

PERCEIVED EFFECT OF LOCAL GOVERNMENT KNOWLEDGE OF CITIZENS AWARENESS OF LOCAL GOVERNMENT INCOME ON ITS UTILIZATION IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

Nigeria's population of over 150 million has its imbedded problem of unemployment caused by mismanagement of available resources distributed to the local governments for development. If the allocations given to local governments are well utilized to provide infrastructure, unemployment will be drastically reduced. This paper surveyed the effect of awareness of local governments' income by the citizens on local governments' functionaries. Thirteen randomly selected local governments from one of the Nigerian states were surveyed with the use of questionnaire. Over 1800 citizens were surveyed and 95% responded. Data collected were analyzed and reported in discrete figures and percentages, and presented in tables and graphs. It was discovered that the knowledge of local governments' income by the citizens could induce the local governments' workers to utilize the funds to provide necessary infrastructure for development. The paper recommended that the authorities concerned should promulgate laws mandating local governments to disseminate information about their income to the citizens since this prompts effective use of such funds.

Keywords: Local government areas; Local government income, Citizens' financial information awareness; Local governments' funding.

BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

It is speculated that Nigeria has a population of over 150, 000, 000 persons; and an environment devoid of natural calamities. Nigeria has the "Black Gold" called Crude Oil and versed arable land for foodstuff. Huge amounts of funds are derived from all these resources to make Nigeria one of the richest countries of the world. In spite of all these endowments Nigeria is grouped among the poorest countries of the world. Local governments in Nigeria receive 20% allocation from the Federation Account and 10% from the State in addition to internally generated revenue, yet the citizens are not empowered to be independent through infrastructural development. These funds that come to the local governments, if properly managed, are supposed to bring development to the local governments and generate employment for the citizens. Corruption is the ailment and human beings are the diseases.

Infrastructures could be built if the resources allocated and generated by the local governments are well utilized. Knowledge of the incomes that come into the coffers of the local governments by the citizens could play an important role in the utilization of such funds to provide needed infrastructure. Information communication is one of the ways to ensure transparency and accountability from any country that is serious about development. Financial Information dissemination is perceived to be a deterrent to financial transparency

imbroglio that is noticed in some Nigerian local governments. If funds are judiciously utilized infrastructural availability will pose no problem. Communities' awareness and access to information is crucial in the development of local government areas. Observation shows that citizens' reaction to certain occurrences in the communities raise a big doubt to their knowledge of the activities of their local governments. A research survey carried out in UK by Bromley and Rao (2000) to find out which agencies were responsible for hospital management showed a low level of awareness, as almost half of the population polled erroneously believed that local council managed hospitals. So, many citizens do not know what is happening in their local governments.

Ofoeze's (1997 and 2003) assertion that local government areas are created to solve rural developmental problems and Late Shehu Musa Yar'Adua's confirmation that local governments are created to harness local resources for rapid development and to enshrine the principle of participatory democracy would be tested in Imo State. In spite of this adequate and clear developmental and participatory structure of the local governments, the local governments have failed to develop the economy of the citizens. This is evident in

the rural decay, mass unemployment and underemployment; illiteracy; lack of basic amenities such as health centres, pipe-borne water, electricity; hunger and malnutrition; poor sanitary conditions; high rate of preventable diseases; low life expectancy of the rural population; high rate of infant and maternal mortality; lack of educational institutions; the decay and collapse of the existing schools, etc., all of which have led to high rate of rural-urban migration with all its negative implication for national development such as the congestion of the cities, armed robbery, prostitution and general decay in social infrastructural facilities. (Ofoeze, 2003, p. 124)

What will be the reaction of the citizenry if the local governments fail to play their role in provision of enabling environment and the citizens languish in want as a result of none availability of infrastructure to enhance employment? On the other hand, which is the focus of this research, how will the local governments react if they know that the citizens are away of the funds they immerse monthly?

Historical Background of Imo State: The Case Study

The Federal Republic of Nigeria occupies an area of 923, 769 square kilometres. Water covers a large mass of 13,879 sq. km. leaving only 909, 890 sq. km. of arable and habitable land area (NBS 2008). Imo, one of the 36 states of Nigeria, was used for this study. Imo State occupies 5,530 sq. km. of the land mass of Nigeria. It is traversed by Imo River covering a length of 225.3 km. Its capital is Owerri which is 533 km. to Abuja, the Federal Capital Territory. Its population is 3, 934, 899. Imo State is situated in South Eastern Nigeria. It shares boundaries with Enugu and Ebonyi States to the north, Anambra State to the south and north, River States to the south, and Cross River and Rivers States at the East. The inhabitants of Imo State are the Ibos whose native language is Igbo, while English is their official language of transaction and documentation. Imo State's indigenes are predominantly Christians.

