



## OGUN-GUANGDONG FREE TRADE ZONE AS A VEHICLE FOR THE SOCIO-ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT OF IGBESA COMMUNITY.

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SANNI, HABEEB ABIODUN, Ph.D. Department of History and International Studies, Lagos State University, Ojo, Lagos Nigeria.

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ADESOGAN, SESIMITE ABIODUN, Miss. M.A. student, Department of History and International Studies, Lagos State University, Ojo, Lagos Nigeria.

### Abstract

The Ogun-Guangdong Free Trade Zone is one of the free trade zones in Nigerian history that dates to the early 1990s with the enactment of the Nigeria Export Processing Zone Act 63 (FGN, 1992), resulting in the establishment of the first Free Trade zone (Calabar) and many more to contribute to economic development and reduce poverty in the country. This essay attempts a study of the relationship between the Free Trade Zone and socio-economic development in Igbesa of Ogun state, Nigeria. Igbesa is one of the rural settlements located in the south-western part of Ogun State. The essay examines the nexus between the free trade zone and the transformation it is intended to bring to this hitherto neglected community from both positive and negative perspectives. The research methodology adopted include historical narrative, using qualitative and narrative approach, use of primary and secondary data collections which include oral interviews, newspaper articles as well as journal articles, and books. These were subjected to proper scrutiny. The essay concludes that the Ogun-Guangdong Free Trade Zone has transformed Igbesa into a major industrial center attracting industrial establishments in their numbers. The zone has generated so much FDI for the state, with more than US\$234 million in revenue in 2021 while having attracted more than \$2 billion in total investment. It has generated thousands of jobs for the community and state at large with opportunities for more.

**Keywords:** Free trade zone, Igbesa, Socio-economic development, Ogun State, poverty reduction

### Introduction

The crisis of economic underdevelopment has been a problem of the Nigerian State. Since independence in 1960, the country has seen spiral inflation, unemployment, high poverty, poor living standards, decadence in the health system, and infrastructural deficiencies, among others. Governments in the country have evolved and enacted economic policies that have hardly influenced the socio-economic life of the people because the national and international firms collapse under the weight of the non-availability of raw materials to service the industries.

The contradictions in the economy led to the establishment of Free Trade Zones (FTZs) to facilitate economic growth, capital development, and technological advancement, as well as improvement in the economy. These zones would supply an environment where enterprises can operate without trade barriers, customs interference, and bottlenecks and consequently generate knowledge spillover, increase employment, attract foreign investment, and facilitate economic breakthroughs (Okeke, al. 2020).

Free trade zones in the form of free harbors, were first set up more than 2000 years ago. The world's first documented free trade zone was set up on the Greek island of Delos in 166 BCE and lasted until about 69 BCE when the island was overrun by pirates. Shannon Free Zone in Ireland established in 1959 is acclaimed to be the first "modern" free trade zone and is operational to date. Over time, free trade zones have become increasingly popular as a policy apparatus for the promotion of export-focused foreign direct investment (United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific and Korea Maritime Institute, 2005). Currently, there are about 3500 FTZs located in 135 countries around the world, employing 66 million workers worldwide (United Nations Environment Programme, 2015).

Nigeria has a Free Trade Zone history that dates to the early 1990s with the enactment of the Nigeria Export Processing Zone Act 63 (FGN, 1992), resulting in the establishment of the first Free Trade zone (Calabar) and many more to contribute to economic development and reduce poverty in the country. This research attempts a study the relationship between the Free Trade Zone and socio-economic development in Igbesa of Ogun state, Nigeria.

Although the free trade zone is considered a workable policy to foster socio-economic development, the lack of a suitable investment environment, deplorable roads, a healthcare system, unfavorable government policies, and insecurity, among others, poses a threat to its success. The free trade zone must serve the purpose for which it is established. Considering the challenges and arguments that surround the operations of free trade zones in Nigeria, this essay evaluates the performance of the Ogun-Guangdong free trade zone and the degree of its impact on the development of Igbesa.

The choice of Ogun Guangdong free trade zone is predicated on the significance of this free zone in Nigeria, which has received little scholarly attention. Equally worthwhile to consider is the zone's activities and its impact on the Igbesa community. Igbesa town where the zone is situated is strategically located, bordering Lagos state, the commercial hub of Nigeria, and relatively close to the border of the Republic of Benin, which channels into the West African region.

This essay contributes to academic discussion on the question of development concerning free trade zones as a development tool. This essay serves as a reference to scholars/researchers and the general populace on the impact of free trade zones on the development of the area under study. It is divided into six sections, the first discusses the geographical location, origin, and development of Igbesa, while the second section looks at the concept of a Free Trade Zone in brief. Section three focuses on the impacts of the free trade zone and the socio-economic development of Igbesa, while section four examines the prospect of the FTZ vis a vis the development of the town. Section five is the conclusion.

### **Geographical Location, Origin, and Development of Igbesa Town**

Igbesa is a suburban community located in Ado-Odo Ota local government area, west senatorial district of Ogun state, Southwestern Nigeria. It is located about 11 Kilometers west of Lagos, with a population of about 11,000 people (Akomolafe, 2019). Primarily an agricultural hub, Igbesa has evolved to become an industrial centerpiece in recent times with the establishment of a free trade zone in the area by the state government.

