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Communal conflict resolution strategies and rural development in Cross River North Senatorial District of Nigeria

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Abstract
This study examined communal conflict resolution strategies and rural development in the Cross River North Senatorial District of Nigeria, comprising Bekwarra, Obanliku, Obudu, Ogoja, and Yala Local Government Areas. The district has experienced persistent intra- and inter-communal conflicts that have significantly impeded rural development. The study argues that the continued occurrence of these conflicts is largely attributable to the inadequate application of effective conflict resolution strategies. It therefore investigated the roles of mediation, negotiation, and compromise as conflict resolution strategies, using the Realistic Group Conflict Theory and Social Identity Theory as its theoretical frameworks. An ex post facto research design was adopted to examine the effects of past communal conflicts. A sample of 400 respondents was selected using Taro Yamane's sample size determination formula, and data were collected through a structured questionnaire. The data were analyzed using Pearson Product Moment Correlation to determine the relationships between the conflict resolution strategies and rural development. The findings revealed significant positive relationships between mediation, negotiation, compromise, and rural development, leading to the rejection of all three null hypotheses. The study concludes that effective application of these conflict resolution strategies is essential for promoting sustainable rural development in the district. It recommends timely intervention by neutral third parties, particularly government agencies and security institutions, to mediate disputes before they escalate. It also emphasizes the importance of dialogue-based negotiation and encourages individuals and communities to embrace compromise as a practical means of resolving disputes, fostering peaceful coexistence, and creating an enabling environment for sustainable rural development.

Keywords: Communal conflicts, negotiation, rural development dialogue

Introduction

Communal conflict is a phenomenon that has attracted much attention in the development discourse. The factors which account for communal conflict within the Cross River North Senatorial District, Nigeria and other parts of West Africa range from a diverse mix of environmental, social, political, ethnic and cultural variables, while constituting the major explanatory factor for famine, hunger and malnutrition. Conflict is ancient, innate and of complex nature in the humanitarian crisis, known for disruption and with strong implications for rural development. Traditionally, Cross River State has witnessed communal crisis of diverse proportions, and fatalities in recent years and these conflicts have grown in occurrence, and assumed more dangerous and sophisticated dimensions that have served as a jinx to rural development.

The term conflict has been defined varyingly by social scientists. There is therefore no dearth of definitions of the concept as there is no exact strategy for its resolution. Conflict appears in a social situation as a disagreement over issues of substance or emotional antagonisms that creates friction between individuals or groups (Abosede, Okon, and Charles 2014). Also, conflict indicates a process when one party perceives that another party has negatively affected, or is about to negatively affect something that the first party cares about (Emeka and Egidi. 2018). Doubtlessly, conflicts when kept within tolerable limits can be a source of creativity and community development, but it becomes a barrier to social development when these limits are exceeded by the contending communities or parties. In the 1930s and 1940s, the traditional school of thought predominantly viewed conflicts negatively, and used it synonymously with terms such as violence, destruction and irrationality, to reinforce its negative connotation (Popoola and Alao, 2012).

From a different perspective, conflict exists when two or more individual or groups are engaged in a struggle over values and claims to positions. As Nicholas (1992) asserted, conflict is an existing state of disagreement or hostility between two or more people or between groups. Communal conflict is a disagreement and confrontation between people of two different communities or within a community. Conflicts have been a plague to the development of rural communities in Africa. Thus, the need to develop conflict resolution strategies is apt. Johan and Emma (2017) observed that communal conflict is a conflict that arises between people seen as original inhabitants (Indigenes), and others who are seen as settlers or migrants struggling over ownership of landed properties in the area. The eruption of communal conflict in rural areas sometimes results to massive loss of lives and properties. In particular, communal conflicts manifests in the forms of injuries, fatalities, genocide, disabilities among groups while constituting the major issue destroying the economic and social development of people in the rural areas of developing countries like Nigeria. Akpenpuum (2013) and Ering (2010) asserted that communal conflicts have hindered manpower growth, socio-economic development in the area and social

cohesion prevalent among groups. Therefore, communal conflict has a propensity to being carnage to development.

