

# **PUTTING IBIONO IBOM HOUSE IN ORDER<sup>±</sup>**

**Being a paper presented at the 26th Triennial Delegates Conference of Ibiono Ibom Welfare and Development Union (IWADU), at Ikpa Pavilion on December 28, 2012.**

## **Protocols**

In those days Hezekiah became ill and was at the point of death. The prophet Isaiah son of Amoz went to him and said, "this is what the Lord says: Put your house in order..."

2 Kings 20 : 1

## **Introduction**

I thank IWADU very much for two things. First, for selecting me to be the Guest Speaker at this 26th triennial delegates conference and secondly, for the choice of the topic, which is indeed very topical. "Putting one's house in order" is right now on the lips of all individuals, groups, communities, States, countries, and the world at large.

Maybe I should start by looking at the topic disjunctively in this order: "Ibiono Ibom". And then, "putting our house in order".

Ibiono Ibom Local Government Area is one of the local government areas that make up Akwa Ibom State. It is listed in Schedule 1 of Local Government (Administration) Law, Cap. 80, Volume 4, Laws of Akwa Ibom State, 2000. It is the largest Local Government Area in the State,

---

<sup>±</sup> Presented by **Engr. Ezequiel Ezequiel, PhD (Birmingham), Barrister-at-Law; Notary Public for Nigeria; Dean, Faculty of Law, University of Uyo, Nigeria; Member, Governing Council of Legal Education in Nigeria; Member, Governing Council of Nigerian Institute of Advanced Legal Studies; Sometime Commonwealth Study Fellow.**

consisting of 8 clans, 220 gazetted villages and 120 Omitted Villages. Its indigenes are very enterprising, very industrious, and relatively highly educated.

## Definition/Explanation of Terms

What about “Ibiono Ibom”?

As noted by Dr. A. U. Ettang in his book, *Ibiono Ibom: A Synthesis of Ibionology*, no single correct meaning of Ibiono has been agreed upon. But the one certain thing is that the name “Ibiono Ibom” implies a Mighty Land founded by a person of legendary power and proven integrity and is believed to have descended from the stock of <sup>Ibibio</sup> ~~Ibiono~~ ethnic group which is regarded as the most ancient of all the ethnic groups in Nigeria. While “Ibom” describes something mighty, great, huge, large and enormous, “Ibiono” was a land founded by Akpan Ankit, or the first person who occupied that land. It is not intended here to go much into history except as would guide us in this paper.

What does it mean to “put your house in order”?

This term should be understood both literally and figuratively. Let’s start with the literal sense: Imagine that your house is cluttered, messed up, and things are not in place. What do you do? You don’t simply shut the door on your mess, rather you put the house in order. First, you **assess the mess**. You consider how to use the house, and what you really need to retain in the house, where to keep them, how to keep them, etc. The idea is to make the house comfortable and inviting. Next, you **analyse the obstacles**. This calls for identification of the main culprits in your



battle against clutter. Third, you **devise solutions**. You take a look around the house. You may decide to store some items in the cupboard, cabinets, book cases, or in a store, or you may decide to dispose of some of the items which are no more useful. Just get the clutter under control! This is what we do in our daily lives.

Figuratively, putting one's house in order means many things. It means bidding farewell to "business as usual". It means putting one's business or personal affairs into good order – as if one were cleaning one's house. It means getting one's act together; organising one's affairs in a sensible, logical way. It means to solve one's problems or to resolve all differences that exist. In this figurative or idiomatic sense therefore, the term is quite wide and encompassing in its meaning. It calls for soul-searching and in-ward thinking. It calls on all of us to put aside our differences and factionalization for our common progress. It calls for a shift of emphasis from "I", "me", "mine" to "we", "us", "ours" – thinking more of the community.

