



CONFLICT RESOLUTION STRATEGIES AND DEVELOPMENT IN OLOIBIRI COMMUNITY IN OGBIA LOCAL GOVERNMENT AREA OF BAYELSA STATE, 2016-2021

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Article history:	Abstract:
<p>Received: July 4th 2023 Accepted: August 3rd 2023 Published: September 10th 2023</p>	<p>The Oloibiri Community has experienced various conflicts that have impeded its development over the years. These conflicts arise from factors such as resource allocation, land disputes, political rivalries, and social unrest. Therefore, this study examined the impact of conflict resolution strategies on the development of Oloibiri Community in Ogbia Local Government Area of Bayelsa State, 2016-2021. The study was guided by three research questions and three corresponding research objectives. The study was anchored on the social identity theory, and the use of historical research design. The research relied on both primary and secondary sources of data generation. The primary data were obtained from oral interview while the secondary data were obtained from documentary materials. The data collected were thoroughly subjected to qualitative and content analysis. The study findings revealed that conflict resolution strategies played a significant role in fostering development in the Oloibiri Community. It also revealed some major causes of conflict in Oloibiri including land struggle, leadership tussle, cult activities, electoral violence, and boundary disputes. The study also found that Oloibiri has various means of resolving conflicts such as; oracle method, family heads method, council of Chiefs methods, negotiation method, mediation method, arbitration method, and reconciliation methods. The study concluded that, community development can be achieved through proactive and inclusive conflict resolution approaches that prioritize community engagement, capacity building, and institutional strengthening must be adopted. The study recommended among others that, the State House of Assembly should enact a law establishing the application of traditional conflicts and/or dispute resolution strategies in the settlement of community conflicts other than, the use of conventional courts.</p>

Keywords: Conflict, Resolution, Strategy, Development, Community

INTRODUCTION

Conflict emerges as a result of profound and enduring discord or incongruence between two or more parties, which can manifest across a multitude of dimensions—personal, fiscal, political, or affective. Conflicts are indelibly etched into the social fabric and constitute an inextricable element of human interaction, according to Wadama (2013). These fissures are borne out of divergent interests, antithetical ideologies, distinct orientations, and variances in precipitative tendencies, existing at a plethora of hierarchical levels—be it individual, communal, institutional, regional, national, or global. A salient example pertains to the contentious issue of acquiring, possessing, and controlling resources like land, which has historically instigated significant frictions amongst individuals, familial entities, and broader communities.

To navigate this labyrinthine landscape of conflict, management strategies must be meticulously deployed to mitigate the detrimental facets while amplifying the constructive outcomes with the ultimate goal of augmenting collective learning and group efficacies, as elucidated by Rahim (2011). The success or futility of these efforts is inextricably tied to the depth of understanding of the causative agents underlying the conflict. Accordingly, conflict resolution encompasses a series of actions aimed at the tranquil dissolution of discord by attending to at least some requisites

and concerns of each conflicting party. The nomenclature 'conflict resolution' is often used synonymously with 'dispute resolution,' especially in contexts involving formalized processes such as arbitration and litigation.

Interestingly, many indigenous societies in Nigeria, such as the Oloibiri, had devised intricate mechanisms for traditional conflict resolution that predate the era of colonial intrusion. Scholars like Ajayi and Buhari (2014) posit that these indigenous methodologies offered a fecund substrate for the modern juridical systems and could potentially serve as robust alternatives to contemporary litigation paradigms.

Due to the failure of western models, most civilizations, especially city inhabitants, prefer to adopt indigenous diplomatic techniques of conflict settlement, which are based on chiefs and councils of elders, the family, lineage groupings, oracle method and oath taking in conflict resolution. Indigenous dispute resolution methods see offences as against the community rather than the individual, the traditional conflict resolution system is therefore effective in discouraging future offenders. Thus, Nigerians believe they are protected by the community (Mengesha et al., 2015). Several communities have established conventions aimed at resolving inter-human and intra-communal conflicts. These conventions were to be followed in order to maintain the peaceful regulation of human activities and the interaction between people and the community (Olowu, 2018). The foundation of this old system was custom and tradition. For resolving conflicts inside communities, the conflict resolution strategies are culturally effective.

In the Nigerian milieu, several precipitating variables contribute to the complexity of communal conflicts. Specifically, within the economically charged landscape of the South-South region—of which the Oloibiri community in Ogbia Local Government Area serves as a microcosm—territorial disputes over arable lands have been identified as a paramount catalyst (Nwaogwugwu & Dabelema, 2019). Additional instigators encompass contestations over demarcation lines, imbrolios pertaining to chieftaincy and traditional leadership, electoral tumult, and the nefarious activities of secret societies. These multifaceted conflicts not only impede the progress of community development but also have deleterious repercussions. They manifest in the obliteration of human lives and material assets, an escalation in criminality, and heightened unemployment rates

The Oloibiri Community has experienced various conflicts that have impeded its development over the years. These conflicts arise from factors such as resource allocation, land disputes, political rivalries, and social unrests. The absence of effective conflict resolution strategies has further exacerbated these conflicts, leading to a stagnation of development in the community. In view of the dysfunctional effects of conflicts on the development of Oloibiri community, several efforts have been employed at resolving conflicts wherever they occur by individuals, groups and government at various levels in Oloibiri, including the use of town hall meetings, Community Development Committee (CDC), Chief council intervention, oracle system, arbitration panels, compromise, mediation, and boundary demarcation. Despite these efforts, conflict issues have not been totally eradicated in the community though there is a significant reduction of such conflicts. It is therefore crucial to explore the strategies for conflict resolution among Oloibiri people in Ogbia Local Government Area of Bayelsa State.

