Land Management and Violent Conflict in Ebonyi State, Nigeria

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Abstract

The nature and character of conflicts in Africa have remained intractable. This is as a result of an unending agitations and fights among parties to the conflict, struggling to win at all cost. In Nigeria, the extent of conflict, especially communal has taken a dangerous shape as losses are counted unceasingly. Interestingly, the degree of eruptions and spread of violent communal conflicts, and claim of ownership of land by communal groupings in Ebonyi State have created a state of perceptible fear among Ebonyians with the attendant loss of lives and property and displacement of thousands of people. Violent communal conflicts have caused huge disarray in the state's internal security situation and reached critical proportions, yet no systematic effort has been made to know the nexus between management of land in the state and persistence of violent communal conflict in the state. Thus, it was on this premise that the study examined how undocumented method of customary management of land account for the persistent violent communal conflicts in Ebonyi state, and how persistent occurrence of violent communal land contestation lead to forced population displacement in Ebonyi state. Methodologically, the study utilized documentary method, and data were analyzed using content analysis. The theoretical framework of analysis for the study was anchored on the theory of Eco-violence theory. The study found that predominance of communal land regimes which makes for management of land undocumented, and subsistence agricultural system where greater percentage of the people depended on were responsible for the continuous violent communal conflict in the state. The study recommended that Ebonyi State government should develop a land law in line with the 1978 Land Use Act that will make land available to peasant farmers in different communities, and also to develop a proactive mechanism that will detect early warning signals where violent communal conflict may likely occur in the State and set up a special panel to hear all land issues in different communities.
Keywords: *Customary, Early warning, Land Use Act, Peasant farming, Violent conflict.*

Introduction

It has been noted that conflict remains a recurring factor and portrays the image of national life of Africa, and Nigeria in particular. According to Ayokhai (2010), Nigeria's development has been arrested and her future critically endangered by violent conflicts. This can be evidenced by recurrence of sectarian conflicts of violent magnitudes across various states and local governments, precisely since the return to democratic and civil rule in 1999. Thus, the incessant agitations and

re-occurring of communal clash of interests especially on land in several quarters and societies in Africa since decades ago following her independencies from the colonial masters have seriously posed dire consequences on the nations' development. In furtherance, myriads of communal clashes and conflicts in Africa, have the capability to limit and constrain development, by retarding the level of infrastructural implementation. This, according to Adetula (2004), have in the long run, interrupted the production cycles and stages, and thereby diverting resources away from productive uses.

Therefore, it is important to note that the bulk of issues and problems in the post-colonial clime are not only limited to omnipresence of conflicts, and their effects on productive capacities, as they are realities of the social system. The bone of contention remains the fact that intra and inter conflicts involve immense destructions of the lives and property. These conflicts and clashes are between supposed blood members of the various families and communities who are now living in perpetual fears. Bring the study down to our door steps, Ebonyi State can be seen as a child of necessities, and emergent states in Nigeria. It is located in the south eastern region of Nigeria. It is important to note that Ebonyi state has in the recent time been known for notorious communal conflicts. This is made manifest on the serial clashes of interests on landed property by members of communities and villages in the state to exclusively appropriate the land resource in their homelands (Ayokhai, 2013).

Sequel to the above, Ebonyi State was created through military fiat by late General Abacha Sani's government on 1st October, 1996 after thirty-nine (39), years of intense struggle for the realization of the State (Elechi, 2017). The State was shortly under the military rules (1996-1999), before it transited to democracy on May 29, 1999 under the leadership of His Excellency, Dr Samuel Ominyi Egwu. It has a landmass of approximately 5,932 square km and lies approximately 7.30N longitude and latitude 50.4E and 60.45/ E (EBSG, 2005). The state has a population of 2.3 million people (National Population Commission, 2006). According to Ebonyi State Government (2005), it has boundary with Cross River State in the East, Benue State in the North, Enugu State in the West and Abia State in the South.

Furthermore, the areas that constituted Ebonyi State before its creation in 1996 had several rashes of communal conflicts notably, the Ishinkwo – Abaomege, Oshiri – Ezzama, Mgbalukwu – Ogboji,

among others. These communal conflicts were traceable to contestations of ownership of land or issues of boundaries, and the situation has continued till date. Natural resource contestation and resultant conflict anywhere in the world is not new. Human beings are heavily dependent on natural resources for their very survival. Natural resources of all kinds, particularly land, water, soil, forest, vegetation, and animals are the major resource base supporting and sustaining the human population. Till recently, we took all-natural assets land, air, water, soil, flora and fauna for granted, considering them as infinite and went about gifting, selling, utilizing and exploiting these resources to the hilt. It is only recently that we have come to realize that these resources are finite and limited. Already, these resources (particularly land) are facing serious threat due to over exploitation, unplanned, unscientific and haphazard developmental activities associated with mismanagement in the country and Ebonyi state in particular where high number of the population depends on farming as source of livelihood.

