



**ICHOKUECONOMICS: A PROFILE OF PROF. HYACINTH EMENTA
ICHOKU 'S PERSPECTIVES ON ECONOMICS AND DEVELOPMENT**

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Introduction

Ichokuconomics is a combination of two words, one Igbo and the other English. The Igbo word is Ichoku, which is not only a name but a philosophy. The second is economics which is an area of study. Put together it would mean the application of Ichoku philosophy to economic perspectives. This application is what gives it its name: Ichokuconomics.

Ichoku, among the Igbo of eastern Nigeria and West Africa, is the name of a bird known in English as Parrot. It is a small bird with colourful wings that inhabits the warmer parts of the African world. They feed on insects and seeds and are mostly found in many African homes for various reasons. Among other birds, Ichoku belongs to a distinguished class referred to as sacred birds or sacred animals. In Igbo religion as in some other world religions, animals belong to an important class of nature that feature prominently (Durkheim 1995). Gods were named after animals-like the goddess Epona in ancient Celtic religion whose name means Horse, whose icon includes a horse (Durkheim 2008). Different

communities and families hold different animals as sacred among the Igbo and they have some affinity with the clan or to be the manifestation of some spirit (Kanu 2015a; Aniako 1978, 1984, 2002). There are times the sacred animals are treated as the property of some deities (Achebe, 1982).

Animals such as the Parrot are considered sacred because the supernatural reveals himself in them. Boyle (1981) defines the sacred as the opposite of the profane. Mckenzie (1995) uses holiness and sacredness interchangeably. He further identifies the holy with the numinous, the mysterious quality of the divine, which is tremendous (fear) and at the same time fascinating (attracts). Hornby (1989) sees the sacred as something connected with religion, and for Haladus (1997), it is a relation between objective and transcendent reality and a man. Among the Igbo of Nigeria, Okeke (2008) avers that the terms sacred and profane throw light on the attitude the people adopt towards the world and material things. Thus Robertson (1971) thinks that "The sacred is to be treated with a certain specific attitude of respect" (p. 55). What makes animals sacred in African ontology is the spirit that is related to them. And because spirits dwell in them, these sacred animals possess great powers and are respected (Hemingway 1984; Metuh 1981).

Apart from being a sacred animal, the Igbo-African believes that the African parrot is a bird that is capable of seeing all and saying all. According to Adibe (2008) "The feather is regarded as the power of insight in the spirit world. The diviners use the feather in their caps and for other rituals. It is diviner's mystical symbol of sight and proclamation" (p. 214). It is also a sacred symbol of surveillance and, therefore, not killed or eaten.

The second word is economics. It can be defined as the field of study that concerns herself with the description and analysis of production, distribution and consumption of goods and services. This would concern

how changes in behaviours and economic agents can bring about changes in economies. The questions raised within economics include: why are some countries rich and some other countries poor? Why has income and wealth become unequally distributed in our world over the past few decades? What effect would growth or decrease in population have on the economy of a people? What would be the consequence of particular actions or economic choices of policies on the economy of a people? What economics does as a discipline is to help respond to these questions among others (Kanu 2018).

In relating Ichoku with economics, economics provides the central context for the application of the Ichoku perspective. The Ichoku perspective provides a basis for an economic pathway that can stand the taste of time. The first element it brings into economics is foresight- with the benefit of foresight anchored on grounded hindsight, better economic policies are made. Ichokuconomics is, therefore, an economic perspective that takes into cognizance the importance of hindsight and foresight, which are indispensable for a sound economic perspective.

Perspectives in Economics and Development

This section of the paper focuses on the different economic and development perspectives of Prof. Ichoku which has been categorized as Ichokuconomics. This perspective is based on the quality of his person and the depth of his principles anchored on foresight, however, with the benefit of hindsight.

a. Poverty and Spacial Variables

There are spatial factors that influence the distribution of poverty in multiple dimensions. This is based on the spatial nature of a place in terms of geographical characteristics and how these influence incidence of poverty which has not been investigated in a multidimensional

framework. To understand this connection between poverty and spacial factors, there is a need to employ spatial regression analysis. The studies of Prof. Ichoku show that some spatial variables such as households' distance to the nearest major road, annual precipitation, and precipitation of the wettest month significantly determine the spatial distribution of poverty in Africa. One key policy message from the findings of his work is that spatial factors need to be considered during the distribution and allocation of resources to eradicate or alleviate poverty in the state (Olowu Ichoku and Nwosu 2018).

