

## THE IMPACT OF EVICTION IN COMMUNITY CONFLICT

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### ***ABSTRACT***

Conflict in agrarian communities has been a norm right from time immemorial. Communities fight over boundary, land ownership, or retaliation over an attack on an indigene. Such conflicts have left communities perpetually antagonistic, creating enemies that may last for a life time. Sometime, it is only divine intervention that can resolve such prolonged and protracted conflicts. When community conflict defies resolution it may result in attacks and counter attacks. One of the major characteristics of contemporary community conflict is eviction. The study found out that prolonged conflicts sometimes escalate into crises which may result in eviction of a weaker or defeated party from ancestral home or settlement, neglect of economic activities which result in poverty and finally resettlement in another area. This research discusses community conflict and its aftermath in agrarian societies. The research states clearly the causes and impacts of eviction or displacement which has become a theory in contemporary community conflict in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

*Keywords: Eviction, Community, Conflict, Escalation, Resolution*

### **INTRODUCTION**

Conflict is a natural phenomenon which has existed right from the time of first human creation. The biblical Genesis account indicates a tripartite conflict and rebellion among the personage of the period, the Almighty, Satan, and the first humans (Adam and Eve). The rebellion conceived and borne by God's arch challenger and rival, sowed the seed of conflict and war which has permeated human history for quite a long time and has defied all attempts to be tamed.

Conflict is endemic, contagious, pandemic and pervasive. Its pervasive nature has resulted in destructive manifestations which abound in all strata of society. One of the theatre of conflict is communities, which include villages, clans, and agrarian societies. Conflict in communities are recorded in all continents of the world, including Africa, America, Asia, Australia, Europe, the Middle East and others. Attempts to resolve some of these conflicts usually end in deadlocks. For example, in Africa, there are some communal conflicts that have

lasted for over a century. These include the Ikot Offiong and Oku Iboku conflict which started in 1908 and is still in existence. It is not as if there has never been an attempt to resolve such conflict by either third party or negotiations by the disputants. It is only that such attempts usually failed and the conflict escalates.

In the olden days, before the industrial revolution and colonization, primitive and traditional war instruments were the main ammunition employed in such conflicts especially in communal African societies. These included bows, arrows, spears, and others. Sometimes charms were experimented as an elixir or catalyst to boost the strength of local fighters. The introduction of guns and other sophisticated armaments automatically changed the art and strategy of community conflicts and wars. The use of guns and charms changed the setting of war between and among communities. This resulted in more casualties, human displacements, and humanitarian burdens. This research into the arts and sciences of community conflict is to bring to the fore Eviction Theory of contemporary community conflicts. The work reflects on concept of conflict, eviction theory of community conflict, case studies of community conflict, and evicted communities.

## THE CONCEPT OF CONFLICT

Conflict is a major aspect of inter- group relations between one community and another. Scholars of conflicts studies have given different definitions of conflict, but all point to the fact that conflict is an incompatible interactive interaction between two entities (Akpuru 12). For instance Johan Galtung sees conflict as a condition in the society where an action system is said to be in conflict if the system has two or more incompatible goals. Similarly, Lewis Coser sees conflict as a struggle over values and claims to scarce status, power and resources in which the aims of the opponents are to neutralize, injure or eliminate their rivals (Akpan 64). Conflict usually arises due to the pursuit of incompatible interest and goals by different groups or parties.

Conflict has been categorized into types such as community conflict, international conflict, boundary conflict, inter- State conflict and intra-state conflict. Conflicts, no matter its type occur in progression of varying intensities. Conflict progression shows that it rises from the lowest to the highest intensity. The higher the intensity, the more the hostilities, increase in cost of management and also eviction or displacement (usio ke idung) of the weak or defeated party. The following are the various stages of conflict as given by (Umar 23) (a) formation/latent stage (b) confrontation/escalation stage (c) crisis/manifest stage.

**FORMATION/LATENT STAGE:** This is the first stage in any conflict situation. This stage is characterized by incompatibility of goals and tension that are yet to be developed. This is the stage in conflict in which early warning measures must be applied to de-escalate the conflict situation. When this is carried out, more lives

are saved and the conflict is better contained. At this stage also, a third party may be invited by the parties to mediate for settlement. The disputants may also agree to negotiate without the assistance of a negotiator.