Conceivably, issues that relate to land and its management, is the most important endowment, that tends to dictate every ways of life of people. It also boils down to the way they live in the society. Land as one of the factors of production is the core for producing raw materials for use by other manufacturing industries in the country. It is believed that no state or its components really survive as an entity without adequate usage to it (Chikaire, Nnadi, et al 2017). Land is an essential factor of production and free gift that supports human's existence. Most importantly, it is from land that all forms of agro-economic activities are depended upon. Sequel to the import attached to land, it cannot be renewed without associated challenges. Therefore, it must be thoughtful and carefully managed in a sustainable way for the good of all members of the community. Sequel to the above reason that Atiola (2010), noted that countries all over the world have evolved different forms of land system or the other, aimed at protecting various groups and interests for effective administration of land.

However, in the reverse influence, land has pervasively underpinned human activities that it usually played some role during war and civil violence. Land- related issues figure into many violent disputes around the world. More importantly, the ongoing communal violence in different parts of Nigeria and Ebonyi state in particular is tied down to competition over scarce fertile land and poor resource governance and management (Collier, 2003). Baranyi & Weitzner (2001)

observed that land has continued to exist, and at same time an object of rivalry in a number of ways, as an economic factor, a linkage between identity and social legitimacy, and as political territory. Thus, the intense struggle on piece of land and its products is at the core of the relationship between land and prevailing conflicts in many quarters in Nigeria in general and Ebonyi state in particular. Such contestations over land usually occur amongst various identity groups, whether on ethnicity, religion, class, gender. The failure to adequately address the foundational problems and issues surrounding land and its usage have tantamount to chances of violence and continued poverty bedeviling the entire society.

However, despite this reviling nexus between land and violent conflict, not a lot have been written about land resource conflict in Ebonyi State; few of the works by scholars like Oji, Eme, et al (2014), focused on Ezza-Ezillo conflict and its economic and social implication on the State. Thus, in spite of all efforts put at resolving the conflicts by government, Oji, Eme, et al (2015), noted that they appear to have become intractable linking it to the spate of violent conflicts and occasional state failure in the maintenance of peace and order by Ebonyi state. However, it is against this backdrop that this study sets out to investigate how land resource management accounted for the communal violent conflict in Ebonyi State, Nigeria.

It is very important here to note that before the creation of Ebonyi state on 1ˢᵗ October, 1996 and its transition to democratic rule on May 29, 1999, the people that constituted the state had several rashes of communal violent conflicts that were land induced. It was believed that the creation of the state and institutions like local councils, more autonomous communities, the State Security Service Command, the Office of Special Adviser on Internal Security, the Ministry of Border, Peace and Conflict Resolution, and the Judicial System, will checkmate and peacefully resolve the ever increasing conflicts in the state, however, despite the creation of these institutions, the spate of violent conflicts have remained increasingly alarming and these conflicts have defiled all management and resolution mechanisms put in place by the state government (Nwefuru & Nnaji, 2008).

However, when land does not or have adequate constitutional, institutional, and customary protection, it becomes a product which is easily subjected to exploitation and abuse by the members of the community. Importantly, weak institution has been adjudged to have leads to

weak management systems. This situation has often continued to deprive individuals of their natural rights, and legal access to land and other natural assets. Importantly, finding plausible solutions to land injustices when it is not carefully planned may be an objective of a war or violent conflict in the society. The abovementioned depicts that land is never just a means of subsistence, but beyond that. It is factor of production seen as family or community property. Thus, the regard attached to land for socio-economic activities in the state is indisputable, as rights to it, is very paramount and synonymous with life and prestige. In societies where agriculture is the major means of sustenance and livelihood, land remains their fallback by high percentage of the people.

