



Review Article

Stimuli to the Economic Growth of Aba Before 1970

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Abstract

Undoubtedly, commerce plays a vital role towards the growth of a particular locality. This is so in the case of Aba, which is often referred to as 'the commercial hub' of Igbo land, South-east of Nigeria. Looking at Aba from economic dimension, it could be said that the area witnessed a lot of economic activities especially, trade in oil palm. It was as a result of this mineral resource (oil palm) that attracted people of different descent- both Africans and non-Africans to the area who came with their commodities to engage in one form of trade or another. Adopting historical methodology which encouraged ample utilization of primary (oral and archives) and secondary sources, it attempts a reconstruction of the history of the town with a view to indicate the relative contribution of economic factors to its growth. Findings however, revealed that the major stimulus for the growth of Aba to an urban center was as a result of economic activities that took place in the town. This factor and the location of Aba, had even before the British presence engendered a trend in Aba's growth. This existing force of growth encouraged the rise in population, rise of entrepreneurship, for instance; leather works that was manifested in the emergence of numerous foreign and indigenous enterprises, and in fact, laid the infrastructures that has made Aba an important town in Nigeria. The increased immigration of people attracted by economic opportunities created a situation in which the Ngwa owners of the land became vastly outnumbered by the non-Ngwa residents. It is on this premise that this paper will examine land and people of Aba, how Aba emerged as an economic hub as well as discusses the impact of economic activities on the area under review.

Keywords: Economic activities, Infrastructures, Aba, Stimuli, Immigrants

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Introduction

Aba, often referred to as the commercial nerve-centre of Igbo land, is a major city and the main trading center in Abia State, South-east of Nigeria. The area under review comprises of five major villages, namely; Aba-Ukwu, Ezi-Ukwu, Obuda, Umuokporji (formerly Okporjiaku) and Osusu (I. Ikonne, Traditional Ruler Osusu and M. Ugbor Traditional Ruler of Aba-Ukwu, personal communication, Dec 9 and 12, 2020 respectively). It is important to briefly look at the location and geography of Aba. This is necessary because according to Hopkins (1973:11), the geography of an area influences the cause of human history and development. He has also argued that Africa's economic past is the record of a continuous dialogue between geography and history; from the very beginnings of agriculture to the introduction of modern industry (Hopkins, 1973). Aba which falls under the Eastern Region was an administrative region. For most of the colonial period, however, it was in Aba Division of Owerri Province until 1952 when it became part of Umuahia Province. In that same year, Aba itself was made an Urban District Council. Aba lies along the west bank of the Aba River and is at the intersection of roads leading to Port Harcourt, Umuahia, Owerri, Ikot Ekpene and Ikot Abasi.

Aba has a long history as a major center of commerce and industry in Nigeria. It was originally established by the Ngwa clan of Igbo land as a market town. After the Aro Expedition and the pacification of the Aba area in 1901/1902, the British colonial government set up a military post in Aba (Munro, 1995). By 1915, a rail line was constructed to link Aba to Port Harcourt, a means through which the Europeans transported coal from Enugu en-route to Europe (Igwe, 2015:10).

Aba has a long and diverse history of contact with the outside world. As a result of the contacts, the activities of the Muslims, Christian missionaries, and the European traders were felt in the area in different times of history. These contacts were made possible as a result of the economic potentials (palm oil) which Aba possesses as well as its strategic location. In course of the trade on palm oil, foreigners who came to buy palm oil in Aba, came with their own products as well as services, for instance, leather shoe mending. Some of these foreigners ended up residing in Aba, thereby, increasing the population of Aba. It is on this premise that this paper sets to appraise the various ways in which the economic activities impacted in the area under review. Comprising of four sections; firstly, the introduction section, secondly, the land and people of Aba, thirdly, highlights on how Aba emerged as an economic hub centre and lastly, an appraisal on the impact of economic activities in Aba.

1. Land and people of Aba

The origins of the Ngwa (and the Aba) are linked with the migration stories of the Igbo generally. As noted by E. Isichei (1976:3), the cradle of human habitation in the Igbo area was probably the Cross River and the Anambra valley/Nsukka escarpment. In her opinion, northern Igbo land was the early nucleus of settlement. But these proto-Igbo settlements, according to her eventually dispersed more widely in the forest of Igbo land concentrating especially in what later became known as Owerri, Okigwe, Orlu and Awka; an area which anthropologists and other scholars came to regard as the Igbo heartland. She adds that, as a result of increased population pressure on this heartland, several migrations out of the area were endangered. She concludes that it was one of these migrations that resulted in the formation of the Ngwa sub-group (Isichei, 1976).

