International Journal of Development and Economic Sustainability, 13(3),85-102, 2025

Print ISSN: 2053-2199 (Print)

Online ISSN: 2053-2202(Online)

Website: https://www.eajournals.org/

Publication of the European Centre for Research Training and Development -UK

Industrialisation in Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria, 38 years On: A Critical Analysis, 1987 - 2023

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doi: https://doi.org/10.37745/ijdes.13/vol13n385102 Published November 10, 2025

Citation: Ekong E.U. (2025) Industrialisation in Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria, 38 years On: A Critical Analysis, 1987 – 2023, *International Journal of Development and Economic Sustainability*, 13(3),85-102

Abstract: *Strategically located on the Southern flank of Nigeria, nourished by the Gulf of Guinea and other great inland bodies of water, Akwa Ibom is also rich in crude oil and large deposits of natural gas. That is where the good part ends. Thirty-eight years of existence, eleven governors - six military and five civilians, coupled with a large population of highly trained technocrats, bureaucrats, and educated citizens. In spite of these, Akwa Ibom State is rated as the seventh poorest state in Nigeria, with 71.3 percent of her people living below the poverty line. Almost four decades of management of human and material resources, coupled with an excessive dose of unbridled greed, ego, jealousy, mafia-style political governance, and the practice of 14th century capitalism has resulted in a largely impoverished citizenry with a seemingly bleak future, neck-deep in a culture of violence and impunity. Politics and political office, answers all things in the state, it is a one-way ticket out of poverty to obscene wealth, absolute powers and unrestrained fleecing of public funds.*

Key words: industrialisation, poverty, natural resources

INTRODUCTION

> I urge you to be dreamers. Dreamers of broad tarred roads and lighted streets in our towns and cities, dreamers of industrial estates dotted all over our countryside, dreamers of a booming economy where our children will receive qualitative education and full employment thereafter. And after the dreams, I want you to think fast and act fast. We have arrived late and at the same time we are in a hurry. With all hands on deck, we can catch up with the fastest and the earliest[1].

[1] Excerpts from a speech by the first Military Governor of Akwa Ibom state, Colonel Tunde Ogbeha during the swearing-in-ceremony of his first batch of civilian commissioners on October 7, 1987.

Print ISSN: 2053-2199 (Print)
Online ISSN: 2053-2202(Online)
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Col. Tunde Ogbeha's speech conveyed the entirety of the expectations of Akwa Ibom people when the state was created in September 23, 1987. The idea was to hit the ground running. Strategically located on the southern flank of Nigeria, Akwa Ibom State has all the necessary indices of an industrial giant. Lying within the catchment area of the Ikot Abasi Export Processing Zone, which is home to the now moribund multi-billion dollar Aluminum Smelter Company, ALSCON on one hand, and the Calabar Export Processing Zone on the other hand, it is also situated within the axis of the Port Harcourt Oil and Gas Export Free Zone, the state should be a one-stop destination for investors. But it is not. So why is Akwa Ibom State with its vast human and natural resources rated by the FOS[2] as the seventh poorest state in Nigeria? The state has 67[3] percent of its people living below the poverty line. Let's go into the recent history of the state to find out how she arrived at her current sorry state.

Scope

This seminar paper will focus primarily on a critical analysis of industrialization in Akwa Ibom State from 1987–2023, and the challenges met during the period under review. Essentially, it will also look at the socioeconomic activities in the area from colonial times, until the period immediately after the Nigerian Civil War, 1900–1970s. It will analyse the economic situation of the state till 2023.The paper is divided into four subheadings. The first subheading is the introduction and scope of the work, the second will focus on a brief history of the state and the early years of economic activities from the colonial period to the 1970s and beyond. The third deals with the industrialization of the state from the period of Clement Isong to the administration of Victor Attah. Mention will; however, be made of the regime of Colonel Udoaka Jacob Esuene of the defunct South Eastern State, where it all started. The fourth subheading will make a critical comparison between now and then, look at the prospects and challenges of industrialization in the state and make recommendations.

Brief History of Akwa Ibom State

Akwa Ibom State is one of the 36 states which make up the Federal Republic of Nigeria. Like Nigeria, Akwa Ibom has a chequered political history. It was created on September 1987, a year after the belt-tightening policy of the Ibrahim Babangida's Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP) was introduced. Nigeria faced very difficult economic times, and so the newly created state had to weather the economic depression of the 1980s and still develop in spite of it.

Today's Akwa Ibom State was before 1967, an integral part of the defunct South Eastern State of Nigeria. Just before the outbreak of the Nigerian Civil War (1967–70), the three Regions that made up Nigeria were part of Gowon's war strategy and broke into twelve States. Akwa Ibom then became part of the defunct South Eastern State. In 1976, the existing twelve state structures were further broken into nineteen and Akwa Ibom become a part of the Old Cross River State. In 1987, the nineteen states were further broken into 21 and the area which is today referred to as Akwa Ibom state came into existence, as a full-fledged state of the Federal Republic of Nigeria. Akwa Ibom state has 31 local

[2] Federal Office of Statistics. Year Book, 1999.
[3] Economic Empowerment and Development Strategy, AK – SEEDS, published by the State Ministry of Economic Development, (2004), Uyo, Vol. 1, p. 12.

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Online ISSN: 2053-2202(Online)
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government areas, and an estimated compact landmass of approximately 7, 2499 km[4] and a homogenous population of about 4.2 million[5] in 2012, current 2025 population estimates put the population at about 7.2 million.[6] Akwa Ibom state has the highest population density in Nigeria, with about 800 people per square kilometres.

The major ethnic group in the state is the Ibibio, with sub-groups of Oron, Annang, and the Andonis. The official language is English, and the major indigenous language is Ibibio. Seventy-five percent of Akwa Ibom people live in rural areas, with 119 clans, populating about 2,664 villages.[7] The state is bounded on the east by Rivers state; on the west by Cross River state, on the north by Abia state and on the south by the Gulf of Guinea. Twenty-five percent of the population lives in urban areas mainly made up of civil servants, teachers, and petty business people, while the rural dwellers are mainly peasant farmers, fishermen and petty traders.