Igbesa kingdom stretches over a large expanse of land/territories, with forty subordinate towns. According to oral information, Agbara, Igbere, Imuta, Alago, Ketu Adie-owe, Odan-Abuja, Odan-Ibudo, Egelete, Totowu, and Imose are among the forty towns. The town is a settlement of the Awori-speaking people, a subset of the Yoruba race, speaking a distinct dialect of the Yoruba language. An anthropologist, Wormalin in his *Intelligence Report on the Badagry District of the Lagos colony* (1935) gives a graphic description of the early Awori he encountered when he writes that: 'They speak a slurred dialect of the Yoruba language...' The Awori people can be grouped into two major divisions: the early Awori and the latter Awori groups. Igbesa is classed as an early Awori settlement, having been founded before 1500 and the monarch, a first-class king (Oreva, 2017). Igbesa is also considered one of the second-tier Awori settlements which first began at Isheri-Olofin, about 12 miles north of Lagos Island (Adeyeri & Sanni, 2013).

Igbesa like every Yoruba kingdom operates a monarchical system of government. However, the primacy of this system has been whittled down with civilization. At the head of the traditional political ladder is the *Oloja-Ekun* – a title for the kings of Igbesa land. The ruling lineage is a powerful one of hunters. They would hunt *Ekun* (tigers) and sell to other powerful lineages who domesticated/ate them, hence the name Oloja-Ekun (Trader of tigers). For easy administration, the town was divided into four quarters: Idomo, Igbe, Osi, and Ogono. A chief oversees each of the quarters. The chiefs represent their quarters in the traditional Council of Chiefs meetings. Apart from the quarters' chiefs, the king also appointed some high chiefs: *Otun Oba* (right-hand man to the Oba), *Osi Oba* (left-hand man to

the Oba), *Akogun*, *Balogun* (warlord), the *Otun* and *Osi Balogun* (right and left-hand subordinates to Balogun), *Abore or Oluwo* (the chief priest, who is an experienced and renowned Ifa priest), and quite a few other chiefs representing various interests. Each quarter is headed by a *Baale*; a quarter is subdivided into compounds (*Iga*). There are many *Igas* (palaces) in Igbesa land, some of them include *Iga Nla*, *Iga Ago*, *Iga Idolupana*, *Iga Idajegemo*, *Iga Idoluba*, *Iga Idorubu*, *Iga Idejiyo*, *Iga Imapa*, *Iga Ilali*. Each compound has its high chief who represents his compound at the quarter's level and the traditional council of chiefs. The compound is broken down into families, with a family consisting of a man, his wife/wives, their children, and extended members of the household. The head of the family is the *Olori-Ebi*, the most senior male member of the household (Akomolafe, 2019).

Like every Yoruba community, the Igbesa people have strong ties with traditional religion. Despite civilization and the import of new religions, traditional beliefs, and practices are still upheld in the land, though with reduced vigor as in the early times. The socio-cultural lives of the Igbesa people revolve around a variety of festivals accompanied by elaborate rituals, sacrifices, and appeasement, indicative of the people's strong belief in traditional deities and ancestral worship (Adeyeri & Sanni 2013). The *Ifa Oracle* is an essential element of the people's religious life.

Ifa according to the Yoruba is considered a god of divination and of hidden knowledge, the mouthpiece of the gods. The Yorubas believe in the existence of an almighty God, who is too exalted to concern himself directly with men and their affairs hence they admit the existence of many gods as intermediaries- termed *Orisas*-gods (Johnson, 1921; 1960). Other *Orisas* worshipped/celebrated by the people of Igbesa include Oro, Egungun, Ogun, Igboodu, Ayelala, river goddesses (*Olokun*, *Olosa*, *Osun*, *Iyemoja*), and *Ojuaale*.

The introduction of new religions such as Christianity and Islam has received wide and rapid acceptance by the people of Igbesaland, with a spiraling increase in churches and coverts and a large number of mosques and Islam adherents. Consequently, many indigenes have abandoned traditional practices and beliefs. Nevertheless, the traditional belief is still at the core of Igbesa socio-cultural, religious, and political life. Thus, the people of Igbesa practice three religions, Traditional religion, Islam, and Christianity with harmonious and peaceful co-existence among the 3 religions.

The people of Igbesa engage in quite a few economic activities. These activities are divided along gender lines, those peculiar to women and those peculiar to men. Some of the activities peculiar to men include farming, and hunting, among others. Igbesa was originally a farmland; hence farming is the primary occupation of the people and an important feature of its economy. The area is made up mainly of fertile plain land, which makes it suitable for farming activities. Ado –odo local government area under which Igbesa town is, within 2 miles is covered by cropland (35%), grassland (31%), and trees (26%), within 10 miles by cropland (46%) and grassland (22%), and within 50 miles by water (37%) and cropland (25%) (Weatherspark, n.d). The area also has good climatic conditions and enjoys high rainfall throughout the year.

Farming in Igbesa nowadays transcends gender, as both men and women cultivate farmlands and grow crops for subsistence and commercial purposes. Many women have farms, from which they harvest and sell produce at the market. Also, farming is no longer a “farmer's” thing in Igbesa. This is because most individuals across different social classes now own a farm to meet personal and commercial needs.

The peasant farmers also practiced a form of animal husbandry. Animals such as goats, sheep, short-horned cattle, local pigs, and domestic fowls were reared in designated places within the family compound. These places are variously called Agbo Maalu/Ewure cow/goat ranch), Agbo Elede (piggery), etc. as the case may be (Adeyeri & Sanni, 2013). These animals were either taken to the field for pasture or were fed with cassava, edible leaves, and other feeds within the compound. This form of animal husbandry is still in practice, and no longer limited to farmers but practiced by people of all classes.

