

COMMUNITY-BASED CONFLICT RESOLUTION AND SOCIO-ECONOMIC ACTIVITIES IN CROSS RIVER STATE, NIGERIA.

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Abstract

This study assessed the community-based conflict resolution and socio-economic activities in Cross River State Nigeria. Multistage sampling procedure were used to select 126 household heads. Data were collected using structured questionnaires and analyzed with percentages and mean statistics. The key technique used in community-based conflict resolution was the involvement of a neutral mediator ($\bar{X}=3.81$; ranked 1st). The most frequently played roles by the stakeholders in resolving conflicts in the area included formation of peace communities ($\bar{X}=3.93$; ranked 1st). Household heads perceived community-based conflict resolution promote stability, enabling markets to function effectively, businesses to operate without disruption, and trade to flourish, thereby boosting their income ($\bar{X}=3.51$; ranked 1st). However, poor funding of peace committees ($\bar{X}=3.74$; ranked 1st) was accepted as the major challenge to the use of community-based conflict resolution. The study concludes that community-based conflict resolution uses different techniques to establish a solid foundation for socio-economic progress, adopting and effectively applying these techniques in resolving conflict can cultivate an environment that fosters economic advancement in the community. The study recommends that development organizations should employ these techniques, as they serve as powerful tools to enhance community stability, peaceful cohabitation among residents and promote socio-economic activities.

Keywords: *Community-based, conflict resolution, socio-economic activities, Cross River State.*

Introduction

Conflict of various degrees has frequently been seen in rural areas, leading to socioeconomic, physical, and emotional imbalances among the populace (Aya & Iyamah, 2024). However, depending on the type and character of the resolution methods employed, society finds it difficult to deal with the inevitable occurrence of conflicts. Sometimes attempting to resolve issues from the beginning can be difficult and even lead to more conflict (Adeniyi & Amodu, 2020). Most current conflicts require intervention tactics that are grounded on the community and take into account their environment of occurrence. These tactics can be found in a variety of forms in various communities since they are ingrained in the customs and cultures of the inhabitants. The guardians of these tactics were capable of separating disputing parties and were unbiased, fair in how they treated disputing parties, accommodative, reciprocal, moderate, etc. In the past, these beliefs helped to reduce disputes within Nigerian communities (Adedeji, 2019).

The main difficulty that people face today is on how to fully resolve conflict whenever they arise, to prevent them from developing and turning into full-scale war through the use of appropriate approaches and adequate plans for their resolution (Elfverson, 2015). Conflict resolution through community-based techniques prevent further escalation and destruction, instead bring both parties together in unity for even development. Community-based conflict resolution refers to the processes and techniques used by communities to manage, mitigate, or eliminate disputes between individuals or groups in a peaceful and constructive manner

(Ahmed, 2020). It is all about solving disagreements in a constructive way and the community members feeling satisfied. Ifeanyi (2020) observed that community-based conflict resolution is a normal technique utilized in the community to resolve issues of instability and dispute with the goal of achieving consensus in the community. When members' core needs are met, valued interests are realized, more productive and effective relationships with all other parties would be achieved.

The growth of rural families and communities depends on the efficient and successful resolution of conflict (Ewetan & Imeokparia, 2021). Egobueze et al., (2024) noted that community-based conflict resolution encourages consensus building, the reconstruction of social bridges, and the reinstatement of order in the society. The techniques used help conflicting parties resolve their disagreements without harming their relationships and improve the efficiency of rural communities in handling conflicts. Effective conflict resolution techniques and inclusive governance are necessary to foster peace, reduce insecurity, and create an environment where communities can engage in sustainable development. These techniques only function when the conflicting parties are willing to negotiate and have a concrete issue to settle thus, restore harmony and build stronger community relationship (Muiya, 2025). According to Dike et.al (2020), a well-resolved conflict scenario encourages growth and development to the advantage of all rural residents, restores peace, harmony and encourages socioeconomic activities. It has also contributed immensely to the development of socio-economic activities in rural communities.

