



Modeling Perennial Communal Land Conflict in Nigeria: A Study of Nchoko Igbeagu Izzi, Ebonyi State

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Abstract

This paper focused on modeling perennial communal land conflict in Nigeria: A study of Nchoko Igbeagu Izzi, Ebonyi State. The paper looked at the concept elucidation of conflict, land conflict, perennial communal conflict, conflict management and perennial land conflict management. It examined various consequences of conflict. The paper identified, developed and classified major models to conflict management approach into traditional, modern and trad-modern approaches in management of perennial land conflict in Nchoko Igbeagu Izzi, Ebonyi State. The paper was anchored on Greed-Grievance Theory. Research design adopted for the study was both qualitative and quantitative. Primary data were generated through interview and focused group discussion while secondary data was gotten from textbooks and journals. Content Analytical Approach was used to analyze the data. From findings made through oral interview, it was observed that communal land conflict usually burst during planting season of the year and that conflict occurs due to injustice and domination. The implications of this are that production is reduced, supply of goods and services are halted and a lot of attacks were witnessed. The paper concludes that leaders at all levels should be transparent and impartial in handling complaints. However, based on the findings it was recommended that leaders at all level in the community should be transparent and justly handle land complaint, negotiation instead of confrontation should be adopted in conflict resolution and mediators should avoid kick-back in conflict settlement.

Keywords: Conflict; Land Conflict; Perennial Communal Conflict; Conflict Management and Communal Land Conflict Management

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Introduction

Igbeagu is one out of the six (6) autonomous communities in Izzi Local Government Area of Ebonyi State. The community shares boundary with Amachi community (South), Cross River State (East), Mgbalukwu and Ndieze communities (North) and Igbeagu-Unuphu/Inyimegu-unuphu communities (West). Occupations of Igbeagu people are majorly farming, trading, craftsmanship and civil/public service. The community is transverse by Abakaliki-Ogoja Transahara highway. There are 64 villages, grouped into five Zones for administrative convenience. The Zones are: Nchoko, Izziophu, Ndiechi, Ndubia and Iphuigwe zones.

Nchoko village in Igbeagu community has five (5) hamlets namely, Ndigwe Nchoko, Nduebo Nchoko, Nduakpurata Nchoko, Nduoruta Nchoko and Nduigboke Nchoko. During the reign of Chief Nwamini Elom Egbe and Chief Ota Ezenyi who later handed over to Chief Nkwede Nkwuda Egede, the five hamlets were under one indivisible village. Peace continued to exist during the tenure of Chief Nkwede Nkwuda Egede until 1990 when rival groups opposed land system in the village. They complained that the way and manner farm land are shared for cultivation by the villagers was based on class and favouritism, and therefore requested for equal treatment or else their own hamlets should be accorded village status. In the words of Okemini Nwandugo (2023) during oral interview, “The observation and complaints by the opposing groups brought trouble; land dispute and leadership tussle in the peaceful Nchoko village”.

In interview with Ezenyi Ota (2023), the conflict resulted to payment of fines, fight, police arrest, destruction of farm, burning of houses and attacks. In 1992, Ndigwe and Nduebo hamlets clashed at Ozu-oto/Nwanduami farmland. Several people including men, women and youth from the conflicting sides were wounded.

Practical evidences show that no community is exempted from ‘communal conflict’. This believe is captured in the statement of Oji, Eme and Nwoba (2015) when they asserted that communal conflict arises when two distinct groups in a community disagree over jointly shared resources due to the possibility of inadequate distribution or the problem of domination by a group. Communal land conflict has its attendant consequences such as reduction in production, reduction in revenue, reduction in supply of goods and services, increase in cost of living and



displacement. The issue of communal conflict abounds in Ebonyi State and Nchoko Igbeagu is not an exception. “It seems that the unending conflict in Nchoko Igbeagu could be associated to problem of non-equitable land allocation and high-handedness of the top class”, Alex Nwankwegu (2023) in an interview. Conflict comes with its own consequences such as illegal destruction of properties, killings, destruction of public peace, destruction of crops and shortage of food, hence, the need for this study to develop a model for communal conflict management especially as it involves communal land dispute.

The conflict lasted for years due to clash of interest by the mediators. Considering the number of years the communal conflict lasted, there is need to develop model to forestall future occurrence of such conflict in the area.

