

**FATTENING, A TRADITIONAL INSTITUTION IN ANNANG ANTIQUITY:
ITS LEADERSHIP ROLE AND LIMITATIONS**

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Abstract

This essay investigates an ancient traditional female institution of learning in Annang land, Ukwoho Mbobo – the fattening institution. It was a semi-formal institution that formed maidens prior to marriage for two objectives: Firstly, bodily nourishment achieved by excessive feeding, total confinement and body massage. Secondly, teachings such as etiquette, leadership roles, traditional values, virtues, beliefs and Annang wisdom. It imparted values such as honesty, industriousness, obedience, respect etc. norms such as respect for the sanctity of life, marriage, the human person, solidarity to one's kin communal spirit etc. which invariably raised the ethical standard for which the Annang women were reputed. These values and norms inculcated in the adolescence was practical in the family and assisted them in exercising their leadership roles in the family and in the society which they understood as joint action. The values and the norms being indigenous, apt to the African context and realities imply that native ways were better digested and were pragmatic for leadership/governing roles. This article argues that for its strength, this ancient practice was significant to training of adolescence that became good mothers, wives and community leaders, significant role in the Annang traditional government, supplemented for the deprived opportunity for female education. It contributed to the societal ethos and peaceful coexistence along with other traditional agencies that operated then. It concludes that the demerits of the institution that we perceive today were then desirable bodily ornaments.

Keywords: Fattening, Body, Institution, Virtues, Tradition, Leadership, Roles, Skills

Introduction

One of the ancient and the foremost traditional female institutions of learning in Annang was the *Ukwoho Mbobo*. It was the institution that formed/ trained candidates in preparation for marriage and leadership roles in the society. At the

completion of the formative period, the candidate became 'mbobo' (maiden). The institution was not completely informal but semi-formal. The institution was responsible for carrying out the rite of passage from adolescence to adulthood for female adolescence where they were trained for the family life as mothers, wives and for the community leadership. It was responsible for the ethical standard for which the Annang women were, and still reputed. Two important objectives of this institution were firstly, bodily nourishment by excessive feeding of the candidates and through total confinement where their bodies were constantly being massaged. Secondly, semi-formal teaching on Annang etiquette, leadership roles, traditions, virtues, beliefs and wisdom were imparted.

This article argues that this ancient practice was significant to training of adolescence that became good mothers, wives and community leaders. It argues that this institution played significant role in the Annang traditional government because supplemented for the poor ancient views on female education. It also contributed to the educational system that made the society ethical and peaceful along with other traditional agencies that operated then. It concludes that obesity and female genital mutilation, the demerits of the institution that we perceive today, were desirable and were considered advantageous for preparing young adolescence for marriage, mark of good health and fruitfulness as well as curbing excessive libido. These practices could be reviewed to meet contemporary realities, health and social needs should the institution be revived.

This essay is presented in four steps. The first section investigates the fattening institution in the Annang cultural milieu to show its meaning and how it was practiced. The second section links the institution to its two objectives and expatiate on the educational objective which is the thrust of our essay (but often obfuscated by bodily nourishment). It will be shown here that the imports of this education was a *sine qua non* to women for the good ordering of the traditional Annang society. The third section connects the institution to the central traditional government in the ancient Annang and shows that women that graduated from it occupied leadership positions in the women council. The last section concludes by stating that the advantages of the institution surpasses its limitations which were then considered aesthetical ornaments for women in the good and ordered society and visible sign of health and fertility.

Fattening institution in the Annang cultural milieu

Annang is one of the ethnic nations in Akwa Ibom State in the South-South geographical region of Nigeria. Its geopolitical location covers eight of the thirty-one local government areas including Abak, Oruk Anam, Etim Ekpo, Ukanafun, Ika, Ikot Ekpene, Essien Udim, Obot Akara. These eight local government areas as can be observed were created from Abak and Ikot Ekpene respectively and they constitute the Ikot Ekpene senatorial district. The uniqueness of Annang ethnic kingdom is vast and often expressed in the assertion “Agwo Annang ade Agwo uko” which translates “an Annang person is a person of excellence/esteem.” This assertion has a wide application and it means a lot for an Annang person because it is not an empty self or ethnic show. The ‘excellence/ esteem’ is not tied down to a single interpretation since the expression is used in a wider context. However, generally, *uko* might be interpreted as excellence but in different contexts of usage, it interprets virtues that are applicable therein. For instance, in a traditional wrestling competition won by an Annang man, the *uko* translates bravery. Some other virtues that entail *uko* are honesty, courage, wisdom. These virtues define the excellence in the Annang person. There is an affinity between this virtues and the Aristotelian ‘characteristic excellence’ as that which defines a thing. Similarly, these virtues define the excellence of an Annang person.

