

The Ibibios in Minna: Assessing their Contributions in the Economic Growth and Development of Minna, North Central Nigeria 1970-2013

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ABSTRACT

The History of Ibibios in Minna is a significant study in understanding the Ibibios living in Minna, their emergence and role in the economic development of Minna town in Niger State. The Ibibios constitute quite a number of the population in Minna and their population is increasing daily unlike their early migration into the region. This article exposes the activities of the Ibibios in Minna alongside their trading activities. The work discusses the contributions of Ibibios to the economy of Minna from 1970 to 2013. Also this work shows how the Ibibio people have at different times in Minna, contributed to the development of Minna. The article made use of primary and secondary data. However, oral interview formed a substantial part of this study due to scanty literature relevant on the subject matter. The study found out that the Ibibios have not only contributed substantially to the economic growth of their host community (Minna) but have lived and interacted peacefully with them all through these decades and recommended such symbiotic relationship among other ethnic nationalities in Nigeria.

Keywords: Assessing, Contributions, Economic Growth and Development

Introduction

A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE IBIBIOS

The name Ibibio identifies the largest subdivision of people living in south-southern Nigeria in Akwalbom state. Akwa Ibom state is one of the six states that make up the South-South geo-political zone of Nigeria. It has interstate boundaries with Cross River State to the East, Abia State to the north and northwest, and River State to the Southwest. To its south is the Gulf of Guinea. ¹ The state capital is Uyo.

Akwabom State was originally part of the eastern region in the three region structure of 1954. In 1967, with the creation of twelve federal states by General Yakubu Gowon's military government, it became part of the South Eastern state (renamed Cross River in 1976 by the military government of General Murtala Muhammed). In September 23, 1987, Ibrahim Babangida Military government carved Akwalbom State out of Cross River State. ²

Akwa Ibom State is one of Nigeria's 36 states which is divided into 31 local government areas with a population of over 5 million

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people. According to the 1991 population census, the state was estimated to have a total population of 2,409,613 while that of 2006 population census was 3,902,051.³ It covers an area of 6,772.1 square kilometers, and lies on latitude 40321 and 50331 North and longitude 70251 and 80251 East. It has a population density of 568 people per square kilometre. The state accounts for 2.8% of Nigeria's total population.⁴ Akwa Ibom is triangular in shape and encompasses the Qua Iboe river basin and the eastern part of Imo river basin with an ocean front which spans a distance of 129 kilometres from Ikot Abasi in the west to Oron in the East, Akwa Ibom is home to beautiful sandy beach resorts as well as salt water mangrove swamps and tropical rainforest and is currently the highest oil and gas producing state in the country.⁵

The early settlers of Akwalbom state were the Ibibio people. The area was a centre for early missionary activity and contact. It was a prominent trade route providing the city state of old Calabar with slaves and palm produce. Language is an important tool in the human society. Apart from the fact that it makes communication and integration possible, it is an important aspect of the socio cultural life of a people. To this extent, language is closely knit with culture as it embodies the society's value system and patterned way of life. The main ethnic groups in the state are the Ibibio, Annang, Oron, Eket and Mbo. There are twenty languages spoken in the state. The Ibibio people form the largest ethnic group and it is the most widespread. Other significant languages spoken in the state are Annang, Oron, Ibeno and Eket.⁶

THE EMERGENCE OF THE IBIBIOS IN

MINNA

Among the first Ibibio settlers in Minna town is Mr. Henry ApkanInokon, aged 86. He said he had left Akwalbom state in search of greener pastures. He arrived at Lagos in 1965 where he worked at Leventis stores at Marina; and then proceeded to Kano in 1975 and from Kano to Niger State where he first settled at Kontangora working with Solidarity Nigerian Enterprise at Kontangora. He said Alhaji Bakko Kontangora was the Chairman/Managing director of the company while he worked under him as the administrative manager; they worked directly with construction companies and together they built the Federal College of Education Kontangora, Federal Low-cost Housing Estate, Prisons, Technical College, Teachers College, Women Teachers College (WTC) all in Kontangora. He said their company was in charge of building the Federal mortgage bank at Minna that was when he decided to settle in Minna and raise a family. Mr. Henry Inokon said during his stay at Kontangora he had met some Ibibio men whom he said arrived at Kontangora years before his arrival and had started a small association of about 10 people. Most of these people he mentioned included Mr. EtimUmoh, Mr. Uwemand family to mention but a few; but he went further to say most of them are no longer in existence.⁷

