

Local Governance Strategies of Okpoko Community in Onitsha to Access Water

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Acronyms

ASWC	Anambra State Water Corporation
CDU	Community Development Union
LGA	Local Government Area

Executive Summary

This study focuses on the dimensions of traditional and governmental urban processes in Onitsha, Anambra State, using access to water as a case example. The findings provide insight into urban-services arrangements across Anambra State and how various stakeholders and interest groups negotiate the processes of service delivery. They also indicate the loopholes of such processes. First, the study shows that the formal-democratic government in Onitsha plays no role in the provision of water, nor does it play a regulatory role in checking water quality, which in turn implies that there is a huge deficit in access to water, particularly in low-income areas where the quality of self-provided water is found to be highly unsafe. Second, it finds that the study community, the Okpoko community, has not had any formal governance structure in the last 16 years. This community is essentially self-governed and has no support from the traditional, local or state government.

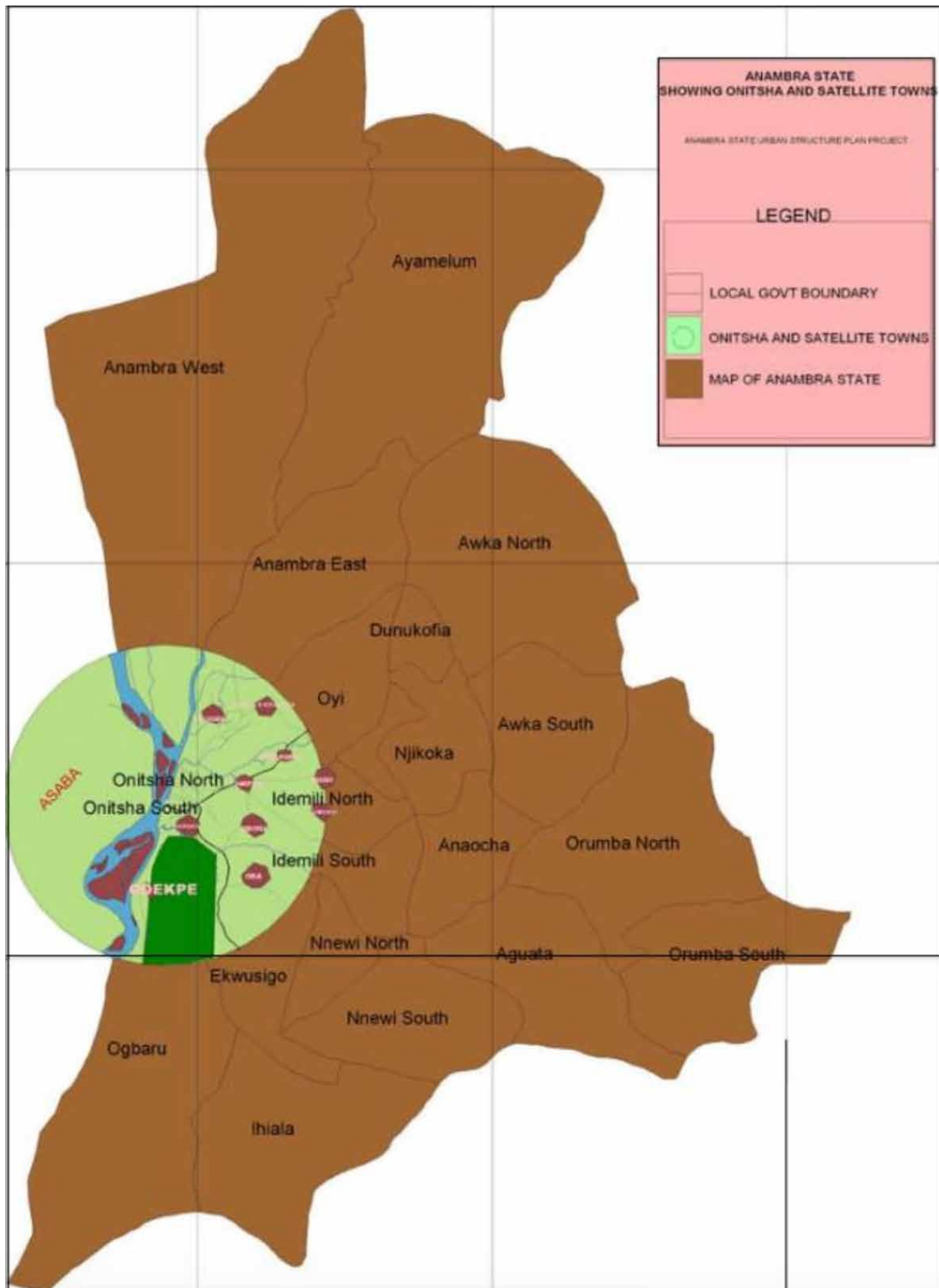
The community is led by a democratically elected president-general, as opposed to the traditional representative that is common in Anambra State. Ironically, this structure of communal leadership is the major cause of the community's exclusion by the state and local governments, which have attempted over the years to interfere in the community's governance structure and impose their chosen community leader on the people. The community members believe that government interference is due to a vested interest in their community land and an attempt of land-grabbing.

