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Article

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EFFECTS OF POLITICAL CONFLICTS ON THE SOCIO-ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT OF EBIRALAND, KOGI STATE OF NIGERIA

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Abstract

This study examines the effects of political conflicts on the socio-economic development of Ebiraland in Kogi State, Nigeria. It explores how persistent political rivalries and power struggles have disrupted economic activities, weakened governance, and strained social cohesion. Using a mixed-methods approach, interviews and analysis of socio-economic data, the research highlights how conflict has contributed to poor infrastructure, unemployment, and limited access to education and healthcare. The findings reveal that political instability occasioned by an array of unemployed youths remains a major barrier to development in Ebiraland. The paper not only brought to the fore the causes of political conflicts but also their effects on the socio-economic development. The study concludes that fostering inclusive governance and strengthening local conflict resolution mechanisms are critical to reversing the negative trends. These insights contribute to the broader discourse on the nexus between political stability and development in Ebiraland.

Keywords: Political Conflicts, Socio-economic Development, Political Instability, Communal Tension, Ebiraland.

Introduction

In Ebiraland, conflicts, particularly political conflicts, have pervaded the society to such an extent that the land appears helpless. Japa (2015) believes that the people of Ebiraland are today haunted by a paradox of their inability to harness the potential and aggregate ideas for stable growth; rather, they resort to self-immolation. If it is not one community against another, it is one youth gang versus another. The political conflicts in Ebiraland became a recurring issue since the first republic, where the Igbira Progressive Union (IPU) and Igbira Tribal Union (ITU)

had frontal confrontations. These conflicts were expressed using different platforms. These included youth gangsterism, restiveness, and clannishness. These became veritable avenues where scores were settled. The self-serving politicians of the land use these platforms to fan the embers of their political interests, which were hardly corporate (Audu, 2010). The dawn of party politics of the 1940s and 1950s in Epiraland brought about bitter rivalry between the Igbira Progressive Union (IPU), which later metamorphosed into the Tribal Union (ITU) and the Northern People's Congress (NPC). The violence that characterised this bitter rivalry spilt over to the Second Republic, where the National Party of Nigeria (NPN) and Unity Party of Nigeria (UPN) became bitter enemies. The same scenario played out during the ill-fated Third Republic of the Babangida era, where the Social Democratic Party (SDP) and the National Republican Convention (NRC) became sworn enemies. Similarly, the People Democratic Party (PDP) and All Nigerian People's Party (ANPP) pitched against each other before the decline of ANPP in 2003 with its loss of the gubernatorial election in Kogi State and in its place came the emergence of Action Congress (and later Action Congress of Nigeria). Thuggery, maiming, killing and burning of houses of political opponents became the striking features of these periods.

The political conflicts during this period of the first, second and fourth republics also witnessed the influx of sophisticated weapons, arms and ammunition into the land (Bello, 2016). Most important was the emergence of militant groups made up of idle and unemployed youths who were ready tools in the hands of the partisan political players and exclusivist clan irredentists. These militant groups were well-structured and well-organised. The leaders of these militant groups, through the use of arms and coercion, carved a niche for themselves. The militant groups also adopted various military tactics and strategies during the crises to intimidate and overcome their perceived enemies. The activities of these militant groups largely had an unprecedented impact on the political and socio-economic activities of Epiraland during the period under review. The impacts are what this study intends to assess vis-à-vis the remote and immediate causes of the crises, the course and effects. The aftermath of the assessment will generate some recommendations that, if adopted, will help mitigate the emergence of similar crises either in Epiraland or elsewhere.

Conceptual Analysis

Conflict: Conflict constitutes an inevitable aspect of human interaction and cannot be avoided. At the heart of social and political interactions are two constant and opposing tendencies – conflict and cooperation. Therefore, an inherent difference of people who live and interact with one another and pursue conflicting interests makes conflict inevitable (Ibrahim, 2022). Ibrahim (2022) opines that as human beings interact with each other in a social setting, and seek to promote their material well-being and survival amid scarce resources, they either cooperate for mutual benefits or disagree over the usage of factors of production and the process of production. However, when incompatible goals are pursued simultaneously by individuals, groups, or communities, conflict is said to exist (Ibrahim, 2022). Sadiq (2022) defines conflict as a situation in which two or more human persons desire goals which they perceive as being obtainable by one or the other, but not both. Conflicts can be explained through a dimensional lens. These include conflict as a form of perception, conflict as a feeling and conflict as an action. As a perception, Ibrahim (2022) and Sadiq (2022) identify that conflict is often the conviction that one's own needs be expressed through several emotions, including fear, anger, bitterness, sadness, hopelessness or the combination of these. They highlight that conflict involves action, which may be violent or destructive. The context of the above analysis shows that conflict is a product of disagreement or differing interests between individuals or groups that takes a violent

