

CONFLICT MANAGEMENT IN RIVERS STATE: PERISCOPING THE INVOLVEMENT OF THE RIVERS STATE HOUSE OF ASSEMBLY

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Abstract

A lot of scholars described Rivers State as a theater of conflicts. Between 1999 and 2011, the State recorded unprecedented number of conflicts in no fewer than sixty communities. Most of the conflicts predated 1999 and are prevalent to date. The conflicts defied both Executive and Judiciary remedies. Conflict management is assumed by both social scientists and policy makers as the principal responsibility of the Executive and Judicial arms of government. The role of the Legislature in this regards is assumed to be incidental, often limited to enactment of legislations to give effect to negotiated agreements or curb the proliferation of conflicts. This research therefore focuses on the involvement of the Rivers State House of Assembly in conflict management in Rivers State from 1999 to 2011. We adopted the doctrine of separation of powers as a framework of analysis and argued that the involvement of the Legislature; especially the Rivers State House of Assembly in conflict management within the period under review was as a result of the failure of both the Executive and the Judiciary to effectively manage conflicts. The study recommends the amendment of the Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, 1999 to provide for financial autonomy for the Legislature as a measure of ensuring the greater involvement of the Legislature in conflict management.

Keywords: Conflict, conflict management, the legislature, separation of powers, Rivers State, Rivers State House of Assembly

Introduction

It is generally assumed by both political scientists and policy makers that conflict management is principally the role of the Executive and Judicial arms of government (Egobueze, 2016). The role of the Legislature in conflict management is assumed to be incidental, often limited to enactment of legislations to give effect to negotiated agreements or curb the proliferation of conflicts. This is assumed to be the case for both international and domestic conflicts.

Conflict has remained a dominant feature of modern democracies because of lack of service delivery by the State to the citizens, and unhealthy rivalry of the ruling elites for access to political and economic power and wide spread corruption (Egobueze, 2016). Nations are almost sliding to self destruction as a result of conflicts; USAID (2004:1) argues that:

‘Civil’ conflict has become the dominant mode of violence in the post-Cold War era. In 2001, all but one of the world’s wars was internal, and widespread, deadly violence now affects nearly 60

percent of the countries of the world. While conflict can be an inherent and legitimate part of social and political life, in many places the costs and consequences of conflict, crisis, and instability have become unacceptably high. Internal conflict causes tremendous human suffering with a disproportionate share of the costs falling on civilian victims. In today's wars, civilians are nine times more likely to be killed than combatants. By the year 2000, internal conflict and repression had generated 14.5 million asylum seekers worldwide and nearly 25 million persons were displaced within their own countries. Child soldiers, gender-specific atrocities, and the targeting of aid workers are all part of "new war" scenarios.

In international conflicts, the executive arm of government takes the lead in foreign policy, especially in treaty making and implementation. Although in some jurisdictions like Nigeria, the Legislature is required to domesticate international treaties before they come into effect, in reality, once treaties have been entered into, their domestication becomes almost a routine exercise.

On the other hand, in domestic conflicts, it is assumed that the Executive and Judiciary take the lead. This is so for a number of reasons; first, it is principally in the process of implementing government policies that most domestic conflicts arise and the Executive arm, as the policy implementation arm of government, is at the fore of managing these conflicts. Secondly, as the arm of government which principally incarnates the capacity and authority of the state, the Executive arm has responsibility to manage conflicts and create political order and stability. Thirdly, the Judiciary is central to conflict management because of its role as the interpreter of policies and legislation. Finally, the role of the Legislative arm in conflict resolution is subdued because as a body, it incarnates the diversities of society and it is precisely such diversities that create the fault lines of conflicts in the first place.

Theoretical Framework

The peripheral capitalist state could be regarded as a site of intra-class conflict over accumulation. 'To be sure, the capitalist state has historically been a site of intra-class conflicts among fractions of capital' (Poulantzas, 1980). It is this fact that lies at the heart of one of the most central principles of political science - separation of powers. Central to the emergence of the capitalist state in the West was the separation of the producer from the means of production and consequently the separation of the state from the economy (accumulation). The economy becomes the site for class struggles over accumulation, while the state incarnates these struggles as the site for setting the grand rules for economic management and balancing the interests of fractions of capital. In the West, separation of powers was very central to competitive capitalism and the liberal state because it served to balance the competing interests of fractions of capital, since these interests were usually strongly expressed in the various arms of government. At the same time, by concurrently limiting and balancing the arms of government, the liberal state appears as non-arbitrary, impartial

and therefore capable of guaranteeing the interests of all fractions of capital (that is, fractions of the bourgeoisie). As a result of this, the political functions of the liberal state, which consist of setting and enforcing the ground rules of accumulation, both through force and through inculcation of the dominant ideology, become preeminent over its direct intervention in accumulation. ‘Although this position is slightly modified under monopoly capitalism, with increased role of the state in the economy, the liberal state generally remains a force standing over the process of accumulation and deftly balancing the interests of the various fractions of capital and not a direct intervener in accumulation’ (Ibeanu, 2007: 299-300).

The peripheral capitalist state presents a different logic. Unlike the liberal state of the Centre ‘developed capitalist state’, this state is a very important site for intra-ruling class struggles over accumulation in a very direct way. As a result of the enormous wealth and resources that are directly controlled by this state, and because autonomous accumulation outside the state is either weak or non-existent, control of this state is the basis of wealth for fractions of the ruling class. This has led to the description of this state variously as ‘a means of production’ (Ekekwe, 1986), ‘patrimonial’ (Menard, 1982), built on ‘primitive accumulation’ (Iyayi, 1986), ‘parcelled out’ to class fractions (Ibeanu, 1999) and generating ‘prebendal politics’ (Joseph, 1987). Consequently, rather than a state that reconciles the contradictory interests of fractions of the ruling class, its structures, institutions and processes, including those of policy making and implementation, are objects of bitter struggles by these class fractions. As such, relations in the State do not consist of “reconciling” the interests of fractions of the ruling class, which is the major ember that fans conflicts but a struggle for spoils among them.

