
Managing of Communal Conflicts in Akwa Ibom State of Nigeria: A Case Study of Etim Ekpo and Ika Local Government Areas

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ABSTRACT

Communal conflicts and violence have become a plague that has eaten deep into the fabric of the Nigerian economy. The goal of this study is to identify the indicators of conflicts in Akwa Ibom State with particular reference to Etim Ekpo and Ika Local Government Conflicts and provide ways of managing the conflicts. The study adopted a survey research design with the questionnaire and interview schedule as the research instruments. It surveyed four hundred respondents who were selected as samples using the Taro Yamane's finite population formula. The sampling frames were the people living in the locality of both local government areas. The sample represented members of five villages, each selected from the four districts that make up Etim Ekpo L.G.A., as well as, five villages, each selected from the three districts that make up Ika L.G.A., and the general populace of both local government areas. Findings revealed that land disputes, Chieftaincy disputes (i.e., traditional ruler tussles), food insecurity, poverty, unemployment etc, are contributory factors to communal conflicts in Etim Ekpo and Ika Local Government Area and by extension, Akwa Ibom State. This study therefore recommends among others, equitable distribution of land, demarcation of boundary, employment opportunities, public education/enlightenment to reduce the adverse effects of communal conflicts.

Key Words: Conflicts, communal conflict, violent, managing.

Introduction

Conflicts and crises are found in every stage of life. Individuals, groups, associations, clubs, societies, local, national and even world community continue to experience conflicts and crises in one way or the other. Conflicts and crises are features of life and they have been since the beginning of creation—conflicts between light and darkness and even between or among the first set of human beings created on earth. So, conflicts and crises are permanent features of life which we have come to live and cope with and resolve from time to time. The existence of conflict cannot be terminated in life unless we want to terminate life itself.

However, a poorly handled conflict or crises could become violent or destructive which could hinder peace and security in the affected area. Thus, effective strategies that can help to nip conflict in the bud and to prevent it from escalating if it erupts, as well as to sustain peace to avert future occurrence crises and their attendant large scale should be developed by any affected area, community, state or even the nation that seeks peace, growth and development.

Communal conflicts (which is also known as armed conflicts) have become common phenomena in Nigeria today. These conflicts mostly ethnic in nature have posed a great concern to all spheres of human endeavour. Communal violence has the propensity to directly and indirectly influence the socio-economic activities among communities in the warring camps.

In Akwa Ibom State, according to Akpaeti (2005), one of the causes of conflict is land dispute. A release from the Department of State Service (DSS) cited by the Institute for Peace and Conflict Resolution (IFPCR, 2002) notes that since the creation of Akwa Ibom State from Cross River State in 1987, several bloody communal clashes have occurred. In some regions communal conflicts lead to only a few deaths or are solved before they have caused any fatalities. In others, however, these conflicts become very violent and dozens, hundreds, or even thousands of people are killed. Ika Local Government Area of Akwa Ibom State is a well-known example of the latter, and communal conflicts have killed hundreds of its inhabitants in the region, as well as, rendering hundreds of people homeless.

Etim Ekpo and Ika Local Government Area, being a case study for this research and having most of its population residing in rural areas, have not been strangers to communal violence or conflicts, as it has had serious implication on access and availability of food, since agriculture is the main preoccupation of rural population. The production of crops and rearing of livestock is the main economic activity of the people. Therefore, communal conflicts have serious implication on food system. Often warring communities or parties tactically resort to manipulation over access to food and livestock. Thus, food insecurity has become an effect of communal conflict.

Statement of the Problem

The rate at which conflicts escalate in Etim Ekpo and Ika Local Government Areas of Akwa Ibom State is quite disturbing and more worrisome as the two local government areas have occupied a volatile position in the history of severe tensions and conflicts in the State. It is important to note that these two local government areas have continued to witness vicious cycle of violent conflicts, some of which have attracted national attention. Issues that do not warrant people engaging in killings and destructions of life and property have surfaced with devastating consequences. One keep wondering what could be the possible causes of these conflicts in Akwa Ibom State as a whole, with reference to Etim Ekpo and Ika local government areas in particular. The goal of this study is to identify the indicators of conflicts in both the local government areas as well as, provide ways of managing conflicts in the affected areas in order to achieve a stable environment for the inhabitants.

Research Questions

The study sought to provide answers to the following research questions:

1. What are the contributory factors to communal conflicts in both Etim Ekpo and Ika local government areas?
2. What are the effects of communal conflicts in both Etim Ekpo and Ika local government areas?
3. What are the possible suggestions for managing communal conflicts in both Etim Ekpo and Ika local government areas?

