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## COMMUNAL CONFLICTS AND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT ACTIVITIES IN RIVERS STATE, NIGERIA

**\*Dr. Lorretta Nkechi ORLU**

Department of Adult Education and Community Development Faculty of Education, Ignatius Ajuru University of Education, Rumuolumeni, Port-Harcourt.

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**\*Corresponding Author: Dr. Lorretta Nkechi ORLU**

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### ABSTRACT

The study investigated communal conflicts and community development initiatives in Rivers State. The purpose of this study is to determine how communal conflicts in terms of land disputes and leadership tussle influences community development initiatives in Rivers State. Two aims, two research questions and two null hypotheses guided the study. With a population of 2,532, which included 60 registered Community Based Organizations (CBOs) in the 15 Local Government Areas of two (2) Senatorial Districts in Rivers State, the descriptive survey study methodology was chosen. A sample size of 546 respondents made up of 417 members and 129 leaders of the chosen registered CBOs was drawn using the multi-stage sampling procedure. The instrument for data collection was a self structured questionnaire coded on a 4-point Likert scale and titled “Communal Conflicts and Community Development Activities Questionnaire” (CCCDAQ). The instrument was duly validated by three research experts. The test-retest method was employed in testing the reliability index of the instrument through the use of Pearson Product Moment Correlation coefficient (PPMCC) and a reliability index of 0.78 was obtained. Mean and standard deviation were used to analyze the data gathered from the research questions; while the null hypotheses were tested using Z-test statistics at a 0.05 level of consequence. From the analyses, the findings revealed that there were no significant differences in the mean ratings of members and leaders of Community Based Organizations (CBOs) on the extent to which land disputes and leadership tussle influences community development initiatives in Rivers State. This also revealed that the respondents agreed to a high extent that communal conflicts

are antithetical to peaceful and harmonious co-existence. Based on the findings, the study concluded that communal conflict has a significant influence on community development initiatives in Rivers State and thus, among other things, the study recommended that there should be sustainability in conflict management and peace building mechanisms such that continuity in development activities could be enhanced.

**KEYWORDS:** Conflict, Communal Conflict, Community Development, Land Dispute, Leadership Tussle.

## **INTRODUCTION**

A community is defined as a social structure that is bordered by territory and comprised of individuals who share similar social, economic, and cultural traits. No matter what stage of growth they are at, these communities aim to advance around the world. This is due to the fact that human demands are limitless and that things may always be done better. Community development initiatives are born out of this never-ending pursuit of improving one's life in any particular community. The concept of community development is deeply embedded in Nigerian families. Specifically, every municipality has a Community Development Committee (CDC) that deals with development-related issues. It is widely accepted that everything a community does to ensure its continued survival and growth is included in the concept of community development.

Initiatives for community development may differ slightly in form and methodology from one community or nation to another; occasionally, they reflect a trend toward a specific national development strategy; other times, they reflect presumptions about the community in question or the means of achieving desired adjustment (Onyeozu, 2007). It involves collective efforts to improve the social, political, economic, cultural and infrastructural well-being of individuals in the community. It includes initiatives such as clearing the water ways, building schools, roads, healthcare centers, and promoting local governance and youth empowerment (Emeodu & Elem, 2023) The United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, cited in Ezimah (2009), sees community development is a process in which people's efforts are combined with those of governmental organizations to improve the economic, social, and cultural conditions of communities and integrate them into national life so that they can fully contribute to national advancement.

Therefore, Maistry (2010) suggested that the objective of community development is to create a functional, healthy community. This is achieved through community-driven interventions for well-being, which may require outside support in certain cases. Assets along with assistance are offered in a manner that acknowledges the community's overall developmental requirements. As such, it encompasses all programmes designed to improve the standard of living for locals. But in the course of achieving personal or collective growth, people engage in conflict-inflaming behaviors.