Communal conflict is always linked to land dispute because its center stage in Africa is land. A study conducted by Abegunde (2006), shows that land is the common factor that propels communal conflict. Land issues, like the degree of communal conflict, are multi-faceted complex and vary from society to society, showing dynamics from one community to another. This conflict affects development as its associated calamities cause a decline in the living standard, a reduction in population (due to deaths), dissuasion towards development activities, among other effects (Crezay 2014). Ubong, Udoh and Kpalaeke (2017), posit that the British colonial government created an imaginary boundary, which is stringed among the people, and communal conflicts among the inhabitants who are forcefully brought together. According to Alabi and Famakinwa (2017), communal conflicts have caused displacement of the people from their ancestral homes, reduction of income which will trickle down to the community underdevelopment, causing economic disorganization, loss of farm lands, loss of jobs, relocation of businesses, and separation of family members. It also leads to the formation of internally displaced persons, as well as asylum seekers among others, resulting to suspension of communication between the two parties in conflict which sometimes aggravates the conflict situation (Ayak 2015).

Communal conflict as a phenomenon has resulted in setbacks to the social development of the Bekwarra nation. This is made obvious in the abandonment of markets, event centers, village squares, drinking joint, chiefs' palaces, among other places of social gathering in the community. Margarita (2004) asserted that communal conflict in Cross River State impedes the state machinery to effectively negotiate increased political security and economic activities. Communal conflict also causes marginalization of vulnerable groups in the conflict Furthermore, communal conflict is inhibitive to productive ventures and remains a common trend in most rural communities in Africa, with retarding effect on socioeconomic growth and development of the rural areas. Considering these negative and destructive impacts of conflict on rural development, especially within the Northern Senatorial District of Cross River State, there is therefore a consequential need to curb such effects. Thus, the need to explore and utilize strategies of conflict resolution becomes expedient. On that note, the work sought to examine communal conflict resolution strategies in relation to rural development in the northern senatorial district of Cross River State. The study seeks to answer the following questions:

1. How does mediation in conflicts relate to rural development in Northern Senatorial District of Cross River State, Nigeria?

2. How can negotiation as a strategy in conflict affect rural development in Northern Senatorial District of Cross River State, Nigeria?

3. To what extent does compromise in conflict impact on rural development in Northern Senatorial District of Cross River State, Nigeria?

Objectives of the study

The general objective of the study was to examine conflict resolution strategies and rural development in Northern Senatorial District of Cross River State, Nigeria. The specific objectives were:

1. To examine the relationship between mediation in conflict and rural development in Northern Senatorial District of Cross River State, Nigeria

2. To assess the nexus between negotiation as a strategy in conflict and rural development in Northern Senatorial District of Cross River State, Nigeria

3. To analyze the extent to which compromise in conflict can help improve rural development in Northern senatorial district of Cross River State, Nigeria

Research hypotheses

1. There is no significant relationship between mediation in conflict and rural development in Northern Senatorial District of Cross River State, Nigeria

2. There is no significant relationship between negotiation as a strategy in conflict and rural development in Northern Senatorial District of Cross River State, Nigeria

3. There is no significant relationship between compromise in conflict and rural development in Northern Senatorial District of Cross River State, Nigeria

Literature review

Mediation in conflict and rural development: Mediation is a dynamic, constructive interactive process where a third party assists disputing parties in resolving conflict through the use of specialized communication and negotiation technique This third-party system, being common in rural areas because of their communal lifestyle, tends to promote rural development and peaceful coexistence (lIvento, 2017). In mediation, the parties cannot be compelled to disclose information they prefer to keep confidential, which connotes that mediation is an art or science with special skills of analysis careful planning and effective communication.

Most recently, emphasis has been placed on the promotion of strategies of conflict prevention through the approach of mediation. According, to the United Nations, the following have been identified as the procedure for any conflict mediation: the mediation shall be conducted in the manner agreed by the parties as soon as possible; after the mediator's appointment, the mediator shall in consultation with the contending parties establish a time table for the submission by each party to him and to the other party, of the statement summarizing the background of the dispute, the contending parties' interests and the possible way of resolving the dispute. Furthermore, the mediator shall promote the settlement of the issues in dispute between the parties in any manner that the mediator believes to be appropriate, but shall have no authority to impose a settlement on the dispute. Where the mediator believes that any issues in dispute between the parties are not amenable to resolution through mediation, the mediator may recommend, for the consideration of the parties, steps and approaches for resolving the conflict to ensure community development. Each person involved in the mediation, including the mediator, parties, their representatives and any other representative during the mediation meeting, shall maintain high level of confidentiality according to the United Nations Standards on peace and conflict dispute resolution. Unless otherwise agreed by the parties, the mediator and the parties shall not introduce as evidence or in any manner whatsoever in judicial or arbitration proceedings, any admission made by a party in the course of mediation.