Research Questions

- i. What are the root causes of conflicts in Oloibiri community?
- ii. What are the conflict resolution strategies adopted in resolving conflicts in Oloibiri community, 2016-2021?
- iii. How have the conflict resolution strategies contributed to the peace and development of Oloibiri community?

Aim and Objectives of the Study

The main thrust of this research is to analyse the impact of conflict resolution strategies on the development of Oloibiri Community in Ogbia Local Government Area of Bayelsa State, 2016-2021. The specific objectives are to:

- i. investigate the root causes of conflicts in Oloibiri community.
- ii. determine the conflict resolution strategies adopted in resolving conflicts in Oloibiri community, 2016-2021.
- iii. ascertain how the conflict resolution strategies contributed to the peace and development of Oloibiri community.

CONCEPTUAL REVIEW

Concept of Conflict

The concept of conflict has been subject to manifold interpretations, often viewed as an intricate interactive mechanism engendered when incongruities, tensions, or divergences surface amidst social entities. As expounded by Rahim (2011), conflicts are not merely a belligerent collision between individuals; they can also manifest as intrapersonal struggles or as inter-group dynamics. Subcategories of conflict further elaborate this complexity: task conflict, relationship conflict, and process conflict, each representing a distinct dimension of discord.

Task conflict pertains to disaccords related to specific elements of a work endeavor or particular facets of a role. An exemplar could be a dissonance regarding the elements to incorporate into a collective presentation. Relationship conflict, conversely, centers around the qualitative aspects of interpersonal dynamics. An instance would be a scenario wherein one member of a group adopts a hypercritical stance toward their colleagues, thereby generating interpersonal friction. Process conflict delineates disagreements surrounding procedural methodologies, such as the allocation of responsibilities within a group initiative. For example, discord may arise over the apportionment of specific tasks in a collaborative venture (Jehn & Mannix, 2012).

It is crucial to recognize that conflict is an intrinsic component of quotidian existence and can paradoxically yield functional outcomes in the long-term, as posited by both De Dreu et al. (2011) and Rahim (2011). Nonetheless, the immediate experiential quality of conflict is predominantly negative for the individuals involved. This stems from the existential threat it poses to personal or collective objectives, thus eliciting a gamut of adverse emotional responses—

ranging from anger and disgust to fear (De Dreu et al., 2011; Jordan & Troth, 2014). Therefore, the emotional tonality of conflict is complex, being both an inevitable facet of human interaction and a stimulus for negative emotional states. Conflict can be described as a disagreement among groups or individuals characterized by antagonism and hostility (Burton, 2012). That is, conflict is a product of opposition of one party to another, with the hope of obstructing the effort of the other from obtaining a goal different from that of the other party. By implication, the parties involved must have opposing principles and values which could arise from interest or ideological differences. Conflict is a situation where potential development of one party is impeded by another (Curie, 2015). In this view, there must be a perceived progressive action and a counter action for conflict to occur. In other words, conflict cannot erupt without an opposing force. Evans (2013) noted conflicts manifest either within a group, among groups or inter persons due to economic, value and power struggles. In other words, there would be no conflicts if there were to be nothing like economic, values and power struggles.

Chinwokwu (2013) proffers that conflict can be conceptualized as an inherent friction emerging concomitantly with the social interplay between two or more individuals. It is deeply enrooted within the human condition, predicated on the pursuit of mutually exclusive objectives and interests by disparate entities. Conflict, therefore, manifests as a contextual dynamic wherein one party perceives that their interests are either already jeopardized or are imminently at risk due to the actions or intentions of another.

In synthesizing these various characterizations, it becomes evident that the essence of conflict lies in the subjective realm of perception, harbored either unilaterally or bilaterally among the disputing parties. Whether these perceptions are empirically substantiated or mere conjectures, whether they are meticulously accurate or egregiously flawed, or whether they are anchored in palpable reality or dwell in the realm of the imaginary is immaterial to the visceral experience of conflict. What substantiates the conflict is the existence of these perceptions within the cognitive architecture of the disputants (Chinwokwu, 2013).

The emotional valence of these perceptions is predominantly negative, arising from a zero-sum understanding of the contentious issue at hand. In other words, each party engaged in the conflict harbors a conviction that the realization of their aspirations is contingent upon thwarting the ambitions of the other. The crux of the matter is, thus, rooted in the desire and veneration each party has for a particular outcome or object, creating a scenario where one individual believes their opponent seeks to outmaneuver them in the acquisition or attainment of a shared desire.

In summary, conflict is not solely an objective occurrence but an intricate psychological construct, nuanced by the myriad perceptions, assumptions, and emotional states held by the individuals or groups in contention.

Conflict Resolution Strategies

Conflict resolution, alternatively termed as conflict management, conflict handling, conflict styles, or negotiation, encapsulates both the intentional and the manifest behavioral responses individuals deploy in confronting a discordant scenario. This multifaceted construct offers a variety of strategies, each deserving of comprehensive elaboration, that individuals may utilize to mitigate the adverse ramifications of conflict. For instance, De Dreu et al. (2011) illuminated that individuals who opt for a cooperative modus operandi in conflictual situations manifest fewer indicators of physiological dysfunction. While a plethora of variant interpretations exists concerning the tactical paradigms individuals might employ, a seminal framework—known as the dual-concern model—postulates that one's choice in conflict resolution strategies is governed by two overarching considerations: self-interest and the welfare of the opposing entity. Conflict resolution should not be misconstrued as merely the cessation of armed hostilities. It is, rather, the inaugural phase in a protracted journey toward the crystallization of a durable peace. The ultimate objective of social conflict resolution transcends mere problem-solving to arrive at contentious resolutions; it aims for the achievement of mutually satisfactory outcomes premised upon a balanced distribution of power and equitable social and economic interrelations. This includes bolstering elements such as self-esteem, identity, and holistic well-being while simultaneously leveraging all latent transformative potentials within the conflicting parties.

