
A CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF IKOT AKPAN UDO – AMAZABA ETHNIC CONFLICT, 1935-2012

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ABSTRACT

Observably, most developing countries are ethnically diverse, Ethnic diversity may lead to increased civil dissonance. The National question in Nigeria is probably one of the most complicated in the world with her over 250 ethnic groups and 120 different languages spoken in the country. The colonialist while pretending to carry out a mission of uniting the warring ethnic groups, willfully and systematically separated the various Nigerian people thereby creating a suitable atmosphere for conflict. With the heterogeneous nature of the country, the tendency of the various nationals is towards parochial consciousness at the expense of national consciousness. The ethnic conflict between the peoples of Ikot Akpan Udo and Amazaba is one of such conflicts which started since 1925 and has continued till today with devastating consequences which include loss of lives, destruction of properties and displacement of community's members. The conflict is intractable in nature with deep rooted interests and claim by each of the combatants. This paper therefore, adapts a historical and descriptive method as its methodology to examine the fundamental causes of the ethnic conflicts and identifies the possible issues for resolution, between the Ikot Akpan Udo and Amazaba people in Akwa Ibom State. One of the recommendations made in this study was that we should not expect the years of cynical indoctrination of the people of the area to yield easily to a new climate of mutual trust and that it is going to take some time through the minds confused by deceit and a psyche benumbed by propaganda.

KEYWORDS: Conflicts, Ethnicity, Early History, Crises, 2008 Attack Ikot Akpan Udo and Amazaba People.

Introduction

Discussions with Ikot Akpan Udo and Amazaba people reveal a deep-seated animosity, hatred, and intolerance existing between the two communities. The background of these protracted disputes is centered on historical accounts of how each of the communities came to settle in the present location.

Ikot Akpan Udo are Ibibio of the Ukpum Ete clan in Ikot Abasi Local Government Area, while the Amazaba people are of Andoni stock in Eastern Obolo. The Ukpum Ete people claim to be the original settlers in the area and that the Amazaba are their tenants. The Ukpum Ete (of which Ikot Akpan Udo is an integral part) argues that between 1943 and 1953, they won a land case against the Andoni, by virtue of which all the lands that the Andoni people of Eastern Obolo are occupying, including Amazaba, belong to them, thus making the Amazaba people tenants.

Corroborating this position, the Clan Head of Ukpum Ete, who is also the village head of Essien Etuk village in Ukpum Ete, Etebom Clement Mark Idemudo, says, "Their grandfather, Obio Akama, an Ibibio Prince from Ikot Epeyak Ikono, escaped from the area to save his life, having violated the law of the area by killing a person on a secret day." He migrated to Ete with his family and some loyal friends and settled there. As they increased in number, some people moved and established their own settlements, which today make up the villages that make up the Ete clan"¹. He went on to say that when

¹ Clan Head of Ete, Etebom Barr. Clement Mark Idemudo. Oral Interview at his Palace in Ete, 17th January, 2021.

the Andoni people came, they approached their forefathers for a place to settle and do their business, which was fishing. Our grandfather obliged, but with a condition. They were asked to pay a yearly tribute of 100 big fish every October of the year, which they agreed to continue to pay until a certain time, when they reneged. As a result of their refusal to pay the rent and after a series of entreaties, the Ete people, together with other Ibibio people, approached the court to enforce compliance and to get a declaration from the court as to the ownership of the land. In 1943, Justice Jackson Jackson of Calabar High Court declared that the Ibibio people are owners of all lands by the right side of the Opobo river coming from the ocean, while the left side belongs to Andoni and Opobo². By this declaration, he affirmed that the Andoni in Eastern Obolo were tenants.

Speaking in the same vein, the lawyer for the Ikot Akpan Udo people and village head of Abasiute village, Ete, Chief Lawrence Ufot, supports the position of the clan head and confirms that the Andoni are tenants of the Ete people and that they pay rent of 100 big fish to their forefathers every year.³

Also corroborating this position, Eteidung Oscar Abel Paul, the village head of Ikot Akpan Udo, affirmed that they are part of the Ete clan and that his great-grandfather, who founded Ikot Akpan Udo, came from Ikono, along with Obioakama, who founded the Ete clan. He also supported the claim that the Andoni as a whole are tenants of the Ete people, and the Amazaba people, in particular, are tenants of the Ikot Akpan Udo people⁴. A position that was firmly supported by John Obotowo, the community leader and spokesperson for the Ikot Akpan Udo people. He maintained that the Andoni in general and the Amazaba in particular are tenants of the Ete people and the Ikot Akpan Udo, respectively.⁵

