

## **THE EFFECTIVENESS OF MBIAM (TRADITIONAL CONCOCTED OATH) IN CONFLICT MANAGEMENT IN IBIBIO TRADITIONAL SOCIETY**

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### **Abstract**

*This work examines the effectiveness of mbiam (oath) in conflict management in Ibibio traditional society. It is important to note that conflict is a social problem that is difficult to stop as far as human beings exists. Hardly, does any society exist without some form of conflict; it is a necessary ingredient of human existence; hence, any human society there is bound to be conflict of many sorts. Due to the prevalence of conflicts, social vices such as stealing, dishonesty, falsehood, etc and the inability for the modern system of law enforcement to combat issues, mbiam, the traditional concocted oath has therefore, been utilised as a mechanism, a traditional religious instrument to combat and address these social ills in the traditional society even if it is imperfectly done with its associated dangers. Significantly, the rationale behind this study reveals why conflict and the need of utilising mbiam, Ibibio traditional concocted oath for conflict management and the sustenance of peace in a traditional society. The work employed survey method, and it is revealed that the fear of mbiam among Ibibio traditional society even in the contemporary scare the people from intense conflicts and instill truth telling, orderliness in the lives of the populace. The work recommends that though mbiam is an effective mechanism in conflict management in Ibibio traditional society, it should not be used in all cases, and whenever it is instituted, high precautionary measures should be taken to avoid excessive harm among the populace.*

**Keywords: Effectiveness, Mbiam, Ibibio Traditional Society, Conflict Management.**

### **Introduction**

Generally, conflict is a necessary ingredient of human existence; hence, any human society there is bound to be conflict of many sorts (Oguntola-Loguda, 2005). It is observed that in traditional Ibibio society, conflict may generally exist whenever or wherever incompatible events occurred and may result in a win - lose character. The resolution, transformation and management of conflict may however produce win-win situation too. In contemporary African democratic society as a whole and Ibibio in particular, the management of these conflicts when they arise will determine their effects on the society. Conflict is as natural as the concept of peace contrary to the global or universal conception. Nigerian democratic system has particular ways of conceptualizing conflict. Traditional definitions of conflict regard it as a struggle over interests, positions, values and claims to scarce status, power and resources in which the aims of the opponents are to neutralize, injure or eliminate their rivals (Onigun Otite & Albert, 2001).

In Ibibio traditional society, religion, law and politics are inextricably intertwined, each merged into the other. Hence, the maintenance of law and order is therefore a religious as well as political duty. Nana (2020) opines that oath taking is indispensable in African traditional religious system. Religion and oath taking shape our minds and characters in positive ways. It makes an individual to remember his or her promise made to another and the efforts to keep to it, thereby treating others as oneself. The gods and the ancestors are believed to have handed down in remote antiquity, a basic charter of life or rule of proper conduct or customs. This made non-conformity and disobedience to laid-down rules an affront to the spiritual components of the society. Consequently, difficult cases are passed down to the ancestors and gods through the medium of oracle, ordeals, *mbiam*- traditional concocted substance, an instrument used in oath-taking. The fear of ancestors and the gods to dictate a particular issue by the use of *mbiam* is an ever-present in the mind of the populace and in consideration of the powerful sanctions on the culprit make the use of *mbiam* in Ibibio traditional life more potent.

Equally, the usage of *mbiam* as a judicial instrument in conflict management depends on the severity of the issue or the disputing parties. However, *mbiam* is mostly used in critical cases whose neglect would have a higher detrimental effect on the culprit as well as to the larger community. Hence, the restoration and maintenance of peace, orderliness, and social harmony in the society is not only the concern of the parties involved, but also of their neighbours in the community. Thus, peace-building has long existed among the traditional Africans, since absence of peace attracts the wrath of ancestors and no community would like to face consequences that most often are detrimental. The restoration of peace vis-à-vis conflict management is the concern not only of the parties involved but also of the neighbours and the entire community. The general essence of conflict management is to preserve and ensure enduring peace in the society, remove the root causes of the conflict, and genuinely reconcile the conflicting parties as well as determining the culprit in a particular difficult situation.

The process of traditional conflict management among the Ibibio people of Nigeria is unlike what is obtainable in the Western system because of its flexibility. It centers primarily on negotiation, mediation, reconciliation, arbitration, conciliation, pacification, and appeasement (Udofia, 2011). Among the Ibibio people, *mbiam* has acquired intellectually and morally pejorative overtones that do not obtain in other societies where the practices and beliefs concerned do not run counter to the prevailing worldview. For efficiency, this paper examines the effectiveness of *mbiam* (traditional concocted oath) in conflict management among Ibibio traditional people.

