
INFLUENCE OF COMMUNAL CONFLICTS ON SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT IN OKRIKA LOCAL GOVERNMENT AREA OF RIVERS STATE.

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ABSTRACT

The Study examined the Influence of Communal Conflicts on Sustainable Community Development in Okirika Local Government Area of Rivers State. It adopted the descriptive survey design. The population of the study was 374. It comprised 44 Community leaders and 330 members of various Community Development Committees in all the communities of Okrika Local Government Area of Rivers State. The entire population was taken as census without sampling due to its small and manageable size. A self-structured questionnaire titled "Influence of Communal Conflict on Sustainable Community Development Questionnaire" (ICCSCDQ) was used for data collection. The reliability coefficient is 0.72. it was determined using the Cronbach Alpha statistics..The data collected for the study were analyzed using mean and standard deviation. The study revealed that political conflict leads to destruction of community properties and breeds animosity among community members which in turn affects the sustainability of community development. It also revealed that chieftaincy tussle and land disputes creates insecurity in affected communities, and scare away development agencies from going into a community which negatively influences sustainability of development. Based on the findings, the researcher recommends, amongst others, that political office holders at federal, state and local government levels should ensure that their elections and political aspirations are

not marked with violence as this leads to destruction of community assets and affects sustainability of development projects.

Keywords: Communal Conflict, Sustainable Development.

INTRODUCTION

Conflict is a characteristic of every human interaction either at personal, family or community level. It is the social process by which individuals or groups seek their ends by directly challenging the antagonist by violence, dialogue or threat of violence (Onah, 2013). Conflict often occurs when social, economic or political space is contested or injustice is perceived in the allocation of economic resources among groups in political jurisdictions such as states, regions or communities. Since different groups and individuals have diverse interests, the aims, objectives and aspirations of some groups will always conflict with those of others. When conflict persists and remain unresolved, it may degenerate to crises.

Conflicts are inevitable in human life and existence and area necessary part of life. Conflicts are necessary for change in human society since they help to build relationships in groups, establish a group's identity, build internal cohesion and can lead to balance of power in society as well as create new rules and laws. To Amirize & Kobani (2020) it is necessary to emphasize the fact that though conflicts are normal in human communities, it is however not reasonable to seek to have a human environment that is conflict-proof or free from disagreements.

Even though conflict exists in virtually every society of the world, it seems to have escalated in some societies to a point where it threatens the stability and development of the society. In Nigeria, conflict in most communities has taken a dimension where it portends grave danger and threatens the survival of the nation. There has been severe cases of inter and intra-communal crises that have destroyed many lives and displaced hundreds of people from their communities as a result of diverse factors including political, social and economic interests (Alimba, 2014). It is believed that some of these conflicts had their roots in the historical antecedences while others

are caused by the elites who are seeking for political positions in the democratic process in Nigeria.

Concept of Communal Conflicts

Communal conflicts could be disputes that occur within a community or between two or more communities. According to Oboh and Hyande (2012) it is that which involves two or more communities engaging themselves in disagreements or acts of violence over issues such as claims for land ownership, religious and political differences leading to loss of lives and destruction of properties. This idea was further elaborated by Eme and Nwoba (2015) who posited that communal conflict is a state of incompatibility that emanates from a commonly shared or used property by a group or groups in a society. Communal crises can be attributed to a number of factors among which include: political discrimination, poverty, inequality, cultural and religious differences (Eminue, 2014). Eminue (2014) maintained that multi-ethnicity is the most frequent cause of conflict. Communal crisis especially in rural communities is more of war of interest as its purposes in most cases are well defined. Horowitz (1985) as cited in Nsobile (2014) also asserts that African societies have been going through difficult times of communal conflicts, antagonism and violence, as a result of the weak boundary structures, endemic poverty, winner takes all philosophy, insufficient land, among others.

Ayuk (2014) identified the changing specter of communal crisis and crime; the grievous consequences it exudes, the non-identification of appropriate and most effective channel of managing the occurrence and weak legal institution for Nigeria as a nation, as further posing greater challenge to addressing, controlling and understanding communal conflict or crises in Nigeria. During communal crises as Ayuk (2014) rightfully observed, lives are negatively affected; occupations and businesses are disrupted; production of subsistence practices are halted, which consequently would lead to chronic shortage of food, famine, unemployment, destruction, refugee problems and academic activities are halted in those communities. The violence outbreak of communal crises has marred development gains of health education,

infrastructural improvement and income generating and distributing activities. These are negative but necessary consequences of inter-communal conflicts.