A more detailed version of the origin of the Ngwa is that based on oral traditions given by Traditional Rulers of Osusu, Aba-Ukwu and Umuokporjiaku (I. Ikonne, M. Ugbor and E. Ugwuzor, personal communication, Dec 9, 12 and 16, 2020 respectively) which corroborated with the account given by J. N. Nwaguru. Be that as it may, the traditions state that, the main body of the Ngwa Clan originated from a town called Umunoha in the former Owerri Division. According to the tradition, a number of people were travelling in search of new lands to settle. One day the migrating parties came to the bank of a stream to take their evening meal. While preparing their food, the stream began to rise; three brothers quickly boiled their yams, hurriedly ate it and crossed over the stream while the others who were roasting their yams couldn't finish on time before the river rose to an impassable level. They were therefore forced to settle on the right bank of the river which from then became known as 'Imo' because of its sudden and swollen size. The three persons whose promptness enabled them to cross to the left side of the river were brothers named; Ngwa Ukwu, Nwoha and Avosi in order of age. To them was given the name "Ngwa" on account of the expeditious manner of their crossing while those who remained on the right bank were known as "*Ohuhu*", literally "he, who roasts", to indicate the cooking method which led to their delay (M. Ugbor, personal communication, Dec 12, 2020).

The three brothers, according to this tradition lived peacefully in Okpu-ala Ngwa for a long time. As their families increased, they moved apart in different directions. Ngwa Ukwu descendants founded the present village of Ngwa Ukwu group; Nwoha's descendants, the villages of the present groups of Umuoha, Mbutu Ovuokwu and Ovungwu while Avosi founded the villages of the Nvosi group, all around Okpuala Ngwa (Nwaguru, 1973:22).

Colonial officials seem to have known of this migration story even before the 1893 intelligence reports of J.G.C. Allen. Writing in 1931 for instance, E.J.G. Kelly, District Officer for Aba Division, noted:

The greatest portion of the (Aba) Division is inhabited by the Ngwa sub-tribe. These people have no tradition as to their origin beyond a vague story of migration from a country West of Imo River to a place now known as Okpuala-Ekelefor in the Bende Division where a settlement was founded... Most villages claim to have migrated from Okpuala Ekelefor or its vicinity (Jones, 1963:30).

According to the tradition, a secondary dispersal southwards from Okpuala occasioned essentially by land hunger led to the displacement of several Ibeme (Annang) settlements. This southward push was initially accompanied by force. But, following strong opposition by the Ibemes, a more peaceful method of penetration was adopted. These later migrations were in two waves. The first wave settled in the western area while the second settled in the south and south-western area forming respectively what was eventually referred to as south-western and south-eastern Ngwa groups of villages. Aba village which was named after the man who led the migration formed part of the south-eastern group (I. Ikonne, 2020).

The oldest and leader of the three brothers, Aba Amaku detected a brand, natural path in the forest, a track created by numerous gigantic elephants. In those centuries ago, it was reported that elephant tracks were then used as roads. The wild elephants moved up and down in search of drinking water, because the dry season was very severe and streams and rivers were then very difficult to locate in certain areas. So Aba urged his two other brothers; Akpara and Mgbede to accompany him to follow the elephant track and see where it will lead them. They encountered a lot of difficulties on their journey. They had no drinking water, no food and the worst of it all, no shelter crowned by unrelenting mosquito bites which caused most of their family members to be sick with the killer malaria disease. Unfortunately, Aba's younger brothers died on the way leaving Aba and his family members to continue his journey following the elephant tracks, which seemed unending.

Suddenly, one severely hot afternoon, during the dry season when the temperature was at the boiling point, Aba Amaku saw a group of elephants on their tracks, marching majestically southwards. He immediately called on his grown up sons to accompany him on an expedition to discover the destination of the elephants. They followed the elephants at a safe distance for some hours. And finally, Aba at the head of the expedition saw the elephants get to a certain big stretch of water, the size of which he had never seen before.

