Conflict of Natural Resources and Change of Livelihood in Rivers State, Nigeria

By

Uchendu Jennifer Matthew
jenniferuchendu531@gmail.com
Department of History and Diplomatic Studies,
Faculty of Humanities,
Ignatius Ajuru University of Education,
Rumuolumeni, Port Harcourt, Rivers State Nigeria
&
Dr. Nyenwe Emem
ememprince82@gmail.com
Department of Sociology,
Faculty of Social Sciences,
Ignatius Ajuru University of Education,
Rumuolumeni Port Harcourt, Rivers State Nigeria

Abstract

This paper examined conflict of natural resources and change of livelihood in Rivers State, Nigeria. The objectives were to evaluate the factors precipitate conflict of natural resources and its manifestation, determine the cases of conflict of natural resources and change of livelihood in Rivers State and identify potential solutions to conflict of natural resources and change of livelihood. Human security and resource conflict theories were employed. The result showed that the factors causing conflict of natural resources in Rivers State were social, economic, political and environmental, which manifested in various forms, such as war, legal battle, and destruction of lives and property. The potential solutions identified were dialogue and mediation, conflict resolution mechanisms, resource governance reforms, community empowerment, sustainable development initiatives, environmental remediation, legal protection and enforcement, international cooperation, long-term peacebuilding, as well as monitoring and evaluation. The conflict of natural resources and change of livelihood in Rivers State, Nigeria, represents a multifaceted challenge with profound socio-economic,

environmental, and human rights implications for the affected communities and the broader region. Through an in-depth analysis of the root causes, dynamics, and impacts of these conflicts, this research has shed light on the urgent need for comprehensive interventions to promote sustainable resource governance, protect human rights and foster peacebuilding efforts in the region.

Introduction

Rivers State, located in the central part of Nigeria's oil-rich Niger Delta area, is blessed with a wide range of natural resources that have significantly influenced its history, economy and cultural scenery. The state possesses huge deposits of oil, productive farmlands and various ecosystems, making it a region of great natural wealth. Rivers State is closely associated with Nigeria's oil and gas sector, as it contains substantial deposits both on land and in the sea. Nigeria's oil output is significantly boosted by major oil fields located in the state, including Ogoni, Bonny and Eleme (Anderson, 2017). The utilisation of these resources has had both positive and negative consequences, contributing to economic advancement while also causing harm to the environment and societal instability. In addition to its abundant oil resources,

Rivers State possesses arable land that is highly suitable for growing crops such as cassava, yam, plantain and vegetable. The agricultural industry of the state plays a crucial role in ensuring food security, generating employment opportunities and providing revenue for its population. Nevertheless, the agricultural industry faces obstacles such as soil erosion, insufficient infrastructure and limited mechanisation, which impede its complete development. Rivers State possesses abundant verdant woodlands and varied ecosystems, hosting significant biological diversity. The woods in the state serve multiple purposes, including production of timber and non-timber forest products as well as maintenance of ecological balance, carbon sequestration and climate regulation (Anderson, 2017). Conservation and sustainable management of these resources are essential for preservation of biodiversity and ecosystem services.

The state is intersected by a multitude of rivers, such as the Niger and its tributaries, which offer abundant water supply for household, agricultural and

industrial uses. The waterways of Rivers State play a crucial role in transportation, irrigation, fishing and hydroelectric power generation, with significant contributions to the state's socio-economic progress. Rivers State possesses abundant mineral resources, including limestone, clay, silica sand and lignite, in addition to its oil and gas reserves. These minerals are useful in a wide range of industrial applications, providing support to sectors such as building, manufacturing and ceramics. The sustainable exploitation and utilisation of these resources can stimulate economic diversification and generate employment opportunities.

The tourism potential of Rivers State is vast, thanks to its natural beauty, cultural richness and historical landmarks. The state is renowned for its numerous ethnic groups and unique attractions, ranging from the mangrove swamps to traditional festivals. This makes it a popular destination for visitors seeking to explore its distinctive features (Anderson, 2017). By focusing on the development of sustainable tourism infrastructure and promotion of cultural preservation, the state can effectively utilise this potential for economic growth and community development. The natural resources of Rivers State are a valuable asset that has great potential for long-term and sustainable development. Rivers State exemplifies the complex relationship between natural riches and violence. Nevertheless, the utilisation and administration of these resources have frequently been tainted by conflict, disagreement and aggression (Anderson, 2017).

