

Economic Cost of Conflict and Socio-Development in Rural Communities in the Niger Delta Area of Nigeria

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Abstract

Whether as a divergent of interest or as a prolonged armed struggle, conflict connotes a situation of crises. It is destructive and retards development. This paper examined economic cost of conflict and socio-development in selected rural communities in the Nigeria Delta Area of Nigeria. Due to its nature, the paper adopted the mixed research design. The sample size of the study is 400 respondents drawn from a projected study population of 44,112,908 persons from nine (9) Niger Delta States. Data was gleaned for the study via the distribution and retrieval of questionnaire in addition to information gotten from key personnel interviews and from textual documents such as books, journal articles, seminal works and other internet sources. Generated data were analyzed using tables and simple percentages, while a single hypothesis for the study was tested using the Chi-square. The paper found amongst others that; economic cost of conflict was mainly instigated by insistent land dispute, leadership tussles, struggles for territorial local control, political struggles and economic marginalization. And that these have impacted negatively on rural community development. Accordingly; the paper recommends amongst others that governments at all levels should work towards adopting effective conflict resolution strategies such as mediation and negotiation on sincerity of purpose basis as a strategy of mitigating communal conflicts in the affected communities, as this will ultimately foster socio-economic development of rural communities in the Niger Delta Area of Nigeria.

Keywords: Conflict, Communal, Economic, Development.

Introduction

Conflict is an inevitable part of human existence. The process of living and interacting with one another makes disputes inevitable. Adam (2020), argues that conflict encompasses disputes, disagreements, skirmishes, wars, altercations, frustrations, and structural inadequacies that manifest within and between groups and individuals.

The sorry situation in the Niger Delta area of Nigeria, according to Onuche & Onu (2024), is compounded with a deluge of intercommunal and intracommunal conflicts like factional rulership, local control, land dispute and tussle over chieftaincy title. Others are migration/investors' conflict such as herders/farmers, human trafficking and cultism. It is stressed that moments of tension, conflict, and violence, often fuelled by competition for resources, political power, and historical grievances have adverse effect on the development of rural communities in the area. The dynamics of these relations are influenced by various factors, including leadership, historical narratives such

as land dispute, and economic disparities (Oladisu, 2014). Alapiki (2010) contends that disputes are not uncommon and are a part of growth and development. He noted that dispute can arise from diverse parties, amongst individuals, families, institutions, corporate bodies, different levels of government, communities etc. These disputes have diverse causes either from a claim of ownership over a property, or a violation of human right by an individual, state or political party.

Sofiri, Kialeee and Jack (2019) noted that during the past decades, the Niger Delta area has been confronted with different forms of social conflicts and complex security challenges, and this has stagnated community development. They opined that militancy marked by the struggle for resource control and self-determination significantly defined the security landscape of the states in the Niger Delta area of Nigeria. The area became an epicentre for armed militia agitations (Ebienfa, 2011). Similarly, Sofiri, Kialeee & Jack (2019) averred that there is a mismatch between the huge revenue accruing from crude oil and the infrastructural and economic development in the area. Despite the abundance of natural resources, these conflicts, however, have led to poverty, unemployment, and general economic hardship which continue to plague most of the communities in the Niger Delta area of Nigeria. These communities are economically and industrially backward with serious implications for unemployment and community development. Noticeable evidence of the collapsing economy in these communities is infrastructural decay, and complete absence of investments. Unfortunately, both the state and the transnational companies operating in these communities do not sufficiently address the needs of the communities and this has worsened their socio-economic condition.

In the light of the foregoing, the paper posed the question: how has economic cost of conflict affected development in rural communities in the Niger Delta area? Accordingly, to a null hypothesis of economic cost of conflict has no significant effect on socio-economic development in rural communities in the Niger Delta area of Nigeria was formulated to guide the paper.

The paper is segmented into four interconnected parts. Part one is the introduction which was just concluded, part two covers a brief literature review of the paper. This includes the analytical framework and brief explanations of relevant concepts to the paper. Part three is a synopsis of the method of which data was generated and analyzed and the final part is the data presentation, analysis, discussion and conclusion/recommendations of the paper.

Analytical Framework

Psycho-Cultural Conflict Theory

The psycho-cultural conflict theory was propounded by Burtton in 1990. It was popularized by Ross in 1993. The theory has been further expanded by Crighton in 1991 and Rothschild and Groth in 1995 to analysed communal conflict and its effects on development.

The theory stipulates those differences in identity based on ethnic origin and culture is the most important need in the hierarchy of human needs and, when denied, results in violent conflicts. The satisfaction of one's basic needs is intricately related to his/her identity. Psycho-cultural conflict theorists like Ross (1997) and Horowitz (1998) believe that conflicts which are caused by identity are usually dangerous, violent, intractable and highly protracted, and often very difficult to resolve. This is because identity which is at the centre of the conflict, is an unshakable sense of worth, which makes life meaningful and includes the feeling that one is physically, socially, psychologically and spiritually safe (Faleti, 2006). When this feeling of safety (identity) is threatened, there is a defensive reaction aiming at protecting this at all costs and the result is violent conflict which becomes a matter of life and death. This tends to affect development since violence

is perpetually continued affecting productive sectors of local economies. The psycho-cultural theory of conflict argues, therefore, that resolving this type of conflict is usually very difficult and tends to defy any resolution mechanism. There is always constant outbreak of violence with such conflicts despite attempts at resolving the conflict. Their resolution takes long and sometimes, it is not possible to talk of resolution, but management. This is because the issue of ethnic identity is uncompromising and its denial is a complete affront to the group's very existence. The outbreak of consistent violence as a result of this type of conflict makes life and security fragile, thereby affecting human well-being and development.