*Mbiam* in conflict management in Ibibio traditional society centres on the presumed ability of the practitioner to manipulate natural laws for his own or his client's benefit; such practices tend to be regarded as evil only when they also involve the breaking of moral laws. The principal components of *mbiam* in Ibibio land involve a belief, knowledge and the use of supernatural forces or beings. Such beliefs and practices principally have magical or divinatory power that occurred in all human societies throughout recorded history, with considerable variations both in their nature and in the attitude of societies that revered them. It is believed that traditional medicine men and women, diviners, and diabolic men in Ibibio land are in possession of *mbiam* with which they carry out different assignments, often to their own advantage, family members, friends, and to the detriments of others in the society. One

would therefore ask; what really is *mbiam*? Is it possible to discover the constitute *mbiam* in Ibibio traditional society? What actually gives potency to *mbiam* in Ibibio traditional society? In what way can *mbiam* be used as an instrument of conflict management in Ibibio traditional society? These issues constitute the thrust of this study.

### **Ibibio People of Akwa Ibom State**

#### **Their Socio-Cultural, Economic, Political and Religious Life**

The term Ibibio refers to the various historical groups who have been known by the generic name "Ibibio" and share common origin, customs, traditions, and language (Udoh, 2008). Ibibio is the ancestral name for the people regarded as most ancient of all the ethnic groups in Nigeria today. The name is a family name for the different nationalities of Ibibio extraction dispersed throughout the present day Akwa Ibom State. Presently, Ibibio are found in the south-south geo-political region of Nigeria, constitute one of the major tribes in the Niger Delta region, known for its rich natural resources. This ethnic group is found in Akwa Ibom State, which is also the indigenous home land of the Ibibio. Bubu and Offiong (2014) quoted Essien (1990) opine that the Ibibio are the fourth largest tribe in Nigeria after Hausa Yoruba and Igbo. They are well populated, numbering about four million people going by the figures of the 2006 National population exercise.

The Ibibio are happy, cheerful people, warm and hospitable to strangers, proud of their homes and heritage, sentimentally attached to the tombs of their ancestors, but they reach out vigorously towards modernization through education. Like in most African societies, the family is the cradle of social interactions and education in the Ibibio society. Ekong (2019) cited Umoh Faithman (1999) asserts that in traditional Ibibio society social interactions and alliance were formed through four institutions, namely: friendship, ally, and grandparents/children relationship. Hence, these social relations united the Ibibio society, helped the people to avoid war and facilitated peace between the Ibibio and their neighbours. The Ibibio society maintained a high moral standard; their morality manifests in different ways, which include respect for parents, elders and the aged, amongst others.

Ibibio traditional society had a simple but strong political system but a large-scale machinery of political organization is the absence of among the Ibibio, such as that which existed among the Hausa-Fulani and the Yoruba and part of Southern Nigeria. Thus, the British invaders concluded that the Ibibio had no political and legal system that was worthy of preserving. Ibibio society consists of *ikpaisong* - clan, which houses *idung* - village, which was often named after the original founder of the village, in each belongs political units known as *ekpuk* – extended family and *ufok/idip ete* – family (Ekong (2019). The village council members constituted the executive arm of government. Its economic functions included fixing the period when certain farmlands and palm fruits should be cultivated. It exercised judicial functions on cases involving debt, bride-price defamation of character, adultery and so on. The village is headed by *Obong idung*, who is administering the village with his council members from the different *ekpuk* (Akpan, 2017).

Among all the secret societies in Ibibio, the *ekpo nyoho* (masquerades) was viewed as a strong judicial agent, orders of the village or the clan councils were carried out by members of the *ekpo nyoho* secret society and was responsible for the enforcement of law and order in the

traditional society. They were regarded as ghosts; their orders were no respecter of persons. For women group, *ebre* and *iban isong* served such purpose. Beside the *ekpo nyoho*, other important the Ibibio judicial instruments were *mbiam* - oaths, *idiong* - divination, *afia* or *ukang* - ordeal, and instruments for administering peace include *ayei* - young palm fronds, *nnuk-enin* - elephant tusk (Ekong, 2019).

Historically, economy in traditional Ibibio society was basically a subsistence economy, and from time immemorial, the Ibibio have attached great importance to their land. Udoh (2008) maintains that land has become the very centre of their lives and of their communities. Civilization through Western education has brought many changes in modern Ibibio society and many Ibibio people today engage in all manner of professional careers for livelihood, yet, due to the high level of unemployment and poverty, a good number in the rural and riverine areas engage in traditional Ibibio occupations fishing, hunting, wood carving, weaving, arts and mats making as their means of livelihood (Ekong, 2019)

Peter (2018) opines that Ibibio traditional religion, centered on worship, consultation, sacrifice, appeasement, and invocation of both the *Abasi Enyong* - Heavenly God and *Abasi isong* - Earthly God by the constitutional and religious head of the community - *Obong-ikpaisong*. In Ibibio traditional setting, there is a firm belief in *mme ndem* - lesser deities found in different clans and *mme ikaan* - the ancestors. They are only functionaries of the *Abasi Ibom* - Supreme God who is omniscient, omnipotent and omnipresent. Among the people, *Abasi Ibom* is so large that he cannot be housed in a shrine similar to cathedrals, temples and mosques that exist in other parts of the world (Ekong 2019). Thus, offering of sacrifices and libations were normal forms of ritual worship among the Ibibio. These rituals were usually performed by *Obong-ikpaisong* or *Nkuku* - a traditional priest or *Obong ufok* - family head or a senior elder.

