

THE NOTION OF PRAYERS AND INCANTATIONS IN IBIBIO TRADITIONAL RELIGION AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

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Abstract

In African traditional worldview, prayers and incantations are not mere words or utterances but vehicles of power, capable of invoking the Supernatural spirit and socio-economic forces that shape economic development. This phenomenon provides the devotees the idea of Supernatural Being, beliefs, ritual practices due to diverse religious experiences. However, it has been observed with dismays the lack of effective prayers and incantations among the devotees of Ibibio traditional religion as the grounds of the erratic and fluctuating economic situation experiencing in Nigerian society today. The paper employed survey and phenomenological methods with techniques such as interview and participant observation model. Finding from the study revealed that Ibibio worldview is predominantly a religious phenomenon, a spiritual view of life where almost everything is given a spiritual or religious interpretation. It was discovered that prayers and incantations are the essential acts of virtues in Ibibio traditional religion as well as the avenues of conversation with the Supreme Being who controls the affairs of man including economic activities vis-à-vis its development for the individual and communal well-being. It is therefore concluded and recommended that Ibibio traditional religion should inculcate in their adherents the virtue of prayers and incantations as well as productivity to enhance individual and communal economic development in Nigerian society.

Keywords: *Prayers, Incantations, Ibibio Traditional Religion, Economic Development*

Introduction

Human beings are at the center of the universe, participating holistically in the religious activities; interacting harmoniously with life-forces according to his/her religious worldview and tenets. Hence, it is observed that religion being a universal and relevant phenomenon in every human life and society provides the devotees the notion of Supernatural, and the observation of certain rituals that motivate the Supernatural. Actually, few literatures have emerged over the years highlighting the multiple ways in which religion impinges on economic development in the modern day Ibibio both for good and bad. Notably, changes in aspects of economic development tend to be associated with shifts in religious affiliations or changes in religious intensity rather than dropping religion altogether (Okoh and Dike, 2021).

Saale (2014) observed that religious people engage themselves in reciprocal activities with the

transcendent personal being they believe to exist. These reciprocal activities that established a relationship, a link between man and the transcendent deity are ritual practices, prayers and incantations. Prayer and incantations are common to adherents of Ibibio religious traditions and every other member of world living religion. Prayer and incantation are spiritual means through which the religious man interiorly and externally communicated with God and all super sensible beings of his invisible world (Ekwunife, 2007).

For the Ibibio people, these religious activities are obligations, and indispensable means of coping with the life challenging issues. During life crises or threatening circumstances, they implore the Supreme Being for intervention and assistance through the mediums of prayers and incantations. These religious activities are potential instruments that can produce dramatic economic development and growth in the society (Saale, 2014). Thus, leaving prayer and incantation out of the people's life is tantamount to ignoring the latent functions of religion in human society in the area of economic development.

This study is instigated by the datum that not much attention has been given to the notion of prayers and incantations in Ibibio Traditional Religion and economic development in spite of the fact that prayers and incantations are regarded as indispensable rituals in the religious and social life of the Ibibio people of Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria. This fact has also implied that there is almost a virtual absence of critical materials on the notion of prayers and incantations in Ibibio Traditional Religion and economic development. This study is significant in the sense that it aims at gathering available data on the notion of prayers and incantations in Ibibio Traditional Religion to examine their necessity for economic development and documents them for posterity.

This paper therefore, shows the potential and contribution of prayers and incantations as core religious rituals in Ibibio traditional religion that mobilizes the Supernatural to enhance economic development in the society.

The Concept of Economic Development

Sen (2003) averred that development can be regarded as a process of expanding the freedoms that people enjoy, and the process of increasing people's real liberties. Development thus depends on the ability and capacity of people to make choices in their personal and social lives. Accordingly, development is seen to be a discontinuous, spontaneous change from steady state that last forever and replaces the previous equilibrium (Frankema, 2021).

In the one hand, economic development is a discipline of economics, concerned with the study of macro-economic factors that influence long-term economic growth as well as microeconomic issues affecting individuals and businesses, particularly in emerging nations. Economic development is further seen as a sustained improvement in material well-being of the society (Francis, 2002). This sustained improvement in well being is considered to be reflected in an increasing flow of goods and services (Okoh and Dike, 2021).

Ideally, economic development includes a process of economic expansion that is sustainable over time (a permanent improvement of income levels) and allows broad participation inclusively (Sen, 1983). Hence, it encapsulates the possibility of reducing poverty in a structural way, increased economic welfare, improved health, and leads to a progressive change in the socio-economic structure of the country. This implies both more output and changes in technical and constitutional arrangements by which it is produced (Kumari and Bhanoo, 2022).