From 1999 to 2007, Rivers State witnessed no fewer than sixty major conflicts which claimed many lives. The sources of conflicts in Rivers State and other Niger Delta States are control over the oil wealth, quest for political power, chieftaincy crises amongst others. The effects of these on the citizens and communities whom the resources are located in their land are multifarious. See in the appendix, a table that contains some of these conflicts.

Rivers State in Historical Perspectives

Rivers State was created by Degree No. 19 of 1967 under the military administration of General Yakubu Gowon (RSG, 2017). ‘This State, created alongside eleven others, had a total land area of about 7,008 square miles. Rivers State was divided into five political divisions, namely; Port Harcourt Division, Ahoada Division, Brass Division, Ogoni Division and Degema Division PABOD’ (Nemieboka, 2005:37). In October 1996, ‘Bayelsa State was created out of the present Rivers State’ (Nyewusira, 2010:57). The State currently has twenty three (23) Local Government Areas and according to the 2006 population census, it is inhabited by about five million (5,000,000) people (Wikipedia, 2017).

Rivers State is ‘the Oil capital of Nigeria’ (Obianime, 2010:1), ‘a nerve centre of oil and gas activities in the federation’ (Amachree, 2010:10), ‘a center stage of oil and gas in Nigeria’ (Bipi, 2012). The State is famous and indeed leading in the

production of oil and gas in Nigeria. 'With enormous reserves of crude oil and natural gas, Rivers State accounts for about 40% of Nigeria crude oil production' (Obiechine, 2010:43). Apart from this, there are many petrochemical related industries in the state. The State is blessed with a plethora of industrial activities; thus, it harbours two petroleum refineries in Nigeria, Nigeria's gigantic Liquefied Natural Gas (LNG) project; located in Bonny Island of the state, a number of multinational Exploration and Producing (E & P) Companies namely Shell Petroleum Development Company of Nigeria Ltd (SPDC), Nigeria Agip Oil Company Ltd (NAOC), Total E & P Ltd, Chevron Nigeria Ltd, Mobil Unlimited amongst others. Besides these multinational companies involved in (E&P) activities, other indigenous companies participate actively in exploration, drilling and or production activities. Some of these are Monopulo Petroleum Development Company of Nigeria Ltd, Petrolog Group, Lonester Drilling Ltd, Drillog Petrodynamics Ltd, Siscon Services Ltd, Weltec Ltd among others

It is important to state that the economy of the State is shaped predominantly by hydrocarbon industrial activities. This strongly accounts for the persistent conflicts in the State because studies indicate that 'States blessed with enormous natural deposits are most often theatres of conflict' because of the quest for survival on who gets what, when and how. Globally, several States are engulfed in one conflict or the other as a result of their natural endowment in oil, gas, gold, diamond, precious stones among others. Besides the oil economy, the State prides itself in agriculture; fishing and farming are the main occupation of the local people. The State is also becoming a tourism destination in Nigeria, the annual cultural carnival – *CARNIRIV* is a new word in tourism lexicon in Nigeria.

Rivers State and Trajectory of Conflicts

Conflicts are persistent in Rivers State in particular and the Niger Delta at large. Ibeanu (2006:1) argues that 'there persists today a myth of a Hobbesian Niger Delta. Gang wars, cult killings, kidnapping of oil workers, hijacking of oil tankers, violent occupation of oil installations, armed robbery, election violence and communal conflicts are the raw materials for this mythology of the Niger Delta'. This myth, in turn, feeds into stereotypes of a Niger Delta that is peopled by groups that are prone to conflicts, criminality and violence.

The causes of conflict in the Niger Delta may be summarized as follows:

- a) Lack of development due mainly to the long period of neglect of the Region by successive supervisory Governments, both Regional and Federal.
- b) Unemployment, particularly of the youths.
- c) Near absence of empowerment of the elders resulting in their inability to meet the most basic needs which the youths ordinarily expect of their elders, leading to general youth disrespect for their elders. This scenario explains the general ineffectiveness of elders in their efforts to contribute meaningfully to the solutions to the problems in the Niger Delta.

- d) Resource diversion both real and perceived from the sub-region to other parts of the country, resulting in the lopsided development between the Niger Delta and other parts of the country.
- e) Lack, particularly of sound and adequate educational facilities for generally highly intelligent youth.
- f) Low funding for Federal Government's development initiatives like the NDDDB, OMPADEC, and NDDC.

Rivers State and indeed most of the Niger Delta holds the bulk of the economic resources that sustains the public treasury in Nigeria. Yet, years of neglect and ecological devastation have left much of the Niger Delta despoiled and impoverished. 'This contradiction of riches is a constant refrain in most conflicts in the State in particular and the Niger Delta at large. 'The oil-bearing communities are then portrayed as greedy and unpatriotic. This explanation is popular in government and *petrobusiness* circles' (Ibeanu, 2000). Surely, this explanation is simplistic and reductionist for it explains everything in terms of money. Without doubt, compensation is important in understanding what is happening in Nigeria's oil belt, but it conceals more than it reveals.

The root of conflict in the Niger Delta rests in the different meanings of security. On the one hand, local communities see the current pattern of petroleum exploitation, which devastates the environment, as a threat to security of livelihoods. State officials and petrobusiness, on the other hand, see security in terms of uninterrupted production of petroleum irrespective of environmental and social impacts. The long rule of the military failed to forge the consensus necessary for a peaceful management of this conflict of securities. Instead, the military ought through state violence to impose the interests of petrobusiness. This practice made the Niger Delta ungovernable. A spiral of violence enveloped the area in the last ten years as local populations mobilized to confront state violence. Repression failed. It failed precisely because it excluded the people (Ibeanu, 2000).

There is a huge amount of money being directed by the Nigerian Federal Government to the Niger Delta Region and the oil companies are desperately paying protection money. 'Within the Region, local politicians are fighting it out for the control of this money and violence protest has become an orchestrated part of political rent seeking, grievance has evolved over the curse of a decade into greed' (Watt 2007:637-8).