Man is by nature gregarious. He does not live alone, grow alone, or carry out his daily activities alone. He needs/lives with others. John Donne was indeed right when he said that "No man is an island, entire to itself; every man is a piece of the Continent, a part of the main". This human attribute ~~of~~ calls for togetherness and public-spiritedness, knowing that by God's design, we are all involved in the Ibiono Ibom project together.

We need to put our Ibiono Ibom house in order in terms of governance, in terms of proper planning and policies, so that we can make optimal use of the abundant human and material resources that we have. To achieve this, we must eschew selfishness, avarice, bias, pride and

prejudice, intolerance and individualism which continue to break the background of Ibiono Ibom. This conference is particularly timely, and the topic, "Putting Ibiono Ibom House in Order" is especially topical; it is a clarion call for an end to the things that divide us, and a concentration on the things that unite us. Yes, "unity" is the word. It is a global desideratum.

## **A Global Craving**

Talking about unity, it is a sine qua non for peace, growth and development of every community, and even for the global community. Speaking on October 24, 2011, the Secretary General of the United Nations, Ban Ki-moon, stressed the need for unity as the world seeks solutions to the key challenges facing humanity, from economic crises and diminishing job opportunities to the consequences of climate change. Indeed, the craving for unity is worldwide. It is the motto of Kentucky in the United States of America. It is also on the Missouri flag. All football teams realize that it is only by unity and teamwork that they can succeed. Little surprise that many football teams have "united" as a prefix or suffix to their names. Popular examples are: Manchester United ("Man U"), Newcastle United, and our own Akwa United. This also underlies the phrase, which has now almost become a cliché, that "United we stand, divided we fall". This phrase has been used in mottos from nations and states to songs. The basic concept is that unless the people are united there would be no development, no progress, and it would be easy to destroy them. The Book of Books also has a word in this regard in Mark 3:25: "A house divided against itself cannot stand".



So, how do we put Ibiono Ibom house in order? This is a big question which requires complex thinking. As Joseph O'Connor once opined, "the quality of a question is not judged by its complexity but by the complexity of thinking it provokes". I'm not going to claim to be an expert in this, and one thing some would say for sure is "That it is easier said than done". For me, I would agree that it may not be easy but I am convinced that it can be done. Some way forward can be proffered. But how do we ensure that the way-forwards are put into practice? There lies the rub.

Putting the Ibiono Ibom house in order requires unity – unity of purpose, of thinking, and of action. If we look around us we see that many are unemployed, some of the employed are losing their jobs, their houses, and their self worth. Materialism and individualism have taken root where altruism and togetherness should reign. We are too caught up in what we have and what we want and how are we going to get this or that, that we don't have time for others or for our local government. Poverty has taken a firm grip of the large majority while the tiny minority who are well-off altruism, they lack empathy, they sympathy.

### **The Ibiono Ibom House**

What is today Ibiono Ibom Local Government Area did not come about overnight. As a Local Government Area, Ibiono Ibom was created in 1981. Before then, it had remained a political nucleus of Itu Division in the Old Calabar. In 1959 it was constituted into a County Council, a status that was held by Ikot Ekpene, Abak, Uyo and the then Eastern Ibiono Ibom. Before the Nigerian Civil War, Ibiono Ibom was recognized and given the status of a Division on 2nd November 1966 by the Eastern Nigeria Government. Therefore there was Ibiono Division, with Mr. J. E.

Isok as the first Divisional Officer in charge. The Divisional status was lost during the Nigerian civil war of 1966 – 1970. It is worth noting that a Division is the equivalent of the present day Local Government Area. This brief history is necessary so that we would know where/how Ibiono Ibom Local Government should be today, compared to its Divisional peers at the time. For instance, Ibiono Ibom was given a divisional status along with Oron the same day, but now Oron has five local government areas while Ibiono Ibom has only one, and even that one had to be paid for with an arm and a leg, literally. This bit of history should awaken us to the need to put Ibiono Ibom house in order if the local government is to meet up with its contemporaries.

