associations were reported to relevant security agencies.<sup>27</sup> Through these rules and regulations, these associations were able to maintain cordial relations among the building materials traders and their customers.

Like other trade associations, the Building Materials Traders Association Kano and the Kano Electricals Dealers Association are voluntary associations of building materials traders in Kano metropolis. They execute activities aimed at enhancing the welfare of their members. The primary objectives of these associations are to promote the business interests of members, share business ideas, provide a platform for strategic discussions and represent the interests of members wherever and whenever the need arises. These associations played great roles in promoting the success of building materials dealers in the area. They sensitized members on how to achieve efficiency in the business. The associations discouraged all forms of unhealthy competition among its members.

The Igbo building materials traders form the majority of the members of these associations.<sup>28</sup> The associations functioned as an interface between the traders and the Kano State Government. Members of the association paid their taxes and levies to the State Government through these associations. Government policies on issues concerning security, standards and quality controls etc. are communicated to the traders through these associations. These associations also liaised with security agencies to ensure that peace is achieved in the area. The leadership of the associations ensured that all forms of illicit trade by members or non-members were reported to relevant security agents.<sup>29</sup>

## **APPRENTICESHIP AND THE BUILDING MATERIALS TRADE IN KANO METROPOLIS**

An apprentice is "a young person who works for an employer for a fixed time to learn the particular skills needed in their job". Apprenticeship refers to "a period of time working as an apprentice; a job as an apprentice."<sup>30</sup> The Igbo are generally well-known for the practice of apprenticeship. From the early times, the art of learning crafts like blacksmithing, carving and some other forms of artwork had been

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<sup>27</sup> Kabiru Dan Zaki, 63 years, Businessman, in an Interview with the researcher in his shop (48F opposite I.D.H Hospital France Road, Sabon Gari, Kano), 15<sup>th</sup> November 2019.

<sup>28</sup> Vincent Nwachinemere Agbalusi, 57 years, President, Kano Electrical Dealers Association (KEDA), in an interview with the researcher in his office (No. 56 Church Road, Sabon Gari, Kano) on 15<sup>th</sup> November 2019.

<sup>29</sup> Kabiru Dan Zaki, 63 years, Businessman, in an Interview with the researcher in his shop (48F opposite I.D.H Hospital France Road, Sabon Gari, Kano), 15<sup>th</sup> November 2019.

<sup>30</sup> *Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary*, 8<sup>th</sup> Edition.

achieved through apprenticeship in Igbo land. Even though the practice may not be a sole preserve of the Igbo, their enterprising nature, commitment and recorded successes over the years have distinguished them from other ethnic groups as far as the apprenticeship is concerned in Nigeria.<sup>31</sup> The practice is seen in various forms depending on the agreement between the master and the apprentice or the latter's parents/guardians. In all, whatever forms the agreements take, apprenticeship, as practised by the Igbo, can be categorized into two. They are the apprenticeship by learning and apprenticeship by service. In apprenticeship by learning, the apprentice stays with the master to learn the trade. In this case, the duration is usually short. For instance, 6 months to 2 years depending on when the apprentice is convinced that he has learnt enough. On the other hand, in the apprenticeship by service, the apprentice not only learns the trade but also renders services to his master even after learning.<sup>32</sup> Hence, the duration of this type of apprenticeship is usually longer when compared to that of learning. The duration ranges between 2 – 8 years depending on the age of the apprentice. In return for the services rendered, the master grants the apprentice capital to establish his own business. As a result of this, the apprentice is motivated to be diligent and patient during the period of learning and service. Apprenticeship by service is the most common type of practice among the building materials traders in Kano. This is because the trade is relatively capital intensive and the parents/guardian of the apprentice in most cases are not able to afford the start-up capital for their children.<sup>33</sup>

The role of apprenticeship in the success of the Igbo in the building materials trade as in other businesses cannot be exaggerated. The practice gives the apprentice mastery of the trade. During this period, the apprentice acquires knowledge of products; models, quality and other specifications that make selling easy. Equipped with such knowledge, it becomes much easier to convince prospective buyers. Besides, the apprentice acquires the virtue of patience in the course of the apprenticeship. This assists them in treating their customers like kings despite possible provocations.<sup>34</sup> Consequently, the practice inculcates the knowledge and virtue required not only to boost sales but also to guarantee customer loyalty.

