

Review

Neighbours at Lodger Head: A Pragmatic Approach to Peace Building in the Conflict Between Alesi and Ochon Communities of Cross River State (2020-2025)

NGORO, Oscar Ebi

Department of Peace Studies and Conflict Resolution, University of Calabar, Calabar, Cross River State, Nigeria.

Correspondence should be addressed to: talktongorooscar4@gmail.com

Abstract: This paper provides a pragmatic approach to peacebuilding between rural communities engaged in conflict with common boundaries. The conflict between the Alesi community in Ikom L.G.A and the Ochon community of Obubra L.G.A in Cross River State was a land ownership tussle and boundary claims, and this has become a recurrent event in the state during planting seasons. This has often claimed lives and destroyed property worth millions of Naira. The paper objectives are: to identify causes and sources of conflict between rural communities of Cross River State, identify pragmatic peace-building approaches to warring communities, examine the conflict timeline in the state from 2020 to 2025, and make policy recommendations for the management of conflict between warring communities. The paper adopted the human needs theory (HNT) expanded in social conflict by John Burton (1997), which revealed that parties or actors are always engaged in conflict whenever their needs are threatened and not met. Methodologically, a descriptive survey research design was adopted, with data collected from secondary sources. The pragmatic approaches to peace building identified were: community-based initiative, neutrality of third-party intervention measures, punitive sanctions of perpetrators, empowering affected communities and incorporation of Nigerian Hunters and Forest Security Service (NHFSS). The recommendations were that stakeholders in affected areas should collaborate with the government and security agencies, and conflicts at early warning signs should be given critical attention to avert escalation.

Keywords: Neighbours, Lodger head, Pragmatic approach, Peace building, Conflict, Alesi, Ochon, Communities, Cross River State.

1.0 Introduction

International and national peace and security are often threatened by communal conflicts (Reutger, 2012). These conflicts appear ethnic in nature but are fought over territory, economic, political, and socio-cultural issues (Bisong and Eremi, 2018). Conflict, as a human characteristic, surfaces due to discrepancies that hamper environmental peace, development, and transformation agendas. It equally involves material and resource tussles that arise commonly within and between distinct ethnic societies or nations. Communities disagree over resources such as water, land, power tussles, and political contests. Conflict is humanly construed, though it takes different forms based on the beliefs of the communities involved, and its implications remain regrettable in nature (Ubani, Datonjo, and Obasiolu, 2020). Such arguments are centred on opposing beliefs, ideals, objectives, demands for connection, respect, and control (Wilmot and Hocker, 2011).

Conflicts in rural areas are centred around struggles for land, boundary demarcation, and water resources. They arise in an environment where competition over insatiable needs and limited resources is eminent. The demands for these limited resources have put communities in continuous antagonism. According to Otor (2019), various component units within Nigeria are caught in the vortex of traumatic boundary (land dispute) conflict. States like Cross River-Akwa Ibom, Cross River-Ebonyi, and Cross River-Benue keep increasing with sad outcomes. The outcome of such increments has created a hotbed for displacement, suffering, and insecurity. In most cases, before conflict escalates, there are signs that accompany such occurrences, such as threats involving intimidation and confrontation. Often, limited attention is given to these signs, and such failure to address these warning signs manifests in destructive dimensions. The retrogressive nature of violence is long-lasting on the progress and development of communities in all spheres of life. Disputes equally introduce food insecurity, amounting to a decline in production, accessibility, utilisation, and availability of food, because farms are destroyed (Dormcklaims, Tangban, Omang, & Ojong-Ejoh, 2021).

According to Mercy Corps (2018), trauma and pain contribute to increased conflict through retaliation across identity groups, expanding the group of people affected by and participating in conflict. As conflict reduces resilience capacities, it becomes a grave concern for policymakers, as the impacts of conflict go beyond the immediate effects of income loss and actually weaken the abilities of communities to bounce back from stressful events. Conflicting communities develop stigmas during and after the conflict situation;

these stigmas rarely erode from the minds of the conflicting parties. It therefore becomes a burden for the stakeholders to brainstorm on how to harness the mindset of these actors in conflict. The consequences of conflict for human existence are enormous, and addressing these consequences caused by conflicts therefore demands a pragmatic approach to ensure a stable society and avert the resurgence of crisis. The objectives of this paper are (I) to identify causes and sources of conflict between Alesi and Ochon communities, (II) to identify pragmatic peace-building approaches for warring conflict communities in Cross River State, (III) to examine the conflict timeline in Cross River State from 2020 to 2025, and (IV) to proffer recommendations for the management of conflict between communities in Cross River State.

