

# COMMUNAL RESOURCE CONFLICT DYNAMICS AND SOCIO-ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT IN CROSS RIVER STATE

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## Abstract

*Communal crisis is gradually replacing the conflict between states which appears to have dominated the international state since end of the Second World War. The harmonious relationship and peaceful co-existence which characterized rural dwellers especially in Cross River State seems to have been torn apart owing to the daily occurrence of crisis within the polity which has in no small measure undermined development of social and economic lives of the people. This crisis manifest in different forms, common among them include; civil wars, violence and conflicts, land disputes, gang violence and political wars, etc. the critical nature of this crisis and its devastating impacts are adversely affecting socio economic wellbeing of affected communities. Data for the study were elicited through questionnaire from two hundred and twenty ( 220) respondents randomly selected from four (4) communities within the study area. Chi-square ( $X^2$ ) was used as analytical tool to test hypotheses. Data collected were analyzed at 0.05 level of significance. Findings confirm that socio economic underdevelopment could be a negative consequence of communal crisis. It is suggested that government in collaboration with the people should rise up to the challenge of maintaining peace and order to pave way for development programmes.*

**Keywords:** *Communal Crisis, Communities, Socio economic, Development.*

## Introduction

Every society is faced with different challenges imposed either by man or nature. Since after independence in 1960, Nigeria has consistently experienced crises of different dimensions with adverse consequences on the social, economic, political and emotional development of the society. Communal crisis or communal conflict/dispute is one of such devastating challenges confronting transitional societies such as Nigeria.

Conflicts as asserted by Adams (2000) are inevitable wherever scarce resources are unequally distributed among competitors and inequality is reflected in cultural and political relationship between groups. Human society as observed by Robinson (1972) in Nsolibe (2014) characterized by differences in ideology, socio-cultural activities, resources endowment and different ethnic affiliations. These differences often result to crisis due to poor management strategy.

Abubakar (2013) identified communal tension in Nigeria as multidimensional comprising religious, economic, social and ethno-linguistic etc. Communal crisis is a divisive force in the sociopolitical environment. Globally, communal crises exist as a result of politics, ethnicity and religion factors. These various crises have resulted in rising nationalism and militancy of various movements seeking determination, local autonomy, separate identity and true federalism. The social and economic consequences of these communal stressors are devastating to the rural economy.

The poor state and performance of the rural sector especially in Central Cross River State is an indicator and a pointer at underdevelopment and this is further worsened by series of communal crisis (Ekot, 2002). Rural communities in Central Cross River State are in a precarious and abysmal state. Communal crisis has been a significant source of

disharmony in Central Cross River State where several people have been allegedly killed, wounded and kidnapped. These several provocative attacks, harassment, abduction and killing have resulted into loss of manpower, destruction of properties, stagnation of economic activities like businesses including farming, increasing cannibalistic acts etc. Hundreds of people have been displaced from their original homes and rendered homeless as refugees in neighbouring communities as a result of brutal and inhuman acts of communal crisis. This is evidenced in the crises between Inyima and Onyeadama in Yakurr and Obubra Local Government Areas; Ukpe, Okpagada and Mgbageda in Ogoja Local Government Area; Usumotong and Ediba, Adadama and Amaegu Communities in Abi Local Government Area of Cross River State and Ebonyi State; Nko and Onyeadama in Yakurr and Obubra Local Government Areas; Efraya and Ajasor Communities; and Iso Bendeghe and Boje Communities, etc. These communal conflicts may have been precipitated by scramble for resources, land, political power and chieftaincy tussle.

For several years running, these communities have engaged in a fratricidal war over parcels of lands despite the peace pact signed by most of the elders of these warring communities. None of these crises ever end without loss of lives, destruction of properties, destruction of lives-stocks and farm products, invading and burning of schools, homes, markets, shops and even hospitals where the sick and injured are supposed to be taken care of; blocking of public roads making it difficult for people to travel outside their territories for productive ventures. These have cumulatively led to the distortion of social, cultural, economic and political activities within the area. The increasing insecurity has wreaked havoc on the environmental wellbeing and hospitality for which most rural communities exemplify.