The deployment of these resources has implications for livelihood, which refers to the methods or resources that individuals or groups rely on to support themselves. Livelihood includes essential components necessary for human survival and progress. It extends beyond just economic operations; it encompasses social, cultural and environmental issues. Livelihood encompasses the essential resources, skills and actions required for individuals to get the fundamental requirements for survival, such as sustenance, housing, attire and, more recently, opportunities for education and healthcare. It includes physical assets, like land, natural resources and financial capital as well as non-physical assets, such as skills, knowledge and social networks. Historically, livelihood has been considered interchangeable with economic pursuits, such as agriculture, fishing and commerce. Nevertheless, in the present era of globalisation, the term "livelihood"

embraces a diverse array of jobs, which include formal work, entrepreneurship and activities within the informal sector. Sustainable economic livelihoods aim to achieve generation of revenue and fair distribution of resources, while also building long-term resilience to withstand unexpected events.

Means of living is intricately connected to social systems and interpersonal connections. Social capital, which concerns trust, reciprocity and cooperation in groups, has a vital impact on livelihood methods. Robust social networks offer assistance during periods of turmoil, enable access to valuable resources and information, and help in collaborative decision-making procedures. Cultural practices, beliefs and identities influence the decisions and preferences people have on their way of life and what they prioritise.

Indigenous knowledge systems provide useful insights into sustainable resource management and techniques for developing resilience. Conserving cultural heritage and traditional subsistence methods is crucial for sustaining biodiversity, ecological equilibrium and community harmony. The viability of livelihoods is intricately connected to the well-being of the environment. The provision of ecosystem services by natural resources, particularly provision of clean water, fertile soil and climate management, is crucial for agricultural productivity and human well-being. Over-utilisation of natural resources, clearing of forests, contamination of the environment, and alteration of climate patterns are great challenges to the stability of people's means of subsistence, especially for marginalised communities that depend on natural ecosystems. To achieve sustainable living, it is necessary to tackle the underlying causes of poverty and inequality, ensure fair access to resources and opportunities, and strengthen the ability to withstand environmental and socio-economic disruptions. Promoting inclusive and participatory methods of development creates a path towards a fair, equal and enduring future for everyone.

Statement of the Problem

In Rivers State, Nigeria, the nexus between natural resource management and livelihood sustainability presents a complex challenge that warrants thorough examination. The region's rich biodiversity, encompassing lush forests, fertile lands and abundant waterways, serves as both a source of sustenance and a

catalyst for conflict among its diverse communities. The exploitation, depletion and mismanagement of these resources often lead to tensions, fuelling disputes over land ownership, access to water and control over mineral deposits, among other issues. These conflicts, rooted in historical, socio-economic and political factors, not only threaten the region's environmental integrity but also disrupt the livelihoods of its inhabitants. As conflicts over natural resources escalate, they precipitate significant changes in the livelihood strategies of local communities in Rivers State. Disruptions in resource access and utilization force individuals and households to adapt their economic activities, often leading to shifts from traditional occupations, such as farming, fishing and small-scale mining, to alternative livelihoods. These transitions impact income generation, employment opportunities, social structures and cultural practices, with implications for the overall well-being and resilience of affected populations.

The aim of this research was to investigate conflict of natural resources and change of livelihood in Rivers State. The objectives were to:

i. evaluate the factors precipitating conflict of natural resources and its manifestation;
ii. determine the cases of conflict of natural resources and change of livelihood in Rivers State; and
iii. establish the potential solutions to conflict of natural resources and change of livelihood.

