

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.