Imo State was created on February 3, 1976 out from the old East Central State (when Nigeria was made up of only 12 States). In 1991 Abia State was carved out of Imo State leaving Imo State then with a population of 2, 485, 635 and now 3, 934, 899 as at the year 2006. (National Population Commission, 2008). As at 2011 Imo State was made up of 27 local government areas (LGAs). Imo State has three Senatorial zones namely Owerri Senatorial Zone made up of nine local governments; Okigwe Senatorial Zone made up of six local governments; and Orlu Senatorial Zone made up of twelve local governments. (Appendix 1 for list of the 27 LGAs and their senatorial zones and headquarters). The State

boasts of abundant mineral resources which include crude oil, fine sand, limestone and natural gas, all in commercial quantities. The State is also blessed with massive agricultural produce such as palm produce, which is the major agricultural product of the state, cocoa, rubber, cassava, cocoyam, yam, and maize. Some economic trees like mahogany, obeche, gmelina, iroko, palm trees, and others exist. With all these resources very few industries exist in Imo State, mainly privately owned. Being in this predicament, how does the State survive?

Funding of Nigerian Local Governments

The Federal Government of Nigeria has a systematic way of funding the local governments. Local Governments get their resources from different sources. A formula is used in sharing this revenue among: Federal Government, State Government, Local Government, Special Grants Account or Special Funds; and different percentages were affixed dependent on the commission that recommended it. (Adesina 1998; Danjuma 1996; Omitola 2005). Later, in post-civil war Nigeria, Decrees on revenue allocation reeled out “which relied heavily on the principle of derivation and to a lesser extent, that of need” (Omitola 2005: 50). From here onwards sharing formula started taking another outlook. On-shore and off-shore oil royalties came on board and a progressive reduction on the “principle of derivation and the strengthening of the principles of needs and population” (Omitola p. 151). Imo State, being an “oil producing State” is assumed to be receiving a handful of revenue from the allocation formula which should reflect in infrastructure and employment of the citizens. This should portend that many school leavers in Imo State should not be looking for jobs. Therefore, the bone of contention of this research was to find out the effect of the knowledge of local government finances by the citizens on the local government.

Statement of the Problem

Local government areas in Nigeria are underdeveloped. The citizens often complain that they were not aware, neither were they informed, of what accrued to their Local Governments from the Federal Government or what was internally generated and how the allocations were spent. The public's speculation is that funds allocated to the local government areas had either been misappropriated or embezzled. Communities suffered lack of amenities for good living such as electricity, good water supply, good road networks and other developmental infrastructures. Indigenes were disgusted with their condition of living. The citizens believe that it is because the local government workers feel that the citizens are not aware of the income that comes to the coffers of the local governments that makes the local government workers treat the citizens with disdain. Therefore, this paper was set to palpate the attitude of the local governments if they know that the citizens are aware of the funds that come to the local governments.

Objectives of the Study

The main objective of this study was to survey the perceived effect of citizens' awareness of local governments' income on the local governments in Nigeria.

The specific objectives were to:

1. Investigate the citizens' level of awareness of Local Government's revenue from the 10% State Allocation, the Internally Generated Revenue and the Federal Allocation.
2. Analyze the local governments' reaction if it knows that the citizens have knowledge of what comes to local governments' purse.
3. Investigate the citizens' perceived use of local governments' revenue if the citizens are aware of such incomes.

Research Questions

1. Are the citizens aware of the finances that come to their local governments?
2. How will the local governments react if the citizens know how much they receive monthly from the federal and state governments?

3. How will the local governments spend local governments' incomes if they know that the citizens are aware of such incomes?

Significance of the Study

Nigeria, with a staggering population of between 140 and 150 million, is the largest country in Africa (Osuji, 2011). It is the 10th largest population in the world. With its high growth rate, Nigeria is projected to be ranked 4th highest population in the world by the year 2050. (Standard 9). This is partly because her rate of natural increase as at 1999 was 3%, significantly higher than that of the world which was 1.5% and that of Africa which was 2.6%. High population increase rate without equivalent increase in employment portends a high societal danger. Therefore, there is high need to create employment for Nigerian's able bodied citizens. This research hoped to highlight ways the local governments could help to generate employment for its jobless citizens to reduce crime rate as a result of unemployment through the use of financial information. This research is supposed to bring to limelight the need for transparency of government functionaries through financial information dissemination.