Moreover, this is the case in Ebonyi state as the continued rise in the re-emergence of violent conflicts among people who are seemingly same ethnically, religiously and culturally homogeneous group has continued to be a serious concern to scholars. However, irrespective of the worrisome and staggering state of peace in the state as a result of these land related conflicts that kept cropping, very few scholars have narrowly focused on them. Conflict experts such as Itumo (2014); Onwe, Nwaogbaga, et al (2015), Oji, Eme, et al (2015), Ani & Samuel, (2017), Nwefuru & Nnaji (2018), have not projected a comprehensive study of these violent communal conflicts in the state, and its relationship with land management and how these persistent communal conflicts have resulted to forced population displacement in the state.

Extant literature have stated how communal co-existence among the members of society could be affected by conflict with attendant disastrous consequence on the socio-economic, cultural and political life and existence of people. Similarly, in their study on Ezza-Ezillo conflict, Onwe, Nwaogbaga, et al (2015), narrated the implication of social conflicts on continuous development in Ebonyi State. They continued by opining that Social conflict is inevitable as there is a tendency on the side of people to make move, expand and control space, or territory using any means possible-peaceful or through the use of force. Similarly, Onyebueke (2018), argued that communal conflict usually presents in form of misunderstanding in which part of a community regard themselves as the rightful owners of the land, while the other groups are regarded as 'strangers' or visitors. This have been the case between Ezza-Ezillo people. In their work on Ezza-Ojiegbe and Mgbalukwu-Obeagu intermittent conflicts, Ani & Samuel (2017), identified migration as a factor that trigger conflict and also a consequence of conflict. On the other hand, Mbah & Nwangwu

(2014) contended that the conflict between Ezza and Ezillo in Ebonyi State is a manifestation of material interest and deep-seated animosity between the two communities in a homogenous setting. In his study on communal clashes between the indigenes of Agila community in Benue State and the community of Ngbo in present Ebonyi state, Orinya (2016), noted that the conflict of interests over land has been a factor devastating both communities in almost a five decades old. The work took a look at the livelihood security situation of the conflict situation and looked at the consequence of conflict in terms of displacement of persons in Agila community of Benue state. The available literature therefore suggest that the efforts of scholars have not been focused on ascertaining if undocumented method of customary management of land accounts for the persistence violent communal conflicts in Ebonyi state and if persistent violent communal conflicts have resulted to forced population displacement in the state.

Theoretical Framework of Analysis

Competition over scarce ecological resources (land), has aggravated in contemporary times owing to the impacts of climate change, which has exacerbated ecological scarcity across the world (Blench, 2004; Onuoha, 2005). Therefore, several theories can be appropriated in explaining the issue under investigation. This study adopts Eco-Violence Theory propounded by Homer-Dixon (1999) to explicate the relationship between environmental factors and violent conflicts. The theory offers insights into the nature and dynamics of the arable land, resource conflict and resultant consequences like forced displacement of persons. The pressure over arable land and the attendant resource conflicts get worse amidst ever shrinking resources, livelihood crisis, imminent policy deficiencies on land management by the state. Increasing population growth rate has continued to exert great pressure on available land resources with varying environmental and socio-economic implications (Tarhule & Lamb, 2003; Fiki & Lee, 2004).

Application of the Theory

Violent communal conflict in different communities in Ebonyi state is aptly captured by the philosophical and ideological underpinnings of the Eco-Violence Theory. The major premise of the Eco-Violence Theory is that, with decrease in the quality and quantity of resources (in this case land), and population growth, there is a carrying capacity on the part of man to enlarge and control

space, or territory using a means possible – peaceful or the use of force in quest for scarce resources. This is indeed manifested in the continuous land contestation in Ebonyi owing to building pressure on land resource as a result of expanding human population which has resulted into expanding needs of humans particularly, food. Conflict is thus inevitable as there is a natural tendency on the part of indigenes of different communities of the state to strive to acquire resources with any means possible. Land is one of the scarcest resources. Undoubtedly, the struggle over who owns or occupies land has been the root causes of violent conflicts in different communities in Nigeria and Ebonyi state in particular.

Eco-Violence Theory also posited that, scarcity of ecological resource (land) leads to pressure on arable land; thus, claims and counter claims over any territory is rooted in the economics of the land, in terms of its fertility, including natural endowments in hydro – carbons. This explains clearly the reason for struggle over land in the state which precisely an agricultural state wherein farmers depend on land resource for livelihood. In Ebonyi state like any other agricultural state, farmland is as important as oil in the south-south states and people and groups in recent times often scramble for it because of its limited supply and inelastic nature and growing need by farmers.