**CONFRONTATION/ESCALATION STAGE:** During this stage in any conflict situation, the parties in the conflict are identified. At this stage the dispute is acknowledged and other issues related to the conflict are cleared. Also at this stage there is low level of violence. Third party intervention is quite necessary at this stage to establish a negotiation process. This helps the parties to communicate and bargain for peaceful settlement. If at this stage the disputants cannot negotiate or communicate, the conflict will move to the next stage.

**CRISIS/MANIFEST STAGE:** This is a stage of conflict whereby parties to the conflict lay down their arms and at the same time measures are taken to resolve the conflict. At this stage violence is reduced to the barest minimum and there is the possibility of settlement. Also at this stage, a third party may be invited by the parties to mediate for a resolution of the conflict. The disputants may also agree to negotiate without the help of a mediator or third party.

**POST CONFLICT/TRANSFORMATION STAGE:** This is the period that follows the end of hostilities. At this stage the conflict is fully resolved and peace building takes place to return the society or community to a normal state. At this stage agreement reached upon by the parties are implemented (Umar 23). Awareness of the different stages of conflict enhances proper management of any conflict. Therefore, it is imperative for experts in the field of conflict analysis and management to be well informed of the stages of conflict. This will enable early understanding of a conflict situation and the best option adopted for intervention and management of the conflict (Utin 93).

## THE CONCEPT OF COMMUNITY AND COMMUNITY CONFLICT

Isaac Albert (17) sees community as the aggregate of individuals living within a geographical area. A community is also referred to as both the geographical environment (a village, town, clan) as well as the peculiar peoples living in it. The peoples that live in such an environment share common interest and vision. In some communities, there may be migrants living together with the indigenous members of the community. In contemporary communities, some people live as tenants and engage in occupation of their choice, including farming, palm wine tapping, fishing, wood sawing, trading on cash crops such as cocoa, oil palm, etc. Most communities are semi-urban in nature because of the provision of some social amenities in the area such as tarred roads, electricity, pipe-borne water and a clinic or a health post. Also, some communities are pathways that

link other areas. Therefore such areas or communities are transit that link big cities. Motorists usually stop at such areas to buy its product which may include fish, fruits, and other farm produce. This makes such communities busy as a result of roadside trading.

Conflicts between communities are usually caused by boundary demarcation especially where there is no definite or natural boundary by natural sources such as river, mountain or rock formation. T.A. Imobighe (13) sees community conflict arising when there is struggle over ownership of farmlands. Equally, boundary dispute arises when neighbouring communities, villages, State or a country refuses to accept either a natural boundary or artificial boundary such as iron pins, monument and fences. Boundary disputes can also arise if there are natural resources available within the boundary between the neighbouring States or communities. Such natural resources could be crude oil or any other mineral resources of very high value. For example the dispute between Nigeria and Cameroon arose as a result of huge crude oil deposit in the oil rich Bakassi peninsular within the boundary of the two countries.

## **SOURCES OF COMMUNITY CONFLICT**

Community conflicts are often attributed to four factors according to Isaac Albert. These are competition for inadequate resources, contradicting value system, psychological needs of groups and individuals and manipulation of information.

**COMPETITION FOR INADEQUATE RESOURCES:** Human wants are naturally insatiable. This is the major reason why groups or communities compete aggressively for resources in the local areas. Community conflict could be destructive when the resources competed for are few and cannot satisfy the needs of a large population and also when the available resources competed for are not evenly distributed. Most conflicts between communities are attributed to inadequate resources. Most communities depend on land, for example, for livelihood. Communities, especially in Africa, are agrarian societies which depend on agricultural produce for both subsistence and commercial purposes. Some communities are not naturally endowed with adequate land for building and agricultural purposes. In this regard there will be competition for available land. This will result in conflict and if not identified and mitigated early, can escalate into crisis.

**CONTRADICTING VALUE SYSTEM:** Values are a set of institutional ideals cherished by a group of people. It is an acceptable behavior or state of affairs accepted by a community (Albert 17). The values adopted by a community shape the thinking of that particular community. When the values of one group commensurate with that of another, the two groups can live harmoniously

together. They may share the same custom and culture. But conflict will arise if there is no correlation between the neighbouring communities. Such lack of correlation could arise if one of the neighbouring communities holds its customs and culture in high regard and therefore faulted and abuse the culture of its neighbours.