Overall, the findings indicate constraints in the institutional governance processes in the city of Onitsha with respect to their authority and discretion to deliver services, and highlight lapses of traditional and community leadership. While community organization and traditional leadership are usually vital ingredients in effective urban services management, the findings of this report suggest that city governance in Onitsha is often disconnected from the realities of service provision and that formal-democratic governance structures lack the political will and power to provide such services at the community level. Not unexpectedly, the role of women, although significant at the community level, is marginalized when it comes to governance processes for service delivery.

Onitsha as an Emerging City

Due to its strategic location and extensive commercial activities, the city of Onitsha has attracted migrants throughout its history. The UN-Habitat Urban Edge Exhibition Report (2010) projects Onitsha as one of the fastest-growing cities in the world. Much of its rapid expansion has been credited to a robust economy driven by commercial activities at the four principal markets: Otu Nkwo (known as the Main Market), Ose Okwodu, Ochanja Relief, and Niger Bridge Head. These markets are a key driver of trade in the state, with the Onitsha Main Market being perhaps the largest in Africa in terms of its geographical size and the number of goods traded. It is also a regional powerhouse in West Africa (Ochia, 1989), patronized by merchants from Accra, Abidjan, Douala, Niamey, Cotonou, and elsewhere. Major merchants from eastern Nigeria have head offices within the market. Onitsha is also a centre for the financing and distribution of Nollywood films.

Onitsha is the gateway to eastern Nigeria and one of the strongest economic hubs in Nigeria (UN-Habitat, 2012), alongside cities like Lagos and Kano. Strategically located on the eastern bank of the River Niger, it can be accessed by the east-west national road routes from Lagos to Benin that link eastern regions of the north and south through the Niger Bridge in Onitsha. The city is divided into two main local government areas (LGAs), Onitsha North and South, with four other LGAs – Ogbaru, Oyi, Orumba North, and South – under the two main ones.