Social Exchange Theory

The theoretical framework adopted for this study is “Social Exchange Theory” developed by George Homans, an American sociologist. The genesis of social exchange theory goes back to 1958, when he published an article entitled “Social Behaviour as Exchange” (Adedeji, Olulowo and Ogundeji, 2025). Citing Homans, Adedeji, Olulowo and Ogundeji, (2025) devised a framework built on a combination of behaviourism and basic economics. This theory holds that people make decisions by consciously or unconsciously measuring the costs and rewards of a relationship or action (Adedeji, Olulowo and Ogundeji, 2025). This theory focuses on face-to-face relationships and is not meant to measure behaviour or change at a societal level. The theory is unique in the sense that it does not necessarily measure relationships on emotional metrics. Rather, its systematic processes rely on mathematics and logic to determine balance within a relationship. To study that social system, it is first necessary to look at an individual's behaviour, instead of the social structures which individuals created (Adedeji, Olulowo and Ogundeji, 2025).

According to social exchange theory, a person will weigh the cost of a social interaction (negative outcome) against the reward of that social interaction (positive outcome). These costs and rewards can be material, like money, time or a service. They can also be intangible, like effort, social approval, love, pride, shame, respect, opportunity and power. Each person wants to get more from an interaction or relationship than they give (Adedeji, Olulowo and Ogundeji, 2025). When a relationship costs a person more than it rewards them, they end it. But when a relationship provides enough rewards, they continue it. What is or is not enough depends on various factors, including a person's expectations and comparisons with other possible interactions and relationships. Another aspect of social exchange theory is that people expect equity in exchange. People expect to be rewarded equally for incurring the same costs, and when they are not, they are displeased.

This theory applies to the notion of prayers and incantations in Ibibio traditional society and economic development pointing out that when these two religious rituals are being performed, the Ibibio people are looking for rewards from Supernatural Being (Abasi Ibom) and divinities (mme ndem) within the relationship. The people equally want more positive outcomes such as healing, wealth, security, prosperity among others than negative outcomes. They even want the rewards to be greater than the cost. Thus, when people receive rewards for certain actions, they tend to repeat them. But when they receive the less reward over and over, it becomes less effective. From the above foregoing, it is pertinent to note that social exchange theory provides a useful framework for understanding the dynamics of prayers and incantations as well as social interactions in Ibibio traditional society for better economic development.

Ibibio People

Abasiattai (1991) declared that the name Ibibio originally was a generic name for *okop-usem Ibibio* - people who understand Ibibio language clearly. Ibibio is the name by which the people are called, and the language which they speak. Ibibio is an ethnic group in Akwa Ibom State; the people constitute one of the major tribes that settle in the South-South, Niger Delta region of Nigeria. Udoh (2008) submits that the Ibibio land lies to the South-Eastern corner of Nigeria, roughly between latitude 4° 25' and 5° 30' North and longitudes 7° 30' and 8° 30' East. To the south, the land is bounded by the Bight of Bonny; Abia State formed its northern

boundary. To the west, the Rivers formed its western boundary, and share a common boundary with the Ijaws, while Cross River State lies in its eastern boundary and shares a common boundary with the western Cameroon.

Udoh (2008) maintained that scholars faced certain amount of difficulty in obtaining reliable historical facts of the origin of Ibibio people. This is due to lack of authentic historical records, and the oral traditions have frustrated their efforts. However, scholars suggested that the Ibibio people migrated from Usak Edik in Cameroon to their present location. Also, the Ibibio people in their oral traditions persistently claim to have migrated from the Middle East. Ibibio scholars and historians lend credence not only to the Middle East theory (and belief) of origin but also to the fact of being from Jewish extraction. The Ibibio people of Ikono Clan are very proud in their claims of being the cradle of the Ibibio people in the present Akwa Ibom State (Lot, 2023).

The land is within the tropical rainforest belt with evergreen foliage of trees, shrubs, and palm trees. The Ibibio land has two climate conditions: dry season that is caused by dry continental North-East trade wind prevalent between November and late March every year, and the rainy season beginning from March to October with July and September as the months with heaviest rainfall. Moreover, the land is richly endowed with a lot of mineral resources, and exploitable forest resources. There are about 300 species of wood in the forest scattered over the place, there are commercial quantity of salt, limestone, clay, gravels, and silica deposits. However, there are environmental hazards such as drainage and serious erosion problems, and ravines seem to be extending boundaries because of lack of proper erosion control.

It is observed that the Ibibio traditional society did not have a centralized or unified system of governance or political organisation as in the case of other tribes in Nigeria/Africa such as Oba of Benin, Obong of Calabar, Emir of Kano ruling over the whole tribe or state. Rather, the Ibibio had and still operates under segmentary unilineal structure which was and is organised on the basis of family, lineage/extended, village, clan, and contemporarily the paramount ruler oversees the traditional activities in each Local Government Area.

In Ibibio traditional society, *ufok* - the family consisting of the man, as the head, wife/wives, and children made of the smallest unit in the village, and a combination of families made up *ekpuk* - a lineage or extended family with a true son of the lineage, the oldest and most respectable male member appointed as *Obong ekpuk* - the head of the family. The combinations of three to five or more *ekpuk* made up *idung* - the village. Each village remains autonomous, and independent with its own legislations for the survival of the citizens. The Ibibio had settled in their land, they elaborated social, political, and judicial institutions which enabled them to stabilise their societies over time (Lot, 2016).