Socio-economic activity improves the quality of a society's physical, social, technological, economic, and environmental wellbeing, which are mostly related to the interaction between social processes and economic activity within a community. According to Adam (2020) study on Nigeria's socioeconomic development and youth employment in the twenty-first century, socioeconomic activity improves the quality of a society's physical, social, technological, economic, and environmental wellbeing (Ogedi, 2024). Socio-economic activities mostly engaged by members in the community include; farming, trading /marketing of goods, resource allocation/ sales of community assets, fishing, lumbering, business activities, educational activities, healthcare services/ traditional healing service, religious / cultural exhibition and community services/ rehabilitation.

Additionally, Graham & Ogolo (2025), described stakeholders' roles in post-conflict peace building to include warning parties, reconciliation, reintegration, creation of peace committees, and sensitization of opposing groups to promote harmony. Community members can be recruited, sensitized, rehabilitated, and reconciled in areas of intra-communal conflict in order to promote peace. Education and sensitization can help settle conflicts brought on by ignorance and improper handling of issues, and where deviant elements are present as a result of inadequate socialization, rehabilitation may be the most dependable and effective way to re-socialize them for community peace.

There are several challenges associated with the use of community- based conflict resolution. According to Chinwokwu (2023), the use of community-based conflict resolution techniques works well in intra-communal contexts where the fundamental values, norms, culture, and traditions are distinctive. However, when it involves two different communities/ethnic groups with different cultures, the resolution techniques must be acceptable and culturally sensitive to both ethnic groups. It is difficult to resolve the conflict when the two ethnic groups' traditional methods must be combined. As a result, culture creates societal divisions and is seen as a barrier to peaceful conflict resolution in multiethnic and multicultural countries.

In rural communities of Cross River State, there have been several conflicts such as those of the community's historical recurrence; others are focused on the socioeconomic

activities carried out by communities, such as land encroachment during farming, encroachment into other community fishing ponds during fishing, marginalization of specific communities or groups during resource allocation etc. Some of these conflicts have been addressed and the root causes identified. Numerous researchers have studied conflict resolution, including Olutegba & Ogungbaro (2020), Ogbujah & Egobueze (2020), Chukwo & Nwosu (2020) and Fadeyi & Muhammed (2023). Despite these advancements, information on the relationship between the techniques used in community-based conflict resolution and socio-economic activities has not yet been sufficiently analyzed and discussed. Hence, the study was designed with this context in mind to assess the different techniques used, examine the roles played by stakeholders, determine the perceived effect and ascertain the challenges associated with the use of community-based conflict resolution in the study area.

Methodology

Cross River State is located in the tropical rainforest belt of Nigeria and covers an area of roughly 23,000 km². The state has three agricultural zones, Ogoja, Ikom and Calabar. According to the National Population Commission (NPC, 2006), there are around 2.8 million people living in the state as of the 2006 National Population Census. A clan head oversees each rural community's traditional government, and each village is governed by a chief who varies in title depending on the community (Aya & Eremi, 2025). The state's main economic activities include agriculture, distribution and sale of farm products, logging, and fishing. Others include industries that pay salaries, factories like government buildings, non-governmental organizations, and private businesses. Social activities range from cooperative activities, religious and traditional gatherings, to educational and health services. Agriculture is the main occupation for more than 70% of the population who live in rural areas.

Multistage sampling procedure was used. In the first stage, three (3) blocks were purposefully chosen from each of the three agricultural zones making a total of nine (9) blocks. Selection was based on where conflict had occurred and resolved. In the second stage, two circles were randomly chosen from each of the nine blocks selected, giving eighteen circles. In the third stage, seven (7) circle members representing household heads were randomly chosen from each of the eighteen circles, giving a total of one hundred and twenty-six respondents for the study.