Research Hypothesis

1. There is a significant relationship between the contributory factors of communal conflicts and its effects on the residents of both Etim Ekpo and Ika local government areas.
2. There is a significant relationship between the contributory factors of communal conflict and the prevalent mode of resolution of conflict in both Etim Ekpo and Ika local government areas.

Purpose of the Study

The main purpose of the study was to examine the devastating effects of communal conflicts on the inhabitants of Etim Ekpo and Ika local government areas and how to manage the causes of such conflicts.

Review of Related Literature

Quite a number of studies have been undertaken by researchers on conflict, focusing on its different dimensions. This becomes imperative so as to situate this study in a proper context, and also to establish a link between the existing or previous studies and this research work with a view to identifying knowledge gaps in the literature with respect to the focus of this study. The essence of this is to shed light on where to intervene by providing the missing link and by updating and contributing to the existing body of knowledge in the field.

Conceptual Discourse on Conflict

The word conflict is taken from the Latin word “conflictus” meaning “struck together”. Conflict means clash, contention, confrontation, a battle or struggle, controversy or quarrel (Nwolise, 1997:28). Conflict as an element of social interaction; has evoked a lot of arguments. Suffice to say that there are as many definitions of conflict. Coser (1956) defines Conflict as a struggle over values and claims over status, power and resources, in which the aims of the opponents are to neutralize, injure or eliminate their rivals. To Donovhue and Kolt (1992), Conflict has to do with the expression of differences by interdependent people in the course of achieving their needs and goals. Bassey (2002) contended that conflict arises as a result of incompatible or mutually exclusive goals or aims or values espoused by human beings. This definition sees conflict from goal perspective.

However, Pruitt and Rubin (1986) see conflict from perceptual point of view (cited in Bassey, 2002). To them conflict denotes the perceived divergence of interest(s), or aspirations that cannot be achieved simultaneously. Ross (1993:14) notes that conflict “occurs when parties disagree about the distribution of material or symbolic resources and act because of the incompatibility of goals or a perceived divergence of interest”. It has also been noted that conflict arises as a consequence of the striving of a man the social being who in the course of promoting some of his objectives, either intentionally or unintentionally upsets or direct to negative uses, instead of strengthening along beneficial line, some of the arrangement that ought to be for the benefit of man hence, conflicts come up as a result of negative contradiction and are such irresolvable by peaceful means (Igwe, 1997; Nwanegbo, 2005).

Omosho (2004) avers that it is widely believed by scholars that a conflict situation crops up when two or more parties could not agree on an issue. The parties involved may not necessarily be governments nations. Posits that “the term Conflict embodies notion of strife, struggle, differences, and disagreement”. It is indeed the struggle for mutually exclusive rewards or the use of incompatible means to achieve a goal. Horowitz (1985) sees conflicts as a “struggle

in which the aim is to get objective and simultaneously neutralize, injure or eliminate rivals”. Daugharty and Falzgrart cited in Omotosho (2004), view conflict as a situation in which one identifiable group of human beings which could be tribal, ethnic, linguistic, cultural, religious, socio-economic, political or otherwise is in a state of conscious opposition to one or more other identifiable human groups. This could be because those groups are pursuing what appears to be incompatible goals.

Communal Conflicts

Communal conflicts arise over the production and consumption of goods, socialization, social control, and social participation (Warren, 1978;99). Communal conflicts are therefore products of social relations. Communal conflicts are threat or action of one party directed at territory – rights, interests or privileges – of another party, because of differences over economic issues, power of authority, cultural values and beliefs (Robinson, 1989; Coleman, 1957). It has been posited in the literature that most communal conflicts are mainly economic issues of which land constitute about 90% of it (Otite and Albert, 1999). The thesis then is “if community is place where people interact to meet their daily needs, then communal conflict takes place within a geographical area and elates to peoples’ interaction.

Causes of Communal Conflicts

Various factors have been identified by scholars as responsible for communal conflict in the country. The causes vary from one area to another. Yecho (2006) indicated that the causes of communal conflicts are not static but rather dynamic and varied in nature depending on the socio-economic and geopolitical circumstances at the time. Onwudiwe (2004) listed social conditions as population explosion, economic migration, and the anti-poor policies of the government as triggers of communal friction. Horowitz (2000) pinned down communal conflict to revolve around politics, politicians, and their pursuit of group advantage. Identified indigene/settler problem, religious differences, ownership of land and its resources, goals and aspirations of people as some of the factors that can ignite communal conflict in the country. Hembe (2000) indicated that political struggle and colonization, while Lyam (2006) mentioned loss of soil fertility, soil erosion, deforestation, bush burning and flooding as some of the causes of communal conflict. Yecho (2006) pointed out that the fundamental causes of communal conflict are poor economic conditions, high level of illiteracy, the quest for, and fear of domination by other groups, land disputes, market ownership, chieftaincy tussle and party politics.