The psycho-cultural conflict theory is similar to the primordial approach to ethnicity which emphasizes the fact that people's ethnicity (identity) is deeply rooted in their past. Irobi (2005) argues that memories of past traumas magnify people's anxieties. This is as a result of ethnic identity which produces fear, hatred and, consequently, ethnic conflict among two ethnic groups which have a history of ethnic discrimination and stratification. Irobi posits that when an ethnic group has a history of being stereotyped and discriminated based on their ethnic identity from another group, it results in violent conflict since ethnic identity remains part and parcel of the entirety of an individual. Ethnic groups which have been discriminated against and stratified into lower class citizens always harbour a feeling of marginalization of their identity and this produces strong feelings of hatred and resentment towards the other group which did the discrimination. This is what Richardson Jr. & Sen (1996) call 'victim mentality'.

According to Chinwokwu (2013), the psycho-cultural conflict approach is premised on the fact that conflict emerged from socio-culturally provoked stereotype that are innate in people's perception of each other. Thus, identity-based conflicts, such as ethnic or religious conflicts are psycho-cultural in nature and dimension which explains why conflicts are difficult sometimes to manage. The fear of extinction or dominion of one group over another is a great problem in managing conflict in societies especially in Nigeria. This identity issue also forms the basis for ethnicity which has heightened Nigeria's struggle for nationhood. According to Nnoli (1978), social phenomenon associated with the identity of members of the largest possible competing communal groups seeking to protect and advance their interest in a political system. Thus, the whole essence of mobilization of people on the basis of identity is to eliminate the tendency of marginalization, especially in the allocation of resources (Ikejiani-Clark & Agbo, 2008). So, it is obvious that the fear of dying, fear of exclusion and fear of the future are underlying causes of conflict in our society especially when 'identity' comes into play.

According to Tsuwa & Ochoga (2016), the theory also emphasizes the role of culturally induced conflict. It shows how enemy images are created from deep-seated attitudes about human actions that are learned from early stages of growth in the explanation of conflict. They contend, therefore, that even though there are different forms of identities, the one that is based on people's ethnic origin and the culture that is learned on the basis of that ethnic origin is one of the most important ways of explaining violent conflict. Identity is thus seen to be the reason for social conflict that takes long to resolve.

The relevance of this theory is evidenced in the understanding that the economic cost of conflict hampers the socio-economic development of that communities in the Niger Delta Area of Nigeria.

Conceptual Explanation

Concept of Conflict

The term "conflict" has manifested itself in many dimensions which has consistently offered so many definitions in the lexicon of political science. According to Ikporukpo (2020), the concept

‘conflict’ is used interchangeably with war, clash, strife, confrontation and many others. Egobueze (2016) noted that conceptualizing the term conflict is difficult due to divided opinions provided by scholars. Thus, the phenomenon has been defined as the existence of non-compatibility or disagreements between two actors (individuals, groups, organizations or nations) in their interaction over the issues of interests, values, beliefs, emotions, goals, space, positions, scarce resources. Conflict occurs when two or more people who, despite their first attempts at agreement, do not yet have agreement on a course of action, usually because their values, perspectives and opinions are contradictory in nature (Egobueze, 2016). It could also occur when a person is troubled over alternative, or juxtaposing opinions, wishes, ideas and feelings.

Conflict, as defined by numerous experts, is the result of a struggle between two or more parties over ideals and claims to status, power, and valuable resources, with the intention of neutralizing, harming, or eliminating their adversaries (Abass, 2018). Okafor (2017) viewed conflict as a state of disagreement or confrontation between multiple parties vying for possession or control of scarce and highly coveted resources. Akpan & Akpabio (2019) describes conflict as an escalated competition between groups at any system level, each striving to outperform the others. Conflicts manifest as disagreements, arguments, fights, and even wars, occurring among individuals, communities, and nations. In any society, the allocation of wealth, influence, and reputation rarely sees unanimous agreement due to the diverse interests of different groups and individuals, leading to inevitable conflicts between their respective goals. Deprived groups and individuals, seeking to improve their share of available resources and power or challenge prevailing norms, attitudes, or ideologies, often trigger conflicts (Iyoboyi, 2014). Amodu (2019) defines conflict as deliberate behaviour aimed at hindering the realization of goals by another party. The incompatibility of objectives and conflicting actions are the primary drivers of conflicts, which can occur on an individual, group, or organizational scale. Conflict emerges when the actions of one party obstruct or are perceived to obstruct the goals, needs, or actions of another party. Various organizational circumstances can lead to conflicts, such as opposing goals, divergent interpretations of information, negative sentiments, differing values and principles, and disputes over shared resources (Nwankwo & Ogbonnaya, 2021). Essentially, conflicts have been pervasive in Nigerian society for numerous years. Okonkwo & Akpoghomeh (2020) concede that the origins of conflicts in Nigerian society are multifaceted, arising from factors such as rivalry over exclusive objectives and interests, efforts to seize control and positions within society, discrepancies in objectives, growing aspirations for independence or supremacy among diverse individuals or groups, scarcity or insufficiency of resources to fulfil the requirements of various factions, and disruptions in communication, among other factors.

