

District Headquarters: Igbaja Town **Density:** 285mi

Weather: 26°C, Wind SW at 5km/h, 56% Humidity

Time Zone: UTC+1 (West African Time)

Languages: Irese (Igbomina-Yoruba), Nupe, English

LGA: Ifelodun

State: Kwara

Country: Nigeria **Etymology:**

Ireseland is a name given the territory comprising the four major communities and inhabited by the people of Igbaja, Obin, Adanla, and Ofarese. Igbaja people are a sub-group of the Igbomina who are also a sub-group of the Yoruba in southwestern Nigeria. The name “Igbaja” is derived from the nickname given to one of the earliest Elese fondly referred to as ‘Elese Agba ija onija ja’, meaning “Elese, the one who fights on behalf of other people”. The title “Elese” implies ‘Eni to nse ogun’, meaning “He who closes the door on war”. Igbaja people speak the Irese variant of the Igbomina-Yoruba language.

Geography a. Location

The Ireseland is located in an area measuring approximately ca.295.48km², with an estimated population of more than 24,000, occupied by Irese people in four towns – Igbaja, Adanla, Obin, and Ofarese. Basically, Ireseland is bounded in the west by River Osin near Ajase-Ipo, in the north by Saraje (sharaji) near Saare (Share) and in the east by Oke-Ode Iponrin.

b. Relief

Igbaja is one of the major towns in Ifelodun Local Government Area of Kwara State and is located approximately 56kms north-east of Ilorin, the state capital; and north-north-east of Ajase-Ipo, an important nodal town on Latitude 8°23'0"N and Longitude 4°53'0"E. This spatial distance is obtained by taking Illorin-Ajase-Igbaja road. An alternative route is the Ilorin-Idofian-Igboowu-Igbaja road, measuring a distance of 20kms between Igbaja and Idofian through Igboowu, and 22kms from Idofian to Ilorin.

It is situated on a fairly sloppy plateau, mostly domed low-lying ridges of exposed laterite, with the gradient slopping from the northern to the southern part of the town. Igbaja rests on a low contour of approximately 360m above sea level and high contour reading of approximately 420m above sea level.

The sprawling settlement dates back to the late 17th to early 18th century and is the headquarters of Igbaja District, comprising Igbaja-Okeya to Alasoro Idi-Apa in the north-east, Adanla to Bolorunduro and Osin in the east and to Oyi in the north. The rapid urbanization in and expansion of Igbaja makes it the largest community, which has practically subsumed the rest of Irese communities.

Obin is located ca.2.5kms east of Igbaja while Adanla is located ca.3kms northeast of Igbaja, just as Ofarese is located ca.5.1kms east of Igbaja. However, the site excavated at Oke-Emo is located on Latitude 08°25'25" and Longitude 04°52'09" and situated approximately 2kms from the palace of the Elese. It is about 1.3kms from the popular ECWA Seminary School, Igbaja.

c. Climate

The climatic condition of Igbaja is characterized by both wet and dry seasons, each lasting about six months. While the rainfall begins around March and lasts till October, dry season begins in November and ends in March. The days are very hot during dry season due to influence of the Guinea Savannah and Orchard bush on the complex Equatorial Belt. Thus, from November to January, temperatures typically range from 33°C to 34°C while from February to April, the temperatures range from 34°C to 37°C.

The total annual rainfall ranges from 1,000mm to 1,500mm and peaks in June through September. The rainfall precipitation is ca.50.8 and 101.6cms during wet season running from April through October. The rainfall is highly influenced by the south-west monsoon winds blowing from the Atlantic Ocean. The beginning and end of rainy season is often marked by thunderstorms and strong dusty winds with a mean temperature of approximately 30°C to 33°C. The relative humidity during wet season is between 75% and 80%.

During dry season, however, humidity stands at approximately 65% with rainfall precipitation dropping to ca.1.27cms between November and March. Similarly, the atmosphere is usually very dusty and visibility poor due in part to the north-south

winds from the Sahara Desert. The day is always sunny with the sun brightly shining for between 6.5 hours and 7.7 hours daily from November to May.

d. Drainage system

Igbaja Town and its environs are well drained by a number of perennial rivers such as Oyun, a tributary of Oyin, which also drains into Osin. River Oyun drains principally the eastern side of the town and flows southwards with part of its tributaries, including some points in the immediate northern zone of the town as well as roundabout the southern and western region of the town.

Neither river Oyun nor Oyin is navigable by canoe. Both also have other support systems such as seasonal streams and water bodies, including Molete, Ayodi, Lago, which enhance the speedy draining of storm water from the town while providing clean drinking water to inhabitants at different periods of the year.

However, today, Igbaja has good road network with modern drainage systems to evacuate storm water within the town. Most of the roads are paved, tarred with asphalt. Others are graded and motorable. On Igbaja roads and streets, vehicles of different types, tricycles and motorcycles can navigate their way through to homes, churches, event centres, schools, market and other places where social interactions take place on a daily basis.

e. Geology and Soil

Igbaja is underlain by igneous and metamorphic rocks of the basement complex characteristic of most south-western cities and towns in Nigeria. It is also decorated with ferruginous tropical soils on crystalline acid rocks and exhibits hilly ambience with sublimely sultry valleys in an average elevation of approximately 300m above sea level, consisting of a mixture of quartzite, quartz-schist, quartzmica and schist. The beautiful landscape is dotted by inselburgs (erosion residues), mostly of low-lying rock outcrops.

The clay-trap soil formations are basically the function of relief, geology and man-induced changes in the topography. Consequently, the soil is composed of patches of reddish clayey, hornblende, biotitic, and gneiss types. The land is also endowed with sandy, loam and low percentage of silt.

History

Like the history of most Nigerian ancient towns and cities, and indeed, African traditional settlements, that of Irese is replete with the paradox of migration: adventure, authority, power, fame, and even economic advantage, brought about by better endowed territories and spheres of influence, sometimes, far removed from their aboriginal enclaves. The Ireses are historically a group of people of Igbomina stock. History suggests that Igbomina people occupy most part of the north-east of Yorubaland and are originally descendants of Oranyan from the east of Oyo.

Archeological evidence suggests that before the coming of Igbomina people to the area, there were late Stone Age settlers whose settlements date as far back as between 1155AD to 1510AD and 1250AD to 1575AD. It says that these pre-Oyo people were followed by Nupe settlers who occupied patches of lands in Ora, Alabe and Igbaja before the arrival of Oyo immigrants. This process persisted into the second half of the 19th century when Ilorin settlers began to infiltrate into Igbomina areas, especially Igbaja district for farming purposes.

