

INDIGENOUS AGRARIAN INSTITUTIONS FOR CAPITAL FORMATIONS AMONG THE IBIBIO PEOPLE, 1900-2000

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Abstract

The role and significant of indigenous capital formations among the Ibibio people cannot be overemphasized. This is because among the Ibibio people, indigenous capital formations played significant roles in raising capital for the major economic and other undertakings of the people such as land acquisition, debts repayments, education of young people, and marrying wives. Using descriptive and analytical methods, as well as a combination of both primary and secondary sources, this work identified the various indigenous agrarian institutions for capital formations. The findings of this work shows that among the Ibibio people within the periods studied, the indigenous agrarian institutions were veritable means of addressing the economic, social and political challenges of the people. They were able to defray debts, attend to their domestic needs, take titles, among others.

Introduction

Capital formation is the creation of capital, which are things that are used to create wealth and growth in an economy. Simply put, it is a tool that is used to generate wealth. Interestingly, the idea of capital formation was considered to be one of the most important ways to assess the state of the pre-colonial economy in Ibibioland. In any case, the role and significance of indigenous capital formations among the Ibibio people cannot be overstressed. This stems from the fact that until the coming of modern financial institutions and contractual systems, the indigenous institutions were the sole means of raising capital to meet the needs of the people and also foster economic development.

The economic profile of the Ibibio people shows that there were a number of capital formations through which resources were raised to meet the needs of the people. These were both agrarian and non-agrarian. The agrarian includes among others, pledging of land, palm oil groove and domestic animals. Non-agrarian are 'etibe' club, pawning, title taking societies, and reciprocal obligations,¹ and so on. These institutions played significant roles in raising capital for major economic and other undertakings of the people such as acquisition of land, building houses, starting small businesses, payment of debts, education of children and marrying wives.²

Generally speaking, the economic underpinnings of a given society determine the compass of such a society. To corroborate this, Uwem Jonah notes that "It is the economy that nourishes and sustains a people, lubricates their historical experiences and also informs the general prospects for the future".³ The Ibibio people engaged in a number of economic

activities all of which was to help the people make their livelihood and foster economic development of the area. In the light of the foregoing, this study generally aims at examining Indigenous Agrarian Institution for Capital Formations among the Ibibio People, 1900-2000, taking cognizance of its functions and contributions to the economic development of Ibibioland within the periods under survey. It should be noted that indigenous economic profile of the Ibibio embodies a number of agrarian institutions for capital formations and this work is not intended to cover all. Therefore, pledging of land, palm oil trees and breeding of domestic animals are the focus of this work.

Land Pledging

To have a holistic understanding of the importance of land pledging as a means of capital formation, it is pertinent to discuss land tenure system in Ibibioland. Like other agrarian economies, the economy of the Ibibio largely depends on land. Practically, all economic activities of the Ibibio people were determined by land. This is why the Ibibio people placed much importance to their land. Land was regarded as their "First Mother".⁴ Sacrifices were made to the goddess of the land for good yield and harvest. Land embodies all the free gift of nature such as rivers, forests, mountains, mineral resources⁵ among others. It suffices to say that the usefulness of land in Ibibio was directly determined by these features of the environment. Land tenure system implies the right to hold and use land. In Ibibioland, land tenure could be divided into four transitionary epochs. In the first epoch, land was communally owned; second epoch land was passed to **ekpuk** (lineages); and from **ekpuk**, ownership was transferred to **ufok** (family); and finally to individual ownership.⁶

There were different kinds of lands and for various purposes. Uwem Jonah quoting Peter Dorner, posits that the right to hold and use land maybe legal, contractual or on customary basis. The present land tenure system in Ibibioland constitutes some components such as ownership, transfer and use.⁷ There were lands regarded as sacred and in Ibibio it was called **akai**, others were communal, individual, lineage, pledged and borrowed lands. Put differently, land was either owned by an individual, family or the community. To buttress this, Ini Etuk writes;

