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Economic Diplomacy in Ibibioland: The Pre-colonial Perspective

by

Uwem J. Akpan
Department of History & International Studies
University of Uyo.
Email: uwemjakpan@gmail.com

Abstract

Until recently, the economic history of pre-colonial Africa was replete with uncomplimentary theories and from scholars of different disciplines. The belief was that the economy was subsistent, uniform, unchanging and very uninteresting. These theorists believed that the dominant agricultural sector was virtually immobilized by a combination of primitive technology, like communal land tenure and extended family, while the development of key entrepreneurial groups was inhibited by the prevalence of an anti-capitalist value system. The historical analytical method was adopted in this research. The theories portrayed pre-colonial Africans as people that lacked the capacity to progress even though they lived in a rich environment. It was believed that it was not until the advent of the Europeans that positive changes were recorded. However, contrary to these theories, the Ibibio pre-colonial economy was premised on agriculture, complemented by trade and the existence of local industries. Thus, their pre-colonial economy was more coordinated, complex and diversified than the Eurocentric writers opined. The success recorded in this direction was activated by economic diplomacy which the Ibibio had practiced in the pre-colonial period. Issues relating to the economy were properly managed through the adoption of various relevant methods and strategies. Since the economy of a people operates in the society and remains fundamental to the survival of such society with the capacity to influence the political and other institutional decisions, economic diplomacy triggered holistic development in Ibibioland. Based on these, it recommended that present day Ibibio economy should not be totally divorced from these fundamental variables if the Ibibio are to be economically relevant in present day Nigeria.

1. Introduction

Just like diplomacy is not an invention of capitalism or of modern nation state, or of classical antiquity, but a principle that existed in every traditional community and had developed independently (Smith, 1989), economic diplomacy, which is the management

of relations between groups in such a manner as to give topmost priority to the economic objectives of a group was also practised in all societies including the pre-colonial Ibibioland. Economic diplomacy involves the employment of various diplomatic strategies in the attempt to maximize the mobilization of external material and financial resources for economic development as well as the application of economic instruments in negotiation and bargaining with other group (Asobie, 1991).

According to Etuk (2015), the primacy of the economy is understood in any human society. It provides the bedrock for both material and intellectual culture of humankind. Man is basically a *homo economicus*. That is to say that man is an economic being. As a matter of fact, the economic system within which he operates informs other aspects of life. These are political, social, legal systems and so on, all of which constitute the superstructure. Rodney (1972) and Hodder and Roger Lee cited in Etuk (2015) have asserted that the economy is an index of other social features and that a lot of social and political interactions are economically induced. It is the economy that nourishes and sustains a people, lubricates their historical experiences and also informs the general prospects for their future. A people's economic activities are therefore conscious and concerted. They are "calculated" and "rational". The Ibibio people have always engaged in meaningful economic life since the beginning of time.

As among other traditional societies in Africa and elsewhere, there was no great differentiation between social, political, economic and religious institutions in Ibibioland. There was almost a total uniform reconciliation and integration of the various institutions which had reciprocal influences on each other. For instance, the priests were the ones who administered the requisite traditional rituals to generate fruitful harvest, while the village cabinet had people who supervised various aspects of the society that had to do with the economy like farmland, animals rearing, markets and etc (Uya, 1984; Akpan, 2016).

2. The Ibibio

The Ibibio live in the South-South geo-political zone of Nigeria. The composition of this group has been differently discussed and the debate as to who are and who are not Ibibio continues among several writers that further discussion here is deemed not necessary (Ford and Jones, 1963; Udo, 1983; Uya, 1984; Ekong, 2001).

In the pre-colonial era, the Ibibio who originated from the Cameroon highland lived in villages and clans and were politically segmented. In other words, they did not exist under the jurisdiction of a centrally administered political organization as was the case with some ethnic groups like the Hausa/Fulani and Yoruba. There was no hierarchical political framework at the head of which one single being, like the Oba of Benin, the Fulani Emirs and etc; every village and clan, like in the Igboland, exercised political authority accordingly (Akpan, 2016).

In order to govern the village, the village head needed a council and the village council remained the highest legislative body for that village. Secret societies like *ekpo*, *ekong*, *atat*, *iban isong*, *ebre* among others contributed to traditional governance in the pre-colonial period. Laws were made for the protection of life and property of the

individual, the conservation of soils, the protection of crops and the regulation of harvests (Noah, 1996).