Nupe Settlers

The first man to settle in Igbaja was Madanga, also called Akusi, a Nupe hunter who settled at Isalegbaja on the peak of Ayodi Hill. He was accompanied by a number of followers and majority of inhabitants of Ogbe area and Sawo compound in Igbaja as well as Atanbati and Elefun compounds, who today claim to be descendants of Akusi.

Although a school of thought argues that Akusi was the real founder of Igbaja, it does appear that as a nomadic hunter, Akusi did not plan to perfect the processes for founding any settlement as he was always on the move hunting for animals from one location to another. Even traditions of origin in Ireseland maintain that after Oyo immigrants had settled, they prevailed on Akusi not to relocate to another area but reside with them because of the friendship they had already cultivated. Besides, settlements of Igbaja did not have their origin at Isalegbaja but Afin where the leader of Oyo-Ile immigrants first settled.

Oyo-Ile Immigrants

History suggests that the processes of transformation of the small Irese settlements into real communities of Igbaja, Obin, Adanla and Ofarese under the over-lordship

of Elese of Igbaja were works of the group from Oyo-Ile. The four communities claim to have hailed from the same “Ile Ajiboro” family, Oyo-Ile in old Oyo Empire. They founded Igbaja at around the same period that other Igbomina communities of Ora, Ikosin, Ofaro, Owa, Agunjin, Oke-Oyan, Iwo and Oke-Aba were founded. Beside the excuse of succession disputes as reason for their relocation, some people claim that they moved to the new settlements to enhance their chances in hunting and farming.

Igbaja is said to have been founded by a hunter and warrior, Elese Adiyelefon who migrated from Oyo-Ile with a large crowd of family members, supporters and associates to Afin. He arrived Igbaja with traditional Oyo objects such as Omololu, Sango, Ida (sword) and Egungun Elewe.

Tradition suggests that Doko - an avid hunter and warrior from Oyo-Ile - was the first Elese that founded Obin, in company of numerous followers. He was said to have been joined by his two younger brothers: Dada and Iwo, whom he had directed to settle separately downhill at Adanla and uphill at Igbaja, respectively. At the time, Obin, inhabited by over 100 households, was the largest Irese community until an epidemic disease struck, killing many and forcing most survivors to migrate to Apado, Saare and Iwo, where they still live till today.

Adanla is said to have been founded by a ferocious farmer, hunter and warrior, Ajala from the Irese family in Oyo-Ile. Its first Elese is said to be Boko from a house in Isale-Ede.

Tradition suggests that Ofarese was founded by a hunter from Oyo, who settled at Igi-Ose with his powerful bow and arrow. It is inhabited by two sets of people: one from Ile-Ife and the other from Ofa. Those from Ofa inhabit Oke-Ofa and produce the Olofa of Ofarese while those from Ile-Ife populate Isale-Ofa and occupy the Ada stool. While the Olofa is the paramount ruler, the Ada is the next most senior in the council of chiefs. The consensus in the other three communities: Igbaja, Obin and Adanla is that Ofarese became part of Irese mainly because the Elese allowed them to settle on his land at the time and provided security cover for them from external invaders. For that, they pay tributes and homage to the Elese.

Political Culture

The political culture of Irese people is derived from their Yoruba ancestral tradition. The structures of political interaction in the communities are unique to the circumstances of their existence. Their ability to coalesce around that sense of community and family, respecting and believing in one another with uncommon love and trust is understandably so because of the age-long innate character that has defined the people for centuries: Respect for elders and playing by the rules.

1. Authority

Put in perspective, from the 18th and 19th centuries when Igbaja comprised of nine villages: Obin, Adanla, Oke-Emo, Ikeku, Ofarese, Gogo, Pee, Ogbe and Para-Oya; and Oke-Emo, Ikeku, Adanla and Obin were the oldest and leading groups, the Elese (Oba) had held the political authority and ruled over all the villages through traditionally accepted succession via rotation to the throne among the four communities. Although since the Elese has been permanently domiciled in Igbaja, the institutions of Elerin of Adanla, Olobin of Obin and Olofa of Ofarese are merely lieutenants to the Elese who confers power and authority on the secondary traditional rulers.

With the flow of authority hierarchically defined, it was easy for the people to mobilize key strong individuals to secure and protect the communities from external aggressors while also working collectively in concert to expand their territorial boundaries for economic and political gains. For this, everyone organized themselves in groups of professions, skills and talents to promote the wellbeing of the people and drive development of the communities.

Traditionally, the people of Obin, Adanla and Ofarese recognize Elese as their superior king, and therefore, during important ceremonies like the Egungun festival, they present gifts and tributes in form of yam, maize, Guinea corn, cassava, livestock, kola nuts, among others, to show loyalty and submission to his reign. These presentations expressed deeper political significance than the economic value there underpin.

2. Structure

The political structure of Irese people before and even after the infiltration of elements of the Ilorin Emirate derives from the mix of lineages, associations and

institution of central state authority. The lineage, by its workings, represents the legislative arm of the community, as it makes binding rules and regulations and stipulates punishments for offenders. Everybody in the community belonged and still belongs to a lineage. Members live, organize and work together under the leadership of the eldest man (Olori-Ebi) to manage their affairs, including celebrating and resolving disputes together. Every member of the lineage carries the banner of the lineage and strives to maintain the reputation and image of the lineage.

The lineage also exercises judicial authority over family members, who violate agreed rules of engagement by trying common cases, especially matrimony, quarrels, debts recovery, stealing and adultery, among members. It also marshals certain punishments ranging from fines to chastisements, among other agreed sanctions and its decisions were supreme over all members.

Also, where the lineage had a chieftaincy title, members had the sole responsibility of recommending to the Elese and the kingmakers the next candidate after the death of the incumbent one. This layer of the lineage gives an impression of the capacity to decide the constitution of the executive arm of the lineage. Succinctly put, the lineage had and still has the power to nominate its candidate or representative to occupy positions of executive authority in the family, lineage or community.

There were also various associations representing different groups, including professional or trade associations, age-grades as well as socio-cultural clubs or formations. Each of the associations had their special roles in the community: ensuring security; fostering peace and unity; promoting development and the wellbeing of the community. These bodies include hunters' association, dyers' and weavers' associations, carvers' and potters' associations, market women association as well as meat sellers, palm oil sellers, and kola nut sellers' associations.

In other to defend, protect and promote the interests of these associations, their members formally organize themselves by working out detailed rules and regulations, electing officers to run their affairs for specific periods of time, holding meetings to review issues, organizing activities to create awareness, and performing such other rites to admit and celebrate members' success stories. The structures of these associations also had and still exercise legislative, judicial and executive authorities and functions, which are replicas of the present-day political structures which define modern democratic institutions of state.