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This body of water is today's Aba River. It was then a clean and bluish body of water, with the capacity to enable steamboats navigate in its expanse, and stretches from Aba to Azumini, and then to the Atlantic Ocean. Aba did not know about all these then. He and his sons were only content to look at the river over and over again, to ascertain whether it was fit for human consumption (N. Egbulefu and M. Ugbor, personal communication, Dec 12 and 29, 2020 respectively).

Having drank from the water and seeing its fitness for human consumption, Aba instructed his eldest son, *Oha*, who led his brothers to go and bring the entire family from Ife-Obara area to the present location. This former place which his father has left with their shrine, Aba named it, *Ihu Ala Ubi* (Face of the Farmland), and directed that his children must pay yearly visit to its shrine. And in his new environment, Aba called his shrine, *Ihu-Ala-Ulo* (Face of the Home). He equally told them to worship Almighty God through this shrine so that he would provide them abundant harvest, good health, and general prosperity and fame. This new home, Aba called it, *Okpokoro-Ugwu Aba*. This particular spot reportedly covers the area of the National Museum of History, Office of the Chairman, Aba South Local Government, National Electric Power Authority (NEPA) head office, and the Aba Town Hall. This area was the first official traditional compound of late Aba Amaku, the founder of Aba settlement (Osuala, 2000:31).

There is a problem which has to do with the time when Aba was founded. While traditions fail to give any clues as to dates for the migrations, various sources and inferences have suggested some periodisation for the migrations and thus the founding of Aba. Isichei (1976), for instance, thinks that the migrations must have been of great antiquity. Nwaguru (1973) drawing inferences from a statement by early British administrators (Harcourt and Koe) dated the secondary dispersal or migrations out of which Aba was founded to the last quarter of the 17th century. In view of Oriji (1981:45), the origin of the Ngwa and the dispersal could be traced to a much earlier date. Drawing inferences from the works of E. Alagoa and others (in Ade-Ajayi and Crowther, 1976:338), he suggested a date of between the 13th and the end of the 14th centuries as the possible date of the migrations leading to the settlement of the area (Alagoa, 1976). However, since several population movements and migrations took place and since that leading to the founding of Aba was one of the very last in Ngwa land, the writer could conclude that Aba was founded sometimes between 13th and 17th centuries with particular date being closer to the end of the 17th century.

Evidence from other sources seems to support this view. It has been shown for instance, that the Ngwa country and Aba were already well settled by the time of the Aro dominance of the slave trade and other hinterland trading activities. According to

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Ekejiuba (1972:13) who carried out extensive research on the Aro, some of these in conjunction with K.O. Dike, the foundations of Aro long distance trade were laid about mid 17th century shortly after the Aro society was constituted.

2. Emergence of Aba as an economic hub

We can deduce that Aba emerged as an economic hub as a result of several factors which include; palm oil and its produce that later saw an increase in its demand, its location, existence of a market (*Eke-Oha*), provision of infrastructures (railway and vehicular transportation, mortuary, incinerators) and houses for accommodating both European and African staff/merchants.

On the eve of the European presence, agriculture was the dominant occupation of the Aba people. Nearly all citizens of working age were engaged in agriculture either directly or in related fields. The area settled by the Ngwa was located in the forest zone and, as noted, land was fertile for agriculture. Access to land, and land tenure were governed by laws of inheritance (Jones, 1949). The technology available to the people was basically a simple one which involved the use of tools as cutlasses and hoes.

Like other parts of Ngwa land, Aba was endowed abundantly with palm trees. What is now the industrial area where factories such as Nigeria Breweries and PZ are located was a great palm oil belt in the pre-colonial period. Besides agriculture, the people also engaged in crafts such as wood carving as well as different types of weaving. In fact, Aba's location on the route to the Rivers and Cross River areas enabled it to gain a lot of weaving, carving and leather works ideas which played a vital role towards her becoming an economic hub. The bulk of Aba people, up till the eve of European conquest, engaged mainly in the local exchange of agricultural and craft products, while only a few engaged in long distance trading (N. Egbulefu, personal communication, Dec 12, 2020). The market where the exchange took place in Aba was the *Eke Oha* market which, until the colonial period was a periodic market which was held usually every 5th day, that is, *Eke* market day. The *Eke Oha* market was a central market which served the people of Aba as well as those from neighbouring villages. This was a characteristic of big village group markets, while smaller village markets served individual village only (Hodder and Ukwu, 1969). Neighbouring markets in the same class as *Eke Oha* during this time included *Orie Ntigha*, *Orie Abala*, *Orie Obegu* and *Eke-Akpara*. Some Aba people often went to these markets for business transactions. Of all the markets, *Eke-Akpara* appeared to have been the favourite of Aba people (Hodder and Ukwu, 1969).

