Chieftaincy Crises in Rivers State: A Bane to the Development of Ikwerre of Rivers State, Nigeria 1995-2010

By

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Abstract

The study examined Chieftaincy Crises in Rivers State: A Bane to the Development of Ikwerre of Rivers State, Nigeria 1995-2010. Although much has been written on chieftaincy and leadership crises in most communities of Rivers State, little is known concerning the chieftaincy crises in Ikwerre of Rivers State. It is on this premise that the study fills the gap in Ikwerre history. The work argues that chieftaincy crises has been a cankerworm in Ikwerre leading to the poor state of development especially in some conflict infested communities such as Rumuekpe, Ogbakiri, Ibaa, Emohua and Ogbogoro. This has led to loss of lives and property, loss of functional community leadership, disruption of community peace, proliferation of firearms, light weapons and armed groups, high rate of crimes, increase in poverty and inaccessibility to social services, disruption of developmental projects, prostitution, migration and relocation and disruption of economic activities. The study was premised on the structural conflict theory which emphasized that when economic, political, cultural and social processes are monopolized by a group, it creates the conditions that make people

adopt adversarial approaches to crisis. The study relied on primary and secondary sources, particularly oral evidence, using historical and analytical methods of data analysis. The study recommends that chieftaincy should be rotational and not hereditary, appointment of Community Development Members (CDC) should be done without the influence of the chiefs, and non-interference of the multinational oil and gas companies in the selection of leaders in Ikwerre.

Keywords: Chieftaincy, leadership, development, crisis, conflict

Introduction

Violent conflicts generated by leadership struggles have caused untold suffering in different parts of Rivers State. There exist numerous conflicts resulting from the struggle for chieftaincy stool in communities such as the Unyeada in Andoni, Okrika and different communities in Ikwerre among others. In Andoni, the chieftaincy stool has been in contention by Chief I.U. Otuo and Chief Nteoguile C. Rogers over who becomes the recognized ruler of the community. This has brought untold suffering for the people of Unyeada.

These conflicts have varied in scope, intensity and nature and have taken immeasurable toll on human lives, leaving many dead, maimed and numerous others displaced within or in other states. The conflicts have continued to weaken the states which have made them remain in a very staunt state of development. Ikwerre is an ethnic group in Rivers State encompassing four local government areas namely Ikwerre, Emohua, Obio/Akpor and Port Harcourt. It is bounded by other ethnic groups, to the north and west is the Ogba Egbema, Ekpeye, Abua/Odual, to the south are the Kalabari, and the Okrika of the Ijo, to the southwest and east are the Tai, Etche and Oyigbo, and to the northeast are the Umuapu and the Ohaji of Imo State. All these groups constitute the neighbours of Ikwerre.

Ikwerre has witnessed several cases of violent chieftaincy crises in some communities such as the Rumuekpe, Ogbakiri, Emohua, Ibaa and

Ogbogoro. The Rumuekpe conflict of 2005-2006 was a struggle for leadership over who controls the monies paid by Shell Petroleum Development Company (SPDC). The aftermath of it was killings, assassinations and destruction of property (Dike, 2016). Ogbakiri had same experience. Ogbakiri was one of the developed communities in Ikwerre infrastructural wise. The chieftaincy crisis in Okporowo contributed to the collapse of Ogbakiri in May 2000. It led to the destruction of buildings, electric poles, schools, churches and loss of lives. In Emohua, the chieftaincy struggle was between the paramount ruler, Chief E.J.A. Oriji and Samson Ozuru from the same lineage in Rumungbooh quarter of Rumuche. In Ogbogoro, the struggle was between Chief Sam Dike and Felix Amadi. The death of the paramount ruler of Ibaa and Obelle, Chief J.J. Ohaka generated another wave of crisis in Ibaa over who should ascend the throne among the *Osunu* group between Chief K.E. Nyenke and Chief Samson Ovua. The major cause of these conflicts has been economic. The various chiefs and their supporters laid claims to the stool with the view of controlling the resources owned by the people. These always generated conflicts as the contestant to the throne are most time not the real supposed occupant of the stool.

Generally, the effects of chieftaincy or leadership struggles on Ikwerre are; high rate of crimes, increase in robbery proliferation of light weapons, small fire arms and the rise of armed gang groups, disruption of various economic activities, fall in oil production, loss of lives and property, insecurity, loss of effective community leadership, migration and relocation, delayed development and weaken the communities involved. Albert (2012:4) affirms that many people from communities experiencing violent conflicts suffer poor level of underdevelopment and hardship caused by the wanton destruction occasioned by such crises which have in turn continued the weakening of most African communities.

Theoretical/Conceptual Framework

The study is premised on the structural conflict theory popularised by Marx (1977) cited in Faleti (2006), Ake (1981), Seeman (1980) and Oberschall (1978) among others. The foundation of this theory is on social conflict approach in which they prescribed a materialistic interpretation of history towards existing social arrangements and a political programme of revolution or reform. Marxism on its historical materialism present conflicts as mostly tied to economic structures and social institutions. Its dialectical materialism assumes that material conditions, particularly the economic system, are the decisive formative influences on social life thereby generating cases of class conflict and continuing struggle between different socio-economic groups. By this theory, the economic factor determines the character of the other social structures (Ake 1981). It assumes that the world cannot be understood by thinking in terms of simple harmonies and irreconcilable contrasts. Therefore, it encourages the recognition that the seemingly united could be prone to contradiction which stipulates a striving desire for unity among the diverse.