The endemic nature of communal crisis with its attendant consequences calls for attention. This study investigated the impact of environmental resources conflict dynamics on social and economic development of communities in Central Cross River State. The major objective was to investigate the association between communal crisis and socio economic development. Specifically, it examined the association between struggle for land, political power and chieftaincy affair and socio economic development.

## Literature Review

Communities in Central Cross River State like every other parts of the world have witnessed persistence reoccurrence of several communal crisis which has posed a devastating consequence on their socio economic development (Pate, 2009). Traditionally, conflict have been conceptualized as a struggle over values and claims to scarce status, power and resources in which the aims of the opponent are to neutralize, injure or eliminate the rivals. It exists in magnitude of range, rift, misunderstanding, family and market brawls, skirmishes and wars, public insurrections and assaults including chieftaincy and boundary disputes (Albert, 2001). Conflict, though an element of social interaction, exists when parties are engaged in serious disagreement and refuses to come to terms with each other. This could be family members, friends, individuals, communities, states and even nations.

Pate (2009) noted that when two or more parties perceive their interest as incompatible, they express hostile attitudes or pursue their interest through actions that damaged the other parties. In the view of Kari (2004), conflict arises when two actors are opposing each other in social interaction and reciprocal social power in an attempt to obtain scarce or incompatible goals by preventing each other from attaining and pursuing their goals. To further buttress this point, Ajayi (2014) acknowledged that conflict is inevitable wherever sever resources are unequally distributed among competitors and inequality is reflected in cultural and political relationship between groups.

The Global Coalition for Conflict Transformation (2016) added that conflict is not solely an inherently negative, destructive occurrence but rather a potentially positive and productive force for change if harnessed constructively. Conflict is not an isolated event that can be resolved or managed; but an integral part of society's ongoing evolution and development. This view tallies with that of Ayayi (2013) who noted that the regularity of conflict has become of the distinct characteristics of the continent. This however, defines communal living in rural communities or Cross River State. The findings from the work of Otite (1991); Deutsch (1991); Zartman (1991) and Azar (1990) reveal that conflict may be in ubiquitous as long as people, nations and groups pursue conflicting interest, there will always be disagreements, disputes and conflict.

Communal crisis has to do with disputes between two or more communities. According to Oboh and Hyande (2006), it is that which involve two or more communities engaging themselves in disagreement or act 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.

The last two decades in Nigeria as stressed by Sambon (2005), have witnessed no fewer than two hundred communal conflicts and casualty figures conservatively put over 500,000 were recorded in a quick succession across the country resulting to loss of lives and properties. A study by Ikurekong, Udo and Esin (2012) reveal that the major consequences of this bloody communal clashes have been outright reduction in the livelihoods and development potential of the natural resources base of the people.

Conflict according to Albert (2001) as cited in Ayayi and Buhari (2014) is a channel through which creative solution to human problems are defined and collective solution identified and developed. Hence, there is nothing wrong with the existence of this crisis as it forms part and parcel of the society. What is disturbing as observed by Omotayo (2005) is the massive destruction of lives and properties as well as disruption of social, political and economic lives of the larger population. Communal crisis therefore constitute a serious social problem that needs to be addressed with urgency. Although communal crisis as identified by Ikenga (2006) has been a scourge on society from earliest times, contemporary rural societies seem to be witnessing more of these crises. This havoc as commented by Eme and Nwoda (2015) has turned the attention of people from creative production to creative destruction. Many people in the process are displaced, thus compounding the problem of increased refugees in neighbouring communities, while some are killed, others died as a result of shocks, and improper medical attention and lot more are injured or maimed.