Most Ibibio (if not all) people believe in the existence of *ifot* - witchcraft. They believe that *ifot* - witch or *uben* - wizard is a spirit that caused deaths and destructions to people in the community. According to Turaki (1999), witchcraft and sorcery refer to systems of belief centred on the idea that persons in the community will resort to means to bring harm to others through nefarious supernatural powers. Ekong (2019) cited McFarlan (1946) no death was considered natural except through extreme old age so that, in the case of sickness or death, it was supposed that someone or other was practicing *ifot* - witchcraft or *uben* - wizardry (*uben*) against the life of the sufferers or dead person. It is a general belief that witches and wizards can travel anywhere in the world for their oppressions. This belief was and is still so strong that even Christians among the Ibibio are not excluded from it.

### **The Concept of Conflict**

It is obvious that there are many notions and interpretations of the term conflict. Actually, conflict may also be seen as a social process due to a state of contradictions that is a product of difference in the aspiration, and wishes of individuals, groups and society. Obviously, society cannot exist without conflict, and as such there must be a mechanism also in place for its management. Hence, conflicts are inevitable wherever severe resources are and they are elements of social interaction that have been defined in various dimensions. It takes various forms and dimensions in African societies, and it seems to be part of excitement for networking relationship, whether negative or positive. Therefore, it is significant to note that

conflict is difficult to define from the perspective of the Africans. Consequently, conflicts are in the magnitude of rage, rift, misunderstanding, family and market brawls, skirmishes and wars, public insurrections and assaults. It also includes chieftaincy and boundary disputes.

Ajayi and Buhari (2014) opines that conflict is described as a condition where an identifiable group of human beings tribal, ethnic, linguistic, religious, socio-political, economic, cultural or otherwise is in conscious opposition to one or more other identifiable human group because these groups are pursuing what to be incompatible goals. This arises from the interaction of individuals who have partly, incompatible ends, in which the ability of one actor to gain his ends, depends to an important degree on the choice or decisions that other parties will take. Conflict could be violent or uncontrollable dominant or recessive, resolvable or insolvable under various sets or circumstances. Conflict situation emerges when two or more parties could not agree on an issue. The parties to such conflict may not necessary be the government or nation states. In an incompatible stage among nation-states, every party involved seeks to achieve certain objectives, such as additional or more secure territory, security, access to markets, prestige, alliances and the overthrow of an unfriendly government.

Consequently, Jegede (2019) opines that the word conflict is derived from two Latin words *con* meaning “coming together”, and *fligere* meaning “to strike”. Therefore, conflict is a state of opposition or hostilities, a fight or struggle. Furthermore, Kirk sees conflict as a state of antagonism, that is, the result of disagreements that arise between two or more people or group of people that have either produced or threaten to produce loss of life, freedom, land, property or livelihood, or cause mental or physical abuse. Hence, conflict is a clash of opposing principles, the opposition of incompatible wishes or needs. It has a long tradition that is as old as mankind. Conflict is an indispensable feature of intra or inter-group relations. It exists where there are social interactions among individuals.

It is quite certain that conflict has been defined variously by different scholars under different ideological, historical, and cultural influences. Metala (2019) quoted Okeke *et al* sees conflict is a reality that does not exist in a vacuum or up there in the blues but among humans. It is unavoidable in human interaction. He further gives more elaborate definition that “conflict is the expression of disagreement over something important to two individuals, groups, states or nations when they have different views, different goals, different needs and different values and they fight over limited resources to address them”. Hence, conflict is seen as the pursuit of incompatible interests and goals by different groups.

Conflict in itself may be personal or it may involve group of persons. Hornsby (2005) defined conflict as a disagreement or an argument, a struggle, fight, difference in wishes and opinion. Oguntola-Laguda (2005) citing Coser opines that conflict is a struggle over values and claims to scarce status, power, and resources in which the aims of the opponents are to neutralize, injure or eliminate their rivals. Oguntola-Laguda (2005) further quoted Nnoli that conflict is a contradiction arising from differences in interests, ideas, ideologies, orientations, perceptions, and tendencies. These contradictions exist at all levels of society as well as inter-personal, inter-group, inter-institutional and international relations. Hence, conflicts are products of divergent interests, goals, and aspirations within a defined social and physical environment.

It is a situation that arises between impulses to hostility and aggression and prohibition against hostile impulse and actions.

It is observed that an active system is said to be in conflict if the system has two or more incompatible goals. The dispute could easily lead to efforts to hurt or harm the actor who is perceived to be standing in the way. This view indicates that conflict is a process, and a condition in society. In other words, it may be interpreted to mean a struggle over value and claims to scarce resources, status, power in which the aim of the opponents are to neutralize eliminate their rivals. It therefore follows that, when conflict is viewed as a condition, it is essentially a situation in which the source of the discrepancy between value expectations and capabilities is another group competing for the same values. When conflict is defined as a process, it refers to an interaction between communities in an attempt to achieve their goal (Ekong, 2019).