Ignorance of what comes to the Local Government impedes citizens' inquiry of their use. This research is expected to create inquisitiveness to the citizens as to request to know not only how much that comes to their Local Government Areas but to also know how it is used. This research should be able to open a channel of communication between the rulers and the ruled. The intention was not to probe the financial activities of Imo State's local governments. No financial records were looked into neither were projects, on-going or executed, part of the research. The work limited itself to a survey on citizens' information knowledge of revenue collection of the local governments and the citizens' perception of its utilization if the citizens were aware of such income.

LITERATURE REVIEW

At the root of development is good management of finance. Information on how funds are allocated and raised in the Local Governments is a perceived prerequisite to the judicious and effective use of the funds. Therefore financial information is deemed to be necessary for transparency and accountability in an organization. Transparency is an illusion without information communication, and information leads to awareness which results into inquisition.

Nigerian Local Governments

Local governments are the closest administrative unit of the Federal Government of Nigeria to the community. Local governments are established to bring government to the grassroots level. It is the third tier of government in Nigeria after Federal and State governments. So Local Governments are meant to be the government of the people particularly (the Rural Dwellers). Decadence in the country – incessant electricity supply, alarming rate of unemployment, cultism in institutions (both secondary and tertiary), poverty, retrogressive economy, corruption, armed robbery, kidnapping and child trafficking, and a host of other crimes - call for a critical look at the duties and obligations of Nigerian local governments.

Nigeria has 774 local governments which are constitutionally guaranteed allocation from the Federation Account with which to finance their specific responsibilities, though the channel of transfer is creating a bottleneck. The Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria also authorizes the Local Governments to generate some revenues internally (Abia, 2004: 127). According to the 1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, the government has a lot of responsibilities for its citizens which are clearly listed in the Fourth Schedule (FRN Constitution, 1999, Fourth Schedule). The impact of the funds is not felt in

the development of the local government areas in Nigeria. This paper proposes that one of the reasons for that is lack of the knowledge of such income by the citizens.

Information Awareness, Utilization and Development

There is a direct correlation between information awareness and local government development. This is the position of Harande (2009) when he said that “lack of development has a positive correlation with the neglect of rural areas”. Alegbeleye and Aina (1985: 13) reiterated the fact that the third world countries have realized “that unless the rural areas are well developed, hardly will any meaningful development occur in these countries”. Therefore a conscious and sustainable effort should be made to ensure that the majority illiterates in the rural and interior local government communities have access to information. Similarly, Disso (1994) expressed the view that information should be seen as a basic resource for development. It is one thing to generate information and it is another to use it. Information utilization is a resultant effect of information communication (Yaya and Ebunuwele (2007).

Information being power cannot be overemphasized (The World Bank Group (2001). For citizenry effective participation in governance there must be a two-way information flow - from government to citizens and from citizens to government. “This is critical for responsible citizenship and responsive and accountable governance. Informed citizens are better equipped to take advantage of opportunities, access services, exercise their rights, negotiate effectively, and hold state and non-state actors accountable” (World Bank, 2011). Without relevant and timely information, it is impossible for the citizens to take effective action. Information should be disseminated in many different methods including, but not limited to, the written word, group discussions, poetry, storytelling, debates, street theatre, and other culturally appropriate forms, and using a variety of media including radio, television, and the Internet. For efforts of the citizens to unite with that of the government, the people must know what the government plans to do. If government plans are not communicated, there will be no participation from the people, hence delay of development.

Olowu (2004: 34), in accordance with Albert and Isife, “stated that efficient dissemination of appropriate information is the beginning of our journey towards attaining the nation’s objective of sustainable development”. Information is paramount and is an important ingredient and agent of development. Davey (1993) concluded on his research on urban management and municipal finances that, to assure hitch free local government growth, access to basic infrastructure, shelter, and employment must be ensured. When these are in place UNDP (1998) concluded that there would be economic growth, social development, and poverty would be alleviated from the cities and towns and local government finance will improve.

