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The Socio-Economic Costs of Boundary Disputes in Rural Nigeria: Evidence From Aladja and Ogbe-Ijoh Communities, Delta State

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ABSTRACT: Inter-ethnic conflict remains a major challenge to socio-economic development in many parts of Nigeria. One of the most persistent and violent conflicts in Delta State is the boundary dispute between Aladja and Ogbe-Ijoh communities. This conflict has resulted in the loss of lives and properties, disruption of social, political, and economic activities, increased poverty, and setbacks in educational development. Despite several peace agreements and interventions aimed at resolving the crisis, hostilities have continued to recur, thereby hindering sustainable development in both communities. This study examined the causes of inter-ethnic conflict between Aladja and Ogbe-Ijoh communities and assessed its impact on socio-economic development. Specifically, the study investigated the major causes of the conflict, evaluated its influence on employment opportunities, and examined its effects on the standard of living of residents in the affected communities. The study was anchored on Conflict Theory, which posits that conflicts arise when groups compete over scarce resources and seek to control valuable assets and opportunities. A qualitative research design was adopted, while data were collected from secondary sources, including books, journal articles, government publications, reports, and credible online materials. Data were analyzed using qualitative content analysis. The findings revealed that disputes over land ownership and boundary demarcation constitute the primary causes of the conflict. The study further found that the recurring conflict has negatively affected employment opportunities by disrupting economic activities and discouraging investment. In addition, the conflict has lowered the standard of living of residents through the destruction of property, displacement of people, reduced access to social services, and increased poverty. The study recommends sustained peacebuilding initiatives, effective boundary demarcation and mapping, equitable distribution of resources, and stronger collaboration among government agencies, traditional institutions, and community leaders to promote lasting peace and facilitate socio-economic development in the affected communities.

Keywords: Conflict, Inter-ethnic conflict, ethnicity, socio-economic development.

INTRODUCTION

Conflict is an inevitable aspect of human society and has existed throughout human history. It arises when individuals or groups pursue incompatible goals, compete over scarce resources, or perceive threats to their interests and values. According to Coser (1956), conflict is a struggle over values, status, power, and scarce resources in which the objective of opposing parties is to neutralize, injure, or eliminate their rivals. Similarly, Thomas (1992) defines conflict as a process that begins when one party perceives that another party has negatively affected, or is about to negatively affect, something that it values. Although conflict may sometimes stimulate social change and

transformation, prolonged and violent conflicts often result in social disintegration, economic stagnation, and political instability (Kreitner & Kinicki, 2010).

One form of conflict that has attracted considerable scholarly attention is inter-ethnic conflict. Inter-ethnic conflict refers to disputes, tensions, or violent confrontations between ethnic groups arising from competing interests, historical grievances, political exclusion, territorial claims, boundary disputes, or struggles over scarce resources (Horowitz, 1985; Osaghae, 1996). In many multi-ethnic societies, ethnic diversity serves as a source of cultural enrichment; however, it can also become a source of tension and violent confrontation when competing interests are not effectively managed (Osaghae & Suberu, 2005). Across Africa, inter-ethnic conflicts have contributed to social instability, displacement of populations, destruction of infrastructure, and loss of lives, thereby undermining socio-economic development (Human Rights Watch, 2005; Osaghae & Suberu, 2005). Nigeria is one of the most ethnically diverse countries in the world, with over 250 ethnic groups.

While this diversity has enriched the country's cultural heritage and social fabric, it has also generated numerous ethnic and communal conflicts. Many of these conflicts have been linked to disputes over land ownership, territorial boundaries, political representation, access to natural resources, and claims of indigeneity (Osaghae, 1996; Horowitz, 1985). Notable examples include the Aguleri–Umuleri conflict in Anambra State (discussed within broader intra-ethnic conflict literature; see Osaghae, 1996), the Zangon-Kataf crisis in Kaduna State (Human Rights Watch, 2005), and the various Ijaw–Itsekiri–Urhobo conflicts in the Niger Delta region (Human Rights Watch, 2005; Watts, 2004). These conflicts have often resulted in the loss of lives and property, displacement of people, disruption of economic activities, and weakened social cohesion, thereby impeding development efforts.