In this context, the notion of reconciliation assumes salience. As articulated by Rahim et al. (2011), reconciliation is a temporally extended, multi-dimensional endeavor, fraught with complexities. It transpires in the milieu of previously ruptured relationships, inherited from the annals of human history. This gradualistic process is inherently asymmetrical, often replete with setbacks and prone to resorting to counterproductive, if not violent, means of conflict redressal. It necessitates an assemblage of virtues: restraint, largesse of spirit, empathic understanding, and indefatigable perseverance. The focus is on deepening and broadening our comprehension of the fundamental causative agents that precipitate conflict, thereby facilitating a more inclusive diagnosis and prescription.

Lazarus (2014) construed conflict management strategies as the internal mechanisms that various authoritative bodies deploy in navigating discord. Numerous schemas have been identified by scholars in the realm of conflict research, which can constructively navigate a given situation. According to Kinnander (2011), conflict can be ameliorated through the adoption of one of five modalities: avoidance, competition, accommodation, collaboration, and compromise. Each modality serves as a distinct tactical avenue for the efficacious management of conflict, offering a diverse toolkit for individuals and groups to engage constructively with the omnipresent challenges presented by discord.

Concept of Community Development

The conceptualization of community development is a subject replete with variegated definitions, manifesting as a complex, multifaceted paradigm. A community, in its quintessential form, constitutes an assemblage of individuals bound by shared identities and historical continuities, residing within a delineated geographical expanse. While some conceptualizations are grounded in geographical coordinates—encompassing neighborhoods or entire municipalities

(referred to as "place-based" or communities of place)—others adopt a more socially nuanced framework, extending to digital congregations, professional associations, or labor unions (characterized as communities of interest) (Kinnander, 2011).

Christenson and Robinson (1989) elucidate community development as a collective endeavor wherein a group consciously engages in a volitional social action, aiming to metamorphose their extant economic, sociocultural, and environmental matrices. From this vantage point, the concept is scrutinized as a collaborative praxis emanating from individuals residing within a specific geographical locale, united by a core objective of elevating their quality of life through conscientiously implemented initiatives.

Corroborating this understanding, it is posited that authentic community development can only germinate when community members coalesce in a cooperative schema, fostering a concerted effort aimed at the augmentation of their collective well-being. Such collective endeavors function as a catalyst, enhancing the community's capacity for judicious resource allocation encompassing infrastructure, labor, and intellectual capital.

In an alternative perspective that integrates a macroscopic lens, community development is envisioned as an amalgamative process wherein community constituents collaborate synergistically with governmental entities. The objective is to engender an upliftment in the community's economic, social, and cultural fabric, aligning these improvements with national imperatives. As elucidated by the United Nations in 2014, this dimension of community development functions as a nexus for communal action and government intervention. Here, community members coalesce to undertake collective initiatives and generate innovative solutions to shared challenges, harmoniously integrating their community into the broader national framework and contributing substantively to the nation's progressive trajectory (Kinnander, 2011).

Therefore, community development is not a monolithic concept but rather a pluralistic endeavor that navigates the complexities of geographical space, shared identities, and institutional alliances, all the while aiming for the holistic improvement of community life.

Conflicts and the Development of Oloibiri Community

The people of Oloibiri are predominantly peasant farmers. This does not mean that the people are not educated or inclined in modern ways of making life easy for the area. Parts of the efforts put in place to advance the life of the people is the involvement of the elites in developing both material and human resources, engaging in community-oriented capital projects through self-help efforts and involvement of governments agencies in the development process. Nevertheless, conflicts pose limitations to community development. Conflict is very vital for development in human society. It is an agent of underdevelopment and destruction of developmental plans in society. In another dimension, Olusola (2015) projected that conflict at any level inflicts humanitarian and environmental tragedy in human societies. The above viewpoints depict the grave consequences of conflicts on community development.

Individuals in the society constantly seek to advance their lives, the economic activities they engage in, determine to a great extent, the economic development in the area. Communities are differentially endowed with natural resources, but the determinants of economic developments are not entirely the natural resources available in a particular place. One of the major determinants is the social-economic environment and the peaceful atmosphere within the area. In an inhospitable socioeconomic milieu, economic endeavors inevitably find themselves enfeebled. Alabi and Famakinwa (2017) postulated that internecine boundary disputes amongst contiguous communities, politico-partisan skirmishes, contestations over traditional chieftaincies, and ethno-tribal hegemonic endeavors deleteriously impinge upon the socioeconomic vigor of the affected locales. It is further elucidated that the incidence of such discordances—boundary disputation, political factionalism, ethnic superiority complexes, chieftaincy squabbles, obligatory tributary contributions, and cultural heterogeneities—correlate positively with the proliferation of conflict and its concomitant ramifications within the communities in question (Kinnander, 2011).

The implication of this analytical framework is profound: unresolved foci of conflict serve as formidable impediments to the maturation of economic activities within afflicted regions. Therefore, in the absence of efficacious resolution of these underlying causative factors, the prospects for economic advancement in these turbulent areas remain conspicuously stunted.

