

**CRIME, POLICING AND JUDICIAL SYSTEM IN PRE-COLONIAL IKA AREA OF AKWA
IBOM STATE**

Akanimo Stephen Okon
Email: akanimo_o@yahoo.com
Phone no: +2347034922926

ABSTRACT

Crime is an integral part of every human society; hence, societies crave to bring crime under control, leading to the creation of different mechanisms for crime control. In pre-colonial Ika society of Akwa Ibom State, several policing initiatives and judicial system were devised for such purpose. With the utilization of primary and secondary sources, and mixed approach, the paper discusses that the use of traditional policing and judicial mechanisms in the control of crime were more effective. Ika people had a variety of models and approach to control crime prior to the creation of the colonial pattern of crime control, through certain institutions such as the extended family system, the lineage system, the age grade system, women societies, religious and other social groups, ancestral cults, and spirit cults, divination, ordeals, secret societies, among others, whose functions were detection, resolution and punishment for offenses. Consequently, British colonialism battered, disorganized and even dismantled these mechanisms, leading to the increase in crime rate. The paper finds out that, the emergence of Western-styled policing institution and judicial system in Ika brought about the use of violence and increase in crime. The paper concludes that the introduction of Western institutions of governance among other forces of globalization left many challenges on the pre-colonial policing institutions and judicial mechanisms of crime control which had effectively served the same purpose among the Ika people. Until a mixed approach through community policing is implemented, crime will continue to be on the increase.

Keywords: Crime, Policing, Judicial System, Pre-Colonial Nigeria, Ika Area, Akwa Ibom State

Introduction

Crime is an integral part of every human society; consequently, every society craves to bring crime under control, leading to the creation of different mechanisms for crime control. In pre-colonial Ika society of Akwa Ibom State, several policing and judicial system were devised for such purpose. Prior to the advent of British colonialism, the Ika in Akwa Ibom State of Nigeria consisted of towns which maintained a peaceful life, exercised autonomy and abided by their traditions and values. The people relatively promoted cordial intergroup relations in terms of intergroup marriages, exchange of trade, culture and festivities. However, from time to time, the people were caught in disagreements on certain issues which by and large led to conflict between groups, families and their neighbours; however, there existed unique mechanisms for conflict management. In pre-colonial era, the people had their government, economic and religious systems, as well as social organizations, which preferably worked in line with the culture and tradition of the people.¹

Ika people had a variety of models and approach to control crime prior to the creation of the colonial pattern of crime control, through certain institutions such as the extended family system, the lineage system, the age grade system, women societies, religious and other social groups, ancestral cults, and spirit cults, divination, ordeals, secret societies, among others, whose functions were detection, resolution and punishment for offenses.² The secret societies had the supernatural authority to exercise political and judicial powers over persons charged with offences likely to

¹E. E. O. Alemika, "Colonialism, State and Policing in Nigeria." *Crime, Law and Social Change*, Vol. 20 (1993), pp. 189 -219.

²T. N. Tamuno, *Police in Modern Nigeria* (Ibadan: University of Ibadan Press, 1970), p. 55.

jeopardize public order and the integrity of the polity. The women's groups in Ika disciplined erring members directly and imposed sanctions, just as it could bring to public attention, an errant and recalcitrant husband.³

Also, ancestors were also believed to be powerful guardian of the moral order of kin-structured societies. They policed the daily behaviour of their descendants and were believed to be able to "see" even the covert feeling of good or ill-will among their kin.⁴ Ancestors were believed to have the power to reward good behaviour with good fortune and to visit misfortune on errant members, whose conducts threatened the peace and solidarity of the kin group. Just as they could affect and punish deviance within the kinship group; intra-group disputes or conflict could also be resolved through arbitration, reconciliation, rituals, and sacrifices.

Oracular consultation enabled individuals in Ika to determine the guilt or innocence of persons in the investigation of crimes and when necessary the ascertaining of the remedial action acceptable to the supernatural agencies. The fear that an individual's hidden offences could be pried open through divination must have helped to constrain people's behaviour in the direction of the normative order. A related technique for administration of justice which was part of the culturally prescribed supernatural apparatus for social control work was the use of ordeals, which were trial procedure of persons accused of crimes such as theft or bewitching of others.⁵

All these were forms of policing and judicial system which involved arresting culprits, investigation and prosecution by the laws and oracles, geared towards preventing crime, were disrupted by the contact with the British who systematically disorganized and disintegrated them and finally brought them under their total control, and subjected them to their system and governance. Consequently, the advent of imperial activities and later colonial administration witnessed the bifurcation of territories in the Ika area.

The paper aims at examining the utilities of policing institutions and judicial system in preventing crime in Ika area of Akwa Ibom State in pre-colonial era. It is observed that in the face of Western-induced policing and judicial system, crime has been on the increase; thus, a study of traditional institutions could help understand how ancestors of the Ika people succeeded in fighting crime which was effective in that era.

The People of Ika

Ika people are found in present-day Akwa Ibom State and are subdivided into three clans namely: Ito, Achan and Ikananang (Odoro), comprising over 50 villages such as Urua Inyang (Nsidung) (the headquarters), Ikot Osukpong, Abiakana, Nto Ukara, Ikot Ikara, Nto Udo Enwan, Ikot Urom and Afen Ikot Okoro. The people are predominately Annang subgroup of people in Akwa Ibom State, who share cultural affinities with the Ibibio people and villages in parts of Abia State. Presently, Ika area shares boundary to the north-east Essien Udim Local Government Area, to the south-east, Etim Ekpo Local Government Area and to the western communities in Abia State. During the colonization of the area by the British, Ika Annang was for the most part under the Aba division of Owerri province as opposed to other Annang who were under the Ikot Ekpene and Abak divisions.