dimension, with the attendant consequence of loss of life and property. In his view, Herbert (2017) says disagreement and conflicts are inevitable everyday occurrences; their resolution can result in constructive change. He says conflicts are often analysed at different levels – interpersonal, group/community and national – and in terms of how the levels interact with each other. They can turn into violent conflict when there are inadequate channels for dialogue and disagreement, when dissenting voices and deeply held grievances cannot be heard and addressed; in environments of instability, injustice and fear (Herbert, 2017)

Socio-Economic Development

The socio-economic development is a process of quantitative, qualitative and structural changes as a result of actions undertaken as part of societal (economic) practice. These changes affect: material living conditions, economic structure and entrepreneurship, access to public goods and services, relations within a social system, the condition of the natural environment, and life satisfaction (Litwinski, 2017). The socio-economic development can generally be defined as a process of changes or improvement to social and economic conditions that affect an individual, organisation, or an entire country (Litwinski, 2017). Socio-economic development is the process of social and economic development in a society. Socio-economic development is measured with indicators, such as GDP, life expectancy, literacy and levels of employment. Socio-economic development can further be understood from the context of unemployment and income indices. If the unemployment rate is high, people have to work for industries that are lower than their abilities on a way lower pay scale. Changes brought about by socio-economic development in less-tangible factors are also considered, such as personal dignity, freedom of association, personal safety and freedom from fear of physical harm and the extent of participation in civil society (Szirmai, 2021). The principles of socio-economic development depend on the health, education, geographical and social environment, and political system. There are three core values of development: (a) sustenance, (b) self-esteem, and (c) freedom. Socio-economic status is typically broken into three levels (high, middle, and low) to describe the three places a family or an individual may fall in relation to others. Socio economics is primarily concerned with the interplay between social processes and economic activity within a society. Social economics may attempt to explain how a particular social group or socio-economic class behave within a society, including their actions as consumers.

Theoretical Framework

The Relational/Vengeance Theory was adopted for this study. This theory attempts to explain violent conflicts between groups by exploring sociological, political, economic, religious and historical relationships between such groups. The belief is that cultural and value differences as well as group interests all influence relationships between individuals and groups in different ways. Thus, several conflicts grow out of a history of conflict between groups that has led to the development of negative stereotypes, racial intolerance and discrimination (Lamorde and Ibebunjo, 2022). The differences in value invariably create the “we” and “others” dichotomy: The fact that “others” are perceived as different makes us feel they are entitled to less or are inferior because of values. This disrupts the flow of communication between us and them and, to that extent, twists perceptions that we have about each other (Lamorde and Ibebunjo, 2022). Okereke (2011) notes that sect members attracted several descriptions where they operated based on the perceptions of the local population. In some communities, where it existed, the sect and its members were described as terrorists and persons with psychiatric challenges (Okereke, 2011).

The state and other members of West African Societies who are targets of terrorist groups' violence may indeed find it difficult to understand the sects penchant for blood-letting on the one hand, the former group becomes in this context the "we" and all efforts are being made to secure it from savagery of the "others", the terrorists. On the other hand, the latter groups bond either by the common purpose of fighting the "unbelievers" for Allah, or a feeling of deprivation or both, see the remaining members of the West African Societies as the "others". In this circumstance, mutual antagonism exists and can be violently expressed. On the part of the terrorist groups, the killing of members by government security forces, the "others" attracts reprisal from it, the "we". In the context of Ebiraland, political rivalries are frequently driven by personal vendettas, clannish alignments, and a desire to avenge past political losses or marginalisation. These vengeance-based conflicts undermine social cohesion, disrupt governance, and divert resources from development initiatives. Thus, the theory aptly explains how the persistence of politically motivated feuds hampers socio-economic development in the land.