### **Types of Conflict in the Society**

There are various ways and degrees that conflict expresses itself over every range of human contact in a society. Obviously, its modes are always changing with changing social and cultural conditions. Some types appear and disappear and new ones emerge. Social conflicts that include all activities in which men contend against one another for any objective often erupt in every human society. Its two fundamental types according to Obilom (2005) are direct and indirect conflicts.

- i. Direct Conflict: This is a conflict that arises when individuals or groups thwart or impede or restrain or injure or destroy one another in the effort to attain some goal; hence, direct conflict occurs. Thwarting or frustrating of goal attainment is involved in such forms as litigation, polemic, propagandistic activity, and much of the struggle of organized economic groups for larger stakes. Often more violent forms sometimes mark economic class conflict, as they do more conspicuously in duel, vendetta, revolution, and war.
- ii. Indirect Conflict: This is a type of conflict that arises when individuals or groups do not actually impede the efforts of one another but in other way round seek to attain their ends in ways which obstruct the attainment of the same ends by others; thus, indirect conflict occurs.

Moreover, competition is impersonal conflict between individuals for attainment of any objects of desire that are limited in supply, whether income or academic honours or beautiful women or social prestige. Thus, such competition does not as such directly interfere with the efforts of another to attain such goals, but only indirectly with the other person's success. Jegede (2019) observed that religious intolerance which simply means hostility towards other religions, as well as the inability of religious adherents to harmonize between the theories and the practical aspect of religion is another type of conflict. It encompasses bigotry which is the obstinate and intolerant devotion to one's opinion and prejudices, especially the expression of intolerance and animosity towards persons of differing beliefs.

Religious conflict exists where there is disagreements between adherents of the one or different religion(s) over doctrinal issues or unjust treatments carried out against member(s) of a particular religion by members of the same or another religion. To this extent, religious

conflicts can be defined as any disagreement that occurs between adherents of the same or different religious group(s) over incompatible religious interests or contradictory doctrinal issues or values which is often interpreted in religious terms. Similarly, religious intolerance, fundamentalism and extremism are co-pilots of the vehicle of religious conflicts in Nigeria simply because they form the base upon which other sources of religious violence rest.

### **The Need for Conflict Management**

It is recommended that resolution and management of conflicts mechanism is necessary in every societal and communal administration and management. This is imperative so as to maximise the benefits and reduce the disastrous effects of conflicts. Oguntola-Laguda (2005) posits that the resolution of conflict makes the society a better and safe place to exist. In the other hand, the inability to resolve the lingering contradictions in the society may lead to genocide, patricide or violence. Hence, the development and progress of such society or community is retard. Oguntola-Laguda (2005) cited Mitchell submits that the management of conflict could be achieved through problem solving workshop, interactive problem solving, third party consultation, or collaborative analytical problem.

Certainly, conflict management is important to the survival of any society or nation in as much as it seeks to facilitate positive change, provide opportunities to conflicting parties to interact and reduce the scope, intensity and effects of conflicts. Obviously, the resolution of contracting views and claims as a basis for seeking options or alternatives to crises thereby alters the perception of interest groups in a conflict.

It is observed that in pluralistic society such as Nigeria, especially in Ibibio traditional society conflict management is principally complex due to difference in culture, religion, language, and historical background which are often very difficult to harmonise. Oguntola-Laguda (2005) quoted Otite maintains that 'the more polarised the conflicting interest, especially with regards to ideological orientation, the more it is difficult to resolve a related conflict of interest'. Hence, process of conflict resolution such as mediation, counselling, organisational development, conciliation, quasi-political procedures, informal tribunals, arbitration of several types and criminal and civil justice systems may not achieve the desired result. Therefore, to maximise the benefits of conflicts resolution all interest groups and institutions need to be reconciled. However, conditions are to be clearly stated for effective and positive interaction; thus, rejection or acceptance of these conditions will determine the impact of conflicts on such society.

Obviously, any society such as Ibibio in the throes of rapid change is susceptible to conflict. Equally, where people of diverse interests reside there is bound to be conflicts. These could lead to confusion, violent, intra-conflict, and inter-conflict, even war and so on. Therefore, there is need for conflict management mechanism to maximise its benefits; thus, reducing the negative effects of conflicts.

Ekong (2019) further states that authority, not property, is the prime cause of social conflicts. He categorizes conflict as being legitimate, reutilized or illegitimate and uncontrolled as interest groups developed and began a conflict with those with exclusive access to authority. Hence, the challenging group engages in illegitimate or encapsulated conflict, since they are

not accorded legitimacy by the dominant authority. Therefore, considering a society to have two faces; those of consensus and those of conflict, and rising from this, resides contradictions and conflicts of interest in the society. Ekong (2019) emphasizes that there are mechanisms in societies that make conflict inevitable. Like any other simple society elsewhere, the Ibibio society was organized around an intrinsic fear of the unknown. In order to forestall criminal and violent acts, the Ibibio people of Nigeria devised a number of social control mechanisms such as *mbiam*, *ukang*, *idiong*, and so on. First, these mechanisms were aimed at instilling fear in potential criminals. Second, apart from this, the Ibibio also had certain institutionalized symbols that they used to check or prevent crimes and conflicts.

