

EFFECTS OF COMMUNITY CONFLICTS ON RURAL ECONOMIC ACTIVITIES IN OSUN STATE, NIGERIA: IMPLICATIONS FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

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ABSTRACT

Conflict is a major impediment of any community development. However, its occurrence is inevitable and requires serious attention from relevant stakeholders. This study focused on the effects of community conflicts on rural economic activities in Osun State, Nigeria. It specifically unveiled the socio-economic characteristics of the respondents; identified the causes of conflict in the study area; determined the effects of conflicts on the economic activities and identified the strategies adopted in resolving the conflicts. Ninety community members were randomly sampled and interviewed. Both quantitative and qualitative data were collected using interview schedule and Key Informant Interview respectively. Data were analysed using appropriate descriptive and inferential statistical tools. The results showed that majority (77.6%) of the respondents were married with the mean age of 43.7 years and above half (52.6%) were males with the mean years of schooling of 10.1 years. Boundary dispute (85.5%), political tussle (82.2%) among community partisans, chieftaincy dispute (77.8%), competition of community members over limited resources (74.4%) and issues related to payment of tributes (70%) were the major causes of conflict. The effects of conflicts identified include loss of properties (mean=2.23), reduction in income (mean=2.23), disruption of economic activities (mean=2.22) and loss of employment (mean=2.10) among others. The study concluded that preventive measures against future conflict such as advocacy for tolerance and sensitivity of government to people's needs should be put in place to enhance sustainable development.

Key words: *Conflict mitigation, effects, community, development, economic activities*

INTRODUCTION

Conflict and consensus are two major patterns of social interactions (Ukaegbu and Agunwamba, 1995). Ekong (2010) also reiterated that conflict is a form of social interaction in which actors eliminate or weaken the other party to obtain a scarce reward. Conflict simply suggests differences and disagreement, struggle and strife. It is an ever-present process in human relations and

an integral part of human's life. Studies have shown that generally, conflicts share three common characteristics. First, there is a kind of contact or relationship between the parties involved; second, the parties perceive conflicting views; and finally, one of the parties always wants to redress existing contradictions (Vanderlin, 2005; Ekanola, 2004; Deutsh, 1991).

There is no single practical definition of conflict; rather, different views exist on a continuum. While some perceive it as a negative situation which must be avoided at any cost, others see it as an occurrence which could be managed and another category consider it as opportunity that must be exploited to the best advantage. Whatever the position upheld on this continuum of viewpoints on conflict, it is certain that a continual state of conflict is not desirable for any meaningful community and national development (Nebgen, 1978). Rather, conflicts constitute a threat to community peace, stability and development as well as having serious implications for tribal co-existence, especially in a multi-ethnic and multi-tribal nation like Nigeria.

The term “conflict” could be best understood by dividing the theories of conflict into functional, situational and interactive. Supporters of the functional approach consider conflict as serving a social function while those who view it as situational suggest that it is an expression under certain situations and the third category views conflict as an interactive phenomenon. Coser (1967), belonged to the functional school of thought and according to him, conflict serve the function of pushing society and resulting to emergence of new institutions, technology and economic systems. The major contribution of Coser was the determination of the functional and dysfunctional roles of conflict. Robbin (2005) defines functional conflict as the conflict that supports the goals of the group and improves its performance while dysfunctional/destructive conflict is the one that hinders group performance.

A supporter of the situational school, Bercovitch (2011), defines conflict as a “situation which generates incorruptible goals or values among different parties”. For Bercovitch (2011), conflict depends on the situation. Conflict arises because of different conditions, such as the influence of a person and external factors. A representative of the interactive view, Folger (1993) defines conflict as “the interaction of interdependent people who perceive incompatible goals and interference from each other in achieving these goals”.

Rahim (1986) posited that most conflicts have negative connotations, invoke negative feelings and often lead to destruction and whether the effect of conflict will be good or bad depends on the strategies used to deal with it but Robbins, et al. (2003) considers conflict as a potential force contributing to the performance of individuals. Thus, it is necessary to pay attention to causes of conflict and correct them in order to improve group performance (Robins, 2005). Bodtker and Jameson (2001) therefore suggested conflict resolution training and direct intervention as some of the ways to influence the communities against conflict.

The study area has experienced different types of community conflicts in the past decades (can you please enumerate these conflict with years of occurrence if available?) which might have affected the economic life of its dwellers in one form or the other. The study investigated the effects of the past community conflicts on the economic life of Osun State, Nigeria. Specifically, the study sought to

- (1) describe socio-economic characteristics of respondents in the study area;
- (2) identify causes of past conflicts in the study area;
- (3) determine the effects of such conflicts on the socio economic life of the people; and
- (4) identify conflict resolution strategies used in the study area.