Supporting this view, Ntete-nna (2002) posits that man was first and foremost a material being. As such, man is able to philosophies or think, because there is food for him to eat and for man to eat, man will have to produce. In production, man links with nature and also interacts with other men. The role which man plays in the process of social production of the material needs determines the political, moral, legal and religious systems which are mostly conflictual in nature. The main argument of the structural conflict theory is that conflict is built into the particular ways societies are structured and organized. The theory looks at social problems like political and economic exclusion, injustice, poverty, disease, exploitation and structural inequality as sources of conflict. Conflicts occur because of the exploitative and unjust nature of human societies and the domination of one class by another.

The emphasis on structural conflict theory is how competing interest or groups ties conflict directly into the social, economic and political

organization of society. Ross (1993) cited in Faleti (2006) notes that when social, political, economic and cultural processes are monopolized by a group, it creates the conditions that make people to adopt adversarial approaches to conflict. As it is the struggle over values or status, power and scarce resources, in which the aim of the conflict groups are to neutralize, injure or eliminate rivals. Resource is a major cause of conflict between individuals and groups within political systems and even between nations.

Khotari (1979) posits that the control and use of resources lies at the heart of the deepening crisis in the world today. Corroborating this view, Scarborough (1998) explains that in situations where existing structures are tilted in favour of one group while putting the other at a disadvantage, the chances are that conflict will emerge and escalate if nothing is done to correct such anomalies. Ighodalo (2012:186) structurally posits that crisis is different from conflict. When conflict situation persist on an issue, it becomes crisis. Therefore, the state of crisis is what comes after a persistent manifestation of states of conflicts. Thus, Idowu (1999) cited in Ighodalo (2012:186) admits that it involves "more manifestation of conflicts and violence to establish a state of crisis".

Todaro (1981) cited in Okowa (2008) conceives development as the entire gamut of change by which an entire social system, turned to the diverse needs and desires of individuals within that system moves away from a condition of life widely perceived as unsatisfactory toward a situation or condition of life regarded as materially and spiritually satisfactory. An improvement by a system to provide the basic needs of its people which include good food, decent shelter, good health, education and a clean environment. By this concept therefore, underdevelopment means a static state of progress within a group or society.

Sources and Method

The data used in the study include primary and secondary sources of information. The primary sources cut across face to face oral interviews which were conducted in some Ikwerre communities such as Rumuekpe,

Ibaa, Ogbakiri, Emohua and Ogbogoro. Through field trips, photographs of some destroyed buildings were taken from some of the communities that have witnessed violent chieftaincy crises in Ikwerre.

The secondary sources availed us the opportunity to obtain empirical data in books, journals, articles and magazines. Inter-disciplinary approach was adopted using knowledge from related disciplines in the Social Sciences, and Humanities to generate data. Comparisons, criticism, analysis and cross-examination were carried out using the historian craft of scrutiny before arriving at conclusions.

Literature Review

Ake (1981) in *A Political Economy of Africa* portrays that material conditions are the decisive formative influences on social life. It meant that material resources could be a factor for war or peace. The work was not focused on the Ikwerre area but gave credence to the fact that material conditions are the decisive formative influences on social life in line with the theories of sociology of conflicts as x-rayed by Marx. Also, Aduke (2012) "Kabba-Ijumu Conflict, 1920-1955" in 1.0 Albert (ed) *A History of Social Conflict and Conflict Management in Nigeria* explains that colonial rule prepared the way for the conflict between kabba and Ijumu and that colonial administrative arrangements affected the people thereby generating conflicts which took the form of protests and agitations as the Ijumu requested to be granted autonomy with a separate court, treasury, police, all of which are colonial creations.

Similarly, Ajigbade (2012) "Ugbo-Mahin Conflict in Iiaje, Ondo State" in Albert (ed) *A History of Social Conflict and Conflict Management in Nigeria* notes that the Ugbo-Malin conflict is one of the oldest intra communal conflicts in Nigeria. It began in 1885 and reoccurred in 1921, 1938, 1976, 1992 and 2008. The causes of the conflict are issues dealing with cultural identity, economy and political. These causes have been identified in the literature as important element in ethnic conflict. It was aggravated by the marginalization of the Mahin in the compensation on oil spillage and

other ecological problems occasioned by the oil exploration activities in the ugboland. The discrimination against the Mahin in the appointment of representation of oil commissions, the construction of Igbokoda-Aiyetoro road and the location of motorpark at Ode Ugo all helped in the escalation of the conflicts.

Tamuno (2011) writing on *Oil Wars in the Niger Delta 1849-2009* explains that the establishment of consular jurisdiction in the two Bights (the Bights of Benin and Biafra) in 1849, to the granting of amnesty to militants in the Niger Delta by President Umaru Yar'Adua, in 2009, can be justified as the story of a protracted 160 year war in the Niger Delta.

Imobighe et al (2002) *Conflict and Instability in the Niger Delta, the Warri Case* examines the incessant conflicts and confrontations which characterized the relationship between the Ijaw, Urhobo and the *Itsekiri* and for which inestimable losses on human and material resources have been incurred. Mention was not made about the Ikwerre people of the Niger Delta. Adesola and Omojeje (2012) "A Critical Analysis of the Socio-economic effects of inter-communal conflicts in Yoruba land" in Albert (ed) *A History of Social Conflict and Conflict Management in Nigeria* discusses primarily the causes of intra-communal conflicts in Yorubaland which includes; land, boundary, and chieftaincy disputes. They also examined the effect of inter and intra-communal conflicts on the socio-economic development of some Yoruba communities, most especially the Ijaw-Iiaje crisis, Owo crisis and so on.