As an ethnic nation, Annang has its worldview, culture, belief system, language, customs, and traditions which highlight her uniqueness. The local language of the people is the Annang language which some consider as a dialect of Efik Language. Annang is a patriarchal society. In antiquity, leadership role was reserved for or predominated by the male other, though there is still not so much difference. However, socially, politically, economically, even religiously, the male other are at the head of affairs with masculine ideologies that promote and are capable of perpetrating the patriarchy. An Annang person does not lose sight of his ancestral traditions and it is often a reason and a justification of the assertion *Agwo Annang ade agwo uko*. One of the ancient traditional Annang practices that laid robust and impeccable foundation for leadership qualities for women is Ukwoho mbobo – the rite of fattening.

Ukwoho mbobo is a semi-formal institution of the rite of passage for the female other. It is the rite of passage from adolescence to womanhood. The importance of this rites could be understood better in the following words, “Mbobo was the most important initiation in a woman’s life. This period of seclusion and

fattening occurred at the transition from adolescence to womanhood” (Pratten, 2007, p. 36). In the Annang cultural milieu, this institution has two cardinal objectives: Firstly, education of candidate in moral virtues, societal values and public etiquette which encompasses leadership qualities and skills, marriage, and family life. “Through these rituals, traditional values and wisdom are shared between generations and families which strengthens the fabric of the community, enhancing social and support systems” (Enang, 2009, p. 41). Wisdom and values that impact on the community and strengthens social support system are invariably leadership skills that are enough for grassroots political offices. Secondly, nurturing of the candidate to a delightful look. The reason for this aspect of formation is that the ancient Annang worldview associated women’s health, fertility, beauty and wealth with plump body size explained as follows “Nigerian culture values plump women as they are seen as the embodiment of alluring fertile, feminine beauty. For this reason, it is traditional for tribes such as Annang to make prospective brides and first daughters to undergo the process of deliberate fattening in preparation for marriage” (Williams, 2020, p.82). To achieve this aim, the candidate is fed with variety of food while restraining her from physical exercises whereas rest and over sleeping was enforced and emphasized. In Annang fattening room, the candidate is fed with six daily meals from varieties of stuffs such as rice, beans, yams, cassava, plantain, fish, meat, traditional dishes like *ayan ekpan* (grated cocoyam), *ekpan kukwo* (cocoyam cooked with spinach, fish, meat or shell fish), and some herbal medicine to help digestion (Williams, 2020, p. 82). These two objectives hang up in a successful and grand public presentation and subsequent giving out of the *mbobo* for marriage. The marriage was followed with the responsibility of marriage and family life: conjugal relationship with the spouse, childbearing and family domestic chores. In Annang culture, these two goals are inseparable as the institution aims at a holistic formation and presentation of the *mbobo* on the grand outing day.

Ukwoho mbobo admits only young women of adolescence age that begin to show some signs of bodily developments, such as development of tender and round breasts, broadening of the waists and visible hips. The candidate must be a circumcised and a confirmed virgin. There is a vital connection between circumcision (*mbobi*) and fattening (*mbobo*). “Traditionally, females who wished to enter *ukwoho mbobo* had to undergo *mbobi* - female circumcision, whose name means “coming of the small breasts” this circumcision was thought to determine whether a female was a virgin while also enhancing the erotic appeal

of girl's genitalia" (Williams, 2020, p. 82). Often, due to uneven bodily development among young adolescence, these visible signs may span between fourteen to sixteen years of age or beyond. However, the admission of the candidate is followed with certain initiation acts to mark the beginning of the process. Firstly, the candidate is bathed by some elderly women without the presence of her mother. At this, restriction is placed on any male other that might want to see her. Seclusion is a significant act that explains that the initiate has rejected the worldly things in exchange for protecting herself from her enemies and evil (Pratten, 2007, p. 36). The entire period of the rite was a secluded time in the life of the initiates, and it lasted for a period.