The estimated population of Ika Local Government Area is put at 89,078 inhabitants with the predominant dwellers.⁶ The area has an average temperature of 25 degrees centigrade and witnesses two distinct seasons which are the dry and rainy seasons with the rainy season lasting for much longer periods than the dry season. The average humidity level is 89 percent while average wind speed in the area is 11 km/h. A number of mineral resources found in the area include deposits of crude oil and natural gas. The people are known for the cultivation of a variety of crops such as

³*ibid.*

⁴T. N. Tamuno, *The Role of the Police in the Maintenance of Internal Security* (Ibadan: Kuru 1989), p. 67.

⁵*ibid.*

⁶Federal Republic of Nigeria, National Census Commission, Report of 2006 Population Census.

sugarcane, plantain, and oil palm. In pre-colonial era, the area hosted a number of markets where a variety of commodities are exchanged within Ika communities and their neighbour. Important economic activities of the people include fishing and canoe making. A number of indigenous festivals were held in the area like the colourful Akakum festival.⁷

The area displays an attractive variety of landscape and picturesque vegetation. The vegetation of the area falls within the tropical lowland rainforest, although human activities in the form of urbanization, farming, lumbering, firewood harvesting, bush burning, and so on, have affected both the vegetation structure and species abundance. The vegetation of Ika area can best be described as mosaic of derived bushes and farmland. The identified wildlife resources found in the area include antelopes, birds, grass cutter, giant rat, squirrels, lizards, snakes and so on. Diverse forms insects were also found. Palm groves and aerable farmland to rugged valleys on the slopes of gently rolling hills, which offered breathtaking view over the surrounding horizon. The climate of the area can be described as tropical rainy types that receive abundant rainfall with very high temperature. The area is characterized by two principal and distinct seasons: the wet and the dry seasons: the wet or rainy season which lasts for about eight to nine months has a longer duration than the dry or hamattan season. The rainy season usually begins about early to middle March and lasts till the end of November. On the other hand, the dry season starts about the last week in November or early December and lasts till March. Ika land is very rich in economic resources, with rich and fertile landmass, forest reserves, and minerals. It has minerals like clay, palm trees, Iroko tree, among others.

In a bid to trace the origin and migration of the Ika people, efforts were made on the Ibibio and Annang, as have been shown in several works.⁸ The origin and migration of the people generally point to the Central Benue region, the cradle land of Bantu expansion to the Cameroons, before migrating to Nigeria area through different route or corridors, as claimed by different groups.⁹ Their migration was generally triggered by many factors such as population explosion, natural disasters, conflicts and the search for land, among others. According to Ukpong, upon leaving the Central Benue valley and migrating southwards through the forests, the Ibibio and Annang settled in Usak Edet in the Cameroon side of the Nigeria-Cameroon border. From Usak Edet region in the Cameroon, the people seemed to have migrated to their present abode through three major directions.

Abasiattai rendered that there were some groups who reached Nigeria perhaps by an overland route and settled at Ibom in Arochukwu where they established the famous shrine known as the Long Juju of Arochukwu.¹⁰ Ukpong pointed that there were other Ibibio groups who reached

⁷A. U. Emmanuel, and M. A. Ukpe, Managing of Communal Conflicts in Akwa Ibom State of Nigeria: A Case Study of Etim Ekpo and Ika Local Government Areas. *International Journal of Research in Education, Science and Technology*, 3(1) (2021): 46 – 55.

⁸The following studies are made by renowned Ibibio scholars for Ibibio people. E. U. Udo, *Who are the Ibibio*. Onitsha: Africana Publishers Limited, 1983; E. Ukpong, The Origin, Migration of the Ibibio People, (Part One), *Ibom Journal of History and International Studies*, 8, 1999; E. E. Ekong, *Sociology of the Ibibio People*. Uyo, Modern Business Press Limited, 2001; Uwen Jonah Akpan, *Akwa Ibom and Her Neighbours: A Study of Regional Diplomacy Since the Pre-colonial Period*, Uyo: Quincy Kings Resources Limited, 2018; Uwen Jonah Akpan, *Ikono: The Cradle of Ibibio Nations: A Refutation*, Uyo: Heritage Preservation Foundation, 2019; M. B. Abasiattai, "The Ibibio: An Outline History – 1960," *The Ibibio: An Introduction to the Land, the People and their Culture*. Calabar: Alphonsus Akpan, 1991.

⁹Uwen Akpan have carried an extensive work to identified scholars who have poured their view on the issue and it can be found in Uwen Jonah Akpan, *Akwa Ibom and her Neighbours: A Study of Regional Diplomacy Since the Pre-colonial Period*, Uyo: Quincy Kings Resources Limited, 2018, p. 6. Uwen Jonah Akpan, *Ikono: The Cradle of Ibibio Nations: A Refutation*, Uyo: Heritage Preservation Foundation, 2019, pp 8 -62.

¹⁰M. B. Abasiattai, "The Ibibio: An Outline History – 1960," *The Ibibio: An Introduction to the Land, the People and their Culture*. Calabar: Alphonsus Akpan, 1991.

mainland by sea through Eket, Oron and Ibeno axis, while the third batch of migrants were believed to have reached the present-day Akwa Ibom through Usak-Uruan corridor. However, in considering the proximity of the Ika area to the latter group mentioned in the former account, it could be purported that some groups in Ika may have migrated from the Arochukwu route which led to the migration of Annang sub-group.

This buttresses the fact that, Ika people migrated from Usak Edet along with the rest of Ibibio-Annang migration bands. While at Usak Edet, the Ibibio-Annang people were known as Afaha and Usak Edet was known as Edik Afaha (Afaha Creek).¹¹ Akpan further submitted that the Ibibio-Annang people had been gradually migrating in trickles over the centuries and through variety of routes, settled in various parts of Ibibio-Annang land.¹² It is within this last submission that the Ika narratives tend to make its revelation.