Socio-Cultural and Economic Life of the Ibibio People

Culture, language and thought are based on symbols and symbolic meanings. It is arbitrary, not based on natural laws, external to humans, but created by people according to the whims of the traditional society. Ibibio people speak Ibibio language. Presently, it is observed that English language is gaining wide acceptance as the people increase their level of education, and they are moving towards modernization. In all ramifications, the people are well versed with their culture. In mode of dressing, the dominant attire of an Ibibio man is a loin cloth, is "*usobo*" with shirt, hat, and staff. The women folk have what is called "*ndot-Iba*" or "*uwawan ofonisin*" with blouse, head-tie and shoe to match (Lot, 2023).

Like in most African societies, the Ibibio people consider family as the cradle of social interactions. The people are happy, cheerful, warm and hospitable to strangers. The Ibibio are proud of their homes and heritage, and sentimentally attached to the tombs of their ancestors, but they reach out vigorously towards modernisation through education. In Ibibio traditional society, the people maintained a high moral standard; their morality manifests in different ways, which include respect for parents, elders and the aged amongst others.

It is believed that the Ibibio cultural folklore, riddles, songs, dances, masquerades, and wrestling provided a platform for socio-cultural interactions, education and recreation among the Ibibio people. Socio-cultural organisations and groups were formed based on gender and age; men's social groups were separate from women. The youth (male) age grade is a social institution performing vigilante/security functions and women age grade helped in the development of the society by sweeping the village, weeding and clearing village roads and surroundings of the streams (Ekong, 2014). Socially, among the people, the family, communal spirit and social ties are very strong. This communal attitude established among them a typical sort of friendliness and trust to which this proverb refers: 'The people even exchange drinking gourds in a dark room'. This trust is strengthened by the fear of the gods and the ancestral spirits who would not hesitate to punish those who seek the downfall of any of his or her fellow tribal woman or man (Essien, 2010).

Historically, economy in traditional Ibibio society was basically a subsistence economy from time immemorial, and the people attached great importance to their land. Udoh (2008) maintained that land has become the very centre of their lives and of their communities. It is their mother earth, because the soil is their source of their livelihood - the river, sea and ocean. Hunting was part of their economic life; men hunt and bring home vast variety of wild animals for meat to the families. It is observed that for good harvest to be achieved, sacrifices were performed to "*ekpo inwang*", a farm deity or ghost who was believed to be responsible for the fertility of the farm. Sacrifices were required to be performed before and after the harvest, and another before the final consumption of the crops especially yam. These acts were believed by the people to be the cause of the bumper harvest then, as compared to the present situation, where fertilizer is heavily used before a little good harvest is achieved. Moreover, indoor occupations such as mat weaving, pottery, and the making of masks and accoutrements for the *ekpo* society became the major occupations during the rainy season.

The Notion of Ibibio Traditional Religion

Every human being has one form of religion or the other; this is because man is a religious being. Religion remains a very important aspect of human existence (Mbiti, 1969). It is a relationship established between human persons and divine person believed to exist. This relationship characterised by a belief system that involves worship of a divine being, symbol, a set day for worship, notion of prayer and incantation. The earnest observance of ritual obligations which mobilizes the supernatural or divine powers, sacred narratives that embedded in their myths which explain the origin of human life and the universe; ethics, religious laws, preferred lifestyle, religious experience and expression (Lot, 2023).

Ibibio Traditional Religion is a religion that has no Sacred Scripture unlike other religions of the world. It is a non-missionary, and its adherents are not converted (proselytes) but members of the society born into the religion of their ancestors furnished by their traditional culture. The Ibibio traditional religion has no written tenets or literature; yet, it is written everywhere for those who care to see and read. The tenets and liturgies are orally written in the peoples' myths and folklores, proverbs, songs, dances, and sayings (Antia, 2005).

Ibibio traditional religion is an aspect of their cultural heritage and the product of the thinking and experiences of their forefathers. This heritage forms a long line which links the forefathers with their descendants who now feel proud of it. The traditional religion of the people remains the belief system that has been handed down from one generation to another (Ibenwa, 2014). The beliefs and practices are indigenous to the Ibibio and its soil, the exact founder and how the religion originated have lost in antiquity. The religion is moderate, tolerant, accommodative and peaceful, it will not fight those that attack it or provoke it to anger.