Upon the termination of the mediation, the mediator shall promptly send to the center or hiring agency, a notice in writing that the mediation is terminated and shall indicate the date on which it terminated, whether or not the mediation resulted in a settlement of the dispute and, if so, whether the settlement was full or partial. The mediator shall send to the parties a copy of the notice so addressed to the centre.

Alabi and Famakinawa (2017) investigated the effect of communal conflict on rural development in Osun State. Their study revealed that conflict prohibits rural development and mediation was recommended as a strategy for conflict resolution. From their study, 77.8% of subjects believe that communal conflicts stem from boundary disputes, while 77.7% revealed that conflict, often leads to the destruction of lives and properties, thereby, constituting an obstacle to rural development.

A related study by Oyesola, (2007), shows that mediation is an extension or elaboration of the settlement process that involves a third party. This third party works with the disputing parties to help them improve their communication and their analysis of the conflict situation, so that they can themselves identify and choose an option for resolving the conflict that meets the interests or needs of all the disputants.

Unlike arbitration, in which the intermediacy listens to the arguments of both parties and make decision for the disputants, a mediator helps the disputants to seek for appropriate ways to resolve conflicts in order to enhance social and economic development.

It can also be seen as the process whereby an acceptable third party who has limited or no authoritative decision-making power assists the principal parties in a conflict to resolve their dispute. Mediation leaves the decision-making power primarily in the hands of the conflicting parties. The parties in conflict enter into a voluntary agreement which they, and not the mediator, are to enforce or implement. Research has it that scholars have advocated a stronger position for the third party, whereby in most cases, conflicting parties have less direct control over the process and outcomes of the conflict measurement.

Alabi and Famakinwa (2017) have it that mediation has remained a veritable tool for conflict resolution in rural Africa. Rural development has been receiving attention of government of the developing countries across the world. This is because there is a culture of conflict in rural communities. Again, about two thirds of the Nigerian population resides in the rural areas, and therefore the development of these areas impact positively on the urban areas. However, this is not realistic due to the constant conflict that exists in the rural areas. Therefore,

mediation is a key to rural development in that it is one of the surest approach and technique to ending conflicts and ultimately pave way for community development.

Negotiation in conflict and rural development

Since the mid-1970s a new position of organizational or societal conflict management has been in place. It is called negotiation. In conflict, negotiation is key because it creates an opportunity for the conflicting parties to discuss on the approach(es) to ending a looming, lingering or ongoing conflict in the community or between communities. Wertheim (2018) maintained that negotiation is used mainly within the intervention lane of the conflict hourglass model.