Orugbani (2009) "Resources" in Alagoa, Tamuno and Clark (eds) *The Izon of the Niger Delta* categorizes the various resources of Ijawland into renewable and non-renewable. While renewable resources include land resources, forest resources and water resources and subdivided into agricultural and mineral resources, non-renewable resources are resources such as crude oil and gas. He posits that Ijawland is a deltaic environment which sustains Nigeria economically and yet, the government has not found it necessary to give the inhabitants pipeborne water and other social infrastructure.

Due to the neglect and marginalization by the government, Isaac Boro and his compatriots, captain Owonoaro, Notingham Dick and others organized the Niger Delta Volunteer Service (NDVS) and declared the Niger Delta peoples' Republic. Okorobia (2013) "Justice: The Missing Link to Peace and Development in the Niger Delta" in Derefaka (ed) *Journal of the Niger Delta Studies* explains that oil, be it plam oil or crude oil has been a significant issue in Niger Delta trade and politics. The author notes that justice occupies a prominent position in the history and culture of the Niger Delta right from legitimate trade period to present as conflict, justice, peace and development are connected. These works were not on Ikwerre.

Nature of Ikwerre Chieftaincy Title

The ascendency to the traditional stool in almost except for very few communities in Ikwerre was done by their ancestors for peaceful co-existence. At the head of the political system is the *nye-nwe-eli*, traditional rulers, the custodian of the land, who in practice does not have overriding powers in a decentralized administrative set up that featured various levels of authority and leadership.

The *nye-nwe-eli* is the oldest descendant male of the first son of the founder of the village (Amadi, 2010:104). Thus, leadership of the village and community levels goes to the eldest surviving son of the progenitor of the lineage, no matter the age. The *nye-nwe-eli* holds the *Owhor*, the symbol of traditional authority and peace. The *nye-nwe-eli* in conjunction with all the principal officers of the community runs the affairs of the community like settling of cases and sharing of the village or community land to various family heads who inturn shares to the members of his family.

As the paramount ruler, he could not arbitrarily take decisions without due consultation with the council of elders. Whitman (1927) noted that the *nye-nwe-eli* was accorded respect in Ikwerre and was entitled to gather palm fruits first before the elders and members of the community because he is charged with the task of governing, protecting and providing

for the people's welfare. He and his cabinet also performed judicial functions and saw to the maintenance of peace in the community.

However, in Ibaa community of Ikwerre, there never evolved a traditional ruler with the title of *nye-nwe-eli*. What existed was the *Oha* title or what we may regard as *Owhor* in other communities of Ikwerre. The different villages of Ibaa appointed an *Oha* who usually met with the *Oha* from the other villages of Ibaa *Oha* meeting. But in 1976, the Rivers State Government requested for a representation in the form of *nye-nwe-eli* Ibaa from the people. This request plunged the entire community into confusion and led to the polarization of the community into two warring camps – *Osunu* group and *Mgbuosimini/Mgbuisinu* group.

Owhonda (2016) posits that a prominent and well meaning son of the community, Chief Samson O. Ovua came into the matter and constituted a "peace committee" whose duty was to reconcile the warring groups. The peace committee resolved that Chief J.J. Ohaka should be the Eze *Uvuahu* otherwise known as *nye-nwe-eli* Ibaa and that on his death another person should be chosen from *Osunu* after which the position should go to Mgbuisinu. It therefore implies that *Eze-Uvuahu* is not hereditary but to be rotational. After the death of J.J. Ohaka, the *nye-nwe-eli* Ibaa, many contestants laid claims to the stool which generated new waves of conflict.

The struggle for chieftaincy stool in Ikwerre has been ascribed to economic causes. Most families now struggle for chieftaincy stool when it does not traditionally belong to their families. This is because access to the chieftaincy position will guarantee the control of the economic possession of whatever God has endowed the community with such as crude oil, land and other economic resources as well as government recognition. The often desperation of other members in the communities to have access to and control over the said resources have always made the unfavoured group to give their support to any traditional ruler who could lay claims to the traditional stool. The factional chief will as well hijack some of the

community's resources for utilization with his members. These experiences happened in Rumuekpe, Ogbogoro, Ibaa, Emohua and Ogbakiri in Ikwerre.

Causes of Chieftaincy/Leadership Crises in Ikwerre

Crisis emanates from a variety of sources and does not just happen. There must be causative factors responsible for any crisis. Adejo (2002:48) perceptibly notes that "each conflict does not just happen .... They are rooted in some basic dissatisfaction or grievance which awaits detonation at the slightest opportunity". There is therefore an obvious unseen stance that leads to visible conflict. Dzurgba (2006) cited in Okpaga (2009:28) agrees that the major cause of chieftaincy crises in Ikwerre is economic resources.