The daily life of the Ibibio is regulated by the tenets of their religion, that is, the people live their daily lives consciously of their religious beliefs and practices (Mbiti, 1969). This is occasion by their worldview. They formed religious ideas, formulated proverbs (*nke*) and myths (*mbuk*) which carried religious meanings, and evolved laws (*mme ibet*) and customs (*edu uwem*) which safeguarded the life of the individual and community. The people were born, nurtured and grew in their traditional religious milieu. Consequent upon this notion, there is a common saying by the people that “*ikimamana ndikid ebote ke isang inuho*”; meaning literally, “*We have been born to see the goat walking four-footed*” (personal communication with Ekong Etim Udo, December, 2025). The implication of this statement is that the Ibibio people born to see their traditional religious beliefs the way it is practiced.

The traditional religion is construed as a belief in and worship of a Supernatural Being, the Creator and the Controller of the universe through intermediaries (Ibenwa, 2014). It is observed that the people had a clear and good notion of God before the arrival of Christianity. According to personal communication with Akon Tom Jim (March, 2026), this is obvious in their common traditional saying “*attimme atotod Abasi, ndion atuk isong*”. Meaning literally that “*the traditional digger first and foremost inform the Supreme God before embarking on any (agricultural) enterprise*”. This notion informed that the people had a good concept of God from time immemorial. Hence, Lot (2016) observed that generally, among the Ibibio people, the belief in *Abasi Ibom* is unique and incomparable for He has the ultimate pre-eminence; things happen with His approval. Certainly, there is a firm belief in God by the people. God is at the centre of Ibibio religion and dominated all its other beliefs (Turaki, 1999).

Essoh (2004) maintains that “*Abasi Ibom* simply means the limitless or infinite God, and He is being called by various names by the people. In personal communication with Ete-obong Sampson Akpan (October, 2025); he asserted that the people have many ascribed to God such as “*Obot*” or *Obod*”, the Creator, “*Nsinsi Abasi*”, Eternal God and Everlasting, “*Edisana Abasi*”, Holy God, *Nsirik-inan-Abasi* (the God whom nothing is impossible), *Aba-nsi-nsi* (Eternal God), *Okposong-Abasi* (all powerful God), *Obong emem* (the Lord of peace), *Utibe-Abasi* (wonderful God), *Uyai-ya- Abasi* (Handsome God) *Ete* (Father), *Abasi nnyin* (Our God) (*Abasi/Ete nnyin*), *Ekamba Abasi* (Great Father), *Nkoon-nkan Abasi* (Supreme God) and so on, are descriptive of His character, attributes and that He is a reality. Equally, in personal communication with Chief Aniefiok Akpan Okon (October, 2025), he noted that *Abasi Ibom* was also manifested in the phenomena such as “*Abasi ukod*”, God of in-law, “*Abasi eyeyen*”, God of Grand-children or Grand-Child, “*Abasi imaan*”, God of Kindred, and so on.

However, the Supreme Being is directly or indirectly worshipped without an image or statue made to represent Him because of His supremacy and uniqueness (Essoh, 2004). Traditionally, the worship of the Supreme Being (*Abasi Ibom*) was usually represented by a small pot with water placed in a clay mound besides “*okono*” and “*itomo*”, the boundary marking plants. This act constitute “*iso abasi*”, the face of God at which the

people offer sacrifices. Such sacrifices were direct appeals, prayers, or other supplications to the Supreme Being (*Abasi Ibom*); specifically on “*etaha*” or “*ata – etaha*” market day, the eight day was set aside for the worship of the Supreme Being called “*usen abasi*” (Lot, 2023).

Ibibio traditional religion was and still polytheistic; the concept of monotheism does not have a place in the religious milieu of the Ibibio people. The people believe in the existence of multiple divinities (*mme ndem*) that dwell in various sacred places in different Clans in Ibibioland. For instance, Anyaang for Nsit clan, Etefia for Ikono clan, Akpasima for Ibesikpo, Offot for Uyo to mention but few. These divinities were believed to cater for the general welfare of the people they represented, and their power could affect the people either positively or negatively. The divinities are maintained by the priest called *Nkuku* or *Okuku* through pouring of libations and offering of necessary sacrifices (Udoh, 2008) to appease and invoke them to act accordingly (Lot, 2016).

Moreover, there is an in-depth believe in other lesser deities (*mme abasi*) and ancestors (*mme ikaan*). Notable among the lesser deities are “*abasi isong*” and (*ndem inwang*), the goddesses of the earth, responsible for the fertility of crops, “*eka abasi*”, the mother of 'gods or head of deities, responsible for procreation and fertility of women; “*ebe abasi*”, a deified husband; and “*abasi ekong*”, the god of war. Also, there is an inbuilt believe in spirits (*mme spirit*), witchcraft (*ifot*), magic or medicine or charm (*ibok*). There was also a market deity (*ndem urua*) who is in charge of the markets as well as farm deities (*ndem inwang*) in charge of farmland.

Obviously, as it is in every other religion of the world; Ibibio traditional religion equally have the idea of afterlife, spirits, and the use of spiritual power, religious symbols, and ceremonies. Also, there is belief in supernatural forces and ancestral spirits, as well as a belief in a creator, who, unlike Christianity or Islam, is assumed to only be the creator for a particular group and not for all populations. There are individuals who can harness supernatural forces in various ways. In Ibibio worldview, the people conceive the universe as comprising the visible (material), and the invisible (spiritual) universe; both universes mingled and are subject to the authority and control of the *Abasi Ibom* (Abasiattai, 1991).