On the other hand, the Andoni people rejected the position of the Ibibio about their status. According to them, the Andoni are Obolo people of Andoni stock in River State who opted to remain in Akwa Ibom State since the days of the defunct South Eastern State and Cross River State. The Amazaba claim to have settled here for over 200 years when the first Anglican church was built on the present site in Bethlehem village in the year 1873 by the Rev. J. A. Prath. The paramount ruler of Eastern Obolo, His Royal Majesty Harry Etetor, corroborated the fact by saying, "We have lived in that present location in Eastern Obolo for over 200 years. "We migrated from Irombi in the Cameroon Republic into Nigeria and settled in the Niger Delta area of Nigeria."⁶ He maintained that their earlier history in the Niger Delta was not documented. They grew up to find that the Ibibio were their neighbours.

He dismissed as hearsay and fake news the claim that the Obolo were tenants and paid rent to their Ibibio neighbor, claiming that such an occurrence never occurred. He went further to say that this formulation of tribute payment started when the Ikot Akpan Udo-Amazaba crisis started. He insisted that the 1999 constitution empowers the Obolo people to occupy where they are now⁷.

² Clan Head of Ete, Etebom Barr. Clement Mark Idemudo. Oral Interview at his Palace in Ete, 17th January, 2021.

³ Chief Barrister Laurence Ufot. Interview with researcher at Ikot Abasi Local Government Area Headquarter on 16th Jan. 2021.

⁴ Village Head of Ikot Akpan Udo, Eteidung Oscar Abel Paul, interview at his Palace in Ikot Akpan Udo on 29th December, 2020.

⁵ Chief John Obotowo, Community Leader and Spokesman for Ikot Akpan Udo Community. Oral interview in his house at Ikot Abasi Local Government Area on 30th December, 2020.

⁶ Paramount Ruler of Eastern Obolo Local Government Area, His Royal Majesty Harry Etetor in his Office in uyo, Oral Interview on 28th March, 2021.

⁷ *Ibid.*

Conceptual Clarification

Ethnic/Ethnicity

Nnoli defines ethnic groups as social formations distinguished by the communal character of their boundaries.⁸ He believes the crucial communal factors may be language, culture, or both. Also, Suberu defines an ethnic group as a "social collectivity whose members not only share such objective characteristics as language core-tertiary, ancestral myth, culture, religion, and/or political organization, but also have some objective consciousness or perception of common descent or identity."⁹

This ethnic identity results from contact with other groups. He, however, argues that ethnic pluralism is necessary but an insufficient condition for ethnicity. Thus, ethnicity is a "social phenomenon associated with interactions among members of different ethnic groups" (Nnoli, 1978), and it occurs when a member of an ethnic group develops a shared awareness of their identity in relation to other groups, with in-group and out-group differences becoming more pronounced over time. Such exclusivist, identity-based discrimination undoubtedly results in conflicts over scarce economic resources and social and political goods.

Ethnicity hardly exists in its pure form. It is a consequence of ethnic group identity mobilization and politicization, especially in a competitive ethnically plural environment or context (Suberu 1996; Nnoli 1978). Also, Wolff says that ethnicity on its own does not cause conflict as several factors are always at play in each conflict situation, agreeing that identity is a fact of human existence and that it is what people make of it or how they deploy it that makes the difference between ethnic harmony and conflict.¹⁰

The manner in which activists define the in-group and out-group relationship (i.e., that 'us' versus 'their' statement) is crucial in conflict dynamics. "The more confrontational is a result of "their" oppression, or the more superior 'we' are compared with "their" oppression, or the more likely are intergroup relations to take a turn for the worse."¹¹

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However, ethnicity is rarely found in its purest form. It is a consequence of ethnic group identity mobilization and politicization, especially in a competitive ethnically plural environment or context (Suberu, 1996; Nnoli, 1978). Also, Wolff (2006) observes that ethnicity on its own does not cause conflict as several factors are always at play in each conflict situation, arguing that identity is a fact of human existence and that it is what people make of it or to what use they deploy it that makes the difference between ethnic cohesion, harmony, and conflict.

⁸ Nnoli, O. *Ethnic Policies in Nigeria*, Enugu: Forth Dimension Publishers, 1978, p.2.