Economic Resources

This constitutes a major cause of crisis in human societies due to its scarce nature. The reason is that resources in the society are always in limited supply as a result gains for one individual or group are often associated with losses for other individuals or groups. People disagree over values and resources. The access to resources has important consequences on the nature of the relationship between the individuals or groups involved on whether it is characterised by conflict or cooperation. Conflict has become inevitable because of the relatively scarce but desirable resources. The often displayed desperation of other members in the communities to have access to and control over the said resources has always been a major trigger of conflict. Tarkah (2015) posits that chieftaincy crisis was a major factor that led to loss of lives and property in Rumuekpe. The chieftaincy stool of Rumuekpe came under contention between the serving King, B.L.K. Ogbara and another major contender, C.J. Okpara. Both of them laid claims to the traditional stool which polarized Rumuekpe community into factions.

The quest to control the economic benefits accruable from the multi-national oil and gas companies led to the leadership crises in Rumuekpe

between 2005 and 2009. This was a struggle over who controls the monies paid by multi-national oil and gas companies such as Shell, Total and Agip. Rumuekpe chieftaincy stool has not been rotational and as such was not to be contended for since the serving king was still alive. But like the structural conflict theory posits most people will always employ adversarial approach to economic issues especially when they are excluded from the control of such resources. Dandyson (2017) affirms that most people struggle for chieftaincy stool when traditionally does not belong to their families. This is because access to chieftaincy position will guarantee the control of the economic possession of what ever God has endowed the community with, such as crude oil, land and other economic resources. The leadership crises delayed development, weakened the community and as well led to loss of lives and property.

In Emohua, the chieftaincy crisis of 1996 was between the paramount ruler Chief E.J.A. Oriji and Chief Sampson Ozuru over the sharing of farm land. This disagreement polarised the entire Emohua community and helped in fostering tension, violence and hostility in the community. The course of the conflict was so grave and wide that Chief E.J.A. Oriji and his supporters were chased out of the community. Many people from the community lost their dear lives and properties worth millions of naira were destroyed (Iwedi, 2016). In Ogbakiri the story has been the same. The Okporowo Chieftaincy crises started after the death of King Benson Woke Echonwere in 1994. The Adanwerekna laid claims to the stool by trying to twist the history of kingship in Okporowo. This caused division among the elders and the youths from the Akwu royal house (Emesiobi, 2016). These crises in no doubt were incited by a group of people due to interest to control the economic resources of the community. These crises led to the loss of lives and total destruction of the communities of Ogbakiri in May 2000 (Emeji, 2016).

Ibaa community also experienced chieftaincy crises caused by the death of the paramount ruler of Ibaa and Obelle Chief J.J. Ohaka in 2006. Orji (2016) posits that after the traditional funeral rites, a 20 man screening

committee was set up to screen the contestants to the throne. The *Osunu* group had the turn to produce the paramount ruler as earlier agreed upon in 1978 when the late king was selected. Many people became interested due to the economic benefits attached to the stool and that generated confusion. Some of the contestants include Chief S.O.Ovua, Chief K.E. Nyenke, Chief Princewill Nwakama, Chief S.E. Amadi, Late Prof. F. Okala and others. However, out of the number that applied only three persons remained after the screening. Later on, the three remaining candidates later disagreed with the crowning committee and decided to do it their own way. Each of them started soliciting for supports from other villages.

The cult groups which had been in existence before now attached themselves to these personalities and used the opportunity to assert their negative relevance in the community (Owhonda, 2016). The *degbam*, *dewell* and *Iceland* cult group fought for supremacy among themselves and the most powerful who eventually wins installed whoever they are supporting as the *Eze Uvuahu* or *nye-nwe-ali* paramount ruler of Ibaa. There were series of attacks and reprisal attacks by the different cult groups on the opposing groups including innocent members of the community. Maiming, killing and destruction of property became the order of the day. Where there is a member from another group who needs to be killed by a rival cult group and eventually escaped, the family members were all killed.

In Ogbogoro, the struggle was between the two sons of Akpalikunga, Chief Sam Dike and Chief Felix Amadi. Njigwum (2016) affirms that Chief Paul Amadi, the father of Felix Amadi was the royal father but his wife, Nyejilam Amadi did not have a son except Felix Amadi who she begot much later with the husband brother, Elendu Wosu of Rumubisio Village. This system of having children for a dead husband is accepted in Ikwerre.

As a result of the death of her husband, she sent the insignia of the stool to Chief Sam Dike her husband's brother inorder and to act as regent on the stool until when a male child be born by Nyejilam and attain the age of 15 years. Little wonder that at the ripe age of 15 years, Felix Amadi and

his mother requested that Ishmael Dike who was a direct son of Chief Sam Dike relinquish the staff of office to him. The request was initially honoured and Felix Amadi became the paramount ruler of Ogbogoro Community. He saw the wealth from the multinationals operating in the area and lost respect for everybody including the elders. Members of the community who wanted to be in control of such resources decided to cause confusion by laying claims to the throne (Wosu, 2015). This polarised the community into factions with vested economic interests as power is at the same time both value and resources. The chieftaincy crisis brought socio-economic hardship to the people. Many people lost their lives and property.

Power

Power is also a main cause of conflict in societies. Okpaga (2009:28) defines power "as the ability to control the behaviour of other people, even against their will." Power also controls economic resources, political process, social institutions, cultural institutions and development. The rate at which Ikwerre people attach respect to those who acquire wealth illegally is becoming unholy. This means that those who are not wealthy are relegated to mean "no body'' in the society. The quest to "arrive" and be recognized has led many people into struggle for what does not belong to them which has often led to crises in Ikwerre. For instance, most people struggle for chieftaincy stool when traditionally does not belong to their families. This is because access to the chieftaincy position will guarantee the control of the economic possession of whatever God has endowed the community with, such as crude oil, land and other economic resources (Tarkah, 2015). Thus, "power" decides and chooses those who gain and those who lose in any given situation.

