

Violence: Effect on Community Development with focus on Edikwu communities in Apa Local Government Area, Benue State

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ABSTRACT

Objective: This paper investigated the influence of violence and its effect on community development with focus on Edikwu communities in Apa L G A. The study was guided by two objectives and two corresponding research questions. **Method:** Descriptive survey research design was adopted for the study. The population size of the study was 200 adult population of male and female residents of Edikwu communities randomly selected from the seventeen (17) communities that constitute Edikwu clan. Questionnaire was the instrument used for data collection. **Results:** The findings of the study revealed among others that challenges such as unemployment, limited economic opportunities, poor road networks, water scarcity, limited health-care facilities and low literacy levels hinder community progress and development. **Novelty:** The study recommended that there is need for social intervention programme to provide opportunities for individuals within the communities especially those who are not gainfully unemployed. This will help provide economic opportunities for them thereby reducing violence and conflict and adequate inputs should be made by both government and individuals such as establishing community-based conflict resolution mechanisms, encouraging inter-ethnic and inter-religious dialogue, engaging the help of traditional rulers and also empowering women and youths. All these can promote community development and reduce violent activities among individuals in the community.

INTRODUCTION

The interface between man and his socio-physical environment involves a continuous process of dependence and interdependence which has the potential of breeding contradiction and conflict. Violent conflict refers to the fact that the parties use lethal violence to gain control over some disputed and perceived indivisible resource, such as a piece of land or local political power. Demarcation along such lines often causes 'sons of the soil' conflicts where the indigenes perceive themselves as the rightful owners of the land [1].

Depicted that communal violence is a situation in which the relationship between members of one ethnic community and the other is characterized by lack of cordiality and mutual understanding which is usually the result of suspicion, fear, and tendency of confrontation [2]. The nature and composition of the state are very important and central to the nature of the relationship that exists within it and most importantly, the disposition of the government in handling the unfriendly relationship wherever it exists. In communities that exists or evolved on platform of consensus and fair play, there is the tendency to have a serene domestic politics, but the opposite is the case.

The situation in Edikwu communities in Benue State is such that most often boycott the due course of legitimization which poses serious consequences on its stability at the

present political dispensation. To rural communities' dwellers, communal restiveness has become despicable acts that are often seen as being perpetrated by a significant proportion of miscreants in various communities and seems no longer to be ignored. These unwholesome acts are usually the product of political influences; where wealthy and highly placed Nigerians anoint their protégé, unworthy and undeserved sons into positions of trust and responsibility (elected or appointed) violating the laid down rules and party guidelines for choosing and nominating candidates into governmental position. Community development as a key variable in this research needs adequate attention in order to identify its effect on rural communities.

Community development may be seen as the transformation of a society with regard to social and economic dimensions. Socio-economic development incorporates public concerns in developing social policy and economic initiatives. The ultimate objective of community development is to bring about sustained improvement in the well-being of the individual, groups, family, community, and society at large. It involves sustained increase in the economic standard of living of a country's population, normally accomplished by increasing its stocks of physical and human capital and thus improving its technology. Udu and Edeh citing O'Neil described the concept of community development using the indicators or the components such as gross domestic product (GDP), life expectancy, literacy level, employment level, health level as well as the less tangible factors such as personal dignity, freedom of association, safety/security and, extent of participation in civil society.

Rural development concept is key in order to be able to underscore the role communal conflicts play, especially in negatively affecting socio-economic development. Rural underscores an area is described as settlement which is depicted by rural communal style of life, occupational structure, social organization and settlement pattern [3][4]. Rural is noticeably agricultural, its settlement system consists of villages or homesteads. Socially it signifies greater inter dependence among people, more deeply rooted community life and a slow-moving rhythm of life built around nature and natural phenomenon; and occupationally it is highly dependent on agrarian, animal enterprises, tree crops and related activities. Thus, community development means an ever-evolving process.