The *Eke Oha* market which, as we noted above, served local traders was also the major market that served long distance trade. In fact, the market was transformed in the 19th century when it operated both as an important central and a border market. Its strategic location at the head of the Aza (Aba) River, bordering Ogbor Hill, enabled it to serve Aro and Bende traders as well as Bonny and Opobo long distance traders. Some of these long distance traders that came to Aba who couldn't finish their businesses had to look for accommodation to pass the night. Even some had to relocate to settle in the Aba area with their family members. In 1930, three new blocks of market stalls were completed and put to use. By 1939, many of the temporary stalls were made permanent and some with bush roofs were replaced with corrugated Iron sheets. In general, as at December 31, 1940, there were in all 744 permanent shops and 1,066 temporary shops in the *Eke Oha* market (N.A.E Abadist, 1940). In addition incinerators, a mortuary and a slaughter house were put up. It is clear therefore that the 1920s saw increased economic activity and growth in Aba.

As earlier noted, Aba was in the centre of Eastern Nigeria's palm producing belt and as would be expected, its fortunes, in terms of growth and development, were largely dictated by the performance of the produce trade. This was especially the case in the period before the beginning of the Second World War. The 1920s was a very active and booming period in the Aba produce trade and trading figures for the period clearly reflected this. For instance, while in 1923, total produce bought in Aba by oil firms amounted to 7,138 tons, this rose to 12,918 tons by 1924, a more than 80 percent growth in just one trading year (N.A.I. CSo, 1924). Also exports from Opobo and Port Harcourt the two main ports served by Aba fairly confirm this boom in produce trade. For instance, the figures for Palm oil exports from Port Harcourt show a consistent growth between 1923 and 1929. The only exceptions were in 1924 and 1925 when 25,803 and 28,287 tons of palm oil was exported respectively: Even so, the figures represented extraordinary increases and were therefore positive instead of negative figures (Martin, 1988).

This healthy state of the township revenue encouraged the development of infrastructure. New roads were opened up while old ones were kept clean. Perhaps the most important road opened up during this period with regards to contributions to commercial growth was the one linking the railway station with Owerri Road, where nearly all the European trading stations were located. The road was built with laterite in 1924 (NAE Abadist, 1926/27). However, it was the vastly improved and diversified transportation system that made it possible for the increased supplies to reach the buying points. These included rail, vehicular and bicycle transport systems. But these various means of transportation had different effects on the different groups of residents. For

instance, though rail transportation encouraged the development of trade and boom for all, it was the Europeans that benefited most from it.

All these played vital roles towards the growth of Aba as an economic hub and with all these in place, Aba's population increased tremendously with both European and African descents that came with one form of trade or the other, including service enterprise. By 1945, Aba had become a kind of "melting-pot" because of the influx of people of diverse cultures and interests to the town. As already shown, immigrants included both the Igbo and the non-Igbo, and even non-Nigerians. The former included those from neighbouring communities in Ngwaland as well as those from Arochukwu, Owerri, Nkwerre and Onitsha (usually called the *Ijekebe*). The latter included Nigerian groups like the Yoruba, Hausa, Efik, Ijo, Ibibio, Annang and non-Nigerians like the Saro, people from the Gold Coast, agents of European commercial firms and officials of the colonial regime. According to the Report of an inquiry into a proposal to excise the Aba Urban District from Aba Ngwa county carried out in 1954, it was said that the population rose rapidly from 12,958 in 1931 to 57,787 by 1952/53, a rise of 345% in 20 years.

3. Impact of economic activities in Aba

Economic activities for instance palm oil had tremendous impact in Aba, amongst them include the following;

A. It led to the development of infrastructures and basic amenities: in order to sustain the rising trade in palm oil, roads were constructed so as to ease the free movement of produce from point of production to point of sales. As earlier noted, Aba was in the centre of Eastern Nigeria's palm producing belt and as would be expected, its fortunes, in terms of growth and development, were largely dictated by the performance of the produce trade.