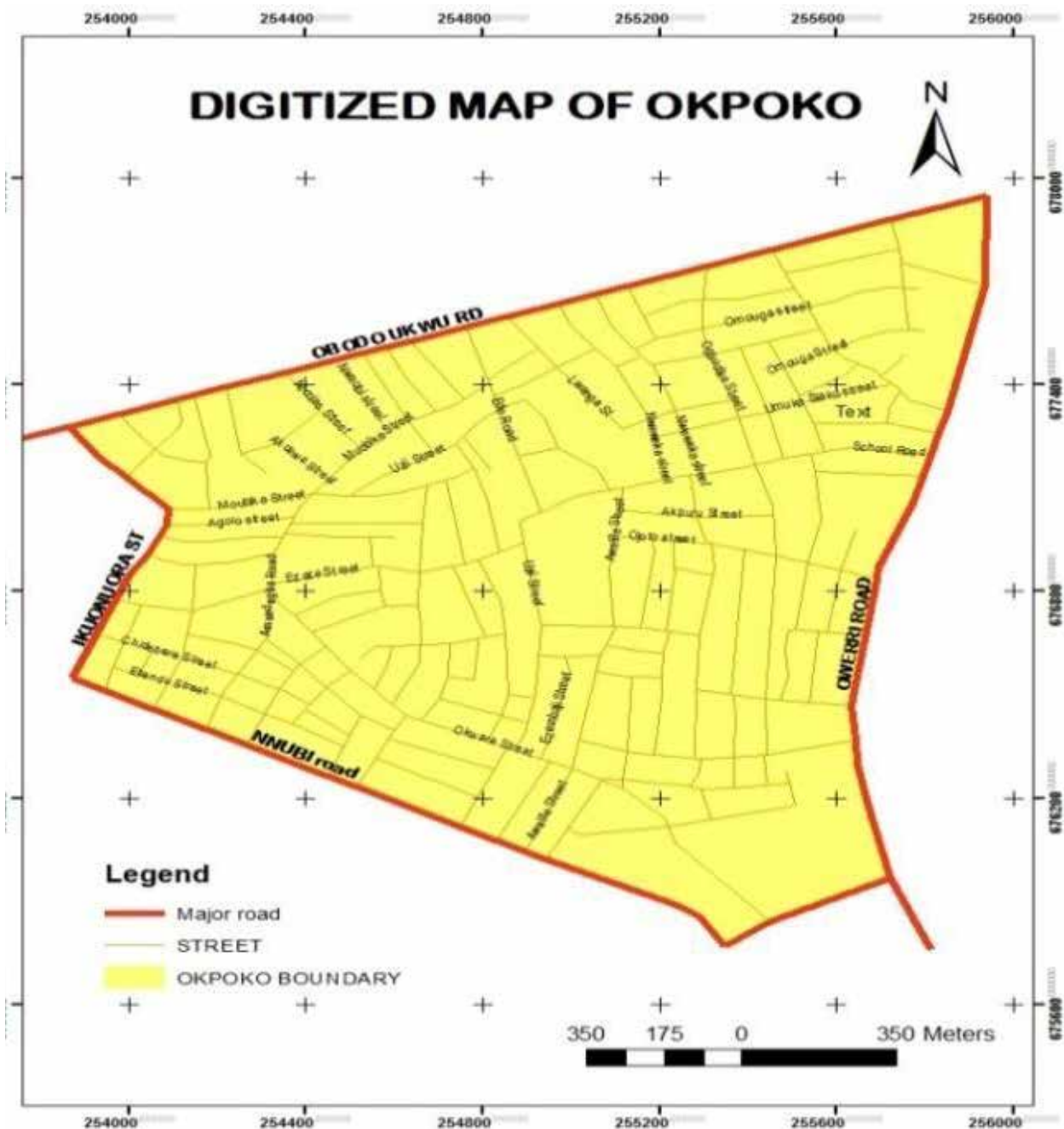


Map of Anambra State Showing Onitsha Metropolis (UN-Habitat, 2009)

Onitsha has experienced rapid and extensive population growth in recent years (Izueke and Eme, 2013) and is faced with myriad complex challenges. Given its importance, not just in Nigeria but across West Africa, any interventions must start by understanding how the city is governed and how it functions in terms of governance structures and responsiveness.

Okpoko community

The UN-Habitat (2012) report classifies Okpoko as the biggest urban slum in eastern Nigeria. It is located in the Ogbaru LGA, which is situated between the Relief Market and the Main Market in the southwest area of Onitsha. It borders the River Niger in the west and the Onitsha–Enugu Expressway in the north. The western region contains the Industrial Layout, where the SABMiller brewery is located, while the eastern layout is residential, bordering Onitsha Owerri Road and Obosi community and, on the south, Odekpe and Atani communities.



Map of Okpoko Slum Settlement (Onwuzuligbo et al., 2017)

In 1978, the population of the Okpoko community was estimated at 31,000; in 2008, UN-Habitat (2009) estimated its total population at 128,000 people. That report also projects an annual population growth rate of 2.83%, a projection based on the 2006 Anambra State National Population Commission (NPC) report. Using this growth rate, the size of the Okpoko community

today has increased exponentially, attracting an estimate of 44,000 people per hectare in 1998 (UNHabitat, 2009;2012b). Okpoko occupies 291.967 hectares (UN Habitat, 2009). It has a high population of low-income earners, comprising mainly of traders, artisans and farmers living with their families. Although densely populated, it lacks all of the basic social goods and services necessary for a functioning society and a good quality of life (AURECON, 2014). The housing units are extremely poor, uncompleted and unsafe; with wooden windows and very little ventilation. Generally, there are approximately four to six adults with children occupying a room of about 3.5 m by 4.0, (UN Habitat, 2009). Some of the houses are also in between bushes, ditches and gutters created by erosion that has emerged over the years. This community has very few drainage pathways and is prone to heavy flooding during the rainy season. Additionally, it has very poor waste management and sanitation, thus, waste disposal and open defecation are done in public and unsafe places. During the course of this study, the community indicates, this has a huge impact on the quality of water in the community, for example, the community reports an epidemic of smelly and colourful water as a result of improper waste management and open defecation.