Ibiono Ibom House is, loosely speaking, a federation of eight clans, namely: Mbiabong, Ibiaku, Utit Obio, Ididep, Use, Ntan, Afaha, and Idoro. If Ikpanya is added it would make nine clans. It would be recalled that Ikpanya was recognized as a clan in 1958. Attempts at putting the Ibiono Ibom house in order has over the years been carried out somehow by individuals but most visibly by the agency or under the aegis of a socio-cultural organization which has assumed different names with the passage of time.

### **Instruments of House Ordering**

Individuals have in their personal capacities, most of them unannounced, done their bit in putting the Ibiono Ibom House in order. Some have awarded scholarships or/and bursaries to students and trainees, thereby boosting manpower development. Some have provided employments, thereby reducing poverty. And yet some others have picked up medical bills of others. Commendable attempts at rural road



construction have been made by individuals as well. These, however, are like the proverbial little drops of water into an ocean of problems and challenges.

More have been achieved with group effort by socio-cultural groups. For instance, the Ibiono Welfare Union floated a scholarship scheme in the mid 1930s by which it awarded scholarships to deserving sons and daughters of Ibiono Ibom. There was later the Ibiono Community Development Association, which later merged with Ibiono Welfare Union in May 1964 into Ibiono Welfare and Development Union (IWDU). There is now the Ibiono Ibom Welfare and Development Union (IWADU), the main purpose of which is to galvanise efforts, promote unity, and bring Ibiono Ibom to limelight. Recently, there has also emerged the Ibiono Ibom Youth for Democracy and Development, whose <sup>declared</sup> principal aims include, "fostering unity, peace and harmony among members" and "condemning and opposing any form of discrimination, injustice and oppression".

Indigenes of Ibiono Ibom who are resident in Lagos State have formed the Ibiono Ibom Welfare and Development Association (IWADA). It has as its objective the welfare and well being of Ibiono Ibom indigenes ("its members") who are resident in Lagos State and the human cum physical development of Ibiono Ibom in general. Except for the understandable emphasis on Lagos, the difference between the objectives of IWADU and those of IWADA is just like that between six and half a dozen. The only visible difference is, perhaps, just in "U" and "A". No wonder there is a reported move to merge the two under the single name/acronym of IWADU which is the mother body – being national or even international in scope. Such merger should be easily feasible where there is group-

mindedness, and the same would be reminiscent of the merger of Ibiono Welfare Union and Ibiono Community Development Association in 1964. There are reports of “deep-seated and entrenched passion” of some IWADA members about “loss of identity” which would follow such merger. With respect, this fear appears to be misplaced because all the officers will still be in place, the name will still be the same except the inconsequential substitution of “Association” with “Union”. It will certainly be more rewarding to have one strong union with branches in the different States and in the diaspora. Again, United We Stand!

### **What’s Wrong with the “House”?: Solutions**

I have already stated what is wrong with the Ibiono Ibom house. Like Hezekiah, the house is sick, very sick. Hezekiah put his house in order, and then, by God’s grace, he recovered. Karl Maier titles his classic novel, *This House Has Fallen*, writing about Nigeria. In our own case, this house is falling; it has not fallen. But all hands must be on deck. The house must be put in order. I had earlier said that I do not claim to be an expert in this, and therefore would not have all the answers. I can nevertheless proffer some suggestions:

- (i) History is necessary both for the present and the future. Accordingly, Ibiono Ibomites, and indeed the rising generation of Ibiono Ibom, should fully understand the neglect and underdevelopment of Ibiono Ibom and then use these historical lessons and experience to redress and reverse the situation. It is easier to know where you are going to if you know where you are coming from. It has been said that he who controls the past controls the future. Our knowledge of Ibiono Ibom history



shapes the way we view the present, and therefore it dictates what answers we offer for existing problems. For example, even apart from size and population, our knowledge of history will impel us to demand for the creation of a minimum of four Local Government Areas out of the present Ibiono Ibom Local Government Area. Our knowledge of history will also impel us to avoid the situation of being tagged “ineffective majority” as was the case at one time. So, a good starting point in our house cleaning should be a good knowledge of Ibiono Ibom history.