The state has a continuous Atlantic coastline which stretches approximately 129sq kilometres from Oron in the east to Ikot Abasi in the west. Coupled with its continental shelf and the estuaries of the Cross River, Imo River, Qua Iboe River, and the Atlantic Ocean, the state is home to a variety of aquatic life, which includes catfish, sharks, barracuda, sardines, bonga, croaker, shrimp, prawns, crayfish, snappers, bivalves, squids, oysters, and several others.

Between 1987 and 2023, Akwa Ibom state has had six military governors and four civilian governors. The state is the largest producer of crude oil in Nigeria (504,000bpd)[8] and the largest producer of condensate in Nigeria. It also boasts huge deposits of offshore oil and gas, deposits of silica sand, clay, kaolin, gravel, nitrate, uranium, gold, coal, salt, and a vast variety of agricultural produce[9].

The state is basically an agrarian economy with most of the peasant farmers holding small family plots, which, by all accounts, cannot have a meaningful impact on the overall food production capacity of the state. Early in the 1970s and 1980s before the area entered political existence, it experienced a period of industrialization that soon fizzled out when the state was born. Presently, there are no functioning industries in the state whether government or private. The state's economic landscape is dotted with small sole-ownership business structure, which is about 87 percent dominated by the non-manufacturing sector, especially petrol stations and three star hotels.

Akwa Ibom State: The Early Years

[4] Akwa Ibom State: Fulfillment of the Dream, Uyo; National Museum and Monument Publications, (2000), p. 59
[5] These figures are based on the 1991 Census figures published by the National Population Commission. The projections were based on the nationally accepted birth rate of 3.1% and death rate of 1.5% per annum. With additional updated figures from the 2016 Census figures.
[6] National Bureau of Statistics, Akwa Ibom State Branch, 2025.
[7] National Population Census, op cit.
[8] Faith Omoboye, Top 10 Oil producing states in Nigeria by daily output, Business Day Newspaper, March 26, 2025
[9] Unveiling Local Government Areas: people, features, and opportunities, A Fact Sheet, Impact Magazine Anniversary Special Edition, Vol. 2, Number 13, September (2012), p. 101-102.

Research has shown that the people who inhabit the area known as Akwa Ibom suffered great indignities at the hands of their neighbours. Between 1650 and 1900, according to Nair,[10] the relationship between the people of Akwa Ibom and their neighbours was dramatically disruptive. The Efik kings on the coast of Calabar, acting in collaboration with agents of European slave merchants, wrenched unsuspecting hardworking villagers from the countryside and disgorged them into the waiting hulks of merchant slave ships from Western Europe.

From 1943-1967, the people who inhabit the areas described above were, according to Ekpeyong:

> The present-day development problems in Akwa Ibom State date back to the conditions that prevailed in Nigeria as a whole before 1967. Until the advent of the initial twelve-state structure in 1967, the non-Wazobia people of this country suffered under a triple handicap: political, economic, and educational. The federal capital and the three regional capitals, namely Lagos, Kaduna, Enugu, and Ibadan as the center of political power, were all located in Wazobia territory. A political capital, by its very nature, is preeminently the radiating center of industrial, economic, and infrastructure development[11].

The Akwa Ibom people suffered intense political, economic, and educational marginalization at the hands of their neighbours. Nineteen hundred and sixty seven was the year that the Akwa Ibom people had their first breathes of fresh air after the suffocated grip of the Igbo leadership on the destiny of the people. From 1967, the people of the area had a chance to map out their collective destiny as a people, which would be based on the socio-economic activities of their people before, during, and immediately after the Nigerian Civil War.

It is important to note that since the creation of South Eastern State and Old Cross River State, all the leaders and governors of the state, with the exception of Dan Abia, were people of Akwa Ibom stock. What concerted efforts were made since 1967 to stamp the state firmly on the road to development? Before looking at the successive governments that ruled the area after 1967, it is important to go down memory lane and briefly examine the socioeconomic activities of the people from 1900-1970s.

Socio-economic Activities from 1900-1970s

Long before the white man ever set foot on the African shore, the African had been engaged in various forms of economic activities within their communities and with the neighbouring areas. Dike and Ekejuiba,[12] said the peoples of the area traded in palm oil, slaves, brass rods, rubber, knives, piassava,

[10] Nair, Kanaan K, Old Calabar, Politics and Society in South Eastern Nigeria 1841-1906, A Study in Diplomacy and Commerce, London: Frank Cass and Company, (1972), p.

[11] Ekpeyong, David B, The Origin of Servitude and its Impact on the Development in Akwa Ibom state, in The Problems of Akwa Ibom State and their Impact on Development, Lagos: Times Publications, (2001), p. 83

[12] Dike, OK and Ekejuiba F, The Aro of South-Eastern Nigeria, 1660-1980. A Study of Socio-Economic Transformation in Nigeria, Ibadan: University Press, (1990), pp. 95-123.

tobacco leaf, gin, rubber, ivory, foreign goods etc. Trading activities went on between the people of the present Akwa Ibom area and the Aro, Bonny, Umani, Efiks, Ekoi and others.

In the Ikot Ekpene, Abak, Essien Udim, and Itu axis, the people of these areas were mainly engaged in pottery, plaited fiber work, wood carvings, mat weaving for ceremonies and roofing purposes, masks, shrine accessories, calabash decorations, household furniture, etc. Their brethren in Etinan, Eket, Onna, Itu, Ikot Abasi, and Esene were engaged in oil palm planting and processing, rubber planting and processing, and piassava, carved walking sticks, wooden household furniture, and weaving clothes manufactured from the bark of trees or raffia. Violetta Ekpo[13] was of the opinion that King Jaja of Opobo, now Ikot Abasi, was undoubtedly the most powerful trader of the late 1890s.