Hunting is another feature of the economic life of the Igbesa people. In the early times before the advent of Western civilization and before the area began to experience developmental transformations, most of the region was made up of thick forests, which made it suitable to hunt for big games such as Antelope, grass cutter, tigers, and so on. After the hunter must have earmarked some meat for his household, the rest of the meat is sold. This was a means of income generation. However, the changes that went with development led to deforestation. Now, people only engage in small-scale hunting of small prey such as bush rats, rabbits, and snakes, among others. Fishing is another economic activity of the people usually done by men. Food is derived for the family and the rest is also sold to generate income. The men also climb coconut and palm trees to harvest coconut and kernels.

The economic activities of the women include mat weaving, palm oil production, and processing palm kernel to extract oil known as *Adin eyan* or *Ososo*. They also extract oil from coconut known as coconut oil. After the men must have cultivated palm trees and harvested the fruits, the women process the fruits, through a long and tedious procedure to extract palm oil. The women processed and still process cassava into finished products such as *gari*, the

staple food of all Awori. The women harvested, peeled, washed, and processed the cassava into either *gari* or *fufu*. Cassava is one of the basic farm products in Igbesa. Individuals even plant Cassava and process *gari* on a small scale for their home use.

The people of Igbesa land are also noted as traders. Lusada market is the market in the Igbesa kingdom that draws traders from everywhere. The market is situated around kilometers eight of Atan- Agbara road. Lusada Market is a popular market situated at the junction of four major roads in the Ado-Odo/ Ota local government Council of Ogun State, Nigeria. The roads are Igbesa Road, Alapoti Road, Agbara Road, and Atan-Ota Road. The market is therefore easily accessible to people from Lagos and Badagry through Agbara Road. Marketers coming in from Owode, Egbado, Sango and Abeokuta can get to the market through Atan Road. Although the market is popularly known and called Lusada Market, its real name is Oba Adesola Gbeleyi Market, Igbesa.

The formal market day is originally scheduled to be held at an interval of 5 days. However, with the development of the area, the market is open every day but still maintains the main market days, which are always accompanied by extra-blooming sales than normal days (Onyekwere, 2021).

Today, the market serves people from everywhere, including foreign traders and buyers. Traders from the neighboring Republic of Benin, Togo, Ghana, and people from Igboland, Hausa land, Efik land, Igede land, and Edo land, all do business together.

Lusada market is a depot for locally grown farm produce which is readily available all seasons, they include vegetables of various kinds, yam, cassava, palm oil, different fruits, pepper, plantain, etc. The people are also suppliers of fish, snails, pork, goats, and dogs as well as bush meats such as grass cutter (Oya), Rabbit (Ehoro), Okete (bush rats/rodents), and other forest animals. The presence of herbal medicine (Agbo) is significant in the market as herbs are being sold for various illnesses such as toothache (Akokoro), typhoid, measles, and epilepsy. Cultural and traditional paraphernalia are also displayed for sale at the market.

The Lusada market is key to the economic life of the people of Igbesa. The daily sales, most importantly the market day sales guarantee their income. Lusada market promotes means of livelihood for many, especially the rural indigenes. Those who lost their jobs and engaged in farming, sell their produce at the market to support their families. The market is also supporting the young folks who hawk their wares and work as *Alabaru*- head portage. With the money earned, they help themselves and their parents thereby contributing to the family income and by implication minimizing the incidence of crime and criminal acts. Many of these young folks are students. By selling, some have made enough to settle some school bills.

The presence of the Ogun State Institute of Technology has made the hostelling business a profitable economic venture for the inhabitants of Igbesa. To meet the accommodation needs of students, hostels have been built by individuals and this has remained a stable source of revenue. Also, its proximity to Agbara- an industrial hub bordering Lagos has made Igbesa a choice place of settlement for a lot of people. This is coupled with the fact that the standard of living is moderate and bearable for the common person. Also, the establishment of the Apostolic Faith Church campground in the area as far back as 1982 has led to increased immigration into the area. These and more have made real estate a viable business for the people, thereby leading to the influx of more artisans such as masons, carpenters tailors/fashion designers, bricklayers, mechanics, steel workers, and technicians, an increase in the number of privately owned block industries and fishpond, etc. The people also engage in small-scale eatery businesses to serve low-income residents. Igbesa, a renowned farming community is gradually becoming a thriving and dynamic industrial hub in Ogun state. Its transformation could be linked to the Ogun Guangdong free trade zone which became operational in 2008 and has since become a major aspect of Igbesa's economy; hosting several companies and a sizeable number of employees who are residents of the town. It has created a career path and a source of livelihood for a lot of residents. Also, a lot of companies such as Viju, Engeepet, and several others have established factories in the town, leading to the creation of more corporate jobs for the people.