Oloibiri community had been infested with boundary dispute, political tussle, chieftaincy dispute, and cult group activities. Much of the conflicts that have turned bloody are linked to the above sources. The lives of prospective economic geniuses have been cut short and economic resources destroyed. The people seem to live in fear and therefore lack the courage of investing or developing economic activities. By implications, there is no positive economic development in a conflict dominated area. When economic activities are not effectively involved by the people of a community, the outcome will be poverty, and increase in crime rate, hunger and gross under development. This perhaps account for the low level of development in Oloibiri community. Galvanek and Planta (2017) posited that strained coexistence among groups within a geographical location can trigger tension and unhealthy competition between groups/communities, thereby hindering conflict settlement processes and outcomes and even exacerbating or creating new conflicts. Also, Willy (2015) remarked that peaceful relations between ethnic, religious, linguistic or other communities make an important contribution to the promotion of social cohesion, public security and human rights.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The scholarly investigation is firmly rooted in Social Identity Theory (SIT), a conceptual framework originally advanced by Henri Tajfel in 1979 and subsequently refined through collaborative endeavors with John Turner in the subsequent

decade. This theoretical construct delves into the complexities of individual self-conception and social identity, particularly as they act as catalysts in shaping behavioral dynamics within intergroup conflicts. The theory posits that individuals are intrinsically motivated to cultivate and sustain a favorable social identity, an endeavor achieved through self-categorization as affiliates of specific social collectives and manifest favoritism towards these in-groups at the expense of out-groups.

Implicit within this conceptual paradigm is the human proclivity for self-aggrandizement and the cultivation of a positive self-image, particularly in juxtaposition with their affiliated social assemblages. Individuals engage in social categorization, delineating themselves and others into distinct collectives based upon commonalities—be they ethnic, religious, or communal in nature. This engenders an in-group partiality, wherein members of one's own social collective are esteemed and championed over those belonging to external groups.

Conflict becomes an ineluctable outcome when these distinct social conglomerates find themselves vying for finite resources, or when discrepancies in power, status, or interests emerge between them. It is in this complex social tapestry that the role of social identity becomes pivotal, shaping perceptual lenses and rendering judgments and behaviors susceptible to bias.

Applying Social Identity Theory to the conflict resolution strategies and development in the Oloibiri community can provide insights into the dynamics of intergroup conflicts and the role of social identity in shaping individuals' attitudes and behaviors. It can help understand why conflicts may arise between different groups within the community and how these conflicts can impact development initiatives. By recognizing the importance of social identity and in-group favoritism, conflict resolution strategies can be designed to address the underlying factors contributing to intergroup conflicts. This may involve promoting a shared sense of community identity, fostering positive intergroup contact and cooperation, and addressing perceived inequalities or resource distribution issues that may be fueling tensions. Furthermore, an understanding of Social Identity Theory can help policymakers and community leaders in devising inclusive development plans that consider the diverse social identities within the community, thereby promoting sustainable development and social cohesion.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The scholarly inquiry employed a historiographical research methodology, an approach that seeks to meticulously authenticate and elucidate the evolutionary trajectory of specific realms of human endeavor through rigorous scientific protocols, as articulated by Špiláčková (2012). The focal populace encompassing this study comprised both male and female adult inhabitants of the Oloibiri community, situated within the jurisdiction of Ogbia Local Government Areas in Bayelsa State—a demographic approximated to number 13,768 individuals. Methodological reliance was placed on a diverse array of documentary materials and oral testimonies, thereby constituting both primary and secondary modalities of data procurement. This amassed data was subsequently subjected to an exhaustive content analysis, a critical evaluative procedure indispensable to the present research, given the intricate characteristics of the phenomena under scrutiny. Content analysis principally entails the summative abstraction of the empirically generated data, serving as a linchpin for the study's analytical rigor.

Research Setting

The research setting is Oloibiri in Ogbia Local Government Area of Bayelsa State. It is one of the communities in Ogbia, Bayelsa State, Nigeria. Oloibiri community shares boundary in the East with Oguoma community in Nembe local government; in the West with Otuabagi community; in the North with Abobiri community; and in the South with Opume community. The geographical coordinates of Oloibiri are 4° 40' 19" North, 6° 18' 31" East and its original name (with diacritics) is Oloibiri. Oloibiri community was the first headquarters of the local government before it was relocated to Ogbia Town. Oloibiri community maintains the traditional headquarters of the local government. The communities in the local government include Oloibiri, Ogbia, Imiringi, Elebele, Kolo 1, Kolo 2, Kolo 3, Emeyal 1, Emeyal 2, Otuasega, Oruema, Emakalakala, Eboh, Obeduma, Akipelai, Otuabagi, Otuoke, Otakeme, Abobiri, Opume, Otuogori, Idema, Otuokpoti, Anyama, Onuebum, Ewema, Otuabulla 1, Otuabulla 2, Ologi, Otuedu, Okodi, Ayakoro, Otuogidi, Otuegila, Ewoi, Otuabi, Otuaba, Akoloman, and Otuobhi (Alagoa, 1966).

Predominantly populated by fishermen and agriculturalists, Oloibiri stands as an epochal locus in Nigeria's hydrocarbon narrative. It was here, on the fifteenth day of January, 1956, that Shell D'Arcy struck the inaugural reserves of commercial crude oil, irreversibly altering the socio-economic and ecological contours of not merely Oloibiri but the entire Niger Delta. Despite its initial production capacity of a modest 5,000 barrels per day—a figure that would later catapult to a staggering 2 million barrels—Nigeria auspiciously ascended to become the sixth-largest petroleum producer under the aegis of the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC).

Notwithstanding its seminal role as the cradle of Nigeria's oil bonanza, Oloibiri remains lamentably plagued by pervasive impoverishment and environmental degradation. The landmark oilfield, being the first of its kind in both Nigeria and the wider West African region, inadvertently heralded a multitude of calamitous repercussions. Exporting its first consignment of crude oil in February of 1958, the Oloibiri field was also connected to Port Harcourt through Nigeria's inaugural crude pipeline, leading to the Bonny Export Terminal.