Hypotheses of the study

Two hypotheses were set in the null form

1. There is no significant relationship between effects of conflict and the socio-economic characteristics of the respondents; and
2. There is no significant relationship between effects of conflict and causes of conflict.

METHODOLOGY

The study was conducted in Osun State, Nigeria. Osun state has 6 administrative zones namely: Ife, Osogbo, Iwo, Ilesa, Ede and Ikorodu. Multistage sampling procedure was used to select the respondents. At the first stage, Ife zone was purposively selected because of incessant conflict experienced in the area. Ife zone has four Local Government Areas (LGAs) and all were selected for the study. At the second stage, 2, 4, 4 and 5 rural communities were proportionately selected based on the total number of rural communities in Ife central, Ife East, Ife North and Ife South LGAs respectively making a total of fifteen communities in all. These communities are: Asun and Igbogbo from Ife Central LGA; Oniyanrin, Abata-Egba, Famia and Alapata from Ife East LGA; Asipa, Rogborogbo, Akinlalu and Moro from Ife North LGA; and Ogudu, Abiri, Onipetesi,

Egbejoda and Idi-Obi from Ife South LGA. Finally, 6 respondents were randomly selected from each of the selected communities, making a total of 90 respondents. Selection was based on the fact that the respondents had lived in the study area for many decades, engaged in one economic activity or the other and witnessed at least one of the community conflicts in the area. Validated and pre-tested interview schedule was used to elicit quantitative information on socio-economic characteristics of the respondents, causes, effects and conflict resolution strategies while Key Informant Interview was used to obtain qualitative data. The data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, while Chi-Square and Correlation analyses were used to make inferences from the hypotheses.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Socio economic characteristics of respondents

Results in Table 1 show that the mean age of the respondents was 43.7 years with standard deviation of 12.7. This implies that majority of the respondents were mature and in their active ages who could adequately determine the effects of conflict on the economic activities in their respective communities. Above half (52.3%) of the respondents were male, while 47.7 percent were female. Majority (77.6%) of the respondents were married. Majority (74.4%) were Christians, while 25.6 % were Muslims. This implies that Christianity and Islam were the two major religious practices in the study area. It is expected that since both religions advocate peaceful co-existence among members, occurrence of conflict should be reduced to the barest minimum. Majority (74.4%) of

the respondents had post primary education. This suggests that literacy level of the respondents was high and this can have implication on conflict resolution and affect the management strategies to be adopted. Also, about one-quarter (23.3%), above one-quarter (26.7%) and one-third (33.3%) had farming, trading and civil service as their

primary occupations respectively. This implies that people in the study area engaged in varieties of economic activities in order to make ends meet. This gives credence the submission of Oyesola (2007) which established that rural dwellers engage in various economic activities for their living.

Table 1: Distribution of respondents' socio economic characteristics (n=90)

Socio-economic characteristics	Frequency	Percentage	Mean	Stand. Dev.
Age				
≤ 40years	40	44.5		
41-60 years	38	42.2	43.7	12.7
Above 60 years	12	13.3		
Sex				
Male	47	52.2		
Female	43	47.8		
Marital status				
Single	15	16.7		
Married	70	77.6		
Widow/widower	2	2.2		
Divorce	3	3.3		
Religious affiliation				
Christianity	67	74.4		
Islam	23	25.6		
Occupation				
Farming	21	23.3		
Trading	26	26.7		
Civil service	30	33.3		
Artisan	10	11.1		
Others	5	5.5		
Level of Education				
Primary education	23	25.6		
Secondary education	28	31.1		
Tertiary education	39	43.3		

Source: Field survey, 2016

Causes of past conflicts in the study area

Results in Table 2 show that multiple causes of conflict were identified by the respondents with boundary dispute between neighbouring communities (85.5%) as the most common, followed by political tussle among

community members (82.2%), chieftaincy dispute (77.8%), clash of interest among community members (74.4%), tribal/ethnic superiority by indigenes (71.1%), issues related to payment of tributes (70%), competition over limited resources like land

(66.7%), and relocation of public institutions (60%). Others include communication breakdown among community dwellers (47.3%), destruction of crops by unrestricted animals (45.6%), differences in cultural values (40%), government insensitivity to people's need (30%) and religious intolerance among community members (14.4%). The implication of the finding is that those causes of conflict that were identified by majority of the respondents indicate the sensitive issues that needed to be amicably considered among all the parties concerned. This result is in line with the findings of Manu, *et al.*, (2014) and Alabi (2010) who identified competition over land, struggle for leadership position, conflict of culture, communication breakdown, poverty

and differences in values as major causes of conflict in their study areas.