Also, the theory posits that people affected by conflict over resource may migrate or be expelled to new lands, thereby triggering ethnic conflicts when they move to new areas, while decreases in wealth cause deprivation conflicts. What this means therefore is that, in many plural or communal groupings, natural resource competition especially land remains a perennial problem in the sense that communal cleavages shape and determine whose group control the natural resources. Now, this typically what happens when communities in the state with common ancestors and culture like Ezza-Ezillo and Ezillo engage themselves in battle in contestation of land when communities feel their land boundaries is being encroached. So that, several violent communal conflicts have usually been caused by the attempt to capture or dominate another communal group so as to seize their natural resources; in this case land. Chiefly for agricultural use.

Literature Review

The review of related literature is done thematically

Customary Management of Land and Violent Communal Conflict in Ebonyi State

It has been a conventional knowledge that conflict or clash of interests which leads to the later, is as old as man himself. It exists where there is social relations among members of family in particular or amongst the members of society. Sequel to the above, Oji, Eme, et al (2014), have adduced to the fact that conflict is a product of social relations which always exists in any relation of social production. It arises from differences of interests in the struggle for resources to meet demands on social life in a distinct socio-physical environment (Otite & Albert, 2001). To Oji, Eme, et al (2014), they posited that men in any society live in a process of interdependence among themselves which always leads to individual differences, contradictions. Conflicts, especially, communal conflict is adjudged to have constituted one of the challenging and ever recurring problem destroying the social and political settings of Africa.

Conventionally, the existence of conflicts especially, communal crises are not new in African societies which is characterized with high indicators of ethno-religious groups and languages. According to Ibeanu (2003), communities in Nigeria have continually being experiencing serial cases of conflicts which are communal, and they were largely induced by land. Notable land triggered related crises are the Zango-Kataf conflict which happened in Kaduna between 1999 to 2001. Also, the Tiv-Jukun-Wukari conflict in Taraba State that occurred between 1999 to 2001. Others ones are the popular Itsekiri-Urhobo Warri crisis (1999-2000); Yelwa-Shendam conflict (2003- 2005), Mangu-Bokoss crisis of 1988-1999, and the Ife-Modakeke crisis of 1999-2000 in the present Osun and Oyo states respectively. The commonest feature of these conflicts is that, it deals with offensive and violent dimensions and strategies which have led to colossal damages of property and lives of people who formerly communed together in peace and harmony. This is effectively captured by Oji, Eme, et al (2014), in their study on Ezza-Ezillo conflict in Ebonyi state, wherein they demonstrated how communal co-existence has been ruptured by conflict with attendant consequences on the social, cultural and political life of the members of communities.

Scholars like Nwefuru & Nnaji (2008), rightly pointed out that since the creation of Ebonyi State on 1st October 1996 and particularly with the return to democracy in Nigeria in May 29, 1999, the State had witnessed several cases of violent communal conflicts that were land induced. These conflicts they posited have several serious implications on governance and development, among which are; loss of power to protect its citizens by the government, diversion of government priorities, increase in arm race and acquisition of light weapons. Likewise, Itumo & Nwobashi (2017), asserted that, in the case of Ezza-Ezillo conflict, the people came from Ezza south and Ezza north local governments area of Ebonyi State on the invitation of the Ezillo to settle a land dispute between them and their Ngboneighbours at Egu Echara in the early 1930s. Interestingly, since the end of the dispute, the Ezza settlers have continued to live among heir host community.

Thus, it has been observed for some time before now that social relations that exist between the two groups of people as contained in the above have not been flourishing, as it has degenerated to the problem of who is an indigene and who is a settler. Although, there are several cases of re-occurrence of conflicts in Ezillo in the last five decades, the most challenging one occurred on 10th of May 2008, a dispute between a boy from Ezillo and one man from Ezza over building of telephone stand at Isinkpuma motor park. Even though, the government of Ebonyi state quickly intervened to resolve and put to an end the conflict, the conflict would have claimed so many lives and properties that worth millions of naira, and equally affected the socio and economic development of the state which they blamed on poor state system to provide logistics to security outfits, and enforcement of law by later.