Death of Elese

The sobriety, majesty, royalty and authority that herald the appointment of new Elese comes with the complex technical processes that the kingmakers follow in announcing vacancy of the revered stool, having traditionally affirmed the death of the incumbent or his deposition after due process.

Kingmakers and the Agbon

In the custody of the kingmakers is usually the traditional but very powerful staff referred to as “Agbon”, which can only be publicly displayed if the Elese is dead or has been deposed/rejected by his people. The mode of presentation typically communicates the state of affairs with the stool. For example, when the Elese is deposed, the kingmakers would carry the “Agbon” for him to see in his palace and they will loudly pronounce his rejection after a laid down procedure had been followed. Usually, such Elese was expected to commit suicide immediately, either by hanging himself or drinking poison, because he is not supposed to live to see the traditional staff with his eyes. Immediately after their visit to the palace, the kingmakers will carry the “Agbon” round the community to announce the death of the Elese.

In Igbaja, the ruling houses identified by oral tradition are: Abidolu, Fakayode, Niniola and Adiyefon families. In the past, succession was by rotation among the four oldest communities of Oke-Emo, Ikeku, Adanla and Obin. But since the seat of Elese moved to Igbaja, it has remained there, even as it is keenly contested for by the ruling houses.

Selection of New Elese

When the Elese stool is declared vacant by virtue of death or deposition, the Elerin of Adanla, who is among the kingmakers, takes over as the Regent until new Elese mounts the throne. Other kingmakers include the Bale of Igbaja, the Olobin of Obin, the Olofa of Ofarese and the Agbaja of Igbaja. Since the Agbaja is the most senior and next-in-rank to the Elese, he presides over the meetings of the kingmakers. At the meeting of the kingmakers, each of the ruling houses willing to contest the stool will present a candidate for consideration and coronation.

But before any action is taken on the candidates, the kingmakers will first initiate the traditional process of consultation with the Ifa Oracle to direct their choice of the next Elese, whose reign will usher in peace and progress in the kingdom. The Agbaja

announces whoever the Ifa Oracle had chosen. After the announcement, the candidate and the kingmakers will retire into the secret cocoon for traditional rites for some days. At the end of the rites, installation of the new Elese will follow, with elaborate ceremonies.

Installation/Coronation

Before the emergence of the Ilorin factor, the Elese-elect was taken to Oyo by the kingmakers, where he was installed and crowned by the Alaafin. But all that changed with the arrival of Islam and the overbearing authority of the Ilorin Emirate over Igbaja during the reign of Abidolu and the introduction of the turban as a centrifugal and centripetal source of influence.

Authoritarianism and Democracy

In the early days, the Elese was the father of all in Ireseland. All village heads such as Elerin of Adanla, Olobin of Obin, Olofa of Ofarese as well as ward leaders and other civil and military chiefs, including warriors, were responsible to the Elese. As the authority bearer, he was a sole administrator and held the power of life and death over the people. However, the Elese hardly exercised that enormous power as the chiefs, council of elders as well as lineages and various associations, with their respective executive officers, wielded the real instruments of power and authority, because their collective decisions, if contrary to that of the Elese, had the capacity to override those of the supreme traditional figure.

The incumbent Elese of Igbaja and Ireseland, His Royal Majesty, Oba Ahmed Babalola Awuni Arepo III, 90 years old in 2020, was born to the family of Disu and Ebelola Babalola Arepo Dynasty of Ile Iya Oba Compound in Igbaja. He ascended the throne on May 3, 1989, after the death of Elese Abdulsalam Olayiwola Areja 11, who was installed in 1959. His selection and installation met all generally accepted criteria and his reign has brought peace, stability, progress and unprecedented development to Ireseland.

The last recorded Bale of Igbaja is Chief Kadiri Alabi, who was installed on January 20, 1983, after he was nominated by the elders of Bale's compound following the death of former Bale, Pa (Alhahi) Buraimo Adedayo, in December, 1982.

Chiefs

The Balogun must have the characteristics of a warrior, as a brave military chief. The post is not hereditary in nature, but appointed after meeting the prescribed qualities of valour. He, therefore, has little or no say in the political affairs of the community except in times of war. In the early days, Ireseland had many brave warriors who performed gallantly in certain wars either during the days of the old Oyo or the Fulani rule, and the Baloguns wielded enormous powers.

Kingmakers and Council of Chiefs

Key traditional rulers in Ireseland are civil chiefs who, from the past, had been responsible for discussing with the Elese those challenges facing the communities and proffering workable solutions while also adjudicating on all matters. The Elerin, the Olobin and the Olofa are the paramount rulers of Adanla, Obin and Ofarese, respectively. At the death or deposition of any of these chiefs, their people nominate a new candidate, who is traditionally presented to the Elese in Igbaja. With the assistance of the kingmakers, the Elese installs the candidate as a chief with all necessary rites in line with Oyo traditions. But as indicated earlier, the use of the turban as chieftaincy regalia began with the acceptance of Elese Abidolu of the influence of Islam.

In Adanla, the Elerin of Adanla, Dr David Oyerinola Adedunmoye, crowned by Elese of Igbaja on April 15, 2017, and born to the Adedunmoye Ruling House of Adanla, is supported by the Asanlu, Eesa, Oluponna, and Eesaba. He took over from Elerin Memudu Alao, who became the Elerin in 1968 and lived for more than 100 years. In Obin, the Olobin is assisted by the Eesa and Balogun. Today, the Olobin, Alhaji Taiye runs the traditional institution since the death of Olobin Yesufu Akano.

In Ofarese, the Olofa is assisted by the Ada and some chiefs, who occupy a number of chieftaincy titles, which appear not to have been filled due mainly to the protracted dispute over who should assume the throne of the Olofa between Hezekiah O. Adeniyi and Alhaji Abdulraman Ajiboye. This disagreement has persisted since the death of Olofa Owoloye Olabinri in 1977. The installation of other chiefs in these communities is performed by the respective paramount rulers after due recommendation by the families concerned.

As indicated above, the Agbaja and Bale of Igbaja as well as the Elerin, Olobin and Olofa constitute the kingmakers and install the Elese whenever the stool is vacant. Conversely, the ward heads such as Shawo, Auwa and Elemoso join the five kingmakers to make up the council of chiefs in Ireseland. These chiefs meet and advise the Elese on crucial matters of importance, settle disputes and perform traditional rites whenever the need arises.