Varvar (2000) indicated that increased demand for land for agriculture, unemployment, rural hunger, poverty impoverishment as communal conflict triggers. Deprivation, exploitation and domination of minority groups by major ethnic groups and leadership problem where highlighted by Angya and Doki (2006) as factors that can exert communal crisis. Equally, religious differences, competition for livelihood resources and traditional chieftaincy tussles were enumerated by Oboh and Hyande (2006) as potential communal conflict triggers in the country.

In analysing communal conflict one can definitely say that the followings are principally the causes of communal conflict.

- **Economic Factor:** This factor manifest in the forms of competition for inadequate resources such land and its content; problems of distribution of available resources; unemployment and poverty.

- **Social Factor:** This has to do with issues that border on deprivation, envy, jealousy, marginalization and exploitation of people. In fact, fear of domination by major groups is equally a social factor that attracts communal conflict.
- **Political Factor:** It involves the contest for available political positions in a community and leadership failure. Also added to this, is traditional chieftaincy tussle imminent in communities in the country.
- **Ecological Factor:** This factor manifests in the forms of encroachment problem, farming and pastoral problems, deforestation, flooding, soil erosion, and bush burning. Communal conflict creates room for people to drift from place to place as a survival mechanism and in search of livelihood.
- **Colonial Factor:** Colonialism is believed to be the background cause to communal conflict in Africa and Nigeria inclusive. Most of the communal conflict have direct attachment to colonial formation, while others manifesting in the post-colonial period have explanation in colonialism.
- **Land Factor:** Land is taken in this study to mean an important economic asset and a source of livelihoods, and it is also closely linked to the identity, history, and culture of communities. Land, understood from this perspective, explains why communities therefore can readily mobilize around land-related issues, making it a central object of conflict.
- **Food Insecurity Factor:** Food and nutrition insecurity are becoming increasingly concentrated in conflict-affected countries, affecting millions of people. Policies and interventions that build resilience to these shocks have the power to not only limit the breadth and depth of conflict and violence around the world, but also strength national-level governance systems and institutions.
- **Unemployment:** According to Okafor (2011) unemployment in Nigeria are with attendant social, economic, political and psychological consequences. One of its social consequences on the Nigerian youths is the high level of youth unemployment. A phenomenon which encourages the development of street youths and urban urchins (“area boys”) that grows up in a culture that encourage criminal behaviour.
- **Frequent Interference in Chieftaincy Affairs by Government** – The frequent interference in chieftaincy affairs takes place through appointment, demotion, deposition and banishment. As a result of this interference, there have also been several clashes between state Governors and traditional rulers leaving a trail of heightened tension in many states. Interference also arise in the creation of new traditional thrones by State Governors e.g. the Benue State Government created several new second-class chiefs in 1997 and at the Federal level, the National Council of Traditional Rulers was created comprising of 74 graded rulers from the country to serve as a consultative assembly to reach the grass root communities and many States Governors have special advisers for chieftaincy affairs. **Poverty Factor:** The persistent conflicts in both Etim Ekpo and Ika local government areas have increased the level of poverty as lives and property are destroy thereby affecting the economy of the area.

Methodology

Research Design

The research design adopted for the study was survey. Survey allows a researcher to study the opinions, attitudes, orientations, etc., of people in large population settings. Also, it provides a basis for the systematic selection of samples representative of the finite population. Therefore, descriptive survey was adjudged suitable for this study, since it allows the researcher to examine the managing of communal conflicts in Akwa Ibom State; of which both Etim Ekpo and Ika local government areas were selected as case study areas.

Population of the Study

The population of this study consisted of male and female residents of both Etim Ekpo and Ika local government areas, using the projected population census figures of the year 2015; which puts Etim Ekpo at 143,110 residents, of which 72,302 were males and 70,808 were females; and also, Ika at 98,322 residents, of which 49,985 were males and 48,337 were females. Hence, the total figure for both local government areas was 241,432 people.

The study population was limited to five villages each selected from the four districts that make up Etim Ekpo L.G.A., as well as, five villages, each selected from the three districts that make up Ika L.G.A., and the general populace of both local government areas.

Sample Size/Sampling Procedures

The sample (400) of this research was calculated by using Taro Yamane (Yamane (1973) formula with 95% confidence level (according to 241, 432 persons gotten from both Etim Ekpo and Ika local government areas population census figures, official report 2015).

Methods of Data Analysis

Simple percentages were used in data analysis after tabulation of the data obtained from the respondents of the study. The Chi-square method was used in testing the hypothesis. Chi-square fitness allows for causal comparative studies and in analysing data expressed as frequencies (Wimmer and Dominick, 1987; Nwodo, 2006). Decision would be taken at 0.05 level of significance.