It is a wholistic term which contains varieties of elements, social, economic, technological and natural spheres of human life and activities. Community development describes noticeable changes in all these components. But such changes should take place in a mutually supporting relationship so as to generate organic and optimum development. Achievement of all these needs a peaceful atmosphere devoid of conflicts.

The Socio-economic development of Africa as a whole have being impacted negatively because development cannot thrive in an environment constantly witnessing violence, instability and insecurity [5]. Some of these impacts are unemployment, poverty and problem of reconstruction, death and loss of lives, displacement and humanitarian crisis [6]. The effects of violence on the development livelihood of the inhabitants in a community or country has led to reduction of revenue being experienced as a result taxes,

charges collected by government agencies for developmental purposes are scarcely generated and loss of human lives which reduces the agile work force as a result of casualties [7].

Statement of the Problem

Over the years, there has been occasional eruption of violent conflicts among the people of Edikwu community. Villages in Edikwu have constantly engaged in serious squabble for land which degenerates into land and boundary disputes. It is the confrontational nature of the conflicts which arises from the struggle over scarce resources like land, and the struggle for power and control of leadership in the form of chieftaincy tussle. These confrontational violent conflicts pose negative implications on the development of Edikwu communities. As such, there has not been any meaningful development in Edikwu communities. Unfortunately, Edikwu communities are among the few communities in Benue State where the government presence is not seriously felt as regards to be provision of basic infrastructural facilities and social amenities needed by the community. The outbreak of communal violence in Edikwu communities resulted from the struggle for power and leadership struggle which have been over-stretched and degenerated into group affairs as well as reaching the climax whereby lives and property are wantonly destroyed. The occurrence of the communal conflict in the community poses adverse effects not just on development but the entirety of lifestyle of the people of Edikwu.

Objectives of the Study

The aim of this study is to determine violence: its effect on community development with focus on Edikwu communities in Apa L G A. The specific objectives were to:

1. Identify the challenges to community development of indigenes in Edikwu communities in Apa L. G. A.;
2. Identify the possible means of reducing violence and achieving development in Edikwu communities in Apa L. G. A.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided the study.

1. What are the challenges to community development of indigenes in Edikwu communities in Apa L. G. A.?
2. What are the possible means of reducing violence and achieving development in Edikwu communities in Apa L. G. A.?

Community Development

The concept of community development has been defined in different ways. A community is seen as a group of people with similar identity and history and live in a definite geographical area. Community is defined in myriad ways: in geographic terms, such as a neighborhood or town ("place based" or communities of place definitions), or in social terms, such as a group of people sharing common chat rooms on the Internet, a national professional association or a labor union (communities of interest definitions). Many scholars trace the origin of modern community development as a discipline to post-World War II reconstruction efforts to improve less developed countries [8]. Others

cite the American “war on poverty” of the 1960s with its emphasis on solving neighborhood housing and social problems as a significant influence on contemporary community development [9]. This indicates that the origin of community development is actually old.

Community development has been defined as a group of people reaching a decision to initiate a social action process to change their economic, social, cultural and environmental situation [10]. By the above definition, the concept was viewed from the perspective of activities carried out by a group of people leaving in a particular geographical area with a common basic aim of initiating and implementing those activities that will improve their life style in the area. Corroborating the above, community development can only occur when the people in a given community come together and work cooperatively to improve their collective well-being in the community. It improves the ability of communities to collectively make better decisions about the use of resources such as infrastructure, labour and knowledge and relies on interaction between people and joint action, rather than individual activity, what some sociologists call “collective agency” [11].

In another perspective, community development is a process where people are united with those of governmental authorities to improve the economic, social and cultural conditions of the communities and the communities are integrated into the life of the nation enabling them to contribute fully to national progress (Briggs). This means that a community itself engages in a process aimed at improving the social, economic and environmental situation of the community [12]. It is the process by which the efforts of a people are united with those of government authorities to improve the social, economic, social cultural conditions of the communities to integrate these two communities into the life of the nation and to enable them to contribute fully to national progress [13]. This is where community members come together to take collective action and generate solutions to common problems. Community development therefore seeks to empower individuals and groups of people with the skills they need to effect change within their communities. These skills are often created through the formation of social groups working for a common agenda.