1.1 Establishing the Study Problem

The proliferation of ethnic conflict in Nigeria, and particularly in Cross River State, has threatened man's existence, especially when handled with levity. None among the eighteen Local Government Areas of Cross River State have escaped 'the rod' of ethnic conflict; these conflicts are fought over natural endowments. Such conflicts, according to Bisong and Eremin (2019), have acclimatised to a dangerous proportion due to untimely responses. Their assertion underscores that whenever the conflict's early warning signs and early responses fail, it leads to community impoverishment and underdevelopment, amounting to miscommunication, fear, loss of trust, and a decline in inter-communal trade relationships.

Alesi and Ochon communities, as neighbours, have been involved in inter-trade and inter-marital antecedence (history) prior to the escalation of boundary and land disputes in 2022 and 2025. This dispute orchestrated a standstill relationship directly with warring communities and, by extension, with other Ofutop and Mbembe indigenous-speaking people. The conflict equally results in the kidnapping and killing of community members on farms and farm routes, as well as the blockage of the Ikom and Obubra Federal Highway. This recurrent condition has created a cross-sectional hunger and starvation, health system failure, educational breakdown, and a large toll of death. Most of these conflicts, of course, surface during the planting season over the struggle for planting space. Recently, the hike in the price of cocoa and palm oil has contributed as a major issue that prompts communal conflict across the state. These situations demand security restructuring channelled at safeguarding people's lives instead of being a protection of the state craft. Human security has become an important area to prioritise because of the constant conflict

challenges faced by humans (Adedoyin, 2013). Human security encompasses the protection of humans from hunger, diseases, unemployment, psychological disorders, violations of human rights, displacements, environmental degradation, communal conflict, and economic and political repression (Akam & Ojen, 2020).

Consequently, conflicts have affected vulnerable populations, mostly People With Disabilities (PWDs), the aged, women, and children. These populations have suffered from diseases and acute starvation. These vulnerable populations become stranded and homeless, especially the girls who become victims of rape. Even in cases where most local government secretariats serve as shelters, many people, such as the aged, are exposed to severe cold, a high risk of disease, and possible death. It is based on this understanding, therefore, that the study is structured to investigate a pragmatic approach to peacebuilding in the Alesi and Ochon communal conflict from 2020 to 2025.

2.0 Literature and Contextual Discourse

The concept of communal conflict has received different codification in the literature. However, these definitions have slight modifications but communicate the same message, which encompasses the incompatibility of interests among different ethnic groups in society. Conflict, from Hussein and Al-Mamary's perspective, is an antagonistic state characterised by opposition, disagreement, or incompatibility between two or more parties (Hussein & Al-Mamary, 2019). Conflicts involve the interaction of human structures in the forms of intrapersonal, interpersonal, intra- and inter-ethnic, and intra- and inter-state. It is an unavoidable part of human existence, stemming from differences in values, beliefs (ideology), resources, goals, and interests. Conflicts are often triggered over misleading historical narratives, competition, and argument. Different views arise as to whether conflict is an avenue for development or underdevelopment.

In an opinion by Abasili, Ezeneme, and Nwokike (2023), conflict cannot be totally destructive or constructive, but rather can be both, with effects that are positive and negative; however, this depends on how stakeholders manage the conflict. They further aver that conflict handled with effective measures would lead to building bridges instead of walls that ensure problem-solving and personal development. However, if a lackadaisical attitude is displayed in handling such conflict, it amounts to escalation, with a plethora of negative consequences (Abasili, Ezeneme, and Nwokike, 2023). Resolving conflict demands a holistic approach involving empathy, active communication, negotiation, and transparency by the panel of inquiry and mediators.

UNICEF (2016) conceived conflict as a complex incident construed by groups or parties as a result of threats to the accomplishment of their interests. Individuals revoke when they perceive incompatibility in needs, goals, and objectives. Claims over resources have brought countless antagonistic confrontations from disputing parties, with attendant consequences. When a dispute grows to hatred, it results in the carrying of arms and weapons to fight and defend territories and resources. In the opinion of Nicholson (1992), conflict as an activity occurs when parties find themselves at loggerheads with each other over desires, needs, and obligations. He further underscores that conflict is multifaceted in nature. This implies that conflict is not only concerned with clashes of interest but also denotes discord over the differentiation of what people want or desire. When these desires are not met, it results in intense anger, and of course, it results in intra- or inter-conflict. Conflicts, being an incompatible trait of humans, turn violent when there is an absence of any form of mechanism to avert such occurrences between distinct ethnic groups or parties engaged in physical combat with lethal weapons to inflict injuries, eliminate, and destroy the opponent in the pursuit of values or resources (Nafey & Gopal, 2019).

