Causes of Conflicts in the Niger Delta Region of Nigeria as Expressed by the Youth in Delta State

Johnson Osagie\textsuperscript{a,*}, Akinpelu ‘Funmilayo\textsuperscript{b}, Adegoke Fred\textsuperscript{c}, Ezeani Samuel\textsuperscript{d}

\textsuperscript{a}FEDERAL COLLEGE OF EDUCATION, OSIELE, ABEOKUTA, OGUN STATE P.M.B. 2096 ABEOKUTA NIGERIA
\textsuperscript{b}UNIVERSITY OF ILORIN, ILORIN KWARA STATE, NIGERIA
\textsuperscript{c}UNIVERSITY OF ILORIN, ILORIN KWARA STATE, NIGERIA
\textsuperscript{d}FEDERAL COLLEGE OF EDUCATION, OSIELE, ABEOKUTA, OGUN STATE P.M.B. 2096 ABEOKUTA NIGERIA

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Abstract

Nigeria is a multiethnic society consisting of different ethnic nationalities. During the years of military dictatorship conflict of all forms is it communal or ethnic conflicts were minimal because they were suppressed by military might. However, in the current democratic dispensation every citizen tends to have more room and opportunity to self expression, manifesting in form of conflict among clans, the Niger Delta youth harassing and abduct expatriate workers and even citizens in the Niger Delta region. These violent conflicts are largely responsible for the backwardness of the country, poverty, unemployment etc. Therefore the focus of this study was to determine the cause of conflicts in the Niger Delta region of Nigeria as expressed by the youth in Delta State. The research instrument was a self designed questionnaire named ‘‘causes of conflict questionnaire’’. This was used to gather data from four hundred respondents randomly selected from four (4) Local Government Areas of Delta State. Six research questions and five null hypotheses were generated to guide the study. Frequency count, percentages, t test and ANOVA statistics were used in analyzing the data. The result revealed that deprivation of the indigenes of the dividends of oil proceeds which is under economic factor accounted for the greatest cause of conflict and closely following it was political factor. The result also revealed that religion and ethnicity have a great influence on the conflicts. Based on the findings, it was recommended that counsellors should be used as resource persons and team members in any dispute or conflict resolution (negotiation and arbitration exercise) in various Local Government Areas, States, and Federal House of Assemblies. Also counselling centres should be established at strategic places, so that youths would have opportunities to express their grievances at the states and federal ministries of youths and within Local Government Areas to offer counselling service to the youths.

Keywords: Conflict, Crisis, Violence, Youth, Causes.

1. Introduction

Nigeria is a multiethnic society, consisting of different ethnic nationalities joined together by the Lord Luggard amalgamation of 1914. Although these groups co-exist, their ethnic and cultural values are different. These cultural differences are sometimes accentuated resulting in various kinds of communal clashes such as the Ijaw-Itsekiri-Urhobo, Benue-Cross River, Ife-Modakeke crises etc.
During the years of military dictatorship, communal clashes and ethnic conflicts were rather minimal because they were suppressed by military might. However, in the current democratic dispensation, every citizen tends to have more room and opportunity to self-expression, but at times, this right is often misunderstood for vulgarism. The resultant effect is conflicts amongst the ethnic groups, tribes, kindred and even clans.

Obiabo, Ogar and Tar-Anyin (2001), further observed that religion and other social interests seemed to have fueled these crises, stating that quarrels amongst clans, kindreds, ethnic group and even interstates are as dangerous as the civil war withered in Nigeria between 1967 and 1970. These conflicts, if not controlled, the wanton destruction recorded in Niger Delta among the Ijaws, Itsekiris, and Urhobos, in Ife - Ife and Modakeke, Nasarawa, Taraba, Benue/Cross river crises, could lead to another much more dangerous dimension (Obiabo, Ogar & Tar-Anyin, 2001).

Another crisis of big magnitude in the entity called Nigeria is the conflict between ethnic groups in the Niger Delta area and the Multinational oil companies. These areas have not known peace since the past eight years. Examples of such conflicts, include Obobutu vs Elf (October 1989), Umuechem vs Shell (October 1990), Uzere vs Shell (July 1992), and Ogoni vs Shell (1990 till date). The latest brewing conflict include the one from the issue of “resource control”, which if not properly handled by the Federal Government as quickly as possible, may hasten tension that may lead to more wanton destruction of lives and properties. This conflict, if allowed may mar the corporate existence of Nigeria (Ojo & Alao, 2001).