In the Ibeno, Oron, Okobo, Itu, and Mbo areas, large-scale fishing was and still is the main occupation of the people in the area. For centuries, fishing has been a source of livelihood for the people. Small fishing islands scattered off the Atlantic Ocean meant that fishermen would leave their families to fully engage in the catch and processing of assorted types of fish, shrimp, crayfish, prawns, for upwards of 3–6 months, after which they would transport the items to the shores for bulk purchasing, with middlemen and women waiting at the coast.

Research findings have clearly shown that an early rudimentary industrialisation process took place in the Akwa Ibom area before and during colonial rule and shortly after the Nigerian Civil War of 1967–70. Communities in Eket, Awa, Nung Ndem, Etinan, Itu, Ikot Abasi, and other areas with inland waterways or inland ports had early trading contacts with European merchants, who had switched from the purchase of slaves to the purchase of oil palm products and had to navigate their way far into the Ibibio hinterland in search of oil palm produce and rubber. Some of these European merchant trading companies had their own transport vessels and had set up trading and processing stations along the river banks and on inland ports in most parts of the Akwa Ibom area (UAC, John Holt, Miller Brothers and Petterson Zochonis). Virtually all the communities in the Awa area, Ukat, Ikot Akpan Ishiet, Ikot Udo Essang, Ikot Nkang, Awa, Awa Ndon, Awa Nkop, and Afaha Attai have creeks and swamps. In the Etinan area, Ibagwa, Eyiesanna, have inland ports and trading stations and were actively involved in the planting and processing of oil palm for sale to European trading companies.

These communities, along with the Opobo boatyard, were actively involved in the building and repair of boats. In Ukat and Ikot Udo Essang, in the ONNA area, Ekong[14]stated that the indigenous people were also involved in the planting and processing of rubber. Scattered along the coast and inland ports of these riverine communities were warehouses, factories, and local processing workshops where produce from the hinterland could be processed and then transported to European merchant ships at the coast in Eket, Calabar, Umani and Bonny. Other communities in Ikot Ekpene, Abak and Essien Udim were well known for the cultivation of medicinal herbs like medicinal herbs, and lemongrass. Some of the cultivated herbs were used for the treatment of various ailments, and the local herbal doctors were

[13] Interview with Violetta Ekpo, former Deputy Director and Curator, National Museums and Monuments, Uyo and a book, Ikot Abasi: The Aluminium City, Uyo: Durand Press, 1990), pp. 111-121.

[14] Ekong, EU, Coastal Trade in Awa, Akwa Ibom State of Nigeria 1900-1970, Journal of Research on Humanities and Social Sciences, Vol. 4, No. 4, (2014), pp. 134-142.

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Online ISSN: 2053-2202(Online)
Website: https://www.eajournals.org/
Publication of the European Centre for Research Training and Development -UK

particularly well known for the treatment of broken bones and bone diseases. Virtually all the communities were involved in the sale and processing of palm wine into the popular local gin. See figure 3 for details.

During this period, local domestic industrial activities were based on the technology available at that time, the needs of the people, and available local materials. According to Violetta Ekpo [15]these were all local domestic industries from which the industrialisation of the state should have taken off. But it did not. Research findings have shown that imported technology or industry without a local base on which to anchor would eventually collapse. These local domestic industries were not sustained or developed after independence, and those that continued to thrive until the outbreak of the Nigerian Civil War of 1967-70 were abandoned shortly after the war. These local industries would have formed the bedrock and a launch pad from which imported technology and modern industries would have taken off.