Yet, in a tragically paradoxical narrative underscored by Yusuf and Abejide (2013), Eneanya (2018), and Anozie (2014), this once-vaunted epicenter of petroleum extraction has descended into a disquieting tableau of abject socio-economic atrophy. The community is languishing under a constellation of daunting challenges: woeful underdevelopment,

endemic poverty, skyrocketing rates of unemployment, and an alarming epidemiological profile. Adding a layer of ecological insidiousness, the land has been mercilessly blighted by catastrophic oil spills.

Depleted of its once-plentiful oil reserves, Oloibiri serves as a solemn monument to a narrative of exploitation and subsequent abandonment. In a tale replete with paradox and irony, the very resource that catapulted Nigeria onto the global energy stage has engendered a litany of maladies for its birthplace. Bereft of palpable developmental indicators, Oloibiri stands as a disconsolate specter, starkly bereft of the prosperity its subterranean treasures once promised. In the harshest of terms, it is manifest that Oloibiri was exploited and summarily forsaken, its vitality drained in the relentless quest for hydrocarbon riches.

DISCUSSION AND ANALYSIS

In this section, analyses data generated were made based on the root causes of the conflicts in Oloibiri community, the conflict resolution strategies adopted in resolving the conflicts, and the contributions of the conflict resolution strategies to the peace and development of the community.

The Root Causes of Conflicts in Oloibiri Communities

Conflict is part and parcel of human existence. Oloibiri people are not exempted from conflicts. Conflict in Oloibiri community took different dimension such as land conflict, headship conflict, and inter-community conflict which would discuss below:

Land Struggle: This type of conflict is more prevalent and pronounced in Oloibiri community. Families often encounter this kind of conflict when there is an encroachment by member of another family. Land is a major means of production in Oloibiri. It is used in Fishing and farming which are the primary occupation of the indigenous people. Therefore, any attempt to take it away from the owner is met with a strong and decisive resistance. This kind of conflicts often resulted to loss of lives if timely and remedial action is not taken. In an interview with one of the Chiefs in the community, Chief Jokori noted that "there are many instances of conflicts arising from land and boundary issues citing the case of Eboa family and Ikalamo family." The most popular method of settling conflict over land is arbitration method (Interview with Chief Dr. Omekwe).

Leadership Tussle: Headship conflict is another form of conflict that is more pronounced in Oloibiri community. This kind of conflict often occur between family members or villages within the community on the successor to the throne if the occupant died. Jokori (2023) noted that, "this kind of conflict although may not require physical confrontation but it can lead spiritual battles between the individuals or families involved. This kind of conflict can equally instigate quarrel and even lead to the death of an individual in the course of the tussle (An oral interview conducted on 24/03/2023)." Another interviewee, Mr. Festus succinctly added that, "it can also led to the destruction of properties if not quickly and properly handled by the relevant stakeholders and authorities in the community.

Cult-Related Causes of Conflict in Oloibiri: In Oloibiri, organised conflicts or crimes manifest most visibly as supremacy clashes between cult groups such as the Aye and Bargers. Over the past decade, such clashes have resulted to the death of many people. The community is somewhat associated with insurrection in which various militia, gangs and cults are part of a complex mix of political forces across the oilfields. A chief, who wished to be anonymous, observed that:

Cult groups in the community have spread all over the whole community, churches, tertiary institutions, secondary schools and even primary schools as well as political structures in the community. Their influence also extends into militias and criminal groups. Cult groups count as loyalist people in high places and are often confident of release where they are detained for one reason or the other. (Personal Interview with an Anonymous Chief on 23/03/2023).

Chief Nelson (A man in his late fifties in Oloibiri) traced the origins of most of the cult groups and their impact on society. Accordingly, Chief Nelson noted that the activities of cult groups tend to be so closely associated with militia activities which were the resultant effect of oil exploration in the community. Thus:

Cult groups are hierarchically organised but they are also designed to survive decapitations at the hierarchy. They are organised as if they were military forces so that it is possible for the top to pass orders down the line. It is always clear who is in charge and all others rigidly follow orders from the superior. In one of the cult groups, organisation is almost identical, the top is referred to as Number 1. (Personal Interview with Chief Nelson Jokori on 24/03/2023).

Other interviewees agreed that, cult related clashes in the community have become like a normal occurrence. A chief who wished to be anonymous noted that, the claim by cultists in the community to have cordial relations with the general public is a serious cause for concern. It is among others an indication that, society is increasingly becoming resigned to the reality of cultism.

Electoral Violence: Another factor identified by the interviewees as one of the root causes of conflicts in Oloibiri is the prevalent electoral violence in the community. Because of elections, all the villages or wards in Oloibiri have been affected with one election-related conflicts or the other. Conflict risk factors related to the election included multiple reports of frustration and confusion over the process of PVC distribution. There were also several reports of destruction of campaign materials by youths and thugs in Oloibiri especially during the 2015 and 2019 general elections which exacerbated tensions in the community. Tensions between parties and candidates escalated to violence on several occasions, often involving suspected paid thugs.

An anonymous Chief lamented that "during the previous elections, there were series of gunmen attacks at polling units; while some came to the election grounds with explosive devices and guns, shooting sporadically and disrupting the process, electoral officials and the electorates had to run for safety. Unfortunately, these gunmen comprise mainly of youths (Personal Interview with a Chief in Oloibiri community on 24/03/2023). Election-related conflict issues included multiple reports of rising tensions sparked off by the destruction of campaign materials by the supporters of opposing parties in Oloibiri community. Clashes involving youths and political thugs were reported in several parts of the community.