Techniques used in community-based conflict resolution were rated on a five-point likert scale of strongly agreed=5, agreed=4, undecided=3, disagreed=2, and strongly disagreed=1. Weighted $5+4+3+2+1 = 15/5 = 3.0$ (decision rule). $\bar{X} \geq 3.0$ ranked in ascending order was accepted as a technique while < 3.0 was rejected

The roles played by stakeholders in resolving conflict was rated at ordinal level on a five-point likert scale of strongly agreed =5, agreed =4, undecided =3, disagreed =2 and strongly disagreed =1. Weighted $5+4+3+2+1 = 15/5 = 3.0$ (decision rule). $\bar{X} \geq 3.0$ ranked in ascending order was accepted as a role while < 3.0 was rejected.

The perceived effects of community-based conflict resolution on socio-economic activities were rated on a five-point likert scale of strongly agreed =5, agreed =4, undecided =3, disagreed =2 and strongly disagreed =1. Weighted $5+4+3+2+1 = 15/5 = 3.0$ (decision rule). $\bar{X} \geq 3.0$ was accepted as positive perception ranked in ascending order while < 3.0 was negative perception.

The challenges associated with the use of community-based conflicts resolution approaches were rated on a five-point likert scale of strongly agreed =5, agreed =4, undecided=3 disagreed =2, Strongly disagreed = 1. Weighted $5+4+3+2+1 = 15/5 = 3.0$

(decision rule). $\bar{X} \geq 3.0$ was accepted as significant challenge ranked in ascending order while < 3.0 was insignificant’

In order to analyze the data, the study used descriptive statistics such as means and rankings to assess the study objectives

Results and Discussion

Techniques used in community-based conflict resolution

The result in table 1 showed that all of the identified techniques had mean scores ($\bar{X} \geq 3.0$) cutoff, indicating that the respondents approved of all of the techniques. The survey found that, among others, involvement of a neutral mediator ($\bar{X}=3.81$; ranked 1st), direct discussions between the conflicting parties ($\bar{X}=3.74$; ranked 2nd), mutual understanding and fostering reconciliation ($\bar{X}=3.67$; ranked 3rd), promotion of open dialogue ($\bar{X}=3.58$; ranked 4th). The involvement of a mediator is primarily supported by cultural and religious systems to the extent that whatever conflict they addressed would have a culturally viable resolution for all sides. These results imply that the mediator does not take sides or impose their own solution but rather helps the conflicting parties communicate effectively through dialogue to find their own solution. This is in line with Aya & Iyama, (2024) who found that the mediator is impartial and has no vested interest in the outcome but focuses on creating agreements based on competing interests to the advantage of both sides.

Table 1: Distribution of respondent based on techniques used in community-based conflict resolution (n=126)

Techniques USED	Mean	STD	Rank
Involvement of a neutral mediator	3.81	0.89	1 st
Direct discussions between the conflicting parties	3.74	0.74	2 nd
Mutual understanding and fostering reconciliation	3.67	0.72	3 rd
Promotion of open dialogue	3.58	0.67	4 th
Fair hearing by a neutral arbitrator	3.47	0.66	5 th
issuing of binding decision	3.41	0.58	6 th
Facilitation of discussions by stakeholders	3.36	0.54	7 th
Compromise by making concessions	3.28	0.51	8 th
Joint creation of mutually agreed solutions.	3.19	0.47	9 th

Field survey, (2025)