In order to maintain peace, certain social control mechanisms were devised through oral education by the telling of folktales and indoctrination, and in traditional beliefs; physical sanctions were also instituted for some deviant acts, particularly those that were believed to endanger the stability and well-being of the society (Ekong 2001). Since most deviant behaviours in the Ibibio society were regarded as sinful or sacrilegious, and were likely to invoke the wrath of gods on people either in the form of famine, pestilence and disease, natural disasters, death or a combination of any of these.

### **Concept and Constituents of *Mbiam***

Udoh (2008) cited Macurrie submits that *mbiam* is “an oath that may be either a solemn declaration of an intention to do this or that”. Hence, it is a solemn promise made that is binding by an oath which may be either verbal formula or a symbolic action. Such an action or formula is recognized by both parties as formal act which binds the people (actors) to fulfil their promises. Equally, *mbiam* as an oath may also be seen as a bond or agreement entered into between persons or groups of persons or between a group of men and a god or gods. Hence, Offiong (1991) defined *mbiam* as a magically potent object used in swearing oaths and in fortifying one’s property against thieves which has the supernatural ability to detect the innocent and the guilty as well as to punish the offender. *Mbiam* is weirdly referred to as juju on which people swore, was an important instrument of social control and in the traditional Ibibio society. *Mbiam* could be liquid, sacred drum, certain leaves, human blood or the Bible and cross (Offiong, 1991). The three main ways in which *mbiam* was used included property fortification, settlement of disputes and determination of innocence and guilt.

*Mbiam* is supposed to be a very powerful fetish in form of a liquid concoction and is believed to be capable of discriminating between the innocent and the offender. It is used as an oath in judicial cases, as a control element in warding off trespassers on property, and can be used by wicked people to bring harm on others. Some traditional people used *mbiam* virtually on everything they own. Thus, *mbiam* is dreaded by many Ibibio people because a minor mistake in the process of its administration may cost even the life the administrator himself and his household. Ukpong (2007) referred to *mbiam* as any object used for personal protection for the guarding of personal property or for swearing. *Mbiam* is compared to the swearing on a Holy Bible. It is believed to have the power of detecting culprits and punishing them accordingly, unless the curse was removed.

Consequently, the constituents of *mbiam* according to Ibibio traditional society can be liquid, sacred drum, certain leaves, human, human parts, the Bible, or cross. Infact, anything or object



believed by the people to be sacred can be used as *mbiam*. It can be taken by an individual as invocation to a deity to witness that a statement made by the individual on a disputed issue is true. *Mbiam* itself may consist merely of swearing by the name of some feared dangerous deity believed to be capable of punishing those who swear falsely by it, or it may consist of some concoction specially prepared by a traditional medicine man or woman into which he/she invoked the name of one or more dangerous deities (Udoh, 2008).

Moreover, other objects which may be used as *mbiam* include the blood from an in-law (ukot), or from a grand-child (eyeyen), or from a grandfather (Ete-bom) or from a grandmother (Eka-eka). Alternatively, a piece of finger or toe nail, a piece of hair, a piece of cloth belonging to any of these classes of persons, or any part of the body (especially the private) could also be used as *mbiam*. Any object, place, or time believed by the people to belong to a deity, therefore sacred could be used as *mbiam*. Still, the sky, sun, moon, stars, stone, sand on the ground, route, fire, rain or sea water, salt, oil, and thing or object can equally be consecrated and sacredised used as *mbiam* among the traditional people of Ibibio.

Antia (2005) describes *mbiam* as a potent liquid used in swearing oaths; it was more or less a magic liquid which could cause anyone, who swore falsely, to fall ill, swell up, and die. Ukpong (2007) equally maintains that *mbiam* could be any object used for personal protection, for the guarding of personal property or for swearing. It was believed to have the power of detecting culprits and punishing them accordingly, unless the curse was removed.

According to Essien (2001:92), an accused person was asked to swear on *mbiam* to declare himself or herself innocent of a crime, and it was believed that the accused would not tell lies and get away without being killed after swearing on the juju. A typical administration of *mbiam* (oath) taking usually take this form with precise utterances: "If I have done, or if I do or if I will do such and such, this *mbiam* kill me, if not so, *mbiam* protect and bless me and my whole house this and next generation and forever." Udo, Essien and Antia agree that the Ibibio believed that if one lied, the power of *mbiam* would kill such an individual.

### ***Mbiam* and its Potency**

According to Ukpong (2007) *mbiam* is a magical potent object traditionally used in swearing oaths and in fortifying one's property, cause sickness to or kill a person who oppresses, treats another unjustly or offends him with impunity. It also is seen as a spirit which goes on errand for the traditional Ibibio people especially in conflict situation and difficult circumstances. *Mbiam* is also consider as a deity to be worshipped, sacrificed to and appeased for effectiveness. Among the Ibibio traditional society, *mbiam* is believed to have supernatural ability to detect and free the innocent as well as the capacity to punish the guilty or the offender. In the context of this paper, *mbiam* has the potency to serve effectively as conflict management mechanism in Ibibio traditional society.

