



The Journal of Sustainable Development Law and Policy



ISSN: 2467-8406 (Print) 2467-8392 (Online) Journal homepage: <https://www.ajol.info/index.php/jsdlp>

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To cite this article: Kelechi Johnmary Ani (2024). Izzih -Ukelle Environmental Crisis and Implications for Sustainable Development. The Journal of Sustainable Development, Law and Policy. Vol. 16:1. 128-141. DOI: 10.4314/jsdlp.v16i1.7

To link this article: DOI:10.4314/jsdlp.v16i1.7



Published online: January, 2025

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IZZIH -UKELLE ENVIRONMENTAL CRISIS AND IMPLICATIONS FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

Kelechi Johnmary Ani*

ABSTRACT

Since the inception of earth, there has been a consensus among scholars that war and armed conflict of any kind often have major negative impact on the people and society more than positive one. Wars especially over land have left many nations and societies underdeveloped. Many national and societal economies have been crippled as a result of wars and armed conflict thereby leading to retardation of development of some communities, while increasing the high level of poverty in the society. This article focuses on the conflict between Cross River and Ebonyi States, which to a large extent affected farming communities. This conflict is about contested land which the people depended on for survival because most of the people are farmers. The researcher used qualitative research method, where primary data were collected from field interviews in the conflict affected terrain as well as secondary materials to develop the content of the article. It found that the armed conflict gave a heavy blow on the people. Consequently, the article recommends that it is important to look at how this conflict negatively impacted on food security in the country and pursue post conflict peacebuilding. Politicians and other stakeholders should therefore try to stop fanning the fuel of enmity within Ebonyi and Cross River State.

Keywords: Izzih, Ukelle, Conflict, land & Sustainable development

1. INTRODUCTION

Land has direct influence on human activities because it is a factor of production that usually plays crucial roles in societal building¹. It determines the settlement patterns of many African people in different environments. It

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¹ Kelechi Johnmary Ani, 'Sustainable Peacebuilding Strategies for the Management of Ezza Conflicts in Nigeria and the Barolong Land Disputes in South Africa' (PhD thesis, North West University 2017)

also determines the nature of structural development in a given geopolitical area. Land related issues are also central in many violent disputes around the world. Many of the past and ongoing communal conflicts in Nigeria are tied to competition over fertile land and natural resources governance². It is widely believed that one of the greatest possessions of an Igbo man is land and any attempt to take the land away from him will result in violent conflict. Evaluating the role played by land in conflicts amongst many nations often helps policy makers to develop strategies towards easing of tensions on the issues of land by different people, groups. Land dispute is a source of conflict between different groups of people and communities in Nigeria. In Igboland, there has been series of land conflicts since independence that has undermined societal developments. Some communities in Ebonyi State had embarked on series of inter-communal conflicts and if all the crisis are to be scrutinised, it will be realised that majority of them are as a result of land³. To address land related conflicts, it is essential to correctly identify the role played by land in the conflict. What factors created vulnerability to land conflicts and exacerbate tensions?

This study is centered on land conflict between Izzi and Ukelle people of Cross River, from 2005 till 2019. It is an indisputable fact that land has become one of the key factors that led to the conflicts between Izzi people and her neighbors⁴. This can be further buttressed with the fact that both communities are farmers and they keep on looking for expansion of their land and these resulted in violence or conflict between each other. Inyang and

² Kelechi Johnmary Ani, 'Enyigba-Izzi-Echalike Ikwo Land Crisis and Implications for Sustainable Development' (2023) 14(2) *Journal of Sustainable Development, Law and Policy* 168.

³ Kelechi Johnmary Ani and Dominique Emmanuel Uwizeyimana, 'Odeshi and Inter-Communal Conflicts in Igboland: Focus on the Obeagu-Mgbalukwu and Ojiegbe Conflict, 1910-2007' (2022) 20(1) *Gender & Behaviour* 18954; Kelechi Johnmary Ani, Victor Ojajorotu and Timi Legend Asuelime, 'Ezza and Kwahu-Ewe Land Dispute in Nigeria and Ghana: Unfolding the Road to Peace and Development' (2019) 6(1) *Journal of African Foreign Affairs* 45; Kelechi Johnmary Ani, Lawson Onyema Chukwu and Samuel Nwite Okoro, 'Inter-group Relations and Peacebuilding in Pre-colonial Nigeria: Focus on Agba and Izhi Environmental Conflicts' in Kelechi Johnmary Ani, Victor Ojajorotu and Kelvin Bribena (eds), *Political Economy of Resource, Human Security and Environmental Conflicts in Africa* (Palgrave Macmillan 2021) 253

⁴ Kelechi Johnmary Ani (n 2)

Nworie have revealed that both the Izzi and Ukele lived peacefully for over two hundred years and were sharing all forms of resources today⁵.

