

**Inter-State Environmental Crisis In Nigeria: Focus On Amegu-Ikwo
Ebonyi And Adadama Cross River Conflict**

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Abstract

Africa as a continent is consistently suffering under the burden of multidimensional conflicts. These conflicts range from terrorism to resource wars, ethnic violence etc. Inter-communal conflict is one of the forms in which conflict has manifested in different parts of Africa. This study, which was developed using qualitative method focused on the Amegu-Ikwo and Adadama land conflict in Nigeria. Amegu-Ikwo and Adadama are border communities within Ebonyi State and Cross River State respectively. The researcher used Homer Dixon's theory of environmental conflict to trace the origin of the conflict to 1927 and its development. The study revealed how the conflict has become a recurrent crisis since 2011 to present. The multi-dimensional negative impact of the conflict and the roadmap to peace were also documented. Finally, the work called for a strong peace building alliance between the power elite, government and the masses in the conflict-ridden communities to ensure sustainable peace.

Keywords: *Conflict, Land, Peace, Ikwo & Adadama*

Introduction

The Amegu-Ikwo and Adadama peoples are hitherto historic brothers who lived peacefully with one another for ages. They engaged in pre-colonial diplomacy and exchanged material and non-material culture till the rise of colonialism. The era of colonialism led to the rise of state formation as well as different forms of administration, which directly began to sow the seed of negative group identity amongst the different peoples of Africa. Within that colonial period, Ikwo and Adadama were administered within different colonial administrative sphere. The location of both communities within the

banks of the popular Oferekpe or Ebonyi River made their geo-political importance as a trading port fundamental. Soon, the negative re-enforcement of their competition over the traditional port area immediately threw them into the path of conflict over the rightful owner of a piece of land lying in the border of the two communities.

The origin of the conflict has been traced to the colonial era of Nigerian history. The Ikwo people have had several conflicts with their neighbours, of which many has resulted to full blown pre-colonial war. Ikwo have fought with their brother neighbours (Izzi and Ezza), however, a higher percentage of their pre-colonial wars with their neighbours have been with various nations from the Cross Rivers region. These nations include the Awkwu, Ntsobo, Adadama, Isobobikobiko/Isobo, Otaka, Ofomana, Okpeji, among others. These conflicts and wars arose mainly from disputes over land, or misunderstanding over environmental resource control. These misunderstanding over environmental resource quickly leads to the killing of a native of one group by another, and the further retaliation of the aggrieved group. Most of these groups of Cross River people are said to have migrated to some part of Ikwo, across the river, to settle and dwell with the message of peace. According to Jonah Nkpuruka in an oral interview, some of these people came in small groups, requesting for temporal settlements. These small groups however spread and grew in number due to population explosion, taking over and usurping more lands at the detriment of the Ikwo people. The encroachment into more land, led the Ikwo to fall out with these foreign tribes, leading to incessant conflicts of which some evolved into full scale pre-colonial war. Ironically, the Ikwo and Adadama have been caught up in the inferno of conflict since colonial era till 2019. Unfortunately, the reactive conflict management strategies used to curtail the crisis does not in any way reveal that the conflict will end in the years to come.

“The Adadama-Ikwo war dates back to the colonial days after the colonial masters had demarcated the boundary between Cross River and the people of Eastern Region with some residents breaching the border demarcation by

farming in their neighbouring villages without respect to the border demarcation” (*The Voice*, 2015:12). The oral tradition of the people maintains that the community leaders were not consulted by the colonial imperialists when they wilfully shared out the people’s land leading to claims and counter-claims by both the Ikwo and Adadama that their land were forcefully handed over to the other community, which they completely rejected. Thus, there has been a long-standing land dispute between Amegu-Ikwo in Ebonyi State and Adadama in Cross River, which dates back to 1927. The Government of Ebonyi State revealed that earlier in 1912, the two communities mutually fixed the *Ugoli* as their boundary but over the years, the people of Adadama began to claim a new location as their boundary (Government of Ebonyi State of Nigeria, 2013:9). The situation was worsened by the forceful colonial border demarcation as well as the contemporary force of acceptance of those border areas as the determinant of geo-political areas within the sovereign borders of the post-independent African States, irrespective of the undeniable reality that the colonial borders separated hitherto brotherly kiths and kilns into different communities, states, protectorates and countries.