**PSYCHOLOGICAL NEEDS OF GROUPS AND INDIVIDUALS:** When individuals and groups are bent on actualizing their aims and self interest without giving consideration to another, conflict is bound to occur. Also, when a group projects itself to be better, unique and superior than others there will be conflict. The psychological needs of communities are potential sources of some community conflict.

**MANIPULATION OF INFORMATION:** The mode of circulation of information in a community can either build or generate conflict in a society. Destructive conflict can arise when information is used to stir up negative emotions. Peace can also reign in a community when information is creatively used to bring people together (Umar 25).

### THE EVICTION THEORY OF COMMUNITY CONFLICT

The eviction theory of community conflict according to this research states that if conflict between communities escalates to the point of crisis, any party in the conflict that is defeated and forced out of the ancestral home, will find it difficult to return. The theory goes further to state that, if conflict between two communities escalates to the point of war and the defeated party is evicted or displaced from the ancestral home and seek refuge in another community, the possibility of returning to the ancestral home may not be realized. Many communities have lost their original home due to communal wars which end in wanton destruction of lives and properties and finally eviction and inability to return. It is difficult for the evicted group to return because of the fact that the entire community is razed down by the victorious party. The victorious party becomes the land lord and king of the community and will therefore mobilize everything human, material and spiritual to defend its area against any external attack or aggression against them. Similarly, the evicted party will not want to surrender, instead it would mobilize from outside and therefore engage in intermittent attack which may not yield positive result to warrant a return to the original home. The theory according this research adds that the king of the community; the victorious group, would not be in peace because of fear of reprisal attack by the opponent. The study found out that the victorious group would be in self defense unless peaceful settlement of the crisis is allowed which in reality may not be realized. Thus, they remain perpetually at war of self defense. The

victorious group would remain perpetually poor because of neglect of economic activities because of emphasis on defense and fortification of the community against any attack from the evicted group. It is in this regard that engagement in commercial economic activities by the people would be abandoned. The result is poverty and fall in the standard of living of the indigenous people.

The essence of this postulation is that peaceful settlement through bargaining is the best approach to any community conflict, the outcome is a win-win result for both parties. But if the conflict does not de-escalate and suddenly escalate into war, it may result in eviction or displacement which results in refugee issues. The application of charms by warring communities has made contemporary community conflict more devastating and dreaded. Charms are enhancement and catalyst for fighting communal war. It enhances bravery, fearless and it may prolong the war which may result in attack and counter attack as well as eviction.

### CASE STUDIES OF EVICTED AND DISPLACED COMMUNITIES

The first case study of evicted community is Ikot Offiong, a village in Mbiabo clan of Itu Local Area of Akwa Ibom State in Nigeria. The communal battle was between Ikot Offiong and Oku Iboku, both in Itu Local Government Area of Akwa Ibom State. It was a psychological battle over land ownership which started in 1908 and escalated into hostilities in the year 2000. The conflict lasted for over hundred years and was depicted in song and folklores within Akwa Ibom and Cross River States of Nigeria due to its prolonged nature. Attempts to resolve the conflict were sought through litigation in court, but in the year 2000 when the high court in Calabar, Cross River State of Nigeria, ruled in favour of Ikot Offiong, the conflict escalated into hostilities which eventually led into the defeat of Ikot Offiong by Oku Iboku fighters. The defeat resulted in razing down of houses in Ikot Offiong and eventually eviction and total displacement from their ancestral home. The people have since taken refuge in Ikot Ekpo, near Calabar, and have been engaging in intermittent and counter attacks which have not yielded any result since then (Utin 58).