Research Questions

i. What are the factors precipitating conflict of natural resources and its manifestation?
ii. What are the cases of conflict of natural resources and change of livelihood in Rivers State?
iii. What are the potential solutions to conflict of natural resources and change of livelihood**?**

Theoretical Framework

Human Security Theory

The United Nations Development Programme (1994) introduced the Human Security Theory. This theory prioritises the well-being and protection of

individuals and communities, emphasising the need of defending their lives, livelihoods and dignity. This approach moves away from traditional security concerns centred around state borders. The primary focus is on the inherent worth of human life and the goal is to guarantee that individuals are able to live without experiencing fear, poverty and humiliation. It places a high premium on safeguarding fundamental human necessities and entitlements, including the availability of sustenance, water, housing, medical care and education, and the absence of violence and prejudice. The theory underscores the significance of tackling the fundamental reasons behind insecurity, such as poverty, inequality and social exclusion, in order to guarantee the welfare and respect of every individual. It offers a thorough and human-focused structure for reconsidering security in a more intricate and linked world by giving priority to safeguarding and promoting the welfare of persons and communities.

Resource Conflict Theory

The Resource Conflict Theory, propounded by Friedrich Ratzel and Halford Mackinder in 1990, posits that competition over limited natural resources, especially land, water, minerals and energy, can intensify tensions and conflicts within and between communities, regions and nations. As resources become more limited owing to population expansion, environmental degradation and climate change, among others, the competition for access and control over these resources becomes more intense, resulting in conflict. It indicates that communities that have abundant natural resources, especially non-renewable resources, such as oil and minerals, frequently encounter poverty, inequality, authoritarianism and violent conflict, among other adverse development consequences. This situation emerges from multiple elements, including inadequate governance, corruption, rent-seeking behaviour, environmental degradation and the detrimental impact of the "Dutch Disease" effect, which refers to the situation where the influx of resource windfalls displaces other sectors of the economy and undermines the possibilities for long-term development. It also offers a structure for comprehending the intricate relationship between natural resources, conflict and development. It emphasises the importance of integrated approaches that tackle the root causes of resource-related conflicts and promote sustainable resource management, fair distribution of benefits and inclusive development.

Methodology

The research employed a qualitative approach; it used content analysis to look at the secondary data. Internet materials, periodicals, textbooks, and both published and unpublished research works were among the sources consulted.

Discussion

Factors Precipitating Conflict of Natural Resources and its Manifestation

In Rivers State, conflicts over natural resources are often influenced by a combination of social, economic, political and environmental factors. The presence of rich oil reserves has led to competition and conflicts over control, ownership and benefits derived from oil and gas resources (Wilson, 2018). Disputes may arise between communities, multinational oil corporations and government authorities over land rights, revenue sharing, environmental degradation and socio-economic development. Rivers State has a complex system of land tenure, with overlapping claims to land ownership under customary, statutory and colonial-era laws (Wilson, 2018). Conflicts often arise between indigenous communities, migrant settlers and government agencies over land rights, boundaries and allocation for agricultural, residential or industrial purposes. The extraction and exploitation of natural resources, particularly oil and gas, have led to environmental degradation, pollution and ecosystem destruction in Rivers State (Smith, 2018).

Oil spills, gas flaring, deforestation and water pollution have adverse impacts on land, water bodies and biodiversity, leading to conflicts over access to clean water, fertile land and sustainable livelihoods. Despite the abundance of natural resources, many communities in Rivers State face poverty, unemployment and lack of basic infrastructure and services. Socio-economic disparities exacerbate tensions and grievances, leading to conflicts over access to resources, distribution of benefits and socio-economic development priorities (Brown & Clark, 2020). Political factors, particularly corruption, nepotism and lack of transparency and accountability in governance, contribute to conflicts over natural resources in Rivers State. Marginalized communities may perceive government authorities and the political elite as biased or unresponsive to their needs, leading to discontent and resistance (Martinez & Thompson, 2019). Rivers State is home to diverse ethnic and cultural groups, each with its own identity, interests and aspirations. Inter-communal tensions and conflicts may arise over competition for resources,

historical grievances, identity politics and political representation, all of which exacerbate conflicts over natural resources. Weak governance institutions, ineffective conflict resolution mechanisms and lack of enforcement of laws and regulations contribute to conflicts over natural resources in Rivers State. Disputes may escalate due to a lack of transparent and accountable governance, which exacerbates tensions and insecurity (Doe, 2020).