Concept of Sustainable Development

Sustainable development is the idea that human societies must live and meet their needs without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. The “official” definition of sustainable development was developed for the first time in the Brundtland Report in 1987 (Kobani & Alozie, 2019).

Specifically, sustainable development is a way of organizing society so that it can exist in the long term. This means taking into account both the imperatives present and those of the future, such as the preservation of the environment and natural resources or social and economic equity. (Youmatter, 2020)

Sustainable development is an organizing principle for meeting human development goals while also sustaining the ability of natural systems to provide the natural resources and ecosystem services on which the economy and society depend. The desired result is a state of society where living conditions and resources are used to continue to meet human needs without undermining the integrity and stability of the natural system. Sustainable development can be defined as development that meets the needs of the present generation without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.

It is interlinked with the normative concept of sustainability. UNESCO formulated a distinction between the two concepts as follows: “*Sustainability*” is often thought of as a long-term goal (i.e. a more sustainable world), while *sustainable development* refers to the many processes and pathways to achieve it. (Clarke, 2020).

Concept of Community Development

Community development has been defined in different ways by different authors. Kobani and Alozie (2019) noted that the concept of community development was first mentioned internationally at the 1948 Cambridge Summer Conference where the concept was defined as a movement designed to promote better living with the active participation and if possible on the

initiative of the community but if this initiative is not forth coming spontaneously, by the use of technique for arousing and stimulating it in order to ensure its active and enthusiastic response to the movement.

Ajayi (2011) also defined community development as a social process by which human beings can become more competent to live with and gain some control over local conditions and the changing world. Bringing the foregoing to bear, there is need to give the main actors due opportunity to gain control over local conditions and to harness resources through effective leadership at the community levels. In the word of Rave (2012) community development has a longer history. And it is as old as human existence, because it seeks to improve man's standard of life. Community members who have the capacity to do something to enhance their quality of life are portrayed as having the ability to think, to decide, to plan and to take action in determining their lives. Therefore, in any community development programme, both economic and individual growth must be given equal attention to ensure that the process of community development achieves its due balance (continuity and sustainability through adequate participation of all the key players in the community).

The whole process of community development according to Kuponiyi (2013) emphasizes the importance of participation as a means of strengthening local communities.

Influence of Political Disputes on Sustainable Community Development

Obanya (2010) observed that education is tied to the political system in operation in any society. According to him, the major problem bedeviling the education system in most African countries is political instability leading to inconsistency in policy formulation and implementation. In Nigeria, the case is no different which has greatly prevented the thriving of ideas which could have led to creativity.

In the opinion of Enathiroro(2010)Nigeria, like many other developing nations, has witnessed an alarming fall in the standard of education at the primary, secondary and tertiary levels of our educational system which has caused differential academic performance of students especially in

the last two decades. The inconsistency of government programmes on education especially when it is viewed in the line of the political manifestoes and ideologies has its input in the aged long puzzle.

The political turmoil witnessed in Nigeria has also led to the neglect of the community development. Gboyegallusanya (2011) in his work stated that politics and political instability have affected community development in Nigeria.

Influence of Chieftaincy Tussle on Sustainable Community Development

The institution of chieftaincy emerged naturally as the evolution of man in Africa and preindustrial societies where chiefs (traditional rulers) or monarchs were the citadel of development and governance. Its emergence probably could be traced to the desire or willingness of one set of people, who regard themselves as forming a distinct group, to establish and maintain superiority over others among whom they are living. Chiefs are generally referred to as those monarchs, other nobles holding offices; heads of extended families, and office holders of decentralized polities whose offices are rooted in the pre-colonial period (Ray & Eizlini, 2011).

The chiefs played active roles in the colonial administration to the envy of the educated elites. They performed functions such as tax collection and administration of customary laws. The chieftaincy institution lost much of the power attributed to it by the colonial State yet; it remains an appropriate institution of community representation in postcolonial Nigeria. At present, the institution has been integrated into the State as an administrative extension, though this role is fraught with ambiguity due to the absence of any constitutional role assigned chieftaincy in the 1979, 1993, and 1999 constitutions. Communities are composed of houses or compounds with presiding chiefs. Occupation of the stool of the His Royal Highness is hereditary and candidacy for the position is limited to a specified list of notables from those families who have the right to the throne and are elected solely by those from the royal families.