Power is often associated with reputation, fame, prestige or supremacy in human affairs. The prestige or supremacy of one individual or group is often associated with the loss of prestige or supremacy of another individual. As a result of this, they must either destroy or weaken such an individual or group. These jealous and selfish tendencies give rise

to conflict between two or more prominent persons or groups in the community. Power has often never been enough for anyone who has it and this is why some leaders go all out to suppress and oppress rivals, opponents and oppositions in order to obtain absolute loyalty. Power is at the same time both value and resource and the contest over power does not play out only in the open spaces but even found in intimate closed spaces. Yet, the questions of value and access to resources have important effects on the parties concerned (Albert, 2012:4).

In Ikwerre, most crises arise from the attempt to reverse the mode of ascension to the community's throne inorder to gain power and ascend to the chieftaincy or kingly stool. On the traditional political scene in most of the communities of Ikwerre, the mode of ascension to the throne is that, the first son of the progenitor has always produced the community's paramount ruler. Onuegbu (2001:15) confirms that in the Obio axis, the first son of Woji in Oroevo, Echendu Woji has been producing the *Eze oha Evo* with the title *eze- gbakagbaka.* After the death of the last direct son of Echendu, Ogbonda was installed as the paramount ruler.

In Emohua, Mgbo family produces the *nye-nwe-eli* Emohua. In Ogbakiri, Ekenta, the first son produces *nye-nwe-eli* Ogbakiri and in Okporowo, the *nye-nwe-eli* hails from Echonwere, the first son of Akwu. In Ogbogoro the *nye-nwe-eli* hails from Kpalikwada, the first son of the founder of the village Akpalikunga. Therefore, the attempt to reverse the mode of ascension to the throne was always met with stiff resistance. This has in one way or the other fostered conflict in most Ikwerre communities such as Ibaa, Ogbakiri, Rumuekpe, Ogbogoro, Emohua and Rumuolumeni. Onigu (1999:337-338) cited in Boh (2014:347) agrees with this position when he laments on the social system of Nigeria thus, The Nigeria society is a social system compounded by contested demands on access to scarce resources especially in the political and economical field. It is a society defined by natural cleavages and manmade conflicts. Natural membership of ethnic group… threatened by the expanding interest of other multiple users… provide ground for the emergence of conflicts.

Leadership

There are positions of leadership in cultural, social, economic and political institutions. There are also leadership positions as traditional monarchy, councillorship, chairmanship, directorship, governorship, youth leader and woman leader. In each case, leadership position is always in limited supply. As a result, a victory for one individual or group is often associated with a defeat for the order. When a defeat is completely reached, conflict arises between two or more individual personalities or social groups over the post contested for (Dzurgba, 2006).

Consequences of the Conflicts on Ikwerre

It is a truism that sustainable social and economic development is hardly possible in an atmosphere of frequent conflicts and generally, the aftermath of every violent conflict is the consequences. It is important to note that these conflicts have caused a lot of harm than good on Ikwerre. The consequences would be highlighted effectively in order to deter others who would want to indulge in conflict in any part of Ikwerre.

Loss of Functional Community Leadership

Most Ikwerre volatile communities have been operating without their chiefs, youth leadership and Community Development Committee (CDC) members because some of the leaders are afraid to return to their various communities. Some of them had lost their lives in the conflict and some had died in the refugee camps. For instance, in Rumuekpe, there are no substantive traditional and youth leadership because they are afraid that what happened to Friday Edu and S.K. Agala may befall anyone chosen or elected for the post. The consequence is that Rumuepke community has been operating without a traditional ruler and youth leadership. This has in turn affected policy making and sustainable development in the community. Also, in Ogbogoro, a care-taker traditional ruler Chief Harrison Okeah appointed by the Rivers State Government has been acting as the paramount ruler of Ogbogoro Community till date (Wokem, 2016). It

was occasioned by the chieftaincy disputes between Chiefs Ishmael Dike and Felix Amadi. This plunged the community into violence that resulted to the end of the royal kingly stool till date. The situation made Felix Amadi to abandon Ogbogoro for Rumulumeni as a refugee but has finally returned home.

Succession disputes often led to violent clash between the supporters of the opposing camps or the two lineage groups. The Okporowo crises started after the death of King Benson Woke Echonwere in December 22, 1994. The Adanwerekna laid claimant to the stool by trying to twist a known historical fact concerning the rulership of Okporowo. This caused division among the elders and the youths from the Akwu royal house and became a contributing factor to the Ogbakiri community conflict (Emesiobi, 2016). Thus, this unfortunate situation left some communities in Ikwerre in the lurch when important political decisions that could engender development were taken in the peaceful communities.