#### **A Brief Concept of a Free Trade Zone and Its Benefits**

Economic zones exist in different forms which is evident in their activities-strategic focus and incentives offered. Different terms have been adopted by countries to represent these zones which include: Free trade zone (FTZ), Custom zone, Customs free zone, Duty-free zone, Export Processing Zone (EPZ), Export free zone, Foreign Trade Zone (FTZ), free economic zone, free export processing zone, free export zone, free production zone, free zone, industrial export processing zone, industrial free zone, investment promotion zone, joint enterprise zone, maquiladora, privileged export zone, Special Economic Zone (SEZ), tax-free zone, zone of joint entrepreneurship, free-ports and zones. The United Nations uses the term "Special economic zones" to capture confined economic zones with distinct regulations. In most cases, a free trade zone is used interchangeably with a foreign trade zone, export processing zone, free zone, and special economic zone among others. For example, free trade zones are

regarded as foreign trade zones in the United States of America. Race & Class (1980) considered industrial free zones and export processing zones as synonyms for free trade zones. In some countries, free trade zones are combined with export processing zones. Most of these zones are similar but with variations. Export processing zones are industrial estates or parks that focus mostly on attracting export-oriented investments (Hamed, 2014) and up to 75% of manufactured products must be exported. However, most free trade zones are more liberal on this and adopt multiple activities.

Free trade zone has been defined in various literature. A free trade zone is defined as an area within which goods may be landed, managed, manufactured, or reconfigured, and re-exported without the intervention of customs authorities (Britannica, 2016). Also, Adekoya (2016) defined a free trade zone as a specific class of special economic zone in a geographical area within one part of the country where goods are re-exported, manufactured, and managed without customs authorities' intervention. Contributing, the World Customs Organization (WCO) defines FTZs in the revised Kyoto Convention of 2006 as "a particular class of special economic zones and a part of the territory of a World Customs Organization (WCO) Contracting Party where any goods introduced are generally regarded, insofar as import duties and taxes are concerned, as being outside the Customs territory". This implies that free trade zones are excluded from duties and taxes applicable to trade. From these definitions, trade barriers, taxes, and customs duties that prevail in the rest of the country are minimal or non-functional in free trade zones. Instead of paying tariffs on each component of a product imported, enterprises within the zone get to import raw and intermediate materials for production without duties, which translates to reduced production costs. Tariffs and duties only apply to finished products after they have gotten outside the FTZ.

The World Bank (2011) defined a Free trade zone as a class of Special Economic Zones that are geographically delimited areas, administered by a single body offering certain incentives (including more liberal and simplified economic regulations) for businesses that locate and operate within the zone. In line with this debate, UNEP (2015) opined that a free trade zone is a designated area within a country where goods may be imported/landed, handled, processed, assembled, manufactured, reconfigured, and re-exported with the companies deriving a wide range of benefits. Thus, FTZs symbolize more freedom in transactions due to their unique free trade status that allows exemption from customs and taxation and provides more flexible policies for export and import procedures (Hamed, 2014).

In the view of Muzwardi (2017), free trade zones are considered free enterprise zones that exist as delimited areas with the availability of infrastructures, services, support systems, administrative management, and other features that offer ease of operations to businesses- foreign and domestic within the zone. Acknowledging that businesses within the zone engage in a wide range of activities such as the production of goods, services, technology, research and education, logistics, health services, and other general services. Race & Class (1980) opined that a free trade zone is a *capitalist dream* and a colony within a neo-colony, separated/isolated from the rest of the country by walls and gates with its governing authority empowered by the central government to provide foreign investors with the ideal conditions to facilitate smooth operations within the zone. The ideal conditions vary from providing subsidized power supply (i.e., water, gas, electricity) to buildings, infrastructure, and land as well as cheap labor, supported and subsidized services, and the presence of a governing body that functions only in the best interest of the investors. In further contributions, Adepoju (2019); UNESCAP & KMI (2005) argued that the free trade zone provides export services mainly to foreign markets.

From the definitions above, a free trade zone exists and works as an entity that is isolated to certain areas in a particular country. In further description of free trade zones, several scholars observed that the zones are usually situated close to ports and major transport routes. UNEP (2015) opined that FTZs are generally located around major ports, international airports, national borders, and locations with geographic advantages for trade. Similarly, UNCTAD (2019) opined that location is a key element in the overall value proposition of FTZs.

As a distinct entity, a free trade zone is governed by its laws, which are generally more flexible and offer incentives that exceed what applies to the rest of the host country. In this view, UNESCAP & KMI (2005); Muzwardi (2017); and Race & Class (1980) agreed that enterprises within free zones are provided with high-quality infrastructure and services than the standard of the host country- such as land, office space, utilities, logistics services, streamlined customs service's/administrative procedure, and tax/duties exemption among others, to enable them to operate optimally and achieve set objectives. However, Ortiz (2022) observed that while free trade zones enjoy a wide range of benefits and freedom, their operations are restricted on certain grounds, arguing that items banned by host countries, particularly those harmful to health and safety regulations are prohibited from being imported into free

trade zones except in special cases. Following, UNCTAD (2019) highlighted criteria for enterprises establishment in free zones, which include stipulated minimum investment, contribution to host country development goals, and specific performance requirements as relates to export performance, employment, and skill transfer. To effectively administer the zone, UNCTAD (2019) informs that the government, zone authority, zone developers as well and users, each with distinct responsibilities work together to facilitate smooth operations.

The unique location, relaxed regulations, and streamlined registrations, as well as services and incentives offered all contribute to the successful operations of the free trade zone. Over the years, the number of free trade zones has increased tremendously and can be traced to the incentives provided to enterprises within the zone and its benefits to the host countries. Stein (2007) argued that the objective of a free trade zone is to attract foreign capital to host countries through foreign direct investments to facilitate development. About this, UNCTAD (2019) observed that SEZs account for over 80% of FDI in China and in some other countries. With limited capital to facilitate development, countries have adopted this policy partly because it is easier to provide relatively well-developed infrastructures in these small special areas than to establish good infrastructures throughout the whole country in a short period. By this and other incentives offered within the zone, firms are motivated to invest in the country by establishing subsidiaries within the trade zone. Johnson (1967) also established this argument with the view that private direct investment has the great advantage of bringing to the less developed country in one package capital, modern technology, managerial skills, and improvement in local operations in an inexpensive way. In another view, Kaplinsky et al. (2009) observed that FDI presents opportunities as well as challenges for host countries, arguing that FDI flows need to be linked to the national development strategies as failure to do so will hinder the development of local/nascent industry and in the long run negatively affect the recipient country's development.

