



SOCIOLOGICAL EXAMINATION OF ETHNIC CONFLICTS IN OBI LOCAL GOVERNMENT AREA OF NASARAWA STATE, NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

This paper looked at sociological examination of ethnic conflicts in Obi Local Government Area of Nasarawa state to find out the causes of ethnic conflicts and assess effectiveness of government intervention in curbing conflicts in the study area. One hundred and two (102) respondents were drawn from three (3) purposively selected wards in study area. The study reveals that majority of respondents sampled were between the ages of 20-30 years (84.3%), male (81.5%) and single (51%). Majority (56.6%) of them also had tertiary education and worked as artisans (38.2%). The findings further reveals that 52 % of respondents were of the opinion that poverty contributed to the crisis in their area and 41.18% of them believed that land dispute was the major cause of conflict in the study area. Again, 52.9% of the respondents indicated that government intervention in resolving crisis was not effective while 71.6% of respondents indicated that traditional and religious leaders interventions in resolving conflict was effective. The study concludes that poverty, unemployment and illiteracy were sociological conditions that caused conflict in the study area. It is recommended that government must learn to intervene early enough in conflicts at the rumor stage and involved traditional heads and religious leader in any negotiations between conflicting groups as means of resolving disputes and differences.

Keywords: Sociological, examination, ethnic, conflict and Obi Local Government

INTRODUCTION

Conflict may mean different things to different people all over the world; some people view it as existence of dispute or disagreement between two actors which may be individuals, groups, or organisations over issues of interests such as: values, beliefs, emotions, goals, space, positions, and scarce resources. But Dokun (2005), view it as “non negotiable issues that relate to ontological human needs that cannot be resolved or compromised”.

Conflicts have become so pervasive that there is hardly any nation in the world that has not been affected by one or two. In Nigeria, ethnicity and religious bigotry has become a fulcrum of various forms of nationalism, ranging from assertion of language, cultural autonomy, religious superiority and self-determination. All these result in to some forms of contextual discrimination characterized by lack of cordiality and mutual suspicion as it is among the ethnic and religious groups in Nigeria. In fact, this mutual suspicion and lack of cordiality among the various ethnic components explains why ethnic conflicts have become a permanent feature of Nigeria as a nation since 1980s to date as posited by Mohammed, (2004).

Undoubtedly Nigeria has experienced many disastrous ethnic conflicts, which have not only undermined and threatened the corporate existence of the pan-Nigeria agenda, but they have also frustrated efforts made towards achieving national development. Notable among such crises are the Maitatsine religious disturbances in parts of Kano and Maiduguri in the early 1980s; Kafanchan

College of Education Muslim-Christian riots; Kaduna Polytechnic Muslim-Christian skirmishes (1981-1982); The Cross vs. The Crescent conflict at the University of Ibadan (1981-1985), Jimeta-Yola religious disturbances (1984), and ZangoKataf crises in Kaduna State (1992). Yet other early ethno-religious conflicts include the Bulumkutu Christian-Muslim riots (1982); Usman Danfodio University Sokoto (1982); and the Muslim-Christian Clash during a Christian procession at Easter in Ilorin, Kwara State (1986).

The first leg of ethnic and religious riots in Nigeria in the democratic era was in July 1999, when some Oro cultists in Sagamu of Ogun State accused Hausa woman of coming out when the cultists were outside holding their service. This led to some altercations, which eventually led to full-blown crisis. Many people, majorly Hausa and Yoruba tribes lost their lives (Albert, 1999). The infamy was temporarily put on check only when a dusk to dawn curfew was imposed on the sleepy town of Sagamu. Unfortunately, as the infamy was put off in Sagamu, reprisal killings started in Kano, a major Hausa city which results into the death of many people and property worth billions of Naira were destroyed. When Kano city was settling down for peace, Lagos erupted with another orgy of violence, visibly as a mark of vengeance over the Kano mass killing of the Yoruba tribe. This time, the O'dua People Congress moved against the Hausa/Fulani traders in the popular 'Mile 12 markets' and for two days, the area was turned to a killing field (Mohammed, 2004).

At different levels and times people experience ethnic discrimination, people complain



of past and present ethnic discrimination, people demand for ethnic rights in their state particularly the conflicts in Jos, Ife/Modakeke saga, Fulani herdsmen crises in Benue and Ekiti state and Niger-Delta crises. Nasarawa state and particularly Obi local government is not spared from ethnic conflict which has become a cancer to meaningful development in most parts of this country. Alubo (2006) noted crisis in southern Nasarawa state in year 2001 where thousands of lives were lost and many houses belonging to Eggon and other tribes were razed down. This he said brought setbacks on the economic development of the people as returnees had to make fresh efforts rebuild their burnt houses. The rate of ethnic conflicts in Nigeria as examined above is so rampant such that the effects are said to be so great and can damp the spirit of unity, peace and harmony for meaningful national development.

It is based on this background that this study was carried out on a sociological examination of ethnic conflict in Obi Local Government Area of Nasarawa state to find out the causes of ethnic conflict and assess the effectiveness of government intervention in curbing conflict in Obi Local Government of Nasarawa state.

METHODOLOGY

This study was conducted in Nasarawa state of Nigeria with her capital located in Lafia. Nasarawa state has diverse ethnic groups such as Koro, Eggon, Alago, Tiv, Mada, just to mention a few.