So far, sixteen years of civilian rule have shown that the rhetoric of rights, whether as resource control or as resource management, is conducive to conflicts. 'While it has failed to resolve pre-1999 conflicts by substituting resource control for human rights, communal livelihoods and environmental protection, it has created new interwoven trajectories of conflict' (Ibeanu, 2006:11). Thus, 'resource control is now

a term used to describe the desire and determination of the communities and people whose resource and or source of survival have been taken away undemocratically and possibly, violently and therefore unjustly' (Okonta, and Douglas, 2001:17). Consequently, there is the persisting conflict between local communities and security, counterinsurgency and surveillance forces, which has led to many deaths, as in the widely publicized Mobile Police invasion of Umuechem, a community in Rivers State in 1990 which Ibeanu (2010:7) argues 'led to the indiscriminate razing down of the community, killing over 80 inhabitants, including the traditional ruler of the town, and destroying more than 400 houses'. Odi in Bayelsa State was razed down by the Nigerian army, acting on the orders of President Obasanjo. Ibeanu (2010:10-14) itemizes six paradoxical reasons for conflicts in the area as a result of oil-led development; these are:

- Those who have it don't use it and those who use it don't have it;
- Those who have it can't extract it and those who can extract it don't have it;
- It protects the livelihoods of those who don't have it and destroy the livelihoods of those who have it;
- It makes the labour of those who have it irrelevant and makes the labour of those who don't have it relevant;
- Those who control it don't work and those who work don't control it; and
- Money for nothing and nothing for money.

There are also conflicts associated with politics; especially conflicts linked to party politics. Contest for political power, which is expected to be free, fair and open in a democracy, has become a major source of violent conflicts in the Rivers State in particular and Nigeria at large. A good illustration is the spate of violent conflicts that engulfed the State following the 2003 and 2007 elections, which are believed to be linked to young gangs recruited and armed by politicians to fight their perceived political opponents during the elections.

The conflict in Rivers State has been exacerbated by emerging issues of gross distortion of Nigerian federalism in respect to resource control; citizenship rights and environmental degradation and access to political power. Unfortunately, the external manifestation has been mainly that of violent agitations and criminal activities by some elements taking advantage of the bad situation. In fact, the former Managing Director of Shell Petroleum Development Company (SPDC) in Nigeria, Mr. Basil Omiyi, tried to summarize the crisis in the state by identifying three factors; these are:

- 1) Inter-ethnic and intra-ethnic rivalries;
- 2) Perceived neglect by government over the years; and
- 3) Economic depression laced with lack of empowerment of the people.

This flows with the sentiments of Egobueze and Elem (2016) as they opined that 'conflicts have remained dominant features of modern democracies. This is as a

result of lack of service delivery by the State to the citizens, and unhealthy rivalry of the ruling elites for access to political and economic power as well as wide spread corruption.’

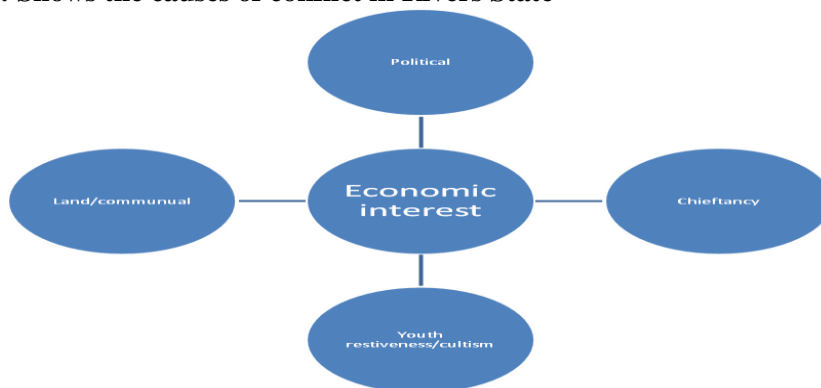
Since independent till date, contemporary Nigeria has become a hot bed for crises. These crises which most often result into conflicts orchestrated by political elites and their allies have been for selfish realization of regional sentimentalism, ethnic chauvinism, religious bigotry, economic materialism and political domination of the State (Egobueze and Elem, 2016:12).

The seriousness of the Rivers State’s debacle made Soyinka, (2007) to state that: ‘I consider that Nigeria is on the verge, on the brink of a massive implosion that will make what’s happening in the Sudan child’s play...’. The analysis above and the crisis in the State, brought about by disagreement over the use of oil seems to confirm the research conducted by the World Bank on the economics of civil war, crime, and violence in oil producing countries that:

- (i) “the key root cause of conflict is the failure of economic development such that many of the world’s poorest countries are locked in a tragic vicious circle where poverty causes conflict and conflict causes poverty”;
- (ii) “Countries that have low, stagnant, and unequally distributed per capita incomes, and
- (iii) That have remained dependent on primary commodities for their exports, face dangerously high risks of prolonged conflicts”; and
- (iii) “Once a country has had conflict, it is in far greater danger of further conflict. Commonly the chief legacy of a civil war is another civil war” (Shakleman, 2006:11).

Most of the conflicts were as a result of oil led development and most of which are currently on-going till date and many new ones have erupted. This is better represented on the diagram below.

Fig 7.4: Shows the causes of conflict in Rivers State



Source: Data from framework

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Commenting on the state of conflict and wanton kidnaps of persons, a youth from Ishukwa-Ndoni community said 'in many cases, state officials and oil companies either generate or fuel these conflicts in their antics of divide and rule. It is a known fact that some oil companies have local chiefs and notables on their payrolls in return for cultivating favourable public opinion on behalf of oil companies. However, 'the oil companies increasingly divulge their names to restive youths, thus fueling anger that stimulates inter and intra communal conflict'.