Background to Political Conflicts in Ebiraland

Political conflicts in Ebiraland that snowballed into perpetual orgy of violence, bloodletting and terror took its root from the down of party politics. This became accentuated between 1999-2007 when political parties in Ebiraland. PDP, ANPP and alter ACN began frontal confrontation, Ebiraland was to say the least, sacked several people were coldly hacked down, some number of people were maimed and deformed; properties particularly houses, vehicles, shops and other valuable were burnt down and wasted as they were casted into atavistic nonsense (Okene, 2008).

Various modes of conflict management intervention were employed (i.e formal and informal modes), yet the conflicts did not abate. Aside from the usual deployment of law enforcement agents to the troubled spots, Tribunals, panels, and committees were also put in place by the Kogi State government to investigate, identify culprits and come up with possible recommendations that could mitigate future occurrences, such possible recommendations that mitigate future occurrences, such includes the Justice Ochimana Panel on the violent conflicts of 2002, that of Chris Ali Committee who probed the recurring conflicts in Ebiraland and came up with a ban on masquerade activities in Ebiraland; Reverend Anthony Akande Peace Committee on the 2008 conflicts in Ebiraland, etc were of no effect, perhaps recommendations from these panels and committee were not implemented, and so, the conflicts persisted. In addition to the above panels, concerned Elders of Ebiraland under the aegis of Kogi Central Elders Forum met to chart ways of resolving the conflicts. The Kogi Central Media Practitioners Association equally did their bit to make peace reign. Ebira Youth Congress (EYC), Ebira Peoples Association, Front For Ebira solidarity, the Club 10 of Nigeria, Kogi Central Community Forum, etc, have all made frantic efforts to put Ebira back on track, to no avail. Therefore, this work is to critically examine the causes of the conflicts, their impacts on the socio-economic development of Ebiraland.

Although scholarly work about various forms of conflicts in Ebiraland abound, none has focused the impact of such conflicts on socio-economic development of the land on the period of this study beyond the existence of newspaper reports on conflicts in Ebiraland, no systematic study dealing with political and related conflicts in Ebiraland that have existed since 2007. We had a PhD thesis on the "Political Leadership and Conflicts in Ebiraland" by M.S. Audu, "Crises and Militancy in Ebiraland" by Bello, M.A. and "History of Party Politics in Ebiraland" by Suberu, O.A.

Causes of Political Conflicts in Ebiraland

There seems to exist a permanent feature in Ebira politics that has continued to increase the level of violent conflict in the land. The tendency for the party members to factionalize has created opportunity for the recruitment of thugs to defend factional interest. The intra-party rivalry in Ebiraland has introduced more violence in the society than any other factor (Bello, 2016). Sanni (2004) says the seeds of internecine “warfare” and the use of violence to secure and retain power, however defined, were sown in the ITU/IPU days of bitter rivalry and congenital hatred. The major national political parties that took over in succession from these precursor political parties regrettably inherited this syndrome of politics with bitterness. The point being made here is that bickering, mutual rancour, and bloody violence became part and parcel of partisan politicking in Ebiraland, and all the processes leading to ascension to power in all facets of violent conflicts are a common feature of a state of high unemployment, high-level poverty, and idleness. As earlier observed, this provides a fertile recruitment ground for thugs and other miscreants by politicians to intimidate, harass and physically assault political opponents. The proliferation of arms in Ebiraland gives the impetus to these miscreants to unleash mayhem on themselves and innocent people in what they label an “attack”. It was a situation where one gang of a ward or quarter mobilised its colleagues to attack another quarter to show supremacy.

Poor family upbringing has also been fingered to be a reason for the army of irresponsible youths that are all over the place. Some of these children had the misfortune of not being given proper training to uphold Ebira's valuesystem of being hardworking, honest, respectful of constituted authority, and being one's brother's keeper. The high rate of divorce among couples causes the offspring of such couples to grow into miscreantsoften linked to these spates of violence. Ebira chieftaincy institutions have also come under scrutiny. Unfortunately, our recent history hardly gives any hope that we can learn to live peacefully together. If it is not a clash over Ohinoyi stool, it is Ohi stool. If one clan is not accusing the other of trying to establish its hegemony over it, it is in disagreement over nomenclature. In many communities, both political leaders and traditional rulers work in harmony for a common goal. In Ebiraland, both do not enjoy such synergy; they are always suspicious of one another. Ebira traditional festivals, hitherto peaceful and entertaining ones, have been taken over by hoodlums. The celebration of the festival now serves as an avenue to settle scores between one gang or club and another. Despite government's clampdown on the celebrations, the hoodlums defied the orders and went ahead to celebrate the festivals that would always end up in bloody clashes.