Rivers State as one of the Niger Delta states located in southern region of Nigeria, is one of the most economically significant states in the country due to its rich vast oil and gas endowments. It has twenty three 23 Local Government Areas (LGAs) which serves as home to diverse ethnicity including the Ijaw, Ikwerre, Kalabari, and Ogoni, among others. The socio-economic landscape of the state is shaped by oil exploration, agriculture, and maritime trade, yet the state faces persistent communal tensions exacerbated by boundary disputes, leadership tussle, and cult clashes among others. These results to a host of developmental challenges (Alfred et al., 2023) Conflict is always a possibility when people interact and live together. It is unavoidable and inevitable since man must interact with other people out of necessity. Disputes have historically occurred between and within families, towns, villages, and hamlets. There are many reasons why conflicts occur, especially communal conflicts: competing interests over land, other resources, and values; disagreements over religious, economic, political, social, and cultural views; or when a person, group, or community harms the economic, social, political, religious, or cultural interests of another community.

Conflicts are normal aspects of all human existence and happen often in interpersonal or intrapersonal relationships, it is an inevitable fact in all social contexts. Differences in interests, wants, ambitions, ideals, and aspirations lead to arguments, crises, uncertainty, and upheaval at all levels of development. This is why Olusola (2013) posited that Nigeria till date has witnessed a dramatic increase in communal violence which presents significant obstacles to community development activities. It is present throughout the nation's geopolitical zones. Conflicts usually cause disruptions to people's daily routines, which slow down development and demolish previously built developmental frameworks, regressing the group in question (Kpurunee, 2021). Conflict can be beneficial or harmful; visible violence, conflicts, large-scale strikes, and other types of disturbance can result in the disappearance of

life, belongings, labor hours, potential capital investments, malnutrition, as well as hunger (Alimba, 2014).

Communal conflict refers to violent disputes between groups within a community (intra-communal) or between communities (inter-communal), often times, it is driven by ethnic, political, or resource-based grievances among stakeholders. These conflicts can manifest in land disputes, leadership tussles, cult clashes, uneven resource allocations or competition over oil-related benefits. Communities in Rivers State that have previously experienced communal confrontations as outlined in Eze, (2018) include Rumuekpe and Ogbakiri, B-Dere and K-Dere, Okirika and Eleme, Soku, Elem-Sangama and Oluasiri, Buguma, Ataba, and Kula, as well as Rumuolumeni. Particularly since 2005, a number of Local Government Areas, including Port Harcourt, Ogba/Egbema/Ndoni, Obio/Akpor, Khana, Ikwerre, Emohua, Eche, Gokana, Andoni, and Asari-Toru Eleme has experienced recurring crises which have disrupted development programmes, displaced populations, and eroded trust among stakeholders. have experienced a rise in communal conflicts resulting from: cult conflicts, boundary/land disputes, leadership tussle, youth protest, etc. Any neighborhood that is involved in conflict experiences greater levels of uncertainty, instability, and violence that affect people's livelihoods and social activities, disrupting things like marriages, religion, sports, and other social gatherings and relationships that are available to community members (Eze, 2018).

Understanding the relationship between communal conflict and development initiatives is crucial for policy formulation and peacebuilding mechanisms (Samphina, 2023). In light of the previously said, this study attempts to investigate ways in which land disputes and leadership tussles influences community development initiatives in Rivers State. This will help identify strategies for conflict-sensitive development planning and sustainable peacebuliding.

### **Statement of the Problem**

In any given society, a community's reality is to live in harmony and peace. However, it is a fact that every group contains outcasts whose behaviors or ways of life are inimical to the ideal peaceful, harmonious cohabitation. Within the state, forces seeking to establish or reassert their unique identities are fighting more and more. This has led to increased political instability, the loss of human life, the destruction of human capacity building, and increased uncertainty on investment and development initiatives in communities. Actually, there are

always two possible outcomes from conflicts: positive and negative. Put another way, disputes occasionally lead to the accomplishment of objectives that may serve the needs of the people or harm such needs by postponing or undermining their economic and social activities.