Socio-economic development refers to the process through which the economic and social conditions of individuals and communities improve over time. It encompasses increased employment opportunities, poverty reduction, improved healthcare services, better educational outcomes, enhanced infrastructure, and improved standards of living (Todaro & Smith, 2015; Seers, 1969). Sustainable socio-economic development thrives in an environment characterized by peace, security, and social stability. Conversely, persistent conflicts discourage investment, destroy productive assets, disrupt livelihoods, and limit access to essential social services (Collier, 2007).

In the Niger Delta region of Nigeria, communal and inter-ethnic conflicts have remained significant challenges to peace and development. According to the Peace and Development Initiative (PIND, 2023), Delta State recorded more than 150 fatalities arising from communal conflicts between 2021 and 2023, largely due to disputes over land ownership and boundary demarcation. These recurring conflicts have contributed to insecurity, population displacement, economic decline, and the destruction of critical infrastructure across affected communities. Among the most notable inter-ethnic conflicts in Delta State is the Aladja–Ogbe-Ijoh conflict. Aladja, predominantly inhabited by the Urhobo ethnic group, is located in Udu Local Government Area, while Ogbe-Ijoh, predominantly inhabited by the Ijaw ethnic group, serves as the headquarters of Warri South-West Local Government Area. The conflict between the two communities centres primarily on a disputed parcel of land measuring approximately 289.9 hectares that forms part of their common boundary. Historical records indicate that low-level disputes existed prior to the major outbreak of violence in 1995 and 1996. Since then, the

conflict has become one of the most protracted communal crises in Delta State, resulting in loss of lives, destruction of property, displacement of residents, and disruption of social and economic activities (Keme, 2020). According to Enock-Etimighan and Ebimiebo (2024), the conflict remains one of the most violent communal disputes in the state despite numerous peace agreements and government interventions. The persistence of the conflict has been attributed to unresolved boundary issues, non-implementation of previous recommendations, and competing claims to the disputed territory.

The socio-economic consequences of the conflict have been significant. Mogborukor, Arisabor, and Yusuf (2022) observed that boundary disputes in Delta State have resulted in loss of income, destruction of farmlands, displacement of residents, reduced agricultural productivity, and increased poverty. Similarly, Umeoka and Sakurai (2025) argue that conflict-induced insecurity negatively affects investment, agricultural production, market activities, and livelihood sustainability. In the case of Aladja and Ogbe-Ijoh, recurring violence has adversely affected farming, trading, transportation, educational activities, and community development initiatives, thereby undermining socio-economic progress.

Despite several interventions by government agencies, traditional rulers, security institutions, and community leaders, the conflict continues to recur periodically. The persistence of the crisis raises important questions regarding its implications for socio-economic development in the affected communities. It is against this backdrop that this study examines the impact of inter-ethnic conflict on socio-economic development in Aladja and Ogbe-Ijoh communities of Delta State, Nigeria.

Statement of the Problem

The Niger Delta region remains one of the most economically strategic regions in Nigeria due to its abundant petroleum and natural gas resources. Despite its economic significance, the region has experienced numerous communal and inter-ethnic conflicts arising from disputes over land ownership, resource control, territorial boundaries, and political interests. These conflicts have undermined peace, security, and development across many communities within the region.

One of the most persistent of such conflicts is the Aladja–Ogbe-Ijoh conflict in Delta State. The conflict, which is primarily rooted in disputes over land ownership and boundary demarcation, has continued for decades despite repeated peace initiatives and government interventions. Over the years, violent clashes between the two communities have resulted in loss of lives, destruction of residential and commercial properties, displacement of residents, and disruption of social and economic activities. The recurring nature of the conflict has created a climate of insecurity that continues to threaten peaceful coexistence and development within the affected communities.

Beyond its humanitarian consequences, the conflict has had profound socio-economic implications. Frequent outbreaks of violence have disrupted farming, trading, transportation, and other income-generating activities, thereby reducing employment opportunities and worsening poverty levels. The destruction of infrastructure and the prevailing insecurity have discouraged investment and hindered the implementation of development projects. Consequently, many residents have experienced declining living standards and limited access to social and economic opportunities. Empirical studies have highlighted the adverse effects of communal conflicts on development in Delta State. For instance, Mogborukor et al. (2022) found that boundary disputes have contributed to the destruction of livelihoods,

displacement of residents, reduced agricultural productivity, and increased poverty. Similarly, Enock-Etimighan and Ebimiebo (2024) observed that the Aladja–Ogbe-Ijoh conflict continues to persist despite numerous peacebuilding efforts due to unresolved boundary disputes and ineffective implementation of conflict-resolution measures.