Also, a transient information on Ika migration was provided by Edet Akpan Udo¹³ who noted that the Ibibio-speaking people belong to the semi-Bantu stock whose cradle land has been located in the Central Benue Valley, to the Cameroon area southwestwards through the equatorial rainforest to Savannah grassland. They reached Ibom, now in Arochukwu, and later Itu in modern Ibibio land. From Itu they fanned out to form the modern Northern Ibibio or Enyong (Itu Mbonuso) and Nkari and southwards to an area around Uyo Government Station where they settled in Ikono clan,¹⁴ from which further movement was made by the people leading to the settlement of several Ibibio-Annang communities.

Uwem Akpan noted that, during the period of movement of the Ibibio people, several large centres of concentrated Ibibio populations emerged, known as *Ibom*, where the various Ibibio groups lived. One of such *Ibom* was reported in the Oban forest, being the Eastern Ibibio migration route. Another *Ibom* was located in the present-day Arochukwu district to include Usak Edet, Ikot Oku Ikono and Ibeno districts, which grew on the Ibom-settlement principle.¹⁵ It is assumed that the origin and migration of the present-day Annang communities, including Ika communities, took off from the *Ibom* located at Ikot Oku Ikono district. Abasattai submitted that the dispersal of this group of Ibibio from this *Ibom* may have been expedited by the Ibo-Ibibio War. Thus, he stated:

The subsequent migration of new waves of Ibibio into the mainland following the war caused further pressure on Ibibio peoples already concentrated in the Ikot Oku Ikono district and in turn triggered massive dispersal from this district in all directions over the Ibibio mainland.¹⁶

Uwem Akpan confirms that Ikot Oku Ikono is situated between Abak and Uyo and surrounded by a ring of villages, each of them the parent of a group of Ibibio villages such as Iman, Nsit, Etoi, Offot, Ibiono, Oku, Itak, among others, is the dispersal centre of Ibibio.¹⁷

Socio-Political Institutions and Policing Initiatives in Pre-colonial Ika Society

The idea of policing has been an age-long practice with some traditional institutions in control of its structure and operations. A socio-political institution implies all practices and activities involved

¹¹*ibid.*

¹²Uwem Jonah Akpan, *Akwa Ibom and Her Neighbours: A Study of Regional Diplomacy Since the Pre-colonial Period.*, p. 10

¹³*ibid.*

¹⁴Edet Akpan Udo as cited in Uwem Jonah Akpan, *Ikono: The Cradle of Ibibio Nations: A Refutation*, pp. 12-13.

¹⁵Uwem Jonah Akpan, *Ikono: The Cradle of Ibibio Nations: A Refutation*, pp. 18-19.

¹⁶M. B. Abasattai cited in Uwem Jonah Akpan, *Ikono: The Cradle of Ibibio Nations: A Refutation*, p. 27

¹⁷Uwem Akpan agrees with G.I. Jones and C. C. Ifemesia who made this suggestion. In Uwem Jonah Akpan, *Ikono: The Cradle of Ibibio Nations: A Refutation*, p. 27

in the administrative management of a society.¹⁸ It also includes setting out laws for members, and how such laws were enforced. The main focus will be on the socio-political institutions found in the pre-colonial Ika society; however, some of these institutions transcended beyond the pre-colonial era. The most important aspect of these institutions were their involvement in policing the community, especially in playing judicial role in the community and prosecuting offenders of the customs and traditions of the land.

Ika people operated a "stateless society" which was organized on the segmentary, unilineal principles. Ekong described a stateless society as one which lacks a centralized system of political organization with a king.¹⁹ Noah observed that the configuration of Ibibio, of which Ika clan formed a microcosm, was anchored on gerontocracy.²⁰ He stressed that age was synonymous with wisdom, knowledge of tradition and close affinity with the ancestors and gods.

Political organization among the Ika people was based on social structure and it consisted of six divisions which include: *idip*, *ufok*, *ekpuk*, *idung*, *oduuk*, *ikpaisong*. The traditional political structure begins with the unit – *idip* (family) which was made up of the husband, his wife or wives, and his children who lived in his compound and depended on his support. The father and husband served as the political head. He, together with his senior wife and his eldest son, formed an irregular or *ad-hoc* council that tried cases (including domestic, marital and land conflict) which arose among members of the *idip* (family).

The *ufok* among the Ika people was the sub-division of an extended family. This unit consists of various *idip*, arising from common father or progenitor. Usually, the oldest man among the members was the head and bore the title of *obong ufok* (head of the house). This position was determined according to the principle of seniority. The head of *ufok* together with other members formed the *esop ufok* (council) that met occasionally. The judicial function mainly involved the settlement of dispute between members of the family, especially civil matters.²¹

Ekpuk (literally knot) among the Ika people was the third unit in the hierarchy. This unit was made up of a number of *ufok* (extended families). The oldest man in each *ekpuk* was the head, who bore the title of *obong ekpuk* (lineage head). The *obong ekpuk*, together with the head of the *idip* *ete* and intelligent men in the *ekpuk*, formed the *esop ekpuk* (ekpuk council) that met regularly as the need arose. The council met for political, social and economic reasons. According to Akpan, in time past, no dispute, no matter its magnitude was permitted to be taken to the *afe idung* (village council), without being first tried by the members of the lineage, which was a semi-governmental institution.²² It was also, the responsibility of the council to share farmlands to the adult male members of the *ekpuk*. The lineage head (*obong ekpuk*) kept the *nkuku ekpo* (ancestral shrine), a role which gives him a religious status. *Ekpuk* was the highest political administrative unit of each lineage (extended family), and the lowest in the rank only to the village. Related *ekpuk* constituted the *idung* (village). *Ekpuk* heads or their representations form the village council.

The *idung* (village) was the fourth political unit in the Ika clan, which was made up of a collection of *ekpuk* (lineages). Each village was believed to have been founded by an ancestor or group of ancestors. Later on, the lineage of the founder multiplied and became patrilineages which became *ekpuk* (extended families). The members of families that constituted the village varied from village to village. However, one of the families was usually regarded as the senior of the rest of the families because members could trace their descent to the founder and the first settler of the village and carried the title of *obong idung*.