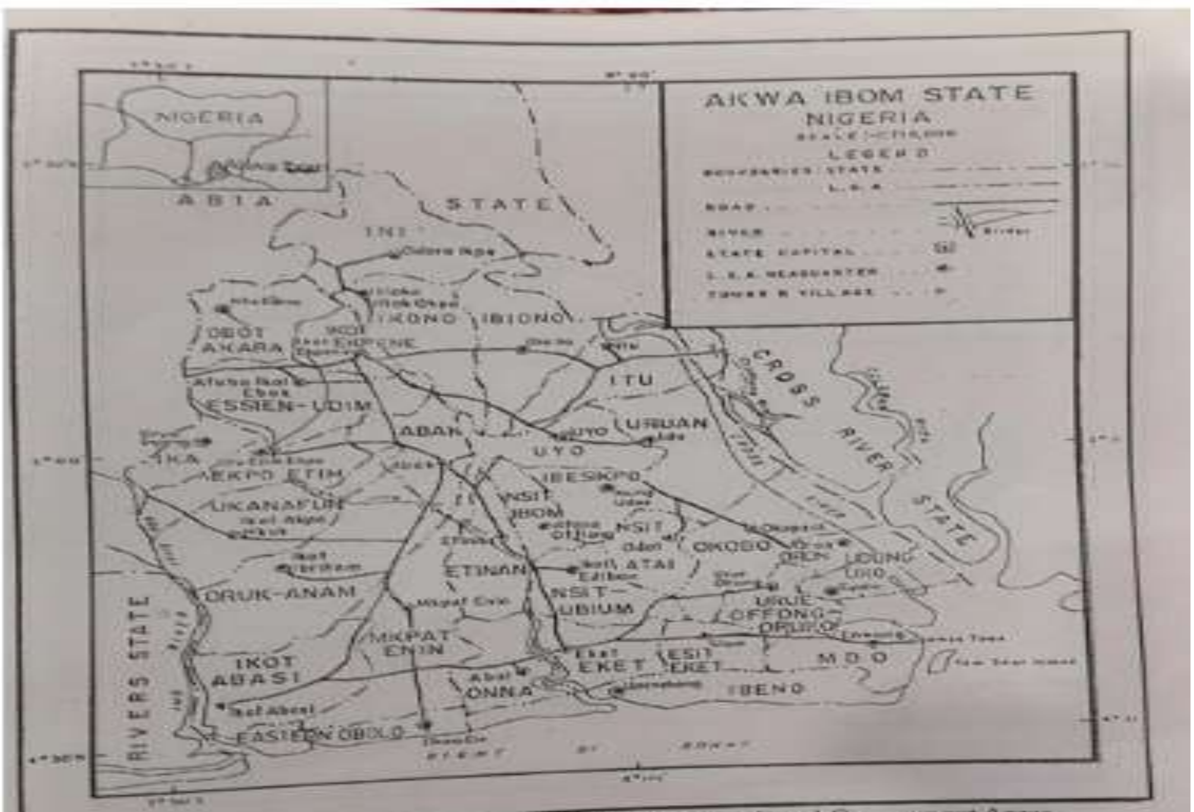

Figure 1: Akwa Ibom State showing the Thirty One Local Government Areas

[15] Interview with Violetta Ekpo, former Deputy Director and Curator, National Museum and Monuments, in Uyo, Akwa Ibom state.

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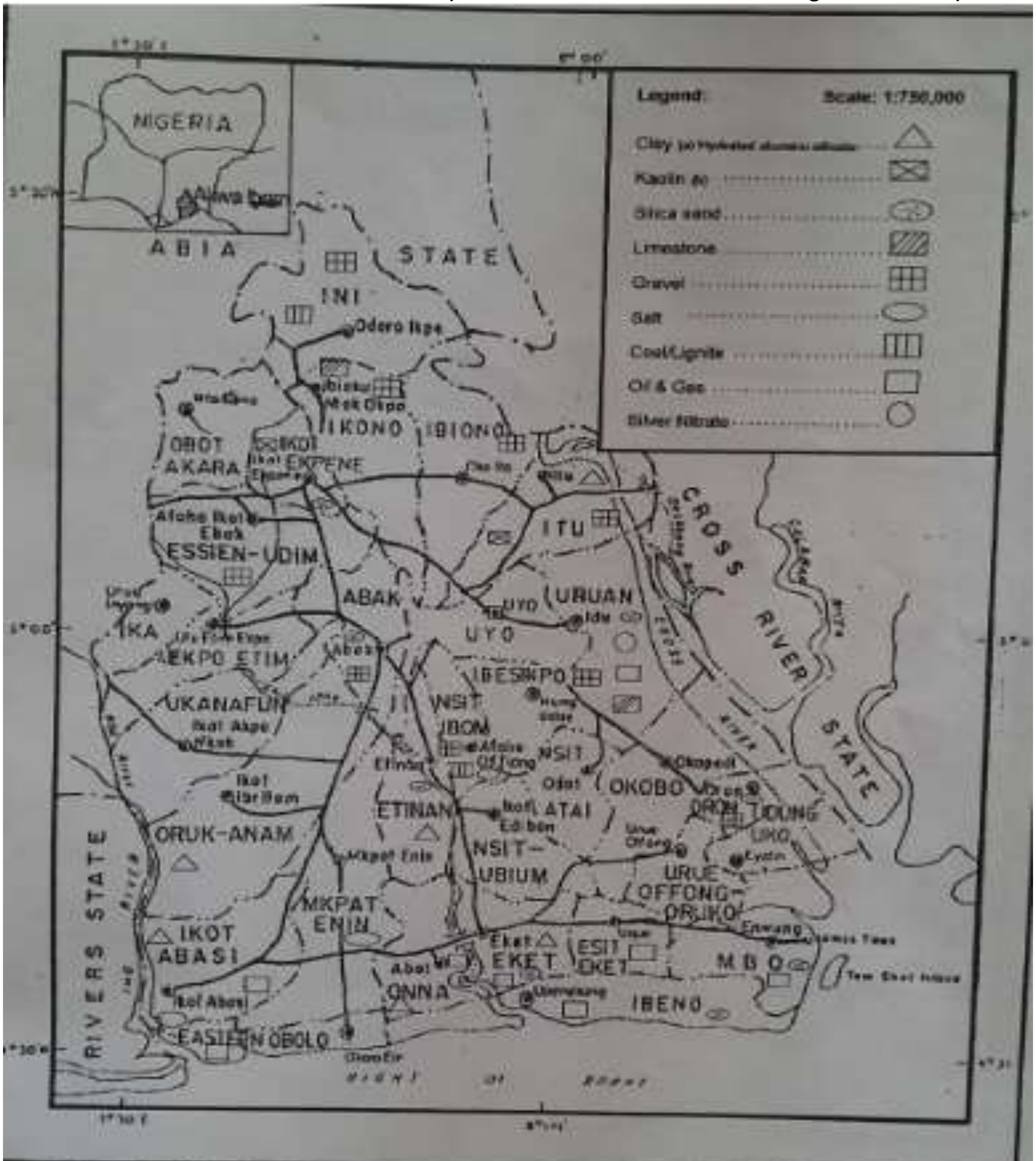

Figure 2: Akwa Ibom State showing the distribution of Mineral Deposits in the related Local Government Areas

Print ISSN: 2053-2199 (Print)
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Figure 3: Akwa Ibom State showing the distribution of Local Domestic Industries during the Colonial Period to 1970s (1900-1970s)

The Concept of Industrialisation

In the view of Todaro and Smith,[16] industrialisation is associated with high productivity and incomes and has been a hallmark of modernisation and national economic power. The authors pointed out that

[16] Todaro, MP and Smith, SC, Economic Development, Eleventh Edition, Edinburgh: Pearson Education Limited, (2011), pp. 65-67.

governments of developing countries like Nigeria tend to make industrialisation a high national priority sometimes with varying degrees of implementation. In Nigeria, where there is low industrialisation; there is a tendency for the country to be highly dependent on primary exports. Zwingina[17] had reflected that the First National Development Plan had among other things, the strategy of replacing primary commodity exports with import-substituting industrialisation and the transference of productive enterprises from expatriate to indigenous hands.