In another research, focusing on terrorism, Ichoku observes that poverty may not act as a significant factor that spurs the level of terrorist activities. He investigated the influence of poverty on terrorism in 26 African countries from 2000 to 2017 in a panel data environment. Findings from the two-stage least square regression, with standard errors which are heteroscedastic and autocorrelation consistent, show that poverty significantly raises the level of terrorism incidents. However, after accounting for unobserved heterogeneity, he finds that the positive relationship between poverty and terrorism becomes insignificant. Further findings employing the instrumental variable quantile regression with fixed effects show that the existing levels of terrorism incidents matter for the impact of poverty on terrorism incidents. The result shows that the impact of poverty on terrorism is only significant at the median. Furthermore, economic growth, political stability, income inequality, and unemployment matter for terrorism in Africa. The study highlights that poverty is not a determining factor for terrorism in Africa when compared to economic growth, political stability, and unemployment. Recommendations are such that inclusive growth, political stability, and unemployment reduction should be prioritized in Africa (Iheonu and Ichoku 2021).

b. Healthcare Income Distribution

The deregulation of healthcare financing and supply in Africa has shifted the healthcare system towards competitive market ideals. Households' decision to utilize healthcare is identical to healthcare financing. This financing arrangement has the potential for income redistribution in a society with already high levels of inequality in resource redistribution. The position of Prof. Ichoku is based on his study of the extent to which the system of healthcare financing leads to catastrophic expenditures, defined as a threshold percentage of a household's income, and the extent of impoverishment arising from healthcare spending. His study employed Aronson, Johnson, and Lambert's decomposition framework to analyze re-distributive effects in terms of vertical and horizontal inequities, as well as the re-ranking effect. He discovers that healthcare spending engenders a high incidence of catastrophic spending and impoverishment in the population and that healthcare spending is pro-rich in its re-distributive effect, with significant vertical and horizontal inequities as well as re-ranking inherent in the system. He, therefore, proposes policy reforms that separate healthcare utilization from healthcare financing, that is, if the poor are to have access to healthcare services (Ichoku and Fonta 2006).

In another research, Prof. Ichoku reviews the changing political undercurrent in health service delivery in Sub-Saharan Africa, chronicling the ideological shift in orientation toward neoliberalism in the health sector, an ideology crafted and introduced into Sub-Saharan Africa by the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank. He examined the implication of this neoliberal reform on the efficiency of healthcare provision and the quality and accessibility of health services for the poor and vulnerable. Drawing an inference from countries in Africa, he argues that the ascendancy of neoliberalism in the health systems of Sub-Saharan Africa has engendered unethical practices and introduced elements of moral hazard in the health sector, reducing the incentive for governments

to develop effective service delivery over the long term. He, therefore, advocated for a rejection of neoliberal ideology in favour of a universal coverage principle if an inclusive health system is to be developed (Ichoku and Ifelunini 2017).

Attempts to examine health financing mechanisms in Nigeria highlight the fact that there is no single mechanism that fits all contexts and people. This prompted Prof. Ichoku to do an in-depth assessment of different health financing mechanisms in Nigeria. His study was undertaken in the Federal Capital Territory of Nigeria and two States (Niger and Kaduna). Data were collected through a review of government documents, and in-depth interviews of purposively selected respondents. Data analysis was guided by a conceptual framework which draws from various approaches for assessing health financing mechanisms. Data was examined for current practices, what needs to change and how the change can happen. Health financing mechanisms in Nigeria do not operate optimally. Allocation and use of resources are neither evidence-based nor results-driven. Resources are not allocated equitably or in a manner that minimizes wastage and improves efficiency. None of the mechanisms effectively protects individuals/households from catastrophic health expenditure. Issues with social health insurance cut across legal frameworks and the use of Health Maintenance Organisations (HMOs) as purchasers. The concomitant effect is that the attainment of Universal Health Coverage is greatly compromised. To improve the efficiency of health financing mechanisms, the government needs to allocate more funds for purchasing health services; this spending must be based on evidence (strategic), and appropriately tracked. The legislation that established National Health Insurance Scheme should be amended such that social health insurance becomes mandatory for all citizens. Implementation of the latter should be complemented by revision of the benefit package, strict oversight and regulation of HMOs. To improve