Mr Henry Inokon said during his stay at Kontangora he had joined an association of South-Eastern states as at 1977, so he decided to establish such an association in Minna. It started with Calabar community welfare association of which the president then was a railway train driver and the name latter was changed to Cross River welfare

association and as at 1987 when Akwa Ibom state was created, the name was changed to Akwa Ibom welfare association leaving their mother state which was Cross River and Mr. Henry Inokon was made the pioneer president of Akwa Ibom welfare association in Minna. He went further to say that the association which started with about 266 members increased because of the population of Akwa-Ibom people in Minna; soon some started inviting their brothers, sisters, relations to join them in Minna and through that the population began to increase. Most of these people, like he said, ventured into all walks of life such as prison workers, railway workers, bank officers, petty traders, amongst others.⁸

Mr. Uwanna Abasi Udo who happened to be the vice president of the association said the Akwa Ibom welfare association is not only in Minna but in all 21 local Governments of the State.⁹ Today, the Ibibios have a population of over 2000 people of which only 878¹⁰ are registered members of the association comprising 670 men and 208 women.

ECONOMIC ACTIVITIES OF IBIBIOS IN MINNA

Economy as a concept has been defined as the effective management of resources of a community or system.¹¹ According to Lipsey (1983), an economy can be seen as any specified collection of interrelated set of marketed and non-marketed productive activities.¹² Ibibio people based on their resources and its utilization were engaged in different economic activities.

Economic activities of the Ibibios are centered on agriculture. Oil palm which is in the state is of great commercial importance. Major cash crops grown include rubber, cocoa, rice and oil palm. While yam, rice,

maize, cassava, cocoyam and plantain are cultivated for local market. Fishing is of importance to the Ibibios as the Qua-Iboe, Calabar and Imo Rivers as well as Cross-River provide the State with sufficient fresh water fishing opportunities. There is also extensive deep sea fishing and shrimping along the coast of the State.

AGRICULTURE

The economy mainstay of the Ibibio people of Akwa Ibom State is based on agriculture. Everybody in the community was involved in farming where local implement for tilling the soil and local cutlasses produced by blacksmiths at the time of the farming were used. They practiced shifting cultivation, and the main crops grown were Ikong, Nmoimu-Ikong, Maize, Atama, Afang, Aditan, among others. Anywhere inhabited by the Ibibios, they still practiced subsistence farming, though the Minna soil is not favourable for the cultivation of most of the Ibibio's vital food crops like the ones earlier mentioned and so the Ibibio farmers decided to engage in the production of that which is profitable to them within the environment.

According to Mrs. Grace Okon Dasha who out of her experience in farming back in the village owned a farmland at her residence in the Tunga area, she cultivates several crops such as pumpkin, water-leaf, Adusa-leaf, Ndrong for commercial purposes and also practices snail farming. She started this trade few years after she arrived Minna late 1999 and with the income from the business she has been able to put up a building of her own. She is married to a Gbagyi man and has three children.¹³ She complained about the weather not being favourable to the cultivation of other types of crops she would

have loved to.

According to Oto, a young man of 35 years of age who has lived most his life in the village and migrated to Minna, hunting formed a major part of his life back at the village and so he couldn't seem to engage in any other activity aside hunting. He had to join the hunting group around his area in Chanchaga popularly called Yan-parow-ta meaning hunters. He added that they are several men from Akwa Ibom like him whom he introduced into this group to make a living. He buttressed that with the income he makes from hunting he could say he is doing well.¹⁴

Ms. Mary Bassej who is from the Oron-speaking tribe of Akwalbom State, prior to her migration to Minna, was a fish farmer back at home; she buys fishes at the water-side and then sells them out. On her arrival in Minna, she decided to continue the trade by traveling down to bring varieties of dried fish to sell in Minna but as time went by the business was no longer lucrative because of the cost of transportation and the risks in travelling every now and then. Since then she decided to make use of her qualification to gain employment in the state. According to Ms. Bassej, she has done several jobs before now working with the Independent National Electoral Commission.¹⁵

TRADE AND COMMERCE

In any community, people carry out trading and commercial activities to enhance their standard of living in which the Ibibio people are not an exception. Trading activities is an important economic activity common to the Ibibios in Minna. Most of the women engaged in farming take their farm produce to the market to sell in order to earn a living.

