

FACTORS AND EFFECTS OF INTER-COMMUNAL CONFLICTS ON ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT IN CROSS RIVER STATE, NIGERIA: AN CRITICAL ANALYSIS

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Abstract

Much like in many climes, land is considered the most significant and valuable community asset that is transferred from one generation to another in Cross River State. This study examines the recurring incidence of inter-communal conflicts and its devastation on economic development in Cross River State. The economic lands, political factors and social factors are the major causes of inter-communal conflicts in the Cross River State. The study adopted the resource competition theory and the dependency theory. The paper utilized both primary and secondary methods of data collection. Data for analytical purpose are extracted through interviews, direct observation for the primary method and textbooks, journal papers, internet materials, and Nigeria Conflict bulletin are obtained for the secondary method. The study recommend that the government need to meet with the conflicting communities and seek their opinions and make suggestion on how to end the conflict. Also government needs to integrate, reconstruct and rehabilitate the warring communities with schools, markets, health care centres etc. In doing these, it will go a long way in bringing peace and sustainable economic development among the warring communities.

Keywords: Inter-communal conflicts, land, devastation, and economic development.

Introduction

Inter-communal conflicts have been in existence in the trouble conflicts prone areas in Africa, especially such countries like Nigeria, Chad, Democratic Republic of Congo, Cote d'ivoire, South Africa, Kenya and Cameroon (Taylor, 2008). Africa continent are multi-ethnic nations and are profoundly divided along religious, cultural, linguistically and ethnic lines. Such divisions they are virtually made up of separate sub-societies each which operate as an interest group that can result into violent conflicts with any opposing groups (Lijphart, 1984). Today in Nigeria we have witnessed severe cases of inter-communal conflicts that have destroyed many lives and displaced hundreds of people from their communities as a result of political, social and economic interest (Alimba, 2014). He believed that some of these conflicts had their roots in the historical antecedences while others are cause by the elites who are seeking for political positions in the democratic process in Nigeria.

Cross River State is one of the heterogeneous states in Nigeria that have continued to experience violent inter-communal conflicts that have been causing serious devastations in the socio-economic development of the state (Nwobo, 2015:1). Inter-communal conflicts form one of the major consistence problems confronting Cross River State in the past three decades. These decades have witnessed a lot of violent inter-communal conflicts throughout the three senatorial zones in the state. The conflicts have long standing history that have created some trouble spots in the state. Some of the conflict prone spots are the Ebom-Ebijakara conflict in Abi LGA (2005), Boje and Esobendeghe conflict in Boki LGA (2004), Abebene and Ovokwa conflict in Obubra LGA (2012), Mbock and Nkonfab in Ogoja and Ikom LGA (2013), Oyoba and Ukele in Yala (2016), New Netim Chieftaincy crisis in Odukpani LGA (2016), Ajassor and Erana in Etung LGA (2012), Ediba and Usumutong conflict in Abi LGA (2014). Several factors are responsible for these conflicts ranging from economic land, political and social as well as tussle for chieftaincy and political office representation in the local and national positions.

Understanding the Concept of Inter-Communal Conflict

According to Alemika (1992), conflict is a product of antagonistic interest between two or more opposing forces or groups within a society. In the same light, Oxford dictionary (2005) defined conflict as fight, struggle or quarrel, a bitter argument or disagreement between people or group of people. While communal conflict is defined as any struggle over economic lands, chieftaincy positions and political power in which the aim of the groups in conflicts are to gain the desire goal but also to eliminate, neutralized or injured their rival groups, (Ritzer, 2007). Lyman (2001) also see communal conflict as any disagreement or dispute between two or more inter-ethnic divisions. Coser (1956:8) postulation inter-communal conflict as a continues tussle over lands, traditional status, political power and limited resources in which the aims of the opposing groups are to destroy and injure their enemies. Carmet (1993) supported this idea that, such conflicts are less amenable to diplomatic intervention as the methods of crisis management and peaceful settlement.

Theoretical and Methodological Foundations

The paper is anchored on two theories: the resource competition theory and the dependency theory. These theories are adopted to enable us juxtapose clearly the factors responsible for inter-communal conflicts, and their effects on economic development in Cross Rivers State. The advocates of resource competition theory include Ijewere (1999), Wunsch and Osaghar (1994) and Mbaku (2010). Their views on resource competition theory, which explains a system of boundaries between groups whose power and relevance are determined primarily by the nature and scope of conflicts for scarce resources among them along communal line, where natural resource completion such as land for farming remained a perennial issue in the case of communal conflicts is determined on whose group control the resources. Therefore, a lot of communal conflicts have usually been caused by the attempt to captured or dominate another communal group so as to seize their farmland. The proponents of dependency theory include Dos

Santos (1970), Rodney (1976), Gitpin (1987) Frank (1970). In their view point on the concept of dependency theory, they explain it as a conditional situation in which a group of countries have their economic conditioned by the development and expansion of another economy to which the former is subjected. In relation to this paper, economic development in any society is relative to the degree of peace observed and sustained over time in such area. In the time of war, there will be no any meaningful economic development of any kind, if there is no peaceful co-existence among the warring communities. So, therefore peace is a determinant of economic development in Cross River State. These two theories are adequate for this study because if tries to explain how communities struggle over limited scare resources and how peaceful co-existence is a determinant of economic development among the warring communities.

The paper adopted a combination of primary and secondary methods of data collection. The primary data was generated through primary research techniques involving interviews and direct observation while the secondary data was derived through the study of existing literature materials on the subject matter, such as journal articles, Nigeria conflicts bulletin and textbooks

Causes of Inter-Communal Conflicts in Cross River State

Inter-communal conflicts in Cross River State is as old as its creation. Over the year's attempts have been made to provide information to explain or account for the remote and immediate factors responsible for inter-communal conflicts in Cross River State. The major factors or causes of these conflicts have been broken down into three; economic lands, political factors and social factors.