Challenges to Community Development of Indigenes in Benue State

The following are the challenges to community development in Benue State which include the following:

Youth Unemployment and Poverty

Benue State occupies the 21st position out of the 36 states of the federation, with a poverty rate of 32.9%. The indices for measuring poverty by the NBS are based on access to education, health and basic services, employment, assets, and income (NBS, 2023). The rising rate of youth unemployment is one of the causes of social crimes like prostitution, armed robbery, oil bunkering, Internet fraud, drug addiction, trafficking, rape, kidnapping, and all facets of violence [14]. Unemployment is associated with economic deprivation, frustration, and helplessness, which lures many youths into violent crimes, which is not only a criminal act but a dangerous misadventure. Youth unemployment in

Benue State is attributed to factors such as the growing urban labour force, outdated school curricula, and a lack of employable skills. Rural-urban migration is driven by push-pull factors, such as man-land ratio pressure and climate underemployment. Infrastructural facilities and social amenities in urban centres make rural life unattractive. Nigeria's liberal bias in education contributes to the lack of entrepreneurial skills among graduates. Rapid expansion of the educational system also increases the supply of educated manpower, further contributing to youth unemployment.

The Desperation or 'do or die' Politics among Benue Politicians

Youth unemployment in Benue State is attributed to politicians' desperation to win elections and occupy political offices, leading to violence in the political landscape. This "do or die" politics, which became more concerning after the return to civil rule in 1999, has been exemplified by thuggery, violence, blackmail, and vendetta. Politics is seen as a lucrative business in Nigeria, and some politicians use violence to maintain power and influence. This do-or-die policy has resulted in numerous politically motivated assassinations.

Proliferation of Small and Light Weapons

The proliferation of small arms and light weapons is adjudged to be the most immediate security challenge to individuals, societies, and states worldwide, fueling civil wars, organised criminal violence, insurgency, and terrorist activities that pose great obstacles to sustainable security and development. The lengthy and porous borders across Nigeria make the country both an entry and exit route for small arms and light weapons proliferation, including countries like Benin, Cameroun, Chad, Gabon, Guinea-Bissau, Niger, and Togo, among others [15]. There are enough weapons to be shared around, and people therefore tend to make use of them for their own personal gain.

Weak Security System

This is a major contributor to the level of insecurity in Nigeria, and this can be attributed to a number of factors, which include inadequate funding of the police and other security agencies, a lack of modern equipment both in weaponry and training, poor welfare of security personnel, and inadequate personnel [15]. According to Olonisakin, the police-population ratio in Nigeria is 1:45, which falls below the standard set by the United Nations. The implication of this is that Nigeria is grossly under policed, which partly explains the inability of the Nigerian Police Force to effectively combat crimes and criminality in the country.

Pervasive Material Inequalities and Injustices

A major factor that contributes to the security challenge in Nigeria is the growing awareness of inequalities and disparities in life chances, which lead to violent reactions by a large number of people. There is a general perception of marginalisation by a section of the people in areas of government development policies and political patronage, and these are triggers of disaffection, resentment, and revolt [15]. The incessant strikes by labour and professional groups and demonstrations by civil society groups are mainly due to pervasive material inequalities and unfairness. Their agitations are aimed at drawing public sympathy for their struggle for just and fair treatment by the government.

RESEARCH METHOD

Descriptive survey research was adopted for the study. Descriptive survey describes the relationships among variables of the study. According to Ivypana, descriptive survey allows the researcher to collect and describe data on various variables and examine the relationships among them. The population size of the study was 200 adult population of male and female residents of Edikwu communities randomly selected from the seventeen (17) communities that constitute Edikwu clan. Questionnaire was the instrument used for data collection. The research instrument underwent face and content validation before adoption and administering the instrument for the pilot test. Reliability test was carried out using 30 copies of the questionnaire and the result was above 0.5 which indicated the instrument was instrument. Descriptive statistics was used to analyse the data.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

Table 1. Challenges to Community Development.