However, *mbiam* will remain inactive when and where there are no utterances to cause it to be active. Hence, ordinary word of utterances can also be used as *mbiam*. The concocted object(s) used as *mbiam* are placed in the shrine or sacred placed for at least seven day for potency to be achieved. Thus, it is more than a juju, charm or fetish object (Ukpong, 2007). The traditional Ibibio people believed that *mbiam* represents the god or spirit of the god from

where the object is derived. Therefore, it is believed by its adherents or worshippers to be most powerful with potency for good or ill. Additionally, *mbiam* are categorised, the superior and the inferior, or the higher and lower *mbiam*. For effectiveness in the administration of *mbiam* absolute loyalty to certain agreement reached in case of conflict in traditional society is required as a condition. Therefore, the traditional Ibibio people tenaciously believed in the efficacy of *mbiam* as an important means of conflict management.

### ***Mbiam* as Instrument of Conflict Management in Ibibio Traditional Society**

*Mbiam* is an Ibibio traditional oath and injunction. *Mbiam* is believed to be in different forms; in powdered form, liquid or aye (palm front leave). Though they may have physical representation, the result is believed to be spiritually manifested. *Mbiam* can be used for different purposes, it can be used to detect innocence and guilt of an accused person, it can be used to keep people from breaking promises and it can also serve as an injunction. In the 21<sup>st</sup> century "*Mbiam*" is still used by several people, of recent apart from being used by traditional rulers it is also said to be used by politicians to keep its supporter's loyalty in check.

*Mbiam* has been identified as one of the agents of conflict management in the Ibibio traditional society. It is observed that *mbiam* (traditional oath) was an important agent of peace since it was used as the last resort for knowing the truth and every Ibibio adult knew that if he or she swore on it deceitfully, he or she was bound to die. Therefore, elders and chiefs always used it in administering justice among disputing parties. The fear of death often caused the culprit confess and pleaded guilty even before the oath was administered". It is observed that in the traditional Ibibio society, *mbiam* (oath) was an instrument of justice, especially when capital offences were committed and if it became difficult to know the truth, then *mbiam* was used as a last resort; but foreign scholars wrongly refer to *mbiam* as juju (Ukpong, 2001).

In traditional Ibibio society and every Ibibio person believed in the potency of *mbiam*. Even today, many Ibibio people still adopt this method in settling various cases and conflicts. Ukpong (2007) explains that, in the olden days, parents inculcated in their children the habit of speaking the truth for fear of being victims of *mbiam* in their adult life. Udo (1983) asserts that before the advent of Christianity, every Ibibio person believed in *mbiam*.

Miscarriages of justice were very rare because, besides asking the accused to declare himself innocent of the crime of which he was accused, the members of his family - *ekpuk* were asked, in case of doubt, to swear in such a way that the penalty inflicted by *mbiam* might extend to the whole *ekpuk* if they swore falsely. Thus, one could clearly see that the killing power of *mbiam*, in some cases, was not only restricted to the offender, as it was capable of exterminating the whole family and/or the entire community. For this reason, *mbiam* was regarded and used by the traditional Ibibio people as an important anti-crime measure with a certainty of nemesis that await the guilty. This measure was combined with many others to keep the Ibibio communities relatively crime free. Hence, in administration of *mbiam* for justice on any issues among the traditional Ibibio society, there is a common saying by the *mbiam* priest "*mbiam emi odo edue ukot akpa itong*". Meaning literary, this *mbiam* (traditional concocted oath) is he/she who misses a step, his neck goes for it. This saying indicates and calls for a careful examination of oneself and the issue concern before swearing or administering the *mbiam*. This explains the symbolism preserved in the expression of the above saying that

a whole people marching together in step along the path of life, with every member of the group keeping in step. As long as this rhythm (of justice) is kept by everyone, there is harmony, peace, order and progress in the community. Obviously, *mbiam* has been identified as one important Ibibio judicial instruments for the traditional Ibibio people. The success of the Ibibio traditional judicial system depended to a great extent on belief in the potency of *mbiam*.

Therefore, from all indications, there is no doubt that the fear of an individual's death or the extinction of the entire family by *mbiam* therefore makes it a potent, a crucial and central in the Ibibio justice and peace practice. Since there are people who will not tell the truth, even to the point of death the Ibibio people prefer to search the truth from *mbiam* especially when it involves family members. Actually, among the traditional Ibibio society, *mbiam* remains an efficient instrument for conflict resolution that enhances a culture of peace and practicing preventive diplomacy. With the use of *mbiam*, the Ibibio were able to resolve their disagreements and tensions amicably. Oath taking or *mbiam* ordeal served as effective instruments of peace building and social justice in traditional Ibibio land. *Mbiam* remains one of the most antique and efficacious mechanisms of peace making and social justice in Ibibio land. Udofia (2009) explains that *mbiam* involves several traditional rites performed with or without sacrifices to instill law and order in the society for the benefit of all inhabitants of a community irrespective of race or culture.