The duration for *Ukwoho mbobo* differs among lineages in Annang. In some lineages, *ukwoho mbobo* lasts between six to twelve months. This duration is flexible due to two variables: 1) economic factor, 2) the responsiveness of the candidate to formation processes. Economic demands are made of the father of the initiate as he must adequately provide for his family and for his daughter in the fattening house. However, the father must pay more economic attention to the daughter in the fattening house as he would like to avoid mockery if the daughter does not look well fed on the grand outing day. On the other hand, if the initiate responds better and faster and show signs that she has good grasp of the objectives of the formation, there will be no need to extend the period. Usually, the rites of initiation begin at a small shrine (*ufok nduongo*) at the fattening square *anwa mbobo* on *ofiong ekpo* market day after which the initiate proceeds to the fattening home with the formators. The fattening period ends on *editaha* market day where the *mbobo* will be publicly presented at the village square before proceeding to the marketplace for dancing. Back to the father's house the celebration continues and people, friends, and relatives present monetary gifts. It is important to note that the appreciation of the *mbobo* with gifts by the people is not only because of her physical beauty, but more because of the leadership qualities that she has acquired. It is hoped that she will employ the knowledge in the services of the community.

***Ukwoho mbobo*, a foundation of indigenous leadership qualities, skills, and roles**

Ukwoho mbobo is an institution in Annang land. It is a semi-formal school that dispenses of knowledge. It is renowned for its role of imparting leadership qualities, skills to its candidates in a semi-formal methodology. As noted in the previous section, *ukwoho mbobo* has two objectives that are integrated into one for

an integral formation of its candidates. Unfortunately, body nurturing is often emphasized to the obfuscation of the educational role. This is because the institution is almost absolutely associated with adorable plump bodily look. However, this section of the essay highlights and exposes the educational role of the *ukwoho mbobo*. As an emphasis: "Through these rituals, traditional values and wisdom are shared between generations and families" (Enang, 2009, p. 41). Additionally, the Annang customary system - a repository of the dos and don'ts of the Annang people, is explained to candidates. This legal system, Essien (2011, p. 206) claims contains the laws that were discerned from the native customs and traditions of the Annang people and carry the insignia of the Annang society. It contains duties and obligations as well prohibition and punishment for certain crimes. As potential family managers and leaders of the society, for them, this education was a *sine qua non*. Reemphasizing Enang, a re-quote of him is made: 'this institution teaches its candidates traditional values and wisdom which they perpetuate from generation to generations'. For emphasis, 'traditional values and wisdom' are highlighted. By this claim, it becomes clearer that education also took place in the Annang fattening homes. At this point, one could ask: what are the Annang traditional values and wisdom? It could be construed that value system is a set of ideas, thought pattern, ways of behavior and of doing things that a people cherish and hold at high esteem. This is because of the roles they play in sustaining the community regarding proper ordering, order and peaceful coexistence and upholding of human dignity. As a people, the Annangs cherish respect especially to elders, solidarity, sincerity, trust, respect for and sanctity of the human life and communal spirit. Although not written down in the ancient times, these values are active in the consciousness of a true Annang person and a violation of any of them is unacceptable and so the defaulter renders himself strange among his people. Okon thinks of values as wealth (*imo*) and equiparate them with attitudes the Annang people generally hold dear such as concern for one another especially at the point of need, dexterity/skillfulness, proficiency in techniques, valor, virtues, wisdom (Okon, 2011, p. 391). These are "wealth", but they are highly cherished values among the Annang people. These values that are inculcated into the *mbobo* candidates form the wisdom of the Annang people.

The Annang wisdom is therefore a summation of Annang value system. Okon (2011, p. 393) renders it as "*Imo ade agwo*" [the human person is wealth] and further claims that "by defining the human person as wealth and so placing him/her above every other thing ever to be appreciated and cared for, "*Imo ade agwo*" endows the human person with inalienable dignity and rights. It places