Izzi people fought armed conflict with the Ukelle people in Yala Local Government of Cross River State. The crisis started on April 15, 2005 as a matter of land misunderstanding that ensued between them and the Igbeagu people of Izzi in Ebonyi State. The conflict which broke out between the two farming communities claimed lives of innocent people. Both conflict parties involved in the crisis have lost their loved ones, properties and houses to the crisis. The importance and need to enlighten the younger generation of the 21st century on the effects and impact of land conflict cannot be over emphasised. This study will help to point out the causes of land conflict, impact and the lesson learned from the Izzi- Ukelle conflict. It is germane to note that this study critically reviewed the land clashes between the Igbeagu Izzi and the Ukele people of the Yale local government, and also to brought to the notice of everyone the need to shun violence and embrace peace in order to ensure that collectively we move our nation's forward. Thus, the study presents the Izzi-Ukele conflict which is hitherto not published in any academic literature. Currently, conflicts within Ebonyi State and those a number of other conflicts in Nigeria have all been published in reputable academic journals⁶, except the Ukelle-Izzi conflict. Thus, the study adds to the existing body of literature in peace and conflict studies.

The study centered on reviewing the conflict and promoting the need to embrace peace in order to foster prosperity and development of the society at large. The scope of the study covers Izzi and Ukelle societies. The conflict started in 2005 but the first peace efforts was in the year 2019, but both communities are still engaging in intermittent clashes on the land issues even though that some security personnel have been deployed down to the buffer zone.

Land conflicts have remained a continuous source of threat to the unity and harmony of the Ebonyi and Cross River state people. Numerous scholars in different field of studies have suggested positively on how to solve the problems of land conflict but there were no reliable agencies or body to

⁵ Bassey Inyang and Benjamin Nworie, 'Neighbours at War' Thisday (6 August 2018)

⁶ See n 3

implement a rigid policy on peacebuilding⁷. The bodies that need to implement peace processes on how land issues will be resolved are often reluctant and are not even well equipped to dispense their assigned duties on the issues of land dispute. And the issues of land dispute have continued to consume the lives of innocent people and properties. Land conflict had remained intractable and undiluted in many parts of Izzi. It was this lack of appropriate bodies to clearly map out boundaries between communities that instigated conflicts and clashes among the Izzi and Ukelle nations and communities.

This study used qualitative methodology to develop its content. In relation to this study, primary sources like oral interview on the origin of the land dispute between Izzi and Ukelle, Cross River State were collected from the conflict terrain and used. The respondents were purposively sampled by the researcher. Secondary materials from academic literatures mainly published books, journal publications were also used to enrich the content of the article. The findings from the field were interpreted thematically and presented in necessary parts of the study. Other written sources like newspaper publications were also consulted because of their usefulness in complementing the facts gathered or obtained from oral interviews. Many books were consulted in order to ensure the detail of the study was unraveled.

2. CONFLICT AND DEVELOPMENT: A REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

This study is rooted on the theory of environmental peacebuilding. This is a form of environmental-focused peacebuilding that is used to return hitherto conflict ravaged environment back to peace⁸. Environmental peacebuilding

⁷ John Bruce, *Land Dispute and Land Conflicts* (Kurn 2016); Karol Boudreaux, 'Land Tenure and Resource Conflicts' *Resources* (27 March 2013); Micheal O. Odey, 'Land Disputes in the Benue Valley Since 1999: A Study in an Aspect of Inter-Group Relations in Central Nigeria' in Olayemi Akinwunmi, Okpe O. Okpeh and J. D. Gwamna (eds), *Inter-Group Relations in Nigeria During the 19th and 20th Centuries* (Aboki 2008); Anthony I. Anthony, 'Agila-Ezza Land Debacle in the Lower Benue Area of Nigeria: Interrogating the Issue of Indigene-Settler Conflict' in Ojong Echum Tangban and Chukwuma C. C. Osakwe (eds), *Perspectives in African Historical Studies: Essays in Honour of Prof. Chinedu Nwafor Ubah* (Pyla-Mak Services Ltd 2013) 343-376