The chiefs are the recognized heads of the larger extended families that trace their origin to a common ancestor, thus, only direct descendants of a given lineage can aspire to the stool of the

compound chief. In all cases, access to the throne can be either patrilineal or matrilineal however, nobility in history or signal achievement mostly measured in terms of wealth warrants either creation of additional chieftaincy stools or conferment of honorary chieftaincy title compounds with presiding chiefs. Occupation of the stool of the His Royal Highness is hereditary and candidacy for the position is limited to a specified list of notables from those families who have the right to the throne and are elected solely by those from the royal families. The chiefs are the recognized heads of the larger extended families that trace their origin to a common ancestor, thus, only direct descendants of a given lineage can aspire to the stool of the compound chief. In all cases, access to the throne can be either patrilineal or matrilineal however, nobility in history or signal achievement mostly measured in terms of wealth warrants either creation of additional chieftaincy stools or conferment of honorary chieftaincy titles.

Influence of Land Disputes on Sustainable Community Development

Land is a vital natural resource that hosts and sustains all living things namely; plants, animals and man. It is a fixed socio-economic asset that aids production of goods and services and hosts virtually all activities that take place on earth (Magel, 2011). Land hosts houses and towns where origin of a man is traced. This is because all communities are located on land and their territories are defined by it. In another dimension, the sovereignty of a kingdom is a function of the area of land it occupies. This is an indication that territorial defense is with the purpose of securing or retaining certain piece of land. Land is central to continuity of life, indispensable in physical development and complex in social relations of production in the economic world. In other words, there is the socio-cultural dimension to it. As a result, conflict over land is often combined with strong economic, spatial, cultural and emotional values.

There are indications that man's complex socio-economic, cultural and physical attachments to land have placed land in a sensitive and unique position. Conflict interests among communities to secure territories, conserve socio-economic resources and carry out physical development activities and practice customs and traditions on land have given birth to untold crises over the ages (Abegunde, 2010). Disputes on land often occur between individuals, groups and

communities. Dispute on land in recent years have done more havoc than good to the 21st century generation. Dispute on land often truncates the socio-economic and physical development of most urban and rural areas leaving the dwellers with economic hardship, poverty accentuation, health challenges, food scarcity, low standard of living, slow city and community growth amongst others. It has been observed in studies that land disputes often result into several deaths and severe injuries during conflict battles especially in situations where it is a communal dispute (Fischer, 2013).

Communal conflict which relates mostly to land issues still dominates southern and middle belt parts of Nigeria. The need for arable land for farming and rearing of animals has increased over the years giving room for conflicts and land disputes. The growth of the town in terms of community infrastructures, housing development and business activities have been seriously affected by crisis associated with land disputes. Businesses are often shut down during crises in the town and this usually leads to loss of lives and valuable goods. It also leads to increase in food prices, high cost of living, unstable society, slow execution of building projects, non-maintenance of community infrastructure, damage of community facilities etc.

Fabusoro (2012) stated that land issues are a leading cause of conflict in Nigeria. They further noted that “access to land has been shown to be important to poverty reduction, economic growth, and the empowerment of the poor”. In addition, they opined that “the importance of territory is perhaps why land disputes are so prevalent in the country, and why they are more difficult to solve than other disputed issues. On the other hand, Olabode and Ajibade (2010) argued that timing of dispute resolution is very crucial in that if two adversaries are unable to settle their territorial dispute early, the resulting dispute is likely to last for several years. It is understandable that if a dispute lasts for several years, a legacy of conflict is constructed and entrenched that makes any type of peace building effort much more difficult if not impossible.

Nigeria as a country has passed through decades of land disputes, and the number of people dying and properties destroyed because of such continues to grow year by year. This has largely affected the rate at which Nigeria cities particularly in the north grow and develop. Conclusively,

evidences showed that the major causes of land disputes in communities and their adjoining villages relates to claims of long time settlements on land, long-term enmity amongst families, scarcity of arable lands for farming among other factors.

THE PROBLEM

Community development emphasizes the need for people to come together to identify their collective needs and meet those needs with their local resources (human and material) and if possible, without the support of the external agencies. This implies that for community people to come together to solve their common problems, they must have some level of harmonious relation. There must be unity and harmony among them.