### **IMPACT OF THE IGBO BUILDING MATERIALS TRADERS IN KANO**

Like other enterprises where the Igbo in Kano are involved, the building materials dealers impacted the economy of Kano society positively. They served as distributors of certain products thereby making them easily available to retailers and

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<sup>31</sup> E. T. Eyeh "History of Igbo Enterprises in Kano, Nigeria, 1960 – 2007", 63.

<sup>32</sup> E. T. Eyeh "History of Igbo Enterprises in Kano, Nigeria, 1960 – 2007", 157.

<sup>33</sup> Obiora Emeribe, 40 years, building materials dealer in an interview with the researcher in his shop (Katsina Road by Triumph, Kano) on 20<sup>th</sup> August 2018.

<sup>34</sup> Jude Iloka, 52 years, building materials dealer in an interview with the researcher in his shop (France Road, Kano) on 20<sup>th</sup> August 2018.

end users. In other words, the Igbo building materials dealers bridged the gap between the end users and the retailers on one hand and the manufacturers on the other. Even though these building materials are arguably not among the necessities in themselves, their end products like shelter, water, electricity etc. are essentials to the well-being of human life. Hence, the Igbo building materials dealers are involved indirectly in the provision of some of the necessities for the Kano populace.

It was also observed that some indigenes of Kano were employed either as salespersons or as apprentices to some of the Igbo building materials dealers in Kano. For instance, Emeka Daniel has Abubakar Inuwa and Ali Fagge working for him as salespersons for the past two years.<sup>35</sup> Besides the people that were directly employed by the Igbo building materials dealers, there were other people whose sources of livelihood depended on the activities of the Igbo building materials dealers. They include cart pushers, truck and taxi drivers, and other transporters who are involved in the transportation of the materials from the point of purchase to the destination of use by the buyer. Most of these materials used in building and construction are usually heavy and bulky. Iron rods, roofing sheets, cement, emulsion paints, armoured cables etc. to mention a few are heavy materials that cannot be easily carried around. Hence, the services of cart pushers, trucks and taxi drivers are needed to transport such items from the market to their point of use or storage. All of these beneficiaries of the Igbo building materials trade are provided with the opportunity of meeting their needs and contribute positively to the economy of Kano. This has a multiplier effect of reducing crime and social vices in society. Malam Abubakar Musa confirmed that he has been in the truck driving business for years. He stressed that he has been fending for his family through the transportation of building materials from the Kofar Ruwa market to other areas of Kano.<sup>36</sup> Kabiru Isah also disclosed that he has been in the business of transportation of building materials for the past 11 years.<sup>37</sup>

Some artisans like electricians, plumbers, welders etc. also rely on referrals from the Igbo building materials dealers for jobs. It is a common practice for buyers to seek the services of experienced and reliable artisans through referrals by the sellers of the building materials. Hence, the Igbo building materials dealers usually recommend trustworthy artisans who in most cases are also loyal customers to the dealers. By implication, the dealers link their customers to experienced artisans and employers respectively.

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<sup>35</sup> Emeka Daniel, 50 years, building materials dealer in an Interview with the researcher in his shop (Katsina Road, by Triumph) on 20<sup>th</sup> August 2018.

<sup>36</sup> Mal. Abubakar Musa, 56 years, Van driver in an interview with the researcher in Kofar Ruwar Market on 23<sup>rd</sup> October 2018.

<sup>37</sup> Kabiru Isah, 53 years, Van driver in an interview with the researcher in Kofar Ruwar Market on 23<sup>rd</sup> October 2018.

The Igbo building materials dealers in Kano like other businessmen in the area pay taxes and levies to the Kano State Government. They include personal income tax, business premises tax, sanitation levy etc. These taxes are paid to the State Government directly by individuals or through the trade union.<sup>38</sup> This forms part of the Internally Generated Revenue (IGR) of the state which is being used in the provision of social amenities and other developmental projects in the state as well as the payment of salaries of state government workers.