Briefing newsmen on the escalation of the Ikwo-Adadama crisis recently, the former Deputy Governor of Ebonyi and current Governor of the state, Dave Umahi stated then that on Saturday 14th January, 2013, the Ebonyi State Government got another report that the crisis had escalated following the renewed attacks on Amegu people who went to their farm. Since then, in spite of government efforts to contain the situation, the area remained tense and conflict ridden. Government of Ebonyi State of Nigeria revealed that on that day, 14th January, 2013; “gunmen from Adadama invaded Ochuenyim village in Ndiagu Amegu Ikwo, abducted 2 persons (a man and a woman) and wounded several others. As soon as such information reached us, all the security agencies were alerted and the Commissioner of Police ordered the deployment of Mobile Policemen to the area to forestall possible reprisals” (Government of Ebonyi State of Nigeria, 2013:9). It was reported that on 19th

January, 2013, the area witnessed renewed attack on a number of Amegu Ikwo people who went to farm, leading to the escalation of the conflict. The Amagu Ikwo people quickly engaged in their popular guerrilla war strategy and retaliated on their Adadama neighbours. The years that followed witnessed the inability of the police and security agencies to check the attacks and counter-attacks from each of the conflict actors. The conflict raised its ugly head in 2014 and escalated in 2015. This study is a synoptic investigation into the dynamics of the conflict and the effort made so far to ensure lasting peace.

Methodology

This section presents the techniques used in the development of the study or research design. The study is a qualitative research. This method was adopted as a way of accessing the existing data on Ikwo-Adadama conflicts in Nigeria. The researcher searched extensively into the scarce secondary sources on the conflict in order to eke-out the historical evidence as well as contemporary dynamics of land conflict in the area. The explorative research style was used to investigate into the current status of land resource as a major fillip to the rise of inter-state conflicts between Ebonyi State and Cross River State in Nigeria. The researcher also gathered primary interviews from eye-witness accounts as well as observers of the conflict dynamics for decades. Two focus group discussions of five to seven men were carried out in each of the two conflict environments of Amagu-Ikwo and Adadama. Data analysis of existing secondary materials that were used in the study were presented thematically to ensure coherence.

Theoretical Framework

This study is centred on Homer-Dixon's theory of environmental conflicts. According to Thomas F. Homer-Dixon, population growth and resource depletion converge to produce conflicts in many parts of the developing world. He found that environmental scarcity leads to economic deprivation, and contributes to civil strife as well as the increases in economic and

political pressures on governments; possibly resulting in the weakening of state legitimacy. Increased gaps between population groups within a state due to the scarcity of resources produce grievances and rivalries, leading to conflict. Due to the scarcity of resources, groups may find it necessary to migrate in search of land and other resources. (Homer-Dixon, 1994:5-40; Homer-Dixon, 1993; Homer-Dixon, Boutwell & Rathjens, 1993).

However, some other groups like the Ikwo and Adadama will refuse to migrate but decides to remain in their historic settlement and fight till they are able to expel their enemies. The causes of environmental scarcity are said to lie in environmental changes such as drought or soil erosion, population growth, which place greater pressure on existing resources and the unequal distribution of resources, thus limiting its access (Dougherty & Pfaltzgraft, 1997:164). This theory of environmental conflicts maintains that reductions occurring in the amount or quality of resources reduce overall total environmental resources available, while an increase in population means a division of the remaining portions of land resources into smaller portions, thus creating scarcity, struggle for scarce environmental land resource and the conflict that follows. It was the scarcity of land and the increasing pressure of population explosion in Ikwo and Adadama that intensified the lad conflict since colonial era to present.