There is greater insecurity of lives and properties in areas surrounded by conflict as a result of increased importation of sophisticated weapons used in engaging opposition parties. Communal crisis or conflict as observed by Effiom (2001) have graduated from the use of bow and arrows, sticks, machetes, dain-guns to automatic rifles, grenades and bomb. The frequency of crisis, according to Oji and Eme (2004) has the capacity to severely constrained development endeavours by destroying infrastructures. One of the serious consequences has been the interruption of production progress and diversion of resources away from productive use. Funds budgeted for viable development programmes are often times rechanneled to rebuilding critical infrastructures destroyed as a result of these crises.

Communal crisis can be attributed to a number of factors among which include: political discrimination, poverty, inequality, cultural and religious differences (Eminue, 2014). Eminue (2014) and Osaghae (1992) 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 Nsolibe (2014) also assert 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 its exudes, the non-identification of appropriate and most effective channel of managing the occurrence and weak legal institution for Nigeria nations, as further posing greater challenge to addressing, controlling and understanding communal conflict or crisis in Nigeria.

Although Celestine and Osita (2010) admitted that conflict in the society is inevitable, and that not all conflict can be resolved but managed, the task of conflict resolution is however, weakened by poorly trained and corrupt control machineries of government and their inability to check, monitor and control people's activities that have the propensity to generate crisis in the society. More disturbing, is the increasing duration between flare-up and the partiality of armed personnel and perceived stakeholders especially politician in handling these crises. Several factors as pointed out by Wood (2016) affect economic (as well as) social development. These include; population, conflict and environment. Conflict is complex, its presence in an area is terrible for economic development. Not only does it cost money but also instability in businesses. Although most times these crises are not remotely stable, their existence create much risk and harm to the socio economic development of the society. During conflict periods 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 and refugee problems. The violence outbreak of communal crises has marred development gains of health education, infrastructural improvement and income generating and distributing activities. These are necessary consequences of inter-communal conflicts. This situation nevertheless poses great challenge to socio economic development as no investor would be willing to undertake serious business commitment in such area.

In Cross River State over the past three decades there have been series of crises between Adadama Community in Cross River State and Ameagu Community in Ebonyi State; Ediba and Usumutong Communities in Abi Wakande and Obubra urban; Nko and Onyeadama Communities, etc. The rising crises within these communities have greatly affected development projects and overall socio-economic wellbeing of the people. The consequences have been which has resulted in the destruction of buildings and infrastructures, distortion of business activities, increasing insecurities and even disruption of social peace and harmony in the area.

## Theoretical framework

The conflict school according to Ekot (2002) sees society as made up of people or groups with conflicting and unequal access to social, political and economic resources. Therefore, society is more or less a battle ground where those who consider themselves as exploited rise up against those who exploit them. Conflict to Coser (1956) as cited in Aule (2015) is commonly regarded as a struggle over values and claims to scarce status, power and resources. This is also the stance of Ralf Dahrendorf where he posited that conflict is the resultant effect of competition. The aim of the opponents are to neutralize, injure or eliminate their rivals.

Similarly, Shapiro (2006) viewed conflict as a process of social interactions, which involves claims to resources, power, status, beliefs, preferences and desires. Giving these assertions, therefore, the social conflict theory of Karl Marx is considered relevant to this study. Karl Marx, a major proponent of the conflict school believes that reality lies only in nature and material things. The foundation of human society is based on human adaptation to nature. That is the organization of activity to provide for material needs and wants. Economic factor (e.g land, economic trees and products etc) is the fundamental determinant of the structure and development of society. Marx was concerned with the economic factor which exists between the opposing classes in the society. Those who have the means of production and those who are exploited by the owners of the means of production. Marx, as stated in Charles (2014) commented that social relations in human society from the beginning of history has been marked by series of struggles and disagreements between opposing classes. That every society in history has been marked by some gradation or differentiation between the haves and the have-nots, the superior and the inferior, the super-ordinates and the sub-ordinates, the high and the low classes.

Giving this view in relation to this study, economic resource such as land in Cross River State is scarce when compared to the demand of the people. The scramble for these scarce resources by individuals and groups often result to conflict, thus the prevalence of communal crisis in Cross River State.