Traditionally, the industrial sector of the economy is composed of manufacturing, construction, infrastructure, electricity, and water. This paper concentrates on the manufacturing sector because it is the dominant sector that drives industrial development in every economy. The manufacturing sector contributes to the development and transformation of the entire economy. It brings skills, competitiveness, technology, infrastructural development, poverty reduction, massive production of goods and services, and therefore creates massive employment opportunities.

Industrialisation of Akwa Ibom State

Before the creation of Akwa Ibom State in 1987, various attempts were made to propel the area into an industrialised society. The mission statement of the state was as follows:

> Akwa Ibom State is to be transformed into a prosperous, highly educated, technology-driven, ethnically harmonious, caring, and pace-setting state in Nigeria through the formulation and implementation of strategic policies and programs to achieve those attributes and to assist individuals, institutions, and communities achieve their optimum potentials.

Managing a consolidation and reconstruction economy immediately after the civil war, the federal military government decided to embark on another development plan. The First National Development Plan[18] covered the period from April 1, 1970, to March 31, 1975, and concentrated mainly on the rehabilitation and reconstruction of the civil war damages and laid preliminary foundation for major developments. The 1975-80 Plan put forward by the South-Eastern State formed part of the Third National Development Plan for the South-Eastern State. Under this plan, U.J. Esuene (1967-75)[19] set out to implement the blue print for the development of the state. The primary purpose of the development plan comprised the following: systematic establishment of a series of pacing devices that will produce 'pressure' or 'inducement' mechanisms that will, in turn, elicit and mobilize the largest possible amounts of our resources.

It also included a comparative appraisal of the strength with which progress in one of the sectors will induce progress in the others; rapid development of the engine of growth (Agriculture, Industry and

[17] Zwingina, JS, Capitalist Development in an African Economy, (the case of Nigeria), Ibadan: University Press Plc, Ibadan, (1992), p. 66.
[18] Federal Military Government of Nigeria: First National Development Plan 1970 –1975, National Archives, Calabar.
[19] Colonel, UJ Esuene,. The first Military Administration of the defunct South Eastern state (1965-75).

Mining) with a rational development of the social overhead component. This was adjudged as the most efficient sequence to promote maximum growth at the shortest possible time.

> In this way, development was sped up because an intermediate sector that was jumped over can be filled in with comparative ease as pressures and needs arose from the already realized sectors; the absence of the intermediate sector will then be felt as a shortage, and the decisions to remedy it are more readily taken than before the gap became evident and dualistic development aimed at increasing output, increasing employment, and raising people's income significantly to mitigate poverty and human misery. This consists of simultaneous development of the modern sector of the economy (such as large plantations, large key industries, urban centers, supermarkets, and modern service establishments) as well as the improvement of the peasant segment (such as peasant farms, small-scale industries, petty trading and rural areas.) These developments go on, not in competition, but as one complementing the other. [20]

The industries established shortly after, were part of the South Eastern State Five Years Development Plan.

Comapny	Year of establishment	Location	Products
Palmil End	1972	Abak	Palm Kernel Oil/Cake
Abestonit Limited	1972	Own	Asbestos Roofing sheets
Champion Breweries	1974	Uyo	Beer/Malt
State Sea Foods Limited	1975	Ibeno	Fish/Shrimps
Qua River Hotel		Eket	Hospitality
Plasto Crown Ind.	1976	Uyo	Plastics Products

- Source: Clement Nyong Isong (1979-83) governor of Old Cross River State, under the Third National Development Plan 1975-80, (Cross River Programme), set up the following industries from 1979 to 1983.

COMPANY	YEAR OF EST.	LOCATION	PRODUCTS
Qua Steel Products Limited	1978	Eket	Steel Products
Peacock Paints Limited	1979	Etinan	Paints
Sunshine Batteries	1980	Ikot Ekpene	Automatic Battery
International Biscuits	1980	Ikot Ekpene	Biscuits
Quality Ceramics	1980	Itu	Ceramic Products

[20] Federal Military Government of Nigeria, Third National Development Plan: Excerpts of the (South Eastern State Programme), 1975-1980, National Archives, Calabar.

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Online ISSN: 2053-2202(Online)
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Akwa Rubber Estates After Limited	1987	Itu	Processed National Rubber
Akwa Feeds Limited	1987	Uyo	Livestock Feeds
Akwa Palm Industries	1987	Eket	Palm Oil/Kernel
Akwa Plant	1987	Uyo	Plant/Equipment Hire
Equipment Services Limited	1987	Uyo	
Akwa Hatchery Company	1987	Uyo	Production of day-old chicks.

- Source: Some industries established during and after the term of governor Clement Isong

None of these ambitious large-scale industries are currently functioning. In the table above, it should be noted that though Palmil Industries, which was established earlier in 1972 had become moribund, the military administrators after Isong still went ahead to establish another Palmil Industry without first determining why the previous Palmil Industry collapsed. According to Umana,[21] the state has quite a handful of moribund industries both at federal and state levels – Nigerian Newsprint Manufacturing Company at Oku Iboku in Itu, Aluminum Smelting Plant at Ikot Abasi and Ebughu Fishing Terminal at Mbo.

Some recent establishments, like the Le Meridien Ibom Hotel and Golf Resort, have already started showing signs of decay with large sections of the facility in various stages of disrepair and neglect. The Ibom Power Plant (IPP) was reported to be embroiled in controversy, since its establishment and has not made any impact on the electricity consumption of the state. Reports have it that the Power company feeds the national grid while the state in which it is located have remained in darkness for years. Before the Mohammad Buhari government left office in 2023, it initiated reforms in the power sector. Unfortunately, the current state government is yet to take advantage of these reforms, while Enugu state have taken the initiative to use the reforms to improve power supply in their state. Ibom Airport Maintenance and Overhaul Facility which was constructed by Attah’s government with the hope that the state will later become an economic hub repairing aircrafts in the South-south Nigeria and the West African sub-region. But that dream did not materialise. The expensive aircraft hanger still lies unused, more than 24 years after it was constructed.

