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The Search for Hygienic Water in Uromi District: The Colonial Attempt

RECHERCHE D'EAU HYGIENIQUE DANS LES DISTRICTS D'UROMI: UNE TENTATIVE COLONIALE

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Abstract

Access to hygienic water is becoming difficult by the day, especially in developing economies. The people of Uromi in the Esan or Ishan region of Nigeria find it challenging to access drinkable water even in the 21st century. The problem of water has been an issue in Uromi since the pre-colonial era. Before the imposition of British colonial rule in Nigeria, the Uromi people resulted to digging pits to trap running rain water as their main source of water, which of course was unhygienic. Colonial documents obtained from the National Archives Ibadan, Nigeria were analyzed and the findings reveal the spirited efforts made by the colonial regime to provide accessible and hygienic water for the people of Uromi. Although the colonial attempt was not very successful, because of the Uromi topography, yet, that attempt improved the quality of water available to the people.

Key words: Hygienic; Colonial; Wells; Water

Résumé

Accès à l'eau hygiénique devient difficile de jour en jour, surtout dans les économies en développement. Les habitants de la région Uromi Esan ou Ishan du Nigeria trouvent qu'il est difficile d'accéder à l'eau potable, même dans le 21ème siècle. Le problème de l'eau a été un problème dans Uromi depuis l'ère pré-coloniale. Avant l'imposition du régime colonial britannique au Nigeria, les gens Uromi abouti à creuser des fosses pour piéger l'eau courante pluie comme leur principale source d'eau, ce qui bien sûr était insalubre. Documents coloniaux obtenues à partir des Archives nationales d'Ibadan, au Nigeria ont été analysés et les résultats révèlent les efforts entrain faite par le régime colonial à fournir de l'eau accessible et hygiéniques pour les gens de Uromi. Bien que la tentative coloniale n'a pas été très réussie, en raison de la topographie Uromi, pourtant, cette tentative a amélioré la qualité de l'eau à la disposition des gens.

Mots clés: Hygiène; Colonial; Wells; Eau

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INTRODUCTION

Water is a natural essential commodity that has no substitute and where there is scarcity of it, there is bound to be crisis of water borne diseases, as every source of water could serve as possible repository of such diseases. The Uromi situation was quite challenging as the people had to develop a system of digging pits to trap and preserve running rain water for use especially in the dry season. With the introduction of colonial rule, vigorous attempts were made to provide hygienic water, but most of the efforts ended in disappointment because of the natural topography of Uromi. The core of the article is to bring to the fore the modest efforts made by colonial regime in Nigeria to provide water for the people of Uromi. One of the major limitations of getting water in Uromi is attributable to the geographical location of the town.

While most studies of colonialism in Nigeria and indeed Africa tend to condemn that phase in the historical development of the people, especially in the light of the exploitation of the people, the fact remains that the

period witnessed certain improvements in the social lives of the people. It is in this last context that the effort of the colonial administration to improve on Uromi peoples' access to improved hygienic water is evaluated. It is worthy of note that subsequent independence administrations in the area continued to contend with this issue of getting potable water for the people and until recently the challenge remained quite daunting. The colonial intervention set the pace in providing hygienic water for the people of Uromi.

GEOGRAPHY OF UROMI IN ISHAN

The people of Uromi belong to the larger family of Ishan people. The colonial authority in some cases spelt Esan as Isan, Ishan or Isa depending on the relative competence of the colonial correspondent in the indigenous language of the people. But the right spelling is Esan pronounced as A-SAN. For the sake of our discussion, Ishan and Esan are used interchangeably to emphasize that the words refer to the same people and region.