Unfortunately, this has not been the case in Okrika Local Government Area of Rivers State in recent times. Communities have been divided along party and tribal lines. People of different political parties and those in support of different community leaders have resentment for one another making it difficult for them to come together to carry out development programmes. There is also the issue of cult related violence which has caused unrest in some communities in the area. This has led to the destruction of community projects, making it difficult for some on-going projects to be completed and discouraging investment in this local government area. This ultimately has slowed down the pace of development in this area. This study, therefore, examines the influence of communal conflict on sustainable community development in Okrika Local Government Area of Rivers State.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The following research questions guided the study:

1. How does political conflict influencesustainable community development in Okrika LGA of Rivers State?
2. How does chieftaincy tussle influencesustainable community development in Okrika LGA of Rivers State?

3. How does land disputes influence sustainable community development in Okrika LGA of Rivers State?

METHODOLOGY

The analytical descriptive survey design was adopted for the study. The population of the study was 374. It comprised 44 Community leaders and 330 members of various Community Development Committees in all the communities in Okrika Local Government Area, Rivers State. The entire population was taken as census without sampling due its small and manageable size. A self-structured questionnaire titled “Influence of Communal Conflicts on Sustainable Community Development Questionnaire” (ICCSCDQ) was used for data collection. The reliability coefficient is 0.72. it was determined using the Cronbach Alpha statistics. The data collected for the study were analyzed using mean and standard deviation.

RESULTS

Research Question 1: How does political conflict influence sustainable community development in Okrika LGA of Rivers State?

Table 1: Mean Response on How Political Conflict Influences Sustainable Community Development in Okrika LGA of Rivers State

S/N	Items	Community Leaders N = 40			CDC Members N = 320		
		Mean	SD	Decision	Mean	SD	Decision
1	Political crises have led to the burning of properties in some communities	2.89	0.62	Agree	3.01	0.69	Agree
2	Political crises have denied many communities the opportunity of completing their community development projects.	2.75	0.53	Agree	2.92	0.68	Agree
3	Political crises have led to temporal closure of schools in some communities in your area.	3.08	0.87	Agree	2.56	0.66	Agree
4.	Using schools for political	2.60	0.50	Agree	2.81	0.53	Agree

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campaigns and elections have resulted in the destruction of school facilities.

5.	Community leaders who belong to opposition political parties are often victimized and sometimes jailed thereby hindering community development in the affected area.	2.70	0.66	Agree	2.56	0.61	Agree
Grand Mean		2.80	0.63	Agree	2.77	0.63	Agree

The result of the data analysis in table 1 above for research question one revealed that community leaders and CDC members agreed with all the items in the table. This is seen in the mean scores of items 1-5 which are above the criterion of 2.50. With grand mean scores of 2.80 and 2.77 for community leaders and CDC members respectively, the answer to research question one is that political conflict leads to destruction of community properties, school facilities, temporal closure of schools and animosity among community members which affects the sustainability of community development in Okrika LGA.

Research Question 2: How does chieftaincy tussle influence sustainable community development in Okrika LGA of Rivers State?

Table 2: Mean Response on How Chieftaincy Tussle Influence Sustainable Community Development in Okrika LGA of Rivers State

S/N	Items	Community Leaders N = 40			CDC Members N = 320		
		X	SD	Decision	X	SD	Decision
6	Argument between community chiefs sometimes result in communal fights that hinders community development.	2.55	0.50	Agree	3.01	0.72	Agree
7	Succession to chieftaincy stool brings fighting in communities that hinders free movement and community development.	3.00	0.68	Agree	2.53	0.51	Agree
8	The hope to ascend to chieftaincy position through hereditary has made heirs not to be serious with developing	2.98	0.62	Agree	3.01	0.88	Agree

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	their communities.						
9	Chieftaincy tussles create factions in communities and causes division which makes it difficult for community members to come together and carry out development programmes	3.11	0.67	Agree	2.66	0.54	Agree
10.	Chieftaincy tussles make it difficult for development agencies to come into a community to carry out development projects.	2.78	0.71	Agree	2.82	0.62	Agree
	Grand Mean	2.91	0.62	Agree	2.80	0.66	Agree

The analyzed data in table 2 above for research question two shows the mean response of community leaders and CDC members on how chieftaincy tussle influence sustainable community development in Okrika LGA of Rivers State. The analysis shows that all items in the table had mean scores that are above the criterion mean of 2.50. This implies that majority of the respondents agreed with the items. The grand mean scores of 2.91 and 2.80 for community leaders and CDC members implies that chieftaincy tussle creates insecurity in affected communities, division and scares away development agencies from going into a community and this negatively influences sustainability of development in Okrika LGA of Rivers State.