man as the master of both himself and his environment. It makes man a being whose life is sacrosanct. It further sees man as the determinant of values especially moral values." The Annang wisdom so described gratifies the basics and the foundational training for any kind of leadership in every age. This wisdom is a complex of politics, ethics, anthropology, sociology, and religion. It recognizes the non-commoditization of human being as well as rejects the hypothetical aggrandizement of the human person. Thus, Annang wisdom is the culmination of the Annang traditional values. This wisdom might not be grasped by all the Annang folks, but it is certainly grasped and lived out by those that have been schooled in the Ukwoho mbobo over others. Recognizing the wisdom gained in the fattening room, Pratten notes "as soon as they [*mbobo*] left the fattening room most women were initiated into the senior women's association within the village. Holding authority over unmarried women and the rites of the fattening house...Leadership positions within the society constituted a pathway to status and influence" (2007, p. 37). It is defensible that this caliber of women are good leaders with sound human, ethical and moral values based on their formation. They influence their family and motivate other women in the community in moral life and leadership roles. Since these women are wives and mothers in the family, it is arguable that they groom their homes properly and exact positive influence towards order and peaceful coexistence in the larger society.

Annang leadership skills promotes collaboration among the people. Collaboration leads to peaceful coexistence within a political society because it entails the recognition of the alterity. Collaboration expresses the wisdom embedded in the Annang adage "*eto isidaha ikpong iforo akai*- one tree does not make a forest" (Okon, 2011, p. 397). This wisdom is people inclusive. It recognizes, asserts, appreciates, and uses the other. By token of it, everyone is accepted to have something to offer irrespective of the area of need. This consideration is people oriented or put it differently, community oriented. Okon describes this wisdom as a dynamic for community consciousness and argues that since the wisdom does not segregate but carries the people along, it invariably builds in the people a consciousness that is capable of bringing in and promoting development in the community. This principle enlivens and reinforces unity and cooperation in the people's consciousness; thus, they realize that they are one and the same people. Specifically, it fosters mutual support and unity that positively impacts on the society for example, in the development of facilities etc. (2011, p. 397). The culmination of the collaborative wisdom of the

Annang people could be perceived crystal clear in the democratic system of governance. Democracy is often commonly and simply referred to as the government of the people for the people and by the people. This is a people oriented and people inclusive system that illustrates the truth of an Annang saying.

“*Obong isi bongo ikpong* (the king does not govern alone)” so the adage goes (Okon, 2011, p. 398). The tenet of this wisdom is an inspiration to the modern democratic system of government. Unpacking this wisdom entails a lot but primarily, it points to division of roles and collaboration with the leaders. Secondly, it echoes the idea of followership and leadership. This is because, as in other societies there are always the leaders and the led. In Annang traditional society, the three levels of leadership are *ufok*, (family), *ekpuk* (extended families), and *ilong* (village) (Essien, 2011, pp. 236-7). The division of the government in contemporary democratic Nigerian society is the reality of the three levels of government. By division of roles, the leaders promote excellence, efficiency as well as avoid unnecessary encroachment on duties that does not fall in one’s area. And by collaboration, other people feel the sense of belonging and worth as having something to offer to the community development. Lastly, this wisdom ensures proper representation of the different folks in the community. The *ukwoho mbobo* as seen above laid a solid foundation for governance in the Annang antiquity.

Government in Annang antiquity

In this piece, we can understand government a group of persons who are tasked with respective responsibilities over a people for the common good of the society. The members of the governing council are either appointed or elected by the people with such prerogative. Since in the Annang antiquity, there has been government that runs the affairs of the people. The government of the ancient Annang society (even contemporary) is patriarchal. The Annang society is patriarchal and the holders of its political offices and power are the male chiefs (Williams, 2020. P. 82). The female other has no position in the central Annang traditional government, like the *ekpuk* (lineage) or *isong* (village). However, women hold offices and exercise powers exclusively in the women’s council called *nka iban*. Leaders of *nka iban* are women who have passed through the *ukwoho mbobo* because they are believed to have acquired the requisite knowledge, virtues and skills to exercise the roles of their office. Like other organized government, Annang government has its political structure: the family

(*ubon*), the lineage (*ekpuk*), isong (village), *iman* (clan). There is an extra ordinary and the apex council of chiefs called *afe* Annang (Essien, 2011, pp. 84-85). We shall briefly explain these governmental structures and levels one after the other.

Firstly, the *ufok* which is the nuclear family, is the basic cell of (Annang) human society. The father who is also the husband is the traditional head. His jurisdiction is his family compound (*ikuro*) where he excises maximum authority within (Essien, 2011, p. 83). In this miniature jurisdiction, the man (assisted by his wife) assumes the responsibility of protecting the lives and property of his family. Majority of the Annang men could be aggressive with intruders into their *ikuro* especially at improper times and in an inappropriate manner. They can treat the intruder as a *persona non grata* and if need be report to the *ekpuk* for proper sanction if malicious or evil intention is revealed. In this level, the role of the mother is also tremendously felt as she acts in her person or on behalf of her husband. However, in some cases where the wife welds more influence than the husband, the woman plays the major role.