Because the Igbo usually take wherever they have settled in the diaspora as a home away from home, they are known for investing largely in their host communities. This is also true of the Igbo building materials dealers in Kano. Proceeds from the building materials trade are re-invested in other enterprises and even in real estate. Hence, several of the Igbo building materials traders built and owned houses in areas like Sabon Gari and Nomansland among other areas of the metropolis. They lived and rented out these buildings.<sup>39</sup>

Despite the eruption of crises from time to time, the Igbo building materials traders like other migrant traders in Kano continued to seek and maintain cordial relations with their neighbours and ensured a peaceful society under which their businesses thrived. The traders whose businesses were at stake in the event of hostilities always made deliberate efforts to foster cordial relations with their neighbours. The Igbo traders through their ethnic unions always tried to maintain peace and control the escalation of crises. In acknowledging the impact of the informal enterprises of the Igbo in uniting Nigerians, Meagher posits that while the political elites divided the people of Nigeria from above, the Igbo informal enterprises united them from below.<sup>40</sup> Despite the successes recorded by the Igbo building materials traders in Kano metropolis, there existed several challenges that confronted them and thereby limited the growth and expansion of their businesses in the area. They include insecurity, high cost of rent and levies, poor amenities, losses from accidents, high exchange rates, etc.

## **CONCLUSION**

The Igbo building materials dealers in Kano metropolis during the period under review contributed greatly to the development of Kano. Primarily, they played an essential role in the supply chain of assorted building materials which are necessities in the construction industry. Consequently, they contribute indirectly to

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<sup>38</sup> Vincent Nwachinemere Agbalusi, 57 years, President, Kano Electrical Dealers Association (KEDA), in an interview with the researcher in his office (No. 56 Church Road, Sabon Gari, Kano) on 15<sup>th</sup> November 2019.

<sup>39</sup> Kabiru Dan Zaki, 63 years, Businessman, in an Interview with the researcher in his shop (48F opposite I.D.H Hospital France Road, Sabon Gari, Kano), 15<sup>th</sup> November 2019.

<sup>40</sup> K. Meagher, "The Informalization of Belonging: Igbo Informal Enterprise and National Cohesion from Below", *Africa Development*, Vol. XXXIV, No.1. (2009): 44-45.

the provision of certain essential amenities like roads, housing, electricity, potable water etc. The dealers also create employment directly and indirectly for a good number of Kano indigenes. Some are employed as salespersons or apprentices while others are engaged in the transportation of building materials. The building materials dealers also recommend the services of some artisans to their customs. Hence, employment opportunities are created for these artisans (plumbers, electricians, etc.) through referrals. By creating employment, particularly for the youths, the rate of crime and social vices is reduced and security enhanced. The Igbo building materials traders also pay taxes and levies to the Kano State government. These constitute internally generated revenue (IGR) used in the payment of government workers and infrastructural development in the state. In terms of relations with their neighbours, the Igbo building materials dealers maintained cordial relations with their neighbours within and outside the market. However, it suffices to state that despite the conflicts that punctuated the peaceful relations between the Igbo and their host community generally, commercial activities continue to bond both groups together. The Igbo building materials dealers maintained law and order in the state. Despite their successes, the Igbo building materials dealers in Kano metropolis were faced with some challenges which include insecurity, high cost of rent and levies, poor amenities, high exchange rates, losses from accidents etc.

**Appendix 1: Table Showing the List of Selected Building Materials Businesses with Wives or Children as Partners**

S/N	AME OF BUSINESS	ADDRESS	PRODUCTS
1	Jude Iloka & Sons	France Road, Kano	Ceilings (POP and suspended) dealer
2	Kyriano Ventures	France Road, Kano	Assorted doors and key locks
3	humac Link Global Ltd.	No.4 32, Kofar Ruwa Market	Plumbing materials
4	C & B Ojinaka & Sons (Group) Co.	No.9 Kofar Ruwa Market	Electrical and Fabricating materials
5	Janco Steel Co. Ltd.	No. 186 Kofar Ruwa Market	Square pipes, sheets, bars, angle iron etc.

**Source:** fieldwork, 2019