In an interview with, Engr. Adolphus Akpan, the Managing Director Greenocean Petroleum - indigenous oil, gas and Power Company in Port Harcourt, he stated:

Almost all the Local Governments in Rivers State and indeed the Niger Delta have experienced one form of conflict or the other. The conflict basically could be attributed to the oil-led development. Communities experience Chieftaincy as well as communal problems because of oil royalties and contracts; politician struggle to win election because of interest in the oil companies for contracts and employment of their people; oil companies employ divide and rule to cause confusion in communities so they would not be united to make legitimate demands; the end result of all is the application of divide and rule principle as adopted during the colonial era. That was the reason why the Niger Delta boiled especially between 2007 and 2009 and pockets of the conflicts still persists till date.

Also, there are conflicts associated with politics; especially conflicts linked to party politics. Contest for political power, which is expected to be free, fair and open in a democracy, has become a major source of violent conflicts in the Rivers State. A good illustration is the spate of violent conflicts that engulfed the State in particular and the Niger Delta at large following the 2003, 2007 and 2011 general elections, which are believed to be linked to young gangs recruited and armed by politicians to

fight their political opponents during the poll. Some of the criminal cult groups recruited were ‘the Bush Boys’, ‘Dey Gbam’, ‘Dey Well’, ‘Icelander’, ‘Elegemface’, ‘KGB’, White ‘Bishop’, ‘Dolphine’, to name but a few. These cult groups were used to perpetrate harm, maim, and even assassinate perceived opponents. Within the period under review in Rivers State, Marshal Harry was the first victim consumed and he was brutally murdered on 23rd March, 2003; he was followed by A. K. Dikibo on 5th February 2004. Both were former Deputy National Chairmen of Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) South-South. Others that fell to the weapons of the assassins and hired killers were Dr. Nzeoma Nwachukwu, a brilliant medical doctor and a perceived Chairmanship aspirant in Ogba/Egbema/Ndoni Local Government election 2006; Mr. Obenade Joseph Ihenacho, father of a Chairmanship aspirant in Tai Local Government Council in 2007; Hon. Charles Nsiegbe – a former Member of Rivers State House of Assembly and a perceived aspirant for Nigeria’s House of Representatives on 23rd November, 2009; Chief Ignatius Ajuru – former Ambassador, Chairman and Pro-Chancellor University of Jos and a perceived aspirant for Senate on 23rd December, 2009; Chief A.E. Egbueze; the father of the researcher, the Chairman Rivers State Civil Service Commission till his brutal assassination on 11th June, 2010; two men were shot dead in Assemblies of God Church on 13th June, 2010 in their attempt to protect the kidnapping of Eze Sunday Njoku, Ochimba 1 of Umuebulu. After them, three other killings suspected to be politically motivated were recorded in the state; the victims were Soboma George; a king militant of MEND extraction on 25th August, 2010; Mr. Paago, a perceived aspirant from Gokana Local Government Area Chairmanship election; Mrs. Lucy Ukabunwa Wokocha, mother of Hon. Augustine Wokocha, Commissioner of Power, Rivers State joined her ancestors 29th October, 2010 through the bullet of assassins. It is worthy to note that the killers and the accessories to these crimes are yet to be ascertained by the Law Enforcement Agencies, especially the Nigeria Police. Most of these killings were perpetrated either in election years or close to an election year. Beside these perceived political assassinations; there were some extra judicial killings.

During the period under review, especially between 2006/2008, the spate of conflict and violence in the state got to a crescendo; militants fought with government forces, sabotaged oil installations, kidnapped foreign and local oil workers and took them hostage for different kinds of ransom. They also embarked on car bombings and wanton destruction of properties. They almost overran Government House, Port Harcourt. There was a state of anarchy; the military completely took over Port Harcourt and its environs. Mrs. Cecilia Omehia, mother of the erstwhile Governor of Rivers State, Sir Celestine Omehia; the Vice Chancellor of Rivers State University of Science and Technology, Professor B.B. Fakae; A Catholic Priest, Monsignor Dr. Pius Kii; Agip Oil Company Ltd Divisional Manager Public Affairs, Naaman Feyi Deinyi; the wife of High Chief O.G Lulu Briggs the oil magnate - Seinyi; the wife of Chief Humphrey Idisi CEO, Lone Star Drilling - Margaret and not less than three hundred other foreign and local residents were at one time or the other kidnapped. In 2007, ‘about eight foreigners were killed and 172 taken hostage’ (*The Telegraph*, 19th April, 2008). Lately, a militant king – Osisikankwu and his gang from Abia State held

Omuma Local Government Area of Rivers State on captive. Innocent and unsuspecting travelers going and returning from Aba, along the Port Harcourt-Aba Express way and villagers in the Local Government were kidnapped and some killed. As noted above, at the root of the problem is a crisis of poverty, political power, oil and gas activities, neglect and underdevelopment. Beside the frequent spates of kidnapping, demand for ransom and show of power by militants in the region, the state has lately witnessed war-like confrontations between the militants and the Joint Task Force (JTF) on one hand and the Police on the other. The Police have in fact seemingly become the whipping boy of the militants, who raid police stations at will and kill policemen randomly. See appendix three, a table that illustrates the issues raised above.

Given the above, the State increasingly became conflict-ridden, this, in turn, heightened competition over control of resources through the acquisition of political power, oil bunkering and wanton kidnap of innocent citizens for ransom which are seen as a means to the wealth. At the institutional/organizational level, there were incessant strike action embarked upon by the educational Institution's Unions. Also, as a result of the struggles and conflict relations in the State, the various arms of government have constituted themselves as arbiters for the resolution of conflicts. This has occasioned conflictual relations between them, and has increasingly weakened the process of attaining peace in Rivers State in particular and Nigeria at large.