Secondly, the lineage called *ekpuk* is the next level of Annang traditional government. The *ekpuk* is a conglomeration of *ufok* of common paternity. It is essentially a collection of families of a common genealogy (Essien, 2011, p. 83). The *ekpuk* has some basic structures like the head, *obong* *ekpuk* that is basically the eldest man of the lineage. The *obong* *ekpuk* has some immediate elders to work with him in matters of decision taking. He consults with them in what is called *udok aru* (consultation). Typical of *ekpuk* is the *afe* - family house, a name that explains that all the members of the *ekpuk* has the same father. In this *afe*, the *ekpuk* meets once a week to discuss matters affecting them, to settle dispute, to make their weekly contributions (*utibe*) and to see one another for the week amidst palm-wine (*ukod mmong*) and pepper soup (*ukang atong*). The *ekpuk* that plays a dual role of government and socials; for governance because it creates opportunity for settle disputes in fairness and to punish the offender. Socials, because it offers opportunity to the people to exercise their freedom of speech, interacting with one another and discuss views and current affairs. At this level, the women governing council is strong. Like the men other, the women also have their executive and take absolute control of their affairs without the men's influence. Unlike the men, the impacts of the women are immensely felt in the community through their activities.

Thirdly, *awio/ isong*, the village is the third level of government. Government at this level was well organized. The *mbong* *ekpuk* (lineage heads) constituted a

council of elder from which a village head (*obong awio/obong isong*) was elected (Essien, 2011, p. 84). The remaining *mbong ekpuk* remained councilors but each with specific task for the village. Collectively, they advised the *obong awio* on certain matters of concern who freely consults with anyone of his chiefs as the need arises. The *ufok isong* (village hall) served as the parliamentary house where public meetings were held. At other times and based on the expected attendance, meetings were held at the palace of the *obong awio* (village head's palace). All public meeting and other information for public consumption were announced by the *amia nkrok isong* (town crier), and the best time to sound the gong was in the late evening and before dawn when everyone is believed to be at home. The sound of the village drum was informative for it was only sounded when there was an important information for the public notice. One remarkable thing about the village level of government is that it tripled the roles of the executive, the legislature and the judiciary (Essien, 2011, p. 84). The justice system was very fare. This was reinforced by *mbiam* (oath taking) and *ukang* (divination) should any of the aggrieved parties felt dissatisfied with any judgement. However, unlike the previous level of government, the women's council is strongest at the village level. It is most organized here with all the administrative structures. All elective positions go to those who passed through the Ukwoho mbobo institution and the women's activities are elaborate and could assume intercommunal level.

Fourthly, the *iman* (clan) was the highest level of government in the traditional Annang society. The clan is a congregation of the villages. The *okuku ikpasong* (clan head) is elected from the village heads. The other village heads constitute his councilors and are collectively called *Afe nkuku* (Essien, 2011, p.84). The *anwa nkuku* (clan parliament) was the center for the traditional council meetings of the *nkuku* (chiefs) led by the *akuku ikpa isong* (clan head). However, today, there is an extraordinary council of all the clan heads of Annang land. This council is called *afe Annang*, it is an extraordinary "traditional political forum where various clan representatives conglomerate to parley out issues concerning the Annang society. In other words, the *afe Annang* is the Annang forum" (Essien, 2011, pp. 84-5). Unlike the men's councils at the different levels of government, the level of women's leadership and authority ranged from the family to the village levels. At the clan level, the women council disappears for obvious reasons - complexity, distance of meeting and time used. As home managers, women cannot afford this time. Worthy of note is the fact that at the highest level, women leaders were drawn from those women who had gone through the

ukwoho mbobo, and who maintained high standard of discipline. Furthermore, freedom and equity was ensured as these led to efficiency and resilience among the people. Additionally, certain practices were advantageous to the government at all levels.