Otite & Albert (2016) noted that the dynamics of conflict arise from the inherent diversity in human interests and aspirations. They contended that as long as different groups and individuals vie for their distinct objectives within a limited pool of resources and opportunities, conflicts will continue to emerge, shaping the interactions and outcomes in various social contexts. Conflict is commonly understood as a state of incompatibility in thoughts or goals, where parties hold conflicting attitudes or values, leading to tension and a failure to reach a peaceful agreement or compromise. This inability to find common ground may prompt one or both parties to resort to violence in pursuit of self-oriented objectives. In the view of Mullins (1996) conflict is a product of opposing behaviours based on incompatibility of goals. It is a behaviour intended to obstruct the achievement of some other person’s goals. Gardiner & Simnions (1992) defined the concept as any divergence of interest, objectives, or priorities between individuals’ groups or organizations

or non-conformity to requirements of a task activity or process. Ihejiamaizu (1996) associated conflict with an overt behaviour that results when an individual or group of individuals thinks a perceived need or needs of the individual or group of individuals has been frustrated or is about to be frustrated. DeCenzo (1997) on the other hand submitted that whenever two people come together, there are bound to be disagreements at times. Sometimes, these differences can grow to enormous proportion where they become detrimental to the parties involved and the organizations. When that occurs, conflict is present. He added that organizational conflicts can take the following forms: horizontal conflict, vertical conflict and role confusion/conflict. According to Chima and Alokpa (2015), conflict is any action oriented intentionally to carry out actor's own will against the resistance of the other party or parties. He further asserts that conflict is an everyday normal on-going for institutionalized process that is natural of social reality.

Concept of Communal Conflicts

Issues surrounding communal conflicts are multi-faceted and complex with dynamics that change over time. This is because communal conflict becomes problematic when it explodes into violent-conflict of all kinds (Fadeyi & Muhammed, 2023). Communal conflict, as defined by Sixtus & Nafiasah (2019), arises when individuals or groups have competing interests over valuable and scarce resources, both tangible and intangible. Such conflicts can occur within a community (intra-group) or between different communities (inter-group). In general terms, communal conflicts are those conflicts in which the participants are communal groups whose primary identity prevails over other identities. Communal conflict according to Azuonwu (2002) is a conflict that occurs between two or more communities. Oboh & Hyande (2006) described communal conflict as conflict involving two or more communities engaging themselves in disagreement or act of violence over issues such as claims of land ownership, religion and political differences leading to loss of lives and destruction of properties.

Likewise, Dzurgba (2006) sees communal conflict as conflict which occurs between two or more communities over territorial land, farmland and territorial water for fishing. The existence of shared bonds or commonalities across groups often exacerbates the intensity of the competition. Communal conflicts are a result of complex social interactions, including issues of control, participation, production, and consumption within a society. Depending on the degree of escalation, managing these conflicts can become challenging (Sixtus & Nafiasah, 2019). In rural areas in Nigeria, conflicts erupted or organized around ethnic divide and most of the time over grazing areas and over cattle rustlings amongst pastoral people. There are also dispute over cultivable land amongst farmers within the same ethnic group and also between ethnic groups. Pastoralist Fulani ethnic group in Nigeria most of the time had conflict with rural farmers over grazing lands which later escalate into ethnic armed conflict between the farmers and the grazers. Most of these rural conflicts over land and cattle have been going on over a long period of time and is happening silently, unreported to the authorities concern, unless large scale killing and destructions takes place and the government intervenes.

Lyam (2000) describes communal conflict as a struggle over scarce resources that are not controlled by shared rules. Communal conflict is defined as a conflict between non-state groups that are organized along a shared communal identity. They are products of social relations. It involves threat or action of one party directed at a community's rights, interests or privileges or of another party, because of differences over economic issues, power or authority, cultural values and

beliefs. This may constitute attempt to eliminate or destroy rules, ones rival among others. It is always associated with antagonistic interest between two or more opposing forces or groups within the society and can be seen in a continuum range from early signals to violent crisis or war as opined by Imobighe (2003).

Concept of Conflict Management

The concept of conflict management has received several meanings; while some scholars view it as techniques applied to prevent and control conflict, others view it as resolution, peace building process and transformation. This paper uses the concepts of conflict management interchangeably to mean conflict prevention, resolution, transformation and peace building process. The way out is to manage the conflict. Conflict management therefore refers to the techniques and ideas designed to reduce the negative effects of conflict and enhance the positive outcome for all parties involved. The process of conflict management involves the establishment of mechanisms that detect early warning signals and record specific indicators that may help to predict impending conflict. This is undertaken in order to avoid the occurrence of violence and its escalation. Conflict management is the process of limiting the negative aspects of conflict while increasing its positive aspects (Rahim, 2011). It is the principle that all conflicts cannot necessarily be resolved, but learning how to manage conflicts can decrease the odds of non-productive escalation. Dalung (2013) asserts that conflict management entails the long-term management of intractable conflicts. He further explained that it is the variety of ways by which people handle grievances standing up for what they consider to be right and against what they consider to be wrong. Conflict management therefore involves acquiring skills related to conflict resolution, self-awareness about conflict modes, conflict communication skills, and establishing a structure for resolving conflict in the environment. It is a process that embraces all articulated strategies, interventions and institutional mechanisms in controlling the escalation of conflict. Conflict management is the application of resolution and stimulation techniques to regulate the level and impact of disruptive conflict within an entity, while harnessing the more positive and constructive aspects of collaboration, cooperation and compromise. It is a process that seeks to remove cognitive barriers to agreement and group synergy. It often covers an array of measures of conflict resolution: problem solving, super-ordinate goals, expansion of resources, avoidance, smoothing, compromise, authoritative command, and altering the human and structural variables (Obona, n.d).