Conceptual Elucidation

Conflict

Thakore (2013) defined conflict as expression of hostility, negative attitudes, antagonism, aggression, rivalry and misunderstanding. Conflict results to friction, discord or disagreement emanating from one group against the other due to unacceptable belief or actions. Abdul (2021) also admitted that conflict occurs within and between groups that are defined by some form of social ties over resources that are jointly owned. Osabiya (2015) observed that conflict occurs as a result of differences in background, differences in value, difference in personal behavior, difference in perception and communication skills. Collaborating, Abdul and Yaser (2019) pointed out that in any environment, conflict cannot be avoided due to differences among individuals, ideas, desires, perceptions and needs. To Ayozie (2018), she was of the opinion that conflict is natural and is a disagreement that results from differences in attitudes, beliefs, values or needs of individual or group. She advocated that traditional method of conflict resolution should be adopted over the contemporary method which neglect cultural norms and value of any society and lead to conflict.



Land Conflict

According interview with Sunday Odam (2023), Nchoko land conflict started when some group criticize land system in the area and laid claim over parcel of land. Nwoba (2018) discovered that incessant land conflict in the various regions of Nigeria pose serious threat not only to human existence, sustainable security but also to socio-economic and political development in the country.

Perennial Communal Conflict

Oji, Eme and Nwoba (2015) sees communal conflict as those conflicts in which the participants are of communal groups competing over access to land and other natural resources. Adewuyi and Ngwu (2018) observed that perennial communal conflict has its root in marginalization of minority by majority ethnic group, or indigene and settlers over scarce resources. In the work of Ogbonnaya, Nwankwo, Udeughele, Elechi and Mgbanyi (2018) communal conflict arises when two distinct groups in a community disagree over jointly shared resources due to the possibility of inequitable distribution or the problem of domination by a group.

Conflict Management

Conflict management is the practice of being able to identify and handle conflict. This can be done in two ways, either using preventive measure or curative measure. Preventive measure involves establishment of common goals, participative or inclusive management, communication and trust. Curative measures involve avoiding, competing, collaborating, accommodating and compromising. Broadly, conflict can be managed through conflict stimulation, conflict reduction and conflict resolution.

Communal Land Conflict Management

Interest to secure land, exploit land resources or develop land is a major cause of conflict across Nigeria (Agheyisi 2019). He noted that Traditional institutions, community leaders, traditional rulers, family heads, development unions and land use decree are ways used in managing communal land conflict.



Consequences of Communal Conflict

Conflict can give either positive or negative result. Though, whether positive or negative, there is need to handle conflict well. Lewis (1990) cited in Nwobashi and Nnaji (2018) pointed out that there is always the possibility of the presence, emergence or manifestations of conflict wherever people interact. Akpenpuun (2013) observed that conflict occurs due to the struggle of individuals and groups to control limited resources. Communal conflict normally leads to massive loss of lives and destruction of properties, affect labour strength, political stability, manpower, economic development and social cohesion. Nwobi (2019) noted that boundary issue is one of the major causes of communal conflict in Nigeria and therefore recommends that colonial boundaries in Nigeria should be revisited by communities under the supervision of state authorities to forestall conflict. From the oral interview conducted, it was identified that communal conflict cause various forms of attacks, reduce production or cultivation of crops, reduce supply of locally produced commodities and services, removes trust, and homeless. Communal conflict can result to either negative or positive consequences.

Negative Consequences of Communal Conflict

One of the consequences of communal conflict is loss of lives and destruction of properties. Aggressive behavior, mistrust, loss of properties and brutal killings usually manifest in communal conflict. It can lead to diabolism. During communal conflict, majority are involved in charm and diabolic means to get rid of their opponents. These charms in their own belief enable them to protect themselves and defend their rivals.

It negatively affects economic development Communal conflict affects economic activities and political structure. Privileged class dominates, suppresses and exploits less-privileged class and this gives rise to constant communal conflict thereby affecting the economic and political structure in a conflict community. It leads to withdrawal or seizure of sitting government social amenities. It is commonly observed that social amenities in any communal conflict area are always the first target for destruction. In the same vein, new infrastructure are not sited in any crisis environment.