The economic engineering has had little or no impact on the quality of life of the people of the state. According to FOS[22] data, Akwa Ibom State is the seventh poorest state in Nigeria. Most of the ‘wealthy’ individuals in the state engage in rent-collector businesses, such as hotels and petrol stations. In 2003, the Federal Government of Nigeria formulated an economic policy, the National Economic and Empowerment Development Strategy (NEEDS), in line with the Millennium Development Goals (MD6s) of the United Nations. The Akwa Ibom State government soon adapted the program to meet

[21] Umana, OA, First Among Equals: A Chronicle of Pioneering Efforts of Akwa Ibom in Development, Calabar:Saesprint Company (2011), p. 90
[22] Directory of Establishments, (Akwa Ibom State, 1997), published by the Federal Office of Statistics, Abuja, pp. 4-18.

the Federal Government's NEEDS and labeled its own program AK-SEEDS[23] (Akwa Ibom State Economic Empowerment and Development Strategy).

The eight-goal Millennium Development Strategy to be achieved by 2015 included: the eradication of extreme poverty and hunger; attainment of universal primary education in all countries; promotion of gender equality and empowerment of women; reduction in child mortality; improvement in maternal health; to combat the HIV/AIDS pandemic, malaria, and other diseases; and ensured environmental sustainability and initiate a global partnership for development. The extent to which these goals have been achieved can be judged by the quality of life of the people. The military administration of Colonel Tunde Ogbeha, which governed Akwa Ibom State, was in a hurry to catch up with the rest of the older states in the federation. Aptly described in his speech, quoted in the introductory part of this paper, the speech gave a clear picture of the governor's vision for the state, and he immediately went to work. Under his leadership, the following companies were established: the Akwa Ibom Broadcasting Corporation (AKBC) both radio and television stations to assist in the mobilization of people for accelerated development. The Pioneer Newspaper, the weekly Pioneer, Anchor Insurance Company was commissioned in 1990. This was followed by the Akwa Ibom Feeds and Hatchery in the same year.

Various attempts at industrialisation-1987 to September 2007

Earlier, from 1983 to 1987, the governor of Old Cross River State was Dan Abia, there were no meaningful achievements worth mention in terms of industrial development in the Akwa Ibom area. After the administration of Tunde Ogbeha, policies churned out for the development of the state were no longer coherent, as there was no clear-cut economic policy thrust for the state. The administrations of Col. Tunde Ogbeha (September 1987-August 1988), Godwin Abbe (August 1988–September 1990); Group Captain Idongesit Nkanga (September 1990–January 1992); civilian governor Obong Akpan Isemin (January 1992-November 1993); Lt. Col. Yakubu Bako (December 1993–August 1996); Navy Captain Joseph Adeusi (August 1996–August 1998); and Group Captain John Ebeyi (August 1998–May 1999) all followed the same pattern.

Research has shown that no meaningful industrialization was recorded during the first 10 years of the state's existence. During the administration of Victor Attah, an attempt was made to put the need for the state's industrialization in proper perspective. Under the acronym SWOT (Strength, Weakness, Opportunities, and Threats), the government attempted to adopt a long-range vision for the state's development in line with the federal government's NEEDS. AK-SEEDS also incorporated some aspects of NEPAD's (New Economic Partnership for Africa's Development). NEPAD gave priority to infrastructure, production diversification, export promotion, and resource mobilization, but the state government did not follow suit. See figures I, 2 and 3 in the preceding pages.

[23] Akwa Ibom State Economic Empowerment and Development Strategy, AK-SEEDS published by the State Ministry of Economic Development, (2004), Vol. 1, p. 12

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Akwa Ibom State is presently 38 years old, but it can be argued that the state has been in existence for over 58 years, since the area presently known as Akwa Ibom State has been clearly delineated and governed by indigenes of the state since the period of the defunct South Eastern State in 1967. Apart from Dan Archibong and few military administrators mentioned earlier, the state had its own sons and daughters at the helm of affairs. Even the military administrators who ruled the state from 1987 to 1999 could not have ruled successfully without the active collaboration of Akwa Ibom bureaucrats and technocrats. Even the Life Enhancement Program (LEAP) and the Poverty Alleviation Program (PAP) have all failed to impact the lives of the people.

Victor Attah in his book mirrored his own state of mind, when he pointed out that;

> Lamentably, the potential that state creation holds manifests only in little, cosmetic improvements in the outlook of the state capital. Similar hints of progress also appear in local government headquarters in the form of improved headquarters office buildings, but hardly anything more. By and large, the promise that the new state held out soon becomes a dream to be fulfilled in frustrating, half-hearted, long-drawn-out little measures, clothed every succeeding year in ingenious, veiled excuses.[24]

Accessing statistics to support the industrialization efforts of the state has been a very daunting exercise. Civil servants in Akwa Ibom State either have not heard about the Freedom of Information (FOI) Bill, which has since become law, or they simply would not be bothered. Some of the statistics used in this paper should therefore be interpreted with caution, since current ones could not be accessed. Some of these statistics are far from the realities on the streets.

Thirty-eight years of economic engineering, the people of Akwa Ibom State have very little to show for it. In a state of about 7.2 million people with a very compact landmass, 71.3[25] percent of the population is poor, which leaves about 28.7 percent of the population outside the poverty range, this represents three-quarter of the population, which in itself is a huge social problem. Akwa Ibom state is an agrarian economy with a very weak and underdeveloped industrial base. All the government-owned manufacturing and service companies have folded up, with the exception of Champion Breweries and Akwa Ibom Transport Company (AKTC) which are both privately managed. Over the years, the government had evolved a state economic policy and blueprint for industrialization based on mineral-related and agro-based industries. The informal sector emerged as a vital component of the state economy, but its mortality rate is high, and the sector represents an insignificant proportion of the economy.