Research Question 3: How does land disputes influence sustainable community development in Okrika LGA of Rivers State?

Table 3: Mean Response on How Land Disputes Influence Sustainable Community Development in Okrika LGA of Rivers State

S/N	Items	Community Leaders N = 40			CDC Members N = 320		
		X	SD	Decision	X	SD	Decision
11	Land disputes sometimes escalate to full blown crisis and leave the communities in unrest which hinders development projects.	3.10	0.50	Agree	3.15	0.52	Agree
12	Land disputes discourage foreign investment in communities which	2.79	0.55	Agree	2.98	0.54	Agree

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	could create employment.						
13.	Land disputes create disaffection among community members which makes it difficult for them to come together to carry out development programmes.	2.88	0.69	Agree	2.91	0.50	Agree
14.	Land disputes scare development agencies away from carrying out programmes in affected communities .	3.02	0.67	Agree	2.81	0.66	Agree
	Grand Mean	2.95	0.60	Agree	2.96	0.56	Agree

The analyzed data in table 4.3 above on research question three showed the mean scores of community leaders and CDC members on how land disputes influence sustainable community development in Okrika LGA of Rivers State. The mean scores of items 11-14 were above the criterion mean of 2.50 which indicates that majority of the respondents agree with all the items. The grand mean scores of 2.95 and 2.96 for community leaders and CDC members indicates that land disputes lead to unrest which makes people leave a community, it discourages foreign investments which could create jobs, causes disaffection among community members and scares development agencies away and this negatively influence sustainable community development in Okrika LGA.

DISCUSSIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

The result of the findings in research question one revealed that political conflict leads to destruction of community properties, school facilities, temporal closure of schools and animosity among community members which affects the sustainability of community development in Okrika LGA. In the same vein, the result of the study for hypothesis one revealed that there is no significant difference in the mean rating of community leaders and CDC members on how political conflict influence sustainable community development in Okrika LGA of Rivers State. These findings are supported by the findings of Gboyega (2011) which revealed that political turmoil witnessed in Nigeria has led to the neglect of the community development. He stated that

politics and political instability have affected community development in Nigeria to a large extent.

The result of the findings in research question two showed that chieftaincy tussle creates insecurity in affected communities, division and scares away development agencies from going into a community and this negatively influences sustainability of development in Okrika LGA of Rivers State. The analyzed data for hypothesis two further revealed that there is no significant difference in the mean rating of community leaders and CDC members on how chieftaincy tussle influence sustainable community development in Okrika LGA of Rivers State. This is in line with the findings of Amadi (2019) which revealed that leadership tussle in communities affects the level of socio-economic development of rural communities in Bayelsa State.

The result of the findings in research question three revealed that land disputes lead to unrest which makes people leave a community, it discourages foreign investments which could create jobs, causes disaffection among community members and scares development agencies away and this negatively influence sustainable community development in Okrika LGA. The analyzed data for hypothesis three further revealed that there is no significant difference in the mean rating of community leaders and CDC members on how land disputes influence sustainable community development in Okrika LGA of Rivers State. This is supported by the findings of a study by Fisher (2013) which revealed that disputes on land often truncate the socio-economic and physical development of most urban and rural areas leaving the dwellers with economic hardship, poverty accentuation, health challenges, food scarcity, low standard of living, slow city and community growth among others. It has been observed in studies that land disputes often result into several deaths and severe injuries during conflict battles especially in situations where it is a communal dispute.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings of the study, the researcher recommended that:

1. Political office holders at federal, state and local government levels should ensure that their elections and political aspirations are not marked with violence as this leads to destruction of community assets and affects sustainability of development projects.
2. Communities should unanimously come together and decide the type of leadership that best suits their community. This way, chieftaincy tussles will be avoided since it affects sustainable community development.
3. Traditional rulers should ensure laws are enacted on how to deal with land disputes to avoid conflicts that would slow down the pace of development in communities.

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