Impact of Political Conflicts on Socio-Economic Development

An average Ebiraman cannot be said to be happy over the frequent political conflicts in Ebiraland, as it's a drawback on the polity. The image of Ebiraland and its people has been battered seriously. Ebira's highly prized cultural festivals are not only adulterated but bastardised. This is what Suleiman (2017) refers to as a cultural nuisance. These conflicts have resulted in the denial of job placement for Ebira indigenes at Obajana Cement Company in Kogi State. A non-Ebira is wary of an average Ebiraman whom he sees as vandalistic and violent. No sane person would encourage a tourist to visit the land during the celebration of a festival, which ordinarily would have fetched the area money from the tourist. There is no denying the fact that the areas affected are depopulated. By implication, Ebiraland is depopulated. Apart from the massive loss of lives, some have migrated to neighbouring towns and vowed never to return. Some have temporarily relocated from troubled spots, while some have become refugees and hostages in their own homes (Suleiman, 2006). The aesthetic value of Ebiraland,

which caused the former Governor Audu of Kogi State to refer to it as “small London” (Graphics 1999), is almost gone. Magnificent buildings have been lost to inferno ignited by the miscreants. At the slightest misunderstanding, for which dialogue would have resolved, the beautiful buildings that make the site of Ebiraland to behold were usually the first target. Economic investment in Ebiraland is now looking difficult. No one in the right frame of mind goes to a place where there is no peace to have a business investment. The series of conflicts, particularly political conflicts in Ebiraland, had scared away potential investors. Some who were already there are now having a rethink whether to continue staying in spite of the situation or not (Japa, 2011).

Managing Conflicts in Ebiraland

The world over, particularly in Africa, there are various mechanisms for managing conflicts. These include traditional, formal or official mechanisms and informal mechanisms. Conflict as a phenomenon has become an inevitable part of human existence, so its management has also become imperative, and since not all conflicts can be resolved via traditional mechanisms, the conflicts in Ebiraland require a high level of mechanisms to manage. Traditional mechanisms that involve the mediation of the elders require the willingness of the parties in conflict to agree to the dispute settlements. In most cases, this method in Ebiraland over time proved to be ineffective due to the magnitude and incessant nature of the conflict and the delay in the core value system of the land. But it was sometimes used depending on the degree and the magnitude of the conflict. However, the conflicts in Ebiraland had grown beyond the limit of traditional mechanisms as means of mediation; hence, all the various mechanisms of conflict management, which included force, were employed.

Traditional Intervention: The traditional rulers in Ebiraland under the headship of the Ohinoyi of Ebiraland, Alhaji (Dr.) Ado Ibrahim set up a committee for the crisis in Ihima. There was also an ad hoc committee on the reconciliation of all warring clans in Ihima; the committee was headed by his eminence Alhaji Ahmad Badamasi. All these efforts yielded no positive result as the crisis continued unabated.

Individual and Organisational Intervention: The concerned elders of Ebiraland under the aegis of Kogi Central Forum (KCF), chaired by Dauudi Alhaji Musa Etudaye, met at the Abdulrahman Okene Town Hall, Okene in 2009 when the crisis had almost engulfed the land to explore means of resolving the conflicts. However, their resolutions fell short of what the community needed for peace to prevail. Ebira Youth Congress (EYC), more than any socio-cultural organisation in Ebiraland, organised services of conferences, seminars and symposia where prominent and seasoned scholars like Professors Abere, Mariyetu Teunfe, Abdulsalam, etc were brought to chart a way forward. EYC also engaged the government at all levels for a permanent solution. Organisations like Pal Collective of Ebiraland, De Club 10 of Nigeria, Front for Ebira Solidarity (FES), Ebira Social Front (ESF) and several others woke up to the challenge via writings and physical delegations to the government just to see to the amicable settlement of the crisis.