But the fact still remains that in a state where only 28 percent of the population live above the poverty line, much remains to be desired. The total staff strength of the State Local Government Service

[24] Attah, Victor, Come Let's Build together, Lagos: Union Communications and Publications Limited, (1999).
[25] Lovina Anthony, Multi-dimensional poverty report in Akwa Ibom, real, Don, published by Daily Post Newspaper, July 05, 2024.

Commission for the years 1996, 1997, 1998, and 1999 were 11,864, 3,157, 4,848, and 5,272[26]. Total staff strength for the state public service for the years 1998 and 1999 was 24,714 and 24, 8914, respectively. Presently, the total staff strength of the Akwa Ibom Civil Service as at December 2024 was 547,735[27]. These two sectors of the state are the largest employers of labour. Statistics for parastatals, judicial service commission, and civil service commission were not available at the time this research was conducted. But it is safe to assume that the total number of Akwa Ibom people in government employment is less than three-quarter of a million. In a state of about 7.2 million, the huge number of people trapped in low-wage, one-man enterprises and the sheer massive number of people who are unemployed and under-employed are to put it mildly, staggering.

Victor Attah came on board as the executive governor of Akwa Ibom State, his administration inherited 12 ailing public-owned enterprises which were mentioned earlier. Eighty-two percent of citizens were self-employed in the informal sector. In his book Attah[28] admitted that government industries merely appear to be avenues for 'jobs for the boys', or to put it properly an inexhaustible drain-pipe of public funds. His government pledged to do the following: Revive all ailing industries where it makes economic sense to do so, explore the feasibility of partnership with managing technical partners at home and abroad, consider the feasibility of utilizing linkages, which might finance projects spared from another or the product of one might serve as raw materials for another; establish Industrial Parks for citing industries in clusters for the economy of space and the enhancement of adequate provision of infrastructure.

Besides the laudable steps listed above, the government also encouraged indigenes of the state to invest in local industries. As part of efforts to move the industrialization process forward, the Akwa Ibom Industrial and Investment Promotion Council (AK11POC) were established. The body was to advise the government on policies to accelerate industrialization and multi-sectoral investment in the state economy. It was also expected to oversee the reactivation of business concerns with government equity interests. According to the then AK11POC Director General, Celestine B. Etouwem, the organization recorded some successes and challenges. Champion Breweries, International Biscuits, Plastic Crown, Pamil Industries, and Anchor Insurance have been privatized; Asbestonit Limited has been permanently closed while other businesses are being reactivated. Out of the seven companies set up after 1987, only Akwa Ibom Transport Company is still economically viable; the rest have been shut down.

Godswill Akpabio to Udom Emmanuel

Former governor, Godswill Akpabio, (2007-2015),[29] established the E-Library in a state which cannot boast of four hours of electricity a day. It has since become part of the aesthetics of the state. The Ibom Tropicana Hotels and Towers under the same governor were heavily subsidized to encourage residents

[26] The Development Framework of Akwa Ibom state, op, cit.
[27] www.nationalbureauofstattistics.org. Retrieved August 20, 2025
[28] Attah, V, Come Let's Build Together, op, cit. p. 19
[29] Daniel US, Udousoro TE, and Effiong, UU, Population Growth and Urban Renewal Programmes in Uyo and Ikot Ekpene Local Government Areas of Akwa Ibom state, Nigeria. Journal of Advanced Research and Multidisciplinary Studies, No. 4, (4), (2024), pp, 1-14

use the facility during festive occasions, because residents had previously avoided it due to cost. Presently, the facility lays waste as only a section is used for shops and Market Square. Seventy percent of the structure which was supposed to house the Ibom Tropicana Hotels and Towers is still under construction, ten years after Akpabio's term ended. Former governor, Udom Emmanuel (2015-2023),[30] established a Coconut Oil Refinery at Mkpat Enin local government area. Locals insist the refinery is yet to produce a unit of coconut oil. Jubilee Syringe Manufacturing Factory, Metering Solutions Factory to produce prepaid metres, and Kings Flour Mill, all at ONNA local government area, are very strategic industries established amidst high expectations, but these industries functioned briefly during the governor's tenure and collapsed before he left office.

Udom Emmanuel's government built the International Worship Centre for a whopping N20 billion naira, in a state where youth unemployment rate is over 65% is quite alarming. Besides, the sheer number of churches in the state leaves no one in doubt that this project is clearly a misappropriation of public funds. The Dakkada Luxury Estate, embarked upon by the state government was merely an acquisition of a vast expanse of land along the Airport Road in Uyo. No attempt was made to kick-start the estate with as little as ten initial buildings; hundreds of hectares of land lie unutilised in a prime property area of the state.

Recommendations and Conclusion

Development of the State's Blue Economy Resources: Ibaka Deep Seaport and Fishing Terminal

Ibaka is a natural harbour; it does not need to be dredged to allow ships to berth. To say that the development of this particular economic project will cause the state to explode is clearly an understatement. Development economists know the benefits of a blue economy, not only in terms of the vast revenue to be derived from the production, processing, canning and tanning of assorted seafood, the benefits of its numerous inland water bodies for transportation and tourism, can only be imagined. The 129 kilometres of Atlantic coastline, can jump-start maritime activities in the state and the stupendous wealth to be earned from the development of exotic water-front seven star hotels and posh residential properties will significantly improve the state's internally generated revenue. The huge employment in this sector will change the fortunes of the state and its citizens.

The need to upgrade from agriculture to manufacture

It is instructive to note that with a landmass of approximately 7, 249 square kilometres; the state simply does not have the landmass required for large-scale merchanised farming. But it can concentrate its efforts on those agricultural produce for which it has comparative advantage, such as cassava and oil palm. The state needs to focus on these two crops and maximize its full benefits and take them to the next stage, in terms of the manufacture of cosmetic creams, lubricants, margarine and butter, car seats and several other products like automobile and aviation fuel. It was recently reported that the Malaysians have been able to produce aviation fuel from the oil palm. There is also cassava bread, starch, cassava flakes, cassava flour and several others. See the maps for details.