Concept of Community Development

There is no consensus on the meaning and goals of community development. Hence, the diversity of definitions. Anikeze (2014) sees community development as any action in a locality by any agency with the primary intention of bringing some benefits to such locality. In the same vein, Okonkwo (2018) refers it as a group of people living together in one place practicing common ownership such as close-knit fishing community. Alternatively, according to him, it is a group of people with a common background or with share interest within societies, e.g the business community. He further opines that community development can be conceived to mean a group of nation with a common history or common economic or political history. In this instance, the international community therefore comes to play. Onwuka (2018) defines it as a place considered together with its inhabitants such as rural community, university community, etc. Meanwhile, Idakwoji (2018) sees it as a group of people having a religion or any characteristics in common. It could therefore be conceived as the public or society in general. Premium Times (2015) holds a similar view and affirms that community development is an educational process; it is something

of the spirit more than something material. It must reach into deep cultural pattern of people, examining them and testing them as principle of faith. It is not a temporary, physical construction. It stressed that it is a building within the heart and mind of men not a recreation centre in the middle of a field. Okafor (2017) defines it as efforts provided for advancement of communities, hesitated that the major emphasis of the concept was upon those activities which aim at prorating the improvement of the basic condition of the community's non material needs.

The United Nations (1962) defines community development as a process where community members come together to take collective action and generate solutions to common problems. Also, the Federation for Community Development Learning (FCDL) as contained in the document of the United Nation defines community development as a set of values and practices which plays a special role in overcoming poverty and disadvantage, knitting society together at the grass roots and deepening democracy. The organization opines that there is a community development profession, defined by national occupational standards and a body of theory and experience going back the best part of a century. They stressed that the term designates the utilization under one single programme of approaches and techniques which rely upon local communities as units of action and which attempt to combine outside assistance with organised self-determination and effort, and which correspondingly seek to stimulate local initiative and leadership as the primary instrument of change. Following the adoption of the UN's definition, the associations have gone on to produce international standards for community development practice.

According to the UNESCO, community development is often linked with community work or community planning, and may involve stakeholders, foundations, governments, or contracted entities including non-government organisations (NGOs), universities or government agencies to progress the social well-being of local, regional and, sometimes, national communities. More grassroots efforts, called community building or community organizing, seek to empower individuals and groups of people by providing them with the skills they need to effect change in their own communities (Jacob, Ugben & Akujuru, 2024). These skills often assist in building political power through the formation of large social groups working for a common agenda. Community development practitioners must understand both how to work with individuals and how to affect communities' positions within the context of larger social institutions. Public administrators, in contrast, need to understand community development in the context of rural and urban development, housing and economic development, and community, organizational and business development. In this vein, community development can be defined as both an occupation (such as a community development worker in a local authority) and a way of working with communities.

Method

The paper adopted the mixed research design. This involved the use of both quantitative and qualitative approach.

The population of the study is projected at 44,112,908, according to the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) in 2022. Table 1 shows state-by-state projected population of states in the Niger Delta area of Nigeria.

Table 1: State-by-State Population of States in the Niger-Delta Area of Nigeria

S/N	States	2006 Census Population	Projected Population
1	Abia	2,833,999	3,841,943
2	Akwa Ibom	3,920,208	5,451,581
3	Bayelsa	1,703,358	2,934,725
4	Cross River	2,888,966	4,175,020
5	Delta	4,098,391	5,636,100
6	Edo	3,218,332	4,461,137
7	Imo	3,934,899	5,167,722
8	Ondo	3,441,024	4,969,707
9	Rivers	5,185,400	7,474,973
	TOTAL	31,224,577	44,112,908

Source: NBS 2022 Population Projection

The sample size for this paper was determined using the Taro Yamane formula for sample size determination.

$$n = \frac{N}{1 + N(e)^2}$$

Where;

n = Sample size

N = Population size = 44112908

e = Sampling error = 5% (0.05)

Applying the above formula to 44112908 population of the Niger Delta area under study is as follows:

$$n = \frac{44112908}{1 + (44112908 \times (0.05)^2)}$$

$$= \frac{44112908}{1 + (44112908 \times 0.0025)}$$

$$= \frac{44112908}{(1 + 110282.27)}$$

$$= \frac{44112908}{(110283.27)}$$

$$= 399.9 \quad \text{Sample Size} = 400 \text{ (Appox)}$$

The purposive sampling technique was used to assign respondents per state. As such forty-four (44) questionnaire was distributed to states with lower population while states with higher population such as Delta, Imo, Ondo and Rivers were assigned forty-five (45) questionnaire each. The paper also used interview as a veritable instrument to generate first-hand information from eighteen (18) interviewees. The participants so selected demonstrate capacity, experience, strength of knowledge and understanding of the issues. All interviewees were given equal opportunity to participate in the exercise so as to provide an unbiased information for the study.