Information Dissemination From the Local Government Areas to the Citizenry

Traditional media and new Information Communication Technologies (ICT) like cellular phones have played a major role in diffusing information to rural communities. Traditional media have been used very successfully in developing countries. To speed up the flow of information, prints, videos, televisions, films, slides, pictures, exhibitions and demonstrations have been used and should continue to be used especially in rural areas where the Local government belong (Munyua 2000). Because the rural dwellers do not have the prerequisite knowledge to handle modern communication gadgets these traditional methods should be encouraged.

Information plays a vital role in the development of nations especially the third world countries. Most of the problems of developing countries ranging from unemployment, malnutrition and starvation, social divisions and rivalries, rural-urban migration, debt crisis,

embezzlement and mismanagement of fund, poverty, over population, unstable government, non-availability of power (electricity), lack of ICT and illiteracy, could be curtailed by proper and well channelled communication system. Adeyemi (1991) argued that solution to the above issues is based on “constant and adequate supply of accurate and timely information”. Invariably lack of information portends persistence of the problems. Adeyemi’s paper did not address the effect of lack of information to the developing countries. Its focus was on service within the context of generation, processing, storage, access and use in development. The World Bank (2011) observed that the critical area where information is needed by the community included “rules and rights to basic government services and financial services”.

Most of the atrocities and unhealthy associations like tuggery, stealing, promiscuity, internet scam, fraudster, drug abuse, bunkering and many other vices that the youths especially are involved in, apart from lack of job, are as a result of not being informed of their consequences and not providing alternative engagements. If people are properly and adequately informed of the consequences of the actions they are about to embark on, they may change their mind. Lack of information has ugly consequences. Even laudable programmes may die for lack of adequate communication. People face undue punishment or penalty because some rules and regulations were not communicated to them.

METHODOLOGY

Social science mostly adopts qualitative type of research. Sometimes, it could be combined with quantitative to present a solid interpretation of findings (Obadara, 2007). Survey design was employed because it is best used to find out the opinion of a group of people towards a particular issue at a particular time. Since the aim of this research was to seek the opinion of the citizens towards their local government functionaries against the citizens’ knowledge about the local governments’ financial income, human beings are involved, therefore, survey research design was more appropriate (Uhegbu (2004). Surveys are usually more quantitative and easier to analyze and draw inferences from.

Twenty seven local government areas with a total population of Three Million Nine Hundred and Thirty-four Thousand Eight Hundred and Ninety-nine (3, 934, 899) (NBS 2008) were involved, out of which 13 were sampled. The 13 randomly and proportionally selected local governments had a population of 1, 950, 149 (Adapted from NBS, 2008). Proportionate random sampling was used to select 1, 840 size to survey using Uzuagulu’s statistical formula adopted in Uhegbu’s thesis of 2004:102. A validated questionnaire was used as the instrument for data collection.

One thousand eight hundred and forty (1, 840) copies of the questionnaire were administered personally and with the help of field assistants who were instructed and guided on what to do. These 1, 840 copies of questionnaire were distributed all categories of citizens residing in the different local government areas used. Out of 1840 copies of questionnaire distributed 1785 were retrieved. Data collected were analyzed using Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS). Data were represented in graphs and tables, and in discrete figures and percentages where appropriate.

DATA PRESENTATION, ANALYSES AND DISCUSSION

This chapter presented the data collected from the field work of the study, which aimed at establishing the impact of citizens’ awareness of local government finances on the local governments in Nigeria, using Imo State as a case study. The results presented in the tables have also been represented in frequencies and percentages, as well as in graphs, for easy understanding.

Demographic Data of Respondents

Eight hundred and fifty-one (851, 47.7%) males and 893 (50.0%) females were consulted for response to the items of the questionnaires. The remaining 41 (2.3% \approx 2%)

respondents did not indicate their sexes. Figure 1 showed the marital status of the respondents. One thousand one hundred and fifty (1150, 64.4%) of the respondents were married while 620 (34.7%) of them were single. Fifteen (0.8%) of the respondents did not indicate their marital status. This implied that majority of the respondents had families to take care of.