One of the main ongoing issues that Rivers State and Nigeria as a whole have faced over the years is community conflicts. Despite both governmental and independent organizations' persistent efforts to stop the threat of communal conflicts, Rivers state's communities continue to be plagued by a number of killings resulting from land disputes, leadership tussles, cult conflicts, unequal resource allocation, kidnapping, oil bunkering, sexual violence, protests, attacks on energy infrastructure, mob justices, vigilantism, youth protests, political and criminal crises, and other incidents. The numerous clashes and her forces that have occurred in Rivers State communities are quite alarming. Consequently, the study was necessitated by the aforementioned issues, which runs counter to the communities' goal of peaceful and harmonious cohabitation that breeds healthy development initiatives.

### **Aim and Objectives of the Study**

The purpose of this study is to investigate the influence of communal conflicts on community development initiatives Rivers States. The specific objectives of this study are to:

1. Ascertain the extent to which communal conflict in terms of land dispute has influenced community development initiatives in Rivers State.
2. Investigate the extent to which communal conflict in terms of leadership tussle has influenced community development initiatives in Rivers State.

### **Research Questions**

The study was guided by the following research questions:

1. To what extent does communal conflict in terms of land dispute influences the community development initiatives in Rivers State?
2. To what extent does communal conflict in terms of leadership tussle influence the community development initiatives in Rivers State?

### **Hypotheses**

The subsequent null hypotheses were examined at the consequence level of 0.05 in accordance with the study's objectives:

**Ho1:** There is no considerable difference between the mean rating of leaders and members of the CBOs on the extent to which communal conflict in terms of boundary disputes influences community development initiatives in Rivers State.

**Ho2:** There is no considerable difference between the mean rating of leaders and members of community based organizations (CBOs) on the extent to which communal conflict in terms of leadership tussle influences community development initiatives in Rivers State.

### **Methodology**

A descriptive survey research design was used in this study. This design, to Nworgu (2015), examines a population by taking a sample, examining it, and describing the comparative incidence allocation and correlations between the characteristics related to society and psychology that comprise the population. The use of a descriptive survey research design is warranted since it facilitates data gathering via questionnaires for the purpose of taking respondents' opinions into account. The study's population comprises 2,532 individuals from 60 registered Community Based Organizations in Rivers State (CAC, 2023). These are basically CBOs whose thematic focus is on community development initiatives. This study adopted the multi-stage sampling procedure in selecting five hundred and forty-six (546) sample size, 417 members, and 129 leaders of the CBOs respectively. The tool for data collecting was the researcher self-organized survey named "Communal conflicts and Community Development Activities Questionnaire" (CCDAQ). This tool was sectioned in two parts "A" and "B". Section "A" covered research question one while section "B" covered research question two. The two sections is made up of ten items organized in a modified four point ranking scale of: Very High Extent (VHE- 4), High Extent (HE -3), Low Extent (LE - 2), and Very Low Extent (VLE -1) The modified four-(4) point scale used to assess the items led to the average mean for addressing the research questions being determined by averaging the four points,  $4 + 3 + 2 + 1 = 10/4 = 2.5$ . As a result, replies with an average score of less than 2.5 are adjudged as low extent, whilst those with 2.5 or more are adjudged as high extent. Three research experts properly validated the measuring device before it was given to the respondents, they made sure that the items, sentence form, concentration, and clarity were all adequate. The test-retest approach was adopted to determine the instrument's consistency as a measurement tool. Twenty (20) respondents, not included in the study population, participated in a pilot study. The group received two administrations of the instrument spaced three to four weeks apart. The internal consistency of the measuring tool was determined by

utilizing the Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient (PPMCC) statistical approach to assess the acquired data and a reliability coefficient of 0.78 was obtained which was high enough to be adjudged reliable for the investigation. Five hundred and forty-six (546) questionnaires were dispersed to the respondents at their meeting locations on the dates and times that their respective leaders informed the researcher. Four research assistants helped with the distribution of the instrument with the assistance of the presidents of the numerous community-based organizations (CBOs) chosen for the study, this made the distribution of the questionnaires feasible, simple and also facilitated 100% retrieval rate. The mean and standard deviation were used to analyze the data gathered on the research questions while Z-test statistical tool was used to analyze the null hypotheses at the 0.05 level of significance.