The spiritual powers (*mme odudu*) can be accessed by consulting individuals (*abia-ibok*) who are able to embody power in objects like amulets or fetishes. There is no heaven and hell, and there is less distinction between the natural and supernatural worlds. Instead, they are perceived as being integrated in many ways. The Supreme Creator (*Abasi Ibom*), ancestral spirits (*mme ikaan*) are moralizing in the sense that they desire for individuals to have a happy and fulfilling life (Aderibigbe and Falola, 2022).

The Cosmological Perception of the Ibibio People

The cosmological perception of the people is predominantly a religious phenomenon, a spiritual view of life and almost everything is given a religious interpretation (Nwoye, 2017). It is the “control box” of culture of the people that determines their thinking, acting or doing, and values (Kraft, 1979). It is the framework of most basic beliefs that shapes the views of the people and their world. It is a blueprint, or a map for reality: first, it helps to explain and interpret life. Secondly, it is the starting point to view life, making decisions and actions, and served as “a definer and creator of cultures” (Okon and Ansa, 2012).

It is the central conceptions of reality to which the members of the Ibibio culture assent consciously and unconsciously to, and from which they develop their values. It lies at the very heart of their culture, touching, and interacting with every aspect of the society. This exerts a great influence and power on a person's life. To a

large extent, it is an Afri-centric cosmo-vision, a picture of the universe the people create for themselves (Nwoye, 2017). Moreover, Olumbe (2008) submits that worldview depends on the community to which a person belongs and grows up in, and on what is learned from family.

Conversely, religion dictates and shapes the worldview of a person, thus, it is essentially a manifestation of the underlying religious beliefs. The worldview is reinforced through repetitions of familiar religious actions and is generally taken for granted until the people encounter a different worldview which forces them to analyse why they do or perceive things in a certain way. This reveals that there exists the phenomenon of mystical causality in the universe.

It is seen as a construction that makeup life, providing a sense of direction, a locus of destination, guidance, sanctions a wide range of human conducts by providing the notion of right and wrong, and a strategy of unity for human thought (Lot, 2016). It aided one to appeal to God through religious rituals - prayers and incantations, for good health, rich harvest, and creates a bond as well as helps the people to understand their origin (Essien, 2010). It further reveals the belief in the Supreme Being and benevolent and malevolent spirits. Consequently, Ibibio views of man's spiritual compositions are rooted in the belief that the world consists of physical (*ererimbot*) and spiritual (*obio ekpo*) aspects. This indicates that man is made up of physical (*ikpohidem*) and spiritual (*ukpon/spirit*) substances.

Conceptualizing the Notion of Prayer in Ibibio Traditional Society

Prayer (*akam*) is an essential element, one of the ritual practices, and obligation in every religion. Ekwunife (2007) asserted that prayer is a spiritual means through which the religious man/woman interiorly and externally communicates with the conceived divine being or God and all supra-sensible beings of His invisible world. Prayer is a solemn request made to a "Superior Power" in the hope of receiving succour. It embraces an atmosphere of awe and reverence where heart-felt requests are made to God. Prayer in itself is humans' acceptance of God as the Supreme of all powers (Usoro, 2013).

Prayer therefore, is an act of virtue in religious beliefs and practices which implies our reverence and dependence on the divine being. It is noted that Ibibio prayers begin with an invocation of clan divinity (depending on the clan and the occasion), addressing the divinity, gods and the ancestors in order of their existence of importance (personal communication with Aniefiok Uko-Obong on 20/4/2026). In Ibibio traditional society, prayers are addressed directly to God by individuals and sometimes indirectly through the intermediaries; these may be in the form of a libation, ritual or casual exclamations (personal communication with Ofonime Thompson Uboh on 20/4/2026). Accordingly, Ifesieh (1989) submitted that prayer is the most practical demonstration of one's relation with the source of his/her existence.

Equally, Saale (2014) asserted that prayer is the multi-faceted communication of believers with the Lord God. Saale (2014) further sees prayer as the act of attempting to communicate with a deity or spirit for the purpose of worshipping, requesting guidance, requesting assistance, confessing sins; as an act of reparation or to express ones thoughts and emotions to the divine being. It is a means of conversation with a divine or Supreme Being; mysterious and sometimes misunderstood by non-adherents of the religious faith.