Disrupted Community Peace

Prior to the communal conflicts in these communities, Ikwerre people enjoyed the peaceful atmosphere that pervaded the communities. Even if there were disagreements, they were easily resolved and the people lived together as one. The situation is now different as lawlessness and disorderliness has become the order of the day. Nyekwere (2016) clearly summarized it thus "The communities in Ikwerre once noted to be peaceful and law abiding with the youths under the absolute control of the elders have now turned into a lawless land where nobody seem to be regarded"

It is a pathetic situation as Ofili (2012:148) posits that disregard of adults by the youths remains one of the negative affects of communal conflicts. Most youths do not listen to parental advice but does the one already planned with their peer groups. In this regard, it could be accepted that communal conflicts disrupted community peace as the youths became involved in armed gang groups and generally disobeyed the elders.

Loss of lives and Property

The various crises and violence in Ikwere led to the death of many people and destruction of numerous properties. Albert (1994), Ikpeze (1997), Otite and Albbert (1999) cited in Nwanegbo (2009:507) admits that "Communities that experience situations of conflict and war retard development either through the destruction of existing structures or discouragement of investment". The total number of deaths recorded in these communities has not been ascertained as it keep increasing on daily basis especially after waiting for your child or relative for quite some time without a clue on his or her whereabouts then, it becomes an accepted fact that he or she must have been killed.

In Rumuekpe crisis, Dandyson (2017) affirms that many lives were lost and properties worth millions of Naira were destroyed. In the conflict of 2005, the first reprisal attack led by S.K Agala faction against Friday Edu and group killed over 100 people. Dike (2016) posits that the total number of death in Rumuekpe is estimated to about 2,500 people many of whom are the youths, women and children. Notably among them are Victor Wokoma, killed and thrown into a well, Mr. Egbe was killed at the Holy Rosary Secondary school Port Harcourt where he served as a teacher. Gilbert Obio was killed at Rumuodara on his way to Port Harcourt. The leaders of the two factions-Friday Edu and S.K Agala were all killed. When Edu was killed, his head was taken to Elele Alimini camp where S.K. Agala supporters were housed for celebration.

Among the buildings destroyed in Rumuekpe are late chief Albert Eyindah Mini estate, chief Eche building, chief Ocho house, late Solomon house, Chinyere Opara Joel building, Nathan Owhor house, Philip Tarkah house, chief Dandyson building, Elder Onwomahuma building. Others are Augustine Dike house, Lawson Dimkpa house, late Clifford Elikwu's building, late Friday Njoku's building, late Maxwell Agala's estate, chief Igwe's building, Augustine Okwerre's house and late chief Ekem building (Dandyson, 2016).

In Ogbakiri, many lives and property were destroyed. Mr. Egerton Obile Elenwo a Deputy Director in the Nigerian Intelligence Agency (NIA), Abuja was killed when he visited home on July 20, 1997. Mr. Ishmael Ihunwo was also killed on the same day. Many pregnant women were forcefully operated upon and thrown into wells (Emesiobi, 2016). The level of destruction in Ogbakiri was near total. Hundreds of houses and other types of property were destroyed. There were few houses that were standing in Ogbakiri and even those visibly standing were half burnt or newly renovated. People were killed in their number. Their houses, properties, schools, markets, churches as well as the crops in their farms were all destroyed.

The few destroyed building I met during my field trip include the Ogbakiri Boys Secondary School, Community Girls Secondary School, Ogbakiri, Chief Ndala Echonwere's Hall, Sir Ezekiel Elenwo's storey building, Felix Elenwo's storey building, late Egerton Obile Elenwo's story building and late E.E. Asuru's building. Some of the houses have been demolished and rebuilt while some have fully been renovated. Many houses that were partly burnt or destroyed were still deserted either because the owners were dead or are alive but do not have the money to rebuild them yet or they are afraid of coming back to Ogbakiri.

In Ibaa and Obelle several lives were lost while property worth millions of naira were destroyed and some looted by the cultist groups. Among those killed in Ibaa are Timmy Chimara, Mr. Aryor, Ndubueze, Elechi, Nbor, Mr Oram Okachi, Mr, Nduku Dokugbor and chief Joker Boro. He was taken from his house by 1:00am and was later discovered inside a well near the Ibaa evil forest dead in March 18, 2014 (Orji 2016). Then in Obelle on July 27 2009 the late Oha Alexandah Egeonu was beheaded in front of his house. Chinedu Uchendu was killed on his duty post in Shell Flow Station in Obelle, Uchenna and Yemar were also killed during the crisis, (Uchendu, 2016). The story is

not different in Ogbogoro and Rumuolumeni and other communities in Ikwerre. Ogbogoro crisis led to massive destructions of property and loss of lives.



Late Clifford Eliku's house destroyed during the Rumuekpe crises



Mr. Dike nwomahuma house's destroyed during the Rumuekpe crises



Late E.E. Azuru's two storey building destroyed during Ogbakiri crises



Late Ezekiel Elenwo's one storey building destroyed during Ogbakiri crises



Community Girls Secondary School Okporowo, Ogbakiri



Mr. Charles Ikenga house's destroyed during the Rumuekpe crises

Fig. 1: Pictures showing destroyed buildings in Rumuekpe and Ogbakiri
Source: Field trip, 2016

Proliferation of Fire Arms, Light Weapons and Armed Groups

The conflicts created unprecedented security problems in Ikwerre and left the belligerents with a lot of light arms. Due to the violence that plagued the Rumuekpe, Ogbakiri, Ogbogoro, Rumuolumeni, Emohua and Ibaa communities, many youth factions emerged. In Rumuekpe, it was the Edu group and the Agala group while in Ibaa it was the *dewell*, *degbam* and *iceland*. Rumuolumeni was polarized between the degbam and dewell cult groups. The Ogbakiri conflict was fueled by the activities of the dodan barracks boys of Oduoha and Echomwere black pirates of Okporowo. These groups provided the nucleus around which communal armies were built. Had they not existed it probably would have been difficult to find a group of boys already mobilized for use as tools to cause trouble. As a result of the nefarious activities of these groups, these communities and indeed

the whole of Ikwerre are now labeled with killings and most especially kidnapping.