### **The Impact of the Ogun-Guangdong Free Trade Zone on the Social and Economic Development of Igbesa Community**

The Nigerian economy has evolved over the years through various policy initiatives, aimed at economic development. Following the crash in oil prices and the attendant economic downturn, the Nigerian government introduced the Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP) in 1986, to revive the ailing economy and position the country for growth. During this time, government interventionist approaches were discarded for economic liberalization (Adeoti, 2011; Ogunkola, 2002). One of the objectives of SAP was the establishment of Export Processing Zones (EPZs) to attract Foreign Direct Investment (FDI). Hence, in 1992, a Nigeria Export Processing Zone Authority Act No. 63 was enacted to encourage economic liberalization. In essence, the authority has the responsibility of promoting and facilitating both local and international investments into licensed free zones (What We Do – NEPZA, n.d.). In 1992, the Calabar EPZ was created followed by the Onne FTZ established in 1997. Several other zones were established afterward. Currently, there are 46 zones in Nigeria; however, only 19 are operational (Operational Zones – NEPZA, n.d.). The Ogun-Guangdong zone is one of the operational zones.

The cooperative initiative between the governments of Nigeria and China led to the creation of the Ogun Guangdong Free Trade Zone. The project originated from a 2004 study by the South China University of Technology on the feasibility of setting up a Guangdong economic trade cooperation zone in Nigeria (AFTFP, 2012). The Ogun Guangdong Free Trade Zone is in the town of Igbesa in Ogun state, Nigeria, 50km from Lagos (Freitas, 2019). The zone is owned and developed as a joint venture between a Chinese consortium which consists of Guangdong Xinguang International Group, China-Africa Investment Ltd CCNC Group, and the Ogun State Government. A staggering 82% of the entire zone is owned by the Chinese consortium, while the remaining 18% belongs to the Ogun state government. Consequently, the zone is completely managed by the China Africa Investment Company, and all commodities produced there are given a 100-year concession. The equity share of the Ogun State is in return for the land and a 100-year concession for the developer (AFTFP, 2012).

The zone is a total area of 100 square kilometers, i.e., 10,000 hectares (AFTFP, 2012). Construction work for the zone began in 2008 after it was approved by the Nigeria Export Processing Authority. The zone is to be developed in two phases. The first phase utilizes 20 square kilometers (2,000 hectares) with an estimated investment of US\$500 million (Brautigam & Tang, 2011). The startup area of 50 hectares was almost fully occupied by 2017, so work commenced on the second phase. By June 2013, there were thirty-four enterprises registered in the zone, coming from Nigeria, China, Lebanon, and India (Chen et al, 2016, Brautigam and Teng, 2014).

Like every free trade zone in Nigeria, the Ogun Guangdong zone is governed by the same laws applicable to free zones in Nigeria. Also, the zone enjoys the incentives provided to free trade zones in Nigeria.

The Ogun-Guangdong zone is intended to be a multi-use development project featuring manufacturing, logistics, commercial, and residential areas. However, the zone mainly features manufacturing and processing activities, with industries producing everything from iron to tomato sauce. Currently, the zone has over 60 registered companies in operation. The major enterprises active within its precincts include Goodwin Ceramic, one of the largest ceramic producers in Africa, producing particularly floor and wall tiles of various types; Hewang Packaging and Printing Company which specializes in the production of packaging materials, particularly cartons; Pannda which focuses on the manufacturing and marketing of all sorts of iron and steel products. Currently, the main production includes steel strip coil, galvanized pipes, and different sizes of custom-made C-type steel which is meeting local demands and the export market; and China glass, producing glass for industrial and domestic use (Vanguard, 2019 July). How has this Free Trade Zone impacted the community where it was located? These can be examined via the following:

**Employment and Quality of Employment:** One of the key objectives of free trade zones is to generate employment opportunities in a higher number. With the provision of incentives to free zones, companies are motivated to establish in the zones. The jobs created from this development are expected to benefit the host community and the country at large. In the case of the Ogun-Guangdong Free Trade Zone, Mr. Daniel Che, the deputy general manager of China-Africa Investment, announced that over 6000 people are employed by the zone (Vanguard, 2019 July). Some of the factory workers interviewed informed that close to 100% of the factory workers are Nigerians; this has a huge impact on unemployment alleviation in the country. It was however stated that the percentage of Igbesa indigenes who work in the zone is significantly low. This is because the locals do not value the zone concept and have a superior ego, being indigenes. While the local indigenes may not have benefited from job opportunities in the zone, other inhabitants of the community, particularly the *Egede* and *Hausa* people of Nigeria, have largely benefited from the scheme. Also, Nigerians from other parts of the country have migrated into the area to grab job opportunities.