Another evicted community was the Ikot Offrong group in the Mbente/Ikot Offrong communal battle in 2011. The two village groups are located in Nkari clan in ini Local Government Area of Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria. It was a psychological battle of supremacy initiated and waged by the Ikot Offrong group against the people of Mbente in the same clan. This started from time immemorial and lasted till this contemporary time which culminated into a final onslaught and hostilities in October 2011. Although most people attributed the cause of the conflict to boundary and land ownership, it is argued that the two groups had lived together as neighbours with strong inter-group relations of marriage and trade without outright confrontation. It is therefore apt to state that

the communal war may have been a psychological battle of supremacy in order to identify the group that is strong and supreme in the clan. The Ikot Offrong group lost the battle, got evicted and houses razed down with major casualties. They have since engaged in counter and intermittent attacks against the people of Mbente since that year. The Ikot Uko village, still in Nkari clan, recently lost their ancestral home over boundary and land ownership tussle which culminated into a blood bath following hostilities with the Anwafia group in the same clan. Ikot Uko group was evicted and displaced in 2018 by the people of Anwafia and has not been able to return. They have since been mobilizing attacks against Anwafia group from their refugee base. This counter attacks has been recurrent, resulting in loss of lives and properties. Another age long case study of eviction or evicted community is the Ibibio group of people that first live in Ibom in Arochukwu, an Igbo speaking community, after migration from Usak Edet in Cameroon since about 8000 BC. Arochukwu is in the present day Abia State in Nigeria. Conflict erupted between the Ibibio group of people and the Igbo people of Ibom in Arochukwu due to cultural differences and inadequate land for building and cultivation. The conflict escalated into crisis and the Ibibio people were defeated after a fierce and protracted confrontation. The defeated Ibibio group were forced to leave Ibom and therefore sought for a new settlement where they are still living till today in the present day Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria (Ukpong 42).

Eviction or displacement also occurred in the conflict between Ife and Modakeke. The conflict is one of the oldest intra ethnic crisis in Nigeria which has recorded over 2000 death and several injured ones in the last two decades. The cause of the conflict according to Fatile (486) state that:

...the genesis of Ife Modakeke feud was the out break of Kiriji war in 1878. During the war, both Ife army and Modakeke army had Ibadan army as ally and over lord but while Ife sympathy at home with Ekiti caused Ife ally on Ibadan side to decamp, the Modakeke ally remained loyal to Ibadan and halted an attempted attack on Ibadan from the rear by Ife army in collusion with Ibadan's enemies who were enroute Ibadan via Gbongan..The Kiriji war had its immediate impact on the relationship between Modakeke and Ife. The former understandably joined Ibadan against Ijesa and Ekiti 'parapo' while the later after a short stay with its benefactor, joined the enemy camp.:

The outcome of the above statement was a very ferocious and destructive attack on the Ife people by the Modakeke people. The effect of the conflict was quite enormous during the second major confrontation in 1882. During the confrontation, the sacred city (Ile Ife) was brought down, the inhabitant driven

out, and many sold into slavery. Those who escaped went to live in the surrounding villages of what was left of Ife territory. It was during the British colonial administration that the Ife people were able to return home in 1894. It should be noted that it was the British colonialists that aided the return of the Ife people to their ancestral home.

Aguleri and Umuleri conflict in the eastern region of Nigeria also led to eviction and displacement. The two communities related by blood origin were living peacefully together until conflict erupted and engulfed them following the British colonial intervention in the area. The sudden transformation of Otuocha to a commercial and trading centre by the European colonialists heightened the rush to the area for land acquisition as well as claims and counter claims of ownership of the area by both Aguleri and Umuleri people. The crisis started in 1933 and led to successive crises in 1964, 1995 and the last in 1999 was more devastating than the previous two crises. It was more destructive on Otuocha and the three communities of Umuleri, Aguleri and Umuoba-Anam. The crisis destroyed the heritage of cultural hegemony and the agriculturally potential lands that one could easily grasp the real feelings and effects of the war. The effect of the crises was that the neighbouring communities of Umueze-Anam, Nsugbe, Nteje, Nando etc all became over stretched with displaced people (both the indigene and non indigenes) never went back to their former places, businesses and went through the sufferings and other consequences associated with such displacement (Nwanegbo 501).

## CONCLUSION

Eviction and displacement are the major effects of community conflict and has been recurrent since time immemorial. This research brought to the fore the major impact of community conflict popularized in the eviction theory. The only option that may enhance a reverse of this postulation is peaceful settlement of dispute by disputing communities. Peaceful settlement of dispute through bargaining is the best method of resolution or prevention of community crisis. It results in a win –win solution for all the parties involved in a conflict.

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