Eka Ekpe, a popular Ibibio business woman at shop number 39 Ultra-Modern market Minna, said she is not only a farmer but a full time business woman and in addition to that she travels once a month to the village to bring that which could not be cultivated in Minna, such as Afang, Atama, Aditan, and many more, that are in high demand by not only the Ibibios but the indigenes and other inhabitants as well.¹⁶

Mrs. Ekong who is also a business woman, sells fufu popularly called Akpu; she prepares it with cassava usually peeled, washed and stored in a container of water and left to ferment for three days. After that is done, she washes it again and stores it in a sack to drain out the water. This process takes about 2-3 days for the water to dry out completely of which the paste is now ready for final process which is the making of the fufu. It is done by mixing the cassava paste with little water to enable it to be stirred properly; when it is on fire, you stir continuously until it becomes strong and then the fufu is ready for the market. According to Mrs. Ekong, she makes up to N5,000:00 (five thousand naira) daily from the sales of fufu. She started the business since got married and her brought her to Minna. The business has sustain her family.¹⁷ Mr. Uyime Etuks is a business man that deals in palm oil; he travels to the village to process the palm fruits into palm oil and transports them back to Minna for sale. According to him, he travels down home to process this palm oil because of the scarcity of palm fruits in Minna and even if found, it cannot be compared with the ones from the village. The palm oil is processed and stored in drums and transported to Minna. He said he makes supplies to restaurants and

market women.¹⁸

According to AkpanObong who is a palm wine tapper, the business is lucrative and he learnt the trade from his father way back in Akwa Ibom state. Local liquor called Ukond-Usung though costly is however sweet and used for entertainment during traditional marriage and burial ceremonies. It could also be processed into gin commonly called Ogogoro. He said that he is not only a palm wine tapper but also works with the Niger State transport authority (N.S.T.A) as a mechanic.¹⁹

The Ibibio people also engage in other activities such as tailoring, welding, woodcarving, and a whole lot of others. There are even some who are civil-servants working with either the State or Federal Government. Some others are lecturers, nurses, midwives, to mention but a few.

THE IMPACT OF IBIBIO PEOPLE TO THE DEVELOPMENT OF MINNA

SOCIAL IMPACTS

This part exposes us to the activities of the Ibibio people in Minna, which have in one way or the other contributed to the development of not only Minna but Niger State as a whole. This group of people who left their state of origin either because they were on transfer from their places of work or in search of greener pastures or for a change of environment have adopted Minna as their place of residence and have not only increased the population but also contributed to the development of the town. Different festivals organized in the town have brought to the public the rich culture of the Ibibio people. It is of importance to note

that during this festivals, the indigenes and other ethnic groups are invited to join in the celebrations, especially the Ekpe festival which is done to promote love and peace in the land. There is also the Nka Uforo Ndico cultural troupe, made up of young men and women including those married. The motive of this group is to promote oneness and love among the Ibibio people in Minna. According to Mrs. Hope Essien, the chairlady of the dance group and a business woman who owns Hope restaurant located at Tunga area, the dance group was established to bring the youths of Ibibio together especially those who are not members of the Akwa Ibom welfare association. She said people who love to be entertained with the rich culture of the Ibibio people do engage them during occasions. She cited an instance when the group performed in a youth forum at the U.K Bello Art theatre in the presence of the Governor of Niger state and other dignitaries. She said guests were so pleased to see a different cultural performance adding intercultural flavor to the occasion. She added that they also attend traditional marriage ceremonies of any member or member's child and also other Ibibio people who invite them. The income generated from their outings is ploughed into use to develop the association.²⁰