However, while existing studies have largely focused on the causes, dynamics, and resolution of communal conflicts in Delta State, limited attention has been given to the specific effects of the prolonged Aladja–Ogbe-Ijoh conflict on socio-economic development indicators such as employment opportunities and standards of living. This gap in the literature creates the need for a focused investigation into how the conflict has affected the socio-economic wellbeing of residents in the two communities. It is therefore against this background that this study seeks to examine the impact of inter-ethnic conflict on socio-economic development in Aladja and Ogbe-Ijoh communities of Delta State. Specifically, the study investigates the causes of the conflict and assesses its effects on employment opportunities and the standard of living of residents, with a view to providing recommendations for sustainable peace and development.

Research Objectives

The general objective of this study is to evaluate the impact of inter-ethnic conflict on socio-economic development between Aladja and Ogbe-Ijoh. The specific objectives of this study are to:

i. examine the major causes of inter-ethnic conflict in Aladja and Ogbe-Ijoh
ii. evaluate how inter-ethnic conflict influences employment opportunities in Aladja and Ogbe-Ijoh.
iii. assess how inter-ethnic conflict affects the standard of living in Aladja and Ogbe-Ijoh.

Research Questions

This study is guided by the following research questions:

i. What are the major causes of inter-ethnic conflict between Aladja and Ogbe-Ijoh?
ii. How does inter-ethnic conflict influence employment opportunities in Aladja and Ogbe-Ijoh?
iii. To what extent does inter-ethnic conflict affect the standard of living in Aladja and Ogbe-Ijoh?

Study Area

Geographically, it is important to examine the physical and human characteristics of Delta State in order to contextualize the study area. Delta State lies between latitude 5°00'N and 5°45'N and longitude 6°00'E and 6°30'E (Odemerho & Ejemeyovwi, 2007). The terrain is predominantly low-lying with an undulating relief of approximately 12 meters above sea level, shaped largely by fluvial processes. The state is drained by several rivers including the Ethiope, Forcados, Warri, Orogodo, and Nun rivers, which play significant roles in fishing, transportation, and livelihood activities. However, these water bodies and surrounding land resources have also historically contributed to boundary and resource-based disputes among communities (Areola, 1990; Mogborukor, 2007).

Delta State is located within the humid tropical rainforest zone and experiences a moist tropical climate characterized by high rainfall, exceeding 2,000 mm annually, with a bimodal rainfall pattern (Ogidiolu, 1996). The region experiences two main seasons: the wet and dry seasons. The wet season begins around March, peaks in July, and has a short dry spell known as the "August break," while the dry season lasts from November to February. The favourable climatic conditions support year-round agricultural activities, which has, in some cases, intensified competition over arable land and contributed to boundary-related disputes among communities (Mogborukor, 2007). Delta State has experienced steady population growth since its creation in 1991,

leading to increasing pressure on land and resources. Administratively, it is divided into 25 Local Government Areas to enhance governance and development planning. However, unclear boundary demarcations and competing claims over land ownership have contributed to recurrent communal conflicts in several parts of the state (Human Rights Watch, 2005; Osaghae & Suberu, 2005).

One of such conflicts is the long-standing dispute between Ogbe-Ijoh community in Warri South-West Local Government Area and Aladja community in Udu Local Government Area. The two communities share a boundary and have engaged in repeated violent confrontations over land ownership and territorial claims. These conflicts have resulted in loss of lives, destruction of property, displacement of residents, and disruption of socio-economic activities in the affected areas.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The purpose of the review is to provide a comprehensive understanding of key concepts, theoretical explanations, and empirical findings relevant to the study. It is structured under conceptual review, causes of conflict, types of conflict, inter-ethnic conflict, and theoretical perspectives guiding the study.