Most conflicts in rural Nigeria are ethnic-based. These disputes arise because of cultivable land among farmers within and between different ethnic groups. These conflicts take dynamic forms, including ambushing and kidnapping along farm and stream paths (Ali & Yahaya, 2019). Following Ali and Yahaya's analysis, those paths become dangerous for rural dwellers to traverse to their farms or streams. These attacks are seldom ignored by relevant authorities, except in cases where there is mass destruction and killing before intervention measures are considered. However, conflict at every point of appearance or existence demands timely attention from state authorities; this would assist in minimising losses or casualties.

This implies that resolving conflict at the latency stage is more profitable than when it escalates to actual destruction of human lives. This escalation is accompanied by so much effect that victims weep over the loss of loved ones, properties, and abandoned farms. Integrating these victims and salvaging them from the trauma and suffering demands a viable and actionable peace-building process.

The concept of peacebuilding is attributed to a Norwegian scholar, Johan Galtung (1975), in his episodic literature "Three Approaches to Peace: Peacekeeping, Peacemaking, and Peacebuilding." According to Galtung (1976), the concept of peacebuilding is an

endeavour aiming to create sustainable peace by addressing the “root causes” of violent conflict and eliciting indigenous capacities for peaceful management and resolution of conflict (Galtung, 1976). In the same vein, Lederach (1997) explains that the concept of peacebuilding is more than post-agreement reconstruction. Furthermore, Lederach upholds that peacebuilding is understood as a comprehensive concept that encompasses, generates, and sustains the full array of processes, approaches, and stages needed to transform conflict toward more sustainable, peaceful relationships (Lederach, 1997).

Peacebuilding involves a variety of activities fashioned to transform conflicting societies into just and harmonious forms or orders, ensuring peace maintenance and sustainability. This is also concerned with stabilising and ensuring the effectiveness of economic, social, and political structures, especially during violent situations. Peacebuilding aims at cementing broken relationships that are induced by the incompatibility of interests among parties of differential ideology and ethnic bases (Vande, 2021). Peacebuilding, as a post-conflict mechanism or framework, is instituted to liberate and rebuild households after the destruction of individuals, communities, states, or societies. It is usually a long-term framework that aims at restoring the aftermath of conflict situations. The concept of peacebuilding has dual perspectives, with the first perspective being tangible, which focuses on reviving destructive entities or environments occasioned by ethnic and sometimes political violence. This perspective concentrates on reconstructing an environment to significantly reduce violence, where recovery and development are integrated to a functional level for people to live normal lives afterwards. This first perspective of peacebuilding involves providing basic amenities, livelihoods, and economic improvement. The second perspective deals with the intangible process of peacebuilding, involving the stabilisation of society. The instability of society could be a result of a poor economic framework in fragile states. For instance, states like the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Lebanon, Burma, and Haiti (Van Brabant, 2010).

Sequel to the foregoing exploration, it denotes that peacebuilding does not only concern or play out during destructive processes but also involves the state of political, social, environmental, and economic stability. When nation-states focus on strengthening their economies and other aspects of the state, it induces peacebuilding, improves human lives, and curtails the possibility of conflict occurrence.

According to Dermot Ahern (2006), cited in Van Brabant (2010), peacebuilding and conflict prevention are ultimately about psychology: addressing fears, perceptions, and

beliefs about the past and about the future. A conflict does not begin when the trigger is pulled; it begins in the heart and mind of the person who pulls the trigger.

Peacebuilding is geared towards averting the commencement or resurfacing of violent conflict; this process is aimed at creating sustainable peace. Its activities are tailored towards confronting the root causes of conflict, establishing a stabilised political and socioeconomic environment. A viable peace-building process creates a supportive system of self-sustaining mechanisms, restores confidence and trust among conflicting actors, ensures durable peace, prevents conflict from resuming, integrates civil society, and institutes means of addressing structural and societal issues (Sharma & Shajahan, 2022). The process of peacebuilding particularly resolves conflict in a non-violent manner. This non-violent process includes support mechanisms and an environment for peace to prevail, harmonises conflicting parties or actors, reduces violence, helps a community to bounce back and move forward, resolves belligerents' differences, shares responsibility among community members, and prioritises early warning signs of conflict (Sharma & Shajahan, 2022).

The peace-building process comes in the form of packages comprising changes in attitude, belief, and behaviours that transform both short- and long-term patterns of conflict existing between entities or groups (Sharma & Shajahan, 2022). This paper opines that the primary objectives of peace-building involve mitigation, containment, resolution, transformation, management, reconciliation of disputants, and building the lives of those traumatised or suffering from psychological imbalance experienced during and after the conflict.

2.1 Theoretical and Methodological Issues

Human Needs Theory

Given that human needs are plentiful, insatiable, and what they chase after is limited, it becomes important to adopt a theory that helps explain the rationale behind human behaviour that constantly puts society in conflict. Therefore, the human needs theory (HNT) suits the analysis under discourse. The theory was first used by Abraham Maslow to explain that humans have different needs, and it is the ultimate desire of man to meet these needs.