Managing Conflicts in Rivers State: The Involvement of the Legislature in Rivers State

The Rivers State House of Assembly is the Legislative arm of the Rivers State Government. It is a unicameral legislature with thirty-two members. The First Assembly of Rivers State was inaugurated in October, 1979. Since then till date, the House has had 8th Assemblies. The 1999-2003 Assembly was composed of three political parties viz; the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP), All Peoples Party (APP), later All Nigerian Peoples Party (ANPP) and Alliance Democracy (AD), while all the others have had only members of the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) without an opposition party member in the House. The House currently has the following Officers: the Speaker, Deputy Speaker, House Leader, Deputy House Leader, House Whip and Deputy House Whip. Worthy to note is that all other Members of the House are Chairmen of Committees and each of them is a member of not less than four other Committees. Through the Committees, the House has been able to exercise its oversight functions. Mishler and Hildreth (1984:26) argue:

Recognizing the minimal role played by most legislatures in the lawmaking and policy processes, scholars increasingly have attempted to account for the prevalence, persistence, and apparent regenerative capacity of legislative institutions in terms of their putative contributions to political stability. The argument usually advanced is that by providing an institutional forum for the

representation of societal diversity and the expression of dissent, legislatures contribute to the integration of society and the legitimation of both government and regime. In so doing, legislatures are credited with reducing levels of political conflict, rendering conflict more manageable, and mitigating the effects of conflict on government and regime.

In support of the above school of thought, Loewenberg and Patterson (1979:65-67) are careful to point out that:

Legislatures are not the only or even the most important institutions that perform these functions. They also note that some legislatures perform these functions better than others and that in some circumstances legislatures may even exacerbate political conflict and undermine stability. Nevertheless, they conclude that when political leaders collectively deliberate on political issues in public, that they do so, how they do so, and to what effect they do so have profound consequences for the survival of political system.

In countries divided by conflicts, and where the management of conflicts by the executive and judicial branches of government have been ineffective, there is an urgent need for reconciliation to enable all communities to work together towards a common vision of a peaceful future. The Legislature can exercise a leadership role in a broad reconciliation process by building relationships across party lines and by bringing to bear its oversight functions. Also, they can use their legislative role to promote reconciliation, for example by drafting laws that address grievances in representation (example, electoral or constitutional reforms), human rights legislation or minority rights legislation that lessens animosities between communities. By participating in the legislative process in a spirit of co-operation to produce such laws – and by strengthening judicial independence to support their implementation – parliaments can play a key role in supporting conflict prevention. In all, the role of the legislature in conflict management could be linked to the concept of Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR).

The specific issues around which conflict revolves, the manifestations of the conflict and the conflict management strategies and processes, however, are different in the social, cultural, organizational, economic, technological and political sectors of society. It is instructive to state that the management of conflicts falls basically with the responsibilities traditional to the executive and the judiciary. However, it is sad to note that these institutions have not been able to adequately stem conflicts. Instead, conflicts have deepened in Nigeria and indeed Rivers State. As a result of this perceived inefficiency, legislative bodies as the broadest representatives of the people have been inundated with petitions from their Constituents on conflicts related matters. The implication of this is that there is the growing trust and confidence by the people in the ability of the Legislature to resolve conflicts. Therefore, the relevant

question is not whether Legislatures contribute to political stability through conflict management, or change: some undoubtedly facilitate stability; others promote change; still others have little effect on either; and all are susceptible to reciprocal influences from their environments, that is, the political system. Nonetheless, the important question, rather, is under what conditions are Legislatures likely to contribute to stability as measured by conflict management and to what extent is this feasible? What combination of legislative structures and procedures is most conducive to political stability, under what circumstances, in what social, economic, and political settings are citizens more likely to trust the Legislature with conflict management than they would with the Executive and the Judiciary?

The legislators, not only have the capacity to represent their people, but also legislate for peace and good governance of the State. This involves in the main, having a say in translating preferences into policy through the enactment of high impact laws that would engender peace and security of the lives and properties of the citizens. Good legislations check conflicts and this is very essential in every stable democracy. The Rivers State House of Assembly has within the time under review, been apt to this responsibility. No fewer than fifty-one (51) Resolutions and seventy-two (72) Laws were enacted, all predicated as maintaining order in the State. See tables 2 and 3, lists of Motions and Laws enacted that are directed towards conflict management.

Johnson and Nakamara (1999) argue: 'requires reconciling differences once articulated, as well as pressing the legislature's claim to power against the executive and other power holders such as political parties'. Thus, law-making is important to the Legislature, just as policy implementation is to the Executive, and interpretation of laws, to the Judiciary. The three arms of government must work in co-ordinate relationship in order to maintain peace and security and provide the dividends of democracy to the people.

The legislature, as the representative body of government, has the potential to be an extremely effective institution for conflict management. Legislatures are the guarantors of pluralism and can play a significant role to ensure the proper workings of government while protecting the interests of minorities (Taylor, 2005:105) or disenfranchised groups. Stakeholders can transfer their grievances from the battlefield to the political sphere, and power-sharing mechanisms can be adopted to bring all segments of society into the political framework (Sisk, 2001:789). In addition, stakeholders can pursue compromises and participate in making difficult decisions on contentious issues of national policy through the legislative and committee processes in the legislature. An effective legislature can exercise oversight over the executive, acting as a check on an authority, which if unfettered, could ignore or abuse minority interests.

'Managing conflict between competing groups is an essential function of legislatures in all democracies' (IPU, 2006:1). The very process of democratization hinges on the development of 'tolerance, bargaining, and compromise among rival political groups' (Barkan, 1995:3). This function is especially critical in post-conflict and fragile states. In these contexts, where there is recent precedent for the use of

violence to settle disputes and grievances, government institutions must reconcile divergent interests and build effective compromises. The importance of compromise creation in conflict management is tremendous. In its absence, the legislature could become an ineffective institution where legislative activity is paralyzed; alternatively, it could produce decisions that are unacceptable to a wide array of social groups or individuals. Either outcome can lead to the breakdown of legislative legitimacy, as governmental inefficacy or systematic exclusion from decision-making processes lead important groups to lose faith in democratic governance structures. Democratic consolidation becomes impossible under such circumstances, for democratization is complete only when key societal stakeholders view the democratic process as the only legitimate way to pursue group interests.