## **RESULTS**

**Research Question 1:** To what extent does communal conflict in terms of land dispute influences community development initiatives in Rivers State?

**Table 1: Mean and Standard Deviation Analyses on the extent to which communal conflicts in terms of land dispute influences community development initiatives in Rivers State.**

S/N	Items	CBOs Members N=417			CBOs Leaders N=129		
		X	S.D	Decision	Mean	S.D	Decision
1.	Discourages inter-community marriage, as people do not relate with one another.	3.39	0.90	VHE	3.48	0.94	VHE
2.	Hinders political fortunes for residents of disputed areas.	3.57	0.98	VHE	3.52	0.96	VHE
3.	Leads to killings and hostilities which hinders development plans.	3.61	0.99	VHE	3.14	0.81	HE
4.	Essential services are often disrupted or inaccessible during conflict situations	3.31	0.87	VHE	3.20	0.83	HE
5.	People in boundary disputed areas love and do things together.	1.88	0.82	LE	2.23	0.83	LE
	<b>Grand Mean</b>	<b>3.15</b>	<b>0.91</b>	<b>H E</b>	<b>3.11</b>	<b>0.87</b>	<b>HE</b>

\*key: VHE = 3.26-4.00, HE = 2.51-3.25, LE = 1.76-2.50, VLE = 1.00-1.75. n =546

The results of the analysis in table 1 above on research question one showed that the leaders and members of CBOs had mean scores in item 1 of 3.39 and 3.49, with standard deviations of 0.90 and 0.94. The averages of item 2 are 3.57 and 3.52, with standard deviations of 0.98 and 0.96. The standard deviations of 0.99 and 0.81 for item 3 are 3.61 and 3.14 on average. The averages of item 4 are 3.31 and 3.20, with standard deviations of 0.87 and 0.83. The averages of items 5 are 1.88 and 2.23, with standard deviations of 0.82 and 0.83. The data revealed that both respondents agreed to a high extent that communal conflicts resulting from land disputes cause people to not relate to one another, cause aspirants to be politically isolated in their parties most of the time, prevent community members from marrying, keep areas lacking in social amenities, and prevent community members from worshiping together. With grand means of 3.11 and 3.15 for CBO leaders and members respectively, exceeding the standard mean of 2.50%, the response to research question one is that communal conflicts in terms of land disputes have a significant impact on community development initiatives.

**Research Question 2:** To what extent does communal conflict in terms of leadership tussle influence the community development initiatives in Rivers State?

**Table 2: Mean and Standard Deviation Analyses on the extent to which communal conflict in terms of leadership tussle influences community development initiatives in Rivers State.**

S/N	Statement	CBOs Members N=417			CBOs Leaders N=129		
		Mean	SD	Decision	Mean	SD	Decision
6.	A community where leaders fight for power has a high level of insecurity.	3.40	0.91	VHE	3.29	0.57	VHE
7.	Encourages migration of the youths to other peaceful areas thus helps improve food security of the community.	1.81	0.83	LE	2.00	0.77	LE
8.	Many communities cannot benefit from any development project because of unresolved power tussle.	3.36	0.89	VHE	3.23	0.84	HE
9.	Results to population decline.	3.30	0.87	VHE	3.40	0.91	VHE

10.	Hinders the economic development of communities.	2.93	0.76	HE	3.24	0.85	HE
	<b>Grand Mean</b>	<b>2.96</b>	<b>0.85</b>	<b>HE</b>	<b>3.03</b>	<b>0.85</b>	<b>HE</b>

\*key: VHE = 3.26-4.00, HE = 2.51-3.25, LE =1.76-2.50, VLE = 1 gh.00-1.75. n =546