⁹ Suberu, R. " *Federalism, Ethnicity and Reprondism in Nigeria*. New York: University of Rochester press; 1996, p.5.

¹⁰ Wolff, S. *Ethnic Conflicts: A Global Perspective*. Oxford University Press, (2006): p.3.

¹¹ *Ibid.* p.9.

¹² Nnoli, O. *Ethnic Policies in Nigeria*, Enugu: Forth Dimension Publishers, (1978): p.13.

¹³ Suberu, R. " *Federalism, Ethnicity and Reprondism in Nigeria*. New York: University of Rochester press, (1996): p.11.

Conflict

As noted by Wolff, the term "conflict" is used to describe "a situation in which two or more actors pursue incompatible, yet from their individual perspectives, entirely just goals."¹⁴ He further argues that sometimes conflict is the result of the struggle for power and material gain by leaders and followers alike. Because they have such vested interests, conflict entrepreneurs prefer conflict to cooperation and privilege violence over negotiations. To have a thorough grasp of conflict situations, they prefer conflict to conflict.¹⁵ The material value or economic viability of the territory is rich in natural resources such as oil, gold, diamonds, and timber. If there are cultural attachments to the territory, there would be more stakes in it.

Conflict may be either non-violent or violent. Notably, what constitutes violence and non-violence varies depending on the context or perception of the legitimate use of force or challenge to authority.¹⁶ Max Weber, in conceptualizing the state, contended that violence is legitimate in the rule of men (Wolff, 2006). To Wolff (2006), violence is the illegitimate or unauthorized use of force to effect decisions against the will or desire of others. The criminal model of violence differentiated between legitimate and illegitimate violence. It places emphasis on the identification of criminals in the target domain. In this perspective, the problem of violence is ascribed to outlaws and thugs who unleash terror on the law-abiding citizens and cause social and political instability in the society. This model tends to ignore the socio-cultural factors that breed violence¹⁷. In an attempt to provide an analytical framework for a deep appreciation of the causes of violence and conflicts, it is pertinent to analyze the various forms in which violence manifests.

Beyond the conceptual and categorical perspectives, violence has been part of human history. In this perspective, the social contract theorists held that man, prior to the emergence of the contemporary state, lived in a state of nature. According to Thomas Hobbes, "life is solitary, poor, brutish, and short in the state of nature." Other theories and models have been developed to explain violence. The micro- and macro-level approach is one of several approaches. This approach draws a web of casual links between the personal biological impulse and psychological disposition on the one hand and global structures, processes, and behavior on the other.

Early History of Ikot Akpan Udo and Amazaba People

Early History of Ikot Akpan Udo

The Ete people, of which Ikot Akpan Udo is part, claim to have migrated from Ikot Ekpayak Ikono many decades ago. Their patriarch, named Obiokama, was a prince from Ikot Ekpeyak Ikono who escaped from Ikono to save his life after violating the law of their community by killing someone on a secret day. This act attracted the death penalty, but being a prince, he was made to escape to save himself. He left with his entire family and some trusted friends and servants. They migrated southward and settled in Ete (the present area). As they increased in number, some people moved and established their own settlements, which today make up the villages that make up the Ete Clan. There were ten villages at the beginning, namely Obio Akama, Ete village, Ubeneke, Ubeneke 2, Abiaran, Abasi Ute, Essien Etuk, Okpoto, Odiono, and Iso Utibe.

The founder of Ikot Akpan Udo is a man named Okpoudo, who was a close friend of Obioakama (the founder of the Ete Clan). According to the village head of Ikot Akpan Udo, Eteidung Oscar Ebel, Paul

¹⁴Wolff, S. *Ethnic Conflicts: A Global Perspective*. Oxford University Press, (2006): p.4.

¹⁵ Ibid. p.17.

¹⁶Otiti, O. *On Conflicts, their Resolution, Transformation and Management*, in Otiti, O. and Albert, I. O. (eds.) *Community Conflicts in Nigeria*: Ibadan: Spectrum Books, (1999): p.11.

¹⁷Turpin and Kurtz, L. R. *Understanding the Web of Violence* in Manfred B. Stager and Nancy, S. Lind (eds.) *Violence and Alternatives: An Interdisciplinary Reader*, New York: St. Martin's press, (1999): p.6.