Typical Prayer format in Ibibio:

According to one of the interviewees (Sampson Archibong Akpan, personal communication April, 2026) the Performer of the prayer raises his hands upwards in reverence, saying: *Àbàsì ényoñ, ye abasi isong*

(the Most High God of heaven and earth; then calling on the ancestors and the clan divinities accordingly while pouring libation:

Mme ete ye ete-ete nnyìn - the good spirits of our fathers and our forefathers; our clan divinities or deities - *Ukana Offot, Awa Itam, Etefia Ikono, Anyaan Nsìt, Itinna Iman, Akpasima, Ùdoe Oku, Ita-uma Ekíd, Anantia Ibìono, Àtákpò ñdém Ùruàn Ìnyàñ*, (*òduọk ukọd* - pours some of the drink on the ground).

The prayer itself generally takes two forms, depending on whether it implies a request or is simply limited to praise. The prayer of request has a juridical pattern in which the offering, as a contractual element dominates. Moreso, the act of prayer may equally be in form of a hymn, libation, incantation or a spontaneous utterance in the person's praying words. Hence, by prayer, the worshipper or petitioner acknowledges divine or God's power and goodness, our own neediness and dependence.

Types of Prayer

According to Onah and Ugwu (n.d.) forms of prayer may include adoration, thanksgiving, confession, intercession, and supplication.

Adoration: Prayer adoration – “*akam ekom*”; is a prayer through which man acknowledges of God's majesty and his/her entire dependence on him (Ifesieh, 1989). This form of prayer appreciates God and his good works in the life of man. Adoration is seen as an intense admiration, culminating in reverence and worship, together with the outward acts and attitudes which accompany such reverence. It involves the act of worship, showing profound regard and reverence to God; entails devotion and veneration to God. This form of prayer elevates one's mind to God and glorifies Him.

Confession: Prayer of confession – “*akam ediyaada idiok-nkpo*”. This form of prayer has to do with man's reflection on his/her wrong actions towards God and his fellow human beings. It enables one to confess his/her sins to God and ask for mercy. Confession involves declaring one's sins to God and asking for forgiveness. It enables one to acknowledge his/her sins and therefore humbles us to ask for pardon from the Supreme Being. The act of confessing ones sins and asking for forgiveness is a sign of a healthy personal relationship with God, understanding that sin separates one from God.

Thanksgiving: This is a prayer of appreciation to God for his loving-kindness, favour, and mercies for one's life. It is a heart-felt gratitude to God in appreciation of his benevolence and it is all about thanking him for his blessings to man. It is a prayer offered to God in recognition of his love for and protection over us.

Supplication: Prayer of supplication – “*edibong akam mbanga nkpo*”. Supplication means to ask humbly and earnestly by prayer. In other words, to make a humble earnest petition, beg the divine for something or concerning a particular issue. Supplication is a humble request from God; a prayer asking for his help in one's life. This includes but not limited to petition for our needs and intercession for others (Koenig, 2006). It enables us to understand, that as human beings, we are totally dependent on God for our needs. Supplication is a plea for grace and mercy over the issues that the person makes. It involves a request for something that one needs so dearly.

Petition: Prayer of petition – “*akam ebenege*” Lawrence-Hart and Tamunoiyalla (2024) observed that prayers of petition are the type of prayer with which the people are most familiar. During this type of prayer, the people ask God for things they need in life, primarily physical needs but sometimes asked for spiritual needs well. The

Africans though acknowledges that God's plans for them are more important than what they desire, they still ask God to do their will. A respondent (Iniobong Akpan Sampson, personal communication, October, 2025) noted that prayer of petition sometimes includes imprecatory: *Abasi wot mbon usua mmi; nwana ekong ye mmo eke enwanade ye ami*. Meaning literary, "God kill my enemies; fight those who fight against me" sometimes the adherents are willing to accept God's Will, whether God directly answers the prayer or not. Nana (2023) opined that prayer of petition is the most important aspect of prayer; its remains an expression of the will of the people who asks favour from God or dependable beings for himself and his well wishers. During this part of prayer, the worshipper invokes the blessing of the deity on all those who wish well but pronounces curses on his enemies.

Intercession: Prayer of intercession - "*akam edinam nkpe ubok mbana owo mme nkpo*". Meaning literary, to pray and intercede for someone or any situation that affect one's being or safety. According to Lawrence-Hart and Tamunoiyalla (2024) a prayer of intercession, the people are not concerned with their needs but with the needs of others. Sometimes, the priest intercedes for the community, family, friends, asking God or the deity to have mercy, shower blessings, protect or heal, answer the requests. However, prayers of intercession seem to be another form of prayer of petition. Intercession is a prayer of petition which leads us to pray as our ancestors did.

The Notion of Incantations in Ibibio Traditional Religion

Duru (2016) asserted that the term incantation is derived from Latin "*incantare*", meaning "to chant (a magical spell) upon," from in "into, upon" and *cantare* "to sing". Incantation may take place during ritual performance, either as a hymn or prayer, and may invoke or praise a deity. It is an enchantment created using words with the intent of casting a spell on an object or a person. In a personal communication with Effiong Etim Okon (January 2026), in his opinion, he noted that incantation means '*uting iko ye mbokpo*'; meaning literally communication with the spirits. Hence, according to Olusola (2023) incantation is an oral spiritual or magical statement either in spoken or chanted form that are usually memorized and recited as part of the major requirements to achieve a spiritual or metaphysical purpose.