S/N	Statements	SA	A	D	SD	n	FX	\bar{x}	STD	Decision
		4	3	2	1	184				
1	Unemployment is a significant challenge to community development	84	63	13	24	184	575	3.13	0.63	Agreed
2	Limited economic opportunities affect community growth	88	36	19	41	184	539	2.93	0.43	Agreed
3	Poor road networks hinder access to market and services	67	63	33	21	184	544	2.96	0.46	Agreed
4	Water scarcity is a significant challenge	50	79	51	4	184	543	2.95	0.45	Agreed
5	Limited health-care facilities affect community well-being	32	101	32	19	184	541	2.94	0.44	Agreed
6	Inadequate educational infrastructure hinders learning	43	61	72	8	184	507	2.76	0.26	Disagreed
7	Low literacy levels hinder community progress	88	36	19	41	184	539	2.93	0.43	Agreed
	Weighted mean							2.93		

Key: Strongly Agreed (SA), Agreed (A), Disagreed (D) and Strongly Disagreed (SD), n = Number of Retrieved Copies of Questionnaire, \bar{X} = Mean and (Weighted mean = 2.93).

Table 1 shows the responses of adult population of males and females on the challenges to community development. Out of the seven items listed, six items produced high mean scores, which were above the average weighted mean of 2.93. These items include item 1: Unemployment is a significant challenge to community development

(\bar{x} =3.13; SD=0.63), item 3: Poor road networks hinder access to market and services (\bar{x} =2.96; SD=0.46), item 4: Water scarcity is a significant challenge (\bar{x} =2.95; SD=0.45), item 5: Limited health-care facilities affect (\bar{x} =2.94; SD=0.44), item 2: Limited economic opportunities affect community growth (\bar{x} =2.93; SD=0.43) and item 7: Low literacy levels hinder community progress (\bar{x} =2.93; SD=0.43). On the other hand, one item produced low mean scores which were below the weighted mean of 2.93 which is item 6: Inadequate educational infrastructure hinders learning (\bar{x} =2.76; SD=0.26). The weighted mean of 2.93 and above is considered as the mean rate of the challenges to community development in the study areas. Above all, the highest mean score was discovered from item 1 on unemployment is a significant challenge to community development. This is not far from the popular saying that an ideal man is the devils workshop. From the analysis, the study revealed that item 1, 2, 3, 4, 5 and 7 was strongly agreed by the respondents, while item 6 was strongly disagreed as challenges to community development.

Table 2. Possible Means of Reducing Violence and Achieving Development.

S/N	Statements	SA 4	A 3	D 2	SD 1	n 184	FX	\bar{x}	STD	Decision
1	Establishing community-based conflict resolution mechanisms can reduce violence	96	61	21	6	184	615	3.34	0.84	Agreed
2	Traditional rulers should play a key role in conflict resolution	86	53	32	13	184	580	3.15	0.65	Disagreed
3	Government should provide support for peace building initiatives	103	53	20	8	184	619	3.36	0.86	Agreed
4	Inter-ethnic and inter-religious dialogue can foster understanding and peace	83	64	24	13	184	585	3.18	0.68	Disagreed
5	Training community members in conflict resolution skills is essential	94	66	8	16	184	606	3.29	0.79	Agreed
6	Encouraging entrepreneurship can reduce unemployment	112	44	20	8	184	628	3.41	0.91	Agreed

7	Infrastructure development can boost economic growth	68	67	34	15	184	556	2.97	0.47	Disagreed
8	Strengthening security agencies can reduce violence	94	54	30	6	184	604	3.28	0.78	Agreed
9	Empowering women and youths can promote community development	76	49	32	27	184	542	2.95	0.45	Disagreed
Weighted mean								3.21		

Key: Strongly Agreed (SA), Agreed (A), Disagreed (D) and Strongly Disagreed (SD), n = Number of Retrieved Copies of Questionnaire, \bar{X} =Mean and (Weighted mean = 3.21).