Similarly, Onwe, Nwaogbaga, et al (2015), x-rayed the implications of communal conflicts on continuous and progressive development of agricultural sector in Ebonyi State with focus on Ezillo-Ezza interplays. They opined that social conflicts are inevitable as there is a inclination on the part of people to migrate, expand and dominate space, or territory using any means possible, either through peaceful or the use of force. They established that the problems associated with indigene-settler, and the intense competition for resources which has been a major cause of communal conflict in Africa and Nigeria in particular is same factor that have kept the two communities in conflict. One common feature of these intractable clashes of interests which

always end-up in conflicts has to do with their violent strategies which led to loss of lives and property of the people. Other studies on conflicts in Ebonyi have established that the Ezillo conflict has affected sustainability of developmental efforts of the state government. The conflict has led to wanton destruction of lives and property including government properties like schools and the Ezillo Regional Water Scheme. Also, the conflicts had seriously resulted in low provision and sustainability of infrastructure facilities in the communities. The conflict did not only affect government properties and projects as aforementioned, but also led to increase in youth unemployment and high crime wave in the state. Similarly, in their work on Ezza-Ezillo conflict, Mbah & Nwangwu (2014), asserted that one of the major contributing factors that motivates conflicts among the people of Igbo is always land. The reason for it remains the spirituality attached to culture of land in Igbo nations as clearly demonstrated on the reverence to deity associated with *Ana.* Importantly, land is has also being expressed as the linkage between those that are living, those who had died and the people who are yet to be born.

Moreover, it has been adjudged by the elders, especially among the Igbo that land remains a very important issue since many people believed that land connects the material and the spiritual, that is to say, it is the very reason for Igbo ontology. Again, so many members of the communities in Igbo race, also see it as something that is worth dying for in other to acquire or continually maintain its inheritance. The spiritual essence affords a limited explanations to the causes of violence that tends disintegrate Igbo of today's culture. On the other hand, the leftists believed that the principal causal factors that cause conflict especially over land are not limited to increasing commercialization of land, but increase in population pressure and dire need of land for one productive venture or the other. Other ones include, the collapse of traditional structures for gaining access to land and managing conflicts arising from it, as well as government rural development policies. Recall that land has remains one of the basic natural resources in Igbo land. However, land is inelastic or limited in supply, yet population explosion among people is seriously making its acquisition, and compensation conflictual. Importantly, while land and other material of interests are the major and immediate causes of communal conflicts, it is believed that they do not explain in adequate terms, the identities that form around them and how these identities acquire specificity and become the basis of conflict intensification.

Moreover, the Ezza-Ezillo conflict started as a resource conflict over material interest in Ishimkpume, Amalinze, and Umuezikoha lands, and is now an animosity conflict. An animosity conflict is one in which memories of past conflicts acquire a relative autonomy and become significant in renewing and intensifying conflicts. Animosity conflicts are likely to be prolonged conflicts in which the protagonists have memories of loss, hurt or humiliation. An animosity conflict often begins as resource conflict. However, over time the original cause of the conflict becomes only apparent, while bitter memories become the immediate course of new conflict. At the same time, fears of preemptory attacks by the opposing side usually provide a very short fuse that ignites new round of conflict (Mbah & Nwangwu, 2014).

In the same vein, Osegbue (2017), argued that communal conflict has manifested itself as the most pandemic issue next to ethno-religious conflict in Nigeria with ownership, access to and use of land as the driver of the conflict. Communal conflict exists in all the geopolitical zones of the country though the character of the conflicts may differ from one zone to another. In Northern Nigeria for instance, while the character of the conflict revolves around farmers and herders, indigene-settler issues which occurs either in pure form and sometimes colored with ethnicity. In Southern Nigeria, it is a combination of indigene-settler issues; farmer- Fulani herdsmen and political resource allocation. It is observed that most communal conflicts display clearly the paralysis of dialogue between political elites as well as the presence of fundamental socioeconomic and political grievances which divide societal groups.

The economic significance of land in rural African communities (in raising incomes, providing employment, and exporting crops and other extractable resources as well as providing tax revenue for governments) has transformed land into a social security resource that has been responsible for spreading of conflicts. Over 70% of population in Africa live in rural areas and engage in peasant agriculture as means of livelihood (Osegbue, 2017). It is true and should be stressed that the use of land for direct production of livelihoods contributes less of a proportion than in the past due to the occupational changes that occur across the societies of the continent but this change in production has not substantially altered the relevance of land to the people and societies of Africa. The importance of land irrespective of various competing conditions is not proportionately reduced

because land still provides a portion of livelihoods that may be the difference between survival or not. Indirectly, land offers the base structure, and sometimes the only basis for social security throughout life among Africans (Osegbue,2017). In most sub-Saharan African societies, land by its nature is regarded as the economic and subsistence base of a people. The economic importance of land accounts for its use as the base for agricultural activities in the predominantly agrarian societies in African continent.