⁸ Albert Dresse, I Fischhendler, J Ostergaard Nielsen and Dimitrios Zikos, 'Environmental Peacebuilding: Towards a Theoretical Framework' (2019)

becomes necessary in any environment that have become overtaken by conflict. The conflict may have emerged through violence, structural crisis or even the quest to maintain a cultural heritage. Galtung has maintained that violence in human society naturally drives the need for peace and peace research⁹. However, it is important to consistently evaluate the place of perception in sustenance of any armed conflict before the part to peace could be advocated¹⁰. This is because in the Igbeagu-Ukelle land conflict, the central cause of the crisis is competition over the ownership of a defined land mass. The implication is that such conflict should be evaluated within the conflict terrain and environmental peacemaking styles adopted to return the people of Ukelle and Igbeagu to their historic culture of peaceful inter-group relations and status of post conflict negative peace, which will stop all forms of armed confrontation and give way for positive peace. This environmental peacebuilding must be community based as the conflict is mainly community driven.¹¹

The boundary dispute between Igbeagu people of Izzi Local Government of Ebonyi State and Ukelle people of Yala Local Government in Cross River State dates back to the 15th of April 2005 when the two neighbours that hitherto lived together peacefully and even intermarried, clashed over contested land. The poor management of the crisis by the traditional and constituted authorities resulted in a big communal conflict. A more detailed account of the conflict origin has it that prior to the 2006 census preparation. The Izzi people who maintained their claim to the contested land for years, sent enumerators to the area in 2005. Immediately, the Ukelle people rejected these enumerators and maintained that their ancestors had settled there for years. The disagreement turned into armed skirmishes and the crisis that

54(1) *Cooperation and Conflict* 99119 <https://doi.org/10.1177/0010836718808331> accessed 12 January 2024; Tobias Ide, 'The Impact of Environmental Cooperation on Peacemaking: Definition, Mechanisms, and Empirical Evidence' (2019) 21(3) *International Studies Review* 327–346 <https://doi.org/10.1093/isr/viy014> accessed 10 January 2024

⁹ Johan Galtung, 'Violence, Peace and Peace Research' (1969) 6(3) *Journal of Peace Research* 167–191

¹⁰ Nwamaka Okeke-Ogbuafor, Tim Gray and Selina Stead, 'Perception of the Existence and Causes of Structural Violence in Ogoni Communities, Nigeria' (2018) 36(2) *Journal of Contemporary African Studies*

¹¹ Samyra Hachmann, Katharina Löhr, Hector Camilo Morales-Muñoz, Luca Eufemia and others, 'Conceptualizing Community-Based Environmental Peacebuilding in Cesar, Colombia' (2023) 51 *Human Ecology* 221–235 <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10745-023-00399-9> accessed 15 January 2024

followed¹². Oral source has it that the land in contention was said to belong to the Ukele people who along with their king gave the land freely to the Izzi people to farm several decades ago. But after some time according to the source, the Izzi allegedly decided to appropriate the land¹³. A source from the oral construct, Richard Nwandiegu said that some villages in Igbeagu Izzi are on Ukele land. The villages according to him include Ndukwe, Ndiakparata and Ndiagwu¹⁴.

Furthermore, the Ukele people saw themselves as landlord in the territory and maintained that the Izzi were later-day settlers. This account was largely rejected by the Izzih people, because the Ukele people in question claimed that the portion of land belong to them and that it was their ancestral land while the Izzi people have already secured it or appropriated it as their farmland for decades, hence the Izzi have continued to use the land for agricultural purposes. Thus, one could simply for the sake of logic ask where were the Ukele when the Izzi took over the land in the years past, farmed and settled extensively on them? Moreover, for the Izzih people, the ideology that the Ukele people tried to claim that they were the rightful owners of the land exacerbated the conflict. Knowing fully well that the two communities were hitherto agitating for the expansion of their farming space coupled with a population density that is rapidly growing due to the maximal birth rate in both Igbeagu Izzi and Ukele(Source).