The lack of good roads and an efficient drainage system affected economic activities in Aba adversely. This was because, as we have noted repeatedly, road transport was a very important factor in Aba's growth. Indeed some regarded it as the "clue to Aba's prosperity" (Goodland, Sept, 22 1956). The provision of good roads and drainage is obviously an important factor in the growth of any city, more so when the city began with mere bush tracks. Road development in Aba for most of our period was slow and inadequate. The most important road, the Asa Road, was not graveled until 1921 and it remained a narrow road until 1948 when it was expanded by three feet (NAE Abadist, 1948). In that year also, the tarring of the whole length of Hospital Road was completed. By 1949, Owerri Road was also tarred. Thus, as late as 1949 only few roads received any worthwhile attention from township authorities and even these, as the District Officer noted, were always in an "appalling state during the wet season".

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Water and electricity constitute two major inputs necessary to encourage the growth of any human settlement. They are important in the daily life of residents and crucial for commercial and industrial development. They could well serve as an important guide to a city's growth, and certainly the availability of electricity serves as an indication of the level of industrialisation. Water and electricity schemes came to Aba rather late. In the case of water, residents and commercial firms for many years depended on the Aba River for their supply, while a few dug private wells in their premises. This remained the case until 1928. The first systematic scheme for the provision of portable water to Aba did not start until 1927 that is about 5 years after its declaration as a Second Class Township. The scheme involved the sinking of a well near the Aba River, 15 feet in diameter and 30 feet deep, at a total cost of £10,490 (N.A.E Abadist, 1930). The water was pumped from the well to a tank from where it was treated and distributed in the town. As to the quality of the water, a government Chemist's Report once described it as "the best natural water supply in Nigeria" (N.A.I CSo, 1939). It is clear that given the date of its introduction, the provision of water was stemmed on the fact that Aba had become economically buoyant enough to take care of it. It also shows that the water scheme was introduced more to generate revenue than to encourage further and sustained growth in the town.

To think that Aba did not have electricity till late 1949, was further proof of the fact that the colonial authorities were only ready to put their money where their mouth was. The thinking would appear to have been that you don't need electricity to move produce to England. What you need is railway, hence this was urgently provided. Even after the authorities eventually recognised the need for the supply of electricity, for which the town was surveyed in mid-April, 1947, the project did not get off the ground until December 1949. After 3 years of construction and installation by Messrs Nigeria Electricity Undertakings, the scheme was completed and was officially commissioned for use on December 10, 1952 (NAE Abadist, 1953). On commissioning, the current was supplied by two 115 kilowatt diesel driven alternators. Electricity was brought to Aba on the conviction that the population as well as commercial situation of Aba at the time, could sustain and pay for an electricity scheme. What this means therefore is that it was a facility brought about because of the rapid and sustained rate of Aba's growth occasioned by commerce. What cannot be denied however is that its introduction encouraged more growth as both European and African enterprises took advantage of its presence to expand their activities and introduced new ones.

B. It led to urbanisation of Aba: Urbanisation as conceived in the modern sense has much to do with the availability of certain kinds of infrastructure: good roads, railway, water supply facilities and electricity. In the absence of these facilities many urban areas would be no more than glorified villages. In fact, these facilities are the main inducements

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for rural-urban migration as young people of working age in particular leave the rural settings in search of a better life in the cities. This was the case of Aba as seen in the preceding section which was as a result of economic activities.

C. Another impact was that it gave rise for the establishment of industries in Aba. Two foreign industries sprang up during the period under review as a result of economic activities (palm oil trade) in Aba. The companies are Lever Brothers Nigeria Limited and Nigeria Breweries.

Lever Brothers Company was the brain child of William Lever but was later joined in his business by his brother called John. By 1890, John teamed up with William in the grocery business. Soon after, they became attracted to soap manufacturing which was thriving in the 1880s. With their successful formulation of Sunlight soap and the cheap availability of raw materials the two brothers switched over completely to the soap business. By 1911, Lever Brothers added the production of Margarine to its business (Harteg, 1970).

As the company's popularity and expansion continued in Britain, and as demand for its products grew in Europe, William Lever embarked on an extensive tour of the world during which he visited Nigeria. His aim was to examine the possibilities of further expansion of the company. Lever Brothers Nigeria was thus a product of the drive by William Lever for outside expansion. It was established at Apapa, Lagos with the name, West African Soap Company, though the exact year of establishment is contradictory.