A popular Ibibio comedian by name Fabian Amos (AKA) Padijo said his career as a comedian started when he arrived Minna in the early 1990s to join his brother in his business. He said as soon as he arrived, he started having problems with his brother and decided to start up something on his own; that was when he was introduced to 91.2 Fm station in Minna, where he cracked jokes and he was known as

chokolimaiyankanbaki (spoon that cuts the mouth) few years later he decided to take his career to the next level and to be a full time comedian which he is today. He said that today he is performs as Master of Ceremonies (MC) during birthdays, weddings, parties, birthdays, church programmes, to mention but a few. He added that being a comedian, he has been able to provide for his family.²¹

Mr Patrick Adahada a NECO staff owns a place called 'Event' that accommodates at least 1,000 people. He rents it out on occasions such as wedding receptions, birthday, seminars, conferences and many other functions. He said in a way, he has contributed to the development of Minna town by establishing such a beautiful place for events, thereby giving the public the ability to make choices when it comes to venues for events.²²

The Akwa Ibom welfare Association do visit the motherless babies homes yearly to donate to the less privileged items such as clothes, food stuffs, toiletries among many others as a sign of their contribution to the society and the less privileged.²³

ECONOMIC IMPACT

The economic impact of the Ibibios in Minna has registered a tremendous effect in the town as the above mentioned economic activities as the farming, hunting and others have helped boost in one way or the other the economy of the town.

Those who own shops in the market pays tax which is collected monthly by the local and state government authorities. According to Eka Ekpe, a business woman at the Kure Ultra-Modern market Minna, she pays tax just like everyone else in the market; she

pays for security and sanitation in the market alongside her shop rent...²⁴ She buttressed that the major economic challenge faced by the Ibibios is the cost of transporting food items from Akwalbom to Minna. According to her, most times she barely breaks even in her business due to high cost of transporting these goods to Minna. This is because the weather condition in Minna is not conducive when it comes to cultivating most of the plants she sells and it has affected other women who engage in such trade. And this has in one way or the other forced some people to veer into other means of earning a living.

Mr. Patrick Inyang, a civil servant working with the Federal Government, said that they are not in exempted from paying tax since money is deducted from their salaries as payment of taxes (pay as you earn PAYE) which runs into thousands of naira depending on your level as a staff. He added that those who own private homes are also taxed when they obtain the certificates of occupancy (C of O). Most of the Ibibio people are also land owners and he said they have helped develop some areas in Minna by putting up nice buildings for rent.²⁵ The Ibibios who operate commercial transport system operating from Chanchaga to Bosso, have also helped to ease transportation system in Minna. Some who are artisans and are skilled in one way or the other, have helped train youths to acquire similar skills to earn a living.

Mrs. Esther Jumbo, an Ibibio woman who owns a popular restaurant called Esther restaurants along Bosso road, said running a restaurant business is not an easy job because she has to make it of a high standard, meeting up with customers'

demands. She said she is not the only Ibibio woman who owns a restaurant; she has to make sure she is without flaws. She said the restaurant has provided people with alternatives of what to eat. She said she supplies food at the Zenith bank canteen, Central bank canteen, Diamond bank canteen, and sometimes she is also called to prepare food on special occasions. She added that she has a spot at the Federal University of Technology Minna (FUT) where she sells food, adding that she helped in the development of Minna town through the job opportunities she has created presently for both the state indigenes as she has at least 30 people on my payroll.²⁶

CONCLUSION

This Chapter has examined in brief the history of Ibibios in Minna from 1970-2013 and how they have contributed in the development of Minna through their economic and other activities. The chapter also shows how the Ibibios' economic activities in Minna are diverse in nature and despite the challenges which they face, they have made ends meet. The study discovered that the issue of inter group relations have always been a major factor militating against the peaceful co-existence of the various ethnic nationalities in Nigeria. This work brings to fore the contributions of ethnic groups habiting a place other than theirs, and whether they are given certain privileges in their area of abode, not minding the ethnic and religious differences. The case of the Ibibio people in Minna have proven different because despite such differences they have been given political and economic rights by the host communities they are said to be developing.

END NOTES

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