The traditional ruler of Igbeagu told the *Sunday Punch* news that peace has been undermined in the area hence communities continued to battle with insecurity and uncertainties in the area. Chief Ukwa, the traditional ruler of the Igbeagu community claimed that the lives of over 500 people from Igbeagu were lost in the conflict, and over 250 houses were destroyed. The violence threw affected communities and their people into pain. Inyang and Nworie maintained that claims and counter-claims over boundaries arose. And because it was not managed well, the issues exacerbated to clashes that have claimed hundreds of lives and recently displaced no fewer than 1,500 persons¹⁵. According to an oral construct from Ofonekom in Ukele, David Okolo said that armed men from Izzi invaded their community in a surprise

¹² Bassey Inyang and Benjamin Nworie, 'Neighbours at War' (Thisday Newspaper, 6 August, 2018)

¹³ Oral interview with Richard Nwandiegu, 45 years old, Achara Unuhu community, Ebonyi State

¹⁴ Ibid

¹⁵ Bassey Inyang and Benjamin Nworie (n7)

attack in the early hours of Thursday 15th of April 2005, and killed many people after burning down houses. The Ukelle people were not pleased by such development and they began to prepare for reprisals which eventually ended in a bitter war¹⁶.

Ogbonna Nwaga in his account maintained that the conflict originated as a result of gunshot that killed one woman that was on her way back from farm in Ukelle. They hurriedly concluded that the attack is from Izzi people and that the Izzi people are the ones responsible for the death of the woman and that was how they prepared and escalated the conflict scenario. By so doing, the crisis degenerated into communal clashes¹⁷.

Additionally, Chief Emmanuel Nwiboko said that the origin of the war can be traced down to acquisition of some parcel of land that was not clearly mapped out by the Nigerian Boundary Commissions between Izzi people and their Ukelle neighbour in Yala Local Government of Cross River State. He said that the tension was still high when suspicious unknown gunmen killed four boys from Ukelle on their way back from meeting. Instead of the Ukelle people to vividly access the cause of their death, they assumed that the Igbeagu people are the one responsible for the attack.

The major cause of the conflict between Izzi and Ukelle people was the quest for land acquisition and expansion. Knowing fully well that the two communities of Igbeagu and Ukelle people were farmers and they relied wholly on agriculture as their main occupation. Couple with rapid increase in population growth, the two communities wanted to expand their farming territory and space which eventually resulted into armed confrontations. It is pertinent to note at this juncture that any attempt made to deprive an African man his land, irrespective of his rank or social status will definitely end in crisis because they have come to see land as one of the highest asset a man can acquire for both himself and his children. Similarly, the value of land cannot be underestimated as it is one of the major determinants of the factors of production, so everything invariably revolves around land and that is why you hardly deprive a man of his land in peace without him wagging war against you even if is a physically challenged person.

¹⁶ David Okolo, Oral interview at Ofonekom on Igbeagu-Ukelle conflict.

¹⁷ Ogbonna Nwaga, Oral Interview at Igbeagu Izzi on Igbeagu-Ukelle conflict.

Moreover, the conflict started on 15th April 2005 when a woman was reportedly shot to death by unknown gunmen on the disputed land when she was on her way back from farm to home. Sequel to these, 4 youths were shot at the same spot on their way back from meeting. All these tensions coupled with the land contention degenerated and exacerbated the conflict as the Ukelle people assumed that Izzi people were the one behind all these tragedies that have befallen their people and that was how they prepared themselves and came for reprisals, In June, 2018, another clash occurred, which claimed about 20 lives and left thousands displaced¹⁸. The 2018 clash was said to have started after an Ukelle indigene was shot by unknown persons. Unfortunately, the Ukelle people concluded that the killers of their son must be from their Izzih enemies.

3. DISCUSSION OF GAPS/ BARRIERS

The Acting Governor of Cross River State at the time of the recent crisis acknowledged that it was the responsibility of the state governors to protect the lives and properties of people within their constituencies¹⁹. However, the reality on ground in the Nigerian state is that all the state governments in Nigeria have failed in the area of the protection of lives and properties across the federation. This is because there is no state within the country that is insulated, insured, or protected from the extreme negative winds of insecurity that are blowing no man any good in the country.