The Conflict Trends

Zartman (1991:299) posits that conflict is an inevitable aspect of human interaction and the concomitant of choices and decisions. Conflict can be viewed as an incompatible interaction between at least two parties where one of the parties, experiences damage and the other party causes damage intentionally. Coser (1956: 121) argues that conflict occurs “when two or more people engage in a struggle over values and claims to status, power and resources in which the aims of opponents are to neutralise, injure or eliminate their rivals”. Thus, it could be stated that conflict is driven by irreconcilable competitions. Miller (2003) states that conflict is a situation of incompatibility where strong desire on the part of one party to carry out ‘the

means' or achieve 'the ends' are, or appears to be incompatible with the other. Thus, the incompatibility of aims, desires and goals remain a driver of conflict. Hocker and Wilmot (1985) present conflict as the interaction of interdependent people who clash because of perceived incompatible goals and interferences from each other in achieving their goals. Folger, Poole and Stutman (1997) explained it better when they argued that conflict is driven by perceived incompatible goals and interference from each other in achieving these goals. It should be noted that the level of reaction or conflict that arises when there are cases of incompatibility, differs from actors to environment, situation and time when such cases arose. But for Stagner (1995), conflict is simply the violent expression of this incompatibility. In Ikwo and Adadama conflict setting, the incompatible factor here remains the acceptance that a given portion of land within their borders is the natural heritage of any of the conflict parties.

One of the immediate causes of the conflict between the two communities has been traced by Governor Dave Umahi to "November 23, 2011 when some irate youths from Adadama attacked a team of consultants working on a World Bank Assisted Erosion Management Project at Ndiagu Amegu Ikwo. The Adadama youths arrested the workers and seized their equipments. When I got the information; I promptly alerted the Deputy Governor of Cross River State via a letter dated 23rd November, 2011, while the workers and their equipments were later released" (Amadi, 2013:18)

Consequently, it was reported that on 7th January, 2012, Oke Alo, a native of Ochuenyim in Ndiagu Amegu Ikwo went to harvest fish from a pond belonging to Bomboy Elechi Oguiyi, who hails from the Ochuenyim Ndiagu, Amegu Ikwo; suddenly, 21 youths from Adadama pounced on him, abducted him and disappeared with his water draining machine. The people of Amagu Ikwo also stated that Nwigboji Nwanchonu who disappeared on October 11, 2012 was also kidnapped by the Adadama people. The former Youth Leader of the People's Democratic Party, Chinedu Oga, who is from one of the communities stated that they attacked our community and abducted a woman

and a boy, inflicted gunshot wounds on our people and burnt several houses. He noted that the abduction of Amegu Ikwo people by the Adadama people became intensified in August, 2012.

The crisis between the people of Adadama in Abi local Government Area of Cross River State and the people of Ndiagu Amagu community in Ikwo Local Government Area of Ebonyi State re-escalated in 2013. Both communities accused each other of throwing the first stone that gave birth to the crisis. The central cause of the crisis in that year was the accusation and counter-accusation that warlords from one community entered the other community and abducted their sons and daughters, while burning and looting the properties of members of the different communities. “In 2014 , the crisis degenerated and led to loss of lives and properties from both sides which made the governments of Cross River and Ebonyi states to declare the area in dispute a buffer zone, while efforts to get the National Boundary Commission to demarcate the area was still in progress” (*The Voice*, 2015:12)

The 2015 conflict between the two communities was said to have started again when some farmers from Amagu Ikwo went to their farms located within the buffer zone without knowing that warlords from Adadama were laying ambush and opened fire on them killing 11 persons. It was reported that the timely intervention of security agencies stopped the Amagu Ikwo people from retaliating the massive loss of lives. The months of June and July, 2015 was thus characterized by sporadic shooting by men suspected to be warlords from both communities, which re-echoed and intensified the psychology of fear amongst the citizens of both communities. Since then till 2019, the conflict has remained re-current and every effort to get the National Boundary Commission to permanently demarcate the area have also been frustrated by the nature of petty politics, poor civil service culture as well as lack of diligence by workers in the Nigerian work environment.