Results and Discussions

Testing of Hypothesis

Hypothesis 1

Null Hypothesis (H₀): There is no significant relationship between the contributory factors of communal conflicts and its effects on the residents of Etim Ekpo and Ika local government area.

Contributory factors of communal conflicts	Number of respondents affected	Number of respondents not affected	Total
Land disputes	43	35	78
Chieftaincy Disputes	51	13	64
Food insecurity	69	10	79
Poverty	98	4	102
Unemployment	72	5	77
Total	333	67	400

Discussion of Findings

Findings are based on the research questions of the study

Research Question 1

What are the contributory factors to communal conflicts in both Etim Ekpo and Ika local government areas?

The answer to the research question can be derived from the given data in table 7. Out of the 400 respondents interviewed, 78 respondents are the opinion that land disputes are the major causes of communal conflicts in their areas. 64 respondents agree that traditional ruler tussle happen to be the cause of communal conflicts. 79 respondents say that food insecurity is the cause of communal conflicts in their locality. 102 respondents agree that poverty is the cause of communal conflicts; while 77 respondents say unemployment is the major cause of communal conflicts in both Etim Ekpo and Ika local government areas.

Calculation of Chi-square (χ^2) value

Rows/columns	O	E	O – E	(O – E) ²	$\frac{(O - E)^2}{E}$
R ₁ C ₁	57	74.76	17.76	315.4176	4.2190690209
R ₁ C ₂	32	14.4	17.76	315.4176	22.1501123596
R ₂ C ₁	193	173.88	19.12	365.5744	1.1024522659
R ₂ C ₂	14	33.12	19.12	365.5744	11.0378743961
R ₃ C ₁	86	87.36	1.36	1.8496	0.0211721612
R ₃ C ₂	18	16.64	1.36	1.8496	0.1111538462
Total					39.6418340499

Hence, the Chi-square value is: 39.64

Next, we calculate for the degrees of freedom (df):

$$\begin{aligned} &(\text{Number of rows} - 1) \times (\text{Number of columns} - 1) \\ &(3 - 1) \times (2 - 1) \\ &2 \times 1 = 2 \end{aligned}$$

That is, 2 df (degrees of freedom).

Decision/Inference: At 0.05 significance level, with 2df, the value in the Chi-square distribution table gives, 5.991. thus, since the calculated Chi-square value of 39.64 is greater than the table value of 5.991, the null hypothesis (H_0) is rejected, while the alternative hypothesis (H_1) is upheld. This shows that there is a significant relationship between the contributory factors of communal conflict and the prevalent mode of resolution of conflict in both Etim Ekpo and Ika local government areas.

Conclusion

The study has established that there exists a significant relationship between the contributory factors of communal conflicts and the prevalent modes of resolution of conflicts, as well as, its effects on the residents of both Etim Ekpo and Ika local government areas.

As stated earlier, conflicts and crises are inevitable societal phenomenon. Management of communal conflicts can stem down the tide of the impending effects of such conflicts or worsen them. Often, the usual way of using force of stop crises or conflicts is only necessary as an emergent measure. The government should go beyond the use of force to bring lasting solution and peace to a society undergoing conflict situations.

Conflict resolution in both Etim Ekpo and Ika local government areas, as well as, Akwa Ibom State and Nigeria in general, requires honest and capable leadership and good governance to reduce the level of land disputes, traditional leadership tussles, food insecurity, unemployment, poverty, oppression, domination, marginalisation, amongst others; and raise the

standard of living of the people. The legal, religious, educational and political systems should be strengthened and improved so that only genuine are retained and profiteers pruned.

Recommendations

For better resolution of communal conflicts in both Etim Ekpo and Ika local government areas, as well as, Akwa Ibom State and Nigeria in general, findings of this study has given rise to the following recommendations:

1. Government should enforce laws on land and provide employment opportunities.
2. Various social and traditional institutions in communities should encourage their members on attitudinal change in their mind set and proper orientation towards others. This can be achieved through proper education and enlightenment of the origins, nature and its effects.
3. Robust, vibrant social communication and dialogue models should be put in place to bridge the current socio-cultural gaps noticeable in the area. This could be done through the activation of social network such as clubs membership, sports, work place ties, alma mater ties etc.
4. Those who lost lives and properties in the conflict should be compensated. Even as public properties such as primary and secondary schools, medical centres, markets should be rebuilt and scholarship and employment provided for the youths etc.
5. Professional conflict mediators such as the Academic Associated Peace Work AAPW, Institute of peace and conflict studies in the Universities should be engaged as better Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) organ.

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