The analyzed data for research question two, as shown in table 2 above, revealed the members' and leaders' mean scores for CBOs. The mean scores of 3.40 and 3.29, with standard deviations for item 6 are 0.91 and 0.87. The averages of item 7 are 1.81 and 2.00, with standard deviations of 0.83 and 0.77. The mean scores for item 8 are 3.36 and 3.23, with standard deviations of 0.89 and 0.84. The mean scores for item 9 are 3.30 and 3.40, with standard deviations of 0.87 and 0.91. The mean scores of item 10 are 2.93 and 3.24 with standard deviations 0.76 and 0.85 respectively. These revealed that both respondents agreed to high extent that communal conflicts such as leadership tussle results in high level of insecurity, encourages youth migration to other peaceful areas which endangers the community's food security, results to population decline and hinders community economic development. With grand means of 2.96 and 3.03 for CBO leaders and members which is higher than the 2.50% criterion mean, the response to research question two is that communal conflicts in terms of leadership tussle have a significant negative impact on community development initiatives.

### Test of Hypotheses.

**H01:** There is no considerable difference between the mean ratings of members and leaders of community based organizations (CBOs) on the extent to which communal conflict in terms of land disputes influences community development initiatives in Rivers State.

**Table 3: Z-test Statistics of no considerable difference between the mean ratings of members and leaders of community based organizations (CBOs) on the extent to which communal conflict in terms of land disputes influences community development initiatives in Rivers State.**

Respondents	N	$\bar{X}$	S.D	SL	DF	Z-cal	Z-tab.	Decision
<b>CBOs Members</b>	417	3.15	0.71	0.05	544	0.45	$\pm 1.96$	Accepted
<b>CBOs Leaders</b>	129	3.11	0.87					

According to Table 4.6 above, there is no considerable difference between the responses of members and leaders of Community Based Organizations (CBOs) regarding the degree to which communal conflict in the form of land/border disputes influences community development activities in Rivers State. This is because the z-calculated value of 0.45 is less than the z-table value of + 1.96 for degree of freedom (544) at the 0.05 significant level. Thus, the alternative is rejected and the null hypothesis of no considerable difference in the mean ratings of CBO leaders and members regarding the degree to which communal conflict related to land/border disputes influences community development activities in Rivers State accepted.

**H<sub>02</sub>:** There is no considerable difference between the mean rating of leaders and members of community based organizations (CBOs) on the extent to which communal conflict in terms of leadership tussle influences community development initiatives in Rivers State.

**Table 4: Z-test Statistics of no considerable difference between the mean ratings of members and leaders of community based organizations (CBOs) on the extent to which communal conflict in terms of leadership tussle influences community development initiatives in Rivers State.**

<b>Respondents</b>	<b>N</b>	<b><math>\bar{X}</math></b>	<b>SD</b>	<b>SL</b>	<b>DF</b>	<b>Z-cal</b>	<b>Z-tab.</b>	<b>Decision</b>
<b>CBOs Members</b>	417	2.96	0.85	0.05	544	-0.82	$\pm 1.96$	Accepted
<b>CBOs Leaders</b>	129	3.03	0.85					

According to Table 4.7 above, there is no considerable difference between the mean responses of members and leaders of CBOs regarding the degree to which communal conflict in terms of leadership tussle influences community development initiatives in Rivers State. This is because the z-calculated value of -0.82 is less than the z-table value of + 1.96 for degree of freedom (544) at the 0.05 significant level. Consequently, the alternative hypothesis is rejected and the null hypothesis, according to which there is no considerable difference in the mean evaluation of CBOs leaders and members regarding the degree to which leadership rivalry within the community affects CBOs' ability to carry out community development initiatives in Rivers State, is accepted.

## **DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS**

### **Communal Conflicts in Terms of Land Dispute and Community Development Initiatives**

The findings in research question one showed that the majority of respondents agreed to a high extent that people in land disputed areas do not relate with one another, which results in killings and hostilities and blocks development plans. The research also discovered that there were no statistically significant variations in the mean scores of members and leaders of CBOs on the extent to which communal conflict in terms land disputes influences community development initiatives in Rivers State. This finding corroborates with that of Alubo's (2011), who asserted that the issues surrounding land disputes also have an impact on the achievement of goals in and access to social development, including education, social activities like marriage and other relationships, sports, and worship, among others, all of which inevitably prevent community members from forming social bonds.