The use of table was employed to analyze data generated from the questionnaire while their responses were arranged, grouped, tabulated and analysed using the simple percentages. The formula for the simple percentage statistical method is provided as:

$$\frac{f \times 100}{n}$$

Where:

f = frequency of response

n = number of population or respondents

By this method, it means that the degree of percentage score of one response to another or others will determine the acceptability or rejection of a particular statement or response. Also, hypotheses will be tested using Chi-Square (X^2). The formula for Chi-Square is:

$$X^2 = \frac{(O - E)^2}{E}$$

Where:

O = Observed Frequencies

E = Expected Frequencies

The degree of freedom for Chi-Square is calculated as:

Degree of Freedom (df) = (R-1)(C-1)

Level of Significance = 0.05%.

Decision rule: The null hypothesis was rejected if the value of Chi-square (X^2) is greater than the table value while the alternate hypothesis will be accepted if the table value is greater than the Chi-square value.

Data Presentation

Table 2 Socio-demographic Analysis of Response Rate

Administration of Questionnaires	Frequency (f)	Percentage (%)
Number of questionnaires administered	400	100
Number of questionnaires not returned	50	12
Number of questionnaires retrieved	350	88
Number of questionnaires valid for the study	350	88

Source: Field Work, 2025

The table above revealed that out of the 400 questionnaire that were administered to respondents, 50 respondents making 12% of the questionnaire were not returned, 350 respondents representing 88% were successfully completed, retrieved and valid for proper analysis. The response rate is 88%.

Table 3: Socio-demographic Analysis of Returned/Valid Questionnaire

Administration of Questionnaire	Frequency of Questionnaire Distributed	Frequency of Returned Questionnaire	Percentage (%) of Returned Questionnaire
Community dwellers	162	150	93
Development/business owners	108	80	74
Religious leaders	130	120	92
Total	400	350	88

Source: Field Work, 2025

Data in table 3 above reveal that out of the 400 questionnaire, 150 questionnaires returned out of 162 that were administered to respondents. Also, 80 questionnaires were returned out of 108 that were administered while 120 returned out of 130 questionnaire that were administered to respondents making 93%, 74% and 92% respectively. The response rate of total questionnaires returned is 88% which is a mark of excellence for the study.

Table 4: Socio-demographic Analysis of Gender

Gender of Respondents	Frequency (f)	Percentage (%)
Male	200	57
Female	150	43
Total	350	100

Source: Field Work, 2025

Table 4 above showed that 200 respondents representing 57% are male while 150 respondents representing 43% are female. This indicates that the majority of the respondents are male. Irrespective of their genders, their responses do not in any way interfere with the outcomes of the study as they are not bias in their views.

Data Analysis

How has economic cost of conflicts affected Socio-Economic development of rural communities in the Niger Delta Area of Nigeria?

Table 5: Land boundary disputes between communities has affected the agricultural sector which is vital to livelihoods and the local economy has been vulnerable to these communal conflicts.

Options	Community dwellers	Development agent/business owners	Religious leader	Total	% of Response
Strongly Agreed (SA)	80	50	70	200	57.1
Agreed (A)	50	20	30	100	28.6
Disagreed (D)	5	10	15	30	8.6
Strongly Disagreed (SD)	15	0	5	20	5.7
Total	150	80	120	350	100

Source: Survey Data, 2025

The question of whether land boundary disputes between communities has affected the agricultural sector which is vital to livelihoods and the local economy has been vulnerable to these communal conflicts, the table above also displayed 200 respondents strongly agreed with 100 respondents agreed that land boundary disputes between communities has affected the agricultural sector which is vital to livelihoods and the local economy has been vulnerable to these communal conflicts. 30 respondents disagreed with 20 respondents strongly disagreed that land boundary disputes between communities have affected the agricultural sector which is vital to livelihoods and the local economy has been vulnerable to these communal conflicts. With a total percentage of 85.7, it is agreed that land boundary disputes between communities have affected the agricultural sector which is vital to livelihoods and the local economy has been vulnerable to these communal conflicts.

Table 6: Communal crises have led to relocation of oil and gas multinational companies thereby reducing employment rate in community development.

Options	Community dwellers	Development agent/business owners	Religious leaders	Total of Response	%
Strongly Agreed (SA)	70	50	50	170	48.6
Agreed (A)	60	20	40	120	34.3
Disagreed (D)	15	5	25	45	12.9
Strongly Disagreed (SD)	5	5	5	15	4.3
Total	150	80	120	350	100

Source: Survey Data, 2025

The table above revealed that 170 respondents strongly agreed that communal crises have led to relocation of oil and gas multinational companies thereby reducing employment rate in community development with 120 respondents agreed that communal crises have led to relocation of oil and gas multinational companies thereby reducing employment rate in community development. Meanwhile, 45 respondents disagreed that communal crises have led to relocation of oil and gas multinational companies thereby reducing employment rate in community development with 15 respondents strongly disagreed that communal crises have led to relocation of oil and gas multinational companies thereby reducing employment rate in community development. By virtue of the highest percentage score of 82.9, it indicates that communal crises have led to relocation of oil and gas multinational companies thereby reducing employment rate in community development.

Table 7: Farmers/herders' clashes have led to the reduction of agricultural produce in communities.