This theory has gained prominence in the contemporary epoch in theorising social conflict. The theory assumes that humans have certain needs, and when they encounter any form of friction or restriction in actualising or satisfying these needs, the resultant effect

would be conflict. In simpler terms, conflicts arise when basic human needs are denied or left unattended. The aim of the conflict resolution process is to harness groups or individuals who are in conflict over particular resources (Burton, 1997). This paper affirms that human needs are essential for the continuation of life propagation, which includes educational, social, cultural, and resource needs. These resource needs include land for food cultivation and housing for shelter, etc. All of these and even more are pivotal for human survival (Nafey & Gopal, 2019).

Burton affirmed that to resolve conflict, the root causes of such conflict should be properly addressed by conflict scientists and peace promoters through the application of various alternative measures, which would be done through radical restructuring of society. He further opines that people find it difficult to cohabit when there is an existing threat to their needs. Therefore, institutions with the prerogative power in the country can address these unmet needs of the actors in conflict to promote sustainable peace (Burton, 1997). The relevance of this theory in this paper cannot be undermined because it showcases the rationale for the conflict in the study area. This theory provides facts that competition for access to natural resources between communities prompts violent conflict.

Methodologically, this paper adopts the descriptive survey research design. Descriptive design is a generative tool utilised in gathering or generating information related to the phenomenon under discourse or study. This design provides details about the topic and enhances the researcher's understanding of a situation through devoting keen attention to the issue under study. This methodology involves the collection of data from extant literature (secondary sources) germane to the topical issue under discussion.

3.0 Results and Discussion

3.1 Succinct Analogy of the Conflict

The conflict between Alesi (Ikom) and Ochon (Obubra) is centred on the struggle over ownership of land lying at the boundary between Ikom and Obubra local governments. This conflict has lingered for a long time, escalating to a full scale in March 2022, with attendant effects on houses, lives, and the destruction of primary schools. The conflict introduces fear and a breach of the relationship that has existed over time between these communities. The post-conflict situation of 2022 brought military checkpoints along the border area to check and monitor the process. This added an additional military checkpoint to the already existing ones in Central Cross River State.

In the year 2025, there was a reprisal attack beginning with conflict early warning signs involving intimidation and confrontations of one community against the other. These signs included inflicting degrees of matches' cuts, the catering away of motor cycles, stealing cocoa, plantains, cassava, harvesting palm nuts, and destruction of already cultivated farms. In July 2025, the conflict signs manifested into another bloody communal conflict. The destruction of houses at the boundary area of Ochon and Alesi and the complete destruction of the Ekunasagha cluster in the Alesi community left indigenes of both communities in disarray by depriving them of shelter. The loss of lives and fears were cross-ethnic, that is, between neighbouring communities of Ofutop and Mbembe Clan.

Furthermore, the proliferation of light weapons and small arms made the conflict disastrous due to a series of attacks and beheadings of people on their farms at different locations, without exception in this Local Government in conflict. Possession of small arms and light weapons by non-military personnel in the state has exposed Cross River State to "shade insecurity" at any given time. The possession of these weapons by non-state actors could be a framework projected by shadow actors. These shadow actors, who are dressed in 'agbada' and 'white linen', are alleged to provoke conflict, probably for their political or economic gains. Nevertheless, no gain is worth the killing and seizure of human lives.

The crisis between Alesi and Ochon did not start in the 21st century, but is a historic challenge, just like any other multi-ethnic society. The conflict before this time was between Agbragba (Ofutop-Ikom), a larger extraction from where Alesi falls as an administrative unit bordering Mbembe-speaking extraction comprising Ochon, Isabang, and Odonget. This conflict at the time prompted many scholars to write on the boundary between Agbragba of the Ofutop clan (Ikom) and Ochon, Isabang, and Odonget of Mbembe (Obubra). Among these scholars were Charles Patridge (an Assistant Commissioner, Obubra Hill District in 1905), who wrote "Cross River Natives"; Captain G.H. Hudson, who wrote "Ofutop Intelligence Report" in 1931/1932, with a caption on page 2 "geographical"; Mr. R.S. Mallison (District Officer, 1937/1938), who addressed inter-tribal boundaries settlements in Ordinance Number 49 of 1933; an erstwhile Ikom L.G.A. Chairman, Eugene Awa (1997), who wrote "Etung Local Government Incursion of Ikom Local Government Area"; and M.P. Ralley (1937), who commented in Civil Review No. 390/37 of the Upper Okpon River Forest Reserve, under the Forestry Ordinance No. 38 of 1937. An excerpt of a radio interview with Dr. Odigha Odigha, in Hit FM "95.9 FM"

Calabar, Nigeria, on the account of the Alesi and Ochon communal conflict in Cross River State, Nigeria, September 23, 2025.