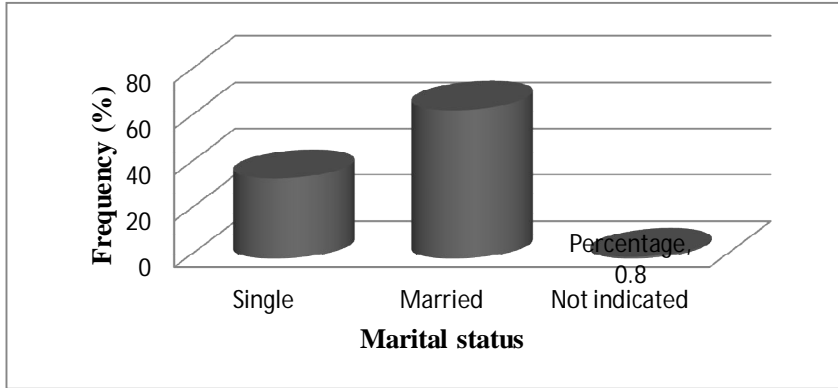


Figure 1: Marital Status of the Respondents

On their educational qualification, only 15% of the respondents had just Primary Six, the rest had secondary, Teachers’ Grade Two (TCII), National Diploma (OND), or National Certificate in Education (NCE), Higher National Diploma (HND), Bachelor of Arts (B.A.), or Bachelor of Science (B.Sc.) degrees, and had Master of Arts (M.A.) or Master of Science (M.Sc.) degrees. Almost equal numbers of teachers (30%) and tailors (31%) responded to the questionnaire. More hairdressers (16%) than those who indicated being jobless (6%) or unemployed filled and returned the questionnaires.

Types of Information That Respondents Receive From Their Local Government

Here 12 alternative variables were presented to the respondents to ascertain how much information about those items they receive from the local governments.

Table 2: Rate of Financial Information from the Local Governments to the Citizens

S/N	Types of information received	Yes	No
1	Income from the Federal Govt. to the LGA	1156 (64.8%)	629 (35.2%)
2	Income from the State Govt. to the LGA	1068 (59.8%)	717 (40.2%)
3	Income generated from the LGA	1128 (63.2%)	657 (36.8%)
4	About Development Projects in the LGA	1197 (67.1%)	588 (32.9%)
5	About Employment Opportunities in the LGA	1164 (65.2%)	621 (34.8%)
6	Company and factory to be built	1034 (57.9%)	751 (42.1%)
7	Information on Job/Employment Vacancies	805 (45.1%)	980 (54.9%)
11	How to train citizens for gainful employment	907 (50.8%)	878 (49.25)
12	Need to pay taxes, licenses, and rates, etc.	1298 (72.7%)	487 (27.3%)

N=1785

From Table 2, majority of the respondents (1156; 64.8%) received information on income from the Federal Government to their local governments. This kind of information was not received by 629 (35.2%) respondents. 1068 (59.8%), 1128 (63.2%), and 1197 (67.1%) respondents respectively received information on income from the State Government to their local governments, income generated from the local governments, and on development projects in their local government areas, while 1298 (72.7%) respondents received information on the need to pay taxes, buy different licenses, and pay their rates.

Citizens’ Thoughts about Elected Officials’ Reaction to Citizens’ Awareness of Local Governments’ Income

Table 3: What the Citizens Think About Local Governments’ Elected Officials’ Reaction if the Officials Know That the Citizens Are Aware of the LG Income

S/N	What local government leaders will do if they know that the citizens are aware of the local governments’ income	Agree	Disagree
1	Utilize the resources for LG development	1325 (74.2%)	460 (25.8%)
2	Share the money with you	597 (33.4%)	1188 (66.6%)
3	Increase LG workers salaries	1049 (58.8%)	736 (41.2%)
4	Employ more workers	1272 (71.3%)	513 (28.7%)
5	Provide infrastructure e.g. electricity, good roads, etc.	1318 (73.8%)	467 (26.2%)
6	Build factories to create employment	1136 (63.6%)	649 (36.4%)
7	Hide and use the money for themselves	619 (34.7%)	1166 (65.3%)
8	Spend the money on ceremonies	491 (27.5%)	1294 (72.5%)
9	Keep the money for election campaign	614 (34.4%)	1171 (65.6%)

N=1785

Table 3 showed that 1325(74.2%), and 1049(58.8%) respondents respectively believed that the local governments’ officials would utilize allocated resources for local government areas’ development or increase local government workers’ salaries. Contrarily, 460 (25.8%), and 736 (41.2%) corresponding respondents believed that the local government officials would not act in the foregoing ways in each case. Also, while 1272 (71.3%), 1318 (73.8%), and 1136 (63.6%) of the respondents respectively thought that their knowledge of local government income would make the local government administrators to employ more workers, provide basic infrastructure, and build factories to create employments for the masses, 513 (28.7%), 467 (26.2%), and 649 (36.4%) corresponding respondents did not agree with the foregoing reasoning in each case. 619 (34.7%), 491 (27.5%), and 614 (34.4%) of the respondents respectively agreed that the foregoing knowledge would make local government officials hide and use the allocated funds for themselves, spend the funds on ceremonies, or keep the money for election campaigns, but 1166 (65.3%), 1294 (72.5%), and 1171 (65.6%) corresponding respondents did not agree with the preceding ideas.