Options	Community dwellers	Development agent/business owners	Religious leaders	Total of Response	%
Strongly Agreed (SA)	65	35	40	140	40.0
Agreed (A)	80	45	60	185	52.9
Disagreed (D)	0		15	15	4.3
Strongly Disagreed (SD)	5	0	5	10	2.9
Total	150	80	120	350	100

Source: Survey Data, 2025

The table above revealed that 140 respondents strongly agreed that farmers/herders' clashes have led to the reduction of agricultural produce in the communities development with 185 respondents agreed that farmers/herders' clashes have led to the reduction of agricultural produce in the communities. Meanwhile, 15 respondents disagreed that farmers/herders' clashes have led to the reduction of agricultural produce in the communities with 10 respondents strongly disagreed that farmers/herders' clashes have led to the reduction of agricultural produce in the communities. By virtue of the highest percentage score of 92.9, it indicates that farmers/herders' clashes have led to the reduction of agricultural produce in the communities

Table 8: Chieftaincy tussles and associated crises have claimed the lives and property of many dwellers thereby hindering infrastructural development and growth.

Options	Community dwellers	Development agent/business owners	Religious leaders	Total % of Response	
Strongly Agreed (SA)	60	40	60	160	45.7
Agreed (A)	70	35	50	155	44.3
Disagreed (D)	5	5	0	10	2.9
Strongly Disagreed (SD)	15	0	10	25	7.1
Total	150	80	120	350	100

Source: Survey Data, 2025

The table above also revealed that 160 respondents strongly agreed that chieftaincy tussles and associated crises have claimed the lives and property of many dwellers thereby hindering infrastructural development and growth with 155 respondents agreed that chieftaincy tussle and associated crises have claimed the lives and property of many dwellers thereby hindering infrastructural development and growth. Meanwhile, 10 respondents disagreed that chieftaincy tussle and associated crises have claimed the lives and property of many dwellers thereby hindering infrastructural development and growth with 25 respondents strongly disagreed that chieftaincy tussle and associated crises have claimed the lives and property of many dwellers thereby hindering infrastructural development and growth. By virtue of the highest percentage score of 90.0, it indicates that chieftaincy tussle and associated crises have claimed the lives and property of many dwellers thereby hindering infrastructural development and growth.

Table 9: Conflict is a major barrier to political development, inflicting severe human suffering and huge economic costs.

Options	Community dwellers	Development agent/business owners	Religious leaders	Total % of Response	
Strongly Agreed (SA)	100	30	60	190	54.3
Agreed (A)	45	45	55	145	41.4
Disagreed (D)	0	5	0	5	1.4
Strongly Disagreed (SD)	5	0	5	10	2.9
Total	150	80	120	350	100

Source: Survey Data, 2025

The question of whether conflict is a major barrier to political development, inflicting severe human suffering and huge economic costs., the table above indicates 190 strongly agreed that conflict is a major barrier to political development, inflicting severe human suffering and huge economic costs with 145 respondents agreed that conflict is a major barrier to political development, inflicting severe human suffering and huge economic costs. However, 5 respondents disagreed that conflict is a major barrier to political development, inflicting severe human suffering and huge economic costs while 10 respondents strongly disagreed that conflict is a major barrier to political development, inflicting severe human suffering and huge economic costs. The highest percentage score of 95.7 signifies that conflict is a major barrier to political development, inflicting severe human suffering and huge economic costs.

Test of Hypothesis: Economic cost of Conflict has no significant effect on the socio-economic development of rural communities in the Niger Delta Area of Nigeria. Item 1 of the research question which states that “Land boundary disputes between communities has affected the agricultural sector which is vital to livelihoods and the local economy has been vulnerable to these communal conflicts” was employed with chi-square (X^2) thus: $X^2 = \sum \frac{(fo-fe)^2}{fe}$

Table 10: Shows responses for calculating frequency expected (fe)

Options	Community dwellers	Development/business owners	Religious leaders	Total % of Response
Strongly Agreed	80	50	70	200
Agreed	50	20	30	100
Disagreed	5	10	15	30
Strongly Disagreed	15	0	5	20
Total	150	80	120	350

Source: Survey Data, 2025

$$fe = \frac{\text{Column total} \times \text{Roll total}}{\text{Grand total}}$$

Table 11: Computation of Chi-Square Test Statistics 1

Fo	Fe	fo – fe	(fo – fe) ²	(fo – fe) ² /fe
80	150(200)/350 = 86	-6	36	0.4
50	150(100)/350 = 43	7	49	1.1
70	150(30)/350 = 13	57	3249	250
50	150(20)/350 = 9	41	1681	187
20	80(200)/350 = 46	-26	676	14.7
30	80(100)/350 = 23	7	49	2.1
5	80(30)/350 = 7	-2	4	0.6
10	80(20)/350 = 5	5	25	5
15	120(200)/350 = 69	-54	2916	42.3
15	120(100)/350 = 34	-19	361	10.6
0	120(30)/350 = 10	-10	100	10
5	120(20)/350 = 7	-2	4	0.6
350	350			524.4

X² Cal = 524.4

Source: Survey Data, 2025

Tabulated at 0.05 level of significance

Hence, df = (R – 1) (C – 1)

Where:

R = number of rows,

C = number of columns

$$= (4 - 1) (3 - 1)$$

$$= (3) (2) = 6$$

From the above analysis,

df = 6

level of significance = 0.05% while

Chi-Square (X^2) = 524.4

Table Value = 12.59

Decision Rule: The null hypothesis is rejected if chi-square (X^2) value is higher than the table value. Here, the chi-square value = 524.4 and the table value = 12.59. It therefore signifies that the null hypothesis which states economic cost of conflict has no significant impact on the socio-economic development of rural communities in the Niger Delta Area of Nigeria is rejected. This, in other words, means that, economic cost of conflict has significant impact on the socio-economic development of rural communities in the Niger Delta Area of Nigeria.