Conceptual Review

Concept of Development

Development is a normative and multidimensional concept that reflects improvements in the economic, social, and political well-being of individuals and societies. It is widely argued that development is context-specific, varying across time, space, and circumstances, and therefore cannot be reduced to a single universal definition. According to Sen (1999), development is the expansion of human freedoms and capabilities. From this perspective, development is achieved when individuals have the freedom to participate meaningfully in economic, social, and political life in ways that improve their overall well-being. It emphasizes not only income but also opportunities, empowerment, and quality of life.

Similarly, Dudley Seers (1969) argues that development cannot be said to exist where poverty, unemployment, and inequality remain widespread. In this sense, development involves the reduction of deprivation and the improvement of basic human needs such as employment, food security, healthcare, education, and social welfare. In summary, development is best understood as a process of improving human conditions and expanding opportunities for individuals and communities to achieve a decent standard of living.

Concept of Socio-Economic Development

Socio-economic development is a broad concept that captures the improvement of both the economic and social conditions of individuals and communities. It reflects progress in areas such as income generation, employment opportunities, education, healthcare, infrastructure, and overall quality of life. Unlike narrow economic growth, socio-economic development emphasizes the distributional and human dimensions of development. According to Todaro and Smith (2015), socio-economic development involves sustained improvement in living standards, including higher incomes, reduced poverty, expanded employment opportunities, and improved access to basic services such as health and education. They argue that development should be people-centered and not limited to increases in Gross Domestic Product (GDP) alone.

Similarly, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP, 2016) conceptualizes socio-economic development as a process that expands people's choices and improves their well-being through access to health, education, decent living standards, and participation in governance. This perspective is strongly reflected in the Human

Development Index (HDI), which measures development beyond income to include life expectancy and education. Seers (1969) further emphasizes that socio-economic development cannot be said to exist where poverty, unemployment, and inequality persist. In his view, real development involves the reduction of inequality, the elimination of poverty, and the creation of employment opportunities that improve the material well-being of people.

In the context of this study, socio-economic development refers to the improvement in employment opportunities, income levels, access to basic social services, and overall standard of living of residents in Aladja and Ogbe-Ijoh communities, which may be influenced by the presence or absence of inter-ethnic conflict.

Concept of Conflict

Conflict is an inevitable feature of human interaction and social organization. Rahim (2017) defines conflict as an interactive process characterized by incompatibility, disagreement, or dissonance within or between social entities such as individuals, groups, or organizations. Similarly, Galtung (2009) describes conflict as a situation in which actors pursue incompatible goals. Robbins (2005) conceptualizes conflict as a process that begins when one party perceives that another party has negatively affected something it values. This highlights that conflict may arise from both real and perceived threats. Kreitner and Kinicki (2010) further argue that conflict is a normal part of social life and can lead to change, although it becomes destructive when poorly managed.

Park and Burgess (1921) and Simmel (1955), as cited in Coser (1964), maintain that conflict is part of social interaction and should not be viewed entirely as negative. Rather, it is a mechanism through which social change occurs. Rahim (2002) further explains conflict through five key elements: interacting parties, contradictory objectives, perception of conflict, manifestation of conflict, and involvement of social entities. These elements show that conflict develops when individuals or groups perceive incompatible goals and act upon those perceptions. Overall, conflict arises from disagreement between two or more parties over interests, values, beliefs, or goals, and is a natural part of human society.

Causes of Conflict

Conflict is a product of several interconnected factors and does not occur spontaneously. The major causes of conflict relevant to this study include: One of the most common causes of conflict is competition over scarce resources such as land, political power, and economic opportunities. In resource-scarce environments, groups often struggle to secure access, leading to tension and confrontation.

Historical grievances refer to long-standing feelings of injustice, discrimination, or marginalization experienced by groups. Horowitz (1985) argues that ethnic conflict often originates from historical patterns of inequality and domination. Galtung (1969) further notes that when historical injustices are not addressed, they accumulate and eventually erupt into violent conflict.

Conflict also arises when individuals or groups pursue incompatible objectives. According to Deutsch (1973), the greater the perceived incompatibility between goals, the more intense the conflict becomes. In such situations, the success of one group is often perceived as the failure of another. Poor communication is another major cause of conflict. Pruitt and Rubin (1986) argue that misinterpretation of intentions, motives, and actions often escalates disagreements into full-blown conflict situations.