At the peak of the Igbeagu-Ukelle crisis, the Ebonyi and Cross River State Governments invited the Minister of Interior, Lt Gen. Abdulrahman Dambazzau (rtd) on behalf of the Federal government of Nigeria to take over the management of the conflict. The Minister superintended the signing of the peace pact as well as the quest to stop the destruction of lives and properties and ensure the resurgence of sustainable farming in the area that will lead to peace. It was the then Acting Governor of Cross River State that revealed the series of peace, policy meetings by the Ebonyi State Government, the Cross River State Government as well as the then Director General of the National Boundary Commission in order to find lasting peace and security to the crisis zone through acceptable boundary demarcation²⁰. This peacebuilding process witnessed the series of peace meetings between

¹⁸ Bassey Inyang and Benjamin Nworie (n 5)

¹⁹ Emma Una, 'Cross River Government Warns Ukelle/Izzi Communal Conflict Refugees against Retaliation' Vanguard (5 July 2018)

²⁰ Ibid

the Cross River and Ebonyi State Government that led to the signing of the peace pact by the Deputy Governors of both states who represented their states and governors. Professor Evara Esu represented Cross River State, while Dr Kelechi Igwe was there for Ebonyi State. Before the pact was signed, some representatives of the warring clans met with their respective state governments and made submissions on the path to peace.

The Ebonyi and Cross River State governments both met and agreed to set up a boundary for both the Ukelle and Izzi clan, which was superintended by the National Boundary Commission. That boundary was located at Ipollo. The state governments also invited soldiers from the Nigerian army to create a buffer zone there in order to attain sustainable peace. Unfortunately, anytime the crisis escalates, the militia on both side will even use guerilla tactics to threaten the soldiers and the few townsmen living around the buffer zone. Ironically, people have continued to blame the National Boundary Commission for failing to clearly demarcate the area since the 2005 crisis. In the heat of the crisis, the Izzi Nnodo Youth Forum through their leader, Hon. Ben Nwovu called on the National Emergency Management Agency to come to the aid of those displaced in Izzi²¹. However, it should be noted that the fact that traditional rulers were not involved in peacebuilding and peacemaking undermined the process²². Why have some Nigerians lost our love for communal life? When did some Nigerians stop being their brother's keeper? Why have some Nigerians become vampires seeking blood? Why do some Nigerians strive to take people's land by force? Why won't Nigerians give peace a chance!

When the Igbeagu Izzi and the Ukelle people engaged in the most recent crisis on 26th June, 2018, it led to the death of men, women, children, and youths as well as the destruction of properties, which forced residents to flee. The 2018 crisis was very devastating that there was no human or vehicular movement on the Trans-Saharan Highway that connected Nigeria to Cameroon and to other African countries. The littered and abandoned bodies of dozens of people who were killed in the conflict, that are found on that highway, immediately sent negative signals to travelers and drivers using the route both locally and internationally, especially those that easily connects Taraba and other parts of Cross River and Akwa Ibom States.

²¹ Ibid

²² Samuel O Onyia, 'The Role of Nigerian Traditional Rulers in Peace Building Activities' (Masters Dissertation, Peace and Conflict Studies Department, National Open University of Nigeria, Abakaliki Study Centre, Abakaliki 2017)

Ocheke Okpako from Benekaba maintained that social peace in the area is at its lowest level due to the conflict. He lamented that the law enforcement agents sent to restore peace and order in the area have not lived up to expectations. According to him, these law enforcement agents turned a blind eye whenever the masses were attacked²³. The armed conflict affected all spheres of economic lives in affected communities of Igbeagu Izzi and Ukelle people. Foods products such as rice, yam cassava, cocoyam, and other farm products were destroyed during the war. Even some of the social amenities that enhanced peoples' life were also vandalised during the conflict thereby making life miserable to people. Animals such as goats, cow, dogs, and other domestic livestock were also either stolen or killed as the case may be. People wandered in abject poverty because they could not sustain their means of livelihood at that time. Many were exposed to illnesses of different kinds such as kwashiorkor that resulted in many people being rushed to hospitals for proper treatment. The scarcity of food and livestock paved the way for an increase in the price of commodities available in the nearby villages. The impact of the conflict from the development point of view cannot be overemphasised. It was an indisputable fact that the conflict has contributed to retarding development and economic growth of the conflict affected communities of Igbeagu and Ukelle. A community leader in Ukelle, Steven Odom maintained that my father was a clan head in Ipollo, Cross River State but if you go there now, his grave has been cultivated into a farm²⁴.