Similarly, Onyebueke (2018), argued that communal conflicts in Nigeria are mainly caused due to disagreement people have over land or some natural resources like oil deposits, solid minerals and water. Conflict can also arise when the communities want to defend their pride, properties or even themselves against the invasion of other communities. According to him, communal conflict usually present in form of misunderstanding in which part of a community regard themselves as the rightful owners of the land while the other group are regarded as 'strangers' or visitors. He posited that the 'strangers' come with their culture and tradition thereby inconveniencing the real owners of the land. In Ebonyi state, the inhabitants of Ezza and Ezillo communities have engaged themselves in protracted communal conflicts which have involved massive destruction of lives and properties arising mainly from misunderstanding over land ownership. These communities are believed to have the same ancestral father and common origin. In spite of this ancestral relationship, they have been having serious communal conflict contesting the ownership of land.

Furthermore, Ani & Samuel (2017), in their work on Ezza-Ojiegbe and Mgbalukwu-Obeagu accounted that, the Ojiegbe, Mgbalukwu and Obeagu communities are three different communities that were traditionally found in Isuland, Onicha Local Government Area, Ebonyi State, Nigeria. The Ojiegbe people, on their side were the descendants of Ezza community, who moved from their kiths and kiln (the Ezza people) to Isuland. They were given a portion of land by the Mgbalukwu and the Obeagu people of Isu to live and pay tribute to them after assisting them in fighting and winning their then Onicha enemies. However, the growth in the population of the inhabitants of the land, made both the Ojiegbe people to extend their area of settlement, on one hand, while on the other hand, the Mgbalukwu and Obeagu communities desired to stop the rapid expansion and annexation of more land by the Ojiegbe people which resulted in communal conflict between the

two communities. The work identified migration as both cause and effect of conflict in the conflict in the communities in the state. At this juncture, it is obvious that the extant literature show that scholars have acknowledged the existence of violent communal conflict in different parts of the state which are land induced, but, the literature lack attempts by scholars to examine the role undocumented method of customary management of land plays in the unending violent communal conflicts in Ebonyi state Nigeria.

- **Violent Communal Conflict and Forced Population Displacement in Ebonyi State**

Land is a basically a natural resource and freely given by God. It is one of the four factors of production that is not movable. Economically, land supports all human activities and, it is from it that all other economic resources are derived. Importantly, it cannot be changed or increased in size or quantity without adverse consequences. Therefore, it calls for careful and efficient management in a very sustainable manner for the good of all. Thus, it is for this reason that different societies of the world over have evolved land tenure systems to protect various land allocations and interests for effective land governance and management (Atiola, 2010). Land, so pervasively underpins human activity that it usually plays some role during war and civil violence. Land- related issues figure into many violent disputes around the world. Ongoing communal violence in different parts of Nigeria and Ebonyi state in particular is tied to competition over scarce fertile land and poor resource governance and management (Collier, et al. 2003). The competition for land has in a number of ways created potential overlapping. These include land as an economic asset, as a connection with identity and social legitimacy, and finally, land as a political territory. Competition over land and its resources is at the center for number and type of identity groups, whether on ethnicity, religion, class, gender. The inability to address the bedrock for the causes have continued to increased the likelihood of conflicts and attendant displacement of population which perpetuate poverty (Baranyi and Weitzner,2001).

Furthermore, Ibeanu (2003), noted that in Nigeria displacement-generating conflicts of three types are alarming. These included the resource-based, identity-based and participation-based conflicts. He further noted that in any of these cases, those affected have little or no chance to stay behind owing to the sustenance crisis that usually follow such conditions. In a similar note, the Joint Humanitarian Action Plan (JHAP, 2013), noted that inter-communal conflicts are underlying

factor of displacement and casualties in Nigeria. The conflicts are usually centered on disputes over land, ethnic and religious differences and are especially common in the North-Central geo-political zones involving "indigenous" Christians and pastoralist Muslims who are viewed as "settlers". Protracted inter-communal conflicts regularly lead to death and displacement throughout Nigeria. In 2013, at least 733 fatalities were reported and an estimated 70,000 people were displaced from communal conflicts in Plateau, Nasarawa, Taraba, Kogi and Benue states.