Mishler (1984:26) argues:

That by providing an institutional forum for the representation of societal diversity and the expression of dissent, legislatures contribute to the integration of society and the legitimation of both government and regime. In so doing, legislatures are credited with reducing levels of political conflict, rendering conflict more manageable, and mitigating the effects of conflict on government and regime.

The legislature promotes integration, mobilizes support for the government and its policies, and legitimizes regimes. 'In several countries confronted by serious political, economic, ethnic, religious, class, or other social cleavages, the legislature provides a forum where representatives of politically salient subcultures can interact and compromise group differences (Egobueze, 2017)'. In several other countries, individual legislators are credited with building support for the government and its policies through constituency outreach and by serving as linkages between center and periphery, articulating constituent concerns to government, and explaining government policies to constituents. Even where social cleavages defy compromise and where individual legislators play minimal roles in resource allocation or linkage, the inclusion in the legislature of representatives from diverse subcultures can be of symbolic value, if only by promoting the appearance of representation.

Concluding Remarks:

Conflict is not only a threat to human rights, but also a barrier to development. Violent conflicts can reverse decades of development gains. The costs of preventing conflicts are far lower than the costs associated with recovery. Conflict management over times has been seen to be the role of the Executive and the Judiciary. The involvement of the Legislature in conflict management is assumed to be incidental, often limited to enactment of legislations to give effect to negotiated agreements or curb the proliferation of conflicts. Most legislatures in recent times play significant roles not only in lawmaking, policy formulation, or resource allocation processes but also in conflict management. Their durability and resilience

as institutions are widely assumed to be consequences of the contributions they make to the maintenance of political order through conflict management. Some legislatures are credited with providing forums for symbolic representation. There is no gain saying the obvious, that genuinely, effective and responsive legislatures contribute to conflict management. The Rivers State House of Assembly is a leading body in this regards.

The Independence of the Legislature is very imperative in enhancing the capacity of the Legislature to effectively exercise its core functions of representation, law- making and oversight. Consequently, it is suggested that the further amendment of the Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria 1999, to guarantee financial autonomy to the Legislature would be a move in the right direction.

Legislatures that are organized to conduct investigations, negotiation and compromise processes in small groups like Committees tend to manage conflicts more successfully. The Committee system appears to be the most useful instrument by the legislature in conflict management. Therefore, we recommend the restructuring of the Committee System of the Rivers State House of Assembly. The Committees should be provided with vehicles, cameras, radio recorded and efficient staff to properly scrutinize Executive actions in order to entrench openness and accountability.

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APPENDIXES:**Table one: selected conflicts in Rivers State (1999-2011)**

S/N	Conflict Location	Type	Date
1.	Emuoha	Communal, cultism, politics, oil wealth	Pre 1999, 2001, 2002, 2010
2.	Choba/Wilbros	Oil wealth	1999, 2000
3.	Ogbakiri	Chieftaincy, cultism, oil wealth	1999, 2010
4.	Abua	Cultism, politics	1999, 2002, 2003, 2007
5.	Abua/Odual Legislative and Executive Council over leadership/finance	Politics, leadership	2006
6.	Buguma	Politics, cultism, oil wealth	1999, 2003
7.	Ogoni/Okrika	Communal (land)	2000
8.	Rumuji	Chieftaincy, oil wealth, youth restiveness/cultism	2001, 2010
9.	Eleme/Okrika	Inter communal, land	2000
10.	Abuloma/Okuru	Cultism, oil wealth	2001
11.	Akuku Toru Legislative/ Executive Council	Politics, leadership	2001
12.	Akuku Toru Legislative/ Executive Council	Oil wealth, youth restiveness/ cultism	2003, 2007
13.	Yeghe/Bori	Land	2002, 2003
14.	Mogho/Kpor	Youth restiveness, land	2002
15.	Kpor	Youth restiveness, chieftaincy	2005
16.	Okrika	Cultism, politics	2002, 2003, 2005, 2007, 2008
17.	Omoku Youth crises	Youth restiveness/cultism, politics, oil wealth	2002, 2003, 2007, 2008
18.	Rumuekpe	Chieftaincy, youth restiveness/cultism, oil wealth	2002, 2003, 2010
19.	Tombia	Chieftaincy, cultism	2002, 2003
20.	Kula	Chieftaincy, cultism, oil wealth	2003
21.	Kaa/Bile	Oil wealth	2003
22.	Egi Youth	Oil wealth, leadership, youth restiveness/cultism	Pre 1999, 2003, 2004
23.	Ogu	Politics	2001
24.	Odemenenyi	Chieftaincy, youth	2003
25.	Ozochi	Oil wealth	2003
26.	Kani	Politics	2003
27.	Aggah-Egbema youth crises	Youth restiveness/cultism, politics, oil wealth	2003, 2007, 2010
28.	Okwuzi-Egbema Youth crises	Youth restiveness/cultism, politics, oil wealth	2003, 2007, 2010