If the local government workers realised that the citizens knew how much they had they would definitely utilize the resources for development to generate employment.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This research work understudied 13 local governments in Imo State with the intention of ascertaining the utilization of local government resources if the local government workers realize that the citizens are aware of local governments’ financial capability.

Conclusion

Although the understudied citizenry could be said to be aware of the finances of their local governments, there was an appreciably high-level ignorance among the populations of the local government areas with regard to local government revenue acquisition, with that of internally generated revenue being the worst circulated.

From the findings, availability of local governments’ financial information to the public, that is, to the citizens, could induce the government to utilize the resources for local government development. Salary of local government workers could be increased and more workers could also be employed.

Utilization of available funds means provision of infrastructure and amenities that eases life, provided enabling environment for self-employment and generates openings for

employment. Therefore, the local government should be mandated to make available information about funds generated or received by them.

Recommendations

No matter how the information is concealed, the citizens will always be aware of financial revenue accruing to the local governments. Therefore, the local government administrators should not deny the citizenry information about local government finances.

As of compulsion, every local government should make available, for public consumption, the finances that accrue to it and its plans on their utilization since this transparency helps in minimizing corruption.

The federal government or other bodies overseeing the local governments should pass a law or edict making it compulsory for the local governments to make their activities and plans known to their people.

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Appendix 1

POPULATION OF IMO STATE BY LOCAL GOVERNMENT AREA, 1991 and 2006

1991			2006				
Local Government Area	Male	Female	Total	Local government area	Male	Female	total
Aboh-Mbaise	53,641	61,719	115,360	Aboh-Mbaise	101,385	94,267	195,652
Ahiazu-Mbaise	44,231	51,939	96,170	Ahiazu-Mbaise	88,440	82,462	170,902
Ehime-Mbano	45,334	51,811	97,145	Ehime-Mbano	67,190	63,741	130,931
Ezinihitte	42,724	49,738	92,462	Ezinihitte Mbaise	85,158	80,435	165,593
Ideato North	55,438	63,081	118,519	Ideato North	81,849	76,557	158,406
Ideato South	39,746	42,490	79,236	Ideato South	83,072	76,807	159,879
Ihitte/Uboma	32,234	36,775	69,009	Ihite/Uboma	62,630	58,114	120,744
Ikeduru	49,905	58,462	108,367	Ikeduru	76,232	73,084	149,316
Isiala-Mbano	49,171	56,999	106,170	Isiala-Mbano	103,832	94,904	198,736
Isu	67,046	76,610	143,656	Isu	85,991	78,477	164,468
Mbaitoli	69,980	78,551	148,531	Mbaitoli	122,037	115,518	237,555
Ngor-Okpala	64,327	71,384	135,711	Ngor-Okpala	81,519	78,413	159,932
Nkwere	59,088	66,942	126,030	Njaba	75,008	70,102	145,110
Obowu	29,690	34,587	64,277	Nkwere	41,642	38,510	80,152
Ohaji/Egbema	57,791	61,325	119,116	Nwangele	66,990	61,482	128,472
Okigwe	63,615	70,084	133,699	Obowo	60,150	57,964	118,114
Orlu	54,533	62,810	117,343	Oguta	74,308	68,700	143,008
Orsu	39,639	47,882	87,521	Ohaji/Egbema	94,644	87,894	182,538
Oru	68,238	81,939	150,177	Okigwe	69,232	63,005	132,237
Owerri	141,566	148,155	289,721	Onuimo	51,635	47,612	99,247
Uguta	41,511	45,905	87,415	Orlu	67,372	75,345	142,717
				Orsu	61,950	58,053	120,003
				Oru East	57,318	54,504	111,822
				Oru West	61,404	56,088	117,492
				Owerri Municipal	62,990	64,223	127,213
				Owerri North	93,093	82,302	175,395
				Owerri West	55,215	44,050	99,265
Total	1,168,448	1,319,187	2,485,635	Total	2,032,286	1,902,613	3,934,899

Source: National Population Commission