Table 2 shows the responses of adult population of males and females on the possible means of reducing violence and achieving development. Out of the nine items listed, five items produced high mean scores, which were above the average weighted mean of 3.21. These items include item 6: Encouraging entrepreneurship can reduce unemployment (\bar{x} =3.41; SD=0.91), item 3: Government should provide support for peace building initiatives (\bar{x} =3.36; SD=0.86), item 1: Establishing community-based conflict resolution mechanisms can reduce violence (\bar{x} =3.34; SD=0.84), item 5: Training community members in conflict resolution skills is essential (\bar{x} =3.29; SD=0.79) and item 8: Strengthening security agencies can reduce violence (\bar{x} =3.28; SD=0.78). On the other hand, four item produced low mean scores which were below the weighted mean of 3.21. These items include item 4: Inter-ethnic and inter-religious dialogue can foster understanding and peace (\bar{x} =3.18; SD=0.68), item 2: Traditional rulers should play a key role in conflict resolution (\bar{x} =3.15; SD=0.65), item 7: Infrastructure development can boost economic growth (\bar{x} =2.97; SD=0.47) and item 9: Empowering women and youths can promote community development (\bar{x} =2.95; SD=0.45). The weighted mean of 3.21 and above is considered as the mean rate of the possible means of reducing violence and achieving development in the study areas. Above all, the highest mean score was discovered from item 6 on encouraging entrepreneurship can reduce unemployment. When individuals in the community are gainfully employed, it would reduce the rate of violence and menace in the society.

Discussion

For research question 1, the study revealed that the respondents agreed with all the challenges to community development which include unemployment, limited economic opportunities, poor road networks, water scarcity, limited health-care facilities and low literacy levels with the exception of item 6 as seen on Table 1.

In line with the findings of research question 2, the respondents indicated that establishing community-based conflict resolution mechanisms can reduce violence. In

addition, the respondents added that the Government should provide support for peace, training community members in conflict resolution skills, Encouraging entrepreneurship thereby reducing unemployment and strengthening security agencies as well can reduce violence.

However, the respondents do not see the need for engaging traditional rulers in playing key role towards resolving conflict. Similarly, inter-ethnic and inter-religious dialogue, infrastructure development and empowering women and youths were not seen as possible ways for conflict resolution.

CONCLUSION

Fundamental Finding : The crucial role and critical position of communal violence in the rural communities of Edikwu communities of Benue State cannot be overemphasized. It is on this premise that this research sought to find out one of the major issues that have affected the rural communities in Edikwu, Benue State from delivering on community development mandate which communal conflict have actually deterred in the most recent times. The study revealed that unemployment is a significant challenge to community development including limited economic opportunities, poor road networks, water scarcity, limited health-care facilities and low literacy levels hinder community progress. **Implication :** These findings imply that if unemployment, infrastructural decay, and social deficiencies persist, the communities in Edikwu will continue to experience setbacks in their efforts toward sustainable development. The prevalence of violence and lack of economic opportunities not only disrupt peace but also weaken the administrative and social structures necessary for progress. Therefore, addressing these challenges is essential for restoring stability and fostering inclusive community growth. **Limitation :** The study was limited to the Edikwu communities of Benue State, which may restrict the generalization of its findings to other rural areas facing similar communal challenges. In addition, the reliance on self-reported data through questionnaires could be subject to personal bias and incomplete disclosure of sensitive issues related to violence and community relations. **Future Research :** Future studies should explore comparative analyses between Edikwu and other communities affected by communal violence to identify patterns and broader implications for rural development. Further research could also investigate the role of government intervention, traditional institutions, and youth empowerment programs in mitigating violence and promoting sustainable community development.

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