The excellence of the Annang traditional leadership can be attributed to several factors. The Abrahamic assertion of the people *agwo Annang ade agwo uko* plays no mean role in performance of an Annang person in any role. Besides the morale inspired by this assertion, the following factors also inspire good leadership. Firstly, the fear of God, for an Annang man, the supreme God is two dimensional: *awasi anyong ye awasi ikpa isong* (God of heaven and God of the earth). An Annang man believes that *awasi anyong ache agwo eting iwuo, ade awasi asong ache agwo ikpat* (God of heavens watches us on the tip of man's head, but God of the earth looks at the soul of our feet). This Annang worldview was a reason for high sense of virtues, fairness and justice in governance and interhuman relationships.

Secondly, the Annang world view of the human person as wealth according to (Okon, 2011) highlights and extol man over and above material possessions. This was antithetical to false testimony or any sort of bribery to gain undeserved favor or justice. If, however, there was doubt in a judgement, there was always a resort to *ukang* (divination). According to Parrinder, "divination or augury, foretelling the future by magical acts is very popular in Africa" (1954, p. 119). *Ukang* follows this principle of divination where in the case of a doubtful judgement is verified through this medium. These specialists were believed to consult with the gods through special oracles to give the right solution to a given problem. Every *ekpuk* had its own ancestral god that was always consulted in times of such needs. Disagreement if any with this medium necessitated *mbiam* (oath taking).

Thirdly, *mbiam* is a force, and operates as *Aruru*. "Invisibly operating, which people believe to pervade nature. It is not identifiable, has no permanent abode and can therefore be conveyed in everything and sent to a place to do either good or harm. It is an impersonal anonymous force, non -physical and it is diffused as a Melanesian force" (Essien, 2011, p. 94). *Mbiam* was the last court of appeal in the Annang antiquity. Its verdict was final, its conviction was irrevocable death. In cases where the accused was acquitted, it was a cause for celebration. This lethal agencies in the Annang antiquity immensely helped not only in leadership, but also in the ethical conduct. However, *ukwoho mbobo* was instrumental to

inculcating sound morality (beginning from the family) as mothers to the larger society. Although, the women did not constitute a council in the apex level or exercise authority, they were however, taught these wisdoms which they in turn inculcated to their household members.

Conclusion: Evaluating ukwoho mbobo in the ancient Annang government

Ukwoho mbobo served a veritable foundational leadership institution in the Annang antiquity. This institution formed virtuous women for grassroot leadership positions in the traditional society. A juxtaposition of leadership qualities especially sincerity, justice and fairness in the traditional Annang society with the present day will score the ancient days higher than the contemporary times. The higher score is attributable to the high sense of virtues and high regards for virtues such as honesty, justice, simplicity, courage, contentment, open minded love for one another, respect for the sanctity of life and the appeal to *mbiam* etc. The practice of virtue among the people was powered by the stringent justice system complemented by irrevocable punishment by death. This kind of death was unstoppable because of its nature. Usually, the oath was administered to the suspected defaulter in the presence of the *ekpuk* or *mbong isong*. The oath had both matter and form. The matter was the items provided by the suspected defaulter in most cases *akaikai* (the local gin) a white cock and two tubers of yam. The yams were cooked with the cock in an open space and everyone present would partake of it. The matter was the word of incantation by the chief priest that administers the *mbiam*. The suspected defaulter would squat holding a small glass of native gin in front of him. After the incantations, the suspected defaulter took a little sand from the soil mixes with the gin and drinks it and waits till the date he sets for the *mbiam* to kill him if he was guilty. The practice was not gender selective but enforce uncompromising compliance with ethics and immensely assisted traditional governance. For the women folk *ukwoho mbobo* prepared them for this task.

Abuse does not take away use. *Ukwoho mbobo* had its limitations. Three of them are outlined: Firstly, the practice of *mbobi* (female genital mutilation) which was a prerequisite to it became an unaccepted practice because of its health implications. This practice, however, was considered to desirable to tame excessive sexual appetite in growing women. Secondly, the fattening room became a place where the candidates in them were overfed to the disadvantage of obesity. This evaluation is only contemporary for, in the ancient days plump women were considered beautiful and fertile. Lastly, the economic implication

impaired girls from poor families to be admitted. This is because parents had to provide for the family as well as the daughter in the fattening room.

Despite these perceived demerits, *ukwoho mbobo* played a vital role in the formation of character and inculcating qualities that prepared women for leadership roles. The demerits we perceived today were rather considered beneficial for the ordering of the society. However, these practices could be reviewed to suit contemporary realities should *ukwoho mbobo* be revived.

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