The effect of economic cost of conflict on socio-economic development of rural communities in the Niger Delta area of Nigeria: Data analysis revealed that land boundary disputes between communities has affected the agricultural sector which is vital to livelihoods and the local economy has been vulnerable to these communal conflicts, the table above also displayed 200 respondents strongly agreed with 100 respondents agreed that land boundary disputes between communities has affected the agricultural sector which is vital to livelihoods and the local economy has been vulnerable to these communal conflicts. The table revealed that 170 respondents strongly agreed that communal crises have led to relocation of oil and gas multinational companies thereby reducing employment rate in community development with 120 respondents agreed that communal crises have led to relocation of oil and gas multinational companies thereby reducing employment rate in community development.

The table also revealed that 140 respondents strongly agreed that farmers/herders' clashes have led to the reduction of agricultural produce in community development with 185 respondents agreed that farmers/herders' clashes have led to the reduction of agricultural produce in community development. The table also revealed that 160 respondents strongly agreed that chieftaincy tussle and associated crises have claimed the lives and property of many dwellers thereby hindering infrastructural development and growth with 155 respondents agreed that chieftaincy tussle and associated crises have claimed the lives and property of many dwellers thereby hindering infrastructural development and growth. The question of whether conflict is a major barrier to political development, inflicting severe human suffering and huge economic costs., the table above also displayed 190 strongly agreed that conflict is a major barrier to political development, inflicting severe human suffering and huge economic costs with 145 respondents agreed that conflict is a major barrier to political development, inflicting severe human suffering and huge economic costs.

A participant noted that:

Consequently, disputes over land access and resources have been leading causes of violence and insecurity. Statistics indicate that between January 2014 and December 2024, communal conflicts led to over 800 fatalities in the Niger Delta. Apart from the loss of human life, communal violence also imposes massive socio-economic costs, including the destruction of property and the disruption of livelihoods. Conflict over land is a prevailing issue that is affecting agricultural investments and economic development in the Niger Delta (M. Etuk, personal communication, January 8, 2025).

In line with participant above, Ikporukpo (2014) says that conflict is a major barrier to development, inflicting severe human suffering and huge economic costs. Violent conflict destabilizes economies, with the impacts often persisting long after the violence ends.

Another participant revealed that:

Communal conflict is more deadly than any other form of conflict. This is because a lot of charms and other African spiritual vices are involved for protection. Be that as it may, communal conflict has led to the death of many dwellers. For instance, we lost about 5 men in our family due to communal conflict relating to intercommunity boundary dispute. We are battling with the psychological and emotional trauma in that loss. (S. Uduak, personal communication, January 8, 2025).

Communal conflicts hinder economic growth by causing loss of life, displacement of labour, disruption of livelihoods, and community devastation (PIND, 2019). The Niger Delta has been heavily affected by communal conflicts over land and land-based resources, with significant consequences for communities, agriculture, and the broader economy. The agricultural sector, vital to livelihoods and the local economy, has been vulnerable to communal conflicts, particularly between herders and farmers. Recurrent conflicts over land disputes have disrupted farming and reduced agricultural productivity, with significant implications for food security and economic stability.

According to 75% of respondents, communal conflicts, especially land and boundary disputes and farmer-herder clashes, have severely impacted agriculture, food security, and the local economy. A farmer in Ohoror, Delta State, described the situation as beyond the loss of life and destruction of homes, the conflict with herdsmen affects both farming and trade between communities. People are now afraid to go to their farms. The conflict has also reduced food supplies, and we are now buying garri [cassava flakes] instead of producing it ourselves.” Apart from immediate losses, these conflicts often disrupt the transport of agricultural goods, leading to rising food prices, limited access to goods, and worsening food insecurity. A substantial 96% of respondents reported that recurrent communal conflicts have led to increased food prices. A trader in Obubra, Cross River State, explained that farm produce prices have risen as more people abandon farming due to land conflicts. Finding enough local rice is difficult because the conflict has made it harder to transport rice from farms to markets.

According to Anierobi (2024), the economic cost of communal conflict extends beyond agriculture and food security, affecting key indicators such as income, consumption, employment rates, trade, and investment. The cumulative effects of violence, internal displacement, infrastructure damage, and disrupted economic activities leave long-term impacts on economic development, perpetuating cycles of poverty and livelihood insecurity. The insecurity associated with communal conflict has also weakened the region's capacity to attract local and foreign investment, particularly in the agricultural sector.

Communal conflicts have significantly hindered agricultural investments in the Niger Delta. These conflicts often result in the destruction of farmland, reducing crop yields and diminishing farmers' incomes. This discourages both local and foreign investors, who view the region as high-risk, fearing that their returns may be diminished by violence and instability. Furthermore, disputes over land rights create uncertainty that makes it difficult for investors to secure land for agricultural activities, further discouraging investment (Etekpe, 2017).