¹⁸Uwem J. Akpan. *Akwa Ibom and Her Neighbours: A Study of Regional Diplomacy Since the Pre-colonial Period*, p. 65.

¹⁹E. E. Ekong, *Sociology of the Ibibio: A Study of Social Organization and Change* (Uyo: Modern Business Press, 2001), p. 155

²⁰M. E. Noah, *Ibibio Pioneers in Modern Nigerian History* (Uyo: Scholars Press, 1980), pp. 5-6

²¹Uwem J. Akpan. *Akwa Ibom and Her Neighbours: A Study of Regional Diplomacy Since the Pre-colonial Period...*

²²*ibid.*

The *obong idung* (village head) presided over the *esop idung*. There was no separation of powers in customary law. According to Akpan, the three principal functions of government were legislative, executive and judicial functions which were usually performed by the *obong idung*.²³ The village head sat with his council of elders at *esop idung*. The position of the village head was monarchical and the village head had to come from a founder or ruling family. The village head council played crucial role in the administration of the village.

Beyond the village, was the *oduk* (sub-clan), the fifth political division in Nkwot clan and of course other Ibibio communities. In each *ikpaisong* (clan), there were two or more *Oduk*. The Ika people like other Annang groups believed that each *ikpaisong* started with one man – the founder of such clan. If three or four sons of the founder moved out of the parent village and founded their own villages away from the parent's village, these new villages formed the nuclei of modern village groups in the clan. All the villages belonging to the *oduk* recognized the first village in the clan that was founded by their father as being the head of the *oduk*. The *obong oduk*, together with other well-meaning members, village group council, settled disputes between member villages in the group and punished wrong doers. Appeals from villages of the group were heard and matters affecting the group were discussed and if no agreement was reached, such matters were referred to the clan council.

The sixth and the last political and administrative division of Annang in Ika was the *ikpaisong* (clan). It was referred to as a collection of *oduk*. The *ikpaisong* had its totem or totems, peculiar deities and symbols. In the pre-colonial times, *ikpaisong* organized a common defence against external aggressors and acknowledge common political, social and economic codes of ethics. At the helm of affairs of *ikpaisong* was the *obong ikpaisong*. Beyond family structure, Ika community featured a lot of socio-political institutions which were very significant to the lives of the people. These institutions were of numerous types with their own laid down rules and regulations guiding their members. Such institutions existed for the men, women and youths. They include: *ekpo*, *idiong*, *ekpri akata*, *atat*, *ebre*, and *mbopo*, to mention but a few.²⁴ Secret societies in Ika played a lot of roles, including assisting in stabilizing community life. These societies were not secret in the sense of crime syndicate or under-world organizations, they were secret in the sense that they had certain rights, rituals and ceremonies which were exclusively limited to and practiced only by their members or initiates. Some of their rituals and ceremonies were even unknown to non-members and were not performed in their presence.²⁵

Policing and the *Ekpo Nyoho*

As an instrument of community policing and social control, all laws of the Ika people were passed and enforced by the authority of *ekpo*. By implication, the *Ekpo* played a crucial role in community policing. The institution was also adopted as a social mechanism for the administration of justice. *Ekpo* checked crimes such as stealing, adultery, prostitution and murder. Ika people ridiculed deviants against the norms of the society and had words of praise for illustrious members of the community.²⁶ In Ika people, *Ekpo Nyoho* was used as an agent for the collection of fines and debts from stubborn persons in the community. In times of war, it was the duty of the members of the *ekpo* to fight for the village or clan under the command of the village head who was mandatorily an initiate of *ekpo*. Dictatorship in politics was unthinkable because of the in-built machinery for the division of power.

²³*ibid.*

²⁴*ibid.*

²⁵*ibid.*

²⁶John O. Udom, 64 years, Resident Ito clan, at his Residence, Ika Local Government Area, 26 September, 2024.

Policing and the *Idiong* Society

The *idiong* cult was a secret society of diviners which operated throughout Ika land and its environs, and its members were viewed as a “guild of seers.” It played an important role in community policing. In the pre-colonial period, *idiong* served not only a social function but also performed some critical political functions. The society provided the most powerful means of checking crimes and its drastic measures against offenders helped in reducing crimes like witchcraft, murder and stealing and so on. It operated as a governing council of the villages and was the most revered of all the secret social institutions in every Ika community. The authority of the society was felt everywhere and its decisions were binding. While *ekpo* acted as an instrument for the execution of policies, *idiong* cult served as the decision-making body, although the clan also had the means of executing its decisions. The authority of the society came to overshadow the powers of the village heads during the pre-colonial period.²⁷

Policing and the *Ekpri Akata*

The *Ekpri Akata* played the role of the Spy police and surveillance patrol team. In Ika community, *Ekpri Akata* as a spy and surveillance agent watched over the community and was founded long ago before the advent of Christianity and colonialism. *Ekpri Akata* in the modern sense existed as the village secret agent in Ika community and was regarded by everybody as a ghost that came to the earth in the night.²⁸ Whatever crimes people committed in secret each year, *Ekpri akata* would reveal to everyone in the village. It served as an investigator. For example, on such nights *ekpri akata* would investigate and reveal to everyone in the village by mentioning the names of all thieves, what they had stolen and from whom. Also, *ekpri akata* would expose all the women and men who committed adultery. Since *ekpri akata* was regarded as a ghost, its story or information was regarded as being true.²⁹ No one could take action in village court against it because soon after giving out its information, it vanished and no one could touch or handle “a ghost.”³⁰ However, the accused person could prove his or her innocence of the charges made by the *ekpri akata* through oath-taking before everyone at the village square. *Ekpri akata* was the “ghost” or messenger of the deity of the land. Ika people forbade murder, secret poisoning of other people and habitual theft among others as instructed by the Supreme God.