Conflicts can be expressed in various ways – physical assault to persons, property, accusations, threats etc. It might also not be expressed overtly as denial and avoidance. Conflict is “any situation where incompatible activities, feelings or intentions occur together”, (Gale Encyclopedia 1998). An extremely broad term used to refer to any situation where there are mutually antagonistic events, motives, purposes, behaviours, impulses etc, (Reber, 1995). It can be seen as “the arousal of two or more strong motives that cannot be solved together” (Encyclopedia Britannica, 1992). Another relevant definition is by Bernstein and others, (1994) who viewed interpersonal conflict as a process of social dispute in which one person believes that another stands in the way of something of value. The valuable things can be academic pursuit, social welfare, facilities, freedom etc.

Oby (2001) asserted that conflict is inevitable and it keeps occurring. Every day, every individual encounters at least two or three conflicts either at home, at work, at social outings or even when a person sleeps in a bedroom without talking to anyone. Therefore people are no longer new to those things that cause these conflicts, known as sources of conflicts.

These causes though inexhaustible can be categorized thus:
(a) Conflicts over resources
(b) Conflicts over psychological needs
(c) Conflicts involving values
(a) Conflicts over resources are usually easy to identify because they can be seen and are more potentially easy to resolve. This conflict occurs when two or more people want the same thing and there is not enough to go round e.g. during fuel crises, dispute over land. In such cases, you might often see the parties attacking the resources and the heat of the conflict will be focused on it usually. However, when the resources are made available the conflicts is resolved.
(b) Conflicts over psychological needs are conflicts, which cannot be seen but affect the psyche of the individual, and its productive capacity. Youths have needs, such as love, security, friendship etc. A student whose seat is taken away might not necessary want another seat elsewhere because she might want to seat close to a friend for protection. Even another seat is provided for her in another place, the conflict might re-occur, been expressed over something else.
(c) Conflict involving values are the most difficult to understand and resolve. Values are the basis of one. They are the belief system, and what people do not want to negotiate. When people in conflict talk about transparency, honesty, fairness, equality, they are talking about different values.

Andrew & Abakpa (2001) stated that conflicts could be resolved using the counselling skills following these steps:
1. Define and analyse the issue/problem to be resolved. Obtain agreement of all the parties as to the problem(s) to be resolved. Rank them, identify each person’s underlying interest and how the resolution of this dispute can be of value to them;
2. Gather fact/information required for resolution. What information for resolution do you need? Who will gather and report the information as the place of relevant prior experience to shed light on a positive solution;

3. Develop multiple options for resolutions. This is a grain storing process;

4. Maintain focus on interest and not position; focus on your interest in the matter, not on demand. Interest are what motivate people, positions are the demand about this interest.

5. Evaluate the options and make a decision. These include taking the most advantageous and lasting option; and

6. Separate the people from the problem after people might have described the problem on individual basis "Sarah makes my work difficult". When such happens the result is generally resistance or even hostility. However, if this is stated directly the other person is encouraged to discuss the issue at hand, and thereby provide an opportunity to develop options. Too often people consider only two options theirs and ours. Effective negotiation result when ranges of options are considered and the best one selected.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

Bur (2001) asserted that violent conflicts are largely responsible for the backwardness of a country. Such crises hinder the people from active participation in the economic, social and political progress of the country. It is evidently clear from the Gross National Product of the country that states are backward especially those states that are crises-prone. The other side effects are on the schools, houses, churches, mosques and displacements of people in the rural areas especially the women and children. Obviously, the effects of this phenomenon on Nigeria can best be seen than imagined. For example, losses and setbacks experienced by Nigeria in crises such as the Warri and Riverine areas cost the nation billions of naira. This is a major setback for the development of the country (Bur, 2001).

The Australian government indicated that it was dangerous for its nationals to attempt non-essential travel to the Niger Delta (including Warri), Bakassi Peninsula as well as the central and northern regions of Nigeria, including Kaduna, Jos and Kano. It noted that there had been a continuous pattern of serious inter-communal violence and unrest over recent years in Kaduna, Jos, Kano and Bakassi Peninsula, which have led to thousands of deaths and curfews imposed in some areas. The conflict between tribal groups in the Niger Delta area continues, and expatriate workers, including Australians, have been held hostage as recently as May 2003. Australians who choose to travel to these regions, despite advice, should exercise high degree of personal security awareness (Madunagu, 2003).

Rasheed, Muogbo, Olatunji and Adewole (2004) reported that on the 23rd of April, seven (7) oil workers were killed, including two American expatriates on the Warri water ways which confirm the fresh travel warnings from Government of the United States, Britain, Canada and Australia alerting their citizens of grave risks of foreigners in the Niger-Delta region.