When Professor Ivara Esu, the then Acting Governor of Cross River State visited the conflict zone, within Cross River Area; he revealed that over 7000 internally displaced persons were camped at St Benedict Primary School, Mfuma²⁵. He advocated that the Ukelle people should not retaliate the attacks from the Igbeagu Izzi people. According to him, "if you retaliate, you may kill somebody, the blood of that person will be on your head"²⁶. He donated bags of rice, garri, bens and milk to the refugees²⁷. The Izzi people had their internally displaced people's camp at Ndiakprata. They were regularly visited by Dr Kelechi Igwe, the then deputy Governor of Ebonyi State. Ironically, in one of the occasions of his visit to the IDP, heavy gunshots were heard coming from the Cross River axis of the contested land towards the camp

²³ Emma Una, (n 8)

²⁴ Bassey Inyang and Benjamin Nworie (n 5)

²⁵ Emma Una, (n 8)

²⁶ Ibid

²⁷ Ibid

where the governor was present. That immediately forced many people to carry their belongings and started running from the IDP camp²⁸.

The conflict left the economy of affected communities crippled. The reality is that many communities in Igbeagu Izzi have been largely destroyed and abandoned due to the crisis. Their inhabitants were forced to flee to safer parts of the Nigerian state. It was stated that 1,500 houses were burnt in Izzi by the Izzi Local Government Chairman while about 10,000 Izzi men and women were displaced. According to the then Chairman of Izzi, corpses of dead people were littered across compounds in Izzi and they freely decomposed²⁹. The armed conflict was seen as devastating because it touched all spheres of human lives including religious aspects. According to oral construct, Chief Ogbonna Nwaga said that roughly 56 churches were burnt down during the conflict. It also affected both the clergies, pastors, evangelist and host of other anointed men of God³⁰. People no longer feel comfortable to attend churches let alone to talk of offering which will be used to engineer church building and other ministerial functions. So it posed a serious threat to the religious bodies and some men of God we're also killed as a result of the armed conflict.

Furthermore, those church building that was destroyed when the crisis escalated have continued to cost people money, time and resources to rebuild it again. Some of these minor churches that can't afford to withstand the psychological problems generated by the conflict destruction gave up immediately. Many men of God don't feel free to embark on any ministry functions in that area as they are always afraid because of the incessant shooting from all sides. This was caused by the concentric effects of insecurity within the area. People don't feel free to close their eyes and worship as a result of fear and anxiety; neither do they have the courage to embark on night vigils, Carrol or any other ministerial outreach. People are always on alert to protect their life. For further illustration, the respondent revealed that there was one certain day that we attended birthday anniversary in 2018 in one of the village close to Igbeagu., around 7pm gunshot here and there started; the police people that are on uniform pulled their clothes immediately they heard the gun sound and covered their dress with their private cloths and hardly will you notice that they are security agents and

²⁸ Ibid

²⁹ Bassey Inyang and Benjamin Nworie (n 5)

³⁰ Ogbonna Nwaga, oral interview with a respondent at Achara Unuhu community

that was how they whole event ended in a rowdy tensions generated by insecurity³¹.

Socially, the armed conflict had huge impact on the lives of the people. People don't in their large numbers to celebrate social functions, like marriages, burials, church, cultural festivals etc. People are very careful with their life to avoid the story that touches the heart. Currently, people around Ebonyi state have known Igbeagu people to be a worrisome region, so hardly attend functions there and they try to desist from any engagement that will take them to that area especially at night. Almost everybody in Igbeagu and Ukelle communities both old and young ones are well equipped with local weapons waiting for anyhow movements from potential sons of violence. The armed conflict dealt a serious blow on the cultural outlooks of the people in the those affected communities of Igbeagu and Ukelle. For instance, some of the cultural festivals that often take place before the conflict received questions mark weather to continue or not as the gathering of the people might results to fresh attack in the sense that the people in the premises cannot justify the security of any anybody. People were afraid and worried at the same time not to fall in the hands of their enemies. So it affects the cultural life, cultural festivals and cultural celebrations of the people.

Most of the government properties were destroyed in the cause of the armed conflict. Government properties were vandalized by some of the angry youths and militia within the conflict area thereby increasing hunger and under-development in those communities. Inyang and Nworie have maintained that when the Nfuma, Ntrigom, Ipollo, Ogba and Ijiraga communities of Ukelle received electricity and other development projects from the then Governor Donald Duke of Cross River State; they were jubilating over the dawn of communal development across clan³². Unfortunately, the hurricane from the conflict did not only halt development but it led to massive emigration from the affected communities and inflicted widespread damages on the people's properties and environment. People were forced to look for a better life outside their communities as many of the government social amenities that helped in sustaining the lives of the people have been completely destroyed.