The quality of employment provided in the zone is however questionable. While the Chinese nationals take up administrative, managerial, and technical positions, Nigerians are employed mainly as factory workers and security men. According to some of the factory workers and supervisors interviewed in the zone, only Nigerians work as factory workers, and only very few work in the administrative offices. The jobs do not take into cognizance academic degrees and qualifications, so all categories of people could be employed. Also, the job recruitment process is informal and done at random with the use of a national identity card. The work condition in the zone for factory workers particularly was described as rigorous with poor remunerations which are mostly processed on a commission basis. As a result, most workers hop from one company to the other in the search for better treatment. A couple of factory workers when asked how long they worked in a company, responded that they spend about 2 or 3 months with a company and move to another once they can no longer cope with the treatment. This indicates that the zone jobs are unstable and unpredictable. Generally, pay in the zone is poor, except for translators who could earn up to 100,000 Naira a month. A community resident (Mrs. Abigail) who worked in the zone as a supervisor in 2021 informed that she was paid between 30,000 and 35,000 Naira per month. The zone jobs do not make provisions for leave, insurance, pension, or gratuity. Summarily, the jobs offered to Nigerians in the zone are mainly unskilled/semi-skilled and do not give room for growth and career development.

While the zone fulfilled its goal of job creation, it has failed to optimally fulfill development goals of improving the living conditions of the people. First, the condition of the jobs provided does not give room for career growth and development. Second, the workers (Nigerians) are poorly paid and made to work harder and in most cases, the salary they earn is barely sufficient to meet their basic needs, so they end up borrowing to keep up. Third, the stress accumulated from the rigors of the job does not do well for the mental health and overall well-being of the people. Despite the high figures of employment generated, many educated citizens remain unemployed because the jobs available to Nigerians in the zone are menial. "Almost 70% of our youths are unemployed. We have doctors, engineers...name it" (Benjamin Akanbi, 2018 Nov).

**Social development:** Even with the challenges surrounding the zone jobs, a lot of community members have been gainfully employed. The effect of young members of the community, channelling their energy into productive ventures is that social vices are reduced. The town was formally known for student cult clashes but being engaged as zone workers has downed the occurrence of this event. Since workers are employed in the zone regardless of academic qualifications, those without academic qualifications who could be employed for criminal activities could be gainfully employed and earn a decent living.

**Knowledge transfer:** Transfer of technical and technological know-how is also a major benefit of a free trade zone, accruing to host countries. Considering the high number of local workers in the zone and that they are mostly concerned with production and types of machinery, they get to acquire advanced technical knowledge. By implication, the knowledge acquired could be transferred to the bigger community. This would reduce the number of foreign experts coming into the country to take up jobs. On the flip side, it was informed by some of the workers interviewed that the Chinese are the ones who handle technical repairs, thus, the local laborers may not be able to gather complete knowledge.

**Community Welfare:** The zone has been criticized for fulfilling its corporate social responsibilities (CSR). For example, Ayinla Rasaq (2021, October) wrote that the Oloja Ekun called the zone out for failing to carry out CSR for the intended growth and development of the host communities. Also, the manufacturing companies in the area, especially the China-owned Ogun Guangdong Free Trade Zone (OGFTZ) were criticized for bad treatment of the local people. Furthermore, the king stated that the China conglomerate and many local businesses do not support the federal government's indigenization policy of hiring locals to work for the companies and that the community has grown dissatisfied over time with both the companies and the free trade zone's performance. While it has recorded some success in community development, it seems not to have done enough.

The free trade zone management has made certain contributions to the social and welfare condition of the people of Igbesa. As part of its corporate social responsibility project, the zone management organizes annual empowerment programs for the members of the community. For example, in December 2022, an empowerment program was organized for women (widows in particular) with the theme "empowering our women folks for better living." In the previous year, they were financially empowered to start small-scale businesses to enable them to fend for themselves. In this light, the free trade zone through its corporate social responsibility is contributing to an important United Nations sustainable development goal, which is reducing poverty. Also, in 2022, the zone management organized a seminar for drivers to sensitize them on traffic safety and minimize business loss, considering the high rate of accidents. The multiplier effect of this action is an increase in the lifespan of the people. Since most members of the community (especially drivers) are barely literate, this program will do a lot to educate them correctly.

The contribution of the zone to education is also felt through the China-Nigeria friendship model primary school Igbesa established in 2012, which has always been a beneficiary of the zone's corporate social responsibility. On the school's 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary, the zone management renovated the school and donated school kits and writing materials to the students. This is a huge contribution to the development of the community as it makes learning easier for the students by providing a conducive learning environment. According to (Onyiriuba, 2000), the challenge of development is to improve the quality of life... and it encompasses better education. The model school when compared with other public schools in the community is of far better standard with conducive classrooms, good chairs, tables, and facilities. However, only a few students can be accommodated in the structure, which means that the larger population of students remains in the despicable public schools without access to quality education. The zone management has also contributed to medical facilities to the community (China-Africa Business Council).

Despite these remarkable contributions, the community still suffers from poor water systems, and medical facilities among others. The provision of pipe-borne water is lacking in the community. Thus, those who do not have the financial capacity to construct a borehole must resort to well water, which is not safe for drinking. Alternatively, the residents had to resort to sinking their boreholes, which sometimes had an impact on the environment. There is no information on any contributions of the free trade zone towards alleviating this challenge.