Another participant noted that:

Apart from lives and property been affected, our economic activities have been affected. Due to the nefarious activities of herdsmen, we find it difficult to go to our farms. The herdsmen usually feed their cattle without crops. The moment we demonstrate resistant, we're attacked unprovoked. This has resulted to poor harvest of agricultural produce (P. Tamunokuro, personal communication, January 10, 2025).

An investor in oil palm production in Biase, Cross River State stated that communal conflict over a land dispute is making it very difficult to acquire additional land for oil palm plantation. Once you indicate interest in buying a piece of land for large-scale farming, different communities and individuals will show up to claim ownership. This is affecting the expansion plan. Besides the difficulty in acquiring land for large-scale farming, instability in conflict prone areas reduces access to credit and financing for farmers and agribusinesses. Financial institutions are hesitant to extend loans to farmers due to the increased risks, limiting opportunities for agricultural expansion. Disruptions in transportation and supply chains compound the issue, leading to higher post-harvest losses, increased transaction costs, and inefficiencies across the agricultural value chain (Ebisi, 2016). These challenges reduce the profitability of investments and weaken investor confidence. Additionally, communal conflicts drive production costs as farmers and agribusinesses must invest in security to protect their assets and workers. Price volatility increases due to supply shortages, leading to inflation and unpredictable returns. As a cocoa dealer in Ile-Oluji, Ondo State explained that cocoa farmers are moving away from large-scale farming to small-scale farming because of conflict over land disputes. This is causing supply shortages and driving up the prices of cocoa. The cumulative effects of unstable agricultural markets that are caused by these conflicts are hindering investment and economic development in the area (Alagoa, 2001).

Meanwhile, 30 respondents disagreed with 20 respondents strongly disagreed that land boundary disputes between communities have affected the agricultural sector which is vital to livelihoods and the local economy has been vulnerable to these communal conflicts. Meanwhile, 45 respondents disagreed that communal crises have led to relocation of oil and gas multinational

companies thereby reducing employment rate in community development with 15 respondents strongly disagreed that communal crises have led to relocation of oil and gas multinational companies thereby reducing employment rate in community development. Also, 15 respondents disagreed that farmers/herders' clashes have led to the reduction of agricultural produce in community development with 10 respondents strongly disagreed that farmers/herders' clashes have led to the reduction of agricultural produce in community development. Meanwhile, 10 respondents disagreed that chieftaincy tussle and associated crises have claimed the lives and property of many dwellers thereby hindering infrastructural development and growth with 25 respondents strongly disagreed that chieftaincy tussle and associated crises have claimed the lives and property of many dwellers thereby hindering infrastructural development and growth. However, 5 respondents disagreed that conflict is a major barrier to political development, inflicting severe human suffering and huge economic costs while 10 respondents strongly disagreed that conflict is a major barrier to political development, inflicting severe human suffering and huge economic costs.

Conclusion/Recommendations

The dynamic nature of communal conflicts in the Niger Delta Area of Nigeria is threatening due to the richness of that area with oil. Over 25,000 people have lost their lives and property due to recurrent issues of communal conflicts within the area. The economic costs of these conflicts have become a serious issue of concern. This paper has uncovered the causes of communal conflicts leading to economic cost that is plaguing the area and have, elucidated on its effects on socio-economic development. The paper finds that incessant land disputes, leadership tussles, local control over territories, political struggles, economic marginalization and greed were significant causes of communal conflict that ultimately leads to economic cost.

These conflicts have led to loss of human security, destruction of property, and poor harvest of agricultural produce. The paper therefore concludes that the negative roles of political actors, incompetent conflict mediators, and plans to avenge have been the factors exacerbating communal conflicts leading to economic cost in the Niger Area of Nigeria.

Accordingly, the paper recommends that; Federal, State and Local Governments should adhere to the report of the National Boundary Commission, monitor the progress of the implementation, and spell out punitive measures to communities or individuals (perpetrators) who wish to escalate the conflict situation.

Community leaders must liaise with wealthy individuals, corporate bodies and organizations to support victims of communal conflict and ensure relief material and see that other forms of humanitarian assistance are rendered to conflict affected community dwellers.

Also, the state government should provide medical and primary health care facilities that would take care of emergency health situation. The state government should also ensure that compensation is paid while infrastructural facilities that were destroyed are rebuilt. Finally, the government at all levels should work towards adopting effective conflict resolution strategies such as mediation and negotiation on sincerity of purpose basis as a strategy for mitigating communal conflicts in the affected communities.

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Table 4.4 Socio-demographic Analysis of Academic Background

Educational Qualifications	Frequency (f)	Percentage (%)
HND/BSc/PGD	200	57
MSc/MPA/MBA/PhD	150	43
Total	350	100

Source: Field Work, 2025

The table above depicted the educational qualifications of respondents and thus revealed that 200 respondents making 57 possess the Higher National Diploma (HND)/Bachelor of Science (BSc) and Postgraduate Diploma (PGD) while 150 respondents representing 43% are holders of Master of Business Administration (MBA)/Master of Public Administration (MPA)/Master of Science (M.Sc) and Doctor of Philosophy (Ph.D). This suggests that the respondents have good knowledge of communal conflicts and its effect on community development in the Niger Delta.