health financing in the country, legal and regulatory frameworks need to be revised. Efficient utilization of resources could be improved through strategic purchasing arrangements and strict oversight. (Onwujekwe, Ezumah, Mbachu, Ichoku 2019, et al).

c. Child Health Management

The free Maternal and Child Health Program (FMCHP) was implemented in 12 states in Nigeria by the National Health Insurance Scheme (NHIS), between 2009 and 2015, using funds from the debt relief gains. It was called the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) NHIS-MDG FMCHP. The program ended with the termination of the MDG in 2015. With the creation of the Basic Health Care Provision Fund (BHC PF) in Nigeria, Prof. Ichoku studied the past implementation experiences of the NHIS-MCH project to identify the enabling and constraining factors to program implementation, and the opportunities for adaptation and program scale-up in Nigeria using the BHC PF. The study was undertaken in the Federal Capital Territory, Abuja, and involved a review of relevant documents and in-depth interviews with 21 key informants. The program was assessed in themes from the conceptual framework. Interviews were transcribed and analyzed using thematic analysis. The program enrolled about 1.5 million pregnant women and children during the period of implementation in the country. The respondents perceived the program as pro-poor, efficient, and effective, and led to a marked improvement in the functionality of the facilities, availability of services and reduced out-of-pocket expenditure, which led to increased demand and utilization of MCH services. There was inadequate stakeholder consultation, alleged corrupt practices, challenges with registration, issues with counterpart funding and public financing management issues identified. Most respondents supported the idea of using the new fund (BHC PF) to revitalize/scale up the Free MCH program. His study highlights the key lessons and implementation challenges identified by the respondents. The

NHIS-MDG FMCHP had a positive impact on the target population though it was not sustained following the conclusion of the MDG program. The findings will inform policy decisions about the appropriateness of sustaining the program and the feasibility of extending healthcare coverage using the proposed BHCPF. The new fund (BHCPF) can be used to reactivate and scale up the Free MCH program, but the current level of funding will not assure universal health coverage for the target beneficiaries as realized from the costing aspect of this study (Onwujekwu, Obi, Ichoku 2019).

In another research, he observed that the health system in many parts of Nigeria has been dysfunctional in several domains including financing, human resources, infrastructure, health management information system and hospital services. In an attempt to scale up Maternal and Child Health (MCH) services and ensure efficiency, Ebonyi State Government in Southeast Nigeria provided funding to mission hospitals across the State as a grant. His study used a nonparametric method to assess the effect of this public financing on the efficiency of mission hospitals. Operational cost and number of hospital beds were used as the input variables, while antenatal registrations, number of immunization doses and hospital deliveries were the output variables. The hospitals were disaggregated into 15 hospital years. The mean overall technical efficiency of the mission hospitals was 84.05 22.45%. The mean pure technical efficiency was 95.56±6.9% and the scale efficiency was 88.05±22.20%. About 46.67% of all the hospital years were technically and scale-efficient. Although, 55.33% were generally inefficient, only 33.33% of hospital-years exhibited pure technical inefficiency. Low immunization coverage was the major cause of inefficiency. The study showed increased maternal health service output as a result of public funding or intervention; however, the mission hospitals could have saved 16% of input resources if they had performed efficiently. It also shows that data envelopment analysis can be used in

setting targets/benchmarks for relatively inefficient health facilities, and in monitoring the impact of interventions on the efficiency of hospitals over time (Aloh, Onwujekwu, Ichoku, Osigwe 2019).