Types of Conflict

Conflict exists in different forms depending on the actors involved and the context in which it occurs.

i. Intra-Personal Conflict; According to Lewin (1935), intra-personal conflict occurs within an individual when faced with competing desires, values, or decisions, leading to psychological tension.

ii. Interpersonal Conflict; Interpersonal conflict occurs between individuals as a result of differences in attitudes, values, or competition over limited resources. Deutsch (1973) notes that such conflict arises when individuals perceive their goals as mutually exclusive.

iii. Intra-Group Conflict; This occurs within a group when members disagree over leadership, roles, decisions, or policies.

iv. Inter-Group Conflict; Lewis (1956) defines inter-group conflict as a struggle between groups pursuing competing interests, values, or goals. It is often driven by competition for resources, power, or recognition.

Simon Fisher's 5 Stages of Conflict

Stage	Features
Pre-conflict/latent stage	Breakdown in communication, cold confrontation
Confrontation/manifestation/escalation	Confrontation, formation of alliances, strained relations
Crisis/explosive stage	The climax of conflict, fierce conflict, violent confrontations, killings and destruction of properties
De-escalation stage/outcome	Conflict is won, lost or a ceasefire is initiated. Dialogue is initiated
Post-conflict stage	Underlying causes of conflicts are addressed to initiate sustainable peace

Fisher's conflict cycle is highly relevant to the Aladja–Ogbe-Ijoh conflict because it helps explain how long-standing tensions between the two communities can progress from latent grievances over land and boundaries into violent confrontations, and why repeated attempts at resolution have not fully prevented recurrence of conflict.

Ethnic and Inter-ethnic Conflict

Ethnic conflict is a widespread phenomenon in multi-ethnic societies. Horowitz (1985) defines ethnic conflict as disputes involving groups differentiated by shared ancestry, language, or cultural identity. Such conflicts often arise from historical grievances and competition over resources. Inter-ethnic conflict specifically refers to disputes between two or more ethnic groups within a society. Otite (2000) explains that such conflicts arise when groups with distinct identities engage in competition over scarce resources. Similarly, Nnoli (1978) describes ethnic conflict as a struggle for political power and economic resources often shaped by perceptions of inequality and marginalization.

Inter-ethnic conflict is further intensified by strong ethnic consciousness, where individuals show strong loyalty to their ethnic group sometimes at the expense of national unity. In plural societies like Nigeria, this often leads to distrust, competition, and violent confrontation when groups feel excluded from political or economic benefits.

Scholars have also explained inter-ethnic conflict through three major theoretical perspectives:

i. Primordialist perspective, which attributes conflict to deep-rooted ethnic identities and historical ties

ii. Instrumentalist perspective, which sees ethnicity as a tool used by elites for political and economic gain
iii. Constructivist perspective, which views ethnic identity as socially constructed and influenced by social conditions

These perspectives highlight the complexity of ethnic conflicts in multi-ethnic societies.

Empirical Review: Aladja–Ogbe-Ijoh Conflict

The Aladja–Ogbe-Ijoh conflict remains one of the most persistent and violent boundary-related disputes in Delta State, Nigeria. The conflict involves Aladja, an Urhobo community in Udu Local Government Area, and Ogbe-Ijoh, an Ijaw community and administrative headquarters of Warri South-West Local Government Area. The dispute has persisted since the mid-1990s and is primarily rooted in contested land ownership and boundary demarcation issues (Oghenesivbe, 2023; Keme, 2020). At the core of the conflict are competing historical narratives over land ownership. Aladja community claims that the land occupied by Ogbe-Ijoh was transferred to them following the displacement of Ogbe-Ijoh people from Warri GRA by British colonial authorities in 1908, after which they were resettled in their present location (Oghenesivbe, 2023). Based on this position, Aladja accuses Ogbe-Ijoh of encroachment into their ancestral farmlands and fishponds.

In contrast, Ogbe-Ijoh maintains that the disputed land historically belongs to them. Keme (2020) argues that the natural boundary between both communities is the creek around the Delta Steel Company (DSC) axis, as reflected in colonial administrative records such as the Nigerian Protectorate and Cameroon Order in Council (1946). He further notes that the 1955 Jackson Line map defined administrative boundaries that support Ogbe-Ijoh's territorial claims, while also pointing out inconsistencies in the recognition of Aladja in earlier colonial records (Keme, 2020; Okobiebi, 2022).