It leads to lose of life and destruction of properties. Human lives and properties are destroyed as a result of communal conflict. Properties are vandalized and destroyed and these entails to setback. Communal conflict equally gives rise to internally displaced persons.

Positive consequences of communal conflict

1. Communal conflict enforces unity among members of the conflicting opponents.
2. During communal conflict, warriors display their abilities, talents and skills.
3. Communal conflict serves as a measure to checkmate leader's excesses and inappropriate enactment of laws/decisions.
4. Communal conflict leads to finding solution to existing conflict.
5. A well managed communal conflict leads to improved ways of tackling issues.

Theoretical Framework

This paper is anchored on Greed and Grievance Theory. The theory is based on the Collier and Hoeffler Model of 1998. Greed-Grievance theory believes that injustice, discrimination, deprivation, and marginalization and its outcomes calls for resistance which is the conflict. This implies that conflict cannot be without perceived injustice. The assumption of this theory is that while greed theory believes that conflict arise as a result of opportunity, grievance theory arise as a result of marginalization. Greed theory is assumed to be seen as taking economic opportunities while grievance is seen as the motivation of a group to rebel against injustice (Hoth and Mengal (2016). Reasons for grievance can be inform of inter-group hatred, political exclusion or vengeance. The implication of the theory to this study is that communal conflict occurs when there is injustice, discrimination, deprivation and marginalization which are the assumption for greed-grievance theory. The application of this theory in this study is that some group complained of injustice and marginalization in the land access and allocation which was not adequately attended to and it brought about communal land conflict. Also, some rebel group believed that they perceived injustice will change if they are allowed to get their own autonomy.