29	Mgbede-Egbema Youth crises	Youth restiveness/cultism, politics, oil wealth	2003, 2007, 2010
30	Omuma	Cultism, politics	2003, 2007, 2008, 2009, 2010
31	Nwebara/Baraku	Land	1950s to date
32	Kpor	Youth restiveness	2004
33	Ataba (Andoni)	Chieftaincy	2004
34	Akuku-Toru, Asari- Toro and Degema LGAs	Cotton – channel	2004
35	Rumuodogo	Youth restiveness/cultism, oil wealth	2005
36	Oyigbo Legislative/ Executive Council	Leadership, politics	2006, 2010
37	Opobo/Nkoro Legislative/ Executive Council	Politics	2006
38	College of Arts and Science	College Unions/ Management	2000, 2011
39	Rivers State Polytechnic	Polytechnic Unions/ Management	2000, 2007, 2011
40	Ignatius Ajuru University of Education	University Unions/ management	2000, 2007, 2011
41	Rivers State University of Science and Technology, Port Harcourt	University Unions/ Management	2000, 2007, 2011
42	Nigeria Union of Teachers (NUT) Rivers State Wing	The Union & Rivers State Government over Teachers Salary Structure and others	2007, 2008
43	Soku	Oil wealth, youth restiveness/ cultism	2006
44	Ishukwa, Ndoni	Oil Wealth	2006
45	Eveku	Youth Restiveness/Cultism	2007
46	Abonnema	Youth Restiveness/Cultism, Politics	2007
47	Bodo/Mogho	Politics, Youth Restiveness/ Cultism	2007
48	Ogbogolo	Chieftaincy, Youth Restiveness/ Cultism	2007, 2008
49	Deeyor/Beghe	Land	2008
50	Obrikom	Youth Restiveness/Cultism, Oil Wealth	2008
51	K.Dere	Cultism	2009
52	Bomu	Cultism	2009
53	Ogbo	Chieftaincy, youth Restiveness	2009, 2010
54	Ihugbogo	Youth Restiveness/ Cultism, Politics	2009, 2010
55	Erema	Oil wealth, Youth Restiveness/Cultism	2010

56	Umudioga	Communal, Chieftaincy	2010
57	Obele	Communal, Chieftaincy	2010
58	B. Dere and K.Dere	Youth Restiveness	2010, 2011
59	Barako/Nwibiara	Inter Communal	2010
60	Ibaa	Cultism/Chieftaincy	2010

Source: This table was constructed with data from Institute of Human Rights and Humanitarian Law, the Rivers State Government, Rivers State House of Assembly, and news papers/internet materials.

Table Two: Motions passed as House Resolution from 1999 to 2010 in relations to conflict management by the Rivers State House of Assembly

S/N	DATES	TITLE OF MOTIONS	SPONSORS
1	20/7/99	The immediate review and or outright revocation of contract between the Rivers State Government and Hotel Presidential, Port Harcourt	
2	23/8/99	Revocation of right of occupancy of the filling stations at Omoku Street, D-Line, Diobu, Port Harcourt.	
3	12/10/99	Declaring Port Harcourt City a disaster area as a result of over flooding during heavy rainfall and blockage of drains.	
4	28/10/99	Demolition of illegal market under the fly-over around Isaac Boro Park	
5	9/11/99	Suspension of all youth activities and illegal street processions	
6	11/11/99	Attitude of traditional rulers over chieftaincy crisis in the state	
7	12/1/00	Restraining all Local Government Council Chairmen in Rivers State from preparing/implementing budget 2000 until the Local Government Bill is signed into law	
8	28/6/01	Illegal blocking of access road to Borikiri sand field area	Hon. J. George Fuayefika
9	4/7/01	Inadequate funding of Local Government Councils	
10	24/7/01	Rescinding the House Resolution suspending the Chairmen, Akuku-Toru L.G.A.	
11	2/11/01	Rescinding the House resolutions suspending the Chairman, Ogu-Bolo L.G.A. Hon. Mina Clever Tende and the special Adviser Mr. George Sekibo	
12	13/01/02	Increase in transport fare in the state	
13	22/01/02	Inviting the commissioner for Economic and Employment Generation on employment of Rivers State indigenes by companies operating in the state.	
14	4/02/02	Inviting the Managing Director/General Manager and Operation Manager of Briston Helicopters on the training programmes of the company	
15	4/4/02	Saving the soul of Opobo Kingdom	
16	29/10/02	Motion to control the construction of illegal structures	

		on government land in Port Harcourt and its environs.	
17	8/9/04	Multinational companies and development projects initiated for their host communities	
18	2/7/03	Proliferation of illegal schools in Rivers State	Hon. G. B. Pidomson
19	3/7/03	RISONPALM management and private mill owners	Hon. Okey C. Amadi
20	21/7/03	Construction of a fuel station in a residential areas	Hon. Jaja T. G
21	4/8/03	Removal of fuel stations from Rivers State indigenes	Hon. Lloyd J. C
22	1/9/03	Motor cycle riders safety campaign	Hon. Sam-Sam E.
23	14/4/04	Indiscriminate sitting of fuel stations in residential areas	Hon. Bazia J.N.
24	24/8/04	The operations of commercial motor cyclist (Okada) in Port Harcourt and its environs	Hon. Lloyd
25	20/10/04	Curbing the menace of Highway hawkers	Hon. Nsiegbbe
26	16/2/05	Encroachment of government lands by some churches, traders and individuals in Rivers State	
27	7/3/05	Summoning the Executive Director, H. I. S Engineering, tax and finance manager, Total Fina Elf to appear before the House	Hon. Lloyd C.
28	9/3/05	Secret recruitment exercise by Shell Petroleum Development Company in Rivers State	Hon. A. Wokocha
29	21/3/05	Implementation of the meat (inspection and sale) law, 1978	Hon. Leyii K.
30	4/4/05	Rivers State Education (Return of schools)	
31	7/7/05	Matters of urgent public impotence	
32	8/8/05	Impeachment of the Chairman, Oyigbo Local Government Area, Hon. Sunday Chukwudi Kanu	
33	7/9/05	Compelling cooperate bodies and business concerns in Rivers State to erect sign posts for identification	Hon. Okeah A.
34	21/9/05	Transport committee on the report on the enforcement of Ministry of Transport (MOT) test	Hon. Ogiri H.
35	25/01/06	Highlighting the obnoxious provision of Decree No. 13 of 1997	
36	11/5/06	Impeachment and suspension of the chairman of Opobo/Nkoro L.G.A. Hon. Christopher Ogolo	
37	30/5/06	Investigating the chairman, Abua/Odual L. G. A	
38	29/8/07	Shell at it again	Hon. Lloyd J. C.
39	15/10/07	Local Government investigations	
40	6/11/07	Matters of urgent public importance: De-registration of some students of Marketing Department by the Rivers State University of Science and Technology, Port Harcourt.	
41	19/11/07	Let's prepare for Local Government Elections	Hon. Ewoh N.
42	19/11/07	Students on Rivers State Government in Malaysia (Third Batch)	Hon. Lloyd J. C.