Consequently, the oath sworn and sealed with the administration of *mbiam*, would likely have included a pledge of friendship and cooperation between the participants. The carnage power of the black and bitter waters of *mbiam* was not only restricted to the offender, as *mbiam* was supposedly able to annihilate the whole family of the culprit and/or his/her entire community. Thus, *mbiam* can be considered a vital Ibibio indigenous anti-transgression instrument, used for the inculcation of the culture of harmony and order in the society. Habitually, the Ibibio utilized *mbiam* as a last resort when the peace and security of the people was critically threatened. One Ibibio proverb sums the criticality of *mbiam* in the Ibibio peace praxis thus: *mbiam ami ado adue ukot akpa itong* - this oath, he who misses a step, loses his neck (dies). *Mbiam* ordeal is a traditional and religious ritual used in detecting and discerning hidden secrets and exposing law breakers. It is a valuable instrument of peace in traditional Ibibio land.

### **Effectiveness of *Mbiam* in Conflict Management among the Ibibio People**

In traditional Ibibio society, every deviant act or behaviour was and is still view as a violation against Abasi Ibom-Supreme God's ndem-deity's or ancestor's authority or rules. This act is not acceptable by the people under any condition or circumstance. This shows that there is no clear demarcation or distinction between religious and social laws that governed the society. Hence, in their religious tradition, the people employed the traditional concocted oath-*mbiam*, because of their firm belief in its potency to checkmate and instilled fear, regulate, and mediate in conflict situations. Therefore, it is observed that the success of the Ibibio traditional judicial system depended to a greater extent on belief in the potency of *mbiam*. Consequently, before the advent and spread of Christianity in Ibibio society, *mbiam* was commonly accepted by most people and to this extent used it to manage all forms of conflicts that were occasioned by human interactions in the traditional society.

Upon this submission, Akpan (56) one of the interviewees submits that because God is at distance from traditional Ibibio people especially during conflict situations, the people availed themselves with the gods of the land to help in the settlement of any impending conflict among the people. He furthers that every conflict especially the direct conflicts where individuals or groups try to thwart or impede or restrain or injure one another in the effort to attain some goal. Such act is not known to ordinary people in the society unless the gods and ancestors are employed to interfere or reveal the culprit before it is made known to the commoners in the society.

Consequently, Asuquo (49) opines that the bribing of judges and pervasion of justice that are prevalence in Ibibio society, Akwa Ibom State and Nigeria as a whole were rare in the system when the people were making effective use of the traditional concocted oath to determine cases in the traditional society. Obviously, if the government of today reverts to the use of *mbiam* in dispensing cases most of these abnormalities will be something of the past.

For instance, if an individual is accused of stealing a goat and it is difficult to determine the truth, *mbiam* is administered, and the truth will be known instantaneously. If the accuser is proved wrong, the accused is fined and also expected to cleanse the one whom he/she falsely accused in a special ceremony. Under this similar circumstance, Iquo (64) maintains that 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. *Mbiam* as instrument of conflict management in Ibibio traditional society is effective in distilling the truth. Ekaete (44) observes that *mbiam* is often used in Ibibio traditional society to extract the truth during the cross-examination process. It also involves swearing an oath for or against an issue brought before elders for judgment.

Equally, Udofia (49) posits that *mbiam* as an instrument for conflict management among the Ibibio involves several traditional rites performed with or without sacrifices, for cleansing, distilling truth, making covenants of protection/secretcy, and instilling law and order (security/peace) in the lives of the populace. He added that whenever *mbiam* is mentioned in any issue among the Ibibio, people will definitely speak the truth at all cost. This indicates that every traditional person among the Ibibio live with that sense of order and become law abiding; hence, the saying, 'the fear of *mbiam* is the beginning of wisdom'. Therefore, is a fearful issue that calls every Ibibio person to behave properly wherever and whenever it is administered.

Udo (52) maintains that *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 punishing the offender through such ailments as whooping cough, paralysis, dysentery and death. Therefore, with such ability, whenever *mbiam* is administered, people's properties are safe or protected against thieves and trespassers. Ituen (65) submits that *mbiam* is very useful mechanism for conflict management in Ibibio traditional society. She furthers that for instance, when conflict erupt among the people or where the people often faced with frequent conflicts; when *mbiam* is instituted the parties would definitely hold their peace for the fear of being killed by the spirit/god of *mbiam*.

An interviewee maintains that on the appointed day, the *mbiam* was brought to an agreed place and usually, sacrifices were performed before the accused took the oath. He further states that customarily, the owner of the *mbiam* was often administered with 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 (Udoakpan, 56). In indirect conflict that where individuals or groups do not actually impede the efforts of one another openly but in other way round seek to attain their ends in ways which obstruct the attainment of the same ends by others. *Mbiam* is often administered to determine such an offender. Iboru (67) observed that if something happens in the case of indirect conflict in which it is difficult to determine the evil/wicked person behind the happening, when *mbiam* is poured within few days the culprit would be made known to the public. This shows that *mbiam* is very effective in management of such conflict. Moreover, according Paul (42), there is a firm belief among the traditional people; the belief in witchcraft is remained strong, accusations and suspicion continued unabated. This undoubtedly breeds conflict among the people. Under this situation, *mbiam* played a very important role in detecting witches and punishing them.