Land-related conflicts are common in Rivers State, with disputes arising over ownership, boundaries and use of land. Indigenous communities, migrant settlers and government agencies may clash over access to agricultural land, urban development, infrastructure projects and compensation for land acquisition (Doe, 2020). Land disputes often stem from historical grievances, conflicting land tenure systems, and rapid urbanization. Rivers State is rich in natural resources, particularly oil and gas, which are vital for economic development and revenue generation. However, disputes over resource ownership, control and benefits often lead to violent clashes between communities, militants, security forces and oil companies. Local communities may demand greater participation in decision-making processes, fair compensation for resource extraction and equitable distribution of revenues, thus challenging the interests of powerful actors and triggering conflict.

The Niger Delta region, including Rivers State, has a history of militancy and armed insurgency, fuelled by grievances over resource exploitation, environmental degradation and socio-economic marginalization. Militant groups, such as the Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND) and the Niger Delta Avengers (NDA), have engaged in acts of sabotage, pipeline vandalism, kidnapping and attacks on oil installations, which escalate conflicts and challenge state authority (Garcia & Nguyen, 2021). Multinational oil companies operating in Rivers State often face resistance from local communities over environmental degradation, land rights and revenue sharing. Conflict arises when oil companies prioritize profit maximization over community development, fail to consult or compensate affected communities adequately, and employ security forces to protect their interests.

Ethnic and cultural diversity in Rivers State sometimes leads to tensions and conflicts over identity, representation, and access to resources (Garcia & Nguyen, 2021). Competing claims to ancestral lands, cultural heritage sites and traditional leadership positions may trigger violence between different ethnic groups, clans and factions. Violent clashes over land, resource ownership and revenue allocation in Rivers State are driven by a combination of historical grievances, socio-economic disparities, political instability, corporate interests and identity-based tensions. Sabotage and pipeline vandalism are significant issues in regions like Rivers State, Nigeria, where the oil and gas industry plays a central role in the economy but often fails to adequately address the concerns of local communities. Sabotage and pipeline vandalism often stem from long-standing grievances and discontent among local communities (Garcia & Nguyen, 2021). These grievances typically revolve around issues such as environmental degradation, lack of socio-economic development, inadequate compensation for land use and perceived marginalization by the government and oil companies. Sabotage and pipeline vandalism are complex challenges that require comprehensive responses so as to the underlying grievances, promote inclusive development, strengthen governance and the rule of law, and ensure environmental protection and social justice.

Social disruption resulting from conflict in regions like Rivers State is profound and multifaceted; it impacts individuals, families and communities in various ways. Conflict often forces people to flee their homes in search of safety, leading to internal displacement or even refugee status in some cases. Displaced individuals and families lose their sense of security, stability and social networks, as they are uprooted from their communities, homes and familiar surroundings. Displacement disrupts social ties and support systems; it exacerbates vulnerability and increases the risk of poverty, exploitation and abuse. Conflict disrupts economic activities, markets and livelihood opportunities, leading to unemployment, loss of income and economic hardship for individuals and communities (Smith, 2018). Displaced populations often lose their sources of livelihood, such as farming, fishing and small businesses, as they are unable to access land, markets and employment opportunities. The loss of livelihoods perpetuates cycles of poverty and dependency, further undermining social cohesion and resilience. Conflict fractures social networks and community

cohesion, as fear, mistrust and suspicion pervade interpersonal relationships. Communities become divided along ethnic, religious and political lines. This situation makes people retreat into their own groups for safety and support. Social bonds and solidarity weaken, making it difficult to build consensus, resolve conflicts or cooperate for mutual benefit. Conflict inflicts profound psychological trauma on individuals and communities, causing anxiety, depression, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and other mental health issues (Anderson, 2017). Exposure to violence, displacement, loss of loved ones and uncertainty about the future leave lasting scars on the psyche, affecting emotional well-being, interpersonal relationships and coping mechanisms. Psychological trauma hampers recovery and resilience, ultimately hindering efforts to rebuild social cohesion and community resilience.

Conflict disrupts essential social services, including healthcare, education and social welfare; it worsens vulnerability and increases the burden on already strained systems. During conflict, health facilities may be damaged or inaccessible, education interrupted, and social welfare programmes suspended, leaving communities without access to basic services and support (Wilson, 2018). Disruption of social services undermines social cohesion and aggravates inequalities, particularly for marginalized and vulnerable groups. Conflict erodes cultural identity and heritage, as communities are displaced, cultural practices disrupted, and traditional knowledge lost. Displaced populations may struggle to maintain their cultural traditions, language, and way of life in unfamiliar environments, leading to a sense of dislocation and alienation. The loss of cultural identity diminishes social cohesion and resilience, as communities struggle to preserve their collective memory and sense of belonging (Smith, 2018).