Impact of the Conflict

The 2013 conflict led to the massive destruction of properties. Amadi (2013:1) reported that at least eight persons lost their lives from Amegu, Ikwo while not less than six people were sentenced to eternity from Adadama in the 2013 conflict. Dave Umahi revealed that eight persons from Ndiagu Amegu Ikwo were abducted from Ndiagu Amegu Ikwo between January-February, 2013. The corpse of one of them by name Omori Ogbonnaya was found in the midst of the 2013 conflict, while the body of the other seven were not traced. Not less than 11 people from Ikwo were feared to have been killed in a renewed hostility between the people of Adadama in Cross River State in June, 2015. Among the victims were two tobacco dealers, Jude Nwite Ayim and Linus Nwele. They were said to have made a farm trip to the contested buffer zone and disappeared into eternity since then.

The conflict also witnessed the displacement of a large number of people from both communities. A total of forty-five houses belonging to Amegu Ikwo people were raised down in the 2013 conflict. Thousands of families were consequently displaced. That made the State Emergency Management Agencies to source for relief materials, which were distributed to affected communities and individuals. It should be noted that the communal clash which ravaged both communities from June-July, 2015 made many residents of Ochi-Ayim Amegu and Item Amegu as well as Adadama people to flee from their homes and relocate to assumed safer parts of the communities as well as other peaceful cities within the Nigerian State. “The gravity of the communal war made it that a popular market known as Nwanga Ngbo market located between Okpuitumo people and Amegu community was closed down for security purposes” (Oginyi, 2015:24).

The economic implication of the conflict cannot be neglected. The people of the area, who are mainly farmers, have been complaining over the dangerous negative implications of the conflict to their carrier. Many of them were not able to plant rice, yam and cassava which they sale to eke-out a living. The implication is that the conflict circle is not only threatening the people’s

economic security but also their food security as there is little farming space as well as very poor social peace and security, which the people needed principally before going to farm.

Road to Peace

It should be stated that both the Ebonyi and Cross River State governments have been making efforts to ensure the peaceful resolution of the land dispute in spite of the attacks, criticisms, abductions and killings that has been witnessed in the conflict-prone environment in recent times. On 6th October, 2011, there was a joint meeting of officials of the two states in Calabar, the Cross River State capital and it was agreed that an inter-state Peace Committee be established. They were to chart a road map for peace and the final demarcation of the boundary of both Ebonyi and Cross River States along the contested terrain. The members of the peace committees from both sides were meant to meet on a monthly basis. Unfortunately, while the Ebonyi people constituted their committee and sent to the Cross River State, they did not constitute their own peace committee members till 2013 when the conflict erupted again. It should be noted that the inability of the Cross River government to establish their own peace committee members frustrated the quest to dialogue and the charting of a new path to peace until the 2013 conflict. Ebonyi State Government of Nigeria stated that “to get Cross River State to attend the Peace Committee meetings is like making a camel to pass through the eye of the needle” (Government of Ebonyi State of Nigeria, 2013:9).

The immediate past governor of Ebonyi State, Chief Martin Nwancho Elechi visited the people of Amegu, Ikwo on 15th January, 2013 and pleaded with them to remain calm and embrace peace. The Ebonyi State Government promised not to abandon the Amegu people as long as they did not take laws into their hands. The then governor of the state had an on the spot assessment of the situation. He was accompanied by the Ebonyi State Commissioner of Police at that time, Mamman Sule. A detachment of mobile policemen were sent to the contested zone in 2013. They were ordered to maintain peace and

buster security of lives and properties without taking sides with any of the two communities claiming ownership of the land. The Deputy Governor of Ebonyi State contacted his counterparts in Cross River State, who at that time was acting for the governor. They agreed that there was need for the peace committees from both states to meet and find amicable solutions to the land dispute. The Ebonyi Deputy Governor and the then Ag. Governor of Cross River State were said to have met in Federal Capital Territory, Abuja on 18th January, 2013 to discuss more on the road to peace, while maintaining their position that the conflict-prone communities would be prevailed upon to prevent further escalation of the crisis situation. Also, the Chairmen of both Ikwo Local Government Area of Ebonyi State and his counterparts in Abi Local Government of Cross River State in 2013 placed machineries on ground to halt the activities of criminals and war-mongers who use speed boats to attack unsuspecting Nigerians living on both sides of the conflict divide.