Economic factors: A large proportion of the population in Cross River State engaged in subsistence farming such as cassava, palm tree, cocoa and yam farming and which is difficult for them to meet up their family needs, as such there is the need for them to expand their production capacity that will meet the family demand, since the available land is not enough. A slighted advancement on neighbouring community land, will automatically call for a war as such land treasure is a key economic factors that is responsible for many communal crises in Cross River State. Other economic factors include forest trees, crude oil deposits, coals, river band, etc.

Political factors: Political participation, oppression and marginalization is one of the resulting effects of struggle over the only political seat allocated to the two or more communities at the local government or zonal level during periodic elections in Cross River State. When an electoral constituency has people with varied identities, the consequences are likely to be adverse. Often time every section aspires to outwit the other leading to political conflicts. Other political factors include, political violent crisis among different political parties in the communities.

Social factors: Every contemporary society is made up people with diverse orientations and interests. The fact that human being live together as social beings do also give rise to social conflicts. In the whole Eastern Nigeria, Cross River State is easily the state with highest number of language identities. Accordingly, unavoidable conflicts attributable to social factors have also been witnessed in the state. Societal issues such as chieftaincy

tussle, cultism and piracy are among some of the social factors responsible for inter-communal conflicts in parts of Cross River State.

Table 1: CASES OF INTER-COMMUNAL CONFLICTS IN CROSS RIVER STATE (1987-2019)

S/N	Communal conflicts	Causes	LGA	Year
1	Ebom-Ebijakra	Economic land and political	Abi	2005
2	Ugep-Mkapni	Economic land	Yakurr	1987
3	Ugep-Idomi	Economic land	Yakurr	1992
4	Ugep-Adim	Economic land	Yakurr-Biase	1996
5	Ediba-Usumutong	Economic land	Abi	2014
6	Okuni-Akam	Economic land	Akpabuyo	2006
7	Calabar City	Social and political	Calabar South and Calabar Municipality	2012
8	Ikot Ana-Ufot	Economic land	Biase	2007
9	Uwet-Akpab-Okoyong	Economic	Odukpani	2007
10	Nko Onyedama	Economic land	Obubra-Yakurr	2010
11	Boke-Nsadop	Economic land	Boki	2010
12	Kutia-Ukwortong	Economic land	Obudu	2010
13	Nkpani-Nko	Economic land	Yakurr	2015
14	Boje-Esobendghe	Economic land	Boki	2004
15	Boje-Alesi	Economic land	Boki	2010
16	Abene-Ovokwa	Economic land	Boki	2012
17	New Netim Chiefta	Social	Odukpani	2016
18	Ajassor And Efraya	Economic land	Etung	2012
19	Ukele-Oyoba	Economic land	Yala	2016
20	Mbock-Nkonfab	Economic land	Ogoja-Ikom	2013

Source: Nigeria Conflict Bulletin: Cross River State, 2012-2019

The Effects of Inter-Communal Conflicts in Cross River State

Inter-communal conflicts have variegated effects in Cross River State. (a) Inter population displacement: A lot of youths, women and children were displaced physically. The physical displacement created severe food shortages and also massive breakdown of markets, schools, health centres, leading to extreme poverty. (b) Unemployment: The inter-communal conflict caused a lot of unemployment on the youths and women because they had to run away for safety of lives, as a result, they left their farms, businesses they have acquired for in life behind which either got burnt or was looted away by their enemies.

In addition, inter-communal conflicts breed (c) Insecurity: on account of insecurity, so many members of the families including husbands, wives, uncles, children are killed leaving the venerable poor youths, widows to provide for the children, the elderly and the sick left behind. (d) Rape: With no fundamental human right protection in the society during the inter-communal conflict; physical violence against women was very common, women were repeatedly subjected to physical and sexual violence like rape. This led to unwanted pregnancies and high risks of women and girls infected with HIV/AIDS. (e) The loss of property: A lot of farmers, business people lost their properties to looters while some of the assets were burnt down such as houses, farmlands etc. were taken away from them by force, leaving them with nothing to lean on.

Conclusion and Recommendations

In conclusion, this paper had tried to find out the factors and effects of inter-communal conflicts on economic development in Cross River State. From the study, we have been able to get some facts about the causes of inter-communal conflicts. The Ediba and Usumutong conflict is one experience that suffices to prove and draw meaningful attention to the danger of inter-communal conflicts and its devastation on economic development. Many lives and properties worth millions of naira have been destroyed.

The study has been able to establish the cause and dynamism of the inter-communal conflicts and its effects on economic development in Cross River State. The following recommendations are made (a) State government and stake holders should meet periodically and dialogue with the traditional rulers, youths and religious leaders in the conflict prone areas on issues that affect them, and seek their opinion and suggestions where it's necessary to resolved the problem and foster peace and economic development in the warring communities. (b) Employment opportunities should be created to employ ideal men, youths, women who have lost all their lives saving as a result of the war. Soft loans and social security should be made available in order engage them on a prescribed fee, that will keep them busy and they will have something to take care of their fundamental basic needs.

The further recommends (c) The main victims of the conflicts are youths, children and women. There is need to create a platform where those out of school children because of loss their fathers or mothers should return to school through providing scholarship for them. Furthermore, entrepreneur skill training centre should be created for the women

and capital should be made available for them. (b) The state government should provide basic essential services such as; health care centres, schools, markets, etc. this will make the community members fill sense of belonging and it will go a long way in bringing peace and sustainable economic development in the warring communities.

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Biographical Notes

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