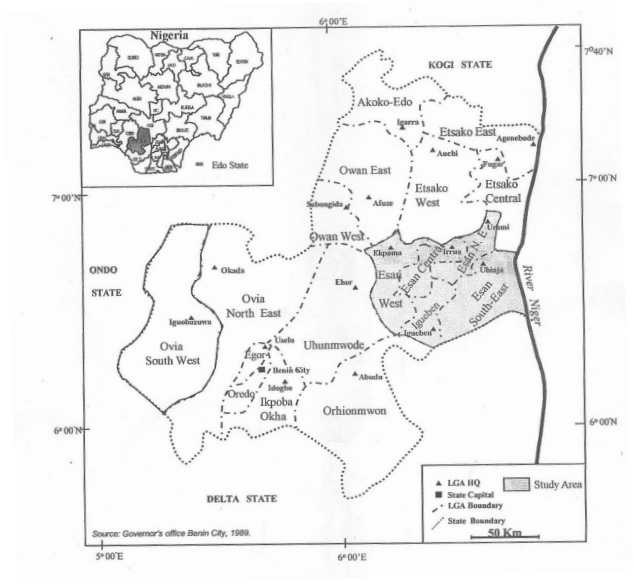

Figure1
Edo State Showing EsanLand

The Ishan region falls within longitude $5^{0}30^{1}7^{0}3^{1}$ and latitude $5^{0}30^{1}$ north and $7^{0}30^{1}$ east of Benin City, the capital of Edo State of Nigeria (Okoduwa, 2007, p. 1). The people occupy a land mass covering about 2987.52 square kilometers (Omo-Ojugo, 2004, p. 4) comprising the following communities, though not listed in order of evolution: Amahor, Emu, Egoro, Ekekhenlen, Ekpoma, Ewu, Ewohimi, Ewossa, Ewatto, Ekpon, Ebelle, Idoa, Igueben, Irrua, Okhuesan, Ozigholo, Ohordua, Okalo, Oria, Opoji, Ogwa, Orowa, Ogun, Ubiaja, Ugboha Ujiogba, Ugbegun, Ukhun, Urohi, Uromi, and Udo (Osagie, 2007). The Ishan territory lies in the northern zone of the Nigerian forest region. The border communities to Ishan are Etsako in the North East, Owan in the North West, Orhionmwon, and Ika of the Delta in the South and South East respectively (Okoduwa, 2007, p. 1). The topography of Ishan can be divided into two broad lines: the plateau, and lowlands (Ibid). Communities such as Uromi, Ubiaja, Ekpoma, Ugboha, and Irrua are to be found on the Plateau, while Emu, Ohordua, Emohimi and others settle in the lowland (Ibid).

Ishan communities began as agrarian settlements of four centers before the 15th century, which were Irrua, Ekpoma, Uromi and Ugboha, but by 1900, all the communities had emerged (Okoduwa, 2002, p. 23-25). They are commonly referred to as Ishan or Esan because of their common cultural practices as reflected in language, dressing, norms, values, etc. though with some variants. The people speak a variant of the Edo language, which language experts believe began to separate into various strands about 4,500 years ago (Flight, 1981, p. 52). The Ishan language is classified under the Edoid languages of the eastern sub-branch of the Kwa group of Niger-Congo (Omo-Ojugo, 2004, p. 3-4).

LOCATING UROMI

Okojie divides Ishan into two groups: Ishan A and Ishan B. Accordingly, Ishan A comprises the earliest kingdoms in Ishan located on the "waterless plateau" (Okojie,1994, p. 2) and Ishan B made up of those on the lowlands rich in water and luscious vegetation (Ojiefoh, 2002, p. 1). Uromi falls in the Ishan A group and "lies between latitude 6½0 north and 70 west of the equator,. . . and longitude 660C and 6½0 of the Greenwich Meridian" (Butcher. 1982, p. 240). Uromi is one of the earliest settlements among the present thirty–one kingdoms in Ishan (Okoduwa, 2002, p. 23-25) and its neighbors are the Kukuruku (Owan/Etsako) in the north, Irrua in the north-west, Ugboha and Ubiaja in the south, Ugbegun and Igueben on the south-east (Butcher. 1982, p. 240).