Moreover, incantation equally involves using words of one or more languages that may not have a direct meaning or even are meaningless (to outsiders) in order to satisfy the needs of people. It is a collection or combination of special words that are uttered or sung to have magical effects. In reciting or uttering these words, one uses a high piercing sound and sometimes slow and soft sounds to punctuate and emphasize whatever is being said or uttered (Duru, 2016). According to an interviewee, Edet Edem Udonwa (personal communication, November 2025), he revealed that incantation seems to be an act of invoking something especially from the spiritual world either for a benevolence act or malevolence. He further states that sometimes, someone may invoke the spirit to ascertain the fact of the matter or any issue that affecting individual or communal well-being. It also involves doing some kind of activity, apart from using the special spiritual passwords or coded utterances. According to Ibibio traditional religious beliefs, incantations work miraculously as the user or enchanter wish and make human wishes come to reality with immediate effect. Hence, it is regarded as a means of achieving spiritual goals with immediate effect.

Relevance of Prayers and incantations in Ibibio Traditional Society

Prayers and incantations are the most common act of worship in Ibibio traditional religious life where the adherents or worshippers communicate directly or indirectly with God, the divinities, and the ancestors.

Lawrence-Hart and Tamunoiyalla (2024) averred that prayers are often transformed into incantations or invocations, a characteristic of African religion. The effectiveness of prayers and incantations depend on a precise formulation with parallelisms, solemn repetition, and accumulation of synonyms. In Ibibio traditional religion, it is the priest that does the community prayer because he uses various liturgical names and attributes of God or the divinities during such prayers and incantations.

Prayers and incantations are common phenomena in every religion; no matter the forms, they relate man to his source of being. Gbenda (2006) asserted that prayers and incantations are offered based on the confidence and conviction of the adherents or petitioners that there exists a divine being who is capable of influencing all the departments of his/her life and who has established a relationship with him/her. During prayers and incantations the devotees or supplicants establish communion with the divine or God. They remain the means of reaching the supernatural world, awareness of the divine, self reflection and self-projection (Onah and Ugwu, n.d.).

Obviously, during prayers and incantations, the believers communicate, give thanks and praises to the Supernatural Being in faith and humility. These acts motivated the adherents to solicit for forgiveness of his/her sins, protection, provision in life, and request for economic development and progress. In personal communication with Ini-mfon Okon Akpan (December, 2025), she averred that through prayers and incantations, the devotees attract the attention of the Supernatural Being to their situation; thus, makes the individual or community to grow spiritually, bring peace to an individual or community, and equally strengthens their faith.

During personal communication with Chief Moses Edem Ekpe (January, 2026), he asserted that when prayers and incantations are made, the people always have concrete intentions and do not 'beat about the bush'. They often begin with thanksgiving and praise, the solemn declaration of intention, then offering of sacrifices and other necessary offerings (pouring of libation) to God and the divinities/deities. The requests often centered on good health, healing, protection from danger, safety in traveling, success on enterprise undertaking, security, prosperity, preservation of life, peace, and various benefits for individual. He further noted that for the community, the people may ask for rain, peace, long life, cessation of epidemics and dangers, success in war, or victory over enemies, protection against sickness and death, fertility for people, animals, and crops.

Obviously, prayers and incantations are usually performed with the purpose of getting results from the Supreme Being whom the people depend on and interact daily with. Apparently, when the adherents of Ibibio traditional religion communicate with *Abasi Ibom* on any issue with a firm belief, *Abasi Ibom* will certainly perform and grant their requests (Oto-obong Akpan Ekpefon, personal communication, November, 2025).

Relationship between Prayers, Incantations and Economic Development

Prayers and incantations within Ibibio religious frameworks are very crucial in shaping spiritual, cultural, and social lives of the people. Their economic role is that of shaping mindset, trust, and culture that allow economic development to work better. According to Adedeji, Olulowo and Ogundeji (2025), the role of prayers and incantations has evolved significant across African history. In the pre-colonial era for instance, they were central to daily life, guiding agriculture, trade, healing, warfare, and governance. In agriculture for instance, Ibibio farmers engage in prayer for rainfall, soil fertility and abundance harvest. Moreover, incantations based festivals such as new yam festival in Ibibioland normally drives local commerce. Such

festival attracts visitors from far and near. Visitors may spend money on transport, hotel and food. This portrays prayers and incantations as elements of religion that cannot be separated from economic development since religion is inherent in humans and thus, drives people's behaviour and actions in more productive direction.