The conflict has been characterized by repeated violent confrontations and economic disruption. Between 1999 and 2008, Aladja community allegedly mounted roadblocks along the only access road constructed by the Shell Petroleum Development Company (SPDC), restricting movement into Ogbe-Ijoh and demanding payments from contractors. There were also reports of sand excavation activities near access routes, aimed at obstructing mobility and economic access between the communities (Human Rights Watch, 2005; Oghenesivbe, 2023).

Despite government interventions, the conflict persisted and escalated. In 2015, tensions increased following a confrontation during a filling station construction attempt in Ogbe-Ijoh, which resulted in the vandalization of an excavator and renewed hostility between both communities (Keme, 2020). Both communities have also accused each other of violent attacks, including destruction of property, assaults, and intimidation, reflecting deep mistrust and cycles of retaliation. Efforts to resolve the conflict included state-led mediation and agreements involving representatives of both communities, alongside security agencies and local government officials. However, these agreements did not yield lasting peace. In 2016, renewed violence was recorded, including stop-and-search operations reportedly carried out at the Aladja end of the road, as well as armed confrontations at waterfront areas following alleged attacks on women engaged in farming activities (Oghenesivbe, 2023).

In response to the escalation, the Delta State Government established the Prof. Abednego Ekoko Panel of Inquiry in 2016 to delineate boundaries between Warri South-West and Udu Local Government Areas, as well as between Aladja and Ogbe-Ijoh communities. The panel recommended boundary

demarcation, including the erection of pillars; however, these measures were reportedly resisted and dismantled shortly after implementation, further undermining peace efforts (Keme, 2020).

Empirically, the conflict has had significant socio-economic consequences. The destruction of houses, markets, roads, and shops has disrupted economic activities in both communities. Many residents have lost livelihoods due to insecurity and restricted access to farmlands and trading routes, resulting in declining employment opportunities and reduced standards of living (UNDP, 2016; World Bank, 2011). These outcomes directly align with the research objectives of this study, which examine how inter-ethnic conflict affects employment opportunities and standard of living in Aladja and Ogbe-Ijoh.

Overall, the literature indicates that the persistence of the Aladja–Ogbe-Ijoh conflict is driven by competing historical claims, unresolved boundary demarcation, and weak conflict resolution outcomes, all of which continue to undermine socio-economic development in the affected communities.

Theoretical Framework

This study adopts Conflict Theory as its theoretical framework because it provides a strong analytical lens for explaining inter-ethnic conflict and its implications for socio-economic development in Aladja and Ogbe-Ijoh communities. Conflict Theory posits that conflict is an inevitable feature of society arising from competition over scarce resources, unequal distribution of power, and conflicting interests among social groups. The theory helps to explain how social conflicts emerge, persist, and influence relationships, institutions, and development outcomes within society.

Conflict Theory is largely rooted in the works of Karl Marx (1848), who argued that society is structured around class divisions between the bourgeoisie (owners of production) and the proletariat (working class). According to Marx, conflict arises from unequal access to resources and power, leading to exploitation, domination, and social instability. Marx maintained that social order is maintained not through consensus, but through the domination of powerful groups over less powerful ones. This unequal structure generates tensions that may eventually lead to open conflict and social change. Although Marx focused on economic class, his ideas provide a foundation for understanding broader forms of conflict, including ethnic and communal struggles.

Max Weber (1947) expanded Conflict Theory beyond purely economic explanations by introducing a multidimensional view of inequality. He argued that conflict arises not only from class differences but also from competition over power, status, and authority. Weber identified three key dimensions of social stratification: Class (economic position); Status (social prestige); and Power (ability to influence others). According to Weber, inequalities in these dimensions often produce domination and marginalization, which may lead to social tension and conflict. This perspective is particularly relevant to the Aladja–Ogbe-Ijoh conflict, where disputes over land ownership, territorial control, and political recognition reflect struggles over both material resources and social identity.

Contemporary scholars have broadened Conflict Theory to explain various forms of social conflict beyond class struggle. Hayes (2022) explains that Conflict Theory has evolved to analyze inequalities arising from competition between different social groups, including ethnic, religious, and political groups. These inequalities often generate tensions that escalate into conflict when not properly managed. Galtung (1973) further contributed by arguing that conflict and cooperation coexist in society. He introduced the idea of structural violence, where unequal

social structures prevent groups from meeting their basic needs, even without direct physical violence. This is highly relevant to inter-ethnic conflicts, where structural inequalities in land access, political representation, and economic opportunities can fuel long-standing tensions.