The village council was assisted by a number of other important functionaries, such as:

Obong Edong (the man in charge of sheep)

Obong Urua (the person in charge of market, trade, industry and foreign affairs),

Obong Unen (the man in charge of poultry)

Obong Ebot (the man in charge of livestock; goats)

Obong Enang (the man in charge of livestock: cattle)

Obong Eyop (the man in charge of oil palm: and commerce)

Obong Ukot (the man in charge of raffia palms: trade and commerce)

Obong Udia (the man in charge of yams) (Udo, 1983).

These could be called ministries, and their heads, ministers. The importance assigned to each of the above functionaries varied from village to village, depending on what the village regarded as important. In Uruan, *obong edong* was the highest in rank (Udo, 1983). Obviously, the Ibibio paid tremendous attention to issues that involved the economy by creating relevant “ministries” and “ministers” to manage their affairs. The outcome was economic development.

3. The Structure of the Pre-colonial Ibibio Economy

Most Ibibio in pre-colonial time were predominantly farmers; others took to trading, fishing, hunting and manufacturing. Farming provided for the sustenance of the people. Consequently, attention was given to land which was regarded as sacred and a gift from God to the dead, the living and generations unborn. Land was owned and controlled by the community. The pre-colonial Ibibio society had no market for labour and no contract of employment, in fact there was no employer of employee rather, the labour need of the people was provided by the family and close associates (Abia, 2015). Craft making was influenced by the physical environment, while trade either short or long distance was also properly managed with traditionally tested diplomatic instruments that enhanced the development of the society.

Agriculture

According to Omon (1986) the economies of all societies, no matter their status, are bound up with land, because all societies exist through direct or indirect exploitation of land in one or more forms. This assertion becomes very relevant to the Ibibio pre-colonial economic system because the people depended extensively on land for their livelihood. Ibibioland developed as a result of agricultural production which provided the base for other economic pursuits. The combination of land and other factors of production like labour increased production and this gave rise to exchange through the creation of surpluses. For example, more labour was often needed in order to step up production which in turn generated surpluses needed to be exchanged for items such as farm implements, salt, fish, and utensils which the farmers could not produce themselves. In this respect, economic diplomatic instruments were employed by the people.

Land Tenure

The indigenous economy of the Ibibio was predicated on land and its social relations of ownership and utility. It was not only regarded as the sustenance of life but also central to production. An inseparable affinity existed between the land and the people as placatory sacrifices and offertories were regularly made to the land goddess, who indeed, was acknowledged to be the “owner” of the land. Land was of communal holding and access to its utility was gained by being a member of the descent group and community (Etuk, 2015).

As noted, characteristically, land is considered the property of the community, i.e., family, village or clan, to which the inhabitants are related in one way or the other. An individual’s right to land co-exists with those of the community to which he belongs either by birth or adoption. The essential right to land was that of use and not of final disposal. According to Ekong (2003), seven types of holdings are recognized in Ibibio area. They include: community land, lineage land, individual land, borrowed land, pledged land, secret society land and sacred groves. Land being the basic infrastructure that drove agriculture was properly managed through the use of traditional diplomatic instruments.

Farming

The mainstay of the Ibibio economy was farming and it afforded the ample opportunity to display the knowledge of local geography as well as mastery of their physical environment (Etuk, 2015). A man’s wealth was measured in terms of farm lands, crops with yams and the number of wives married. The agricultural production was therefore undertaken through the employment of family labour and sometimes with slave labour. As the bulk of the population were engaged in agriculture, it was customary for the entire family to provide labour especially during planting and harvesting seasons. Thus the labour strength was determined by the size of the family. It is therefore not difficult to see the reason why the men had to marry many wives. In addition to the family and slave labour, additional labour was obtained from outside. Such labour came from relations and friends. This kind of labour was without wages; the reward was often in kind such as feeding and giving of farm proceeds during the harvest. Where a man did not have many male children and did not have slaves, he resorted to the use of domestic servants attached to his wives (Omon, 1986).