The community is self-organized and informally governed. According to the oral history of community members, this community was divided into six main zones in the early 1990s for easier management. Every three years, the community's informal governing council organizes a general election to choose a community leader, popularly known as the president-general. The elected president-general then appoints officials to assist in the governance of the community for the duration of the term. These officials include a commandant (chief security officer), a youth leader, a secretary, a public health and sanitation officer and a women's leader. The Community Development Union (CDU) is made up of members appointed by the governing council under the president-general's office. The people of Okpoko, through their CDU, have established and financed a community secretariat with three functional magistrate courts. The community members explained that, since they are a big community that has been neglected by the government, they have had to come together to develop and sustain their own self-organized governance structures.

Methodology in Field Research

This study uses focus group discussions, oral histories of the community and governance structure, a community scorecard, participant observations, and structured interviews. A total number of 18 community members participated in the data collection; with 4 women and 14 men. The CDU representatives nominees consisted of two women from the market women's association and two men from the health and sanitation union of the CDU. At the first meeting with the community, the community scorecard was thoroughly discussed and explained as scoring the water availability, cost, quality and management in the community, on a scale of 1 (low) – 10 (high). The discussion and interview questions were designed to elicit opinions, perspectives, attitudes and sentiments about traditional and formal governance processes in the community. At the state level, structured interviews were conducted with the commissioner for public water and the director for water resources.

The participant observation process involved walk-along observation of how six households accessed water for two days. Prior to this, the two participating female household heads were interviewed about the process and its generic implications. Twelve water sources were visited within the two-day period and key stakeholders – including the water-site manager and Catholic and Anglican priests – were also part of those interviews. Finally, the stakeholders' feedback

meeting was an occasion to present initial findings and to get the community’s reaction as well as clarifications of these findings by all state and non-state stakeholders, except the religious leaders.

The case of the Okpoko community

Community governance structure

Although the community is strategically positioned within the city, the administrative office of its local government is located very far away due to the huge geographical size of the local government, which makes grassroots accessibility difficult. It is hard for the state and even the local government to know what is happening there. About 80% of the community members are not originally from Anambra state; most are from Enugu, Abia and Ebonyi States. More recently, very poor people have arrived from northern Nigeria.

Since 1960, the community has been – informally - governed by a president-general supported by the governing council and the Okpoko Community Development Union. As mentioned above, the president-general is elected through a democratic process for a three-year term in an election self-organized by the community members, while the Community Development Union representatives are appointed by the ruling president-general. The president-general can seek re-election or run again in the future. Presently, the Okpoko community is headed by Hon. Edwin Emesinna, who is originally from Imo State. He previously governed the community as president-general from 2007 to 2009.

Structure	Description
President-General	Elected by the community for a three-year term, can seek re-election or contest again another time. This position is equivalent to that of a traditional community ruler and should, according to the community, represent the community at the Obi of Onitsha Council, as mandated by the state Constitution
Governing Council	An appointed cabinet made up of sub-unit leaders that include literate youth, women, and men
Community Development Union	Representatives of all sub-units within the community, nominated by the governing council to serve the community in core areas
Local Government	Okpoko is under the jurisdiction of Ogbaru LGA, which is very far away and has no presence in this community, nor does the community have responsive access to it

Overview of Governance Structure in Okpoko Community

Source: Field research in November 2019–January 2020

Traditionally, Onitsha is administered by the Obi of Onitsha, a paramount traditional leader whose council of governance is assisted by a hierarchy of male and female chiefs and various gender- and age-group associations. The male chiefs consist of Ndi Ichie (Red Cap Chiefs) and Agbalanze Society (Ozo-titled), who represent various lineages and regions in Onitsha, the Agbalaniregwu, and the Council of State, which is made up of prominent male titleholders representing the various descent and regions of Onitsha. The women’s hierarchy within the Obi of Onitsha Council consists of the Omu (queen of Onitsha), Otu Odu (titled women), Ikporo Onitsha (married women),

as well as the Unuada Inyemesi and the UmuAgbogo (young women) groups.