Uromi is made up of twenty villages and they are located approximately on a landmass of not more than 60 square miles (Ibid). These villages are Amedokhian, Arue, Awo, Ebhoiyi, Efandion, Egbele, Eguare, Ekhue, Eror, Idumoza, Ivue, Obeidu, Onewa, Oyomon, Ubierumu Ne-uwa, Ubierumu Ne-oke, Ukoni, Unuwazi, Utako and Uwalo (Osagie, 2007, p. 1). Among the Esan plateau dwellers, Uromi stands topmost on the plateau sitting at about 1000 feet above sea level, (Butcher. 1982, p. 240) with the village of Ivue occupying the highest point on the Ishan plateau with about 1,490 feet above sea level (Okojie, 1994, p. 2). Underlying the plateau is "the lignite group of rocks consisting of clay, fine grained sands, lignite and carbonaceous clay"(Geography of Ekpoma, 1983, p. 7).

PRE-COLONIAL ATTEMPT AT GENERATING WATER

Being a plateau region, the people of Uromi had great difficulty in accessing drinkable water, which made the inhabitants to undertake "a distance of at least six miles to go for water, some to Ubiaja and some northwards" (Butcher. 1982, p. 240). It is this challenging water situation that may have informed Okojie's description of the region as "waterless Esan plateau." This did not mean that water did not exist on the plateau, but it was insufficient to meet the demands of the people due to the depth of the waterbed which made it difficult to sink deep water well. Before British colonial rule in Esan, the people of Uromi and other communities on the plateau had intelligently responded to the water crisis by constructing what may pass as modern day water reservoirs. These plateau people dug deep ponds Oghodo, where they stored dropping and running water from rainfall during the wet season, and dispensed the water for community needs in the dry season (Okoduwa, 2007, p. 5). Tattam who witnessed the utility of the pits commented thus;

> The water supply of most of the inhabitants of the plateau is obtained from pits dug in the red earth. These may be up to fifteen yards in width and ten feet deep. They are usually situated on the sides of "streets" in villages and if rainwater does not drain into them naturally, a small dam is thrown across the street to intercept and divert it. The sides and bottom of the pit are battered in order to render the earth compact and less pervious to water….The inhabitants in time past, observing that these particular pits conserved their water better than others, may have agreed to use them as reserves. The main objection to the water obtained from pits [is] that…the quality of the water is poor owing to its high content of red clay and contamination. Some of the inhabitants declare that they prefer it to clear water (NAI ID 255, Vol, 1).

The Christian missionaries were the ones who first taught the people the art of generating clean water. As Okosun remarks, "Fr. Corbeau taught them to mix the colored water with the red earth and to stir the mixture vigorously. This was allowed to settle and in a few minutes, all the dirt would settle down to the bottom leaving clean colorless water on top. This was carefully drained out and boiled to render it fit for drinking" (Okosun, nd:26). This method was so crude that it was incapable of actually purifying water, as water borne diseases were rampant among the people. The continuous digging and maintenance of these ponds created the various Benin-like moats Iyala in Esan as evident in Uromi. The presence of these moats in Uromi was mistaken by Obata as part of the extension of the Benin moats (Obata, 1996, p. 319). Rather than that being the case, the moats were dug by early settlers to serve their water needs as already explained. However, with the establishment of colonial rule attempts were made by the colonial authority to provide clean and hygienic water to serve the needs of the community.

IMPOSITION OF COLONIAL RULE

With the effective occupation of Uromi by the British in 1901, the whole of Ishan had come under effective British colonial administration. Meanwhile, the whole of Nigeria had earlier been administratively divided into Provinces headed by Residents with the former Benin kingdom being one of the Provinces with headquarters in Benin. The Benin Province was divided into five divisions of Benin; Ishan; Kukuruku; Agbor and Asaba headed by District Officers (DO), while the Ishan Division was further sub-divided into five districts of Ubiaja; Uromi; Irrua; Ekpoma and Ewohimi under the supervision of former traditional rulers who were now designated as District Heads with headquarters at Ubiaja. The two pillars of administration introduced by the colonial regime to administer the Nigerian territory were the Native Administration and Native Courts (Adewoye, 1977). The Native Administration replaced traditional form of government while the Native Courts now performed the previous duties of the traditional judiciary.