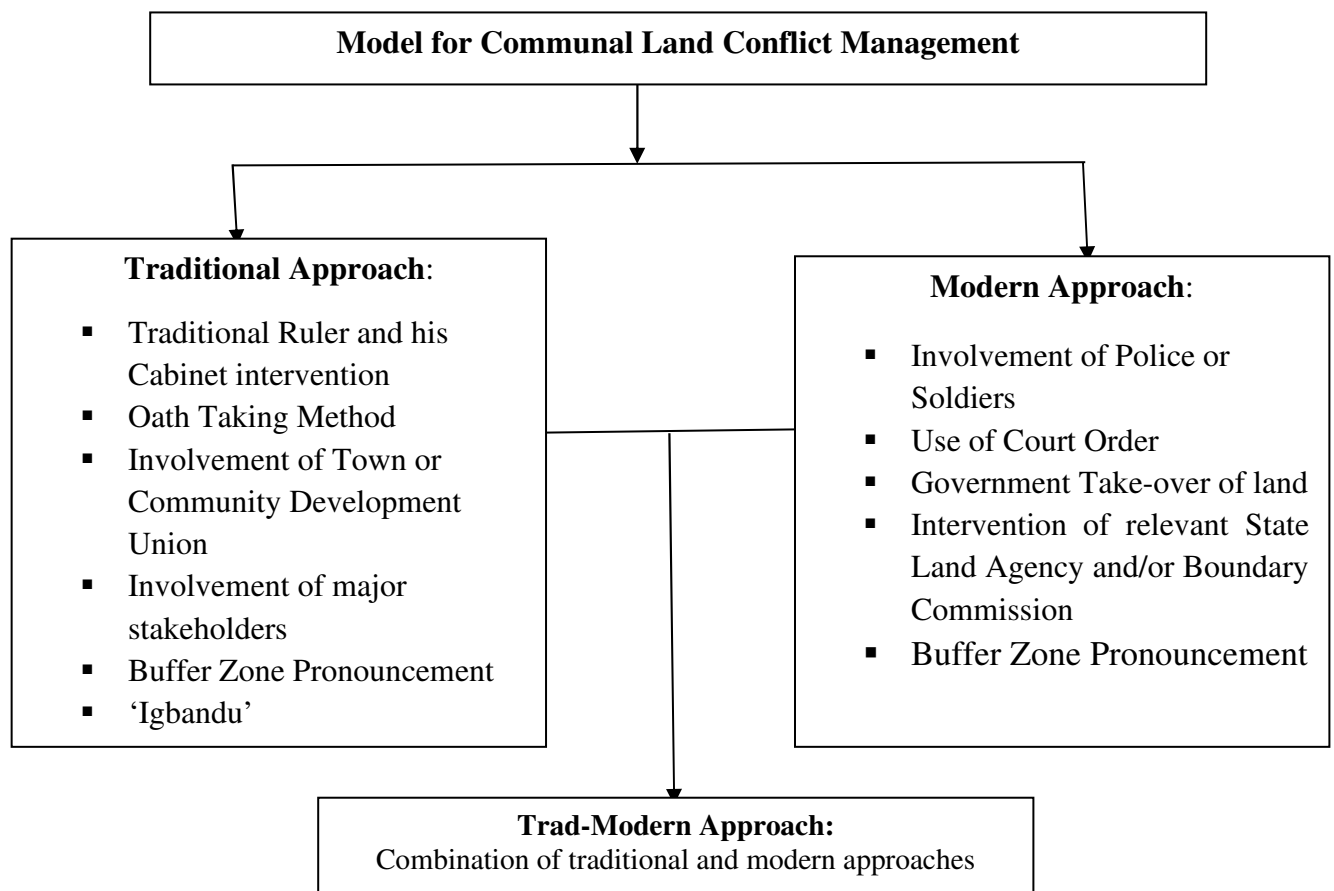
Methodology

Research design adopted in this study is both qualitative and quantitative. This is because the study engaged members of the community involved in the land conflict in interview and Focused Group Discussion (FGD). Primary source of data was employed in this study. Primary data was sourced through interview and focused group discussion. Secondary data was generated through textbooks and journals. Data collected for the study were analyzed using Content Analytical Approach.

Model for Communal Land Conflict

The model below is developed for communal land conflict management.

Fig. 1: Model for communal land conflict management



Source: Okafor, Nwangele and Okoro Model for Communal Land Conflict Management 2023



From Fig. 1 above, there are three basic approaches toward perennial communal land conflict management which includes: traditional approach, modern approach and combination of traditional and modern approaches referred to as trad-modern approach.

1. **Traditional Model Approach**

i. Traditional Ruler and his Cabinet's intervention

This is a situation whereby worrying villages complained and invite the community traditional ruler and his Cabinet for settlement of land crises. Olaniran and Arigu (2013) revealed that non-participatory roles of traditional rulers in the present day administration as compared to their roles in managing and resolving conflict in pre-colonial Nigeria is accounting mainly for the manifestation of conflict. They believed that during pre-colonial era, traditional rulers manage affairs of their localities, administer justice and resolve tension in their different localities with unwritten laws. A traditional ruler and his cabinet are the custodian of culture and as such, they should be firm and apply justice in handling all manner of communal land conflict no matter who are involved.

ii. **Oath Taking Method**

In this Approach, the most elderly man, each from both sides swears an oath that the land in question belongs to his side. The oath takes place on a chosen date, venue and time and preferably, morning time. A year gap is usually given and if any of the two elderly men who took the oath dies before a year, the land will be taken over by the side whose elderly man is still living while the side that their elderly man died loses the land. Ele (2017) stated that to swear an oath or to take an oath is a ritual practice of making the parties or disputants and their witnesses prove the sincerity of their allegations, assertions and demands in the process of conflict resolution.

iii. **Involvement of town or community development Union**

Every community has town or development union. Leaders of this town or development union are invited to intervene where there is communal land dispute. Nwobashi and Nnaji (2018), disclosed that traditional rulers and town unions of various communities should



institutionalize inter-community relations that can help handle issues of common concern that can escalate into violence. Leaders of development union should always note that no developmental programme thrives in a conflict prone area and as such, it should aim at enthrone peace in order to attract government amenities and developmental programmes.

iv. **Involvement of major stakeholders**

Selected major stakeholders in a community in a place where there is communal conflict normally meet to settle the dispute and restore peace between conflicting sides. It is expected that those stakeholders should be straight-forward in administering justice to such case referred to them to avoid escalating the conflict.

5. **'Igbandu' (Covenant)**

Ayozie (2018) admitted that people are well known for their tradition which they use to guide themselves in all their affairs of their lives. She categorized 'igbandu' into three as between man and man; between deity and man and between God and man. In the case of communal land conflict, elders invite two conflicting parties and administer 'igbandu' on them. In this case, the mostly elderly man in each group declares that as long as the world exists, his own group will never fight, attack, insult or think evil against the other group with regard to anything that has to do with the land under conflict. 'Igbandu' has its own repercussion if violated.