Indeed, agriculture was seen as an occupation or profession from which man could make his livelihood. The Ibibio people had for centuries been farmers, deriving more than 90 per cent of their living from *ikpaisong* which they regard as the source of the very basic requirement of human life. This belief can be substantiated with the Ibibio saying, *adia nkpo ono isong, koro isong edide eyen eka owo*. (This literally means, “share or give a part of whatever you eat to the land for it is your brother”). Similarly, when the elders pray, they always call on the *Abasi Enyong* (God of the Heaven) and *abasi isong*

(god of the land), showing the reverence given to the Heaven and earth or *isong* (Etuk, 1991).

Farming practice followed the seasons classified (according to weather trends and conditions) into, *ini ndaeyo* (dry season) which lasts from October to April, and *ini ukwo edim* (rainy or wet season) which lasts from May to September. In-between these two major seasons came other minor seasons which depict the agricultural cycle itself. These minor seasons were known variously as *ini ntem ye ukpikke okpod*, (clearing and lopping season), *ini uto* (planting), *ini idok* (harvest season) and *ini ekarika* (harmattan season) (Etuk, 1991).

The Ibibio people cultivated vegetables, food crops and fruits such as: yams, plantain, bananas, cocoyam and wateryam. Others included pumpkin, okro, maize and so on. Since agriculture was the dominant occupation in those days, the people exercised great care in agricultural matters. Even young men and women were well tutored in the art of crop cultivation. Many beliefs were associated with plant life and growth. Certain crops, for example, corn, might not be planted by a very lean person, lest the stalks became lean also. The farmer must eat before the planting so that the corn cub might be filled with grains (Akpan, 2016). Indeed, these issues were aspects of economic diplomacy in the sense that the beliefs of the people had to be properly managed traditionally to aid abundant production.

The clearing and lopping season lasted from mid-December to February, during which fallowed bushes were cleared and made ready for planting. The planting season fell between March and April, during which yam and other crops were planted. The actual harvest usually lasted from the time the first yams were pruned for the *usoro Abasi* new (yam festival) in August. The farming season usually commenced when *ekpuk* heads began to forage for and earmarked new portions of land meant for the cultivation of crops during the year. The important aspect of economic system was strengthened by co-operative and communal labour organized by “labour groups”, founded on the idea of mutual self-help. Farmers in many parts of Ibibioland enlisted the support of others from other clans who always obliged with the understanding that they would also benefit from the practice when it was their turn to do so. Age grades constituted the most potent example of co-operative labour. At the end of every “labour day”, those invited were offered sufficient food and drinks by the person on whose instance they laboured. In this respect it could be said that without the use of diplomatic acts such as: negotiation, bargaining, persuasion, inducement or threat, agricultural production would not have been enhanced was the case in Ibibioland (Etuk, 1991; Akpan, 2016).

Sacrifices were always made before the farming season began. The objects of sacrifice included sheep, goat, tortoise and fowl. The sacrifice was performed by the village elders, led by an accredited priest specially ordained for this purpose. Harvesting was an invaluable part of the farming process. It was after harvesting that farmers could adequately evaluate the worth of all their effort during the farming season. It was also during the harvest period that the farmer could determine what he would have to feed on in the subsequent year and what he could afford to preserve for cultivation in the next season. In Ibibioland series of harvest-thanksgiving offerings commonly known as *usuk*

udia, (new yam festival), always marked the approach of the yam harvest. There was no harvest of yam until the ceremonies were over. The celebrations lasted from August to September yearly. The purpose of the festival was to show gratitude to *obot* (creator) with the first fruit of the farm and to ask for the forgiveness of past misdeeds. The practice of sacrifices to aid farming was a diplomatic venture because priests were involved who used acceptable methods and strategies in the process such as libation, appeasement of the ancestors and other forms of rituals. This was an aspect of economic diplomacy in the pre-colonial Ibibio society (Akpan, 2008).

Hunting

In times past the Ibibio were a race of skilful hunters. They went daily into the forests around them and returned with abundant harvest of wild animals such as the deer, antelope, wild pigs, wild cows, porcupine, monkey, hedgehog, civet, elephant and leopard. The hunters organized themselves into parties of several hunters, accompanied with dogs. The dogs were trained to pick up the scent and follow the trail left by the animals. The dogs had *ntakruk* (rattle) fastened to their necks. The hunters, *mme ata ikot ewa*, would always make some enchantments and urge the dogs to pursue and catch their prey. The rattle enabled the hunters to locate the dog in the bush. It was a dangerous occupation, full of all sorts of hazards. It was a man's job, challenging, exciting and rewarding. The weapons used by the specialized hunters included spears, arrows, clubs, matchets and dane guns. Also, snares and traps were more widely used. Elaborate traditional ceremonies often followed the killing of a leopard which was regarded as the "king" of all animals (Ukpong, 2007; Akpan, 2008).