Ijo or Itadogun

The council of chiefs or its special meeting is otherwise known as “Ijo” or “Itadogun” in Ireseland. It holds as an assembly at 17-day interval each. Most meetings dealing with the affairs of the communities, which are not secret, could be discussed and settled in the open at the palace of the Elese by the council of chiefs.

However, the “Ijo” or “Itadogun” is not held in nobody’s house, not even the Elese’s palace, but at a sacred and solemn site in-between Ofarese and Adanla. All members of the council of chiefs attend the meeting as a matter of necessity. The Elese himself is a member and must also attend. No one, not even the Elese, presides or chairs the meeting. The moment it begins, everybody becomes equal. This is to allow everyone freedom to fairly ventilate their views on issues without fear or favour. All secret matters that ordinarily could not be discussed in the open are tabled and resolved at “Ijo”, including criminal cases against any chief or the Elese. Even discussions about their possible deposition can be addressed and disciplinary measures applied on anyone found culpable. At the end of the meeting, all issues discussed and resolutions reached are kept secret.

Socio-Cultural Dynamics 1. Interaction with Oyo-Ile

Before the incursion of Fulani (Ilorin) influence, Irese people had very strong relationships with the old Oyo Empire and consulted with the authorities before major decisions were taken. During wars, the Ireses had roles to play: participate actively, alongside the Oyo warriors to fend off enemies and “closing the door on war”; during festivities, bring gifts and presents to pay homage to the Alafin, as a show of loyalty and respect, in addition to participating in most traditional rites and ceremonies, but not without the invitation of the Alafin.

One vital aspect of this relationship is that the Elese never took any decision without the active participation of other chiefs, who must also consult and secure buy-in of

their subjects. Together, the Elese, the kingmakers and council of chiefs discuss the issues at stake and carry the message down to their people in the villages and wards, who never quivered in supporting any affirmative action to contribute and participate in the endeavour. Overall, the Ireses, before the advent of Ilorin Empire, looked on the Alafin as their “father” and the Alafin, acting in this capacity, also gave orders to the Ireses to undertake certain duties, military or civic in nature.

2. Traditional Heritage

Apart from their strong affiliation to Oyo-Ile, Irese people were irrevocably attached to their socio-cultural heritage, religious beliefs and values; and observed them with enthusiasm and in convivial atmospheres. But the influence of modern religious beliefs embedded in Islam and Christianity have gradually eroded confidence in the indigenous African traditions and religions which propelled their sense of community in the past. In fact, reports suggest that less than 10 per cent of the Irese population, today, still engage in the rites associated with the original traditional values which bond them together in the old.

3. Oro Ita or Ita Oloro

Hitherto, “Oro Ita” was a vital communal festival observed annually in all Ireseland. It was the “Etutu” traditional rite believed to have been initiated by the first Elese at Obin. The descendants of Elese in the communities participated in the ceremonies on behalf of all the people of the land. The rite was and is still performed at Ita’s forest (Igbo Ita) on a hill at the outskirt of Alasoro where the celebrants will go in the morning and not return until the next day. The significance of the annual ritual is to secure the protection of the whole Ireseland against all evils and dangers of the year. To assure the acceptance of the sacrifices, rain must fall and soak them as they descend the hill and return home, with joy and in celebration mood.

4. Ope Isa

The “Ope Isa” festival, which lasts seven days, is celebrated after the “Ita” festival. The significance of the “Ope Isa” festival is that it is performed for the protection of the land and the people against misfortunes. Throughout the seven nights that the rituals are performed, the Egungun (masquerade) must guard and parade the streets from midnight through the early hours of the day, and no individual, who is not associated with the rites must come out or see the masquerade.

5. Egungun

The Egungun was and still remains a unique, seven-day annual festival. It is a unifying socio-cultural activity of the Irese people with a multiplicity of origins. The most common is the Egungun Elewe, which could be found in virtually all Igbomina communities and is believed to have been brought by immigrants from the old Oyo. In the whole of Igbominland, the Elewe is believed to have originated from Oyo-Ile through the instrumentality of the Elese of Igbaja.

However, the Egungun can still be traced to a number of houses in Igbaja, including the most senior of them all: Sanbeleke at the Balogun Abaanigbe's compound; and Obadimeji from the same Balogun Abaanigbe's compound. There is also Egungun Eleru at the Sangote's compound, said to have been brought from Idofian during their migration to Igbaja. During the Egungun festival, some Idofian people join their ancestral kinsmen at Igbaja to celebrate. Another Egungun Eleru at Agboku's compound was brought from Ilota, near Idofian, and the people of Ilota also join their kits and kin in Igbaja to celebrate during the annual festival. The Paaka is also an Egungun mostly associated with the youths and young children and usually adorned with clothes and rags. Children look up to it every year!

The significance of the Egungun cult is the belief that the rites performed during the seven-day festivities help protect the communities from all evils and misfortunes within the year. Celebrated during the dry season, the people of the four communities of Igbaja, Adanla, Obin and Ofarese joyously troop out in their numbers to the rhythm of the drums as they dance to the palace of the Elese to pay homage, amidst the rituals. One characteristic of the Egungun is the fact that it manifests the people's ancestors who come once a while into the world to see his children and bless them.

The mystery of the Egungun is that only those connected with the secret rituals know what it is made of while the ordinary people cannot see beyond the physical regalia and dressing. However, once an Egungun is out, members of the family must gather to receive blessings. Incidentally, the Egungun knows every member of the family and calls them by their respective names as he blesses them. Relatives outside the community are usually informed of the date the Egungun will appear and on the seventh day, as he bids farewell to the people, those who see him as their "father" literarily weep because he will be leaving them for the unknown world he came from.

6. Orisas (Divinities) and Ancestral Worship

In the past, apart from the Egungun cults, there was hardly any family without one kind of traditional god (idol) or the other, such as “Orisa” as ‘Sango’, “Oya”, “Sigidi”, “Ifa”, “Orisa Oko”, “Orisa Osun” and “Orisa Einle”. As obtained in other Yoruba communities, Irese people call the name of God, the Creator and Supreme Being, as “Olodumare”. They make regular consultations and worship the “Olodumare” through the “Orisas”, which they see as His representative. In the past, virtually every family house in Irese believed in Divinities and ancestors, represented by man-made shrines and idols. But not so anymore!