Okpoudo followed his best friend, Obioakama, when he left Ikono. They migrated and settled in Ete. He stayed with him for a while and, being a hunter by profession, left Ete and settled further into the interior at Ikot Okwo. After a while, he went back to Ikono, brought his brother to Ikot Okwo, married a wife for him, and made him the head of the village while he moved on further inward towards the Atlantic Ocean and settled at the present place, Ikot Akpan Udo.¹⁸

Early History of Amazaba

These are the villages that constitute themselves into what is now called Amazaba: Bethlehem, Amanbugi, Okorobulom, Amanglas, Ayama, Amoka, and Okoronyong. These were independent Obolo villages that sprang up near Ikot Akpan Udo. According to the Paramount Ruler, His Royal Highness Harry Etetor, the Amazaba and Eastern Obolo people have settled in their present location for over 200 years, with the first Anglican Church built at the present site in Bethlehem village in 1873 by Reverend J. A. Prath.¹⁹ He went on to say that the early history of their people was not well documented as fishermen with migratory tendencies. Hence their heavy reliance on oral history²⁰.

Relationship Between Ikot Akpan Udo – Amazaba before the Crises

According to the village head of Ikot Akpan Udo, Eteidung Oscar Abel Paul (while answering questions from the researcher in his office in Ikot Akpan Udo) says that the relationship between the Amazaba people and my people was very cordial. "We had no problem." We worshipped in the same church, intermarried, and had inter-cultural festivals where the two communities actively participated and engaged in competitive games such as football, wrestling, and so on. The relationship was so cordial that some of them bore our names; they learned and spoke our language; our children attended the same school; they played together; they worked together. To forestall crises, a joint committee made up of representatives of the two peoples was set up to attend to complaints and grievances among the people and address them. We really were close friends. "What is happening now is a surprise to me."²¹

Also speaking in the same vein, the Paramount Ruler of Eastern Obolo, His Royal Majesty Harry Etetor, in his words said

*"I am surprised at what I am seeing now. I lived and grew up in Ikot Abasi, and I was in the Cross River State House of Assembly. We enjoyed an excellent relationship with our Ibibio neighbours throughout. I truly do not understand what is causing all of these crises among our people."*²².

This position was supported by all the people the researcher interviewed.

Origin and Escalation of the Crises

Narrating the origin of the crisis, the clan head of the Ete Clan, Etebom Clement Idemudo, says that:

"The Obolo people were traditionally fishermen who came from Andoni land. They approached our great grandfather for place to

¹⁸Village Head of Ikot Akpan Udo, Eteidung Oscar Abel Paul, interview with the researcher in his Palace in Ikot Akpan Udo.

¹⁹ Paramount Ruler of Eastern Obolo Local Government Area, His Royal Majesty Harry Etetor in his Office in uyo, Oral Interview on 28th March, 2021.

²⁰*Ibid.*

²¹ Village Head of Ikot Akpan Udo, Eteidung Oscar Abel Paul, interview with the researcher in his Palace in Ikot Akpan Udo.

²² Paramount Ruler of Eastern Obolo Local Government Area, His Royal Majesty Harry Etetor in his Office in uyo, Oral Interview on 28th March, 2021.

stay and dry their catch before sale. Our father, being friendly, obliged them with the condition that they pay a yearly tribute of 100 big fish. As more and more Obolo people came, our grandfather gave them land stretching up to Atabrikang. Annually, the Ete people send agents who go around collecting the tribute in fish and sometimes money. The Andoni paid consciously as agreed. However, close to the Biafran war, the Ete people started creticising and accusing the agents of embezzling the tribute collected. These accusations provoked the agents, who stopped going for the tribute collection. One of the agents I grew up to see was Late Ebenezer Etukakpan, and he had the receipts (duplicate) issued to Andoni people after collecting tribute²³.

Because of this lacuna, the Andoni people stopped paying tribute despite all entreaties. By 1935, the Ete people approached the district court in the area to enforce the payment of tribute or vacate the land. The plaintiff in this case for the Ete people was one Udom Nse in Case No. C/8/41.