The male chiefs, the Ndi Ichie, are mainly responsible for advising the Obi on general and emergency issues as custodians of welfare, security and prosperity in the city of Onitsha. The Onitsha Progressive Union is a city development union made up of representatives from all zones and communities appointed by the respective traditional community rulers across Onitsha. The union relates directly with the Obi of Onitsha and is expected to lobby the state and local governments for the provision of basic services and participation in project planning processes at the state, LGA and community levels. In practice, the union is mostly involved in collecting market levies from traders on behalf of the state and local governments. There is currently no evidence suggesting that the Onitsha Progressive Union has successfully fulfilled its mandate so far. For example, the lack of access to water in Onitsha is a city-wide problem.

Various villages and communities are represented by their chiefs at the Obi of Onitsha Council. This accords them the right to be recognized by the state laws and to approach the Obi's Council for dispute settlement and other forms of intervention. Although this traditional governance structure should include the Okpoko community, the findings suggest otherwise. Okpoko is a non-indigenous community: most residents have moved from other states some decades ago. As such, they established a communal leadership structure with an elected president-general in place of the traditional rulership by a chief. The study suggests that this is the main reason for their exclusion, marginalization and discrimination by the LGA, state and traditional government. Nevertheless, President-General Emesinna says there is no alternative for Okpoko:

As a diverse community with various ethnic groups, if we were to use the traditional rulership structure, who could be chosen? What the government wants is to frustrate us so that they can use the opportunity to always pick a leader for us, whether it is in our interest or not. I believe that, as a people, we have a right to pick our own community leader and the government should leave us alone.

The president-general proposes that, as a non-indigenous community, their unity is their strength and splitting it into the kind of ethnic gatherings and associations that are seen in Lagos could be disruptive. One exception is the people from northern Nigeria, whose insistence on forming a Hausa association is the main reason why they are not fully integrated. The president-general explained, *"We have people from Akwa Ibom and Ebonyi State in our governing council, but the Hausa people do not want to mix and always stay on their own. We cannot force them to accept this community as their own."*

Access to water in Okpoko

The Okpoko community is seemingly abandoned by the government and this has intensified their dependence on the informal communal self-governance structure. For example, the CDU is in charge of security and safeguarding the community. In 2012, it turned an abandoned police station into a community security office, which is financed and managed by the community members. Commandant Victor Okpara, the chief security officer of Okpoko, said:

Every last Saturday of the month, we go from house to house to collect the monthly security levy and people are always outside waiting with their monies to pay. Community members are paying the monthly security levy without failure because all of us know the importance of security, and since the government is not providing this, so we have to do it ourselves.

The Okpoko security union is mainly in charge of securing two of the biggest markets in the city, the Relief Market and the Onitsha Main Market, which lie on its borders. Funding is done through the household levy as well as a security levy paid by market traders. It is vital to note that these market traders, many of them from the Okporo community, concurrently pay daily taxes to the LGA and state government without getting any service in return.

“When it is time for general elections,” the president-general said,

the government will come to lobby for votes in our community. After elections, they started using various means to try and destroy the democratic governance structures that we the people have developed and sustained over the years, pushing the agenda that we are not from Ogbaru LGA or from Anambra. If I am good enough to vote for a governor as an Imo State indigene in a prominent community in Anambra State, then my people’s vote for me should be allowed to stand.

Community members unanimously indicated that the main reason why the LGA is marginalizing the Okpoko community is that the president-general is from Imo State. The state government, in collaboration with the local government, has been trying to impose an indigenous person from Ogbaru LGA as a community leader. As at the time of this study, the community filed a legal case against the state government for interference and failure to acknowledge their leadership structure. This is because the state presented a candidate for the election and declared him the community leader even though he lost the vote. This state-imposed person, who the community terms illegal, currently resides at the state government secretariat without having access to the community secretariat. On the other side, the community elected candidate presently governs from the community secretariat alongside the community governing council without any support from the state and local government. The community fears that the government wants to evacuate the people through forced evictions once its candidate is imposed.

Apart from the political implications, there are also loopholes in the administrative processes, unclear institutional jurisdiction and overlapping duties between the state and local governments. Most striking is the inconsistency between the regulatory role of the state Ministry of Public



Formal-democratic government in Onitsha plays no role in the provision of water or checking water quality. Therefore, there is a huge deficit in access to water, particularly in low-income areas.