Fishing

The people of the riverine parts of Ibibioland including Itu, Uruan, Ikot Abasi, and Onna were primarily fishermen by occupation. The people from the earliest time of their habitation in the area established fishing ports and engaged in substantial fishing activities which attracted fishermen from within and outside of Ibibioland. Fishing, being a part of agriculture, followed the seasons and fish availability fluctuated with the tidal movements of the sea and with different flood periods of the rivers. Fishermen tended to migrate in search of their catch. Such migrations, it was believed, led to the development of most of the fishing settlements. The main crafts used in the business are canoes, while nets, harpoons, hook, spears, and trap of various sizes and shapes, certain herbs like *oto* such as was also used.

Apart from the river and streams, *ibiok* (lake) was also of economic value in some parts of Ibibioland, like in present day Etinan and Onna Local Government Areas. In some years, especially of heavy rainfall, some of these lakes would over-flow into the nearby river and by so doing they attracted a lot of fish from the river to the people of the nearby communities. It should be noted that lakes in Ibibioland have been very closely associated with *mfot* (frogs). During the rainy season, the ponds become filled with water and this water attracted a lot of frogs. Specially designed implements were used in catching the frogs for both consumption and for sale (Akpan, 2016).

Manufacturing (Local Craft)

In Ibibioland, crafts and local industries formed part of the people's economic activities. The people's social and physical environment influenced these crafts and industries during the period under study. Raw materials were got from the immediate environment and the culture of the people also determined the type of arts, crafts and industries that were in vogue. This aspect of the economy was not undertaken by all members of the society. It involved the various levels of arts, crafts and industrial technology such as carving, skin-dying and decoration, pottery, weaving, soap making, food processing, distillation of local gin, blacksmithing, oil palm processing and so on. For the manufacturing sector of the economy to work well diverse economic diplomatic principles had to be adopted to manage the sector.

However, only a few and relevant aspects of the manufacturing sector would be discussed in this study.

Palm Wine Tapping

Palm wine tapping was also an important occupation of Ibibioland. This business was a very lucrative one. Like hunting, it was a man's job because the men folk were able to climb the palm tree and also tap the wine. The palm tree used to grow in the swamps owned by individuals or families. In addition to the palm wine trees in the swamps, palm wine trees were also planted around the homes. Palm trees served as the main source of alcohol beverage. Tapping was done twice a day (in the mornings and evenings), with intermittent tapping in the afternoon to draw abundant flow of wine. Calabash was used in the process of collecting the wine which started to flow in the first week of tapping. Fermented drinks and non-fermented drinks come from palm wine. Some quantity of the fermented drink was distilled into local gin. This wine served dual purposes (economic and social), during occasions like marriages, burials and other related functions (Etuk, 1998).

Carving

Carving was an important aspect of craft in Ibibioland. It was done exclusively by a few families naturally endowed with this talent. It served as a substitute to farming and trading for some individuals. Although most practitioners were believed to be naturally gifted, some individuals could also learn through the process of apprenticeship.

Some of the carved items produced included: kitchen stools, special chairs meant for elders, wooden spoons, knives, hoe handles, pestle, musical instruments and masks. They also served the hunting needs of the people by carving some weapons for the killing of big animals. Other items included statutes positioned in people's compounds. Most of the traditional gods were carved by these men. Their carvings portrayed what the people were worshipping like trees, fish, animals, sun, star and so on (Akpan, 2008).