**Infrastructural development:** One of the goals of free trade zones is the transformation of developing areas. In the case of Igbesa town, the presence of the zone has improved to an extent the outlook and development of the community. On 29 April 2021, the government commissioned the 10.25km well-tarred dual road with streetlights on the Lusada- Igbesa axis, constructed through a public-private partnership. This infrastructural development has eased transportation in the area and given it a modern outlook. For years, residents of the community have groaned about the appalling state of the road as it was a major road that led into the town. Now a journey that would formally take over an hour now takes less than 30 minutes.

**Economic Growth / Linkages:** According to the governing board of the Ogun-Guangdong Free Trade Zone, the zone has generated over \$300 million in FDI over the past 15 years (the nation, 2022 August). Some of the major international brands in the zone include Goodwill Ceramic with an investment of over \$100 million; China (Nigeria) Glass about \$100 million; Hewang Packing & Printing (\$50 million); and the Lee Group, a Hong Kong-headquartered footwear manufacturer that has also made a substantial but undisclosed investment (Freitas, 2019). Considering that Igbesa is an agricultural hub and that the zone is multi-use, engaging in the production of different



things even tomato sauce, the local suppliers have had the advantage of supplying raw materials to companies in the zone. According to Daniel Chi the deputy general manager of China-Africa investment, the industries are sourcing most of their raw materials from Nigeria and a lot of local suppliers are meeting the raw materials needs of the industries (Vanguard, 2019 July). This effect is business expansion for local vendors, more income, and better living conditions, which is the objective of development.

**Standard of living:** It is no secret that the free trade zone has affected the cost of living in the town and neighborhood. The migrations resulting from job opportunities in the zone have increased the value of land, housing, and rent in the area. Thus, people have to keep up with the new standard of course. This has however been complemented with an increase in demand for businesses because of the increased population. This means more income and better living conditions.

**Environmental issues:** The land allocation for the free trade zone has generated a lot of controversies between the indigenes and the zone. They see it as an encroachment on their land, especially as land is employed for farming, which is the primary trade of the Igbesa people. Upsetting is the fact that there was no adequate compensation for those affected by the free trade zone land allocation. Toyin Aina, the Ayelu of Igbesa said “When you are given ₦70, 000, ₦80, 000, is that one compensation?”

### **Prospects of Ogun-Guangdong Free Trade Zone to the Development of Igbesa Town**

The Ogun Guangdong free trade zone has proved successful over the years especially when compared to other zones in Nigeria and its impact on its host community is quite noticeable. Although the zone is beset with a lot of challenges, it exhibits potential for growth, success, and more importantly, the development of its host community- Igbesa town. The proximity of Igbesa to Agbara industrial estate which is close to Badagry- the border town with the republic of Benin, and relative proximity to Apapa and the Murtala airport have positioned the area as a viable environment for investments. Little wonder that companies are establishing within the community and zone in their numbers. Consequently, the area has become a commercial and industrial hub and an attraction of investments from both local and foreign investors. Currently, over 60 companies are operating in the zone and more have proposed to invest. By implication, more jobs are created, especially to the benefit of the local community. Also, government revenue increases through tariffs and applicable fees.

The awful condition of the Atan- Agbara road was a major challenge to the operations of the free zone as well as other businesses within the area. However, with the commencement of the reconstruction of the road in 2021, the axis is positioned for greater economic boost and development. The completion of the road would drive more investors into the zone. This would provide more jobs and increase the internal revenue of the state. As more people troop into the area for jobs, the value of land, property, and rent increases. Those who have abandoned their houses because of bad roads will come back and people will be encouraged to purchase houses and lands in the area. Thus, the real estate business will thrive more. Also, the completed road will ease the movement of goods and commuting of labor. Businesses have incurred losses severally because of accidents with their trucks on the bad roads which damaged their goods. This will reduce drastically once the road is completed and businesses will thrive more.

With a land mass of 100 square kilometers, the zone can attract about 1000 enterprises. This would provide more than enough jobs (both skilled and unskilled labor) for members of the community. Good jobs translate to income generation for citizens, the community, and the country at large. In essence, the living conditions of the people would be uplifted and increased government revenue through tax from citizens would facilitate the development of the community and country.

In 2016, Governor Ibikunle Amosun of Ogun State took part in a working visit to China alongside President Muhammadu Buhari, during which investments worth over \$1.2bn were attracted to the state. One of the agreements sealed during the visit includes a \$1 billion deal for the establishment of a hi-tech industrial park in the Ogun-Guangdong Free Trade Zone located at Igbesa (Vanguard, 2016 April). Also, the zone management is making plans to partner with other Asian countries like Lebanon and India to take a portion of the Ogun-Guangdong Free Trade Zone. The presence of Goodwill Ceramics, one of the biggest producers of wall and floor tiles in Africa, Hewang Packaging, and other big firms in the zone, coupled with incentives offered, would attract other investors to the zone. All these would drive the industrialization of the community, as well as socio-economic development.

The successful operation of the zone and the subsequent influx of investors into the zone will boost the economic and social life of the community. Increased population by job availability would lead to an increase in demand and sales for businesses; the Lusada market will boom more. According to a zone factory supervisor interviewed, some companies within the zone have up to 1,000 Nigerians as workers. This is a huge number that will positively impact

on trade in the area. Recreational centers, malls, and financial institutions that are not present in the area because of low demand will begin to set up investments in the area. Consequently, the area will gain more exposure. With the high number of local labourers in the zone, knowledge is transferred to the local community which would serve the development of indigenous industries and increase the brain bank of the country. This would reduce the number of foreign experts coming into the country to take up employment.