Age Grades and Gender-based Groups in Ika

The term “age group” is used in most parts of Africa to describe a set of people born around the same period or within a period of two years of each other and membership of the group was for life, unless one was expelled on grounds of misdemeanour. Each age group had its own codes of conduct and also served as a handy unit for the division of communal labour. In the pre-colonial era, every member of Ika community knew members of his age grade in various fields of activity. Ika people were very conscious of their social status, arising from their ages, hence, in some Ika communities there were in most cases, 4-5 age grades. Also, for the purpose of identification, such age grade had a name. In addition, each grade in Ika communities had a code of conduct and its own symbol,³¹ in the form of a modern flag. The names of the age grades varied from village to place and reflected its functions, aspirations, age, behaviour patterns, and moral code. The age grade in Ika community also provided mutual assistance to members in times of need.³² For instance, if a particular member was in need of a wife, his colleagues engaged themselves in looking

²⁷Uwem J. Akpan, Law and Public Governance in the Ibibio Traditional Society, pp. 1-12.

²⁸*ibid.*

²⁹*ibid.*

³⁰John O. Udom, 64 years, Resident Ito clan, at his Residence, Ika Local Government Area, 26 September, 2024.

³¹Stephen Mathew Ekpo, 76 Years, Ikananang Odoro clan, IkaLocal Government Area, 22 January, 2025.

³²Essien Umo, 50 years, Achan Clan, at his residence, Ika Local Government Area, 26 January, 2025.

for a suitable girl or woman for him to marry and also contributed money to support their colleague.³³

Also, a particular age grade took charge of musical entertainment on the day of the marriage. Members of a particular age grade performed reciprocal labour services to their members in turn. Women assisted such as weeding in the farm as well as planting crops. The men assisted their members in clearing bush for farming and in planting of crops. Men assisted their members in clearing bushes for farming and planting of crops, such as yam, building of houses and fences around compounds. The age grade was some sort of an educational institution to its members because it inculcated in each member the pattern of behaviour of a particular society. Within the age grade, each member learnt to engage in activities such as climbing of oil palm trees to harvest the fruits, swimming, entrapping of animals and fishing while others members also got engaged in physical exercises such as wrestling. In the olden days, it should be noted, wrestling was an important sporting activity that attracted many spectators.³⁴

Women's Efforts and Policing Initiatives

Apart from grouping the population on age basis, Ika people had a number of social organizations based on sex and differentiations. Among these, all female groups were very important and included groups like, *ebre*, *iban ison-esit* (strong-willed, hard-hearted women), *iban isong idung* (women of the land), *assian ubo ikpa*, *ndok ufok ebe* and so on. These social groups played very important roles in moral education, legal, mutual aid and preservation of the rights of the female sex.

The Judicial Process in Pre-colonial Ika: The *Mbiam*

Mbiam (weirdly referred to as juju), on which Ika people swore, was an important instrument for policing the community and social control in the pre-colonial Ika society. The success of the traditional system depended to a greater extent on belief in the potency of *mbiam*. Before the spread of Christianity, *mbiam* was commonly accepted by most Ika people and to this extent, the bribing of judges and pervasion of justice were rare because, beside asking the accused to declare himself innocent of the crime, members of the family were asked in cases of doubt, to swear in such a way that the penalty inflicted by *mbiam* might extend to the whole family, if they swore falsely.³⁵ In most cases, the whole family preferred declaring the accused guilty and paying the fine or fines imposed on him, to swearing to *mbiam*, when they knew that *mbiam* would kill them too.

Every village in Ika faced the task of getting individuals and groups to adhere to the normative behaviours and standards of any group they belong. As noted earlier, in the traditional Ika community and in larger Annang society, raw physical force exercised by *ekpo* was one of the means of checking deviant behaviours.³⁶ *Mbiam* being a magically potent object used in oath taking and in fortifying one's property against thieves, had the supernatural ability to detect the innocent and the guilty as well as punish the offender through such ailments as whooping cough, paralysis, dysentery and death. *Mbiam* could be liquid, sacred drum, certain leaves, human blood.³⁷

In Ika community, there were three ways in which *mbiam* was used. These were property fortification, settlement of disputes and determination of innocence and guilt. Since the belief in witchcraft remained strong, accusations and suspicion continued unabated. Under this situation, *mbiam* played a very important role in detecting witches and punishing them. Often, a house with roof was built and all the bottles and other containers of *mbiam* were stored there. Certain

³³*ibid.*

³⁴E. Ukpong, "The Origin Migration of the Ibibio People..."

³⁵Stephen Mathew Ekpo, 76 Years, Resident of Ikananang Odoro clan, Ika Local Government Area, 22 January, 2025.

³⁶Edet Okoko, 50 years, Family Head, Nung Eyio village, at his Residence, Ika Local Government Area, 8 February, 2025.

³⁷Uwem Jonah Akpan, Law and Public Governance in the Ibibio Traditional Society...

observances, for example, sacrifices, requiring egg, chicken, goat, ram and so on were made at the appearance of the new moon. Other observances included forbidding menstruating women and parents of twins from passing near *mbiam* house, the practice varied from *mbiam* to *mbiam*. In some places, a priest of *mbiam* was required to carry out the ritual as a full-time job. In the past, human beings were sacrificed to certain *mbiam* at intervals of every three, seven or twelve years, thus, a typical *mbiam* house was littered with human skulls. At times, it was a requirement that when *mbiam* kills the culprit he or she must be beheaded. Some skulls were attached to the bottles containing the *mbiam*; a very frightful sight.³⁸

One way to demonstrate one's innocence if accused of being a witchcraft, was by swearing on *mbiam* as the accuser must provide the *mbiam* to be taken by the accused after he approached the person or family believed to have the most lethal type of *mbiam* and paid the required fees. On the appointed day, the *mbiam* was brought to an agreed place and usually, sacrifices were performed before the accused took the oath. Often, the owner of the *mbiam* was given another *Mbiam* to swear that he would not trick the accuser by secretly neutralizing the *mbiam* upon the receipt of bribe from the accused and also that the *mbiam* he brought was the real one. Certain *mbiam* required that the accused should stand naked during the swearing, and this was always religiously complied with.³⁹