Decorations

In time past, Ibibio people, particularly the women folk, decorated their bodies. They had artists who specialized in body painting, tattooing and cicatrizing. Women painted their bodies with *okukin*, *mkpong-isong* and *nkong odung*. Their patterns were usually abstract derived from floral and geometrical motifs. Men tattooed their backs, chests, bellies, arms, calves and temples. Cicatrices were done on the limbs, chests and belly and on the calf if the person had beautiful legs. The patterns usually made with sharp pointed steel which produced a series of dots that made the desired patterns. Skin decoration and dyeing was not an occupation *per se*, in Ibibioland. It was usually done for leisure. The materials for this were obtained locally, from the surrounding bush. When the stem or seedlings were got, they were planted quite close to the house for easy reach by those who needed them. These arts are almost dead now, as most young women prefer Western-type of cosmetic treatment (Ema, 1991).

Pottery

Pottery involved digging up laterite soil which was slippery to touch, after mixing with water. The extracted part of the soil was then moulded into the desired shape by the potter to form the body of the pot. The size, the shape and style were determined by the purpose for which they were made. These pots were used for several purposes, such as fetching water, storage of water, preservation and storage of other items and for decorations. Ceremonial pots were usually very large; they were made to contain several gallons of palm wine for a time. Bowls of different sizes were also made. The large kinds were used for grinding pepper and crayfish. The pots while in the making were designed and decorated by the potter after which they were put into the furnace to make them stronger and lasting. This practice prevailed in some Ibibio communities like Iman Ibom (comprising present day Etinan, and Onna Local Government Areas, Itam and Ibiono Ibom) (Ukpong, 2007; Akpan, 2016).

Basketry

Basketry included all kinds of baskets made with fibre and split of the outer part of a palm branch. There were many kinds of baskets. They included baskets for carrying crops to and from the farms and markets, and baskets for storing a fattening girl's clothes. Other products of basketry included trays, sieves, baskets for drying fish and meat and for storing crayfish.

Smithing

Smithing was done in small scale. In the pre-colonial period, the number of smiths in Ibibio could be counted on the fingers of one hand. The fact was that Ibibio people were by tradition workers on wood. Iron ore was found in small quantities, and only in few areas. As such, the people turned to crafts for which they would always find abundant materials. The Ibibio ancestors had enough wood in the forests from which to fashion their weapons for battles, so that the need to smelt iron ore and make weapons for battles for self-protection did not arise. The little smithing that went on in some parts of

Ibibioland was concerned with the production of farm tools like hoes, door hinges, knives, diggers and so on. The art of smithing was believed to be hereditary; people were unable to do this perfectly unless they came from the family with such antecedent (Ema, 1991).

Soap/Pomade Making

Soap and pomade making was another important occupation in the economic life of the Ibibio people. In pomade making, materials such as palm oil, coconut oil, bean oil were prepared by hands. Some scent leaves such as lemon grass were put in the oil during the process. Another kind of pomade was made from palm kernel oil called *enu* which was black in colour and usually very medicinal. It was used in the treatment of illnesses like convulsion, stomach ache, fever and constipation. It also served some economic purpose. Soap making was very good and essential for domestic and commercial purposes. It was got from raw materials such as coconut fibre, palm oil, oil bean leaves and ashes. The coconut fibre and oil bean leaves were collected and burnt. The remnant collected and mixed with water, was later distilled and boiled to a solid state. The soap was black in colour and also medicinal. It was used for the treatment of skin diseases such as rashes, eczema, ringworm and scabies. This local soap was prepared for both domestic and commercial purposes (Etuk, 1998).

Distillation of Local Gin

Local gin distillation was another occupation embraced by both men and women in Ibibioland. It served only as a substitute for palm wine and was processed through fermentation of palm wine which was left for about four days. The distilled gin evaporated through a connected pipe which emptied itself into another sealed container to avoid further drifting of the evaporated gin.

4. Trade

Trade was also an important economic activity that brought the pre-colonial Ibibio people together in exchange of goods and services. It helped in improving the people's economic and social life. The Ibibio people participated actively in both internal and external trade.

According to Northrop (1978), West Africa is traditionally a region of long-distance trade. Trade in this region has a very ancient origin. Market had been the principal mechanism for the distribution of goods among the Ibibio people. It afforded a channel through which agricultural products, livestock and articles created by craftsmen reached the customers. Not only did the markets have economic significance like buying and selling, it served as a centre for social and religious activities. Socially, it served as an avenue where people gathered to hear news, meet debtors, settle disputes out of courts and enact friendship pacts. These pacts were never meant to be broken. Ceremonies marked such treaty/pact making events. By performing these functions, Ibibio market centres played fundamental roles in intra and inter-ethnic diplomatic relations and conflict resolution/management. Nearly all the Ibibio villages had a market square where villagers and people from adjoining communities exchange goods and services. The Ibibio have

eight days in their week. These are: *Fionetok, Edereobo, Obo, Urua Obom, Fionaran, Edereitaha, Urua Ekpe, Urua Ukat*. These names vary slightly from place to place. A full week is known as *odot*, and each market therefore holds once in a week (Akpan, 2016).