The presence of the zone is of immense benefit to education in the community. Students of Ogun State Institute of Technology (OGITECH) have the privilege of undertaking their industrial training in the zone. An enormous number of students have been a beneficiary. After schooling, they could also be gainfully employed by enterprises within the zone.

The zone can transform the community into a refined and modern environment. This is evident with the outcome of the construction of the well-tarred dual road with streetlights on the Lusada-Igbesa axis through a public-private partnership of which the zone Chinese partners are a major part. Formerly, the road was bare and in bad condition. This is an indication that the zone has more to offer the Igbesa community concerning road and infrastructural development. On a tour around the zone on March 12, 2018, the Managing Director of Ogun-Guangdong Free Trade Zone, Mr. Wilson Wu, said, "Our prospect is to build a city which is 100 square meters like Dubai or Hong Kong which will be a quite special place in Nigeria. We are going to have manufacturing companies here; we will have housing estate, polo club, golf club, and other things that will be very attractive for Nigeria." (Adeoye, 2018)

Also, the free trade zone has carried out some corporate social responsibility which has improved the social condition of the people and community. For example, in December 2021, the China-Africa Investment Free Zone Committee the management company of the zone conducted its annual empowerment program, which was themed "self-reliance through agronomy." The zone is interested in doing more. The new chairman of the zone Hadjia Hafsat Oduwole announced in a press conference on August 16, 2022, that the FTZ would engage more with women as they are vital to the development of the nation (Daud, 2022 August).

## Conclusion

Free trade zone is an economic policy tool that has been employed by countries of the world to pursue development. The goals of free trade zones such as attracting FDI, promoting industrialization, increasing foreign exchange, and job creation, among others, can directly and indirectly transform an economy positively and impact economic development. The Success of the Shannon free trade zone and Chinese zones is a testament to this. An analysis of the Ogun Guangdong free trade zone also shows a level of success in terms of developmental impact. Igbesa was mostly an agricultural center, but since the state government established a free trade zone there, it has transformed into a major industrial center attracting industrial establishments in their numbers.

The zone has generated so much FDI for the state, with more than US\$234 million in revenue in 2021 while having attracted more than \$2 billion in total investment. Also, thousands of jobs have been generated for the community and state at large with opportunities for more. The OGFTZ would require the construction of infrastructure such as roads, ports, and power plants, which would create jobs in the construction sector. Additionally, businesses operating in the OGFTZ would need to hire workers, which would create new job opportunities in the region.

Despite the contributions of the zone, the town is still plagued with a lack of appurtenances of development such as a poor road network, epileptic power supply in the community, and low standard of living, among others. However, it is important to note that a free trade zone is not a panacea for development, but only a medium through which social and economic development can be achieved if implemented accordingly. Therefore, the host government has a huge role to play in deriving ultimate results from the scheme. Free trade zones should be aligned with other development goals of the host country.

Based on the findings of this study, the OGFTZ has huge prospects in line with the aims and objectives of this study. However, certain things need to be put in place to drive this goal.

1. Establish clear regulations and guidelines: To ensure that businesses operating in the OGFTZ comply with both Nigerian and Chinese regulations, it is important to establish clear regulations and guidelines for companies operating within the zone. This will help to minimize confusion and ensure that businesses can operate efficiently. Also, the government should revisit the development criteria for zone developers in order to evaluate and monitor the fulfilment of corporate social responsibility.
2. Develop infrastructure: Investing in infrastructure development is crucial to the success of the OGFTZ. This includes investing in transportation, power, and communication systems, as well as housing and other

- facilities for businesses and workers in the zone. The government should rise to its responsibilities, especially on off-site infrastructure construction. Thus, creating a conducive environment for the zone to thrive.
3. Promote cooperation and collaboration: Encourage cooperation and collaboration between Nigerian and Chinese businesses operating in the OGFTZ. This can be done through the establishment of joint ventures and other partnerships, as well as through the sharing of information and resources.
  4. Encourage the involvement of SMEs: Small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) are a vital component of both the Nigerian and Chinese economies. Encourage the participation of SMEs in the OGFTZ by providing them with the necessary resources and support to operate and succeed in the zone.
  5. Address potential negative impacts: The OGFTZ could have potential negative impacts on local communities, particularly in terms of job displacement and environmental degradation. It's important to address these concerns and mitigate potential negative impacts through effective community engagement and sustainable development practices.
  6. Provide training and capacity building: Offering training and capacity building opportunities to businesses operating in the OGFTZ can help to ensure that they have the necessary skills and knowledge to succeed in the zone. This can include providing training in areas such as regulatory compliance, marketing, and language.
  7. Create a one-stop-shop service: To make it easy for businesses to navigate the regulatory environment, creating a one-stop-shop service that provides businesses with all the necessary information and support they need to operate in the OGFTZ is helpful. This can include providing information on regulations, taxes, and other requirements, as well as help with registration and licensing.
  8. The government should have an independent monitoring team to check enforcement, violations, and exploitation.
  9. The government should check overlap activities between her agencies like customs, immigration, NEPZA, Central bank, FIRS, etc. to avoid duplications and contradictions.
  10. The degree of "value-added" criteria that are permitted in the zone should have a clear definition from the government (as assembling, manufacturing, trade, and services). This will resolve disputes such as when customers or investors view software upgrades for electrical components as adding value.
  11. Operational concerns, such as how long raw materials can stay in the zone, the movement of duty paid on raw materials from customs territory to the zone and securing payment/bond to expedite customs clearance for both export to other countries and the host community, should be reviewed regularly.

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