The history of disputes over land or boundary encroachment is not peculiar to the Alesi and Ochon communities, but a common trend that has become a ‘companion’ to the rural societies in Nigeria. Conflicts are not natural occurrences but are humanly induced because of man’s insincerity and the quest to amass resources for oneself. This has often led to countless challenges and struggles for possession of resources, which invariably fuels most of these disputes. Cross River State has witnessed a harvest of conflict between communities over boundary configurations. This situation prompts the state to rebuild occasionally and, as such, possibly taints the image of the state before its contemporaries. This issue has, on many occasions, redefined and shifted government attention from creating viable economic and investment opportunities for the state to settling conflicts and reconstructing dilapidated structures, building Internally Displaced Persons Camps (IDPs), and reuniting families with their ancestral homes.

3.2 Causes and Sources of Communal Conflict: Alesi and Ochon Crisis in Perspective

Scholars have provided different causes and sources of conflict, especially in rural societies. In the view of Albert (2001), the indigene and settler problem, resources, religious disparity, and also mining, lodging, infertility of the soil, deforestation, and bush burning often trigger or escalate communal conflict. Yecho (2006) argued that the state or nature of poor economic downtrodden, dominant illiteracy, fear of group domination, disputes over natural resources, and tussles over chieftaincy issues are marked as common factors for conflict occurrence in rural environments.

Varvar (2000) stated that the increase in financial impoverishment, starvation, indigenous settlement problems, and unemployment are also common factors that have prompted communal conflict. Similarly, Angya and Doki (2006) discussed that conflict does not just ensue but is based on the exploitation, deprivation, and domination of minority societies by major ethnic societies, which can further fuel crises in rural societies.

Claim of land ownership: One's observation may not be totally wrong to state that conflict in most rural parts of Cross River State is fuelled by claims over land ownership. To affirm this assumption, Table 1 shows the track record of conflict in the state within the time frame covered by this paper. Parties in conflict often clash over the same piece of land; this is mostly witnessed in situations where there is no proper documentation. In some cases, parties present different documents showing ownership of the said acclaimed piece

of land. This contradiction in document presentation leaves the situation at a more critical level of determining who the rightful owner is. This action then incorporates a litigation process, which could be a win-loss affair. In the case where one community is not satisfied with the litigation outcomes, the conflict takes a different dimension or the same pattern of conflict as at the first instance. Many reasons are behind the constant conflict, but the most noticeable is over the fertility of such land. This is attributed to the issues witnessed between Ikom and Obubra in recent years.

In a paper by Eteng and Agbor (2018), they observed that land in Central Cross River State communities, where Alesi and Ochon happen to be part of this place, is a determinant of the existence of the indigenous population. This population engages in food production, such as garri, cassava, yams, and other cash crops. These crops are produced on the basis of land availability to sustain the rapidly growing population of the areas. This indicates the undoubted nature of land. Eteng and Agbor (2018) write that, with a high fertility rate and pressure on limited land, the tendency has always been for people to wrongfully claim land that does not belong to them or to go beyond the land mark. Any opposition to this by the other group is seen as a threat to the survival of the individuals concerned. The protracted struggle for the ownership of land often resorts to shedding blood or murder, as the case may be, resulting in communal war (Eteng & Agbor, 2018).

Encroachments: Conflict arises as a result of neighbours quarreling over land boundary encroachment. Different communities, as a result of a deficiency in knowledge of boundary positions, struggled and engaged in bloody confrontations, accusing each other of encroachment. The conflict between communities in Cross River State has always revolved around boundary challenges.

Poverty: The domination of poverty in the rural society has impeded the development of Ikom and Obubra LGA, Cross River State. In the submission of Eteng and Agbor (2018), they described poverty as follows:

You can see it on the walls of our streets. You can notice it in our kind of buildings and settlement patterns. You can see it on our farm roads within our communities. It is most noticeable in the clothes we wear, in our cooking utensils, in our diet, and in the manner the youths address their elders. During the rainy season, you can notice poverty in the number of leaking roofs, insect bites, typhoid, and malaria infections.

Buttressing these scholars' position, poverty remains dominant in rural environs, Alesi and Ochon inclusive. This menace negatively prompts vulnerable populations, especially the youths, to indulge in social vices like cultism, robbery, or stealing other people's belongings, such as crops on the farms, especially in conflict situations. Looters use this conflict situation as a window of opportunity to harvest crops like cassava, yams, cocoa, and palm nuts from farms abandoned by victims of conflict over fear of attack.