However, each of the factions usually provided arms for their members to enable them fight their opponents and link their loyalty to a bigger cult from neighbouring communities while seeking their support for arms and personnel. In Ogbakiri, Okporowo in Diaspora and Rumuoro hired mercenaries from Gokana, Ogoni to help in the destruction of the communities (Onuegbu, 2000:57). After these wars, peace talks have started and yet the survivors who possessed the arms have neither surrendered nor destroyed their guns, ammunition and explosives. They have not equally denounced or resigned from being the members of such armed gangs. Nwanegbo (2009:508) tells us that "After such communal wars, many of the armed youths usually lost their parents and so the only means of livelihood known to them becomes their guns. The hired mercenaries also dispersed into the thin air with their arms to source for sustenance and livelihood with their guns". The situation puts these communities at risk for future conflict occurrence due to the presence of arms and dangerous gang groups thereby generating a group of blood thirsty young men. They sometimes become easy tools for political thuggery for the politicians in Ikwerre.

High Rate of Crimes

Communal conflicts in Ikwerre have led to increase in the level of crimes in the area. In the pre-colonial Ikwerre society, there were rules and regulations which guided the behaviour of people. There were offences which brought shame and disregard to not just the offender but to the family generally but the story is different today as some people no longer feel ashamed for the social vices committed by them. This drastic transformation of the social relations in the area has created a great concern for the society. Gaining ascendancy are social vices such as rape, prostitution, armed robbery, kidnapping, child abuse, disregard of adults by the youths, breaking and entering, petty theft, alcoholism, drug abuse,

intentional land and chieftaincy disputes. Most of these nefarious acts are mainly executed by the youths who possessed the arms and belonged to armed groups. In Ogbakiri, women were raped; pregnant women were operated upon to determine the sex of the unborn babies thereby terminating the lives of the mother and child (Mba, 2016). The elders were virtually molested and beaten. Many women who fled as refugees take to prostitution as a means of livelihood in communities where they had run to since their businesses have been shattered and destroyed. In Rumuekpe many women were raped and robbery on the major road became the order of the day. Recently hostage taking and kidnapping has increased their tempo for social vices as a result of the financial attraction.

Increase in Poverty and Inaccessibility to Social Services

The youth in some Ikwerre communities embarked on several agitations again their exploitation by a certain group of people within the communities. The communities ridden by conflicts have always been associated with poverty as well as classified as zones with high propensity for rural-urban migration. The high rate of poverty and unemployment has been the driving force for these conflicts in Ikwerre. If the youths are occupied with jobs, there would not exist the extra time for fermenting trouble.

The "free" youths in an attempt to firmly request for royalties from the oil companies utilized by a group which they demanded to change so that the oil proceeds could be used to alleviate the economic condition of the people mostly in Rumuekpe and Ogbogoro, generated conflicts. This crisis indirectly increased the rate of poverty in the communities. The quality of life of the average person in these communities has diminished because their markets have been destroyed; river polluted with oil spillage, dynamite explosions and other war explosives. The fear fostered by the violence deprived them from farming which has been their main economic activity. The adverse effects of these conflicts on the local economy increased the level of poverty in these communities and have helped to

further reduce the standard of living. The insecurity created by these conflicts made many businesses including shop owners to abandon their only source of livelihood thereby reducing the ability of this group to cater for themselves and their family. The effects of the conflicts made some of the oil company to temporarily relocate to other areas. The absence of the company increased the rate of unemployment as most of the employed youths were dropped thereby rendering them unemployed.

Furthermore, the people in these areas cannot access the social services provided by the government or through community effort. The youths in these communities while they were fighting for the supremacy and control of youth leadership also destroyed the social amenities that had alleviated the suffering of the people prior to this period. In Ogbakiri, the youths destroyed their schools, health centres, maternity homes, hospitals boreholes electric poles and transformers. The story is just the same in Rumuekpe where electricity gadgets, tele-communication mask, schools, bore-hole for water were all destroyed. The school systems were badly affected. The teachers ran away and many lost their property. A range of factors affects children's ability to continue their education. The most common are the shortage of family income due to the loss of their parent's livelihood, insecurity for the children in the schools and death of a sponsor. Some children were used for labour in place of adults who have died to support the family (Adesote and Omejeje, 2012:41).

With resumption of school after the war, the teachers refused to go back and were seen demanding for transfer out of the conflict areas. The few that accepted to teach in such place became more like visiting teachers, coming to work once in a while. This situation cannot help academics and school management in the affected communities. The result was the loss of interest by the children to further their education as they are ready to stay without education thereby paving the way for mass illiteracy. In the health sector, many doctors and nurses declined their posting to the conflict ridden communities of Ikwerre such as Rumuekpe, Ogbakiri, Ibaa and Ogbogoro while some of those already there frequently request for

transfers to other places as a result of the perceived violence in these communities. Recently, the kidnapping of doctors has further diminished their interest to work in the rural communities of Ikwerre.