Utilities and the conflicting implementing roles of the Anambra State Water Corporation (ASWC) and the local governments. In an interview, the representative from the ministry suggested that the lack of safe and clean water in the state is due to the collapse of the ASWC's board in 2003, which was due to lapses in financial and administrative challenges. The 2015 Anambra State Water Law sought to create a framework for effective water management and delivery by making the ASWC the key implementer and direct regulator and by placing the ministry in a supervisory role, including liaising with end-users. The absence of a board at the Water Corporation up to today makes it impossible for the state or the local government to intervene in how water is accessed, regulated or managed across the state.

Governments, international donor agencies and civil society organizations have all, at some point, been involved in development projects to improve the living conditions of the Okpoko community. Between 2006 and 2012, the European Union and UNICEF, in a collaborative effort with the state and the local government, embarked on a slum upgrading programme. It focused on improved access to water, waste management and environmental sanitation. From July 1981 to July 1991, the World Bank, in collaboration with the state government, implemented a state-wide US\$67-million water project that included the city of Onitsha. Data provided by the state ministry of public utilities suggest that this project collapsed as soon as it ended. According to government officials, this was largely due to the community members' attitude towards it, stating as well that this is also the key reason why there is no state involvement in providing public goods and services in this community.

The community sees both of these projects as huge failures, as their living conditions have since deteriorated. They also confirmed that there has not been any state-initiated or -funded project in this community in the last 16 years. Presently, there are no donor- or state-funded water projects in the community. Within the study area within Okpoko community, zone 5 and 6, the main and available sources of water are privately-owned boreholes by political elites, abandoned government water projects that have been revitalized by the churches and are managed by the community, rainwater harvesting, streams, and individually owned shallow wells.

At the insistence of women from the community, the Catholic and the Anglican churches revived three abandoned water projects, among them a solar-powered water project in a local secondary school that was built by Médecins Sans Frontières in 2018 (although the solar pump was stolen shortly after installation). Eight abandoned government and civil society projects didn't function beyond a three-month period. Community members think that these projects failed because they were planned and implemented without their involvement. According to one woman leader, *"NGOs and governments just come to our community and mount these projects and go, without involving us and handing it over to us. Who do they expect to manage it? And if no entity is responsible for handling it, how will it last?"* This was identified as the main reason why water projects have not been sustainable in the Okpoko community. The vandalization of projects serves to express displeasure with the fact that projects are often contracted to vested interests and that neither the government nor the contractor engages with the people in project development and implementation. For example, since 2015, every election season, the state government would revive water projects that are located in the compound of a preferred candidate and such projects immediately cease to exist after the election period.

Findings suggest the main sources of water in the Okpoko community can be classified into the following categories:(1) social; (2) private; (3)cart pushers (4) non-functional public, (5) rainwater harvesting and (6) sachet water (please see table 2).

The social water project is a collaborative project between local religious entities and by the community women association. At the cost of N20 per 10l, this source of water is the cheapest as it is not profit-driven and all the revenue generated is spent on administrative and maintenance costs. The private water source was revamped during the 2019 elections on the land of a local politician who provided free water for all community members during the election period, to just restrict access 5 days after his electoral defeat. As mentioned above, the borehole is now run as a private business and remains, despite the high cost of N90 per 20L one of the few available sources of drinkable water in the Okpoko community. The water provided by other private boreholes often has a bad smell/taste and brownish colour, contributing, according to community health representatives from the CDU, to growing water-related diseases and infection rates particularly affecting women and children. Sachet water, which is produced in a factory owned by the same local politician, would be the safest source of drinking water, though many household representatives indicate that the price of a bag of 20 sachets varying from 150 to 250 Naira is not affordable for them. Cart pushers demand N70 per 10L, the water is mainly used by local restaurants in the open markets. Other public boreholes have not functioned since 2003.