Again, in Ibibio land where spirituality is deeply woven into daily life, prayers and incantations promote community cohesion and serve as norm enforcement which boosts economic development. According to Etim Mfon Akpan in a personal communication (January, 2026), this practice reflects the Ibibio traditional religious conviction that spoken words, when ritually empowered are authoritative, normative and sacred with transformative force. This resonates with Durkheim's (1912/1995) cited by Adedeji, Olulowo and Ogundeji (2025) claim that ritual acts, by mobilising collective belief, strengthen social cohesion and reaffirm moral order. In a personal communication with Bassey Udo Ukpog (March, 2026), he maintained that fear of spiritual consequences of rituals such as prayers and incantations often deters theft, fraud, breach of contract in Ibibio community. This basically lower fraudulence acts in businesses thereby contributing significantly to the economic development of the society. Thus, one can say without fear of contradiction that prayers and incantations are social technologies. Though these two religious rituals do not build factories or industries for the Ibibio people, they shape humans through risk tolerance, trust, networks and mental resilience. Sometimes, in weak institution, prayers and incantations fill gaps that banks, courts and insurance would normally covers. For instance, traditional incantations are still used in Ibibio society to settle business disputes. This method works faster and is cheaper than courts.

Similarly, Mbiti (1975) noted that human beings are notoriously religious, and religion has permeated all aspects of human life. Be it politics, education, agriculture, and so on. Moreover, it has become profoundly clear that just peace-making and dialogue with other religions cannot be toyed with. This is because peaceful coexistence remains the essential prerequisite for growth and development in the society (Ogbonnaya, 2012). It is noted that development in human society is not a mere story; at the level of the individual, it implies increased skill and capacity, greater freedom, creativity, self-discipline, responsibility and material well-being.

Consequent upon these facts, it is observed that God will ever respect the principle of prayers (and incantations) in anything he does on earth because prayer was born out of God's arrangements for man's assignment on earth (Munroes, 2002). Besides, the concept of religion revealed a relationship between human persons and divine person believed to exist. Hence, with prayers and incantations the people communicate with the divine being for economic development and growth. Nana (2023) observed that prayers and incantations in traditional Ibibio society could be private or public, individual as well as communal. To the adherents, they are consciousness acts, a reality and a necessity to communicate with the divine. Stephen Akpan Udo (personal communication, February, 2026) observed that the economy of any community whose people hold firm these religious beliefs and practices grow faster.

Finally, religion can be used as a veritable tool for the repositioning of the Nigerian economy through prayers and incantations. For instance, in Ibibioland, Clan Heads, Village Heads as well as community leaders employ prayers and incantations to promote peace, social order, and stability in their domain. Actually, when there is peace in a society sustainable economic development is possible. Moreover, Ibibio traditional religion teachings on honesty, fairness, trust, and integrity develop attitudes that are conducive for the

promotion of economic growth in the society. It is observed that when prayers and incantations are performed according to the prescribed norms, answers are assured with meaningful economic development and social transformation.

Conclusion/Recommendations

The paper discusses the notion of prayers and incantations in Ibibio traditional religion and economic development. Obviously, religion plays a critical role in the process of enhancing and sustaining economic development in the society both at the local and national levels. Hence, religious activities such as prayers and incantations can influence the economic development of Ibibio traditional society in particular and Nigeria as a whole.

Positively, religion stands as a reliable institution providing stepping stones to sustainable economic development. Thus, Ibibio traditional religion makes room for peaceful coexistence which is the essential prerequisite for growth and development in the society. This is achievable through effective ritualistic prayers and incantations.

Purposeful and effective prayers and incantations together with hardwork and discipline life-style foster economic growth and development in Nigerian society as a whole. Moreover, Ibibio people should develop (religious) values such as honesty, integrity, creativity that enhance economic productivity, and advance their economic development and wellbeing.

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Oral Interview

S/N	NAMES	AGE	PLACE	DATE
1.	Ekong Etim Udo	61	Obiokpok Nsit	12/12/2025
2.	Akon Tom Jim	47	Ikot Ikang Nsit	21/3/2026
3.	Ete-obong Sampson Akpan	54	Uyo	11/10/2025
4.	Chief Aniefiok Akpan Okon	71	Okoro Nsit	23/10/2025
5.	Aniefiok Uko -Obong	49	Okoro Atai	20/4/2026
6.	Sampson Archibong Akpan	56	Afia Nsit	20/4/2026
7.	Iniobong Akpan Sampson	50	Obiokpok Nsit	15/10/2025
8.	Effiong Etim Okon	64	Ediam	23/01/2026
9.	Edet Edem Udonwa	65	Ikot Akpa Etok	22/11/2025
10.	Ini-mfon Okon Akpan	43	Uyo	21/12/2025
11.	Chief Moses Edem Ekpe	75	Ikot AbiaEnyie	22/01/2026
12.	Oto-obong Akpan Ekpefon	62	Etinan	11/11/2025
13.	Stephen Akpan Udo	56	Efa	12/02/2026
14.	Etim Mfon Akpan	45	Mbierebe Akpawat	17/01/2026
15.	Bassey Udo Ukpong	63	Mbierebe Akpawat	12/03/2026