COLONIAL ATTEMPT AT PROVIDING WATER

Erection of Water Tank in 1916: To ameliorate the water crisis in Uromi, the colonial authority under Mr. Falk, the District Officer (D O), Ishan Division wrote to the Resident to encourage the erection of more water tanks to reserve rain water, especially for traveling and visiting Europeans (NAI BP 67/1916). The erection of the water tanks was first carried out by the Education Department of the Native Administration in Uromi "Primarily for the school staff and incidentally Europeans staying at or passing through Uromi and who might want drinking water are also supplied" as stated by the Inspector of schools (Ibid). Though citizens of Uromi were not the primary target for the erection, but it marked a milestone in bringing to the awareness of the people, a possible and more hygienic alternative to the traditional methods of water generation and preservation. There was however further attempt to increase the access to water and this led to the development of well sinking.

SINKING OF WATER WELLS

The compelling need for water not only for Europeans but also citizens of Uromi compelled the colonial authority in the Division to embark on the sinking of water wells around Uromi. The services of six professional well diggers were secured from the city of Kano, Nigeria to carry out the exercise in 1928 (NAI BP 170/1928: Vol, A). As hard as the diggers tried, the site of water was no where near and that frustration led to the initial abandonment of well sinking in Uromi. In paragraph 20 of his Annual Report for 1929, the D. O. Ishan Division, expressed his frustration when he stated,

> the wells at Uromi were abandoned by order of the Resident when they had been sunk 140 feet without finding water. This was a very disappointing result as I had hoped to find water at about 40 feet and sink numerous wells throughout the Division. The dearth of water is a real hardship for many towns during the dry season but I am at a loss to know how to remedy it. The matter has been referred to the Geological Survey Department by the Resident (NAI BP 162/1929: D).

Indeed, the Resident, Benin Province had written to the Honourable Secretary, Southern Provinces, Enugu in a memorandum dated 27th May,1929 requesting for the assistance of the Geological Department in locating possible waterbeds because of the hapless search for water and the hardship caused by the situation (NAI BP 131/1929). The Director of the Geological Survey, replied the Resident that one of its staff, Dr. Bain had visited the site of the wells on his way from Asaba to Lokoja and made some observations, but that the Resident should provide answers to the questionnaire sent, as answers provided "would give some assistance in estimating the possibility of water being found at reasonable depths at Uromi" (Ibid). And this was forwarded to the D. O Ishan Division by the Resident in a correspondence dated 26th July,1929 (Ibid) and on the 30th of the same month, the Resident demanded to know from the D.O if he had complied with the Director's request (Ibid). The D O informed the Resident that he had complied and forwarded the request directly to the Director (Ibid), and in turn the Director sent the observation and recommendation of Dr. Bain on the water crisis in the Ishan Division to the Resident, Benin Province through the Secretary Southern Provinces, Enugu (Ibid).

Dr. A.D.N Bain's preliminary investigation on how to improve the supply of potable water in the Ishan Division revealed among other observations that the people obtained their water from ponds and that of the four Ishan Communities of Uromi, Irrua, Opoji and Ekpoma visited, Uromi and Irrua were in desperate need of water and that the Uromi situation was worse (Ibid). Dr. Bain explained that the difficulty of reaching water after about 140 feet depth was reached was because Uromi "is situated on high sandy ground and no definite water course passes through the town" (Ibid) and therefore recommended that sinking of experimental wells should be undertaken by the water supply section of the Geological Department (Ibid).

In line with Dr. Bain's recommendations, the Resident, Benin Province wrote from Ubiaja to the Honourable Secretary, Southern Provinces, Enugu requesting for a more detailed investigation of the area and the likely cost of sinking new wells at Uromi so that the Native Administration in the Division could raise money for the undertaking. The Resident also added that the Medical Officer in charge of the Division had informed him that the most common diseases in Uromi were water-borne and therefore pleaded for an urgent intervention in saving the local inhabitants from the health hazard (Ibid).

As a result of the inaction after about nine months from the last communication between the Resident, and the Geographical Department, the District Officer, Ishan Division was compelled to write to the Resident, Benin Province informing him of the Division's preparedness to undertake Bain's recommendations and pleaded that experts should be sent to the Division to access the financial cost of the undertaking (Ibid). Pending the arrival of experts from the Geological Department, the Resident therefore mandated the Divisional Engineer, Public Works Department, Benin Division to undertake an investigation of the wells in the Ishan Division and make recommendations.