Reactivate ailing industries

[30] Daniel US, *et al*, op. cit.

With the benefit of hindsight, the state does not need new industries for now. Its major priority would be to reactivate ailing ones, inject funds, and hire new and effective managers with track records to deliver desired results. Akwa Ibom state is blessed with vast untapped natural resources. Reports from the Ministry of Economic Development[31] has it that the state harbours over one hundred untapped mineral deposits in commercial quantities such as gold, silver, quartz, salt, coal, uranium, silica sand, clay. In addition, there is over one billion tons of iron ore, about one hundred metric tons of limestone and several others. Every local government area in the state has unique natural resources which can be harnessed for the development of the area. Entrepreneurs need the strong support of government, not only to survive but to thrive. With over 65 percent of youth unemployment in the state, the importance of this sector cannot be over-emphasised.

Ibom Power Plant (IPP)

It cannot be over emphasised that without a stable regular source of power, the state may well forget about any possibility of industrialisation. The Ibom Power Plant which was incorporated in 2001, has never operated at its full capacity of 190mw, at best it operated at 50 percent of installed capacity. Residents of the state have never felt the impact of the IPP more than 24 years after it commenced operation. Inspite of the reforms the Buhari government signed which empowered state governments to handle their energy sector, Akwa Ibom state yet to take up the challenge. Neighbouring states like Abia and Enugu have taken up the challenge of their electricity sector and have improved the operating environment for citizens and entrepreneurs alike.

Dearth of infrastructure and investment funds

Inspite of being reputed as having a better road network than any other state in the country, most of the local government areas have very little or non-existent infrastructure – electricity, roads, health centres, schools in these areas are of less standard than the schools located in the cities. The only part of the state that is truly developed to an extent is the Uyo capital city area. Apart from this, the industrial sector located in rural areas, needs a massive injection of funds, expertise and effective management skills in other to lift the state to the level of industrialization.

CONCLUSION

With the army of unemployed youths in the state, mostly aged 15 to 35, Akwa Ibom is certainly facing a potentially volatile social problem. These unemployed and unemployable youths flock to political party headquarters, political rallies, the homes of party stalwarts, and are very active in street political dance troupes. More importantly, they are an ever-ready tool in the hands of do-or die politicians, and are willing to do anything for a fee and handouts, which may include kidnapping and politically motivated murder.

[31] Source: Akwa Ibom State Ministry of Economic Empowerment and Development Strategy 2004, published by the Akwa Ibom Ministry Economic Development, (2004), vol.1

In spite of being the largest producer of crude oil (504,000mpd)[32] in Nigeria and home to ExxonMobil, now Seplat and in spite of being the largest producer of condensates in Nigeria, also receiving the largest sectorial allocation from the federation account; its citizens have nothing to show for the staggering financial allocations that entered their treasury every year. The spate of selected cosmetic infrastructural development witnessed in the state capital and some favoured local government headquarters in recent times is less than 0.5 percent of what the state receives annually. The abrogation of the on-shore, off-shore oil dichotomy raised resource allocation to the Niger Delta states from 26.82 percent before the ruling to 38 percent after the ruling. The whiff of the seeming wealth of the state was openly flaunted in the obscene display of wealth by the ruling political elites who have their hands elbow-deep in the public till.

A cursory look at the distribution of industries revealed a spirited attempt to ensure that each of the Old Divisional Administrative Units had an industry in its domain. Though the number of industries was inadequate even at that time, it was nevertheless substantial considering the area had suffered years of neglect and marginalization, first by the former Eastern Region and also by the federal environment. In spite of impressive beginnings, things fell apart after the creation of Akwa Ibom State. Industries that had thus far been doing relatively well soon became avenues to create jobs for political thugs and the favoured sons of local godfathers. It was not long before the companies buckled under the weight of executive myopia, unbridled greed, incoherent policies, and pandemic corruption. Thirty eight years on, it is time to put the state and its citizens first.

In the course of this research, it was observed that successive governments in the state pay lip service to development. Development projects like Fadama, River Basin Development Projects, Small and Medium Scale Enterprises (SMEs), and Industrial Parks which brought success stories in other parts of Nigeria, on reaching Akwa Ibom state never get to see the light of day. Even the federal government-initiated Technology Incubation Centre (TIC), which gave birth to several cottage and small-scale industries in other states, the Akwa Ibom state TIC is in a coma, with credit facilities meant for budding industrialists diverted to private use. Virtually every item used in the state is procured from Aba, Onitsha, Lagos, and some parts of northern Cross River State. From building materials and house-hold furniture to organising a child dedication ceremony in the family sitting room would require a journey to neighbouring Aba and Onitsha before such event could successfully take place. Akwa Ibom it must be noted is primarily a consumption state; it manufactures very few products and buys virtually every product it consumes, especially farm produce.

It's about 55 years since the first development plan was drawn up; the quality of life in the state has worsened, as it is listed as the seventh poorest in Nigeria. For a state that was said to be in a hurry to catch up with the rest of the federating units in the country, this research finding has shown that the state is not even in the race.

[32]Faith Omoboye, Top 10 Oil-Producing States in Nigeria by Daily Crude Output. Published by Business Day Newspaper, March 26, 2025

There is already an avalanche of information on the path the state could follow to get itself out of economic relegation zone in Nigeria. What is required is a sincere, determined leadership, with a clear vision of where it wants Akwa Ibom state to be, ten years from now, and a single-minded determination to make the right decisions to arrive at that destination. No amount of advice, recommendations, development plans, rolling plans, and blueprints can move a state from their position of footnote to a position of prominence if there is no desire on their own part to make a change for the better. There is no dearth of sound development plans for Akwa Ibom state, but there is certainly a dearth of sound purposeful leadership.