There was also the call that the National Boundary Commission (NBC) should intervene in demarcating the land border between both communities/states. The immediate past Deputy Governors of Cross River and Ebonyi States after series of peace meeting on the road to peace in contested land wrote to the NBC. The Ebonyi State and Cross River States Governments have earlier established boundary committees to look into the dynamics of the boundary relations between them and their neighbouring states. The Ebonyi State Government wrote a letter to the NBC on 11th December, 2011 demanding that they should “constitute a joint team of officials of both states and demanded NBC to do ethnographic study of both states to avoid mistrust and hostilities. We have done several other reports on the problem without results. It would seem that the NBC has abandoned its earlier attempt to do ethnographic study of the area following threats from Cross River State indigenes to the Commission not to steep feet into the disputed area” (Government of Ebonyi State of Nigeria (2013:9). The multiple nature of the bottleneck that cripples government bureaucracy in Nigeria had never

allowed the commission to engage in a comprehensive ethnographic study of the area, let alone demarcating the border clearly.

Sequel to the June 2015 outbreak of crisis, the current Deputy Governor of Ebonyi State, Dr Kelechi Igwe made a trip to Calabar, Cross River State to meet the current Cross River State Deputy Governor, Prof. Ivara Ejemot-Esu. Ivara Ejemot Esu said the meeting was to get briefed by key players and major stakeholders in the management of the crisis since the two administrations are new. They agreed to constitute the inter-state peace committee. The members of the committee will determine the factors responsible for the failure of previous peace initiatives in Yaya/Izzi, Obubura/ Abakaliki, Obubura/ Ikwo and Abi/ Ikwo communities (other border communities between both states where intermittent conflicts are experienced). The committee members include “Deputy Governors, Commissioners of Justice, Commissioners of Local Government, Permanent Secretaries in the office of Deputy Governors, Special Advisers on Security Matters, Brigade Commanders, Commissioners of Police, Surveyor General and directors of state security services” (Oginyi,2015:24). They were also mandated to critically examine the boundary lines proposed by the National Boundary Commission as well as critically examine the existing boundary demarcation captured in various areas. It was also resolved that six-man sub-committees be constituted in each of the four sections in dispute to help speed up the job of the central committee and the affected local government chairman and secretary are to serve as chairman and secretary respectively.

Conclusion and Recommendations

This paper is synoptic history of the inter-communal conflict between the people of Amegu Ikwo, Ebonyi State and the Adadama of Cross River State in Nigeria respectively. It traced the origin of the conflict to the colonial period. The work however revealed that since 2011, the conflict has re-echoed on a yearly basis. The multi-dimensional impact of the conflict was also documented before the efforts at peace building by the governments of the states involved in the conflict were presented. The conflict affected inter-

group relations on the Ikwo-Adadama border of Ebonyi and Cross River States.

Finally, there is the need for the speedy stimulation of the activities Inter-State Peace Committee. They need to consult the local communities extensively this time to ensure that the process does not break down because of the inability of the power elite to carry the community actors along in the peace process. Consequently, their findings should be submitted to NBC to enable it quickly demarcate the boundaries of the border communities amongst both states. The place of legal instrument in the peace process cannot be neglected. Transitional justice is needed to manage the psychology of revenge planted in the heart of those that have lost their loved ones in the course of the recurrent conflicts. Such transitional justice backed by informal peace education would help the masses to migrate from the sense of horror and move to a condition of peace consciousness driven by re-conditioning their mind for peace through its facilitation by messages of forgiveness and reconciliation. Again, the place of traditional peace building should not be neglected. It is a necessary instrument that should be driven by peace-loving members of the communities involved in the conflict in order to promote lasting peace.

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