Food insecurity: Food insecurity is mostly present in communities that are affected by communal conflict; this is similar to the issue experienced in Alesi and Ochon communities in Cross River State. The issue of food shortage appears in society as a result of the persistent conflict.

Population factor: As the population increases, people need land for building (residential purposes) and other economic activities or purposes. This makes land become scarce, causing communities to struggle over ownership.

3.3 Pragmatic approach to peacebuilding in rural communities in Cross River State

Conflict resolution is elusive, especially when conflict reaches its peak; it demands pragmatic models or approaches to restore peace in situations where the conflict has escalated to a full scale. Conflict, whether local or international, is best resolved or managed at its latency point. Aside from this, resolving conflict after this point becomes cumbersome due to the degree of destruction, fear, loss of trust, and inability to identify the position of shadow actors in the conflict transformation process. However, despite the challenges that beset the peacebuilding process, results can be achieved. The peacebuilding approach must be an inclusive, sustainable, and feasible process to address root causes and strengthen community relationships.

Community-based initiative: this is an inclusive approach structured based on rural ideology; it involves the participation of different traditional actors in ensuring the existence of peace in communities. This approach encompasses women, elders, and youth leaders in designing and implementing feasible peace initiatives in communities (Mac Ginty, 2011). The objective of this approach is to establish a sustainable community after violent conflict. The need to involve actors from local communities is that they easily identify shared needs and the necessary means to achieve them. When communities take charge of the process, it contributes to sustainable interventions. A community-based approach can be used to reconnect two communities and strengthen local governance

through interaction, communication, and decision-making. Such a process can help to overcome mistrust that exists between communities (Haider, 2009; Lederach, 1995).

Neutrality of third-party (government) intervention measures: Third-party intervention is an involvement by individuals or groups that are not a party to the conflict but seek to influence and help resolve the outcome of the conflict (Mahr, 2023). Addressing conflict and ensuring peacebuilding feasibility and attainability, there is a need for stakeholders in the resolution process to be transparent and neutral in their dealings. Any act or situation where the third-party mediator exhibits questionable character in the resolution process causes conflicting actors or communities in conflict to lose confidence in such a mediator (government), making it difficult for a sustainable peacebuilding process. Peacebuilding in rural areas like Alesi and Ochon demands high neutrality by the government and other meaningful stakeholders to ensure that parties unanimously accept, without doubt, a peaceful resolution process.

Punitive sanction on perpetrators: punitive sanction should be meted out to perpetrators or those discovered as conflict promoters in accordance with the provisions of the law or convention made to address such issues. The decision of relevant stakeholders or the government over disputing area(s) should be respected by conflicting parties. Punitive sanctions would checkmate parties who failed to adhere to the declarative status quo on the conflicting areas or zones established by the government. Therefore, when parties contravene this directive, they should be sanctioned as a deterrent to other people; this sanction should also include those who are involved in stealing people's farm produce or crops in abandoned farms.

Empowering affected communities: The trauma that comes with how a community is destroyed is rarely forgivable and forgettable by affected persons, whose lives have been shattered and property destroyed. This, therefore, demands that all hands must be on deck to help restore the sanity of these persons and repress the reoccurrence of such situations. Communities affected by violent conflict should be given keen attention by governments, Civil Society Organisations (CSO), Faith-Based Organisations (FBO), and private individuals in rebuilding dilapidated communities. Attention should be on infrastructural development, manpower development, security, and the provision of basic amenities such as clothing, food, health services, shelter, and schools.

Incorporation of Nigerian Hunters and Forest Security Service (NHFSS): The government should incorporate the service of Nigerian Hunters and Forest personnel within

the affected areas. This engagement would provide security for people who own and farm in the conflict areas. This security outfit, in the discharge of its duty, should be attached to other armed personnel, such as the Army and the police force. The presence of the Nigerian Army and the Nigerian Police would serve as overseers of the surveillance process.

3.4 Timeline of communal conflict in Cross River State

Communal conflict as an annual issue has affected the rural territories or communities across three Senatorial Districts of Cross River State. Below is a timeline analysis of communal conflict in Cross River State from 2020 to September 2025.