- (ii) Whenever Ibiono Ibom is lucky enough to have its indigenes in Dr. A. U. Ettang (in his *Ibiono Ibom: A Synthesis of Ibionology*), called the *sanctum sanctorum* of the State (or Federal) Government, they should readily create their impact. Our sons and daughters who are in Government should let it rub off on the local government.

Politicians who make unfulfilled promises to ensure electoral victory should be called to account to the people. They must show what they have done in their own families, their villages, their clans and in Ibiono Ibom as a whole. We have seen enough to be convinced that unity must begin at home. The Ibiono Ibom people can no longer be deceived with empty promises. We cannot be deceived. Abraham Lincoln, the 16th American President, was indeed right to have said that **“It is true that you may fool all of the people some of the time; you can even fool some of the people all of the time; but you can’t fool all of the people all of the time”**. This should be borne in mind by our politicians. We should constantly ask ourselves: Are we useful to our people? This is a pertinent

question that will motivate us to set our Ibiono Ibom House in order.

- (iii) More than anything else, there is need to speak with one voice on all issues. Some of us may be surprised when told that a disagreement on a seemingly minor thing like where to site a local government headquarter can cost the creation of that local government. There must be unity in order that development may follow. Ikot Ekpene has a township, properly so called, with good nylon-tarred road network, complementary street-lighting, modern buildings, etc. So do Eket and Oron, to a great extent. One would not even talk of Uyo, because it is understandably in a class of its own, being a State Capital. On the other hand, Ibiono Ibom has nothing to show for its old Divisional status and early comparative surfeit of trained manpower and prominent people in virtually all fields of endeavour. State and indeed national pioneers like Dr. Obot Essien Antiabong, Chief Ntieyong Udo Akpan, Professor Asuquo Udo Antia, Mr. Charles Ebong, Barrister Mbere Basse Mbere, Mr. Cyril George Umoh, Mr. Edet Akpan Ukpong, Mr. Peter Henry Imaha, Engr. Jackson Anana, Rev. (Chief) Effiong Utit, Obong Philip Efiang and Ignatius Cardinal Ekanem, easily come to mind.
- (iv) Ibiono Ibom has always been a hot-bed of political activities. This by itself is healthy, because to be left out of politics is to be left out in the cold; it is to be left out of governance. What is condemnable, however, is the increasing trend of make-or-mar, "do-or-die" politics. Wild, reckless and spurious accusations are routinely flung at opponents. Some are demonized while others are pandered. Live and let live, has given way to live and let die!



In the process the local government is torn apart. This raises serious concerns about our brand of politics: politics of bitterness, of hatred, of spite, of division, of exclusion, of vendetta and vindictiveness, and of self-destruction. Politically, things have gone amiss and must be put a-right. This is the time to right the wrongs. There cannot be a better time than now. This is the time to put the Ibiono Ibom house in order for the sake of peace, progress and development. The time indeed is NOW.

## **Conclusion**

What are the “next steps”? At the end of this conference let us honestly evaluate the conference. We would most probably rate it as satisfactory, good, or excellent. But we should not stop at that. The conference should not be a mere ritual or just an annual talk shop. A definite plan of action should be mapped out, maybe by the Executive members of IWADU, for subtle, discreet but steady implementation. The modalities can be worked out, but certainly not in this paper. But it is clear that each person must determine to contribute his quota from his own little (or big!) corner. On the whole, it is my view that how well we can put Ibiono Ibom house in order depends very much on our communal spirit, unity of purpose, brotherly love, selflessness, accessibility, and our humility. It is my hope that this conference will give us all these, so that we can jointly and severally put Ibiono Ibom house in order.

Thank you for your patience, and for your audience. Thank you.