Modern applications of Conflict Theory have been developed by scholars such as John Paul Lederach (1996), who introduced Conflict Transformation Theory. Lederach argues that conflicts should not only be resolved but transformed by addressing underlying relationships, attitudes, and structural causes. Similarly, Galtung (1999) emphasizes the importance of peacebuilding approaches such as dialogue, reconciliation, and restorative justice in achieving sustainable peace. Best (2006) and Faleti (2006) also highlight that Conflict Theory forms the foundation for modern conflict management approaches such as Conflict Resolution Theory, Conflict Transformation Theory, and Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR). These frameworks help to analyze root causes, stakeholder interests, and long-term solutions to conflict.

Structural Conflict Theory further explains that conflict arises from systemic inequality in access to resources, power, and justice. According to Loadenthal (2018), structural inequalities produce conditions of exclusion and marginalization that increase the likelihood of conflict. This perspective is particularly relevant to the Aladja–Ogbe-Ijoh conflict, where contested land ownership, boundary ambiguity, and perceived marginalization have contributed to repeated violent confrontations and socio-economic instability.

Strength and Criticism of Conflict Theory

One major strength of Conflict Theory is its ability to explain social inequality and the unequal distribution of resources, power, and opportunities in society. It highlights how these inequalities generate tension and conflict among groups. Another strength is its emphasis on power relations, showing how dominant groups maintain control over resources and institutions. This makes it particularly useful for analyzing ethnic and communal conflicts. The theory is also widely applicable, having been extended to explain ethnic conflicts, political struggles, religious violence, and social inequality. Furthermore, Conflict Theory recognizes conflict as a potential driver of social change, where struggles against injustice can lead to reforms and transformation.

Despite its usefulness, Conflict Theory has been criticized for overemphasizing conflict while underestimating cooperation and social stability. Critics argue that Marx's original formulation is overly economic, failing to fully explain conflicts driven by cultural, religious, and psychological factors. The theory also struggles to explain why many unequal societies remain stable for long periods without major conflict. Additionally, it may oversimplify social realities by attributing most conflicts to competition over resources and power, while ignoring the complexity of identity, history, and institutional factors.

Application of the Theory to the Study

Conflict Theory is highly relevant to this study because it provides a comprehensive explanation of the Aladja–Ogbe-Ijoh conflict. The theory explains how competition over land, political recognition, and economic resources has contributed to prolonged hostility between both communities. It also explains how unequal access to resources and weak institutional resolution mechanisms have sustained the conflict, thereby negatively affecting employment opportunities, infrastructure, and the standard of living in both communities. Conflict Theory provides a strong analytical foundation for understanding the causes, dynamics, and consequences of the Aladja–Ogbe-Ijoh conflict. It explains how competition over land, power, and resources—combined with structural inequalities and historical

grievances—has sustained the conflict and negatively affected socio-economic development in both communities.

METHODOLOGY

Research design is a blueprint that outlines the procedures for collecting, measuring, and analyzing data in order to answer research questions. Aniche and Efanodor (2018) describe it as a work plan that specifies what must be done to complete a research study. Similarly, Creswell (2014) explains qualitative research as an approach that focuses on understanding the meanings individuals or groups assign to social problems. Denzin and Lincoln (2005) note that it is useful for examining complex social realities, while Merriam (2009) emphasizes its focus on meaning and interpretation. Based on these perspectives, this study adopts a qualitative research design. This approach is suitable because it allows for an in-depth examination and interpretation of existing information on the inter-ethnic conflict between Aladja and Ogbe-Ijoh and its socio-economic implications. It enables the researcher to analyze meanings, patterns, and explanations from secondary sources without statistical measurement. The design is appropriate for this study because the Aladja–Ogbe-Ijoh conflict is a complex social issue involving historical, political, and socio-economic dimensions that are best understood through descriptive and interpretive analysis.