While this was going on, another group of Ibibio people outside Ete Clan, led by the Chief of Essene Clan, Chief Ntuenibok, approached the District Court against the people of Opobo Town to repossess an Ibibio settlement called Isong Inyang (Down Below) occupied by Opobo people. Chief Ntuenibok was the plaintiff representing the Ibibio people in Suit No. C/21/1935. Both cases remained pending in the District Court for a very long time. However, both cases were consolidated before Justice Jackson Jackson, sitting at the Supreme Court, Calabar Division, and in 1943, a judgment was derived in favour of the Ibibio people.²⁴

That was the situation until 1945, when the chiefs of Okorette and Andoni went to court in a separate action against the Ete/Ibibio people, claiming that the land stretching from Okopedi toward Iko and to Atabrikang villages belonged to the Andoni. The court relied on the principle of res judicata (relying on the previous judgment) and refused the prayer of the Andoni. They lost the case again.²⁵

The Andoni people remained undaunted and proceeded to the West African Court of Appeal (WACA) against the Ete people in suit WACA/2264. The judgment was delivered on May 5th, 1947, and the case was struck out. The judgment favoured the Ete people of the Opobo division.²⁶

All these judgments confirmed that the Andoni people were occupying the land illegally and should therefore vacate for the rightful owners, the Ete/Ibibio people of Opobo. But unfortunately, this judgment could not be enforced to get the Andoni people out of the Ete land they are occupying illegally. This was due mainly to a lack of funds to engage a barrister to help enforce the judgment. As a result, the Andoni continued the occupation of the land unmolested. Emboldened by the non-enforcement of all previous court judgments and the inability of Ete/Ibibio to do so, the Andoni began to harbor expansionist ambitions to expand their current territory.²⁷

In 1975, the Andoni invaded a village called Itak Abasi and chased the inhabitants, who were the Ibibio and their chiefs, away. They annexed the village, changed its name to Agawazi (their indigenous name), and seized their houses, livestock, and other properties. To this day, the chief and

²³ Clan Head of Ete, Etebom Barr. Clement Mark Idemudo. Oral Interview at his Palace in Ete, 17th January, 2021.

²⁴ Ufot, L. O. Interview at his residence in Ikot Abasi Local Government Area. Lawyer representing Ete Community, on 20th July, 2019.

²⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁷ Chief John Obotowo, Community Leader and Spokesman for Ikot Akpan Udo Community. Oral interview in his house at Ikot Abasi Local Government Area on 30th December, 2020.

people of Itak Abasi village are living as internally displaced people in different villages in the Ikot Abasi local government area. The state government did nothing about the invasion and sacking of the Itak Abasi community until today.²⁸

Further emboldened by the lukewarm attitude of the government towards their activities and the lame-duck response by the Ibibio people of Ete, the Ibibio made another attempt. In 1979, they advanced further and attacked Ozubo (Inua esuk). They burned the only church there and chased the people away. They attacked and took over Iso Toyo village and set up what they called the AMAZABA group, made up of seven villages, namely Bethlehem, Amangbugi, Okorobulum, Amanglas, Ayama, Amoka, and Okoronyong, joining forces together to accomplish their expansionist dream.

This situation of relative peace remained until 2008. To further their expansionist ambitions, the Andoni planned a surprise raid on the people of Ikot Akpan Udo village. In the year 2008, the people of Ikot Akpan Udo came under a commando-style attack from the Andoni people of Eastern Obolo. At the end of it, 21 people lay dead, and many others wounded, and several houses were burned down and some destroyed, after which they escaped. The state government was alarmed by the extent of death and destruction and set up a commission of inquiry to unravel the reason for such an attack under the retired chief magistrate, Mr. Akam, in 2010. The Akam commission sat at Eket and, after several months, completed their inquiry and submitted their report to the government, but till today the white paper on the crisis has not been released²⁹ (Ufot, 2019).

Meanwhile, a concerned lawyer from the Ete community, Barrister Laurence Obot Ufot, approached the High Court in Uyo for action against the people of Andoni. joining the chairman of Eastern Obolo Local Government Area, who was then Hon. Charles Uduyok, the paramount ruler (now late), Chief Uwen Ukafia, and Reverend Mbong in the suit. In 19th September 2008, he successfully obtained an injunction from the High Court restraining the Andoni in Suit No. HU/432/2008 from coming to or near the Amazaba/Ikot Akpan Udo area.³⁰ (Ufot, 2019).

To enforce the injunction, the government stationed soldiers in the community to stop any violations. Since the soldiers left the community, the Andoni people have made several attempts on the community but were resisted by the Ikot Akpa Udo people, who are now fully prepared to defend themselves from any such attack.