Within the structure of communal ownership in Ibibioland, seven categories of land were generally recognized. These included sacred land or grove known variously to the people as *akai*, *efakisondem*, *ikotokpo*. Sacred lands were believed to house the numerous deities of the area while title society grooves provided sanctuaries for cultural societies... Other types of land holding were *ikotekpuk* or *ndoon* (lineage land); *ikotisong* or *ekpene* (communal land); *okpokpoikot* (individual land); *nnonkamaikotor ntonwuo* (borrowed land) and *ikotubiong* (pledged land).⁸

Generally, land played a significant role in the economic life of the people and also was a means of capital formation. The Ibibio people have a large expanse of land and equally plants both food and cash crops. In pledging land as a means of raising capital, an individual may decide to pledge his land to someone else for cash loan. A source posits that it was only lands owned by individuals that could be pledged. Conversely, family or community land could not be pledged without the express permission from the family head and members or village head and members of the village council respectively.⁹ Land was given as a security for loan. The pledged land was not to be sold, this, however, was based on agreement the parties entered into. The creditor may cultivate the land and also harvest the palm fruits from it. This was the interest he got on his loan. On the other hand, the debtor (pledgee) also uses the cash loans to start trade, pay for children education, be initiated into society or meet other pressing needs in his family.

However, it should be noted that the pledged land was redeemable and it was dependent on the agreement entered into by the parties involved. Uwem Jonah maintains that a land could be redeemed "at any time the borrower or kinsmen can defray the debt".¹⁰ In line with this, the pledger cannot get back his land if he has not repaid his debt. Consequently, the pledgee will continue to be in possession of the land as long as his money is not refunded. In event that the pledger could not redeem his debts, maybe on account of death, the son or any member of the family could redeem the land. This partly explains why planting of perennial crops or erecting a permanent structure in a pledged land was not allowed in Ibibioland.¹¹

Another aspect of land usage as a means of capital formation in Ibibioland was **nnonkamaikotor ntonwuo**(borrowed land).¹² This type of land was usually given within a fixed period of time probably yearly or a full farming season.¹³ Like pledged land, borrowed land was not to be sold, or any permanent structure erected. The major difference between pledged and borrowed land was, an individual could pledged his land if he was in need of immediate financial need, and the land was redeemable as soon as he was able to defray his debts. Though there was agreement to this effect, however, the pledgee could be in possession of the land as long as he had not gotten his money from the pledger. In borrowed land, the borrower was only expected to use the land within a specified period of time, usually during farming season. As soon as the period elapses, the borrower was expected to return the borrowed land. As means for capital formation, the borrower could plant on the land, harvest and sell the crops, use the money to meet his financial needs.¹⁴

Palm Oil Tree Pledging

Pledging of palm oil (**eyop**) tree was another means of capital formation in Ibibioland. The area is also blessed with an extensive oil palm grooves. According to EkongUdoeyop, "the area presents potential investment opportunities on oil palm related industries".¹⁵ Oil palm grove was owned by community, lineage or by individual. In some communities in Ibibio, a large expanse of palm oil grove used to be assigned to members of the **Ekong**society to use for their individual gains.¹⁶ In this connection, members of the **Ekong** society were people who occupied unique place in Ibibioland both in their lifetime and even after they are dead.

As warriors' society, the **Ekong** members in some communities were decorated for their bravery with a grant of oil palm grove. This gesture was to encourage young men to fight

wars and defend their land from external invasion.¹⁷ Accordingly, members could hold this palm oil groove for not less than two years' period and they used the proceeds from there to pay for the initiation of at least three of their male children.¹⁸ Like land, the Ibibio also attached great importance to their oil palm. This explains the popular saying in Ibibio, "we live by our palm".¹⁹ The oil palm was used variously for different purposes. As regards the uses of the oil palm, Edet Udowites, Like the raffia palm it had many uses: the frond (*ubak*) was used for building fences (*oko*) and racks for the storage of farm crops; the trunk (*ekpateyop*) was used as timber for building houses, the rib for making brooms and the oil from both the fruit and the kernel as food and medicine, respectively; the palm oil especially was used for lighting the houses, and the fibre as firewood.²⁰