Likewise, according to Orinya (2016), in his work entitled "*Communal Conflict, Internal Displacement and Livelihood Security: An Analysis of the Agila Situation*", noted that the inter-communal and violent conflict between people of Agila and Ngbo, is a contest for the sole control of land, which is a natural endowment. It has been observed that the initial reports of inter-communal conflict between the two agitating communities was first reported during the colonial period. Since then and till now, Agila community has continued witness both intra and inter-communal conflicts resulting to loss of lives, destruction of properties and population displacement (WEP, 2009). Importantly, the Agila versus Ngbo communal conflict is over a disputed portion of about ten kilometers stretch of boundary between Ebonyi and Benue States. The conflict at onset during colonial era was an irregular minor clash that never resulted in any loss of life except for demolition of few huts and destruction of farms on the disputed land (Otokpa, 2014). The increasing population, migration and inevitable demand for land for economic activities have ensured the frequency of the conflict is continuously on the rise. It is record that the formal partitioning of the boundary through Legal Notice 126 of 1954 by the colonial government brought some respite to the area until the Civil War of 1967 that broke out. The effects of the later forced the entire Agila community to be displaced by the Civil War, and they returned to their ancestral land in 1970 in order to settle after the war ended.

In his words, Orinya (2016), displacements due to inter and intra-communal conflicts have both affected social relations and group formation in the society. The intra-communal conflict between royal and non-royal groups has continue to bring up disunity and mutual hatred that tore community into two. In some major cases, marriages which involved members of the communities were dissolved and friendship ties broken. Further implication of the conflict is that it pushed a large number of members of the community from their ancestral homes leaving them with deep

feelings of hate toward their opponents. Importantly, the situation has been exacerbated by the massive displacement of people caused by increasing incidence of violent conflict between Agila and Ngbo, which has put Agila town under pressure since 1999. Families have been separated as vulnerable members migrate to safety in other towns and villages.

In a comparative note, according to Integrated Regional Information Networks report (IRIN, 2007), Communal clashes in Akwa Ibom state over the control of a parcel of land in August 2008, had caused destruction and displacement of persons. At the root of the conflicts lies the distinction between indigenous populations and settlers and the different type of access to land that is traditionally granted to the later. The communal clash reared its ugly head, in August 28, 2008, when the Andoni militants, from Eastern Obolo Local Government Area, wreaked havoc on the quiet village of IkotAkpan Udo where not less than 37 houses were completely brought down, the market razed and the villagers taking refuge in the neighbouring satellite villages. The current mayhem was said to have started from a disagreement between two motor cyclists from the two communities, but the Ikot Akpan Udo community traced its remote cause to the unbridled quest by the Andonis to acquire Ibibio land in IkotAbasi Local Government Area. The community, which alleged that the Andonis were settlers, said the court at IkotAbasi had in the past adjudicated in land disputes between it and the Andonis, adding that the court ruled that the Andonis were granted tenancy on condition of payment of tributes to the Ibibios (IRIN, 2007). Mohammed (2017), he argued that the causes of displacement, particularly those linked to communal clashes and ethno-religious violence, tend to be the most sensitive in terms of sentiments and perceptions. Communal clashes, such as the ones currently taking place in southern Kaduna between herdsmen, and the native farmers which have already lasted for a very long time, have claimed hundreds of lives. The Catholic Church in the region has also stated that 1,422 houses, 16 Churches, 19 shops, and one primary school were destroyed in Kafanchan and Chikun LGAs between October, 2016 and early January, 2017 Over 2,000 people have been displaced from neighboring villages and are taking refuge in a school compound run by a pastor in the area.

Furthermore, in Logo Area council of Benue state, continuous clashes between farmers and herders in the state has led to the killing of 100 displaced persons; mostly women, children, and the elderly in 2016 while taking refuge in camps located at Ukura, Gafa, Per, and Tse-Gusa at Ukemgbiraghia

Twarev Ward, an attack described as one of the bloodiest on Benue communities by the suspected herdsmen. Another attack in Agatu LGA in the state was one of the most publicized attacks in 2016, where there was huge public outcry and a call to bring the attacks in the region to an end. The continuous crisis has caused a total displacement of 7,000 people, with attendant consequences on homes, farms, and barns which were utterly and completely destroyed.