The present study is an attempt to further research into the causes of conflicts especially with respect to Niger-Delta. Although Owuamanam (2001), Bur (2001), and Onuorah (2001) have focused more on conflicts in schools, workplace and homes (marital), the present study was an attempt to come in close touch with those that are deep necked in conflict in the Niger Delta region of Nigeria, where an empirical study of conflict has not been carried out, at least to the best of the researchers knowledge. It is also intended to highlight the counsellors’ role in reducing or resolving conflicts in Nigeria.

This study is intended to fill the gaps in the highlighted literatures by investigating the causes of conflict in the Niger Delta as expressed by the youths of Delta State.

1.3 Research Questions

From the statement of the problem, these research questions are being raised:

1. What are the causes of the conflicts as expressed by the youths in the Delta State?

2. Is there any difference in the causes of the conflicts as expressed by the youths in Delta State on the basis of gender?

3. Is there any difference in the causes of the conflicts as expressed by the youths in Delta State on the basis of age?
4. Is there any difference in the causes of the conflicts as expressed by the youths in Delta State on the basis of religion?
5. Is there any difference in the causes of the conflicts as expressed by the youths in Delta State on the basis of ethnic background?
6. Is there any difference in the causes of the conflicts as expressed by the youths in Delta State on basis of educational qualification?

1.4 Research Hypotheses

The following null hypotheses were formulated to serve as guide for the study:
1. There is no significant difference in the causes of conflict in the Niger Delta as expressed by male and female respondents.
2. There is no significant difference in the causes of conflict in Niger Delta as expressed by the respondents on the basis of age.
3. There is no significant difference in the causes of conflict in Niger Delta as expressed by the respondents on the basis of religion.
4. There is no significant difference in the causes of conflict in Niger Delta as expressed by the respondent on the basis of ethnic background.
5. There is no significant difference in the causes of conflict in Niger Delta as expressed by the respondents on the basis of educational qualification.

1.5 Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to investigate the causes of the conflicts as expressed by the youths in Delta State.

The study will further investigate the influence of variables of interest, such as, gender, age, religion, ethnic background and educational qualification on causes of conflict in the Niger Delta region of Nigeria as expressed by youths in Delta State.

2. Methodology

2.1 Research Design

The research design that was employed for this study was the descriptive survey design.

2.2 Sample and Sampling Procedure

The target population for this study was the youths in Delta State. The four Local Government Areas involved in the conflict include Uvwie, Udu, Ughelli North, and Warri Central Local Governments. Uvwie is made up of the Urhobos, Udu comprises the Itsekiris and Urhobos while Ughelli North is purely Ijaws, and Warri Central comprises Itsekiris and Ijaws.

A two stage sampling procedure was adopted for this study. First is the purposive sampling procedure used to select the four Local Government Areas. For the second stage in the sampling procedure adopted, stratified random sampling technique was used. In doing this, the dip-hat techniques was used such that all the names of possible participants by strata from the school and Local Government Areas were written in pieces of paper, and the papers folded and put in a bowl. Then, picking them one by one such that every participant has equal chance of being selected, and in all 400 participants representing a distribution of 100 per Local Government Area, were selected to participate in the study.

2.3 Instrumentation

The questionnaire that was used for the study was styled “Causes of Conflict Questionnaire” (CCQ). The questionnaire consists of five (5) sections. Section A is on personal information about the respondents. It consists of five questions. Section B is meant to look into how political factors cause conflicts, and it consists of eight (8)
questions. Section C has eight questions that deal with how social factors contribute to conflict. Section D has to do with the economic factor, how it causes conflict, this section has eight items.

2.4 Validity

To ascertain the content validity of the instrument of the study, the draft was given to five experts in the department of Guidance and Counselling for vetting. The researcher effected the experts’ correction and incorporated their suggestions in order to meet the objective and purposes of the study. The experts consensus was that the instrument has content validity and therefore suitable to be used for the study.

2.5 Reliability

To establish the reliability of Causes of Conflict Questionnaire (CCQ), test-re-test method was used. A total number of thirty (30) questionnaire forms were given to the respondents in Ilorin Metropolis. The respondents were youths with similar characteristics with those who actually participated in the study. The reliability of the instrument was found to be 0.68, which was adjudged as adequate for determining the reliability of the instrument.

2.6 Procedure for Data Administration and Collection

The questionnaire was administered to the respondents by the researcher and four research assistants in each of the Local Government used. And as soon as they finished the exercise, the respondents submitted the questionnaire to the researcher or the research assistants.

2.7 Procedure for Scoring the Instrument

The items in the instrument were scored using four-likert type scale of 4, 3, 2, and 1.