Source	Price	Providers	Reliability	Use
Water cart pushers	N70 per 10 liters	Water pushers (tenants/migrant workers from the north/Hausa tribe); mostly available in open markets	Not reliable	Drinking, cooking
Social Development Project	N20 per 10 litres	Catholic and Anglican churches; managed by CDU women	Most reliable	Drinking
Sachet	N150–250 per bag of 20 sachets	Local entrepreneurs (private local factory owned by political elite)	Reliable; price fluctuations during festive seasons	Drinking
Private provider	N90 per 20 litres	Private provider: political elite mentioned above	Reliable; expensive, sometimes bad taste and colour	Washing, drinking (after boiling)
Public boreholes		Government; usually installed during election period & CSO source	None have functioned since 2012	Cooking, drinking

Summary of water sources in Okpoko community

Source: Field research in December 2019–January 2020

Accessing water has over the years been a main source of conflicts for the community. About six ago, community members attacked private contractors who were mandated by government to dig boreholes, without considering the needs and seeking participation of the community. It eventually led to a security crisis, prompting the community to try a more peaceful approach. It realised that the violent attacks had a negative impact on its reputation and actually fuelled and justified its marginalization and exclusion by the government. However, six years later, the peaceful approach also seems to have left the community vulnerable to vested political interests and more government indifference.

In the meantime, the water department of the Ministry of Public Utilities meant to supervise the Anambra State Water Corporation, has continued to exist despite the collapse of the corporation

in 2003. It was not able to provide public water to the city of Onitsha or the state of Anambra since then, raising the question: what has the water department been doing? Interactions with community members and ministry officials reveal that the state government, through the Ministry of Public Utilities, has continually contracted private individuals to implement water projects throughout this period. Seemingly, this was done like in the Okpoko community, without community involvement and a maintenance strategy as such projects were later neglected and left unregulated by the state. At best, the state government seems indifferent to the lack of water and exonerates itself from its responsibilities by blaming community members for vandalizing the equipment. This line of argument implies that a behavioural change of the end-users would solve the problem of project sustainability. It is a tactic often used by all levels of government in Nigeria to divert blame for their own failures, their inability to govern effectively, and the corruption in the system.

The community itself has proven that it is able to sustain a self-organized water supply, as shown by the revitalized access they achieved with assistance from the churches. All it seems to need is respect for the community's leadership when implementing such a project and the adoption of an inclusive approach to create community ownership: largely driven by the community women's association and with technical support from the Anglican and Catholic churches in the community, three abandoned water projects, among them a solar-powered water project in a local secondary school that was built by Médecins Sans Frontières in 2018 (although the solar pump was stolen shortly after installation) were revived. The women's groups approached church representatives to share their grief over the lack of water and, in various consultation processes, were able to get the churches to invest financially to revive the abandoned projects. The women's associations now manage the water sites; water is sold for N20 per 10 liters. The water is available to all community members regardless of their religion. The income generated is saved in a community development water-management account and used to pay for the services of the site managers and for maintenance. The church leaders take an explicitly apolitical stand, assuming the role of an impartial fund manager. Management practices are in line with the usual transparency and accountability rules of the churches and include avenues for any member of the churches to review the income and expenditures at monthly community meetings. This seems to be one of the reasons for the smooth running of the water sources and is in stark contrast with the lack of transparency and accountability from the state and local government.

The Okpoko community has only limited technical capacity to demand transparency and accountability from the LGA and state government and the one-sided power dynamic of the government against the people makes empowering this community with the right skills and technical support crucial for governance improvement. Although the community development association is a registered organization, recognized by the Anambra State government at all levels, its governing council lacks the basic skills that could enhance productivity in their various internal and external roles. For example, the council did not know which state ministry to approach about the water challenges in their community, or how to go about it. Nor did they know how to resolve their issues with the LGA chairperson to improve governance cohesion for the community's benefit.

Although the women are actually running the main water sources in the community, there is a huge gender imbalance in the community governance structure. They are not significantly represented in the governing council and, therefore, do not have a significant voice in decision-making processes; with the exception of a woman leader who is a highly political figure and married to a former LGA chairperson. Women form their own groups to discuss and take action

on issues directly affecting them, such as their intervention with the Catholic and Anglican churches for water provision and the management of the sites by the women’s council. However, women confirmed that they are quite politically active, with many indicating their membership in political parties and their active involvement in mobilizing voters during election periods.

Women are also responsible for rainwater harvesting or fetching water from the stream – which is considered relatively safe and the most cost-effective. The average distance to collect water is approximately 8 kilometres back and forth, with an average travel time of about 40 minutes each way. Since women often work as traders, leaving home very early in the morning and returning home late every day, it is the children and young mothers with infants who make the daily 8-kilometre trek to fetch clean water for their households.