³¹ Ogbonna Agaenu, Oral interview at Achara UNUHU community; Paul Oyi, Oral interview at Nkaliki Unuhu community; Onele Ezekiel, Oral Interview at Nkaliki Unuhu community.

³² Bassey Inyang and Benjamin Nworie, (n 5)

Politically, the people were also affected as it created a vacuum for discrimination, marginalization, victimization and hatred among the people. A number of the prominent political figure in the conflict ravaged communities were targeted and killed in the conflict thereby putting an end to their various political dreams, contributions and future ambition causing a miserable and unwanted suffering and poverty to their respective households and dependents.

The conflict was very devastating that Mfuma, Ntrigom, Ipollo, Ogba, Ijiraga, Benekaba, Ujijama, Okpokodou communities of Ujegatom in Ukelle were badly destroyed within the period of their conflict with the people of Igbeagu Izzi. The death toll at the end of the 2005 crisis was put at 500 lives³³. The then Director General, Cross River State Primary Healthcare Development agency, Dr Betta Edu, when she visited the conflict ravaged area raised the following rhetorical questions: how do you console a woman whose child and husband were killed during the communal clash? Was I supposed to say all will be well? Can all really be well again?³⁴ There are things that happen to you as a mother and it is honestly better for you to just die at the spot than live with the unending unbearable pain. The conflict zone in both Ukelle and Igbeagu are still like ghost communities that were largely deserted.

4. ADDRESSING THE POLICY BARRIERS: RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSION

There are countless reasons we should always strive to go for peace irrespective of our status, goals and our insatiable wants and needs. Let the warring communities learn to lead by example through peaceful coexistence, love and care for others personality and not focusing largely on selfish interest at a particular point in time. African adage stipulates that united we stand and divided we fall. The unity and peace amongst these communities will promote healthy intergroup relations and development. The Ebonyi and Cross River State governments must promote good governance and welfare societies for the general populace. Land issues and related ones have denied many people access to the dividends of democracy and their investment as well as hard work in the past. There is a need for stakeholders in Izzi and Ukelle to shun violence, greediness, selfishness, as well as discrimination of

³³ Ibid

³⁴ Ibid

any kind that will result in conflict and embrace peace so that our society will be a safer place for human co-existence.

In conclusion, the imaginary border lines between Cross River and Ebonyi State at Ipollo currently records the presence of soldiers sent to keep the peace in an area, which is considered as the buffer zone between the Ukelle and Izzi communities. There is need to sustain that buffer zone. Currently, the issue of unwanted gunshots here and there has reduced as both communities sort things out through negotiations and dialogue on the need to end the crisis and embrace peace. There was a little free movement now in those communities as people now had some comfortable time and space to be happy and live like relatively safe human beings. This should also be encouraged and sustained.

Land indisputably was one of the major cause of wars within some of the modern African societies. Reason been that the majority of the African people have chosen agriculture as their main occupation especially those ones that are not lettered enough and any attempt for whatsoever reason to deny them land will eventually results to armed conflict or war. The case of the Ukelle and Igbeagu people agrees with the general analysis of the centrality of land in driving conflict, hence not left behind as the people are predominantly farming communities. The situation was worsened by the rapid increase in population density. They the more the birth, the more the people began to acquire and occupy land for different existential need and their children continued to search for more land to attend to their needs. There is also the increase in need for farm space and land, which eventually resulted to armed conflict that have led to the death of people and left others injured in the conflict area.

The study showed clearly that properties were destroyed, and there were massive migrations out of the conflict ravaged areas. The communal clash which took place between the Igbeagu people of Izzi Local Government of Ebonyi State and the Ukelle people of Yala Local Government of Cross River State started on 15th of April 2005. It was a very disastrous armed conflict that left some unforgettable impact and signs on the lives of the bother parties involved in the armed crisis as the number of innocent souls, properties, farm products and rest of other things were destroyed as a result of the crisis. Thousands of people were displaced in their houses and they went far away from home in search of refuge, peace, safety, and how to eke-out new life.