The clashes between rural farming communities, cattle rustlers, and nomadic herdsmen have been retaliatory, creating a cycle of violence with countless innocent victims. Displacement of such communities having been haphazardly handled in the past without any long-term, sustainable solutions has created an environment of continued tension and risks of recurrences of violence. Communities affected by this type of violence are forced to move out of their homes out of fear or, in some cases when their villages are destroyed, to neighbouring villages and public buildings such as schools. This, however, does not guarantee security, as in some cases, further attacks take place in their places of refuge. Displacement due to clashes between nomadic herdsmen and rural farmers in some parts of the country, particularly where large expanses of farmland has eaten up into traditional grazing routes of pastoralists, has created tension and violent clashes between communities. Renewed clashes over land between ethnic Tivs and nomadic Fulanis in Edo and Benue states also led to the displacement of an estimated 15,000 people since March 2012.

Moreover, recounting the Aguleri-Umuleri communal conflicts which is the deadliest communal conflict over land in southeastern part of the country, (Otite & Albert, 2001) stated that the Aguleri-Umuleri communal conflict led to forced population displacements. They continued that the spillover effect of the conflict made the neighbouring communities of Nsugbe, Nando, Nteje and Igbariam over stretched with refugee settlements in the time of conflict between the two communities. All public places like schools, churches, town halls became accommodations for displaced persons. Due to the fact that these communities were overpopulated, there was general breakdown in social system breeding social ills like stealing. Perhaps, the expulsion of Umuleri refugees for breeching their agreement was an effort on the part of Nteje community to restore order to their community in the face of breakdown of social system. They argued that the conflicts also led to unprecedented security problems in neighbouring communities. The war left the belligerents with lots of arms. While most of these youths lost their places of business in the

conflicts, some others lost the willingness to make an honest living. The result of this was that these youths from Aguleri and Umuleri went to the neighbouring communities of Nsugbe, Nteje, Igbariam and Nando and started making a living with their guns. They terrorized neighbouring communities for years. Even the state felt their terror.

The communal conflicts also affected food production and distribution. The Omabala area is an agricultural area. Otuocha market is the central market in Anambra-East and the most popular Eke market in the area. As a result of this, the Otuocha market is well attended by all the communities in Anambra-East local government. Thus, most traders from Nsugbe, Nando, Igbariam and even Nteje in Oyi local government area who have farms bring different economic crops like cassava, garri, pepper, yams, tomatoes, okro for sale at Otuocha market. During the conflicts between Aguleri and Umuleri, traders could not sell their wares at Otuocha market and even transport cost to and from those communities increased. The fact that neither production nor distribution of food was possible in the warring communities increased the pressure of food supply in neighbouring communities and created scarcity of foodstuffs and an increase in the prices of food.

Furthermore, Stones (2014), argued that to fully understand land conflicts in Nigeria, especially those that result in violence, one must map out the various types of land issues found in the country and examine the historical context in which these conflicts were born and the current environment in which they continue to exist. At this point, it is apparent that scholarly efforts have been made to acknowledge that there are lingering issues of violent communal land contestation in different states in the country and different parts of the state, but available literature was not able to highlight how persistent communal land contestation have led to forced population displacement in Ebonyi state.

Conclusion and Recommendations

In conclusion, the study avers that there has been a rising wave of communal violent conflicts in Ebonyi state since 2000 to date. The conflicts are land induced and had persisted because of the undocumented system of customary land management in the communities. These land conflicts among communities has resulted in forced displacement of persons. The management and resolution mechanisms put in place by government are not proactive and inadequate as there are

no camps to take care of people displaced during communal conflicts in the state. This menace has grievous implications for the governance, and economic growth of the state, given that Ebonyi is an agrarian state. The study recommends that:

- Ebonyi state government should revisit land laws in the state and try to come up with laws that will relax the land rights in different communities of the state and make land available to persons in the communities in line with the Land Use Act of 1978.

- The state government in collaboration with local government area chairmen and traditional rulers should work out modalities that can clearly demarcate the boundaries of the existing communities of the state.

- There should be a well thought out blue prints and well-trained personnel on peace advocacy for the people of the state.

- The state government should set up special Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) panel with a sole mandate to hear and settle all pending land related disputes .

- The traditional rulers and town unions of the various communities in the state should institutionalize inter-community relations that can help neighbouring communities to handle incidents of issues of common concerns that can escalate into violence.

- The state should be proactive in management of people displaced by communal conflicts by establishing IDP camps in conflict prone communities in the state.

- Ebonyi state government should put in place more robust institutional mechanisms that are proactive and have the capacity to detect early warning signals that breed violent communal conflict.

- There should be appropriate legislative enactment to deal with and define fairly and equitably the rights of citizens in the community.

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