- Strongly Agree - 4 points
- Agree - 3 points
- Disagree - 2 points
- Strongly Disagree - 1 point

Section A, which is on personal data of respondents, was scored using simple percentage and frequency count. Section B with eight (8) items was scored using a four-likert type scale of 4, 3, 2, and 1. The highest any respondent can have in this section is 32 i.e. (4x8) and the least is 8(1x8). The range is 32-8 = 24. The midpoint is 24/2 = 12. The cut off point is 32-12=20. Thus, a score of 21 to 32 is considered as having a high perception, while 20 and below are considered as having low perception.

In section E, the scale, which has to do with the consequences of conflicts with 15 items, was scored using a four likert scale of 4, 3, 2, and 1. The highest any respondent can have is 60 i.e. (4x15) and the least is 1x15 =15. The range is 60-15 = 45, the midpoint is 45/2=22.5, while the cut off point is 22.5+15, which amounts to 37.5 score of 38.5 to 60 is considered to have low perception of causes and consequences of conflicts.

2.8 Method of Data Analysis

The statistical method of analyzing this section was frequency count and percentages. The research questions were analyzed using mean rating of the items and mean rank order. Five hypotheses generated in the course of research work were tested using two statistical approaches of t-test and analyses of variance (ANOVA).

3. Results

3.1 Research Question 1

What are the causes of conflict as expressed by the youths in Delta State?
Table 1: Rank order of Factors Expressed as Causes of Conflict by the Youths in Delta State

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factors</th>
<th>Means</th>
<th>Rank</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Economic</td>
<td>23.481</td>
<td>1st</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Political</td>
<td>23.216</td>
<td>2nd</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Socio-culture</td>
<td>20.357</td>
<td>3rd</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3 shows that economic factors with a mean of 23.481 – ranked 1st in the factors expressed as cause of conflict. It was closely followed by political factors with a mean of 23.216 – ranked 2nd, socio-cultural with a mean of 20.357 – ranked 3rd.

3.2 Hypotheses Testing

Hypothesis 1 stated that: There is no significant difference in the causes of conflict in the Niger Delta as expressed by male and female respondents.

Table 2: Means, Standard Deviations and t-test Values of Male and Female Respondents on the Causes of Conflict in the Niger Delta State.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>No.</th>
<th>X</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>DF</th>
<th>Cal. T-Value</th>
<th>Critical t-Value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>211</td>
<td>68.60</td>
<td>9.01</td>
<td>398</td>
<td>-1.43</td>
<td>1.96</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>189</td>
<td>69.93</td>
<td>9.16</td>
<td>398</td>
<td>-1.43</td>
<td>1.96</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2 shows the result of t-test analysis of the respondents on the basis of gender on the causes of conflict. The results revealed that the calculated t-value of -1.43 was lower than the critical t-value of 1.96. Therefore the hypothesis was accepted.

Hypothesis 2 stated that: There is no significant difference in the causes of conflicts in Niger Delta as expressed by the respondents on the basis of age.

Table 3: Mean of Squares, Sum of Squares and F-value of Variance of Respondents on the Basis of Age.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source</th>
<th>DF</th>
<th>Sum of Squares</th>
<th>Mean Square</th>
<th>Cal. F- Value</th>
<th>Critical F-Value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Between Groups</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>382.6224</td>
<td>127.5408</td>
<td>1.55</td>
<td>2.60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Within Groups</td>
<td>396</td>
<td>32622.3376</td>
<td>82.3796</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>399</td>
<td>33004.9600</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3 shows the result of the analysis of Variance of respondents on the causes of conflict on the basis of age. The results revealed that the calculated F-value of 1.55. Therefore the hypothesis was accepted.

Hypothesis 3 stated that: There is no significant difference in the causes of conflict in the Niger Delta as expressed by the respondents on the basis of religion.

Table 4: Mean Square, Sum of Squares and F-value of Variance of Respondents on the Basis of Religion

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source</th>
<th>DF</th>
<th>Sum of Squares</th>
<th>Cal. F- Value</th>
<th>Critical F-Value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Between Groups</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>883.0732</td>
<td>5.47</td>
<td>3.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Within Groups</td>
<td>397</td>
<td>32121.8868</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>399</td>
<td>33004.9600</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Significance at 0.05 level of significance.

Table 4 shows the result of the analysis of variance of respondents on the basis of religion on the causes of conflict. The result revealed that the calculated F-value of 5.47 was higher than the critical F-value of 3.00. Therefore the hypothesis was rejected.