Legal battles arising from disputes over resource ownership and revenue allocation are common in regions like Rivers State. Legal battles often arise when multiple parties claim ownership rights to land, mineral resources or other natural assets. Indigenous communities, migrant settlers, government agencies and private corporations may assert competing claims based on customary law, statutory regulations or contractual agreements. These ownership disputes can degenerate into lengthy and contentious legal proceedings, as each party seeks to defend its rights and interests. Legal battles may ensue over contractual

agreements between governments, corporations and local communities regarding resource exploitation and revenue sharing. Disputes may arise over the interpretation, implementation or enforcement of contractual terms, leading to arbitration, litigation or out-of-court settlements. Contractual disputes often involve complex legal issues, such as property rights, fiduciary duties, environmental regulations and community consent (Johnson & Brown, 2019).

Legal battles also occur when governments and corporations fail to comply with regulatory requirements, environmental standards and social safeguards related to resource extraction. Local communities and civil society organizations may file lawsuits alleging violation of environmental laws, human rights abuses or breaches of corporate responsibility. Legal challenges may result in court injunctions, fines or regulatory sanctions against non-compliant parties, which delay or halt resource projects. Legal battles over resource ownership and revenue allocation prolong conflict, exacerbate tensions and delay resolution, as parties await court decisions or arbitration rulings. Legal proceedings often take years to conclude, and they consume financial resources, time and energy, and divert attention away from other pressing issues. The uncertainty surrounding legal outcomes further undermines trust and cooperation between stakeholders, hindering efforts to reach negotiated settlements or compromise agreements (Garcia & Ngugen, 2021).

Legal battles may also be influenced by political interests, corruption and patronage networks, which complicate resolution efforts. Politically connected individuals or corporations may seek to manipulate the legal process to their advantage, and thus undermine the impartiality and integrity of judicial institutions. Political interference in legal battles heightens tensions, erodes public confidence in the rule of law and perpetuates cycles of conflict and impunity. Legal battles arising from disputes over resource ownership and revenue allocation are complex and contentious processes that intensify tensions, delay resolution and engender conflict (Kim & Lee, 2020). Addressing these legal challenges requires robust legal frameworks, independent judiciary, transparent governance and meaningful engagement with affected communities. By promoting dialogue, negotiation and conflict resolution mechanisms, stakeholders can work towards equitable and sustainable solutions that benefit all parties involved.

Cases of Conflict of Natural Resources and Change of Livelihood in Rivers State
The Okrika Waterfront Conflict

In the heart of Rivers State lies the Okrika waterfront, a picturesque stretch of land where the waters of the Niger Delta meet the bustling activities of human life. Yet, beneath its serene facade, a simmering conflict brews, threatening the very existence of its indigenous communities and their traditional way of life (Brown & Clark, 2020). For generations, the Okrika waterfront has been home to vibrant fishing communities whose lives have revolved around the bounties of the river. Fishing has not only been a means of livelihood but also a way of life, deeply rooted in the cultural fabric of the region. However, in recent years, the tranquil waters have been disturbed by the ripples of discord, as government-led urban development plans clash with the aspirations and rights of the waterfront dwellers (Garcia & Smith, 2021).

The Okrika waterfront conflict is emblematic of the broader challenges facing indigenous communities across Nigeria, where the quest for economic progress often comes at the expense of marginalized populations. At the heart of the conflict lies the issue of land tenure and ownership. The government's plans for urban renewal and commercial development have led to forced evictions and land grabbing, displacing thousands of residents who have called the waterfront home for generations (Kim & Lee, 2020). The consequences of this displacement have been profound, rippling through the social, economic and cultural fabric of the affected communities. For many of the people, fishing, which once provided a steady source of income and sustenance, has become a distant memory. Restricted access to traditional fishing grounds, pollution from industrial activities and loss of fishing infrastructure have decimated the once-thriving fishing industry, leaving families struggling to make ends meet (Kim & Lee, 2020).