$\bar{X} \geq 3.0$ = Accepted technique; < 3.0 = Rejected

Stakeholders’ role in resolving conflicts

Findings in Table 2 highlight the part that stakeholders have played in resolving conflict in local communities. The outcome showed that all of the identified items had mean scores above the decision rule of ≥ 3.0 indicating that the respondents accepted all of the roles. In particular, it was discovered that some of the most frequently played roles by the stakeholders in resolving conflicts in the area included formation of peace committees ($\bar{X}=3.93$; ranked 1st), mobilization of resources for reconstruction of affected areas ($\bar{X}=3.88$; ranked 2nd), and enforcement of local sanctions ($\bar{X}=3.81$; ranked 3rd). This implies that stakeholders

actually played a variety of roles in resolving conflicts in the studied area. The outcome confirms the observations made by Aya & Eremi (2025) that stakeholders establish peace committees to mediate disputes between parties, provide funds to advance peace, and, when necessary, implement traditional sanctions against belligerent groups. The outcome corroborates Olaiya, (2019) assertion that community stakeholders use sensitization, dialogue with disputing parties, creating of peace committees, mobilization of resources, as well as rapprochement and rehabilitation to address conflict in the community.

Table 2: Distribution of respondents according to stakeholders' role in resolving conflicts (N=126)

Stakeholders' role in resolving conflicts	\bar{X}	Rank
Formation of peace committees	3.93	1 st
Mobilize resources for reconstruction of affected areas/ people rehabilitation	3.88	2 nd
Enforcement of local sanctions	3.81	3 rd
Engage conflicting parties for settlement	3.67	4 th
Summon conflicting parties for settlement	3.32	5 th
Promote consensus building	3.30	6 th
Sensitization of affected communities/ courtesy visits	3.06	7 th
Custodian of indigenous culture and tradition of the community	3.05	8 th
Rehabilitate and reconcile deviants and reintegrate them	2.91	9 th

Source: Field survey, 2025; decision rule = $\bar{X} \geq 3.0$ = accepted role; < 3.0 = rejected role

Perceived effects of community–based conflict resolution on socio-economic activities

The data in Table 3 illustrates how socio-economic activities in the research region are seen to be impacted by community-based conflict resolution. The findings showed that the variables investigated had mean scores higher than the decision rule of $\bar{X} \geq 3.0$, indicating that the respondents approved of all the items. In particular, it was discovered that community-based conflict resolution promote stability, enabling markets to function effectively, businesses to operate without disruption, and trade to flourish, thereby boosting income ($\bar{X}=3.51$; ranked 1st). Peaceful environments attract investment, generate employment, and create opportunities for communities to enhance their economic well-being ($\bar{X}=3.47$; ranked 2nd); a vital tool for achieving sustainable food production and broader development goals. ($\bar{X}=3.43$; ranked 3rd). Resolution of conflict creates opportunities for revitalizing industries such as tourism, boosting agricultural production, and fostering new business development, thereby enhancing overall quality of life ($\bar{X}=3.38$; ranked 4th). This conclusion implies that community-based approaches to conflict resolution create an enabling environment for socioeconomic activities in the community. This finding supports the claims made by Ogbujah & Egobueze (2021) and Adeniyi & Amodu (2020) that using community-based approaches to resolve disputes boosts economic activities like farming and business development as well as the growth and provision of fundamental social services like education and healthcare. The results support Ewetan & Imeokparia (2021) who claim that community-based conflict resolution raises the income of rural residents by fostering an environment that is stable and peaceful, allowing for the growth of productive activities.

Table 3: istribution of respondents based on Perceived effects of community-based conflict resolution on socio-economic activities

Perceived Effects of Community-Based Conflict Resolution on Socio-Economic Activities	Mean	Rank
Promote stability, enabling markets to function effectively, businesses to operate without disruption, and trade to flourish, thereby boosting income.	3.51	1st
Peaceful environments attract investment, generate employment, and create opportunities for communities to enhance their economic well-being.	3.47	2nd
A vital tool for achieving sustainable food production and broader development goals.	3.43	3rd
The resolution of conflict creates opportunities for revitalizing industries such as tourism, boosting agricultural production, and fostering new business development, thereby enhancing overall quality of life.	3.38	4th
Facilitate the rehabilitation and reintegration of conflicting parties into the community, thereby reducing the risk of renewed violence and promoting collective healing.	3.33	5th
Enable communities to focus on rural development, sustainable farming, and improved food production, all crucial for lasting stability and prosperity	3.30	6th
Restore social relationships and foster collaboration, both of which are crucial for local development and resilience	3.27	7th
Invested in education and healthcare, nurture human capital necessary for long-term development	3.25	8th
Foster an environment free from fear and uncertainty	3.19	9th
Fosters productive economic and social participation	3.13	10th