## Methodology

The study adopted a survey research design. Out of the 18 local government areas in Cross River State, the ones with incessant communal crises were purposively studied. These constituted the strata of the study. From these strata, 4 communities were purposively selected based on the intensity and persistency of communal conflicts. These were the clusters of the study. From these 4 clusters, respondents were systematically selected. The actual selection adopted the Taro Yamene's (1967) sample determinant formula. Thus, from a population of 954,763 that make up the Central Cross River State (NPC, 2006) 400 respondents constituted the sample of the study. From each cluster, 100 people participated.

The major instrument of data collection was the questionnaire and Key Informant Interview (KII) with community heads in these affected areas. Data were obtained from both primary and secondary sources. The mean rating was used in dividing the total estimate by total frequency rating below 3.5 means the respondents did not agree, whereas rating from 3.5 and above means, the respondents agreed. Chi-square ( $\chi^2$ ) statistical technique was used to test the hypothesis earlier stated to guide the study. This is tested using 0.05 level of significance. The study also made use of secondary data gathered from textbooks and journals to complement the primary sources of data. The analysis of the study was based on the three hundred and seventy five (375) questionnaire that were properly filled and returned by respondents.

**Table 1**  
**Socio demographic data of respondents**

S/N	Items	Variables	No. of Respondents	Percentage (%)
1	Sex	Male	213	56.8
		Female	162	42.2
2	Age	20-25	34	9.1
		26-31	56	14.9
		32-37	103	27.5
		38-43	132	35.2
		44 and above	50	13.3
		<b>Total</b>	<b>375</b>	<b>100</b>
3	Religion	Christianity	319	85
		Islam	2	0.53
		Traditional	52	13.8
		Others (specify)	2	0.53
		<b>Total</b>	<b>375</b>	<b>100</b>
4	Marital status	Single	21	5.6
		Married	320	85.33
		Divorced	7	1.86
		Widow	11	2.93
		Others (specify)	6	1.6
		<b>Total</b>	<b>375</b>	<b>100</b>
5	Educational level	Primary	75	20
		Secondary	283	75.4
		Tertiary	17	4.53
		<b>Total</b>	<b>375</b>	<b>100</b>

### Field survey, 2018

Table 1 indicates the socio demographic data of respondents who participated in the study. From the table, 9.1 percent (N= 34) belonged to the lowest age bracket of 20-25 years of age. The highest number of respondents were from the age bracket of 38-43 years of age. In terms of sex, 56.8 percent (N = 213) were male while 42.2 percent (N= 162) were female. This implied that more males than females were involved in the study. Religiously, these are Christian communities as portrayed by 85 percent (N=319) of total respondents. Traditional worshipers are also found and a few Muslims. In terms of marital status, majority of respondents 85.33 percent (N=320) were married. Educationally, majority of respondents, 75.4 percent (N= 283) had acquired secondary school education while 4.53 percent (N=17) of total respondents had acquired a certain type of tertiary education.

### Analyses

Hypothesis 1: There is no significant association between scramble for land ownership/community resources and socio economic development.

Hypothesis 2: Struggle for political power/ chieftaincy position has no significant association with socio economic development.

Table 2

**Responses on the association between scramble for land ownership/community resources and socio economic development**

Responses	Male	Female	Total
S/A	80	65	145
A	38	25	63
D	30	40	70
S/D	65	32	97
	213	162	375

Source: Field survey, 2018

Chi-square computation of expected frequency

$$E_1 = 145 \times 213$$

$$\frac{375}{375} = 82.36$$

$$E_2 = 145 \times 162$$

$$\frac{375}{375} = 62.64$$

$$E_3 = 63 \times 213$$

$$\frac{375}{375} = 35.78$$

$$E_4 = 63 \times 162$$

$$\frac{375}{375} = 27.22$$

$$E_5 = 70 \times 213$$

$$\frac{375}{375} = 39.76$$

$$E_6 = 70 \times 162$$

$$\frac{375}{375} = 30.24$$

$$E_7 = 97 \times 213$$

$$\frac{375}{375} = 55.1$$

$$E_8 = 97 \times 162$$

$$\frac{375}{375} = 41.9$$

**Computation of Chi-square**

Cell	O	E	O-E	(O-E) <sup>2</sup>	$\frac{(O-E)^2}{E}$
1	80	82.36	-2.36	5.57	0.07
2	65	62.64	2.36	5.57	0.09
3	38	35.78	-2.22	4.93	0.14
4	25	27.22	2.22	4.93	0.18
5	30	39.76	-9.76	95.26	2.4
6	40	30.24	9.76	95.26	3.15