Different markets were held on different days of the Ibibioland eight-day week and were named after the day of the week on which the market was held or after the founder of the settlement. Markets had a particular deity that superintended over it, and to this end, acts such as stealing, cheating, and flouting of market regulations were offences committed against the deity and repercussions commensurate with such acts were expected.

Ukpong (2007) has given a list of some important markets in Ibibioland as follows: Ikono/Ini (Urua Edet Ukpom, Urua Itu Mbonuso, Urua Obo), Ikot Abasi/Mkpat Enin (Urua Ete, Urua Ukam, Urua Esene, Urua Amadi, Urua Ikot Aba), Itu/Ibiono Ibom (Urua Itu, Urua Ikpa, Urua Obo Itam, Urua Etaha Itam), Eket (Urua Udo Inyang), Etinan/Nsit Ibom (Urua Mkpafi, Urua Ekponwa, Urua Obo Umoren, Urua Ikot Obong, Urua Mbiokporo, Urua Etinan, Urua Udofia), Uyo/Ibesikpo - Asutan (Urua Akpan Andem, Urua Nnung Udoe), Uruan (Urua Issiet, Urua Ekpene Ukim Urua Ifiayong).

The increased trading activities fostered by increase in population led to long-distance or external trade which enabled goods from distant places to reach the people of Ibibioland. By this, the costs of goods were reduced since the long-distance traders acted as distributors as well as retailers. Long-distance trade, according to Hopkins (1973) provided an opportunity for bringing together, areas with differences in degree of specialization and consumer demands.

Long-distance trade developed the characteristics of market oriented trade. Its dominant market transaction was the exchange for exchange value system of trade. Thus, while yam exchanged for salt, fish and other products by the people were used to obtain more goods for trade both by the people and their trading partners, the goods so obtained were also exchanged for other products. For example, slaves and palm oil were exchanged for European goods such as clothes, dry gin, tobacco, guns and gun powder, which were in turn exchanged for local products while the slaves and palm oil were further exchanged for European goods.

According to Ukpong (1986), the Aro were the principal carriers of long-distance commodities throughout Eastern Nigeria where they established many trading stations. In Ibibioland, there were about 45 of such trading stations which had been established since the days of the Trans - Atlantic slave trade. These trading stations existed in Ibiono Ibom, Ikono, Ikot Abasi, Mkpat Enin, Etinan, Nsit Ubium Local Government Areas among other places. The Aro engaged in slave trade and other commodities mentioned above. In addition, other Igbo groups from Abriba, Nkwerre, and Awka traded with the Ibibioland. Ibibioland groups such as Ikono, Ibiono Ibom, Itu, Ikot Abasi, Mpat Enin, Iman, Nsit and Ubium and transacted businesses with the Igbo. The Aro in particular forged alliance with some prominent Ibibioland men and got protection through their oracle – *Ibin Ukpabi*.

The Ibibioland also had external trade relations with the Central and Upper Cross River regions. The port at Itu served as the gateway. There were markets at Itu, in Ibibioland, Enyong, Ukwa, Umon, Ikom where the people transacted their businesses.

From the Cross River region came commodities such as yam, coco yam, water yam, pot, etc, while fish and imported goods were bought at Itu. Also the Opobo (Umani), constituted another set of long-distance trading partners with the Ibibio. The Ibibio also traded with Cameroonians. Obot, Akpan and Umana (2017) opined that the *esuk Uyo* (Uyo beach) used to receive customers from far distances including the Democratic Republic of Congo.

The Palm Produce Trade

After the slave trade era came the so-called “legitimate trade”. The Ibibio were major players in the “legitimate trade”, supplying the British firms with the bulk of palm oil that they needed to consolidate their industrial economy. It is worthy to note that Ibibioland during this time had the largest belt of oil palm trees in the world. For this reason, the area contributed significantly in making the region which is now called the Niger Delta to be known as the Oil Rivers Protectorate during the colonial period (Umana, 2008).