Role of the Kogi State Government: Put a committee in place comprising the Ohinoyi of Ebiraland who was the paramount ruler and chairman of Ebira Traditional Council, the local government chairmen, Area Commander of police, Chief of State Security Services (now known as DSS), Head paramilitary agencies - Customs services, immigration services, Prison services and Civil Defence to come up with meaningful suggestions that would mitigate future occurrence. It was believed by concerned Ebira indigenes that this security structure could not

maintain law and order, either that they compromised their responsibilities, or the local government chairmen starved the committee of the much-needed funds to accomplish their mission.

Disarmament Approach: Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration (DDR) was essentially developed and enhanced by the United Nations Peacekeeping Doctrine to sustain peace support operations, leading to military containment of war with long-term expectations in areas of rehabilitation and rebuilding the society politically and economically (Bello, 2016). In Ebiraland, the proliferation of light weapons, sophisticated arms and ammunition made the conflicts more difficult to contain. The police became inconsequential in the internal security operations during the conflicts in Ebiraland, because of their inability to manage security information, on the other and, and their tendency towards corruption. The Ebira Peace Initiative Movement was floated for the sole aim of disarming the youth. Appreciable effort was accomplished on this. A good number of actors on the field were demobilised with the cooperation of the executive chairman of Okene Local Government Council (Audu, 2009). Army Task Force in Ebira Conflicts: More successes in bringing to an end the crises with the setting up of the Army Task Force. It made a following to the success recorded by the Okene local government council, and happily, the area began to enjoy relative peace.

Findings

The following are the findings of the study:

- i. One of the major findings of this study is the division of the Ebira polity along clan lines for political gains.
- ii. The unleashing of violence on innocent and suspected persons by the masquerades and the youths is also connected to political gains.
- iii. The army of unemployed, able-bodied, and hungry ones was exploited by the politicians for political gains.
- iv. The chains of political conflicts have negatively impacted the socio-economic development of Ebiraland.
- v. The victims of violent political conflicts in Ebiraland are mainly women and children. Several women turned widows with added responsibilities of children's upbringing, in addition to industrious women having their properties and markets destroyed when properties and markets were torched by irate youth groups.
- vi. The state has limited capability to fashion and implement appropriate policies that can address the social malaise.

Conclusion

The study has examined the complex relationship between political conflicts and socio-economic development in Ebiraland, revealing that persistent political instability has significantly hindered progress in key areas such as education, infrastructure, public service delivery, and economic growth. The findings indicate that political rivalries, clannish tension, and exclusionary governance practices have not only weakened development initiatives but also deepened social divisions with the land. The evidence suggests that sustainable development in Ebiraland cannot be achieved without addressing the root causes of political conflict. Promoting inclusive governance, empowering traditional institutions and fostering civic education are critical steps towards peace and stability. Moreover, youth empowerment, institutional reforms, and transparent political processes must be prioritised to restore peace, public trust, and encourage community-driven development. Ultimately, resolving political conflict is not merely

a political necessity but a socio-economic imperative. Without peace and stability, the aspirations of Ebiraland and its people for meaningful development will remain elusive.

Recommendations

For Ebiraland to return to what it used to be, a peaceful and prosperous land, the following suggestions are made:

- i. Political stakeholders in Ebiraland should adopt inclusive governance practices that reflect the diverse interests of the local population. Power-sharing mechanisms and equitable political representation can help reduce tensions and promote stability.
- ii. Traditional leaders and community-based organisations like Ebira Renaissance Group (ERG), Ebira Youth Congress (EYC), Front for Ebira Solidarity (FES), Ebira Peoples Association (EPA), among others, should be empowered to mediate conflicts and promote peaceful coexistence. Their roles in dialogue conflict resolution and grassroots mobilisation are vital for social cohesion.
- iii. Government civil society actors like Ebira Human Rights Defence should establish mechanisms for detecting early signs of political conflicts and responding proactively to prevent escalation.
- iv. A high rate of youth unemployment is both a cause and a consequence of political instability. Targeted vocational training, entrepreneurship programmes, and youth inclusion in governance can reduce their vulnerability to political manipulation.
- v. Enhancing transparency in resource allocation and political processes can help rebuild public trust and reduce grievances that often fuel conflict.
- vi. Regular inter-community forums and civic education campaigns should be conducted to promote mutual understanding, tolerance, and political maturity among the populace.
- vii. Ensuring that political crimes and electoral violence are persecuted without bias can deter future offenses and reinforce the role of the law.

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