Attack of Ikot Akpan Udo

After the attack on Ozubo (Inua Esuk) and Iso Toyo villages in 1979, there existed a period of relative peace. No serious confrontation took place until 2008, when the Andoni once again attacked another Ibibio village called Ikot Akpan Udo. This particular attack was spearheaded by the Amazaba in particular (who are immediate neighbors to Ikot Akpan Udo), with support from their kith and kin from Western Andoni and other areas. At the end of the attack, 21 people were killed, many others were injured, several houses were burned, and other properties were destroyed and/or looted. The state government was alarmed by the number of deaths and extent of destruction and hurriedly set up a commission of inquiry under the retired chief magistrate, Mr. Ekam, in 2010 to unravel the remote and immediate causes of the conflict and make appropriate recommendations. According to Barrister Laurence Ufot (the lawyer of Ikot Akpan Udo and village head of Abiaran), the commission sat at Eket

²⁸ Village Head of Itak Abasi, Eteidung Akpan Udua Oton. Oral Interview on 30th December, 2020 in his house in Ikot Akpan Udo.

²⁹Ufot, L. O. Interview at his residence in Ikot Abasi Local Government Area. Lawyer representing Ete Community, on 20th July, 2019.

³⁰ *Ibid.*

and, after several months of inquiry, completed their assignment and submitted their report to the state government, but till today, the white paper has not been released.³¹

Immediate causes of the ethnic clash of 28th August, 2008

The Ikot Akpan Udo people pinned the immediate cause to a simple interpersonal disagreement and argument between two people. Mr. Itohowo of Ikot Akpan Udo and Mr. Macdonald Sunju of Amazaba These two people had a simple disagreement, which centered on where a motorcycle was parked by Itohowo in one of the villages in Amazaba. The quarrel involving these two people was brought up for settlement by the elders of the two communities in the Apostolic Church compound in Ikot Akpan Udo, with the pastor of the church as chairman. As the meeting was being arranged, news broke that one of the elders who was to take part in the meeting and who was also the village head of Amauka village (one of the Amazaba villages) had been killed. The Amazaba immediately believed, without further investigation, that the said village head, whose name was Chief Sunday Eli, was killed by the Ikot Akpan Udo people, an allegation which the Ikot Akpan Udo people vehemently denied.

As a result of the death of Chief Eli, the meeting to settle the dispute between the two people could not be held. The issue of the quarrel between Itohowo and McDonald immediately took a different shape, and on the evening of August 28th, 2008, the clash occurred, and the Andoni suddenly attacked the Ikot Akpan Udo people unprepared.

The Remote Causes

The remote causes have been identified as a protracted land squabble which has currently disturbed the peaceful co-existence of the two communities for many years. The Ikot Akpan Udo people allege that their clan, the Ukpum Ete clan, won a land case against the Andoni people in River State between 1943 and 1953. As a result of the land case, the Ikot Akpan Udo maintain that all land occupied by the Amazaba belongs to them and that the Amazaba are tenants. The Amazaba alleged that they have always been harassed, insulted, and called tenants by Ikot Akpan Udo people who would not allow them to enjoy peace.

Secondly, economic interest resulting from the discovery of a large deposit of crude oil and gas in the area has helped to a great extent to generate anxiety among the two people, who incidentally belong to different tribes and cultures. They are simply attempting to position themselves to reap the full benefits of the oil discovery in the area and are unwilling to budge on their demands.

According to the village head of Ikot Akpan, Udo Eteidung Oscar Paul, external support and encouragement from western Andoni people and the River State government cannot be ruled out in view of the national oil and gas politics where the struggle to acquire more oil wells means more revenue to states of the oil producing area. That is why Eastern Obolo are always agitating to join River State and Western Andoni, where they are rightly from.³²

Finally, the very fact that the two contending communities belong to different ethnic groups with different languages, cultures, and traditions is an issue in the crisis. Conceding to each other means giving up their God-given wealth to a stranger, as well as all economic benefits and heritage that they would have passed on to future generations.

³¹ Ufot, L. O. Interview at his residence in Ikot Abasi Local Government Area. Lawyer representing Ete Community, on 20th July, 2019.

³² Village Head of Ikot Akpan Udo, Eteidung Oscar Abel Paul, interview at his Palace in Ikot Akpan Udo on 29th December, 2020.