The Engineer, at the end of his investigation did a preliminary report on the Uromi water supply scheme and sent copies to the D O Ishan Division, which contained among others the financial implication of improving the quality of water supply in the Uromi community. He put the cost estimate at about 2,920 pounds for the purchase and installation of pumping plant, pump house and store; rising main, water shop and running cost (Ibid). The engineer also suggested the erection of over head tanks that could contain about 16,000 gallons of water per day from which water would be sold to the local at one penny per gallon (Ibid).

With this new information, the Resident had to write to the Surveyor – General, Lagos to send one of his experts to come and ascertain the data presented by the engineer before the arrival of the Geological Surveyor Department (Ibid). The Resident memo was acknowledged but the Surveyor-General did not make any commitment whether he would send any member of his staff to the Ishan Division as requested by the Resident (Ibid). Fortunately, the Director of the Geological Survey wrote to the District Officer, Ishan Division and requested from the D O to furnish him with the size of Uromi population and likely depth of well required (Ibid). The D O promptly responded to the above request from the Director of Geology that a well of not more than 200 feet would be required for a population of about 22,000 persons in the communities the well would be sited (Ibid).

The Director of Geological Survey therefore promised the D O that he would make "an officer available early in November for work in your Division. He will devote himself to a close examination of the subsurface water supply which now seems the only hope of the area" (Ibid). And in a later communication to the Resident, Benin Province, the Director, Geological Survey of Nigeria informed the Resident that Dr. C.M. Tattam, a geologist would be in the Ishan Division from mid-November 1932 for geological investigation of water supply in the Division (Ibid).

TATTAM'S RECOMMENDATIONS

Dr. C.M Tattam took into consideration the observations

of Dr. Bain and that influenced the extensive and comprehensive investigations that he carried out in the whole of Ishan Division. The Investigation involved the use of the electrical resistivity method to prospect for water and discovered that groundwater was heavy in Irrua and thin in Uromi. And as such the chances of getting water in Irrua at about 150 feet deep well was high unlike in Uromi, especially at Ivue. Tattam agreed with Bain that the sandy nature of the Ishan Plateau made it difficult to reach water, but went further to add that the most challenging factor in getting water in this region was the geological composition of the Ishan Plateau. That is, a dipper level in to the earth crust revealed less sand but cement–like clay that made it difficult for groundwater to penetrate to the surface (NAI ID 255, Vol, 1).

Details of Tattam's investigation therefore determined his recommendations on the available possibilities to improve upon the water scheme in Uromi. He made his recommendations on the basis that the Province would adequately budget for the water scheme as funding the under listed project was germane to the success of the outcome of the investigation (Ibid). Tattam therefore recommended the following;

a. **Surface Supply:** This would mean to improve on the existing pre-colonial system of generating water through the pit practice by constructing a fitter bed of concrete to reduce the amount of red sand washed along with the running rain water.

b. **Supply from Spring:** that it would cost the Division between 20,000 to 30,000 pounds to link all the functioning springs in the Division with pipes to be distributed in a network of well laid out piping plan that would require installation of pumping machines in strategic locations including the villages of Erro, Idumuoza, Eguarre, Oyomo, Amedokhian to Efandion all in Uromi.

c. **Groundwater Supplies:** This would take its course from the Irrua swamp and pumped in connection with other sources of groundwater throughout the Division in the same distribution plan as recommended in B.

d. **Sinking of wells:** that sinking of wells would be cheaper as it would cost just about 100 pounds to sink one starting from Uromi because "the need for water is greatest in Uromi district", but wondered if the people would draw water from wells of 100 feet or more deep. However the sinking of a minimum of 17 wells was recommended to be sited at one in Ekpoma, four at Irrua and 12 in Uromi. The distribution of these wells was influenced by the approximate size of population in the areas that required water most as Ekpoma and Irrua had about 4,000 respectively, while Uromi alone had about 22,000 inhabitants. Wells raging from 70 to 120 feet deep were beaconed to be dug in the following Uromi villages, Ivue 3, Arue 2, Idomuoza 1, Error 1, Utako 1 and Egbelle 4 (Ibid).

e. **Drilling:** Deep drills were also recommended when available that would enable the sinking of boreholes starting from Ivue and from there water would be distributed to other parts of the plateau. In the alternative, suspected heavy water bed could be excavated and concrete walls constructed in the escarpment to hold water and also to prevent collapse.