7	65	55.1	9.9	98.01	1.78
8	32	41.9	-9.9	98.01	2.34
					<b>10.15</b>

Source: Field survey, 2018

$$df = (R-1) (C-1)$$

$$= (4-1) (2-1)$$

$$= 3 \times 1$$

$$= 1$$

Based on the degree of freedom, the critical chi-square value at 0.05 level of significance is 7.82 while the calculated  $X^2$  is 10.15.

If the calculated  $X^2$  is greater than the critical value, the alternate hypothesis is accepted while the null hypothesis is rejected. Given the above computation, the calculated  $X^2$  is greater than the critical value.

Therefore, we reject the null hypothesis and accept the alternate hypothesis. Meaning that there is a significant association between scramble for land ownership/community resources and socio economic development.

**Table 3**

**Response on the association struggle for political power/ chieftaincy position and socio economic development**

Responses	Male	Female	Total
S/A	90	70	160
A	48	20	68
D	40	25	65
S/D	35	47	82
	213	162	375

Source: Field survey, 2018

**Chi-square computation of expected frequency**

$$E_1 = 160 \times 213$$

$$\frac{375}{375} = 90.88$$

$$E_2 = 160 \times 162$$

$$\frac{375}{375} = 69.12$$

$$E_3 = 68 \times 213$$

$$\frac{375}{375} = 38.62$$

$$E_4 = 68 \times 162$$

$$\frac{375}{375} = 29.38$$

$$E_5 = 65 \times 213$$

$$\frac{375}{375} = 36.92$$

$$E_6 = \frac{65 \times 162}{375} = 28.08$$

$$E_7 = \frac{82 \times 213}{375} = 46.58$$

$$E_8 = \frac{82 \times 162}{375} = 35.42$$

#### Computation of Chi-square

CELL	O	E	O-E	(O-E) <sup>2</sup>	$\frac{(O-E)^2}{E}$
1	90	90.88	-0.88	0.77	0.01
2	70	69.12	0.88	0.77	0.01
3	48	38.62	9.38	87.98	2.28
4	20	29.38	-9.38	87.98	2.99
5	40	36.92	3.08	9.49	0.26
6	25	28.08	-3.08	9.49	0.34
7	35	46.58	-11.58	134.1	2.88
8	47	35.42	11.58	134.1	3.79
					<b>12.56</b>

Source: Field survey, 2018

Given the degree of freedom of 3 and a significance level of 0.05, the critical table value of 7.82 is less than the calculated chi-square ( $X^2$ ) value of 12.56. Thus, the alternate hypothesis is accepted indicating that there is a significant association between struggle for political power/ chieftaincy position and socio economic development.

#### Findings

The struggle for land ownership and its related resources is found to be a factor in communal crisis. This is also as a result of the importance attached to land as the source of existence especially in the rural communities where life is completely depended on this land. This finding support Shapiro (2006) that conflict involves claims to resources, power, and status. Findings also agree with Eminue (2014) that communal crisis can be attributed to claims over land ownership etc. some land areas have enormous economic resources, people also farm on it, hence it becomes highly valuable that if tempered with unjustly can generate crisis.

The findings also indicate that communal crisis has often resulted to full blown wars in Central Cross River State leading to destruction of lives and properties. This finding to some extent contradicts the view of Global Coalition (2016) that conflict is not solely an inherently negative destructive occurrence but rather a potentially positive and productive force for change if constructively harnessed. Giving the havoc created by communal crisis as it greatly destroys rather than building the area.