In Ika, certain *mbiam*, like *mbiam Nko*, forbade people to eat any overnight food. The accused was provided with the statement that he or she uttered before the *mbiam* while a small quantity of *mbiam* (in case of liquid) was placed in a cup, often a calabash or gourd, and the accused drank it.⁴⁰ Once the accused had taken it without suffering ill effects, he or she was cleared of the accusation, hence the general belief in the potency of *mbiam*. So, before the accused took the oath, he or she was exhaustively interrogated by close relatives and friends, and urged to confess if indeed he or she was guilty. This interrogation became very necessary when the accuser demanded that the accused also ask the *mbiam* to kill other members of his or her own family.⁴¹

Ukang Judicial Instrument

As noted above, among the Ika people were several cults used in governance, combating crimes and maintaining the general harmonious and peaceful co-existence. Such cults include: *Ekpe*, *Ekpo*, *Ekong*, *Idiong*, *Ukang*, *Mbiam* and *Iman*. Among the greatest instrument of crime control was *Ukang* (trial by ordeal). *Ukang* is a traditional and religious ritual used in uncovering, revealing and discovering and other criminals. *Ukang* is widely used in detecting crime and it was believed that miscarriage of justice rarely occurred.

There are many types of *Ukang* among the Ika people: they are *Ukang ufiop aran* (ordeal of hot boiling oil), *Ukang nsen unen* (ordeal of egg), *Ukang ikpa unam* (ordeal of animal skin), *Ukang uyetenyin* (eye-washing ordeal), *Ukang ntuen ibok* (ordeal of the alligator pepper), *Ukang Okok* (bamboo ordeal), *Ukang akpe eyop* (ordeal of palm fruit fibres) and *Ukang ndam* (ordeal of raffia). *Ukang* was a direct appeal to the spiritual beings to show by miracle where the right lay. *Ukang* has religious sanction.

Ukang is an important instrument of crime control among the Ika people to keep to one order. This was one form of social justice and crime control in the area. The basic principle here is that if a person was guilty, evil will befall him according to the words used in administering the *Ukang*. There is no doubt that among the Ika people that the traditional institution of *Ukang* was effective

³⁸*ibid.*

³⁹E. Ukpong. The Origin, Migration of the Ibibio People, (Part One), *Ibom Journal of History and International Studies*, Vol. 8 (1999).

⁴⁰Edet Okoko, 50 years, Family Head, Nung Eyio village, at his Residence, Ika Local Government Area, 8 February, 2025.

⁴¹*ibid.*

instrument of crime control, restoring trust, fidelity, establishing the truth or falsehood of what people say especially on disputed issues and doubtful circumstance.⁴²

Ukang was one form of traditional instrument of crime control in Ika land administered through the use of metaphysical or mystical powers to discover hidden secrets. *Ukang* was feared much in Ika this fear contributed immensely to crime control. According to J. S. Mbiti supported above explanation when he observed that:

The gods are the most reliable beings and also the powers that are capable of vindicating the just and expose as well as punish the wicked. As custodians of morality, justice and sincerity, the ancestors, divinities and other spiritual beings are fellow man. The belief is that God or some of their higher beings greater than man will punish the person who swears falsely or break the stipulations of the oath, agreement or statement.⁴³

Ukang played significant role in the control of crime in Ika land. It prevented the wicked acts among the people because no matter how secret a particular crime was, it must be discovered and the defaulters or culprit would be brought to "book" or punished according to the laws of the land.

The fear of *Ukang* was the driving force in the maintenance of a high level of morality by doing what was right, good and moral and avoiding what was evil or wrong. People in Ika feared being exposed through the instrumentality of *Ukang*. *Ukang*, therefore was potent in social control. *Ukang* was an effective traditional instrument used by the people to discover the truth of a matter, discover hidden secret and to cast away doubt with reference to the validity and reliability of a statement or accusation in any circumstances. According to Ekong,⁴⁴ because of the awe it created in the minds of the people, many people in Ika shunned or avoided embarking on any criminal activity. However, it appeared that *Ukang* was usually used as the last resort when other avenues of crime detection have failed to achieve the desired result.⁴⁵ The *Ukang* ordeals were very mysterious, often full of dreadful processes that cannot be scientifically proven. Essien therefore concludes that *Ukang* and many other ordeal methods in Ika society had their root in the people's religious worldview.⁴⁶

Ukang provided the norms and standards of behaviour for the people and checks criminal activities on the part of the people and the rulers as they guaranteed the existence and enforcement of the traditional law, morality and ethics. The fear and belief in *Ukang* helped the people to maintain high moral standard and strengthened cordial relationship between God (Supreme Being, *Abasi Ibom*) and man as well as between humans. With the practice of *Ukang*, people in Ika were deterred from committing crimes in the community because of the fear of supernatural punishment. *Ukang* provided check and balance which regulates and put the Ika people on a steady economic, political, social, cultural and religious balance responsible for stability and meaningful government.⁴⁷ The mere mentioning of the word *Ukang* automatically called the people to order and direct their actions.

Challenges of Insecurity and Crime in Modern Ika LGA

The issues of insecurity in present day Ika are multiple, ranging between violent and peaceful protests, sea piracy, cultism, land, and communal disputes, disputes over royalties (chieftaincy) accrued from mineral deposits/oil, armed violence such as kidnapping, tussle over the headship of natural resources (e.g., oil and gas), environmental disputes over ownership of lands where oil well

⁴²I. G. Ekong, "Ukang-Trial of Ordeal in Annang Traditional Society (kot Ekpene: Unpublished Seminar Paper, 2009)

⁴³J. S. Mbiti, *Africa Traditional Religion and Philosophy* (London: Heinmann Educational Book Ltd, 1969), 205-211

⁴⁴I. G. Ekong, "Ukang-Trial of Ordeal in Annang Traditional Society..."