The oil trade followed the route established in the Lower Cross River region during slave trade era. Before the hinterland of Ibibioland was opened to European firms, products were sent to the port of Calabar through a relay process; in Calabar, they were then exchanged with the Europeans or their agents. But with the imposition of colonial rule and the subsequent opening of the interior by colonial agents, ports were opened at places such as Itu, Ikot Offiong, Esene, Okon Eket, Nwaniba, Ikot Udo Esang, Ekpene Obom, Ekpene Ukpa, Awa Iman and so on (Abia, 1998; Akpan, 2016).

5. Medium of Exchange

With respect to the medium of exchange, three evolutionary periods are discernible. First, the period of the reciprocal obligation; secondly, the period of barter and lastly the period of the currencies. The earliest form of exchange, reciprocal obligation, was gratuitous gift-giving which subsequently developed into a commercial form of exchange bound by the norms of Ibibio society as a whole. It became contractual obligation enforceable under customary and moral grounds. Such material gifts were extended to recipients in times of hardship such as bad harvest, at the time the parent died or when one had to be initiated into a secret society, and was unable to complete the rite. Such a gift needed to be returned in good time. Failure to do so could mar the relationship of the parties concerned. Later, it was found that the reciprocal obligations could only fulfill the need of exchange within close knit communities of the village type. It could not fulfill the requirements of distance commercial transaction. This need was fulfilled partially by the barter system (Udo, 1983; Ekong, 2001).

The Barter System

Barter was the physical exchange of dissimilar goods based on the coincidence of want. The barter system was supported by a code of norms and was the first stage in the market economy in Ibibioland. The system might have been part of the feature arising from the fundamental economic changes which probably took place at the beginning of

the African Iron Age, leading to alteration in population distribution, settlement patterns and social organization (Ekong, 2001).

Commodities Currencies

In Ibibioland, the first commodity that was used as a medium of exchange was goat. Goats were used for the payment of bride price and for a price of building a new house. During marriage, a father could get seven goats while the mother could get five or four goats. Building a new house could cost three goats depending upon the size of the house. Animals were also used to generate wealth, for it was a custom in Ibibio communities to enter into co-ownership of domestic animals or fowls. For example, if one had a friend or a relation who was not rich, one could buy the poor person a she goat, hen, a cow or a dog to take care of. The first two litters went to the owner of the animal while the third litter went to the care taker, who reared them alongside his mentor's animal. This provided an opportunity for him to become rich himself (Akpan, 2008).

With the advent of the Europeans, goods such as scissors, knives, locks, earthen wares, brandy, rum, hats, mirrors, beads, gunpowder, dane-guns and salt were exchanged for local produce – mainly palm oil and kernel. A standard method of fixing prices on barter goods with the Europeans was established by the riverine middlemen. This was known as the “bar”. The “bar” was not a circulating currency but merely an accepted standard for valuing trade goods. Other currency used in the 19th century included the cowrie shell, *mbamba*, introduced from India.

According to Ekong (2001), the following was a typical table for the cowrie shells:

40 Cowries = 1 String = ¼ Kobo to 1 Kobo
5 Strings = 1 Bunch = 3 Kobo to 5 Kobo
10 Bunches = 1 Head = 18 Kobo to 20 Kobo
10 Heads = 1 Bag = 1 Naira 80 Kobo (then worth 4 Dollars).

Cowries shell were not very popular in the Ibibio area but was more popular in other parts of Nigeria. The more popular currency in the Ibibio area was the Manilla, a horse-shoe shaped upper currency considerably heavier than the cowries shell. The Manilla was worth about 3 Kobo by 1850. Its importation into Nigeria was prohibited in early 20th century.

6. The Financial System

The financial arrangement in Ibibioland before the introduction of colonialism depended on the pre-colonial financial institutions. This was because the services of commercial banks were not available. The Ibibio people then had to embark upon financial organization known as *e-fe-etibe*, whereby members contributed together a certain sum of “money” then in circulation on a certain market day. Each member contributed according to his or her financial capability. The amount so contributed went to the members in rotation each market day, till all the members claimed their shares. Rich people could become members in two or more *e-fe-etibe*. With “money” from this association, traders improved their trade. Men could marry more wives, build houses, get

initiated into secret societies or start trade. In addition to these three people, there were shareholders whose duty was to ensure that contributions from the members of their group were made regularly. *Efe-etibe* could be organized either in the market or in the house (Akpan, 2017).