Given the qualitative nature of this study, data were collected primarily through secondary sources. Secondary data refer to information that has already been collected, analyzed, and documented by other researchers or institutions for purposes that may differ from the objectives of the present study (Kothari, 2004; Dawson, 2002; Kumar, 2005). McNabb (2004) further describes secondary data as previously generated information that researchers use to gain insight into a specific phenomenon. Based on this, the study relies on existing materials relevant to inter-ethnic conflict and socio-economic development. Data were obtained from textbooks, academic journals, government reports, conference papers, newspaper publications, internet-based sources, and policy documents. These sources provided relevant information on the causes, nature, and consequences of inter-ethnic conflict, particularly the Aladja–Ogbe-Ijoh dispute, and its effects on socio-economic development indicators such as employment opportunities, infrastructure, and standard of living.

The data collected for this study were analyzed using qualitative content analysis. This involves a systematic examination of relevant literature and documents in order to identify patterns, themes, and meanings related to the research objectives. Through content analysis, the study interprets existing scholarly works and documented reports on the Aladja–Ogbe-Ijoh conflict, focusing on its causes, escalation patterns, and socio-economic consequences. The analysis was guided by the research questions, particularly those relating to employment opportunities and standard of living in the affected communities.

The choice of qualitative and secondary data approach is justified because it allows the researcher to access a wide range of existing knowledge on the subject without the constraints of fieldwork limitations such as insecurity in conflict-prone areas. It also enables a comprehensive synthesis of scholarly perspectives, historical accounts, and policy-related documents necessary for understanding the dynamics of the Aladja–Ogbe-Ijoh conflict.

Findings

Based on the literature reviewed and the analysis of secondary data, the study made the following key findings in line with the research questions:

The study found that the Aladja–Ogbe-Ijoh conflict is primarily driven by contested land ownership and boundary demarcation disputes. Both communities present competing historical narratives over rightful ownership of the disputed land. These conflicting claims are further reinforced by colonial records, local historical accounts, and perceptions of injustice. In addition, unresolved boundary issues, historical grievances, and weak implementation of government interventions have sustained the conflict over time.

The study revealed that the recurring conflict has severely reduced employment opportunities in both communities. Economic activities such as farming, fishing, trading, transportation, and small-scale enterprises have been disrupted due to insecurity and violence. The destruction of farmlands, markets, and access roads has discouraged external investors and limited local business activities, thereby increasing unemployment and economic hardship among residents.

The findings show that inter-ethnic conflict between Aladja and Ogbe-Ijoh has negatively affected the standard of living of residents. This is reflected in the destruction of houses and infrastructure, displacement of people, reduced access to basic social services, and rising poverty levels. Continuous violence has also created insecurity, limiting access to education, healthcare, and livelihood opportunities, thereby lowering overall quality of life in both communities.

CONCLUSION

The study concludes that inter-ethnic conflict between Aladja and Ogbe-Ijoh is fundamentally rooted in unresolved land ownership disputes and boundary demarcation challenges, which have persisted despite multiple government interventions and peace efforts. Guided by Conflict Theory, the study establishes that competition over scarce resources, unequal access to territorial claims, and historical grievances are central to the persistence of the conflict.

Furthermore, the study concludes that the conflict has had significant negative implications for socio-economic development in both communities. It has disrupted employment-generating activities, destroyed infrastructure, displaced residents, and reduced the overall standard of living. The continued recurrence of violence demonstrates that peacebuilding efforts have not adequately addressed the structural causes of the conflict. Finally, the Aladja–Ogbe-Ijoh conflict remains a major barrier to sustainable socio-economic development in Delta State.

Recommendations

i. Since the conflict is mainly caused by land and boundary disputes, the government should carry out a clear and final boundary demarcation between Aladja and Ogbe-Ijoh. Both communities should be involved in the process to ensure fairness and acceptance. Old maps and historical records should also be properly reviewed to reduce disagreement.

ii. Because the conflict has affected farming, fishing, trading, and other jobs, government should introduce job creation and empowerment programmes in both communities. Skills training, youth empowerment, and support for small businesses should be provided. Roads, markets, and other damaged infrastructure should also be repaired to help restore economic activities.

iii. Since the conflict has reduced the quality of life of residents, government should provide support for affected people, including housing assistance, better access to healthcare, and improved social services. This will help reduce

hardship and improve living conditions in the communities.

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