⁴⁵E. U. Udo, *Who are the Ibibio...*

⁴⁶*ibid.*

⁴⁷*ibid.*

are located, as well as projects location/site among others.⁴⁸ The extent of inhumanity, sophisticated weapons, and conflation of interests in the conflict combined to make it a very complex one. This calls for a specific analysis of the trends, patterns, and actors at the micro and macro contexts.

As an area with large deposits of crude oil, condensate, and gas, which made it an economic hub of the state, the conflict had dire implications for the economy and security which underscored the need for a broad-based multi-dimensional approach in responding to it. A major consequence of this is the availability of a mass pool of youths who can be easily and spontaneously be mobilized for acts inimical to public peace and safety. The massive unemployment situation of these youths further placed them in a situation of precocity and proneness to violence either armed or unarmed.⁴⁹

According to the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA), human security is a people-centered, comprehensive, context-dependent, prevention-oriented approach to strengthening and empowering people. Typically, human security views everything as being capable of affecting and influencing human dignity, and freedoms and, therefore, requires deliberate efforts to achieve and protect.⁵⁰

In its broadest formulation, the term security goes well beyond military considerations and security can be understood as a defense against external (or internal) threats as well as the overall socio-economic well-being of a society and the individuals who compose it. Human security can also be seen as being the protection from hidden and hurtful disruptions in the daily activities, at home, offices, or communities. That is, it is a state of being safe or secured from danger and it is the absence of the threat to peace, stability and national cohesion, as well as the political and economic objectives of a country.⁵¹ Human security is focused on "identifying and addressing widespread and cross-cutting challenges to the survival, livelihood, and dignity of their people.

Ika local government area was prone to criminal activities such as housebreakings, armed robbery, stock thefts, rape, electoral and political crimes, among others. Ika local government area was caught in the web of crime dilemma, manifesting in the convulsive upsurge of both violent and non-violent crimes.⁵² Notable in this regard were the rising incidents of armed robbery, assassination and ransom-driven kidnapping, electoral crimes, which were ravaging the polity like a tsunami and spreading a climate of fears and anxieties about public safety.

The upsurge of crime was blossoming as the area was on the global crime map from 1996. These throes of crime for decades were traceable to poverty, poor parental upbringing, and greed amongst the youth, get rich quick syndrome, inadequate crime control model of national security among others. Record shows that the spate of crime assumed a debilitating proportion and required the intervention of policy makers in this regard. According to John Effiong, crime in the area portrayed the inability of government to provide a secure and safe environment for lives, properties and the conduct of economic activities considering the alarming increase in criminal activities in the area such as armed robbery, terrorism and other related crimes.⁵³ According to the *Nigeria Crime Watch* crime such as armed robbery, cultism, kidnapping, rape, domestic violence, assassination,

⁴⁸U. Isreal, 'Community Policing Strategies in Akwa Ibom State, 1999 -2019,' *International Journal of History and Philosophical Research*, Vol. 9, No. 3 (2021), pp. 9 – 27.

⁴⁹B. Mayer, *The Dynamics of Conflict Resolution: A Practioner's Guide* (Lagos: Longman Books Limited, 2010).

⁵⁰C. C. Mezie-Okoye, and J. D. Denis, "Crime, Community Policing and Social Disorder in Ikot Ekpene Local Government Area of Akwa Ibom State," *International Journal of Management, Social Sciences, Peace and Conflict Studies (IJMSSPCS)*, Vol. 6, No. 1 (2023), pp. 121- 128.

⁵¹C. O. Kwuelum, "Dialogue as a Peace Building Panacea for Social Cohesion and National Reconstruction in Conflict affect context: A retrospect of Nigeria," *Journal of Sustainable Development* Vol. 5, No. 6 (2014), pp. 250 - 255.

⁵²The Police Public Relation Officer, DSP. Timfon John, 40 Police headquarters, Ikot Akpan Abia, Uyo, 8th March, 2025.

⁵³The Police Public Relation Officer, DSP. Timfon John, 40 Police headquarters, Ikot Akpan Abia, Uyo, 8th March, 2025.

thuggery and hooliganism were recorded for Akwa Ibom State for which Ika local government area constituted 45 percent rate of the crime,⁵⁴

Other prevalent crimes in Ika local government area were electoral related crimes. According to reports by the United States Agency on International Development (USAID), electoral related crimes constituted 35 percent of the total crime index in Nigeria, and Ika local government area constituted 12 percent of Akwa Ibom State crime index.⁵⁵ These crimes included, rising political violence, illicit channeling of public funds into party activities, undemocratic internal governance of the political parties stifling genuine intra-party competition, snatching of ballot boxes, buying of votes by politicians, increased intimidation of the media and harassment of political opponents, among others.

Consequently, community policing model in Ika local government area as adopted by the Nigeria Police Force (NPF) in its pilot Divisions successfully integrated many policing concepts (including traditional approaches) into a fully functioning model of community policing, including the policing excellence model, neighbourhood policing, intelligence-led policing, conflict prevention; and student-centered problem-solving training approaches. NPF personnel who were trained in community policing proactively acted beyond simple crime fighting and law enforcement. They relied on the community, decentralized to the neighbourhood level to be more accessible, maintained contact and co-operation with their communities, engaged in tactics to target specific problems identified by the whole community, worked in partnership with other public and private organizations and continually evaluated and adapted their strategies.

Conclusion

Crime is an integral part of human society; consequently, every society craves to bring crime under control, leading to the creation of different mechanisms for crime control. By implication, every society has its own means of controlling the social behaviour in order to maintain peace. Among the most successful checks on crime were those stemming from traditional and informal social mechanisms, superstition, taboos, religions, customs, shared values and moral standards; thus, approaches provided, among other things, the technique by which those with the intention to commit crime or those found guilty of acts prohibited by the society were punished.