Negotiation is a process of discussion between two or more disputants, who seek to find out a common and general solution to conflicts. In the process of negotiation, parties involved show willingness to restore peace and reduce conflict. A study by Oyesosla (2007) revealed that negotiation is a strategic discussion that is directed towards solving conflict between two conflicting parties. In negotiation, one of the parties attempts to persuade the other party to agree with the point towards conflict resolution. The study further revealed that since there is a communal conflict in the rural society, negotiation is apt for peace which exists in stages. The first stage which is crucial to conflict resolution involves making decisions related to the solution of the problem in conflict. The second stage is the discussion stage. At this stage, the parties come together and listen to each other. Another stage is the reassessment stage. After the initial discussion, the next stage is the reassessment stage by the parties. Here, the parties evaluate viewpoints of each other, set their priorities with proposal to ending conflict. The next stage of negotiation is the proposal stage. At this stage of conflict resolution, the parties show flexibility with conditions towards ending the conflict immediately after the proposal. There is also the bargaining stage, where the focus is on the term of win-win outcome through the process of negotiation. The stage that follows is the agreement from both parties to end conflict. And the final stage is the implementation of a course of action. Form the agreement, a course of action is developed which is to be followed by the parties. The course of action is the manner in which parties perform their dues towards conflict resolution. Negotiation involves discussion aimed at reaching an agreement. It has difficulties that present in consensual form. Consensual negotiations are based on stakeholders identifying their own needs and interest, and subsequently find ways to promote mutual gains. This approach seeks high levels of collaboration, and presumes that the parties have the necessary goodwill to communicate throughout the process. Consensual negotiations are particularly important when they are aimed at strengthening long-term working relationship. They are producing potentially more satisfying and enforceable settlement, because the disputants work out their own resolution. Other types of negotiation include hard and soft negotiation styles. Hard-style negotiation often relies on the use of coercive strategies to encourage each side to make concessions and reach agreement. This agreement aims at promoting rural development. Through proper negotiation, any kind of disputes can be resolved. Thus, negotiation provides solution to the problems of two or more disputants through proper discussion and agreements. Margarita (2004) and Ering, Abonor and Abul (2015), are of the opinion that negotiation strategy is a commonly used strategy in conflict resolution in West Africa, which constitutes a solution to the underdevelopment of the region.

West African countries have at one stage or the other experienced some forms of conflict in the last 50 years. Essentially, conflict within West Africa tends to be localized or regional in nature, spilling in a new case across borders. African conflicts have resulted in substantial losses of human lives and displacement of people as refugees. In Liberia for example, the number of war related deaths has been put at a conservative estimate of 150,000 people representing 5% of the total population. Also, hundreds of thousands of people were injured and displaced because of the conflict. This has been a challenge to the development of Africa. The multi-dimensional nature of conflicts, the diversity, and trends, have serious consequences on the long-term structural stability of the state machinery, as well as impedes it from effectively negotiating increased political security and economic activity.

Furthermore, conflict mitigates against the general development of the rural areas. In general, countries subject to conflict and complex emergencies are characterized by weakness or absence of government functions, poorly performing institutions, authorities which lack legitimacy, and a tendency for transition from violent conflict to protracted ones. (Margarita, 2004). Populations living in the midst of chronic but fluting conflicts strive to protect their livelihoods and food security, by adopting negotiation, as conflict hinders food security leading to under development. Therefore, negotiation as a conflict resolution strategy is apt for the socio-economic development of rural areas.

Compromise in conflict and rural development

Compromise as a conflict resolution strategy is geared towards amicable solution of conflict between two conflicting parties. Adie (2017), Ering (2011) argued that in conflict, compromise means one party letting go

for the other. He argued further that compromise is a mini-win/mini-lost strategy, based on a solution that partially satisfies the interests of the parties involved. In this approach, one party shifts ground for the other. This approach results in the parties attempting to win as much as possible while preserving the interpersonal or inter-group relationships (Neil, & Kevin, 2018). Compromise approach to conflict is to assume that a win/win solution is not possible and adopt a mid-point or sacrificial stance that involves a bit of winning and a bit of losing, with respect to both the interests and the relationships of the contending parties. In compromising, persuasion and manipulation dominate this strategy of conflict resolution, and has been used by many diplomats to promote international peace. This strategy of conflict resolution has been used by many for rural development.

Theoretical framework

Realistic group conflict theory

The theory was propounded by Muzafer Sherif in (1966). The basic assumption of the theory is that communal conflict occurs because members of the communities see themselves as not having common identity, not sharing the same ancestral origin, different in migration and settlement history. The theory also holds that communal conflicts erupt between communities if they both claim ownership and heritage to the same land, whether residential or agricultural, hence, suggesting inter-group competition and hostility between groups resulting from real or perceived conflicting goals. The assumption can be stressed further that the dynamics which evolve when groups are engaged in competition lead the groups into developing and prejudicing enmity towards each other. The theoretical relevance to the paper rests on the assumption that communal conflict arises because it is seen as a rational approach by the two groups to secure their recognition and other resources. Therefore, the theory is relevant on the basis of its recommended resolution strategies as an approach to curbing conflicts. The pitfall of the theory, however, is that it does not specify a strategy that is seen as the best in ending conflict. Nevertheless, the theory is relevant and has been adopted as a theoretical analysis to the study.