Palm oil was one of the most important sources of income generation to the Ibibio people. Apart from being cultivated, it also served as a means of raising capital for the individual and the community at large. For instance, in most communities in Ibibioland, there was a period that no one was permitted to harvest the palm fruit which was called (**ewukeyop**) until after about three months. After this period, the ban was lifted and the people were allowed to pay a certain amount of money to the community before harvesting. The communities used these monies to send a promising son of the community to school abroad, repair markets or village halls²¹ among other things. Similarly, an individual may decide to pledge his oil palm tree to get loan and meet some of his immediate family or individual needs. As earlier said, oil palm tree like land was owned by the community, lineage, family or individual. An individual who may have been in dire need of money, could pledge some oil palm trees in his farm. The pledgee was only entitled to the number of oil palm trees given by the pledger in line with the agreement and within the stipulated period of time. According to a source, this practice required absolute trust, as the pledgee may decide to use more than the number of oil palm trees that was pledged.²² However, the oil palm trees were redeemed as soon as the pledger was able to refund his loan. The pledgee on the other hand, enjoyed the numerous uses of the oil palm as earlier stated in this study. He could harvest the oil palm, sale it or even process the palm oil, sale the oil and the kernel. The researcher has a firsthand experience as regard this.

Breeding of Domestic Animals (ubokufene)

Livestock breeding was a practice in almost every household in Ibibioland. The economic value of domestic animals among the Ibibio cannot be overemphasized. It constitutes a very necessary aspect of the economic life of the people. Ownership of domestic animals was what partly defines the wealth, prestige, social status and economic security of the owner. The Ibibio people bred domestic animals such as goats, chicken, dogs, pigs, sheep, cat, cow²³ among others. Like land, domestic animals served numerous purposes in Ibibioland. To corroborates this, Ikechukwu Cosmas opines that, "the use of livestock cut across the nutritive, economic, social and ritual spheres of life".²⁴ Generally, domestic animals had nutritional, economic, social and religious value for the people. These livestock were used during ceremonies such as burials, marriages, dedications, fines and other festivals of the people.²⁵

As a means of capital formation, domestic animals played significant role in this regards. It was noted earlier that domestic animals served a number of purposes and most importantly

as economic security to the owner. An individual may decide to sell his domestic animals to raise money to meet his urgent needs. This was possible because ownership of domestic animals was seen as a sort of bank savings where the owner could resort to in times of emergency.²⁶ Similarly, an individual could decide to give out an animal to another person, usually a friend or relative to nurture. In some communities in Ibibio, the offspring of the first rounds of birth was given to the owner of the livestock, while the second was given to the person that bred it, regardless of the number. In some cases, the offspring of the first two rounds of birth was given to the owner, while the offspring of the third round became the property of the person who bred the animal.²⁷

It should be noted that this arrangement was however, dependent on the agreement between the parties. However, such agreement could be terminated if the owner decides to sell his livestock or if the animal is dead. In any event, the person who bred the animal, could decide to sell his own share of the offspring or nurture it to expand its species. This eventually served as saving for him in event of urgent and other necessary financial needs in the family. This practice according to Uwem Jonah, is still effective today. Aside its economic benefits, it has been a reliable instrument for intergroup relations amongst the Ibibio people.²⁸

Conclusion

The work focused on the agrarian means of capital formations among the Ibibio people 1900-2000. It has described and analyzed the various agrarian institutions for capital formations among the Ibibio. The Ibibio people have had robust indigenous institutions which were peculiar to their economic system at the time. The themes discussed in the work were land pledging, oil palm trees pledging and livestock breeding which played significant roles in capital formations of the people. Land was of great importance in Ibibioland. This was because every other economic activity was dependent on land. Among the people, land was owned by community, lineage, family or individual and this also applies to oil palm grove. Individuals who were in need of loans, could pledge his land or oil palm trees in exchange for the loan within a stipulated period of time. Generally, the roles of these institutions were numerous and permeated almost every sphere of life in Ibibioland. These institutions were the means of raising capital to meet financial needs and the general development of the area. Monies gotten from this practice were used for various purposes ranging from payment of debts, education of children, building of houses, marrying of wives, taking titles and development of the community as the case may. It suffices to say that despite the influence of external factors like the presence of modern banking systems and other contractual institutions, these indigenous institutions are still reliable means of capital formations among the Ibibio people, especially those staying in the villages.