Table1: A Table showing the conflict timeline in Cross River State between 2020 to September, 2025

S/N	COMMUNAL CONFLICT	CAUSES	L.G.A	YEAR
1	Afono and Ibini	Land and boundary	Biase	2020
2	Erei and Ekoli-Edda	Boundary	Biase and Ebonyi	2020
3	Abankang and Alok	Land dispute	Ikom	2021
4	Itega and Oba	Land and economic factors	Yala	2021
5	Ipuolo and wanikade	Dispute over land	Yala	2021
6	Yaha and Ugaga	Economic factor	Yala	2021
7	Nnam and Abankang	Boundary and land struggle	Ikom	2021
8	Urugbam and Abanwan	Claim of land ownership	Biase	2022
9	Alesi and Ochon	Land and boundary clash	Ikom and Obubra	2022
10	Igbekureko and ugaga	Dispute over land	Yala	2023
11	Ijegu-Yache and Mbaaka (Benue)	Land dispute	Yala and Benue	2023
12	Ovonum and Ofatura	Disputed farm land	Obubra	2023
13	Ofunokpan–Mbembe-Ntansele	Farmland and ancestral land claims	Obubra and Ikom	2023
14	Nnaorokpa and Ofunokpan	Dispute over oil palm plantation	Obubra- Ikom	2024
15	Usumutong and Ediba/Ebom and Ebijekara	Land and boundary	Abi	2024
16	Alesi and Ochon	Land and boundary	Ikom and Obubra	2025
17	Boje and Isobendege	Boundary clash	Boki	2025
18	Abonkib (Obudu) and Mbezerem (Vandeikya-Benue)	Boundary clash	Obudu and Vandeikya-Benue	2025
19	Biakpan and Etono	Land dispute	Biase	2025

Source: Adopted from the author's unpublished thesis, 2025.

4.0 Conclusion and Policy Recommendation

This paper examined a pragmatic approach to peacebuilding in the Alesi and Ochon communities of Cross River State, covering 2020-2025. These communities have been at loggerheads over natural resources, particularly land and boundary encroachment. The conflict resulted in large-scale violent conflict with numerous impacts on the lives and development of the conflicting communities. The conflict not only destroyed lives and property but also impeded trust and unity, amounting to a decline in inter-trade and inter-marital practices. The recurrent Alesi and Ochon land boundary has often affected the sustainability of both those residing in urban and rural areas. The boundary between these two communities, and by extension, Ikom and Obubra, has often been challenged in recent times despite different scholars' positions in the early nineties concerning the boundary of these two communities. The recent conflict between these communities has weakened the human security of rural people across nearly every aspect of their lives, including shelter, food, health, economic, social, political, education, environment, and agriculture. Struggles over natural resources have resulted in several casualties and the destruction of property.

This conflict, therefore, demands swift action by stakeholders, particularly local government chairmen, traditional rulers, youths, and women leaders of communities, to collaborate with government and security agencies in addressing and finding a lasting solution to the conflict, which would further improve human security. Conflict Early Warning Signs and Early Response (EWER) should also be given critical attention before dispute escalation to avert possible destruction of human lives, livestock, and properties, as well as the distortion of businesses.

References

1. Abasili, K. N., Ezeneme, E. V., and Nwokike, C.E. N. (2023). Analyzing the roots of ethnic conflict in Nigeria: an in-depth examination. *Global scientific journals (GSJ)*: Volume 11, Issue 10, October 2023, Online: ISSN 2320-9186. www.globalscientificjournal.com.
2. Adedoyin, A. (2009), *Migration in Nigeria: A country profile* (Geneva: International Organization, Security and Development in Albert, I.O., and Eselebor, W.(eds). *Managing Security in party intervention to community conflicts*. Ibadan: John Archers.
3. Akam, S. S., Ojen, M.I (2020). Inter/intra-state communal conflict and conflict management in Cross River and Ebonyi states of Nigeria. *Journal of Social Sciences Enugu state university of science and technology* Volume 5, Issue 1, 2020.
4. Albert, I.O. (2001), *Building Peace, Advancing Democracy: Experience with Third Party Interventions in Nigeria's Conflict*, Ibadan: John Archers Publishers Ltd.