Social identity theory

The theory was propounded by Henri Tajfal (1981). The theory proposes that every individual divides his/her social world into distinct classes or categories and then group themselves into different units. The theory also assumed that people strive for positive social identity to take advantage of the others. The theory also focuses on group comparison between backward and advance groups, in which members of the backward group must decide whether to emulate out-group behavior, in order to complete or adopt different coping strategies. The differential compensation of backwardness is perceived to have emerged from past injustices and discrimination in group because of anxiety, fear, aggression prejudice, low self-esteem among others. The theory is apt because according to its proponents, conflict emerges because of perceived injustice and discrimination meted on less privileged individuals by out group members, who display traits of dominance over others. Therefore, the theory is still relevant to the work because most of the conflicts in African society emerged from an attempt of one group to display dominance over the other. Hence, there is a violent reaction from the other group leading to conflict. The weakness of the theory is that it never recommended measures for conflict resolution.

Methodology

The work adopted Ex post facto research design. This is because the design allows the researcher to study the "after the facts" of communal conflict, and how the conflict has been a bottleneck to rural development in Northern Senatorial District of Cross River State. The design also allows the researcher to identify the relevant conflict resolution strategies. The study area is in the Northern Senatorial District of Cross River State, Nigeria. The Senatorial District has five Local Government Areas namely: Ogoja, Yala, Bekwarra, Obudu and Obanliku. The areas have similar demographic characteristics, and forms part of the State that shares a boundary in the north with the Northern part of Nigeria, precisely Benue State. In the South, the area is bounded with Boki local Government Area of Cross River State, in the West with Ebonyi State and in the East with the Cameroon Republic. The people in the area share some similarity in their migration history and ancestral origin, with their major occupation being farming.

The study population comprised males and females. According to the 2006 census result, the study area has a population of about 5,000,650 (2006 NPC. From this population, the sample of the study was drawn. Consequently, a total number of 400 respondents were selected for the study from the area. That is, eighty (80) respondents from each local government area, using the Taro Yamane (1965) sample size determination. The formula is presented below.

$$n = \frac{N}{1+N(e)^2 1+N(e)^2}$$

Where:
n = Sample size
N = Total population
e = error limits

The work purposively selected the five (5) local Governments in the Northern Cross River (Ogoja, Yala, Bekwarra, Obudu and Obanliku). Communities from the eighteen local government area that make Cross River State. Thereafter, the purposive sampling technique was used in selecting five political wards, five from each of the local governments (totaling 25 wards). Also, five communities, were selected from each of the sampled political wards (totaling 25 communities). The reason for the predominant use of the purposive sampling was the fact that the researcher is one of the constituents of the Northern Senatorial District of Cross River state, who also has adequate knowledge regarding the wards and communities where conflict activities have been witnessed at regular intervals. Afterwards, a simple random sampling was used in selecting sixteen households from each of the five sampled communities across the Northern Senatorial District of Cross River State (totaling 400 households). The questionnaires were subsequently administered to 400 respondents, one each drawn from the 400 sampled households across the Northern Senatorial District of Cross River state. The researcher was fortunate to find at least one eligible respondent in each of the 400 sampled households. This study used two sources of data; that is primary and secondary sources of data. The primary source utilized essentially questionnaire and other information that were obtained from the field. while the secondary data were the information the researcher obtained from journal publications, textbooks, internet and other library materials.

Data analysis

Test of hypotheses

Decision rule: If the calculated value is greater than or equals the critical value of 2 (two) then the null- hypothesis (H0) is rejected and accept alternate hypothesis (H1); and if the calculated value is less than the critical value, accept the null hypothesis.

Hypothesis One: There is no significant influence between mediation in conflict and rural development.

To test this hypothesis, Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient was used. The result is presented below.

Pearson Product Moment Correlation of the relationship between mediation in conflict and rural development in Northern Senatorial District of Cross River State, Nigeria

Variables	N	Mean	SD	r-value	Sig.
Mediation	388	6.66	4.82	0.159	0.74
Rural Development	388	11.2	2.10		

Significant of 0.05 level: df 386: critical r value 0.159

The calculated r value of 0.74 is greater than the critical r value of 0.159 at 0.05 level of significance with 386 degrees of freedom. This means mediation is related to rural development. Hence, the null hypothesis was rejected.