Additionally, the results are also in line with Wigwe's (2019), who found that underdevelopment caused by land disputes negatively impact the social life of community members as no sane local, state, or federal government would choose to locate projects in a contentious location for fear of not able to accomplish the project until the issue is fully settled. Further she asserted that land disputed territories remain underdeveloped with respect to social facilities including roads, schools, hospitals, electricity, and places of worship. Similarly, the finding bolsters Kpurunee's (2021) assessment that communal disputes have posed a major danger to the harmony and mutual coexistence which breeds healthy development initiatives. This is because when these dispute breaks out, people frequently part ways and perceive one another as rivals, which causes major breaches in intimate communication and friendly relationships. In extreme circumstances, this is followed by the start of violent confrontations, which frequently cause people to relocate to safer areas leaving the communities desolate.

### **Communal conflicts in terms of Leadership Tussle and Community Development Activities in Rivers State.**

Research question 2 findings on the extent to which communal conflict in terms of leadership tussles influences community development revealed that most respondents agreed to a high extent that a community where there is a leadership tussle is highly insecure, that the community's food security is threatened by the migration of the youths to other peaceful

areas, the communities cannot benefit from any development project because of unresolved power tussle, it leads to population decline and hinders economic development of communities. The study also discovered, based on the tested hypothesis in table 4 that there were statistically significant variations in the mean scores of members and leaders of CBO on the extent to which leadership tussle influences community development activities in Rivers State. This backs up the findings of Egwu's (2013), who found that many communities cannot profit from development projects because of long-standing, unresolved leadership tussle. This is due to the fears connected with this type of community conflict. Additionally, her findings mentioned that no significant community development initiatives can take place in a community whose leaders are constantly engaged in violent power tussle that negatively impact the people they are supposed to be leading. Furthermore, the results of this study aligned with that of Akpenpuun (2013) who claims that traumatizing events resulting from leadership tussle also demolish or weaken the local health care system and that crucial services are frequently interrupted or unavailable in times of communal strife.

## **CONCLUSION**

Sequel to the results of findings, the study conclude that communal conflicts in Rivers State deeply rooted in ethnocentrism, boundary/land disputes, leadership tussle, political tensions/marginalization, and competition over natural resources are antithetical to peaceful and harmonious co-existence of any given community. Since there can be no real development in a conflict-stalled area, these conflicts have severely disrupted community development efforts, leading to unstable infrastructure projects, population displacement, and a decline in social trust.

Peace is the cornerstone of any sustainable community development initiatives, not merely the absence of violence. Development initiatives in conflict-striken areas can only succeed when there is a shared commitment to nonviolence, inclusive governance, and mutual trust. On the other hand, tackling underlying issues like poverty, youth unemployment, marginalization, and equitable development initiatives can aid in averting future conflicts. This is why community development planning initiatives in Rivers State needs to be conflict-sensitive in order to guarantee long-term progress, as communal conflict is a persistent cankerworm that eats away the social fabrics of a given locality wherever it occurs, necessitating a systematic approach to conflict resolution that considers sustainability.

Communities in Rivers State can be turned from conflict areas into centers of resilience and prosperity by incorporating peacebuilding into development frameworks. Rebuilding infrastructure is not enough to achieve this; it also calls for restoring trust, encouraging inclusive discourse, and making sure that development initiatives take into account the opinions and needs of all parties involved. Communities take an active role in their own advancement when they feel empowered and heard. Development then becomes a tool for long-term stability, healing, and unity in addition to economic growth. Rivers State is at a turning point in history, and with the correct policies, it can set an example for how development and peace are not mutually exclusive but rather complementary.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations were made:

1. Community stakeholders should incorporate peacebuilding into development initiatives, this will encourage sustainability in conflict management and peace building mechanisms such as regular meetings and dialogue between neighboring communities and within communities to avert any indices of conflict before it erupts. This will enhance continuity in development activities.
2. The state's local government areas should effectively implement enlightenment campaign through adult education programmes aimed at teaching the populace about the causes, nature, and effects of conflicts on their socioeconomic lives as well as the necessity of protecting their community from crisis.

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