Hypothesis 4 Stated that: There is no significant difference on the causes of conflict in the Niger Delta as expressed by the respondents on the basis of ethnic background.
Table 5: Mean Square, Sum of Squares and F-value of respondents on the basis of ethnic background.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source</th>
<th>DF</th>
<th>Sum of Squares</th>
<th>Mean Square</th>
<th>Cal. F-Value</th>
<th>Critical F-Value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Between Groups</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1646.9049</td>
<td>823.4525</td>
<td>78.9875</td>
<td>10.43*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Within Groups</td>
<td>397</td>
<td>31368.0551</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>3.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>399</td>
<td>33004.9600</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Significant at 0.05 level of significance

Table 5 shows the result of the analysis of variance of respondents on the basis of ethnic background on the calculate F-value of 10.43 was higher than the critical F-value of 3.00. Therefore the hypothesis was rejected.

**Hypothesis 5 stated that:**

There is no significant difference in the causes of conflict in Niger Delta as expressed by the respondents on the basis of educational qualification.

Table 6: Mean Square, Sum of Squares and F-value of respondents on the basis of educational qualification.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source</th>
<th>DF</th>
<th>Sum of Squares</th>
<th>Mean Square</th>
<th>Cal. F-Value</th>
<th>Critical F-Value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Between Groups</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>465.4599</td>
<td>93.0920</td>
<td></td>
<td>1.13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Within Groups</td>
<td>394</td>
<td>32539.5001</td>
<td>82.5876</td>
<td></td>
<td>2.21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>399</td>
<td>33004.9600</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 6 shows the result of the analysis of variance of respondents on the basis of educational background on the causes of conflict. The result revealed that the calculated F-value of 1.13 was lower than the critical F-value of 2.21. Therefore the hypothesis was accepted.

4. Discussion

The discussions of the results in this study were based on each of the findings. Table 1 which presents the item by item rank order of the causes of conflict as expressed by the respondents, reveals that struggling for land ownership, large scale corruption in the nation’s political system and government approach in handling conflict are the major causes of conflict in Niger Delta. In table 2, the null hypothesis, which stated that, there is no significant difference in the causes of conflict in Niger Delta, as expressed by male and female respondents was accepted. In other words, there is no significant difference in the expression of the male and female respondents on the causes of conflict. Male and female respondents share the same view due to the fact that they share the same cultural background, which goes a long way in determining how people view things around them. In table 3, the null hypothesis which stated that there is no significant difference in the causes of conflict in Niger Delta as expressed by the respondents on the basis of age was accepted. This shows that there is no significant difference in the causes of conflict on the basis of age. In other words the youths who are the respondents view the causes of conflict in the same way. In table 4, the null hypothesis which stated that there is no significant difference in the causes of conflict in the Niger Delta as expressed by the respondents on the basis of religion was rejected; this shows that there is significant difference on the basis of religion. This is in line with Aslem (2001) who remarked that religious differences place a barrier between people of the same decent. Also Jegede (1991) further emphasized that religion causes differences in families by observing that when a husband and his wife subscribe to different religion disagreements may arise about the children’s religious upbringing. In table 5, the null hypothesis which stated that there is no significant difference in the causes of conflict in the Niger Delta as expressed by the respondents on the basis of ethnic background was rejected, meaning that there is significant difference on the basis of ethnic background on the causes of conflict. This is in line with Bur (2001) who observed that conflicts occur as a result of a disagreement with the view of other, which is usually fuelled by differences in cultural background. In table 6, the null hypothesis which stated that there is no significant difference in the causes of conflict in the Niger Delta as expressed by the respondents on the basis of educational qualification was accepted. This shows that there is no significant difference on the causes of conflict on the basis of educational qualification.

4.1 Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations are hereby proposed:
More professional counsellors should be trained for use in human institutions as personnel/human administrators for conflict resolution business with the help of learned skills. Networking of all counselling activities across the states, nation and institutions to benefit from common cases, strategies and ideologies for better counselling services should be made available. Professional counsellors should be used as resource persons and as team members in any dispute or conflict resolution, negotiation and arbitration exercises. Youth centres should be carefully provided at strategic places within communities to offer counselling services to youths. Media enlightenment should form a veritable tool for counselling the youth for conflict management.

4.2 Conclusion

The result of the findings revealed that deprivation of the indigenes of the dividends of oil proceeds which is under economic factor accounted for the greatest cause of conflict and closely following it was political factor. The result also revealed that religion and ethnicity have a great influence on the conflicts. Hence, the need for the Government, religious bodies, counsellors and nongovernmental organizations to promote and exhibit values that can serve as melting point of diverse cultures, beliefs and ideologies in the country.

References


The new encyclopedia Britannica. (1992), 35