Finally, Tattam maintained that if funding was slow, the initial scheme could begin with sinking 4 wells in Uromi, 1 in Ekpoma and the possibility of pumping water from the Irrua swamp to serve its environs and that these wells should be sunk at points closer to high groundwater channels.

IMPLEMENTATION OF THE RECOMMENDATIONS AND ITS IMPACT ON THE COMMUNITY

The reports of Bain and Tattam tilted towards well sinking in their recommendations. On the basis of the recommendations the United African Company (UAC) was commissioned to sink wells in Uromi and Irrua from 1933 (NAI ID 255: I). In that same year, water was struck at Irrua, and later in 1938 some amount of water was found in Uromi (Butcher, 1982, p. xviii). The efforts of colonial authority to provide water for the people of Ishan Division and Uromi in particular to some extent transformed the societies technology of generating water

IMPACT ON THE COMMUNITY

The impact of colonial generation of water on the community manifested itself in three ways; surprise, shock, and anger.

Surprise: the people were much accustomed to their traditional method of digging shallow pits to trap and preserve rain water as rightly observed by Tattam. But with the introduction of the technology of well sinking and eventual provision of well water, some members of the community were fascinated. This fascination came with its own suspicion as captured in the narrative of Pa Imoisili of Uromi that the people did not initially understand the health benefit of the 'new' kind of water, but that they were more fascinated with the mystery of bringing water from the ground different from the kind known to them. In fact, he went further to stress that it took some time and conviction before majority of the people decided to partly domesticate the 'white man's water', while there were those who, out of ignorance and phobia of the depth of the wells refused to have anything to do with water from the well and preferred the traditional pit system (Imoisili, 2008).

Dr. Tattam observed that the people of Uromi tended not to be emotional about the sinking of well when compared with the desire to fetch from the pit and concluded with the expectation that "perhaps the

people would change with time as soon as they come to appreciate the new development" (NAI ID 253, Vol, 1) The surprise and suspicion should be expected from a people not used to water well technology.

Shock: For some members of the community, their surprise and suspicion developed into morbid apprehension for some reasons. The depth of the wells was shockingly way beyond what they were customarily used to, as their pits were not deeper than 10 feet. The psychological stress was perhaps observed by Tattam as he noted in his recommendation whether the community would fetch from wells as deep as 100 feet or more. The people's suspicion of the danger of deep wells was heightened in 1941 with the death of a school teacher who fell into one of the deep wells in Uromi (NAI ID 727/1941). The immediate impact of the death had a far reaching implication as skeptics began to mobilize the people to resist further sinking of wells in the community (Imoisili, 2008).

Given the above situation, the colonial authority had to reduce its pace of sinking more wells and rather concentrated in maintaining existing ones which further compounded the water crisis in the community as the existing ones were inadequate. So, between 1942 and 1947, nothing much was done to ameliorate the water crisis (NAI ID 727, Vol, I-VII/1942-1947), perhaps due to the hangover of the 1941 incident.

Anger: however, by 1948, the colonial authority began to construct concrete underground tanks to reserve water as a partial remedy to the phobia of well, but came up with the new policy that the stored water would be sold to the people in order to raise fund to maintain existing sources of water supply. As stated in the 1948 Annual Report for the Division "at Uromi, two 5,000 – gallon concrete underground tanks have been completed. One of these will fill in the wet season from the Native Court roof. . ." and water sold by water tanks (NAI ID 727, Vol, III/1948). The sale of water was in line with the suggestion made in 1932 by the Benin Divisional Engineer of the Public Works Department. The sale of water with water tanks provoked a violent protest in the community against the King (Onogie), who was the supervisory District Head, for 'conspiring' with the colonial authority to tax the people for fetching water (Ibid).