Certainly, one of the ways to demonstrate one's innocence if accused of being a witch, 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 (Udoete, 53).

However, in contrast to the effectiveness of *mbiam* in conflict resolution or management; *mbiam* when wrongly administered or instituted can cause deadly havoc to the entire family or community, and when proper and adequate precautions are strictly adhered to. Consequent upon this, Victor (64) submits that *mbiam* is not a good mechanism for conflict management and should not be used either among individuals or community because of the deadly consequences associated with it. Any mistake in administration will wipe out the whole family or village. Effiong (67) equally observes that not all the village heads are morally upright especially in conflict management; therefore, they can do and undo. Alternative measures should be sought for conflict settlement, and *mbiam* may be employed as the last resort in any conflict management depending on the magnitude of the conflict for it may cost human life. This would help the people to minimise the high rate danger associated with *mbiam*. 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, therefore the family of the culprit would always look for the alternative to avoid swearing on any *mbiam*. Besides, *mbiam* can be manipulated or bribed depending on the people involved, and the priest. Hence, every Community or society faces the task of getting individuals and groups to adhere to the normative behaviours and standards of any group they belong.

In the administration of *mbiam*, the accused is provided with a specific 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. Once the accused had taken it without suffering ill effects he or she was cleared of the accusation, hence then general belief in the potency of *mbiam*. So before the accused took the *mbiam* 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 (Offiong, 70). It is observed that *mbiam* oath is binding on every indigene of the participating communities in the case of war or conflict that involves the entire community. *Mbiam* is taken to the effect that the contracting parties accept peace and there would be no more war and bloodshed amongst and between communities (Itoro, 41). Thus, the violators of *mbiam* oath face the wrath of the deity's present, and the ancestors, who in the presence of god constitute the source of moral sanctions and peace guarantors. This first Oath taking process relaxed tension in the war-torn area and paved way for their processes that brought the final peace. The traditional method of resolving the conflict was adopted in peace.

### **Conclusion**

It is obvious that the Ibibio society has changed tremendously the people now live in cities and rural communities with electricity and assorted communication gadgets. Equally the spread of Christianity directly impinged on the existing social institutions such as *mbiam*, *ukang*, *idiong*, etc and its extinction in administration of justice in Ibibio legal system and the destruction of shrines in modern Ibibio and new law enforcement agencies have entrenched vices, such as corruption, kidnapping, armed robbery to be very prevalent in the society, quite unlike what was obtainable in the Ibibio traditional society. This unfortunate scenario calls for the integration of *mbiam* institution as a mechanism or method of monitoring, preventing, managing and resolving conflicts as well as instilling truth telling among the Ibibio populace. This would help remove the root-causes of the conflict, reconcile the conflicting parties genuinely; provide security of lives and property. It would equally preserve and ensures harmony, promotes truth telling, good governance, law and order; set the right milieu for societal production and development.

### **Recommendations**

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations were made:

- i. Recognising that *mbiam* can play a role in conflict and peace does not mean it should be administered at random or carelessly.
- ii. The on-going judiciary reforms in the country should extend to the native jurisprudence, and the administration of *mbiam* for effective service delivery.
- iii. *Mbiam* in Ibibio judicial and religious traditions need overhauling to make it more effective and acceptable by the contemporary Ibibio person.
- iv. Adequate precautionary measures should be set in place to avoid excess or more danger and complication.
- v. Administration of *mbiam* as an aspect of African Traditional Religious practices can contribute effectively in restoring dignity and moral values in the lives of Nigerians in the present democratic era.

## ORAL INTERVIEW

S/N	NAMES	AGE	STATUS	DATE
1.	Akpan Anietie Ukpung	56	Member village council	12/1/2022
2.	Asuquo Udo Okon	49	Elder	12/1/2022
3.	Iquo Philip	64	Trader	15/1/2022
4.	Ekaete Inyang	44	Housewife	15/1/2022
5.	Udofia Ubong	49	Deacon	21/1/2022
6.	Udo Okon	52	Member village council	21/1/2022
7.	Ituen Job	65	Member village council	21/1/2022
8.	Udoakpan Inyang	56	Ete Idung	10/2/2022
9.	Iboro Akpan	67	Oku Mbiam	10/2/2022
10.	Paul Udoowo	42	Youth Leader	10/2/2022
11.	Udoete Enang	53	Member village council	18/2/2022
12.	Victor Okon	64	Oku Mbiam	18/2/2022
13.	Effiong Ukpung	67	Member village council	24/2/2022
14.	Offiong Edet	70	Family Head	24/2/2022
15.	Ito Udoson	41	Teacher	24/2/2022

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