Moreover, the forced evictions have shattered the social cohesion and support networks that were integral to the traditional way of life. Families have been torn apart, communities fragmented, and cultural heritage threatened, as the Okrika waterfront transforms into a battleground between tradition and modernity. In the face of these challenges, the people of the Okrika waterfront have shown resilience and determination, seeking out alternative livelihoods to survive in the changing landscape (Kim & Lee, 2020). Some have migrated to urban centres in search of

employment opportunities, while others have turned to small-scale trade or informal sector activities. However, these alternative livelihood strategies often lack the stability and security provided by traditional fishing activities, leaving many of the people in a state of perpetual uncertainty (Anderson, 2017).

The Ogoni Oil Conflict

The Ogoni people have long grappled with the devastating consequences of oil extraction on their land, their livelihoods and their way of life. The Ogoni oil conflict stands as a stark reminder of the enduring struggle for justice, environmental preservation and socio-economic empowerment in the face of corporate exploitation and government neglect (Brown & Clark, 2020). For generations, the Ogoni people have been custodians of a land blessed with abundant natural resources, including fertile soil, lush forests and pristine waterways. However, the discovery of oil beneath their feet in the mid-20th century heralded a new chapter in their history, one marked by the relentless pursuit of profit at the expense of people and the planet (Garcia & Nyuyen, 2021). The story of the Ogoni oil conflict is one of systemic injustice and environmental devastation. As multinational oil corporations descended upon Ogoni land, eager to tap into its vast oil reserves, the landscape was transformed and the lives of its people forever altered. Oil spills, gas flaring and toxic waste dumping became commonplace, poisoning the land, contaminating water sources and destroying ecosystems upon which the Ogoni people depended for their livelihoods.

Amidst the environmental degradation, the Ogoni people rose up to demand justice and recognition of their rights (Garcia & Smith, 2021). Led by the visionary activist Ken Saro-Wiwa, the Movement for the Survival of the Ogoni People (MOSOP) emerged as a powerful force for change, advocating environmental protection, community empowerment and equitable resource distribution. However, their peaceful protests were met with violence and repression, culminating in the execution of Saro-Wiwa and eight other Ogoni leaders by the Nigerian government in 1995 (Garcia & Smith, 2021). The aftermath of the Ogoni oil conflict has been profound, reshaping the livelihoods of the Ogoni people in tangible and intangible ways. Traditional occupations such as farming, fishing and artisanal crafts, once the cornerstone of the Ogoni economy, have become increasingly unsafe in the face of environmental degradation and resource

depletion. The land once fertile with crops now lies fallow, and waterways once teeming with fish now polluted and lifeless (Garcia & Nyuyen, 2021).

The Eleme-Okrika Land Dispute

For decades, the ancestral lands shared between the Eleme and Okrika communities have been the focal point of a simmering conflict, catalysing profound changes in the livelihoods and socio-economic dynamics of both peoples. The roots of the Eleme-Okrika land dispute run deep, stemming from competing claims to land ownership, resource allocation and historical grievances (Martinez & Thompson, 2019). At its core is the struggle for control over fertile farmlands, strategic waterways and natural resources that sustain livelihoods and underpin cultural identities.

For the Eleme people, whose heritage is intertwined with the land they inhabit, the dispute represents a fight to preserve their ancestral territories and way of life. Agriculture has long been the lifeblood of the Eleme economy, providing sustenance and livelihoods for generations. However, the encroachment of Okrika communities on Eleme lands has disrupted traditional farming practices, leading to land shortage, crop loss and economic hardship (Smith, 2018). Similarly, the Okrika people, whose livelihoods are deeply rooted in fishing and trade, have faced challenges as a result of the land dispute. The strategic location of Okrika along the waterfront has made it a hub for maritime commerce and fishing activities. Tensions with Eleme communities over access to fishing grounds and waterways have escalated, leading to conflicts that disrupt maritime activities and threaten the livelihoods of Okrika fishermen and traders (Wilson, 2018).

The Eleme-Okrika land dispute has also had broader implications for socio-economic development and community cohesion in Rivers State. Displacement, insecurity and mistrust between the two communities have hindered efforts to foster social integration, economic cooperation and sustainable development initiatives. Moreover, the protracted nature of the conflict has deterred investment, stunted infrastructure development and perpetuated cycles of poverty and underdevelopment in the region (Smith, 2018).