The significance of these Divinities and ancestors to the people lies in their religious concept in relation to “Olodumare”, the Creator and Supreme Being. To them, the Divinities and ancestors represented messengers, ministers and agents of God. As they were indoctrinated to believe, the Divinities were intermediaries between God and man, an idea shaped by their socio-cultural setting, where the highest authority, for example, the Oba or Elese, is not approached directly but through lesser agents, sometimes, chiefs. The Yorubas have such revered and exalted notion of God that they could not have thought of approaching Him directly but through His messengers – the Divinities. It is this religious belief that was misinterpreted by the Europeans, when they came with their own religion and erroneously concluded that the people did not know God, thereby using derogatory terms as “Idol worship”, “paganism”, “fetishism” to describe them and their religion.

7. Marriage and Child Bearing

In Ireseland, marriages and child-births follow the same traditional rites and processes. Inter-marriages were, and are still an acceptable form of union, celebrated in the communities. A daughter given away in marriage by one family to another in the other community is seen as conforming to tradition. It is also seen as a union not sealed in strange land.

In the past, when a child was born to a family, the first thing that happened was that the Ifa Oracle was consulted to seek and know the future of the child; and to know whether the Orisa or Egungun desired any ritual or sacrifice for the good of the child. The people also believed that a newly born child made a journey from another world into this world and consequently was expected to bring presents for the gods, that

they might receive him or her with all the necessary love and admiration. In this regard, on the first day of birth, the child's mother will go to the gods for the necessary rituals with palm oil (which signifies 'Ero' – well-being or peace), and as many as two "abata" kola nuts on behalf of the child.

Also, on the eight day after birth, all members of the family, along with their relations and well-wishers gathered together in the house's ancestral shrine for the naming ceremony. The significance of the rites performed during the ceremony is not in the fact that a name is announced for the new born baby but that the child is delivered into the hands of the ancestors for protection, direction and guidance against rampaging evils and locking dangers into successive feats all the days of his or her life.

Presided over by the ancestral priest and head of the house, rituals were performed inside the shrine with, among others, edible things such as hen and kola nuts for a female child; and cock with kola nuts for a male child. After killing the hen or cock, the blood will be spilt inside the shrine and the kola nut broken and passed round for all to eat. Shortly after that, the priest will announce the child's name and every will join their voices in prayer and blessings for the child and the parents.

Entertainments follow immediately at the same venue. The child's head is also shaved any time of this day or soon after to complete the induction process. But only a few families follow this process today as modern religions have wiped out such beliefs. No more consultations with Ifa Oracle or visits to shrines for child naming. Churches now do child naming, dedication and baptism.

8. Facial Marks

The idea of facial marks has been a common denominator of Irese people's cultural beliefs. As in most Yoruba communities, facial marks depict a family's lineage and heritage. In the past, the Abaja was peculiar to the descendants of Elese in the four communities. But nowadays, Pele is the mark common on their faces.

Traditionally, while Abaja belongs to their father's lineage, Pele belongs to their mother's lineage. Characteristically, the facial marks give out their wearers so quickly to those who appreciate the origins of the marks. For instance, Abaja consists of four or seven vertical lines of marks made on each cheek. For those conversant

with tribal marks and their origins, it is easy to look someone in the face and tell him or her where he or she hails from.

But society has changed exponentially. Descendants of Balogun now wear “Pele” marks on their faces, consisting of three horizontal marks on each cheek. Another popular mark, “Keke” runs down from the head to the cheek and mostly belongs to Mogaji’s descendants. However, the storyline of today is that most of these facial marks are disappearing fast from the streets of Igbaja and Ireseland, except among some of the elders who enjoyed the value and associated respect such marks accorded them in the olden days.

Blend of Culture and Modern Religion 1. Switch from African Traditional Religion to Islam

History indicates that Irese people originated from Oyo-Ile and were, therefore, subservient to the authority of the Alafin of Oyo until the advent of the Ilorin Empire. However, there is no consensus as to how the people became subjects of the Emir of Ilorin: whether it was voluntary or by conquest. But one thing is clear: Igbomina communities such as Igbaja, Iwo, Oke-Aba and Ijara came under the control of Ilorin during the reign of Emir Abdulsalam (1831-1842) and that was also during the time of the 16th Elese of Igbaja, Abidolu. He became the first Elese to be turbaned by the Emir rather than being crowned by the Alafin as it had been the tradition.

Traditionally, accepting the authority of a particular overlord, whether by conquest or voluntary submission, translates to accepting its political, religious and cultural values. Thus, the conversion of Elese Abidolu into Islamic religion and also accepting the turban from Emir Abdulsalam meant subjugating Irese people to the whips and caprices (power and authority) of Ilorin.

Influence of Islam

At the time of Emir Abdulsalam, Ireseland was administered by one Malam Ali Gambari, a fief, who consequently appointed his relatives as Ajeles, such as Pelu and Alufa, over the communities. These characters freely gave land to those they favoured and many Ilorin farmers took advantage of this deliberate policy to move over to settle in Ireseland: Oroki (1831 and 1842), Sabala (1842 and 1860), and Durosoto (1842 and 1860).

As with Islam, virtually all the new settlers were already believers in Prophet

Muhammad as the messenger of Allah and the Koran (Qu'ran) as the original message guiding the Islamic religion. Therefore, their custom and traditional values, socio-cultural behaviours and habits, and mode of interaction with others had been shaped by these traits. For instance, they abhorred western education but took Qu'ranic recitation in the Mosques seriously, just as they relished nomadic farming, especially livestock: ram and sheep, goats, cattle, and even camels. Their lifestyle is lubricated by polygamy; something akin to the traditional value system of those enmeshed in traditional African religion.

Besides, they had an appreciation of leadership through indirect application of political power and subtle diplomacy and deployed it very well in the use of indirect rule to administer the affairs of the people without making it obvious that they were controlling their lives. For example, Irese people paid no tribute or taxes in form of money directly to the Emir of Ilorin, but they pledged their loyalty to the Emirate by selecting able-bodied men to work in the royal household's farms, build mud houses, bans and gardens for them over a period of two to three months, for free. In addition, the Elese and his chiefs went annually to Ilorin to celebrate Eid-el-Kabir festival with the Emir, but not without carrying yams and goats contributed by their subjects for the Emir and his household. Who says these were not tributes? Of course, there were used to pay homage to the Emir.

Although the Elese of Igbaja was given the right to judge certain cases within his jurisdiction, including divorce, intra and inter-family crisis as well as family land disputes but the authority to adjudicate on boundary disputes, chieftaincy problems and criminal cases rested in the Emir, who could either wield such powers or delegate same to the Balogun. These value systems were more easily inculcated by the Irese people, and helped the spread of Islam.

Interfacing with Christian Religion 1. In The Beginning...

For the first time, Christianity interfered with African traditional religion in Irese through an Ijesa man and trader simply named Jegede in 1920. He regularly came to Igbaja for trading activities and often lodged at one Pa Emmanuel Odewumi Wele, an Ogun worshipper's compound in Isalegbaja. Ogun worship is the worship of the god of iron.