Situation after 2008 attack

After the attack in 2008, the state government was alarmed at the extent of destruction to lives and properties and hurriedly set up a commission of inquiry headed by a retired magistrate, Ekam, to unravel the immediate and remote causes of the conflict and make appropriate recommendations. Meanwhile, the Ikot Akpan Udo lawyer and village head of Abasuiute, Ete Eteidung Lawrence Ufot, approached a Uyo high court for action against the Andoni, joining the Local Government Council Chairman then, who was Charles Uduyok, the Paramount Ruler (now late), His Royal Majesty Uwem Ukafia, and Reverend Mbong in the suit. On September 19th, 2008, he successfully obtained an injunction from the Uyo high court restraining the Amazaba in suit no. HU/432/2008 from coming to or near Ikot Akpan, Udo. To enforce the injunction, the government stationed soldiers and policemen to foil any violation of the injunction.³³

However, after the soldiers and policemen left the community, the Andoni attacked the community several times but resisted. Also, an Ad-Hoc Peace and Reconciliation Committee was constituted by the Akwa Ibom State Government on May 24, 2012, with Chief (Barr.) E. Eneyo as chairman to broker peace between the Amazaba and Ikot Akpan Udo peoples. The committee carried out their duties, completed their report, and submitted it to the then Deputy Governor, Obong Nsima Ekere, on July 12, 2012.

Till today, the report and outcome of Chief Ekam's and Chief Eneyo's committees have not been published. Since the beginning of the crisis in 2008, Ikot Akpan Udo has been attacked 14 times with no serious consequences, except in 2016. In 2016 alone, the Andoni attacked Ikot Akpan Udo three times. first on January 8th, January 12th, and November 18th. The attack of January 12th was almost as devastating as that of 2008. At the end of it, 16 houses were burned, 15 motorcycles and a Toyota Camry were destroyed, and the house of the village head was also burned. This time, there was no loss of life like in 2008. It was during this attack that the Divisional Police Officer (DPO) was shot and wounded when he led his men to intervene.

Government reaction to the attack

The government, alarmed by the extent of destruction, sent in security personnel to be stationed there to prevent the continuation or reoccurrence of the crisis. In the interim, a commission of inquiry headed by a retired magistrate, Akam, was set up. The committee sat in Eket and, after its work, submitted its report to the government, but no white paper or report has been published up to today. A peace and reconciliation committee was set up by the then Deputy Governor, Nsima Ekere, in May 2012. The committee completed its task in July 2012 and submitted its report, but it has yet to be made public or its recommendations implemented.

In all these attacks with attendant consequences on lives and properties, the government has not thought it wise to assist the people to get back on their feet or compensate them in any way, leaving them to self-help. No wonder that, since the 2008 attack, Ikot Akpan Udo has been attacked 14 times, with three attacks in 2016 alone. The attack of January 12th, 2016 left 16 houses burning, 15 motorcycles destroyed, and one Toyota Camry destroyed.

The government's handling of the crisis has led to a recurrence of attacks. There have not been attacks for some years, but that does not mean that the crisis is over. The people on both sides have just bottled up their anger, waiting for when and where to vent it. Asked by the researcher whether he is

³³ Ufot, L. O. Interview at his residence in Ikot Abasi Local Government Area. Lawyer representing Ete Community. 20th July, 2019.

satisfied with the way the government has handled the matter, the clan head of Ete, Etebom, Barr. C. M. Idemudo. His response was

“Government action has not been satisfactory at all. They have done nothing positive. They have sympathy for the Andoni and have been protecting them.”³⁴.

However, the paramount Ruler of Eastern Obolo, His Royal Majesty Harry Etetor, after castigating the government for not publishing the committee reports and helping the Amazaba people return to their villages, was optimistic that peace will soon return. He said that they have signed the final peace accord, which has been accepted by both parties. He believes the conflict will be a thing of the past³⁵. This optimism is shared by Dr. Gibson Okworo from Eastern Obolo, who believes that peace will soon return.

While we await the publication of the accord and the return of peace, the government should take bold steps to compensate the victims of the attack and help the wounded be on their feet again.

Assessment of Government’s Handling of the Crises

Good governance is a key instrument that enables and sustains peaceful, secure, and overall social development, as it is likely to breed peace and provide for the security of lives and property, which will in turn create the enabling environment for sustainable development to thrive. Odock³⁶ posits that good governance is "a system of government based on good leadership, respect for the rule of law and due process, accountability of the political leadership to the electorate, and transparency in the operation of government."

The United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (UNESCAP) confirms in summary that:

Governments that are ineffective and inefficient, not transparent, not responsive to the people, not held accountable for their actions, inequitable and exclusive to the elites, non-participatory, do not follow the rule of law, and lack consensus-driven policies are examples of bad governance.³⁷ We have seen the qualities of both good and bad governance. We can now assess how well or poorly the government, both national and state, handled these crises over the years, which resulted in massive destruction of lives and property and turned a previously friendly neighbor into sworn enemies, stifling economic development and leading to widespread poverty, unemployment, and restiveness in the area.