5. Ali, U.D. and Yahaya, G. S. (2019) Ethnic conflict in Nigeria: causes and consequences. *International Journal of Scientific Research in Multidisciplinary Studies* Vol. 5, Issue 1, pp.70-77, January (2019) E-ISSN: 2454-9312, P-ISSN: 2454-6143. www.isroset.org
6. Angya, C.A. &Doki, G.A. (2006). Women's Participation/Involvement in Conflict Management in Benue State: A Review. In T.T. Gyuse& O. Ajene (Eds.) *Conflicts in the Benue Valley*.Makurdi: Benue State University Press.
7. Bisong, T.L. and Eremi, E. O (2018).Trends of ethnic conflicts in Cross River State, Nigeria. *Scientific Research Journal (SCIRJ)*, Volume VI, Issue XI, November 2018 74 ISSN2201-2796.
8. Burton, J. (1997). *Violence explained* (Manchester: Manchester University Press).
9. Dormcklaims E., Egbe E.T., Omang, T.A. & Ojong-Ejoh, M.U. (2021) Communal Crisis and Livelihoods in Akamkpa (A Regression Analysis Study).*SAINSMAT: Journal of Applied Sciences, Mathematics, and Its Education* ISSN: 2775-5371 (print) Vol. 10 No. 1 (2021). ISSN: 2776-3641 (online). <https://doi.org/10.35877/sainsmat225>
10. Eteng, F. O., and Agbor, U. I. (2018).Sustainable Management of Communal Violent Conflicts and Peaceful Co-Existence in Central Cross River State, Nigeria. *Advances in Social Sciences Research Journal*, 5(10) 331-345.
11. Galtung, J. (1975). Three approaches to peace: Peacekeeping, peacemaking, and peace building, in Galtung, J (ed). *Peace, War and Defence: Essays in Peace Research*, Copenhagen: Christian Ejlens, 282-304.
12. Haider, H (2009). Community-based approaches to peacebuilding in conflict-affected and fragile contexts. Governance and Social Development Research Center (GSDRC). www.gsdrc.org
13. Hussein, A. F. F. & Al-Mamary, Y. H. S. (2019). Conflicts: Their types, and their negativeand positive effects on organizations. *International Journal of Scientific & TechnologyResearch*, 8(8): 10-13. <https://www.ijstr.org/finalprint/aug2019/Conflicts-Their-Types-And-Their-Negative-And-Positive-Efects-On-Organizations>
14. Lederach, J. P. (1995). *Preparing for Peace: Conflict Transformation Across Cultures* Syracuse University Press, Syracuse, New York
15. Lederach (1997), *Building peace: sustainable reconciliation in divided societies*, Washington: United States Institute of Peace Press.
16. Mahr, N. (2023). Third-party conflict resolution/ definition, method and examples. <https://study.com/academy/lesson/third-party-conflict-resolution-strategies-lesson.quiz.html> Accessed 1st October 2025.
17. Mercycorps (2018).*Conflict, livelihoods, and resilience: community capacities in Nigeria's Middle belt*; Mercy Corps, Portland, OR, USA, 2015.Accessible at <https://www.mercycorps.org/research>.
18. Nafey, A. and Gopal, D. (2019). *Conflict resolution and peace building*. School of Social Sciences, Indira Gandhi National Open University, Maidan Garhi,
19. Nicholson, M. (1992). *Rationality and the Analysis of International Conflict*. Cambridge University Press.

21. Ngoro, O. E. (2025). Communal conflict and food insecurity in Alesi and Ochon communities, Cross River State, 2020-2025. An unpublished thesis, for the Award of Master's Degree, submitted to the Department of Peace Studies and Conflict Resolution, University of Calabar, Calabar, Nigeria.
22. Otor, O. A. "Fluctuating Cooperation and Tensions in Akam-Olulumo (Okuni) Boundary Relations." *International Journal of Advanced Research* 7 (October 2019): 691-702.
23. Reutger, T. K. (2012). Ethical Conflict, Encyclopedia Britannica, Inc.
24. Sharma, P. and Shajahan, P.K (2022). Addressing conflicts and peacebuilding in social work. University of Delhi <https://www.studocus.com>. Accessed 29 September, 2025.
25. Ubani, P., Datonjo, K., Obasiolu, C.(2020). Determinants of social and rural communal conflict in the South-South environment, Nigeria. *International Journal of Research and Scientific Innovation (IJRSI) | Volume VII, Issue II, February 2020 | ISSN 2321 2705*.
26. UNICEF (2016). Introduction & context for UNICEF conflict analysis. <https://www.unicef.org/media/96581/file/Guide-to-Conflict-Analysis>.
27. Van Brabant, K. (2010). What is peacebuilding? Significantly different perspectives on peacebuilding. International Peace Alliance.
28. Vande, P (2021). Conflict and peacebuilding processes in Nigeria, 1999 – 2020. In Adejoh Sunday, Martinluther Nwanieri, Ikechukwu Maxwell Ukandu (Ed.) *Africa and emerging trends in global politics: festschrift in honour of Rev. Fr. Dr. Innocent Tyomlia Jooji*. PP 33-50, Pyla-Mak Services Ltd.Kaduna, Nigeria. <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/382821118>. Accessed 29 September 2025
29. Wilmot, W.W. and Hocker, J. (2011). *Inter-personal Conflict*. New York: McGraw-Hill.
30. Yecho, J. I. (2006), *An Overview of the Tiv-Jukun Crisis*, In Gyuse T.T. &Ajene, O.(eds.), *Conflicts in the Benue Valley*, Makurdi: Benue State University Press.
31. An excerpt from a radio interview with Dr. Odigha Odigha, hosted by Hit FM "95.9 FM" Calabar, Nigeria, on the account of Alesi and Ochon communal conflict in Cross River State, Nigeria, Tuesday, 23 September, 2025.



© 2026 by the authors. Submitted for possible open access publication under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution (CC BY) license (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/4.0/>).