2. First Christian Convert

It is not clear if Jegede was an adherent of Sudan Interior Mission (SIM) which came into Africa from USA and Canada in 1893, but his friendship availed him the opportunity of preaching the Gospel of the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ as enunciated in the Holy Bible to Pa Odewumi, who eventually became the first Christian convert in Igbaja. Pa Odewumi was shortly joined by others, who Jegede taught how to read and write after a hard day's work in the farm and during Sunday services, so they could appreciate the Bible, engineer their faith and understand Christian religion. As the number of believers increased in fellowship, so was the level of curiosity and enthusiasm to learn more and broaden their knowledge, thereby enhancing their intellectual capacity to explore the world beyond the circumference of Ireseland, Igbomina and Oyo. But Jegede's sojourn in Igbaja was just for four years.

3. First Missionary and First Indigenous Pastor

As he prepared to depart in 1924, Jegede sent words across to Agunjin, seeking help to nurture the new congregation. In response, one missionary, Reverend Donaldson, a representative of SIM at Agunjin came to Igbaja. He established the first missionary church at Alere's compound within the vicinity of the present ECWA church cemetery in Igbaja. The first indigenous pastor of the SIM church (1924-1927) was one Pa David Babalola, an ex-traditional ruler at Eruku, who relinquished his throne to become a Christian faithful.

4. Influence of Christian Values

Apart from moral education (anchored on avoidance of sin in its ramifications and taking of any one's life, forgiveness) and sanctity (embedded in purity, avoidance of adultery, infidelity), Christianity brought with it basic lifestyles that appeared at odd with traditional African religion: monogamy, for instance. These values and lifestyles were inculcated in and imbibed by the new believers, who hitherto, were traditionalists. Christianity created an avenue for not only quality, secular education, but education that recognized and integrated the moral and spiritual values of Christian faith. This rare combination helped propel Christianity into the hearts of many. But while many saw education as pivotal to other development opportunities and joined the faith as a result; others tittered with certain character and moral concerns the Bible held sacrosanct.

5. Crisis of Confidence

Between 1935 and 1936, disagreement over failure of some members to play by the rules clearly spelt out in the Bible began to manifest. One key point of dispute was polygamy. Some of those who practiced it were sometimes discriminated against, for example, by refusing them the privilege of being baptized, even as some others didn't see anything wrong with polygamy. This issue necessitated realignment of interests. Issues of love and hate, right and wrong, truth and lies, honesty and more, agitated their minds in respect of how these reconciled with the teachings of God's word.

6. Birth of Baptist Church

But what finally caused the splitting of the church into two separate belief systems - liberal and conservative faith - was the refusal of some 14 delinquent members to pay six pence fine each as disciplinary measure for not participating in routine church activity: They had absented themselves from scheduled manual work with the excuse that they attended one of their friend's marriage ceremonies. Some European missionaries invited to settle the dispute were referred to the lingering issue of polygamy as one of their grievances. Although they paid their fines later, the emergence of two factions, convinced in their beliefs, resulted in the splitting of the church, with one faction forming the Baptist Church, having received support from the Baptist mission at Ogbomoso while the other remained in the SIM church. Even so, the discord continued.

For the believers in Adanla, they continued to worship and follow their faith from around 1924 until 1932 when they built their first SIM church. During the crisis, they sided with the remainers in the former SIM church. Even after building their own church in Adanla, they sustained that relationship with their brothers and sisters in Igbaja. Today, that relationship still exists.

7. Birth of ECWA

Interestingly, ECWA Theological Seminary, Igbaja started as a School of Prophets in 1918, the first of its kind in Nigeria, but ECWA was only formerly founded as a church in 1954, having evolved when the SIM-related churches (initially in Nigeria) came together to form an indigenous body of Christ. Since then, the body of Christ has continued to grow in Igbaja, with new additions, including the Apostolic, Living

Faith Church and Redeemed Christian Church of God, among others, just as schools of mission have increased in number, size and impact.

Economic Resources 1. Vegetation

Igbaja is blessed with huge natural resources that, if exploited maximally, could help transform the economy of Ireseland through improved revenues while also making the area the tech and medical hub of Africa. These include spear grass

Andropogon citenium, ‘eekon’ *Impereta cylindricai* and the ‘ikin’, guinea grass, *Panicum maxiuma* and *Hyparrhemia sp.*, ‘beere’ *Anadelphia arrecta*, and ‘eruwa’ *Andropoggon gayanus*. There are also several weeds such as *Chromolaena odorata*, and shrubs and trees of significant value to humanity.

Take the locust bean tree, for example. Indeed, the *Parrkia bibglobosa*, Ilorin basalm or ‘Iya’, or African Copaila basalm – *Daniella oliveri*, Mahogany bean – *Afzelia Africana*, *Milicia excels* (syn *Chlorophora excelsa*), ‘Agano’ – *Drypetes gossweileri*, fig tree – *Ficus vogeliana*, ‘Abo’ *Homalium dolchophyllum*, *Khaya senegalensis* and ‘isin’ – *Blighia sapida*, ‘Iyeye’ – *Spondias mombin*, ‘iya Asagidi’ – *Bridelia micracrantha*, ‘emi’ *Vitellaria paradoxa* (syn *Butyrospermum paradoxum*), *Berlinia grandifolia*, *phyllanthus discoideus*, ‘Igbaluwere’ – *Entada Africana* and *Acacia nilotica*. Some of these could be exploited for timber, different kinds of woods for building works and construction activities.

Economic shrubs include African bow string or ‘Pankere’: *Sansiviera triasciata*, *S. senegambica* and *S. Liberica*. Others are ‘Orupa’ *hymenocardia acida*, *Protea alliotti*, *Cochlospermum planchoni* and ‘Agbalumo’ – *Crysophyllum albidum*.

Climbers include species such as ‘Ibo’ – *Mimosa Himalayas* and ‘Igi iru’ – *Bauhanian sp.* Oil palm tree is also a great source of revenue for the community and *Elaeis guineensis*; and palm species such as fan palms, *Borassus aethiopium*, *Elaeis idolaterida*, and raffia – *Raphi a viniera*, *R. suderica* and *R. hookeri*, are in abundance.

Micro environment of thick forest with climbers, especially along water bodies, could be found scattered all over the lands in Adanla, Obin and Ofarese. But despite the high concentration of these great potentials for economic vibrancy, palm oil production is not a popular specialty of the native industry. However, palm wine

tapping is rather more prominent among the people, particularly in Adanla, where *Alchornea cordifolia* and *Adenia cissampeloides* populate the forests.