The Nigerian government launched a pilot health project, titled the “NHIS-MDG free Maternal and Child Health Program” in 2018. The program focuses to address the critical problem of access to health care services for pregnant women and children under five years in the country and to accelerate the achievement of two of the three health-specific MDGs (4&5). The program was implemented in some states in Nigeria between 2009 and 2015 using funds from debt relief gains. The funds were directly disbursed by the MDG office in the presidency to the NHIS for use in providing services to beneficiaries in the implementing states. Prof. Ichoku's study assessed the implementation experiences of the free maternal and child healthcare program (FMCHP) to identify achievements and challenges faced by the program for reactivation and scale-up in Niger State, Nigeria. He discovered that the FMCHP has positive improvements and increased service utilization as a result of the availability and accessibility of services offered. It also led to a marked improvement in the quality of health facilities. Most importantly, the removal of financial barriers to accessing health care within the implementation period. However, non-payment of full counterpart funds affected the program's continuity. Other health system factors that negatively affected the program were inadequate human resources resulting from the increased workload, weak monitoring and Health Information Management System (Ezenwaka, Onwujekwu, Ichoku, 2019).

d. Farmers and Livelihood Diversification

Farmers' life without livelihood diversification into off-farm and non-farm income activities becomes difficult due to the unstable and meagre

agricultural context of the study area. Farm income alone cannot feed the ever-increasing population. Hence, livelihood diversification is a matter of life or death for the majority of the households in the study district. Prof. Ichoku has been interested in identifying household livelihood diversification options; identifying reasons why smallholder farmers need to diversify, and analyzing the implication of livelihood diversification strategies on smallholder farmers' income. His study found that 43% of the overall annual income of the farmers comes from off-farm and non-farm activities. This implies that non-farm and off-farm activities have significant implications for improving farmers' livelihoods. Therefore, more efforts are required from the regional government on supporting livelihood diversification into off-farm and non-farm activities than sticking to the drought-vulnerable, limited farm-land and rain-dependent farm income (Gebru, Ichoku and Phil-Eze 2018).

e. Terrorism, Economic Growth and Military Expenditure

Prof. Ichoku also investigated the influence of military expenditure on the relationship between terrorism and investment in twenty-four African countries for the period 2001 to 2018. The study utilized fixed effects regression with Driscoll and Kraay standard error and cushions the effect of simultaneity and reverse causality using the lags of the regressors as instruments. The empirical results reveal the negative effect of terrorism on both domestic investment and foreign direct investment (FDI). The study further reveals a negative net effect of military expenditure on the relationship between terrorism and investment. Furthermore, it was discovered that a threshold of 2% to 5% of military expenditure in GDP is required for military expenditure to offset the negative effect of terrorism on FDI. The study recommends that counter-terrorism initiatives be tailored more towards inclusive growth policies, increasing access to education, and improving the quality of governance. Two research objectives motivated this study: to understand the effect of terrorist

activities on economic performance in Africa and to examine whether military expenditure can effectively offset the hypothetical negative effect of terrorism on economic performance in Africa. (Iheonu and Ichoku 2022).

Prof. Ichoku also discovered that across African countries, terrorism has become a major challenge to socioeconomic development. While there are studies that have examined the influence of terrorism on economic growth, his research adds to the existing literature by investigating the role of military expenditure on the relationship between terrorism and economic growth in Africa. The study utilised a dataset comprising 24 African countries for which terrorism activities have increased substantially in the last decades. Utilising an instrumental variable Fixed Effects model with standard errors that account for cross-sectional dependence, serial correlation and group-wise heteroskedasticity, the study revealed that, (1) terrorism has a detrimental effect on economic growth in the selected African countries, (2) the interactive effect of military expenditure and terrorism on economic growth is significantly positive, (3) the net effect of military expenditure on the relationship between terrorism and economic growth is positive when the number of terrorism incidents acts as a proxy for terrorism but negative when the number of terrorism fatalities acts as a proxy for terrorism. However, this negative effect is substantially lower when compared to the unconditional effect of terrorism on economic growth in Africa (Iheonu and Ichoku 2021).

Conclusion

The foregoing presentation of the perspectives of Prof. Hyacinth Ementa Ichoku has been put together and captured: Ichokuconomics. The use of the concept Ichokuconomics speaks more of the thread that holds his perspectives together, a kind of common denominator in his works.