Endnotes

¹Otoabasi Akpan *et al*, *A History of Itam People*, (Uyo: Ndeco Educational Publishers, 2012), pp.180-181.

²Interview with Elder Okon Essien, 71 years, Afaha Atai-Ibesikpo, Akwa, Rtd. Civil Servant, 24/03/2023.

³Uwem Jonah, "Economic Diplomacy in Ibibioland: The Pre-colonial Perspective", *International Journal of Social Sciences*. Vol.12, No.1. (2008), p.2.

⁴Edet Udo, *Who are the Ibibio?*, (Onitsha: Africana-Fep Publishers Limited, 1983), p.95.

⁵Otoabasi Akpanetal *A History of Itam People*, p.142.

⁶Otoabasi Akpanetal *A History of Itam People*, p.147.

⁷Uwem Jonah, *Akwa Ibom and Her Neighbours: A Study of Regional Diplomacy Since the Pre-colonial Period*, (Uyo: Heritage Preservation Foudation, 2018), p.84.

⁸IniEtuk, "Ibibio Indigenous Economy" in Philip Afaha (ed.), *Witness to History*, (Abuja: Command Publishers, 2015), p.277.

⁹Interview with Mrs. Bassey Daniel Inyang, 67 years, Ikot Okwot-Nsit Ubium, Trader, 29/04/2023.

¹⁰Uwem Jonah, *Akwa Ibom and Her Neighbours*.,p.86.

¹¹Uwem Jonah, *Akwa Ibom and Her Neighbours*.,p.86.

¹²Ini Etuk, "Ibibio Indigenous Economy" ..., p.277.

¹³Interview with Elder Okon Essien, 71 years, Afaha Atai -Ibesikpo, Rtd. Civil Servant, 24/03/2023.

¹⁴Interview with Mrs. Bassey Daniel Inyang, 67 years, Ikot Okwot- Nsit Ubium, Trader, 29/04/2023.

¹⁵Ekong Udoeyop, *Ibesikpo Asutan and National Rebirth: A Compendium of Who is Who*, (Lagos: Eldemo Enterprise Limited, 2006), p.5.

¹⁶Edet Amamkpa, *A Short History of Ibesikpo*, (Uyo: Modern Business Press, 2001), pp.11-12.

¹⁷Edet Amamkpa, *A Short History of Ibesikpo*, p.12.

¹⁸Interview with Mrs. Bassey Daniel Inyang, 67 years, IkotOkwot-NsitUbium, Trader, 29/04/2023.

¹⁹Edet Udo, *Who are the Ibibio?*, p.214.

²⁰Edet Udo, *Who are the Ibibio?*, p.214.

²¹Interview with Elder Okon Essien, 71 years, Afaha Atai-Ibesikpo, Rtd. Civil Servant, 24/03/2023.

²²Interview with Elder Okon Essien, 71 years, Afaha Atai-Ibesikpo, Rtd. Civil Servant, 24/03/2023.

²³Uwem Jonah, *Akwa Ibom and Her Neighbours*; p.92.

²⁴Ikechukwu Cosmas A., “'IlumeAku' 'Ilu Elulu' Keeping Custody of Domestic Animals” in *Mmiri Imo Journal of History and International Studies*, Vol.1. No.3.

(2015).p.358.

²⁵Uwem Jonah, *Akwa Ibom and Her Neighbours*; p.92.

²⁶Ikechukwu Cosmas A., “ 'IlumeAku' 'Ilu Elulu' ...,p.358.

²⁷Uwem Jonah, *Akwa Ibom and Her Neighbours...*,p.92.

²⁸Uwem Jonah, *Akwa Ibom and Her Neighbours...*,p.92.