There are three interpretations of the rationale that caused the protest. One, that the protest could be understood as an indicator that the people had began to appreciate the convenience of walking short distances to fetch water, therefore the payment of water rate was considered as a deliberate attempt to prevent the people from close sources of water. Two, that water was considered as a free gift from the ancestors and gods, therefore it was so annoying for anyone to impose taxes on god's given water. This interpretation is supported with the fact that the people did not pay any form of money to trap rain water before the emergence of colonial rule in the community. Three, the people expected their king and chiefs to resist and protect them against colonial imposition of water rate. Rather, those expected to protect them, were in fact responsible for the collection of water rate. The protest was therefore a reaction to perceived 'unpatriotic' gesture from their local leaders. Little did the people understand the ideology of colonial policy and that their local leaders were subjected instruments in the hands of the colonial authority.

In the overall analysis, the people of Uromi responded to the provision and sale of water by the colonial regime from a disadvantaged position of ignorance of the nature of colonial rule and advantages of hygienic water.

However, the provision of underground tanks did not stop the maintenance of the wells in Uromi as they were repaired and cleaned in 1949 (Ibid: 1949), and by 1951 new drills were carried out at Ivue to the depth of 805 feet, yet no appreciable water was struck (NAI ID 727/1951). Therefore, to further complement the sinking of wells to ameliorate the water crisis, the Sanitary Officer of the Division, Dr. D. Ungar recommended in his sanitary inspection notes that "something should be done about it and the Native Administration should be approached to build underground tanks . . ." (NAI ID 335/1951). In spite of these efforts, the Annual Reports of 1952 and 1953 in the Division did not reflect any improvement in the provision of water supply (NAI ID 727/1952 and NAI ID 727, Vol, X/1953), even the efforts of the government of the Western Region of Nigeria to construct pipe-borne water system did not make immediate fundamental appreciable difference (Butcher,1982, p. xix). At the close of colonial rule in Nigeria in 1960, the Uromi people still trekked some distances to get clean water.

CONCLUSION

One of the major challenges the people of Uromi faced in the pre-colonial era was getting adequate water to meet their daily needs. They tried to adapt, especially by depending on rain water which they ingeniously tried to store. This was not quite effective, especially as the water was to a large extent considered unhygienic. The people had no choice than to make do with what they could improvise at that point in time. Trekking long distances to get water was only meant to complement water derived from the various pits that littered the Uromi communities.

The colonial administration in Uromi in order to address the problem of providing hygienic water for the people adopted a number of measures. The first step they took was to erect water tanks to reserve rain water, which in itself was not radically different from what the people were doing previously. Since this was considered inadequate the administration attempted to sink wells starting from 1928, but had to abandon the efforts, after failure to strike water after digging as far as 140 feet It was in a bid to overcome this challenge that other methods

such as the resistivity mechanism was adopted while Drs Bain and Tattam carried out individual but complementary investigations on the water sourcing crisis in the area. Both of them recommended sources including, a surface supply, supply from spring, groundwater supplies , sinking of wells and the drilling of deep wells.

In its determination to provide water the colonial administration now adopted well sinking as the most viable option and commissioned UAC to sink wells from 1933.Even when the wells were dug the people, partly due to superstition or failure to appreciate the higher quality of the 'new water' refused to immediately embrace it, a development that was worsened with the death of a school teacher who fell into one of the deep wells in Uromi in 1941. By 1948 colonial authority began to construct concrete underground tanks to reserve water which was to be sold to the people. This was unacceptable to the people for a variety of reasons, hence they protested.

What was most important in all of these attempts by the colonial administration to provide hygienic water for the people, was the seriousness and commitment displayed by the colonial administration in dealing with the problem. Even efforts by independent government in Nigeria didn't immediately provide the desired result. After many years of futile efforts to deal with this problem it was only in 2010 that the Edo State government acquired high level sophisticated borehole drilling machines that can now effectively drill deep enough to get water which is processed to acceptable hygienic standard for the people. In the final analysis, the pioneering colonial efforts in providing water for the people of Uromi through the various water schemes set the right platform on which post independence administrations had to build. .

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