Encroachment of community land by another community: This is a major cause of intercommunity conflict which is more prevalence among the communities in Ogbia Local Government. It is the most violent of all other conflicts in Oloibiri. This kind of conflict emanated from the encroachment of community land by member of another community. It is often settled by the third party, (The Clan Heads or Traditional Rulers). The community heads of the various disputed communities represented the communities in dispute settlement. It is often settled through arbitration method with traditional oath taken process to ensure the authenticity of the information given by the disputants (Interview with Chief Jokori, 2023).

The qualitative analysis above proved that the major causes of conflict in Oloibiri community include land struggle, leadership/headship tussle, cult-related causes, electoral violence, and the encroachment of community land by member of another community. These findings corroborate with the findings of Otite (1999) who found that conflicts inexorably arise from the competition over access to scarce resources. Also, Alabi and Famakinwa (2017) found that boundary dispute between neighboring communities, political tussle among community partisans, chieftaincy dispute among community members and ethnic/tribal superiority with non-indigenes are the major causes of communal conflicts. While Collier and Hoeffler (2004) found that communal conflicts often arise due to competition over limited resources such as land, water, or economic opportunities, Kalyvas (2006) found that politicians sometimes exploit ethnic or religious differences for their own gain, exacerbating tensions between communities. They may manipulate existing grievances or incite violence to secure political support or maintain power.

Conflict Resolution Strategies adopted in Resolving Conflicts in Oloibiri Community

Several traditional strategies have been adopted in resolving different conflicts Oloibiri community since time immemorial but the focus of this study is from 2016-2021. The people recognize these strategies as means of reconciling individuals or communities whenever conflict issues arise. Some of the conflict resolutions strategies in Oloibiri community are examined below.

The Oracle Method: This is the highest traditional method of resolving conflicts between individuals or communities in Oloibiri. The use of oracle has been proven to be the most reliable means of resolving conflicts especially the land or boundary related conflicts. In an interview with Chief Jokori who aptly captured the above observation in the following lines; "the use of oracle is the best in resolving land related conflicts in Oloibiri community. For instance, Ebu family verses Ikalamo family dispute over land; Oracle from Otueke was brought to show the boundaries. Usually, the oracle will be placed on the land in conflicts, with some incantations made and the oracle will move to the right boundary (Interview with Chief Jokori, 2023)."

Family heads method: On minor disputes between families, the heads of different the conflicting family resolves the matter. However, in a case where they are unable to resolve the conflict, other neutral families will mediate. On electoral related conflicts involving family members, the family heads will resolve it, but the escalated cases are resolved either by the Police or the law courts (Interview with Chief Jokori, 2023). Trust and culture plays a major role in this method.

Council of Chiefs methods: The first point of call in resolving intercommunal conflicts is the Community Development Committee (CDC). In a case, where the CDC fails to resolve the conflict, the Chiefs Council headed by the Royal Highness (the King) will resolve it. According Chief Nelson Jokori who is also a member of the Oloibiri Chiefs Council, the members of the council are drawn from family or compound heads, and that the chiefs are categorized into two: the founding father chiefs and others. There are seven (7) seven founding father chiefs that mediate in interfamily land disputes namely; Oloi, Ikpesu, Adogo, Ogboka, Okere, Akuro, and Ogbonya. Furthermore, Chief Jokori stated that the Chiefs Council and the leadership of the King had embarked on massive enlightenment against cultism. As a result, cult groups' activities were not noticed before, during, and after the 2023 general elections unlike the previous elections where cult activities disrupted the process and even displaced many from their homes. It however pertinent to note that culture and tradition play vital role in this method.

Compromise Method: In the nuanced realm of intergroup conflict resolution, a modus operandi often referred to as the "middle-of-the-road approach" has been traditionally venerated. As elucidated by Ezeanyim (2010), this paradigm entails a mutual relinquishment, wherein each conflicting faction accedes to surrender a modicum of their aspirations, culminating in a compromised denouement. In this scenario, there is an absence of unambiguous victors or vanquished; rather, what emerges is an equitable willingness to apportion the disputed object, resulting in a resolution that provides for the partial mollification of the contentions harbored by both parties. The salient hallmark of this compromising tactic resides in its intrinsic "quid pro quo" ethos, a finely-calibrated equilibrium that manifests moderate degrees of both assertiveness and cooperativeness. In the particular case of Oloibiri, this approach has been intrinsically woven into the fabric of its indigenous methods for arbitrating conflicts. Chief Omekwe bears testament to the efficacy of this approach, citing its successful application in ameliorating the boundary discord between the Akisi and Apah families within the Oloibiri community.

Negotiation Method: In the traditional societal fabric of Oloibiri, negotiation serves as an instrumental modality in the orchestration of conflict resolution. This intricate ballet of dialogue and concession aims to establish an accordant *modus operandi*, acting essentially as a calibrated exchange designed to cultivate sustainable relational dynamics. It is cooperation that underpins the essence of negotiation, acting as the *sine qua non* for reaching a harmonious concord and facilitating mutual comprehension.

To engender tranquility within the Oloibiri community, negotiations—replete with strategic bargaining—are meticulously conducted. Such undertakings necessitate the application of perspicuous wisdom; a deliberative slowing of proceedings, a scrupulous observational stance, and an adept calibration of the community's developmental focal length are indispensable. As Timipre (2023) incisively articulated, negotiation is a nuanced tapestry requiring the adroit application of creativity, the ultimate dividends of which are manifested in community betterment.