The sampling techniques used for this study were cluster sampling, purposive sampling and a simple random sampling technique to captured; male, female, youth and aged people in the conflicts areas of Obi Local Government of Nassarawa state. In doing so, the population was first of all clustered into wards after which three (3) wards were purposively selected which were: Duduguru ward, Daddere ward, and Tudun- Adabu ward. These wards were selected to ensure representation of every ethnic group and also based on conflict recurrence in the area, followed by a simple random sampling technique which was used in selecting one hundred and twenty respondents which supposed to be the sample size for this study but unfortunately, one hundred and two (102) questionnaires were retrieved at the end of the study which made the study sample size one hundred and two (102). Data collected were analysed using descriptive statistic.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The finding of this study presented in Table 1 reveals that majority (84.3%) of respondents sampled were between the ages of 20 and 30 years. Similarly, 81.5% of the respondents were male and 51.0% were single. Table 1 again reveals that majority of respondents sampled had tertiary education (56.9%) and 38.2% worked as artisans.

Table 1: Distribution of Respondents based on Socioeconomic Characteristics n=102

Socioeconomic Characteristics	Frequency	Percentage
Age		
20-30 years	86	84.3
31-40 years	15	14.7
41-50 years	1	1.0
Gender		
Male	83	81.4
Female	19	18.6
Marital status		
Single	52	51.0
Married	41	40.2
Widowed	9	8.8
Level of education		
Primary	12	11.7
Secondary	32	31.4
Tertiary	58	56.9
Occupation		
Farming	22	21.6
Trading	19	18.6
Civil Servant	22	21.6
Artisan	39	38.2

Source: Field Survey, 2015



Moreover, the information in Table 2 shows that about 52% of the respondents were of the opinion that poverty contributed to the crisis in their area while 23.5% were of the view that unemployment contributed to the crisis in their area and 24.5% of the respondents believed that illiteracy was the cause of the crisis in the study area. This implies that abject poverty can make people violent and commit several forms of

atrocities as a way of providing solution to their poverty. This finding follows the assertion of Elaigwu (2004) who also looked at poverty as causes of conflict reported that; "condition of life are currently very hard for the average Nigerian. Breaking and looting of shops during religious crises, armed robbery, political violence, banditry and other forms of crime have virtually been legitimized by the logic of imperatives of survival.

Table 2: Distribution of Respondents based on Sociological Conditions that Contributed to Crisis n=102

Sociological Conditions	Frequency	Percentage
Poverty	53	52.0
Unemployment	24	23.5
Illiteracy	25	24.5
Total	102	100

Source: Field Survey, 2015

The data in Table 3 reveals that 41.2% of the respondents were of the view that land dispute was the cause of the conflict in the study area, 30.4 of the respondents believed it is political dominance from other tribes that causes the conflict, 23.5% of the respondents were of the view that ethnicity was the cause of the conflict. Similarly, 3.9% of the respondents believed that chieftaincy tussle was the causes of the conflict,

while 1% of the respondents view the conflict from the religion perspective. This implies that land is the major factor that causes dispute in the study area which may be attributed to importance people attached to land. This corroborates the findings of Nwankwo (2015) that land is the driver of conflict because land is a resource that means a lot to the people.

Table 3: Distribution of Respondents based on causes conflict n=102

Causes Conflict	Frequency	Percentage
Land dispute	42	41.2
Polities	31	30.4
Ethnicity	24	23.5
Chieftaincy	4	3.9
Religion	1	1.0
Total	102	100

Source: Field Survey, 2015

The data in Table 4 shows a large percentage (37.3%) of the respondents who believed that their farming activities were disrupted during the crisis, 29.4%opined that education was disrupted while 21.6% of the respondents also said that market was disrupted during the crisis, and 11.8% said that medical services were disrupted. This finding is in line with statement of former Nigeria president, Olusegun Obasanjo in 2004 that

"violence has reached unprecedented levels and hundreds have been killed with much more wounded or displaced from their homes on account of ethnic identification. Schooling for children has been disrupted and interrupted; business lost billions of naira and property worth much more destroyed".

Table 4: Distribution of Respondents based on Activities Disrupted during Crisis n=102

Activities Disrupted during Crisis	Frequency	Percentage
Farming	38	37.2
Education	30	29.4
Market	22	21.6
Medical services	12	11.8
Total	102	100

Source: Field Survey, 2015



Data presented in Table 5 show clearly the respondents' assessment of government intervention in resolving crisis. Forty-seven percent of the respondents sampled indicated that

government intervention was effective while 52.9% of the respondents indicated that government intervention in resolving crisis was not effective.

Table 5: Distribution of Respondents based on Assessment of Government Intervention in Resolving Crisis n=102

Assessment of Government Intervention	Frequency	Percentage
Effective	48	47.1
Not effective	54	52.9
Total	102	100.0

Source: Field Survey, 2015

Information in Table 6 reveals the respondents assessment of the traditional and religious leaders in resolving conflict in the study area. Seventy-one percent of the respondents sampled indicated that traditional and religious

leaders interventions in resolving the conflict was effective while 28.4% of the respondents indicated that traditional and religious leaders intervention in resolving crisis in the study area was not effective.

Table 6: Distribution of Respondents based on Assessment of Traditional and Religious Leaders Intervention in Resolving Conflict n=102

Assessment of Traditional Rulers and Religion Leaders	Frequency	Percentage
Effective	73	71.6
Not effective	29	28.4
Total	102	100.0

Source: Field Survey, 2015

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The study concludes that poverty, unemployment and illiteracy were sociological conditions that caused conflict in the study area which disrupted farming activities, system of education, market and medical services. And these have caused a lot of suffering and hardship for the people due to ineffective of government effort in resolving conflicts in Obi Local Government of Nasarawa state.

Based on the findings of this study the following recommendations were made;

1. Government should encourage dialogue and involved traditional heads and religious leader in any negotiations between conflicting groups as means of resolving disputes and differences.
2. Government must learn to intervene early enough in conflicts at the rumor stage.

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