Hypothesis Two: There is no significant influence between negotiation in conflict and rural development. To test this hypothesis, Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient was used. The result is presented below.

Pearson Product Moment Correlation of the relationship between negotiation in conflict and rural development in Northern Senatorial District of Cross River State, Nigeria.

Variables	N	Mean	SD	r-value	Sig.
Negotiation	388	9.87	2.83	0.62	0.02
Rural Development	388	14.10	1.90		

Significance at 0.05, df-386, critical r-value = 0.159

The result revealed that the calculated r-value of 0.62 is greater than the critical revalue of 0.159 at 0.05 level of significance with 386 degree of freedom. With this result, the null hypothesis which states that there is no significant relationship between negotiation and rural development was rejected.

Hypothesis Three: There is no significant influence between compromise in conflict and rural development. To test this hypothesis, Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient was used. The result is presented below;

Pearson Product Moment Correlation of the relationship between compromise in conflict and rural development in Northern Senatorial District of Cross River State, Nigeria

Variables	N	Mean	SD	r-value	Sig.
Compromise	388	13.44	2.88	0.641	0.14
Rural Development	388	12.13	1.91		

Significance at 0.05, df-386, critical r-value 8.159.

From the result, the calculated r-value of 0.641 is greater than the critical r-value of 0.159 at 0.05 level of significance with 386 degree of freedom. With this result, the mill hypothesis which states that there is no significant relationship between compromise and rural development was rejected.

Discussion of finding

From the result, the first hypothesis revealed that conflict resolution through mediation leads to rural development. In other words, mediation could be seen as potent strategy for conflict resolution. Mediation has succeeded in many other conflict situations across the globe. The finding supported the study of Alabi and Famakiowa (2017) that negotiation remains a veritable tool for conflict resolution in rural communities of Africa Therefore, mediation is a key to rural development. Iivento (2017) noted that mediation is consciously evolving as a discipline and increasingly becoming an active part and strategies of conflict resolution especially in rural areas.

The second hypothesis which stated that there is no significant relationship between negotiation and rural development was rejected and the alternate hypothesis was accepted. That implies there is a relationship between negotiation and rural development. The result from the second hypothesis revealed that negotiation promotes rural development because it allows fir shifting of ground between the conflicting parties. This is in line with Rashimi, Hebeed and Pakeer (2014) who asserted that negotiation curb the outbreak of violent thereby promoting rural development.

The third hypothesis which states that there is no significant relationship between compromise and rural development was rejected. Therefore, it connotes that there is a significant influence between compromise and rural development in most conflicting communities of the Northern Cross River State. The finding aligns with the position of Emeka and Egidi (2018), who argued that compromise is one of the key elements of non-violence change that when embraced will reduce the issue of communal conflict that has been a bane to rural development in most of the African countries. Abegunde, (2006) also noted that when there is compromise in the process of argument among any two parties, there will be no conflict and this will translate to community development in such societies.

Conclusion

Since conflict is part and parcel of human life, and is inevitable in the community there is need for resolution using a workable strategy. The process of managing conflict to achieve constructive rather than destructive outcome is clearly essential to community development. Conflict is ancient in nature and a salient feature of every human society. It was the conflict and struggling nature of human society that prompted the ancient philosopher St. Augustine (1950) to say that "a man will not have peace until he sleeps in the Lord". Conflict manifests in form of destruction, killing, war, anger, disagreement, quarrel, envy etc., Communal conflict is a common feature in rural areas of developing countries of Africa. These conflicts are always associated with boundary disputes, forest claim, ownership of economic trees, construction of footpaths, migration and settlement in unknown destinations, inheritance system among other factors.

Recommendations

This paper recommends the following on the basis of the findings of the study:

1. That members of the community should always see mediation of the third party in conflict resolution as a part of peace that will lead to community or rural development. There is need for quick intervention by the third party especially the government and her security agents.

2. That while conflict is looming, one party should initiate negotiation so that the problem may not degenerate into conflict that will hinder rural development.

3. Advocacy for compromise among contending parties, to mitigate conflict and enforce

4. Community and rural development in the Northern part of Cross River Stale, Nigeria.

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