The requisite for negotiation even permeates the familial architecture of the Oloibiri society. For instance, in a familial dispute involving a father's demand for his son's eviction from their shared domicile, negotiation emerged as the touchstone for resolution. The son, in a vivid manifestation of effulgent enthusiasm, deconstructed his father's arguments as incongruous with the ethos of the Oloibiri familial system. He proffered a well-articulated defensive narrative as a prelude to entering negotiations, positing: "I am ensconced in my paternal abode. Should you find our cohabitation intolerable, it is incumbent upon you to seek residence with your own father." This retort was recorded in an oral interview conducted on March 24, 2023, and exemplifies the primacy of negotiation within the cultural framework of Oloibiri.

Mediation Method: Mediation stands as a quintessential modality of conflict resolution that champions voluntarism, abjures coercion, and remains fundamentally non-binding. This technique serves as an intricate art form in itself, aiming to intercede within a maelstrom of discord and provide a scaffold upon which amicable relations may be reconstructed (Adewoye, 1977). Assisted by sagacious mediators, the process propels disputing parties toward consensus, carving a path for the transmutation of conflict so that its future reiteration might be precluded (DeRouen & Bercovitch, 2012).

A comprehensive study by Eralp et al., (2012) disclosed that mediation was deployed in a striking 69% of all ethnic crises pervading the African continent between 1990 and 2005. In the specific microcosm of Oloibiri, the disputants often voluntarily engage in mediation, induced by an array of catalytic factors. According to Mr. Bob, an oral respondent, these include an exhaustion of contentious energies, burgeoning rationality within the conflicted parties, an abiding trust in the wisdom of mediators, concerns over social justice, apprehension of the ignominious outcomes of their bellicosity, and a dread of reputational decline within public scrutiny.

Mr. Rufus, another interviewee, delineated the imperative attributes that distinguish accomplished mediators. These encompass an aura of imposing gravitas, significant social capital within the community, an encyclopedic understanding of indigenous customs and norms, intellectual agility, cognizance of the potential ramifications of their advisory contributions, an unwavering resolve to quell hostilities, and a commitment to re-establish harmonious social relations. During the mediation process, these arbiters are predisposed to realign and recalibrate the disputants' loyalties and commitments toward the broader community, evoking in them a revived consciousness of their indispensable roles in the advancement of social justice and communal development.

Reconciliation Method: In the traditional socio-cultural fabric of the Oloibiri community, the re-establishment of peace and the mending of frayed relationships serve as the linchpins of the conflict resolution paradigm. This protocol is predicated upon an inherent communal necessity to cultivate unity and to enmesh individuals in a tapestry of collaboration and mutual compromise. Within this framework, the antagonistic parties perpetually retain an openness towards the reinvigoration of order, interpersonal rapport, and rational discourse. As noted in an interview with Mr. Apah (2023), the alchemy of reconciliation becomes indispensable for extinguishing the tinder that ignited the initial conflagration, thereby forging a harmonious path forward for the community.

The art of reconciliation serves as an entrancing force, amalgamating the divergent interests of the disputing parties and the wider civil society which orchestrates these pacificatory endeavors. Achieving this apotheosis of communal tranquility necessitates the deployment of rhetorically persuasive lexicon. Indeed, the adage that "a soft word turns away wrath" finds resonant expression within the Oloibiri milieu, where language possesses an almost talismanic potency. Furthermore, these restorative discourses are traditionally steered by venerable elders, individuals whose reservoirs of wisdom and accrued experience equip them uniquely to navigate the treacherous waters of interpersonal discord. Their words, grounded in sagacity, often serve as a soothing balm on the inflamed spirits of the community, guiding it back to a state of harmonious equilibrium.

Arbitration Method: In the traditional society of Oloibiri, arbitration emerges as an indispensable modality in the complex matrix of conflict resolution. This legal mechanism manifests through the appointment of an impartial arbiter, tasked with rendering judgments to which all disputing parties are inexorably beholden. Arbitral proceedings, convened within designated tribunals, are enshrined in the community's long-standing jurisprudential tradition. Governed by a framework that synthesizes the authoritative mandate of Oloibiri's governance structures, the vested interests of the litigants, and the foundational customs and norms, arbitration receives unequivocal endorsement and seamless integration into the community's conflict resolution schema. It is akin to the litigative processes familiar to Western—particularly English—jurisprudence, providing an alternative avenue when traditional conflict resolution strategies prove inefficacious.

A comprehensive survey of the conflict resolution landscape in Oloibiri reveals a multifaceted strategy encompassing the Oracle method, patriarchal arbitration, the Council of Chiefs' mediation, compromise, negotiation, mediation,

arbitration, and reconciliation. These findings resonate with extant scholarly discourse on the subject. For instance, Kong and Yao (2019) have elucidated the pivotal role of trust in cross-cultural negotiations. They contend that the cultural paradigms one brings into such negotiations can profoundly affect both the anticipatory framework and the eventual outcomes, amplifying the complexity inherent in establishing trust, even within mono-cultural contexts.

Similarly, Rees and Kopelman (2019) delve into the influence of cultural imprints on emotional dynamics during negotiations. Complementary to this, DeRouen and Bercovitch (2012) and Eralp et al. (2012) expound on the import of mediation as an efficacious tool in conflict resolution, a thesis supported within the traditional bounds of Oloibiri. Ezeanyim (2010) also champions compromise as a venerable technique for intergroup conflict resolution, emphasizing the absence of clear victors or vanquished and advocating for mutual concession. Lastly, Onwubiko (1973) has analyzed the Oracle method within the traditional Igbo system, positing it as the ultimate judicial authority, rendering irrevocable judgments on disputative matters.

Thus, the articulated methodologies and their theoretical underpinnings contribute not only to a nuanced understanding of Oloibiri's traditional dispute resolution mechanisms but also to a broader scholarly discourse intersecting culture, trust, and legal traditions. The community's conflict resolution strategies, therefore, stand as both a distinctive manifestation of their social and cultural idiosyncrasies and as a fascinating prism through which universal principles of dispute management can be explored.