Disruption of Developmental Projects

Communities that experience situation of conflict and war experience retard development through the destruction of existing structures or discouraged investment. The disputed Ikwerre communities of Rumuekpe, Ibaa, Ogbakiri, Ogbogoro, Rumuolumeni, Emohua and Omuchioga face high security risk. The fear of insecurity has always discouraged the government and the multinationals operating in some of the communities from carrying out development projects.

The Ogbakiri Boys Secondary School and the Girls Secondary School were still in ruins when the researcher visited the place during my field trip. Rumuekpe Secondary School was not yet renovated. It is imperative to note that no development can take place in an atmosphere of perpetual conflict. Also, the various social units in Ikwerre that have contributed to sustainable development such as the age grades, social clubs, women organization and so on could not sustain the zeal mantra that had in the past propelled them in providing social amenities such as schools, markets, bus stops and hospitals. Most of the existing ones that were destroyed have not been renovated.

Disruption of Economic Activities

The violence associated with conflicts in Ogbakiri, Rumuekpe, Ogbogoro, Ibaa, Emohua and Rumuolumeni adversely affected production, marketing and investment in agriculture, the basic economic activity in Ikwerre. During the outbreak of the Rumuekpe, Ibaa, Ogbakiri crises, the fishermen found it difficult to go for fishing. Most fishermen and farmers from these communities were forced to abandon their nets, boats as well as their crops in the farm because of the fear of being attacked or killed. The transportation networks were also disarticulated during the

years of conflicts as fishermen and farmers were unable to transport their food stuffs to the market places when eventually they succeeded in getting them out of the farm.

Throughout the period of crises in these communities, both the land and the youths that could have been involved in the production of food were engaged in the conflict thereby hindering the production of goods and services. The overall economic effects are extensive and include dislocation of traditional economic activities and associated livelihood pursuits such as local preservation of food items like corn and okro which is done by members of these communities in Ikwerre. Expectedly, all the economic effects translate to reduced income for the crises ridden communities. Therefore, the diminished productivity and viability of local economic arising from violence have negatively affected the lives of people living in those communities. Commerce has also been negatively affected by the violence that characterized these communities. Disputed and warlike areas find it difficult to attract potential business men and women. Such activities as looting, robbery, kidnapping scares away market women who visits these communities for the purchase of food stuffs which are usually sold in the state and the neigbouring states. Adesola and Omejeje (2012:40) posits that restricted movements, disruption in businesses, the loss of capital through burning of houses and shops limits the rate at which the buying and selling would have been carried out.

Recommendations

The study recommends that:

- Chieftaincy should be rotational and not hereditary.
- Appointment of Community Development Members (CDC) should be done without the influence of the chiefs.
- The multinational oil and gas companies in Ikwerre should desist from interfering in the selection of leaders in Ikwerre.

Conclusion

Ikwerre has experienced myriads of communal conflicts. The contentions arising from chieftaincy and youth leadership struggle are driven by economic interest to control the benefits accruable from the multinationals. In Rumuekpe the chieftaincy struggle was between the serving King B.L.K. Ogbara and C.J. Okpara. In Ogbogoro, the two sons of Akpalikunga, Sam Dike and Felix Amadi contested over the throne.

In Ogbakiri, Ibaa and Emohua chieftaincy struggles aggravated the spate of conflicts in the area. The quest for a rotational chieftaincy stool between London Echonwere of the ruling Echonwere house and Hamitton Echongbe of the Adawerekna house of the Okporowo community largely increased the crises. Crises in Okporowo degenerated to other villages in Ogbakiri and finally led to the destruction of the entire Ogbakiri. The chieftaincy struggle between S.O. Ovua and K.E. Nyenke from the *Osunu* Group led to the increased cultist activity in Ibaa. The consequences of conflicts on Ikwerre include collapse of functional community leadership, disruption of community peace, loss of lives and property, disruption of economic activities, migration and relocation, increase in poverty, high rate of crimes, proliferation of small arms and inaccessibility to social services.

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Name	Sex	Age	Status	Occupation	Place of Interview	Date of Interview
Dandyson Edward	M	75	Family Chief	Farming	Rumuekpe	26/12/2017
Dike Jaloh	M	58	C.D.C Member	Farming	Rumuekpe	01/08/2016
Emeji Nnamdi	M	65	Elder	Business	Ogbakiri	02/01/2016
Emesiobi Bliss	M	53	C.D.C Member	Business	Ogbakiri	02/01/2016
Iwedi Gloria	F	50	President, Emohua	Civil Servant	Emohua	02/03/2016

			Women Meeting			
Mba Nwobike	M	45	Community Member	Business	Ogbakiri	27/08/2016
Njigwum Sunny	M	70	Elder, Egbelu village, Ogbogoro	Retired Shell Contractor	Ogbogoro	12/04/2016
Orji Mabel	F	45	Secretary, Nwereonma Women Meeting	Petty Trader	Ibaa	18/08/2016
Owhonda Samuel	M	50	C.D.C Member	Lecturing	Ibaa	08/03/2016
Tarkah Philip	M	70	Elder	Farming	Rumuekpe	26/12/2015
Uchendu Matthew	M	68	Elder	Retired Civil Servant	Ibaa	15/12/2016
Wokem ThankGod	M	55	Community Member	Business	Ogbogoro	02/06/2016

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