PI	Key Findings	Rating (1-10)	Comments
Access	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Poor access and time-consuming No functioning government borehole Most people walk 5 km to fetch drinkable water daily 	2	Only 2 of 14 participants rated accessibility
Reliability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Inversely proportional to access No correlation with municipality size Cost fluctuates during fuel scarcity Boreholes close too early 	2	
Quality	Brown color Bad flavor Bad smell Sometimes good quality		The main factors impacting the quality of water are the rainy season with flood and generally poor waste management.
Role of Government	Poor responsiveness Zero supervision	0	
Overall Satisfaction	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> No satisfaction 	0	Respondents, disappointed with the lack of government response, say that, although privately-provided water has problems, at least it is water.


Community scorecard for access to water: rating of performance indicators (PI)

Source: Field research in December 2019–January 2020

Urban governance is extremely challenging and, where government fails, self-organization and independent institutions play a critical role in bridging governance gaps. Although the Nigerian Constitution clearly assigns responsibilities to state and local governments, it is difficult to ascertain who is in charge of what in a city – and it is even more complicated when the city in question is the economic hub of a state. In the city of Onitsha, traditional and religious organizations are an important component of urban governance. As non-political institutions, they should have an impact on inclusive communal governance processes and community education. The research community is characterised by a strong informal and communal system. Current political interventions are weakening these structures. The local government’s office, which is constitutionally supposed to bridge the gap between the state government and the

people at the grassroots level, is located too far away to offer any meaningful service. Inefficient administrative boundaries and the political tension between the Okpoko leadership and the LGA make coordinated urban governance processes impossible, with severe implications for the provision of public goods and services.

Beyond poor access to water, the community is plagued by poor waste management and sanitation, lack of public health facilities and no road systems. With regards to service delivery, different agencies at the state and local governments pursue various political agendas, leading to the fragmentation and abandonment of this community. State representatives maintain e.g. that government can not deliver water due to the current non-existence of the water corporation. This contradicts the fact that the state government has, on numerous occasions, awarded water projects to its political allies in this community, without involving the community members.



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Currently, water management in Nigeria is subject to federal laws, such as the Water Resources Act (1993), the Minerals Act (1990) which has since been updated in the year 2007, the National Water Resources Institute Act (1990) which was initially enacted in 1985, the River Basin Development Act (1990) first adopted in 1987, as well as state edicts and laws. Federal government has the responsibility to construct dams through the River Basin Development Authorities, which tempts state governments to blame federal government for their own failure to provide potable water. In Anambra State, the Ministry of Public Utilities suggests that efforts are being made to revive the state water corporation and to bridge the state-wide gaps of access to water. They believe this will enable the state to ensure the quality and availability of water to all communities across the state.

The existing conflict between the Okpoko community and the different levels of government, as well as the inability of the traditional ruler to formally intervene on the community's behalf, is inhibiting their existing informal governance structures. Community members' claim that the formal recognition of their community leader by government would automatically formalize the community's relations with the Obi of Onitsha and their representation at the Obi of Onitsha governance council, which takes part in negotiating the delivery of basic goods and services is supported by the Obi of Onitsha. Currently, the opposite is the case: ongoing government attempts to politically interfere even further weakens its self-governing structure; reinforcing the

inconsistent and conflicting roles of traditional, governmental and communal urban governance. The result is low community ownership of projects implemented by government or civil society, which in turn creates poor project sustainability.

This study shows that the organizational structures of informal systems in communities in urban areas need to be embraced as an integral part of urban governance solutions. Its findings challenge assumptions that disregard the importance of informal and communal governance in cities. There is an evident disconnect between the community and the government at all levels. The community organization lacks a constructive framework to engage with government to affect change.

To address this, it is recommended that:

1. Public and private interventions need to adopt a multilevel and collaborative governance approach and to harness the platforms of the formal and informal institutions as well as the traditional body for sustained dialogue and advocacy.
2. Such a dialogue forum needs to find a solution to include the person the community elected as its traditional leader into the Obi of Onitsha Council. It raises the far-reaching question on how people can adequately be represented in the multi-ethnic fabric of Nigerian cities where indigeneity is still the official criteria for eligibility. Who is the democratically elected leader here and who has the legitimacy with the people?
3. Directly related is the need of technical support for the community from civil society in order to strengthen their governance efforts, to launch and drive their own advocacy campaigns and to ensure that their existing informal governance structures are sustainable. The continued existence of this community and its protection against land-grabs by politically vested interests depend on its members' abilities to maintain their independence from the state and local government.

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Author's Bio

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