This finding was supported by excerpt from Key informant interview conducted across the study area

Struggle for leadership position among members, communication breakdown, boundary disputes on farmland and poverty have led to many conflicts among members in this community. (A community member from Abata-Egba Village)

Some of the causes of conflict in this community are lack of love among community members, boundary dispute, clash of interest among members and competition over land resources. (A community member from Asipa Community)

Table 2: Distribution of respondents according to causes of conflicts (n=90)

*Sources of conflict	Frequency	Percentage
Boundary dispute between neighbouring communities	77	85.5
Political tussle among community partisans	74	82.2
Chieftaincy dispute among community leaders	70	77.8
Clash of interest among community members	67	74.4
Ethnic/tribal superiority by indigenes in the community	64	71.1
Issues related to payment of tributes	63	70
Competition among community members over limited resources	60	66.7
Relocation of public institution e.g local govt, secretariat	54	60
Communication breakdown among community dwellers	43	47.3
Destruction of crops by unrestricted animals	41	45.6
Differences in cultural values	36	40
Government insensitivity to people's need	27	30
Religion intolerance among community members	13	14.4

Source: Field survey, 2016 * Multiple responses

Effects of conflicts on residents' socio economic life

Results in Table 3 reveal that loss of properties (mean=2.23) and reduction in income (mean=2.23), were the most serious

effects of conflict on the communities, followed by disruption of economic activities (mean=2.22), displacement from farm/loss of farm (mean=2.22), loss of employment (mean=2.10), loss of lives (mean=2.09) and

retardation of community development (mean= 2.03). Others include relocation of business associates (mean=2.01), loss of shops and goods (mean=1.96), delaying execution of development projects (mean= 1.96) and separation of families (1.91). While destruction of government properties (mean=1.42) ranked least. The implication is that the devastating effects of conflicts on the communities could constitute a major hindrance to the vitality of economic activities and sustainable development. Generally, it would be irrational for entrepreneurs to invest in a conflict prone area. The result conforms to the submission of Ofuoku and Isife (2009) who reported that reduction in income, displacement of farmers from their land, loss of lives, arms running and loss of houses and properties were the

common effects of conflict among their respondents.

This finding was supported by excerpt from KII sessions conducted across the study area

I remembered I lost a big cocoa farm to conflict during the last communal crisis which has devastating effects on my livelihood and income because I can't go back to the farm again. (A community member from Alapata Village)

Many of my people in this community have lost their cocoa farms, goods, shops, jobs and income to series of conflicts. In fact it has affected economic activities of this community negatively. (A community leader from Abiri Village)

Table 3: Distribution of respondents according to the effects of conflicts (n=90)

Effects of conflicts	Ranked Mean	Stand. Dev
Loss of properties	2.23	0.70
Reduction in income	2.23	0.74
Disruption of economic activities	2.22	0.63
Displacement from farm/loss of farm	2.12	0.82
Loss of job	2.10	0.82
Loss of lives	2.09	0.86
Retardation of community development	2.03	0.85
Relocation of business associate	2.01	0.78
Loss of shops and goods	1.96	0.89
Delaying in execution of development projects	1.96	0.89
Separation of family members	1.91	0.97
Destruction of government properties	1.42	0.79

Grand mean=2.02

Source: Field survey, 2016

Conflict resolution strategies used in the study area

Results in Table 4 show that local mediation with the use of community leaders/elders or third party to resolve conflict was considered the most common method of resolving conflicts (86.7%) among community members in the study area, followed by tolerance (74.4%), peaceful reconciliation (74.4%), compromise (72.2%), use of truce (72.2%) and scapegoating (69.7%). Others include segregation (64.4%), strategic withdrawal (51.1%), super-ordination (38.9%) and confrontation with the use of police or court (35.6%). It is evident from the result that majority of the respondents used

local mediation and peaceful negotiations to resolve conflict. This attest to what Pkalya *et al.* (2004) observed that the use of local mediation was more prevalent in resolving conflicts among rural dwellers due to its potency. This may be due to the fact that elders and community leaders are held in high esteem and accepted as men and women of wisdom with impeccable characters whose pre-occupation is to see to the peaceful co-existence among their kith and kin. Also, the finding agrees with the report of Manu *et al.* (2014) that both farmers and grazers in their study area preferred peaceful negotiation to resolve conflict because once both parties are satisfied, there is lasting peace.