In pre-colonial Ika in Akwa Ibom State, several policing and judicial system were devised for such purpose. The paper notes that the use of traditional policing and judicial mechanisms in the control of crime was effective in pre-colonial era. Ika people had a variety of models and approach to control crime prior to the creation of the colonial pattern of crime control, through certain institutions such as the extended family system, the lineage system, the age grade system, women societies, religious and other social groups, ancestral cults, and spirit cults, divination, ordeals, secret societies, among others, whose functions were detection, resolution and punishment for offenses.

However, British colonialism battered, disorganized and even dismantled this mechanism, leading to the increase in rate. Colonial administration and its attendant post-colonial administration in Ika area brought about the emergence of a modern police force as an organ of the state for crime control, with its vast bureaucracies anchored on centralization, hierarchical authority/power structure and professional staff. It is this emergence of the state as an entity which resulted into the creation of specialized agencies such as the police and the armed forces for controlling the use of violence and crimes. It appears the introduction of Western institutions of governance among other forces of globalization left many challenges on the pre-colonial policing institutions and judicial mechanisms of crime control which had effectively served the same purpose among the Ika people.

⁵⁴Nigeria Watch Database on Fatal Crimes in Nigeria by Nigeria watch <http://nigeriawatch.org/media/html/Ukoji2016.pdf>

⁵⁵United States Agency on International Development (USAID), Democracy and Governance Assessment of Nigeria, Center for Democracy and Governance, 2016., p.14.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Abasiattai, M. B., "The Ibibio: An Outline History – 1960," *The Ibibio: An Introduction to the Land, the People and their Culture*. Calabar: Alphonsus Akpan, 1991.
- Abasiattai, M. B., "The Ibibio: An Outline History – 1960," *The Ibibio: An Introduction to the Land, the People and their Culture*. Calabar: Alphonsus Akpan, 1991.
- Akpan, U. J., *Akwa Ibom and Her Neighbours: A Study of Regional Diplomacy Since the Pre-colonial Period*, Uyo: Quincy Kings Resources Limited, 2018.
- Akpan, U. J., *Ikono: The Cradle of Ibibio Nations: A Refutation*, Uyo: Heritage Preservation Foundation, 2019.
- Alemika, E. E. O., "Colonialism, State and Policing in Nigeria." *Crime, Law and Social Change*, Vol. 20 (1993), pp. 189 -219.
- Ekong, E. E., *Sociology of the Ibibio: A Study of Social Organization and Change*, Uyo: Modern Business Press, 2001.
- Ekong, I. G., *Ukang-Trial of Ordeal in Annang Traditional Society*, Ikot Ekpene: Unpublished Seminar Paper, 2009.
- Ekpo, S. M., 76 Years, Ikananang Odoro clan, Ika Local Government Area, 22 January, 2025.
- Emmanuel, A. U. and Ukpe, M. A. Managing of Communal Conflicts in Akwa Ibom State of Nigeria: A Case Study of Etim Ekpo and Ika Local Government Areas. *International Journal of Research in Education, Science and Technology*, 3(1) (2021): 46 – 55.
- Federal Republic of Nigeria, National Census Commission, Report of 2006 Population Census.
- Isreal, U. 'Community Policing Strategies in Akwa Ibom State, 1999 -2019,' *International Journal of History and Philosophical Research*, Vol. 9, No. 3 (2021), pp. 9 – 27.
- Kwuelum, C. O., "Dialogue as a Peace Building Panacea for Social Cohesion and National Reconstruction in Conflict affect context: A retrospect of Nigeria," *Journal of Sustainable Development* Vol. 5, No. 6 (2014), pp. 250 - 255.
- Mayer, B., *The Dynamics of Conflict Resolution: A Practioner's Guide* (Lagos: Longman Books Limited, 2010).
- Mbiti, J. S., *Africa Traditiona Religion and Philosophy*, London: Heinmann Educational Boo Ltd, 1969.
- Mezie-Okoye, C. C., and Denis, J. D., "Crime, Community Policing and Social Disorder in Ikot Ekpene Local Government Area of Akwa Ibom State," *International Journal of Management, Social Sciences, Peace and Conflict Studies (IJMSSPCS)*, Vol. 6, No. 1 (2023), pp. 121- 128.
- Nigeria Watch Database on Fatal Crimes in Nigeria by Nigeria watch
<http://nigeriawatch.org/media/html/Ukoji2016.pdf>
- Noah, M. E., *Ibibio Pioneers in Modern Nigerian History*, Uyo: Scholars Press, 1980.

Okoko, E., 50 years, Family Head, Nung Eyio village, at his Residence, Ika Local Government Area, 8 February, 2025.

Tamuno, T. N., *Police in Modern Nigeria*, Ibadan: University of Ibadan Press, 1970.

Tamuno, T. N., *The Role of the Police in the Maintenance of Internal Security*, Ibadan: Kuru 1989.

The Police Public Relation Officer, DSP. Timfon John, 40 Police headquarters, Ikot Akpan Abia, Uyo, 8th March, 2025.

Udo, E. U., *Who are the Ibibio*. Onitsha: Africana Publishers Limited, 1983.

Udom, J. O., 64 years, Resident Ito clan, at his Residence, Ika Local Government Area, 26 September, 2024.

Udom, J. O., 64 years, Resident Ito clan, at his Residence, Ika Local Government Area, 26 September, 2024.

Ukpong, E., The Origin, Migration of the Ibibio People, (Part One), *Ibom Journal of History and International Studies*, Vol. 8 (1999).

Umo, E., 50 years, Achan Clan, at his residence, Ika Local Government Area, 26 January, 2025.

United States Agency on International Development (USAID), Democracy and Governance Assessment of Nigeria, Center for Democracy and Governance, 2016., p.14.