As Production and demand for Lever Brothers products increased, the company's management began to think of a factory outside Lagos. The idea was mooted by one Mr. H. Overgoor, a Dutch who served as Chairman and Deputy Managing Director of the company in the period 1950-1963. Aba was chosen as the location for the second Lever factory after exhaustive discussion. Construction was completed in 1957 and formal opening took place in 1958. The first product was Kippel Bar Soap. This was followed by the production of Lifeboy and Sunlight soaps. At the same period, the company produced glycerin-an oil extracted from palm oil and palm kernels after soap making (M. Ogbonna, personal communication, March 22, 2021).

A number of factors were responsible for the choice of Aba. The first was the availability in the Aba area of the main raw materials for the production of soap namely palm oil and kernels. Secondly, market research showed that Aba could serve not only the large Eastern market, but also be a very important link between the South, and the North-eastern market.

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Science and Education Development Inst., Nigeria

Nigeria Breweries Limited, another company established in Aba during the period before 1970. This choice was informed more by the commercial viability of the area than the presence of raw materials. Another important reason for the choice was Aba's geographical location. It was located in a thickly populated center where there was wealth from produce trade and other businesses; where there existed a good transportation system and where it would serve the Igbo heartland as well as peoples of the Rivers and Cross River areas. More importantly, Aba was seen by the company as an important link between the South and the North-Eastern regions of the country both commercially and demographically.

The Aba factory was built at Factory Road which was originally a palm belt of the Ngwa. Actual construction of the factory began in 1955 and after about 3 years of construction and installation, the factory was ready for production in 1959. Brewing began in the factory on March 18, 1957 while bottling began a month later. The Only beer produced in Aba at that time was Star Beer. The factory however produced a range of mineral waters also. These were Tango, Corolla, Tonic water and Soda water. In general, the quantity of drinks produced then was small. For instance, only about 1,000 hectoliters of beer was produced in the early days of the company (H. Ndulagu, personal communication, March 19, 2021).

D. It also gave rise to service enterprises. This provided great opportunity for African contribution to the rise of Aba. This was particularly so because Africans engaged in a wide variety of them which provided extremely needed services to the people. Some in fact filled gaps that were not touched at all by European enterprises. The major services Africans provided included human portage (head loading/truck pushing), bicycle repairing, carpentry, brick laying, barbing, shoe making/mending, watch repairing, blacksmithing, tailoring and transportation.

A number of factors encouraged the growth of service enterprises in our period of study, particularly after 1945. The first was the rapid growth of Aba into a major urban area. This rapid urbanisation with its attendant increase in population, created an urgent need for social and economic services. As already noted, many of the services demanded by the people were neither planned for nor provided by either the colonial state or Europeans. Europeans avoided the services because they were often small in nature, and given their overheads, often yielded profits Europeans founded unattractive. Africans thus had to establish enterprises to meet these needs.

Another major factor that encouraged the growth of the service enterprises was the personal desire of immigrants to make a success of their lives in an increasingly

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competitive cosmopolitan setting. Some immigrants unable to find jobs tried to establish one service or the other. Several others, who on entering the town had no skill or money and who became labourers either on the railway, in the market, or with produce merchants, soon moved to establish personal service businesses as soon as they saved enough. Other cases involved apprentices on the particular service graduating and proceeding to establish their own businesses. In all these cases, the desire of the promoters for personal success in life was an important factor.

Another factor that encouraged the growth of service enterprises was the Second World War. This was because after the war, many Africans who had served in that war in various capacities returned to Nigeria with a lot of skills. Aba was a resettlement centre from which many ex-service men returned to their homes in Eastern Region. As would be expected, those from Aba division and other areas decided to remain and settle in Aba ostensibly because as at that time, Aba provided them better opportunities for survival than other competing centres. On discharge, the ex-service men hoped that the colonial government would provide them employment as a way of smoothly re-integrating them into the society. Unfortunately, the government thought differently. In order to survive therefore, some of the ex-service men fell back on the skills they had acquired in various fields during their stay abroad, as well as on their discharge benefits, to set up some service enterprises.

Conclusion

In all, we could see from foregoing discussions that Aba within the period under review witnessed a lot of economic activities starting from trade in oil palm to service enterprises, for instance, leather works. It was as a result of these economic activities and location of the market along the Aba River that attracted people of different descent into Aba. The economic activities that took place at Aba, had its antecedent impact, which in all, made Aba, a commercial and urban centre.

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