In the drier areas of the communities, especially the northern part of the low-land forest vegetation, *Milicia excelsa* (syn. *Chlorophora excelsa*), *Alstonia*, *booeni*, *Ceiba pendantra*, *Heildegardia barteri*, *Terminalia superb* and *Triplochiton scleroxylon*, are highly favoured for their dietary value.

The abundant fallow farmlands and unfarmed hinterlands in-between settlements are woody plants of ‘Kukute’ and ‘Orupa’ – *Hyrnenocardia acida*, ‘Ira’ – *Bridelia ferruginea*, *Bosqueia angolensis*, ‘Orirr’ – *Vitex doniana*, Baropon – *Stanlotia stipitata*, *Albizia* sp., *Newbouldia laevis*, mango – *Mangifera indica*, cashew – *Anacardium occidentale*, guava – *Psidium guajava*, ‘Abo’ – *Annona senegalensis*, ‘Ogbogbo’ – *Detarium macrocarpum* and ‘Emigbegi’ – *Euphorbia hirta*.

2. Carving and Leader Works

The favourable resources and climatic conditions support the prospect for a thriving economy. Irese people are best known for their excellent works of art, ‘igba finin’. Their different exhilarating carvings, depicting creative wood works of art are of immense economic benefit to the people and make many families great. The ingenious people of Ile-Imusu, Ile-Odi and Ile-Agba have made economic sacrifices with their creative and special crafts like calabash carving, leader works, and wood carving, just as some have survived making and selling fascinating pottery wares with distinctive finishing from the riches of the clayey subsoil. From the sale of calabashes, many champions have made lots of money that contribute to the economic profile of the area.

3. Farming

As great farmers, planting basically garden eggs, Okro, cassava and yams, Irese people earned their riches and fame from regular increased turnover of agricultural production. They have remained self-sufficient in food production and contributed to ensuring national food security, exporting various produce from the sweats of their labour to other regions of Nigeria and elsewhere.

With adapted strategy of fallow system of agriculture, which restores soil’s fertility after a particular cultivated plot is abandoned for a number of years, the peoples’

mixed farming approach helps accommodate the various cash and food crops in the same farm settlement at a time. The people practice the hoe agriculture in the undiluted plains. However, with increased modernization, some now deploy tractors for ploughing ridges. They mostly undertake this exercise in an agrarian system that brings together food, cash crops and livestock in an intricately integrated matrix.

The farmers have made Irese rich in agriculture through the cultivation and harvest of mostly tropical forest and typical savannah crops of different varieties such as yams – *Dioscorea spp*, cassava – *Manihot utilissima*, rice – *Oryza sativa*, beans – *Canavalia ensifbrimis* and *Phaseolus lunatus*, soya beans – *Glycine soja*, melon ‘egusi’ – *Cucumeropis edulis* and *C. manni*, sweet potato – *Ipomoea batatas*, cocoyam – *Colocasia esculenta* and *Xanthosoma mafafffa*, maize – *Zea mays*, Guinea corn – *Sorghum spp.*, cotton – *Gossypium spp.*, groundnut – *Arachis hypogeal*, okro – *H. esculentus*, onions – *Aliuni cepa*, and tomato – *Lycopersicum esculentum*.

The tireless farmers of Ireseland also cultivate and harvest both for domestic and commercial purposes leafy vegetables such as *Amaranthus candidatus*, pumpkin – *Cucurbita pepo*, garden egg – *Solanum melongena*, pepper – *Capsicum annuum* and *C. Frutescens*, during the rainy and dry seasons along the river and stream valleys. These are in addition to the bananas and plantains – *Musa sapientum* and sugar cane – *Saccharum officinarium*, pawpaw – *Carica papaya*, avocado – *Persea gratissima* and mango – *Mangifera indica*.

4. Cotton Spinning, Dying and Weaving

The talented women of the area also engage in cotton spinning, dying and weaving. Blessed with the creative skills and knowledge from their Oyo ancestral heritage, the women have put their endowments into boosting the economies of their communities by making their products an integral part of the comparative business advantage of the Irese people.

5. Trade and Commerce

The women are not left out in the effort to boost the area’s economy. They have kept the Elese Market or Oja Oba Market booming and attracting traders who exchange quality goods and merchandise, from far and wide, including Yorubas from the west, Nupe, Hausa from the northern part of Nigeria, till date. The exceptionally beautiful

women dominate the culture of buying and selling in the market which serves majority of the people in the entire Ireseland.

The circle of Igbaja market has been five days. The present market, established by Elese Fakayode in the 1820s, serves the four communities, just as their neighbouring communities of Okeya, Yaru, Alasoro, Agunjin, Apata, among others, throng Igbaja to buy and or sell produce, wares, goods and services of commercial value.

6. Fishing

The brave men of the communities also engage in fish farming to support their subsistent lifestyles. Beyond the thirst for food and desire to fight hunger, the people also display fish catches for sale to eke out a living.

7. Blacksmithing

The men of Ireseland are also good blacksmiths and use revenues derived from their handiwork to manage their family affairs while contributing to the economy of the area. Apparently, most of those engaged in the business have their ancestral connections with the Nupe aborigines and transferred their skills to others who cared to learn the new craft. They made and still make hoes, cutlasses, axes, bows and arrow heads and traps out of iron-ore.

8. Hunting

For the many brave men of Ireseland who are born warriors and defenders of their territorial heritage, hunting is an occupation that lends credence to their identity as Yoruba-Igbomina with natural military instincts. Taking advantage of the vast forests and serene ecosystems, the professional hunters practically live on animals killed during specially coordinated expeditions. Some still do!

The origin of hunting in Ireseland is traceable to the founders of the four communities, most of whom were brave hunters, with genealogical traits as far back as 1800 and 1900AD. Some of the hunters used dogs to hunt; others used bows and arrows while the rest used Dane guns. In fact, the people were so brave that one of the Eleses who reigned at a time was known as ‘Adiye L’efon laaye’, meaning: “He who fixes the price of buffaloes before they are hunted’.

9. Commercial and Industrial Activities

Irese people also engage in commercial and industrial activities to promote economic development and growth. The communities, especially Igbaja, are endowed with entrepreneurs, innovators and skilled manpower in various fields of human endeavour, including artisans. The small and medium scale enterprises (SMEs) exist in Ireseland. Although there are gradually rising in size and impact, there are yet to proportionately measure the contributions of agricultural production and its value chain in the area's economy.