Contributions of Conflict Resolution Strategies to the Peace and Development of Oloibiri Community

Peace plays a crucial role in community development, fostering stability, social progress, and sustainable growth. When communities experience peace, they can focus their efforts on collective development and well-being. The key highlights of some contributions of conflict resolution strategies to peace and development in Oloibiri community include:

Enhanced Social Cohesion: The return of peace to Oloibiri community brought about the promotion of trust, cooperation, and solidarity among the community members. It fostered a sense of belonging and shared identity, leading to stronger social cohesion within the community, facilitating collaboration, dialogue, and collective action for development purposes (Interview with Mr. Anderson).

Economic Prosperity: Peace is closely linked to economic prosperity and development. Due to current peaceful nature of Oloibiri community, businesses now thrive, investments increased, and job opportunities are expanded (Interview with Chief Dr. Omekwe). According to Chief Jokori, most of the markets which stopped functioning due to cult activities are all functioning currently, the houses destroyed are being reconstructed, while incidences of crime and cult activities have reduced drastically. As such, there were no case of cult group activities during the 2023 general elections in Oloibiri community.

Improved Governance and Institutions: There is now effective governance structures and accountable institutions in Oloibiri. Resources are now allocated efficiently. The traditional governance systems are now more strengthened to contribute to better management of community affairs and the equitable distribution of resources, and fostering development (Interview with Miss Deborah).

Access to Developmental Facilities: The community now has easy access to education and healthcare services, leading to improved human development outcomes. Schools now function without disruption, and children can access quality education (Interview with Mr. Bob).

Environmental Sustainability: Peace in the community has facilitated the sustainable management of the community's natural resources and environment. Community stakeholders now engage in dialogue and cooperation to develop and implement sustainable development practices. Oloibiri environment is more protected now than before (Interview with Mr. Richman).

The above study analysis found that the conflict resolution strategies adopted in resolving different conflicts in Oloibiri community have brought about peaceful coexistence among the residents in the community, reduction in crime and kidnapping rate, reduced cult groups' activities, resettling of deserted homes, and revived business activities in the Oloibiri community. No meaning development can take place in the face of rancour, acrimony and mutual distrust. Thus, when a community is bedeviled with conflicts and violence, insecurity of food, economic activities, lives and properties will be experience. The findings of the study on the contributions of conflict resolution strategies to development in Oloibiri community is in agreement with the findings of other scholars such as Willy (2015) who remarked that peaceful relations between ethnic, religious, linguistic or other communities make an important contribution to the promotion of social cohesion, public security and human rights. In peaceful communities, businesses thrive, investments increase, and job opportunities expand. A study by UNEP (2016) indicated that in peaceful communities, stakeholders can engage in dialogue and cooperation to develop and implement sustainable development practices.

CONCLUSION

Frequent communal conflicts have hindered speedy community development in various societies including Oloibiri. Apart from the people killed and properties destroyed, there is massive loss in the source of livelihood and limitations to economic activities. In the past, Oloibiri community was engulfed in conflicts that have translated into underdevelopment. Many of these conflicts resulted from land disputes, cult related clashes, chieftaincy/leadership tussle, political crisis, and violence as a result of crude oil exploration. All these interfered with the quest for the development of the community, people deserted the community and rural economic activities were interrupted. The above crisis called for proper traditional conflict resolution strategies which recognized the cultural dimension to conflict resolution. The comprehension of the past of the people and how conflicts are resolved between individuals and

communities to a large extent helped in resolving the myriads of communal conflicts in Oloibiri community. These conflict resolution strategies include the oracle method, family heads method, the Chiefs council method, negotiation method, mediation method, arbitration method, and reconciliation methods. The study found that conflict resolution strategies had significant impact on the development of Oloibiri community, and that effective conflict resolution mechanisms contribute to improved social cohesion, economic growth, and infrastructure development. The study concludes that achieving community development requires proactive and inclusive conflict resolution approaches that prioritize community engagement, capacity building, and institutional strengthening.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The following are recommended based on the findings of the study.

- i. There is need to strengthen community participation. Community leaders should encourage active involvement of community members in decision-making processes and conflict resolution initiatives. Establish platforms for dialogue and inclusiveness, ensuring that diverse perspectives are considered.
- ii. Both the State and local government as well as community leaders should ensure equitable distribution of resources, particularly in areas of contention. Develop transparent and accountable mechanisms for resource management, addressing issues related to land disputes, access to basic services, and economic opportunities.
- iii. Provide training and skills development programs to empower community leaders, local institutions, and stakeholders in conflict resolution techniques. This will enhance their ability to address conflicts effectively and promote sustainable development.
- iv. Establish or strengthen local institutions responsible for conflict resolution, such as community-based organizations or traditional conflict resolution mechanisms. Provide them with adequate resources, authority, and legitimacy to resolve conflicts promptly and fairly.
- v. Encourage collaboration among government agencies, non-governmental organizations, and community-based organizations to pool resources, expertise, and efforts in conflict resolution and community development. Foster partnerships that can provide technical support and financial resources.
- vi. The problem of conflicts in any society always lies in the management of the conflicts. It is in this sense, this study recommends that conflict management and peace-building mechanisms such as regular meetings and dialogue within or between communities should be encouraged by leaders of the communities, political actors and by renowned personalities in the communities.
- vii. Third parties should be well acquainted with the cultural practices of the people especially in issues relating to land. They must be carefully selected based on their good knowledge of the culture of the people. Some of the conflicts are easily tackled through traditional means of conflict resolution.

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