Potential Solutions

In the verdant landscapes of Rivers State, Nigeria, the coexistence of rich natural resources and diverse communities has long been a double-edged sword. While these resources offer opportunities for economic growth and development, they also serve as catalysts for conflicts that disrupt livelihoods and threaten the well-being of local populations (Gracia & Smith, 2021). As the state grapples with the intertwined challenges of resource management and livelihood sustainability, a concerted effort is needed to chart a path towards peace, prosperity and environmental stewardship.

Empowering local communities with rights to land, resources and decision-making fosters a sense of ownership and stewardship, which reduces the likelihood of conflicts (Doe, 2020). Strengthening community-based resource management approaches and promoting inclusive governance structures that amplify the voices of marginalized groups, including women and indigenous peoples, help ensure that decisions about resource use and management are equitable and sustainable. Investing in sustainable development initiatives that promote economic diversification and reduce dependency on resource extraction alleviates pressure on natural ecosystems and mitigate conflicts (Anderson, 2017). Supporting alternative livelihood opportunities, such as eco-tourism, agriculture, renewable energy projects and small-scale enterprises, can create new pathways for economic growth that are environmentally friendly and socially inclusive. Establishing effective conflict resolution mechanisms at the community, local government and state levels can help peacefully resolve disputes over natural resources (Anderson, 2017). This involves providing training and capacity-building support for mediators and facilitators, promoting dialogue and negotiation between conflicting parties, and ensuring access to justice and legal recourse for affected communities (Doe, 2020).

Implementing measures to protect and restore degraded ecosystems, particularly reforestation, watershed management and pollution control initiatives, can safeguard critical habitats and water resources while promoting sustainable resource use. Enforcing environmental regulations, holding polluters accountable and promoting sustainable land use practices are essential for preserving the ecological integrity of Rivers State for future generations (Wilson, 2018).

Facilitating multi-stakeholder collaboration and partnerships between government agencies, civil society organizations, academia and the private sector can enhance collective efforts to address shared challenges and opportunities related to natural resource management and livelihoods. Fostering dialogue, knowledge exchange, and joint problem-solving approaches that leverage diverse perspectives and resources can promote sustainable development in Rivers State (Johnson & Brown, 2019). Promoting environmental education, awareness and capacity-building initiatives among local communities can enhance their understanding of sustainable resource management practices and their role in conservation efforts. Raising awareness about the impacts of resource conflicts, promoting traditional ecological knowledge and fostering a culture of environmental stewardship and responsibility are essential for fostering a sense of collective responsibility for the stewardship of Rivers State's natural resources (Kim & Lee, 2020).

Conclusion

The natural resources conflict in Rivers State is multifaceted and deeply rooted in historical, socio-economic and political factors. Addressing these challenges requires a holistic approach that prioritizes inclusivity, environmental sustainability and social justice. By fostering dialogue, implementing equitable policies and empowering local communities, Rivers State can harness its rich natural resources for the benefit of all its inhabitants. This will produce peace, prosperity and ecological integrity for generations to come The conflict of natural resources and forced displacement in Rivers State is a multifaceted challenge with profound socio-economic, environmental and human rights implications for the affected communities and the broader region. Through an in-depth analysis of the root causes, dynamics and impacts of these conflicts, this research has stressed the urgent need for comprehensive interventions to promote sustainable resource governance, protect human rights, and foster peacebuilding efforts in the region.

Recommendations

Based on the findings, the following are recommended;

i. There should be inclusive and participatory approaches to decision-making processes related to natural resource management, ensuring

meaningful consultation and engagement of affected communities in planning, implementation and monitoring of development projects.

ii. There should be strengthening of governance frameworks, enhancing transparency and accountability in resource governance, and addressing systemic issues of corruption and impunity, in order to promote sustainable resource management and prevent human rights abuses.

iii. People should invest in alternative livelihoods, sustainable development initiatives and climate resilience measures to mitigate the adverse impacts of resource exploitation and climate change. This will reduce dependency on natural resources and foster economic diversification.

iv. People should promote dialogue, mediation and conflict resolution mechanisms that involve all stakeholders, especially government authorities, local communities, indigenous groups and private sector actors. This is crucial for building trust, resolving grievances and fostering peace in the region.

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