The findings confirmed the conclusion of Oji, Eme and Nwoda (2015) that conflict has turned people's attention from creative production to creative destruction. This is seen in the displacement of people from the original home thus compounding the problem of increase refugees and also the destruction of infrastructures including human lives. The findings also support the view of Ajo et al (2014) that political stalemate and periodic eruption of violence has resulted in significant cumulative declines in Gross Domestic Product (GDP). As it is rightly assumed that 90% of the nation's GDP, apart from oil, comes from rural productivity. The persistent crisis in rural communities has greatly contributed to failure to raise investment rates leading to low growth rate of GDP. This has greatly increased the level of poverty in the area, state and nations at large. This is as confirmed by Ayuk (2014) that during conflict periods, lives are negatively affected, occupants and businesses are disrupted, production of subsistence practices halted, which consequently would lead to chronic shortage of food, famine, unemployment, destruction and refugee problems.

The qualitative data obtained during the KII indicated that struggle for political power and chieftaincy position, destruction of lives and properties, increasing and criminal tendency among many and disruption of economic activities are exacerbating communal conflict and contributing in no small measure to the underdevelopment of the socio economic life of the people. This was nevertheless blamed on the inability of the 'culture elders' to mediate by putting

in place a better strategy to allocate community resources. Also, the national and state boundary commissions failure to carry out deep ethnographic study on the disputed area. This according to many is as a result of politics and threat from influential members of the area. Aremu (2010) further noted that many young people in countries coming out from conflict not only lack employment opportunities, but have also been denied education and economic empowerment because of war. It is observed that unemployed youth who are former combatants will no doubt develop criminal behavior if they are not given some form of economic supports. The weapons already in their possession and has affected not only security and peace of the area but also socio economic development of the area.

## Conclusion and recommendation

For several years now, rural communities of Cross River State like any other state have witnessed severe communal crises. This has in several ways affected socio economic development in these areas. This manifestation is seen in the loss of lives and properties leading to disintegration and cohesion within the rural areas. Criminal activities such as robbery considered to be an off-shot of poverty and unemployment resulting from communal crisis have now become part and parcel of the area. This trend should not be allowed to continue if the rural area must witness socio economic development. Necessary efforts must be put in place by all and sundry to stop this negative trend. This will promote security of both lives and properties alongside investment which will also enhance adequate exploration of their numerous natural resources for even development.

A poor man who has nothing to lose can easily be convinced to join in conflict. Hence, poverty may be seen as one of the causes of conflict. Eradication of poverty is therefore a major step through which communal crisis can be reduced. This can be done in a number of ways; through provision of gainful employment for the teeming unemployed youths, creation of equal avenue and access to qualitative education through which the minds of the youths can be enlightened to know the danger and evil of conflict, provision of adequate remuneration for public and civil servants and promotion on the basis of competence.

There is also need for regular boundary checks by the boundary commission to ensure strict adherence to boundary demarcations by neighbouring communities. This will enable them horridly step in, in the effect of arising conflict between communities with regards to land dispute which is considered to have been the greatest reason for communal crisis. The rural communities need to be properly developed through revival and implementation of viable rural development policies, which will stimulate the development of social infrastructures, establishment of industries and adequate exploration of the rural resources to enhance development purpose. This done, it will contribute maximally to reduction of unemployment, poverty, crime and even conflict in the rural society.

The rural people on their part need to revive cultural values such as dance competition, football competition, wrestling etc. among communities. This will go a long way to institute peace and harmonious co-existence within the territory. The educated elite/ and National Orientation Agency should be more involved in the proper enlightenment and education of rural people on the dangers and effects of communal war and the need for peace to enhance development process in the rural areas. There is need for committed and sincere leadership who will ensure even distribution of resources, promotion and protection of cultural norms and values and the rule of law, and also protect the rights of individuals, groups and communities. This will help in alienating feelings of inferiority by the minority and promote a sense of belonging and oneness.

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