7. Conclusion and Recommendations.

Diplomacy is the process through which the business of states is carried out by officials through the use of appropriate means, methods and strategies. It can be applied to all sorts of situations, conditions and objects. It can also be applied at all levels of human interactions between two individuals or groups, each with set objectives, or between homogeneous entities to exert some influence or achieve some ends in exercising their rights. According to Asobie (1991), economic diplomacy, therefore, is the management of relations in such a manner as to place accent on the economic dimension of group's relations. Indeed, in the process, priority is given to economic objective.

As this discourse has shown, the economy of any society, including the Ibibio pre-colonial society, provides the bedrock for both material and intellectual culture of humankind; hence, man is basically a *homo economicus*. That is to say that man is an economic being. This situation becomes very prominent in view of the fact that in the Ibibio pre-colonial society, there was no differentiation between the structures of government. For instance, religion permeated the political, economic and social structures and functions, and the village head for instance performed these functions. Indeed, the structure of the Ibibio pre-colonial society necessitated the application of diplomacy and its governance particularly in the economic sphere. Diplomacy and trade were unalterably linked with the Ibibio markets. Market diplomacy included the use of negotiation, bargaining, inducement, threat and so on.

For instance, since trade was basically organised through relay process, it warranted group movements of people who conveyed trade items through head portorage. Apart from the challenge of movement of trade items, security challenges also conditioned group movement. The fear of slave raiding and head hunting required the traders who travelled to long-distance markets to move in groups and negotiate rules guiding peaceful trade relations. Market centres played significant roles through the enactment and upholding of economic pacts. As a result of the use of sound diplomatic methods, reciprocal hospitality atmosphere between the Ibibio and her neighbours existed. This particularly manifested in the cordial relations between the Ibibio and the long-distance trading neighbours such as the Aro, Umani (Opobo), Ekoi and the Cameroonians. Sometimes, inter-group marriages were undertaken to enhance trade. This resulted in *ukot* (in-law) and produced *eyeyen*, (grand- children) who Ibibio tradition regards as sacred beings. Also in some instances, the language of the trading partner was adopted to enhance communication.

In the pre-colonial Ibibio society, one prominent diplomatic instrument was *mbiam*, a magically potent object used in oath-taking and in fortifying one's property against thieves. There were three main ways in which *mbiam* was used. These were: to fortify one's property, to settle disputes and to determine the innocent and the guilty. The

Ibibio ensured that no thief got into one's farms to steal, thus, most people fortified their property. Disputes, particularly those that related to land were settled by administering *mbiam* on the disputants. The belief was that *mbiam* would determine the rightful owner (Offiong, 1991). *Mbiam* was also used in the management of other economic processes like trade and the craft industries.

Priesthood also played a central role in the economic sphere of the pre-colonial Ibibio society. According to Utin (1987), a priest is an important person in any religion, especially in traditional religion. He was the mediator between God and man and is dedicated to the service of a deity. His functions included offering of man's worship to the deity. The priest was therefore the one who offered series of sacrifices before the planting season began and the thanksgiving before harvest. If this aspect of the tradition was left out, it was believed that it would result in poor harvest. In some cases, any neglect of the appeasement of the ancestors believed to be the nourisher of life was reasoned as an act that could result in the death of the members of the community.

Moreover, *nwana ntem* (cooperate farming), corporate hunting were diplomatically initiated to boost the economy. In the absence of banking services unlike what is obtainable in the present era, diplomacy was used in the form of *etibe* (contribution). This also called for the use of relevant traditional rules to guide the action of members for the smooth running of such groups. Also diplomacy was applied in the process of accumulating capital such as farm seedlings and instruments for farming and craft businesses. This built trust and ensured the continuity. Like modern economic diplomacy which is a credible aspect of diplomacy, pre-colonial economic diplomacy engendered the development of the Ibibio society.

It recommended that present day Ibibio economy should not be totally divorced from these fundamental variables if they are to be economically relevant in present day Nigeria.

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