Field survey, (2025); $\bar{X} \geq 3.0 = \text{Positive}; < 3.0 = \text{Negative}$

Challenges to the use of community-based conflict resolution approaches

The challenges for using community-based conflict resolution approaches in the study area are shown in Table 4. The respondents, according to the outcome, accepted 13 of the 14 challenges. The study found that, among other things, some of the most frequent obstacles to community-based conflict resolution in the region included poor funding of peace committees ($\bar{X} = 3.74$; ranked 1st), lack of enforcement machinery ($\bar{X} = 3.69$; ranked 2nd), many local leaders are often compromised ($\bar{X} = 3.61$; ranked 3rd), and lack of trainings on conflict resolution ($\bar{X} = 3.50$; ranked 4th). This implies that rural communities have developed efficient local strategies for managing their problems, they frequently lack resources needed to politicize the process. In addition, many community-based peace projects have fallen short over the years due to a lack of efficient machinery to enforce or carry out peace deals (Muiya 2025). Elfversson 2015) discovered that many community members tasked with carrying out post-conflict peace initiatives lack training or knowledge in peace building and frequently use methods that exacerbate the situation rather than try to mitigate it, made similar findings. This demonstrates why Chinwokwu (2023) believed that for a peace process to be successful, it is imperative to put the necessary machineries including resources for the community-based intervention. The results corroborate those of Adedeji (2019) and Ahmed (2020), who linked a lack of trust, compromised local power elites, political factors influencing the escalation of tensions in communities, a lack of resources to effect

rehabilitation and reintegration of warring groups, and a lack of objectivity on the part of actors claiming to be working toward conflict resolution to the failure of community-based conflict management.

Table 4: Distribution of respondents based on challenges associated with the use of community-based conflicts resolution

Variable	\bar{X}	Rank
Poor funding of peace committees	3.74	1 st
Criticism of community –based approaches e.g lack of enforcement machinery	3.69	2 nd
Many local leaders are often compromised	3.61	3 rd
Lack of trainings on conflict resolution	3.50	4 th
Collusion between local power elites and the political class	3.38	5 th
Difficulty in finding neutral party to mediate peace between conflicting groups	3.33	6 th
Difficulty in determining the proportionality of compensation	3.29	7 th
Contradictions/conflict between laws and traditional practices	3.21	8 th
Culture and language problems	3.10	9 th
Political interference on local authorities	3.08	10 th
Political interference on local authorities	3.08	10 th
Difficulty in arbitrating government influenced communal conflicts	3.05	11 th
Colonial influence and hangovers	3.03	12 th
Lack of trust of the traditional leadership	3.01	13 th
Intervention of military in armed conflict diminishes the value of indigenous approaches due to ritualized rites associated with them	2.05	14 th

Source: Field survey, 2025; $\bar{X} \geq 3.0$ = Major challenge; < 3.0 = Minor challenge.

Conclusion and Recommendation

The study concludes that community-based conflict resolution encompasses diverse techniques for resolving conflicts through local participation and ownership. This process goes beyond the mere attainment of peace; it establishes a solid foundation for socio-economic progress. By adopting and effectively applying appropriate techniques, societies can cultivate an environment that fosters economic advancement, nurtures human potential, and steers communities toward sustainable development while breaking the persistent cycles of poverty and violence.

Based on the findings of this study, community-based conflict resolution techniques are consider highly effective in addressing conflicts and play a crucial role in the expansion and development of socio-economic activities in rural areas. The study recommends that development organizations employ these techniques, as they serve as powerful tools for promoting community stability and fostering peaceful cohabitation among residents.

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