Table 4: Distribution of respondents by conflict resolution methods used (n=90)

Conflict management strategies	Frequency	Percentage
<i>Local mediation</i> by elders or community leaders (third party)	78	86.7
<i>Tolerance</i> (conflicting parties accept each other views)	67	74.4
<i>Peaceful negotiation</i> (identifying and correcting source of conflicts)	67	74.4
<i>Compromise</i> (settling conflict based on give and take principles)	65	72.2
<i>Use of truce</i> (conflicting parties agree to suspend the conflict)	65	72.2
<i>Scapegoating</i> (blaming conflict on evil forces)	62	69.7
<i>Segregation</i> (placing conflicting parties far away apart from each other)	58	64.4
<i>Strategic withdrawal</i> (allowing conflict to take care itself over time)	46	51.1
<i>Super-ordination</i> (ending conflict by one party totally submitting to other party)	35	38.9
<i>Confrontation</i> (use of court or police to settle conflict)	32	35.6

Source: Field survey, 2016

Hypotheses testing

Results in Table 5 reveal that sex ($\chi^2=30.737$; $p \leq 0.05$), occupation ($\chi^2=120.256$; $p \leq 0.01$), marital status ($\chi^2=75.639$; $p \leq 0.05$) and level of education ($\chi^2=118.606$; $p \leq 0.01$) of the respondents had significant association with

effects of conflict. Whereas religious affiliations ($\chi^2 = 20.737$ $P=0.05$) had no significant association with effects of conflict. Thus, the effect that conflict will have on respondents is not a function of their religious affiliation.

Table 5: Results of Chi-square analysis showing the association between the socio-economic characteristics and effects of conflict (n=90)

Variables	χ^2 -value	d.f	p-value	Decision
Sex	30.737	1	0.043*	S
Religion affiliation	21.707	1	0.299	NS
Occupation	120.256**	4	0.001**	S
Marital status	75.639*	3	0.050*	S

*Sig. at 0.05 level of significance, **Sig. at 0.01 level of significance,

Source: Field survey, 2016

Results in Table 6 reveal that at 0.05 level of significance, respondents' level of education ($r = 0.309$) had negative and significant relationship with effects of conflict on them. This implies that the higher the respondents' level of education, the lower the effect of

conflict on their economic activities, i.e., when people are highly educated they are more likely to engage in salaried job which may not be seriously affected by occurrence of conflict.

Table 6: Results of correlation analysis showing significant relationship between effects of conflict and selected socio-economic characteristics (n=90)

Variables	Correlation Coefficient (r)	Coefficient of Determination (r^2)	p-value	Decision
Age	0.147	0.022	0.167	NS
Level of education	-0.245*	0.060	0.020*	S

*Sig. at 0.05 level of significance, **Sig. at 0.01 level of significance

Source: Field survey, 2016

Results in Table 7 reveal that at 0.01 level of significance, boundary dispute between neighbouring communities ($r = 0.292$), political tussle among community partisans ($r = 0.524$), chieftaincy dispute among community members ($r = 0.316$) and ethnic/tribal superiority with non-indigenes ($r = 0.331$) had significant relationship with effect of conflict. While at 0.05 level of significance, payment of tributes ($r = 0.223$) and difference in cultural values ($r = 2.16$) had positive and significance relationship

with effect of conflict. This result shows that the higher the frequency of boundary dispute, political tussle, ethnic superiority, chieftaincy dispute, payment of tribute and differences in cultural values among community members, the higher the occurrence of conflict and its effects in the community. The implication of the finding is that as long as these causes of conflicts remain unresolved, economic activities in the study area would also remain undeveloped.

Table 7: Results of correlation analysis showing significant relationship between effect of conflict and causes of conflict (n=90)

Variables	Correlation Coefficient	Coefficient of Determination	p-value	Decision
Boundary dispute between neighbouring communities	0.292	0.085	0.000**	S
Political tussle among community partisans	0.524	0.275	0.005**	S
Chieftaincy dispute among community leaders	0.316	0.100	0.002**	S
Clash of interest among community members	0.029	0.001	0.784	NS
Ethnic/tribal superiority by indigenes in the community	0.331	0.110	0.001**	S
Issues related to payment of tributes	0.223	0.050	0.035*	S
Competition of community members over limited resources	-0.073	0.005	0.492	NS
Relocation of public institution e.g local government secretariat	0.050	0.003	0.640	NS
Communication breakdown among community dwellers	0.219	0.048	0.038	NS
Destruction of crops by unrestricted animals	0.014	0.000	0.899	NS
Differences in cultural values	0.216	0.047	0.041*	S
Government insensitivity to people's need	0.131	0.017	0.220	NS
Religion intolerance among community members	0.128	0.016	0.229	NS

*Sig. at 0.05 level of significance, **Sig. at 0.01 level of significance

Source: Field survey, 2016

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The study revealed the various causes of community conflicts in the study area and the devastating effects it has on the economic life of the people, it was therefore concluded that the causes of conflict which were identified to be significant in the findings such as boundary dispute, political tussle, ethnic superiority, chieftaincy dispute, payment of tributes and differences in cultural values should be given special

attention by community leaders and members to prevent future occurrences. Measures such as advocacy for tolerance by religious leaders, organising conflict resolution training for the community members by the grass root tier of government, sensitivity of government to the people's needs and prompt intervention of the local and political leaders were recommended to enhance uninterrupted sustainable development in the area.

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