Like every other sector, the business climate in Igbaja, and by extension, the other three communities, is expanding and opening its doors to grow the economy and drive sustainable development of Ireseland. Igbaja also has public power supply system to stimulate socio-economic growth in the area. Many youths have been pulled out of the unemployment bracket through engagement in innovative agricultural entrepreneurship activities. Others have been empowered with minibuses for commercial transport business, which opens up more economic opportunities for Irese people. More potential have been identified and locked into the economic value addition to Ireseland.

Education and Modern Skills Development

Western education came to Ireseland through the instrumentality of one Ijesa man, Jegede, who ostensibly brought Christianity to Igbaja, around 1920. He was one of the traders from Osomalo, who regularly came to Igbaja for trading activities. Jegede did this through teaching the first Christian converts how to read and write in order to appreciate and assimilate the Bible and the full essence of Christian religion and faith. But the Muslims, who had grown in size due to the early incursions of Ilorin Emirate which worked in concert with the colonial administration to promote Islam and establish the Ilorin Provincial Authority, refused to send their children and wards to the existing mission schools, for fear of being converted to Christianity. Thus, between 1920 and 1950, western education was the exclusive preserve of Christians. Even some pagans were morbidly reluctant to embrace education for fear of erosion of their cultural and traditional values.

In order to facilitate understanding of the Christian religion and reduce the acceptability gap amongst the people, believers who later formed the Evangelical Church of West Africa, now Evangelical Church Winning All (ECWA), partnered

international Christian mission organization, Sudan Interior Mission, now Serving In Mission (SIM), to start the first primary school in Ireseland at Igbaja in 1938, to among others, also impart the Class of Religious Instructions (CRI) on the people in the church's compound. Following an application made by a missionary of the Sudan Interior Mission (SIM), Mr Crouch, who was its manager, the Ministry of Education in Kaduna, approved the establishment of a full-fledged primary school at Igbaja in 1940. By 1946, the present building of the school along the Seminary Road was built, with classrooms from primary one to seven and the number of pupils similarly increased to 105. It was later affiliated to Igbaja Teachers' College, which took up the responsibility of supervision, maintenance and supply of teaching aids. The college then, used students for teaching practice. Its name was subsequently changed to ECWA Demonstration Primary School, Igbaja.

Indeed, the road to western education did not just begin and end there. SIM also pushed the boundaries of education beyond Igbaja and sustained opportunities for scaling up academic knowledge, embedded in Christianity to Adanla, with the commencement of the Class of Religious Instructions (CRI) around 1932 for Christian converts. However, real primary school education did not begin in Adanla until around 1967. Similarly, Ofarese had a community primary school founded in as late as 1972.

In the same token, the Baptist Church, which seceded from SIM church in 1936, also established a primary school at Igbaja in 1946, with an initial enrolment of 10 pupils. With funding and technical support from Ogbomoso Baptist Mission, the school became a full-fledged primary institution with all the classrooms completed in 1962, when a new building replaced the old structure. In February, 1969, Baptist Community Grammar School was founded in Igbaja. Kwara State Government began supporting the institution in 1974 as part of efforts to boost educational development in the state.

Apparently in a desperate move to close the yawning education and social gap between the Muslim and Christian populations and the rest of the people, the colonial Native Authority built a community primary school in 1950. That school literarily liberalized opportunities for the Muslim population as well as those whose traditional religious beliefs impeded their ability to acquire basic education and redefine their future. The last of the post-primary institutions to be founded in Ireseland till date was the Muslim Secondary Commercial College (MUSECO) in

1980 by the Igbaja Muslim Organisation. Today, Igbaja remains the centre of academic excellence in Ireseland, with additional two primary schools to satisfy the burgeoning educational demands of the teeming young population, curious to dig through the ignorance of their forebears and explore the intricate knowledge farm that drives modern societies.

Ireseland's pursuit for academic excellence was cemented with the establishment of the first post-primary school, the Teachers' Training College at Igbaja in 1944, with an initial enrolment of 12 students. Those pioneer students graduated in 1947, with Grade 11 certificate. But the state government converted the institution into a secondary school in 1973 alongside some other Teachers' Training Colleges.

Of course, modern Igbaja first caught the admiration of the world through the instrumentality of Radio ECWA, the radio broadcasting outfit of SIM. This was later accentuated through the Theological College, an arm of the same Christian mission. Today, Igbaja Theological Seminary is a degree awarding institution, accredited by the National Universities Commission (NUC). Similarly, a new ultramodern e-library has been built and equipped to serve the mass of young people who see a future in the emerging tech world, pushing to revolutionise the way we work, live, and travel and even communicate with one another. Also, a College of Education, Al-Hikmah University; NYSC Secretariat, masts to boost mobile telecommunications networks dot Ireseland, especially Igbaja.

Water, Sanitation and Health (WASH)

In the past, the people of Irese had to trek to the rivers and streams to fetch water to drink, cook, bath, and undertake other domestic and commercial (including building) activities. But today, only a handful would want to dissipate energy to do that as there are modern sources of potable drinking water within the communities, especially Igbaja. Apart from carefully dug-out water wells, bore-holes are now readily available in many private homes. Igbaja has a well-reticulated, integrated water supply system, with large overhead tank. Religious centres and schools also have private water supply systems. And wealthy private individuals, socio-cultural groups, non-governmental organizations, foundations, politicians and governments have one water project or the other to serve the public good.

The availability of good water supply in most of Ireseland has now improved the sanitation system in the communities. Unlike before when open defecation and pit

latrines were the norm, present-day developments in urban habitation have introduced compact buildings with toilets designed to take out urines and excrements (faeces) into underground soakaway systems, thereby promoting public hygiene, and ultimately, good healthcare, within the communities.

Also, Ireseland has evolved from a people mostly reliant on traditional herbs and medicinal leaves prepared by herbalists and native doctors to treat literally all ailments to those who now throng available modern healthcare facilities for medical attention. Unlike in the past when almost every household had a traditional healer and or medicine man, modern Irese now has a Primary Health Centre and a Cottage Hospital at Igbaja to cater for the healthcare needs of the people and even residents of other communities.

Only recently, the Primary Healthcare Centre was renovated in addition to the purchase of a minibus for the use of the Igbaja Cottage Hospital to enhance efficient performance of the doctors as well as other medical staff. This provision also enhances easy movement of patients to the hospital from different areas of the town.

The very availability of these modern health facilities has obviously redefined public healthcare management, with a view to reducing, to the barest minimum, the number of people susceptible to diseases, infections and other health challenges, particularly with medical professionals in place to attend to their needs. Accessibility to WASH, no doubt, is already changing the narratives and socioeconomic history of the inhabitants of Ireseland.