We shall now assess some decisions and actions of governments, both national and state, and how these gave rise to and sustained the crises.

The first point to note here is that the arbitrary creation of states and local government areas in Nigeria has been responsible for the avoidable crises we have in the country. For example, with regard to the state's creation in 1967, the entire people of both Eastern and Western Andoni, including Opobo and Nkoro, were under the Opobo division of the then Cross River State. During this period, there were no manifest crises between the Ibibio, Andoni, and Opobo people except for individual disagreements with limited consequences.

³⁴ Clan Head of Ete, Etebom Barr. Clement Mark Idemudo. Oral Interview at his Palace in Ete, 17th January, 2021.

³⁵ Paramount Ruler of Eastern Obolo Local Government Area, His Royal Majesty Harry Etetor in his Office in Uyo, Oral Interview on 28th March, 2021

³⁶ Odock, C. N. "Democracy and Good Governance", National Open University of Nigeria. Course Code PCR112 Monograph, 2006, P.4

³⁷ Owoye, O. and Bissessar, N. *Bad Governance and Corruption in Africa: Symptoms of Leadership and Institutional Failures*, Commission for Asia & Pacific (UNESCAP). Retrieved from: <http://www.unescap.org/pdd/prs/projectActivities/ongoing/gg/government.pdf>, 2009, p.1.

However, with the further creation of states and local governments in 1996, things changed. A very unscientific method was used, and, without the proper consent of the people concerned, Western Andoni and Opobo/Nkoro were ceded to River State, while Eastern Obolo were separated from their brothers and were made to remain in Akwa Ibom, thereby creating identity crises among the Eastern Obolo people (a small Andoni group in a predominantly Ibibio neighbourhood), hence their constant crave to be joined with their brothers in River State.

However, when in 1975 the people of Umeruke (Andoni people) attacked, destroyed properties, and chased away their Ibibio neighbours from Itak Abasi village, the government did absolutely nothing about it. Till this day, the chief and people of Itak Abasi are living as internally displaced persons in Ikot Akpan Udo village (where the founder of Itak Abasi came from) with no form of government intervention or support.

The irony here is that the Akwa Ibom State Government under Governor Godswill Akpabio in 2008 awarded a certificate of recognition as village head to the chief of Itak Abasi, Eteidung Akpan Udua Oton, while he was still living in Ikot Akpan Udo. This suggests that the government is even ignorant of the plight of the people of Itak Abasi. Technically, Itak Abasi does not exist again because its name was changed by Andoni to AGAWAZI. The village is under the charge of the Andoni people, who have driven the Ibibio people.

Again in 1979, the Andoni attacked Ozubo (Inua esuk), burnt the only church there and drove the inhabitants away. They went further and attacked Iso Toyo village and set up the Amazaba, which in Andoni means seven villages.

Also, the people of Amazaba have been displaced from their communities. The whole Amazaba settlement has been overtaken by bushes, and the people have scattered all over since 2008. After the attack on Amazaba, the government did nothing.

Until this time, the government did nothing, thereby failing in its responsibilities towards the people it governs. If they had taken proactive steps, the canage of 2008 on Ikot Akpan Udo village could have been avoided and all the lives and property lost could have been saved.

When the burble finally burst in 2008 with the massive attack on Ikot Akpan Udo, 21 people were killed and several houses were burned and/or destroyed, thereby displacing many families and wounding many others. The government took reactionary steps instead of being proactive and taking proactive actions.

Conclusion

It is clear from this paper that there is no eternally derived way of resolving conflict. Each conflict is unique in its own sense and calls for a peculiar solution after a careful review of its cause(s), the actors involved, and their willingness to work for an available solution to the contentious issues. The unending contention since 1935 between the Ibibio and Andoni in general and the Ikot Akpan Udo and Amazaba in particular is a major test of our resolve to live peacefully with each other for the sustainable development of the area. Ethnic conflicts have a fairly long history in the cause of our national life. The interplay of divisive forces has given mutual ethnic suspicion a new urgency.

Recommendations

1. We should not expect the years of cynical indoctrination of the people of the area to yield easily to a new climate of mutual trust. It is going to take some time to sort through the minds confused by deceit and a psyche benumbed by propaganda.
2. Let's just take the first and right step today and have the courage to go on.