2. **Modern Model Approach**

i. **Security Agents Involvement**

This is a situation whereby policemen or army are invited by any of the conflicting group, local, state or federal governments depending on the degree of the crisis. Arrest and detention of offenders and victims of circumstance are common in this approach. Security agent should be civil in intervening in land conflict to avoid escalating or triggering the issues.



ii. **Court Order**

Where there is communal land dispute, one side can sue the other, demanding for justice and favourable court ruling and court ruling should be respected.

iii. **Seizure of the affect land by Government**

Another way to communal land conflict management is enactment of laws for government to take over disputed land, especially when all efforts to settle the conflict fail and evidence of bloodshed or use of dangerous weapons/rifles had been established.

iv. **Use of Boundary Agencies**

Relevant State Ministries/Agencies or Boundary Commission should promptly respond to land conflict by creating justified boundaries without expecting kickbacks. Ever-lasting peace be the watchword of the Agencies and not material gain.

v. **Buffer Zone Pronouncement**

A disputed land is declared buffer zone by government when every reasonable attempt to settle the crisis failed. To label a land buffer zone means that no human being especially from the worrying groups is allowed to enter, cultivate, harvest or tap any resources in the affected land till further notice. This is done to save lifes and secondly, to enable the mediators think of what next to do. Armed security personnel are always deployed to guard buffer zone area. Once buffer zone is pronounced, community elders should avoid pushing their youth to war or further encroachment in the area by any of the conflicting sides to ensure peace and safety of lives and properties.

3. **Trad-Modern Model Approach**

Trad-Modern means traditional and modern. It is a combination of both traditional and modern model approach in management of communal conflict. In Trad-modern approach, conflict management can take any of the step applied in either traditional or modern approach to arrive at conflict resolution. For instance, police arrest can be used first after which the case may be referred back to the traditional ruler to settle. Trad-modern is approach is effective because it gives wilder approach to conflict management.



In other words, trad-modern approach can combines two or more of the methods listed in either traditional approach or modern approach in conflict management.

Conclusion/Recommendations

In any given society, conflict is inevitable because of existence of diversity, communication gap, limited resources, personality, power and use of power. Perennial communal conflict in Nchoko Igbeagu lasted for a long time because of clash of interest among the mediators. It was also observed that economic and political factors contributed to the conflict. On the strength of this, application of developed traditional model approach, modern model approach or a combination of both traditional and modern model approach as a control measure is a pre-condition for lasting peace in communal conflict.

The paper recommends that leaders at all levels should be transparent and impartial in handling complaints. However, based on the findings it was recommended that leaders at all level in the community should be transparent and justly handle land complaint, negotiation instead of confrontation should be adopted in conflict resolution and mediators should avoid kick-back in conflict settlement.

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APPENDIX 1

LETTER TO THE INTERVIEWEES AND INTERVIEW GUIDE

Business Management and Entrepreneurship Studies,
Ebonyi State University,
Abakaliki.

10th July, 2023

Dear Respondents,

We are here to interview you in respect of the perennial communal land conflict in Nigeria: A study of Nchoko Igbeagu Izzi, Ebonyi State. The purpose of the interview is for academic purpose and your response to the interview questions will be treated with utmost confidentiality, please.

Thank you.

Yours faithfully,

Nwangele Sunday
For: the Co-Researcher



INTERVIEW GUIDE

The following questions were formulated to guide the Researcher in sourcing information in respect of the perennial land conflict at Nchoko Igbeagu.

1. Are you a member of Nchoko Igbeagu?
2. How long have you lived in Nchoko Igbeagu?
3. Are you aware of the communal land conflict in Nchoko Igbeagu?
4. How did the crisis started?
5. What was the cause of the communal land conflict?
6. Was there any casualties recorded in the conflict?
7. Were people arrested by Police?
8. How did the arrest ended?
9. What was the role played by the Traditional Ruler of the community?
10. What was the role of community development union in resolving the conflict?
11. What role did Government play in the conflict?
12. What are the consequences of the conflict?