43	20/11/08	Assessment and collection of revenue on behalf of Rivers State Government by tax consultants	Hon. Ogiri H.
44	8/01/09	Diversion of public interest by an Italian Multinational Company	Hon. Ordu C.
45	9/01/09	Non-compliance with the Rivers State employment law, 2000 by companies operating in Rivers State	Hon. Okeah A.
46	30/1/09	Inviting the caretaker committee chairmen and the commissioner for finance on the activities of the councils	Hon. Tamuno M.
47	14/7/09	Rivers State employment law 2000, with particular reference to Intel and its host communities	
48	3/11/09	Motion to investigate the activities of the 23 L. G. A. Chairmen of Rivers State in pursuant to section 7 of the 1999 constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria	House Leader
49	9/3/10	Motion on the ongoing dualization of Elekahia/Rumuosi Road, walling off of inhabitants and blockage of preconstruction drainage network.	Hon. Jones Ogbonda
50	24/11/10	Matter of urgent public importance: Suspension of the Chairman of Andoni Local Government Council	House Leader
51	25/11/10	Suspension of the Chairman of Ogba/Egbema/Ndoni LGC	House Leader

Source: Office of the Clerk, Rivers State House of Assembly

Table Three: Bills Passed: 1999 to 2010 by the Rivers State House of Assembly

S/N	DATES	TITLE OF BILLS	SPONSORS
1	12/6/01	Reconsideration of the Rivers State Parastatals Unified Pension Scheme Bill, 2000	
2	13/6/01	Road traffic (Amendment) bill, 2001	
3	20/6/01	Rivers State physical planning and development Bill, 2000	House Leader
4	25/6/01	Public and political holders salaries, allowances and fringe benefits Bill, 2001	House Leader
5	5/07/01	Street begging and hawking (Prohibition) Bill, 2001	
6	17/7/01	Noise pollution control Bill, 2001	Hon John Bazia
7	1/8/01	High Court (Amendment) Bill, 2001	House Leader
8	8/8/01	Marine Transport (Safety) Bill, 2001	
9	19/8/01	Rivers State registered bound Bill, 2001	House Leader
10	26/11/01	Rivers State Appropriation Bill, 2002	House Leader
11	30/10/02	Dehumanization and harmful traditional practices Bill 2002	Hon. Nwogu E.
12	18/03/02	Magistrates court (Amendment) Bill, 2002	House Leader
13	10/4/02	Local Government (Amendment) Bill, 2002	House Leader
14	6/5/02	Rivers State road safety commission Bill, 2002	
15	6/5/02	Primary schools (Teaching of indigenous languages) Bill, 2005	Hon Anthony Wali
16	15/05/02	Passengers welfare scheme Bill, 2002	

17	15/05/02	Environmental Sanitation (Amendment) Bill, 2002	House Leader
18	15/05/02	Review of the Local Government (Amendment) Law Bill, 2002	House Leader
19	24/9/02	Rivers State environmental protection agency, (Amendment) Law, Bill, 2002	House Leader
20	25/9/02	Rivers State Ecology Endowment Fund Bill, 2002	House Leader
21	6/12/02	Rivers State Appropriation Bill, 2003	House Leader
22	4/3/03	Reproduction OF Health Services Bill, 2003	House Leader
23	15/7/03	Pension (Governor and Deputy Governor) Bill, 2003	House Leader
24	28/10/03	Rivers State Revenue High Court Bill, 2003	Hon. Lloyd
25	4/11/03	Tourism promotion fund Bill, 2003	Hon. Ogiri H.
26	17/02/04	Rivers State Education (Return of Schools) Bill, 2004	Hon. Pie Noah
27	1/3/04	Land development (Provision of Roads) Bill, 2004	Hon.Wokocho
28	2/3/04	Prevention of transmission of AIDS (through blood transfusion) Bill, 2004	Hon. Wokocho A.
29	8/3/04	Contract drafting and vetting fees bill 2004	Hon. Lloyd
30	17/3/04	Rivers State Roads (Tolls) Bill, 2004	House Leader
31	7/4/04	Rivers State Local Government (Amendment) Bill, 2004	House Leader
32	8/6/04	Secret cult and similar activities (Prohibition) Bill 2004	Rt. Hon. Amaechi R.
33	25/8/04	Physical planning and development (Amendment) Bill, 2004	Hon. Kichner I.
34	18/10/04	Property tax Bill, 2004	House Leader
35	19/10/04	Agricultural development fund Bill, 2004	Hon. Chuku G.
36	25/10/04	Real property tax Bill, 2004	House Leader
37	16/11/04	Rivers State Appropriation Bill, 2005	House Leader
38	3/01/05	Anti-Social behavior (Prohibition) Bill, 2005	Rt. Hon. Amaechi R.
39	8/01/05	School Rights (Parents and Students) Bill, 2005	House Leader
40	28/2/05	HIV/AIDS (Non-Discrimination) Bill, 2005	House Leader
41	16/6/05	Rivers State Universal Basic Education Board Bill, 2005	Hon. Ikiriko H.
42	20/6/05	Skill Acquisition Bill, 2005	Hon. Okey A.
43	9/8/05	Child Rights Bill, 2005	Hon. Membere
44	14/9/05	Sand Dealing and Dredging Operation Bill, 2005	Hon. Lloyd
45	26/9/05	Supplementary Appropriation Bill, 2005	House Leader
46	7/11/05	Block Molding Regulation Bill, 2005	Hon Pidomson Gabriel
47	8/11/05	Infrastructures Maintenance Agency Bill, 2005	Hon. Lloyd
48	14/11/05	Customary Court Law (Amendment) Bill, 2005	Hon. Lloyd
40	15/11/05	Limitation Law, (Amendment) Bill, 2005	Hon Wokocho
50	22/11/05	Rivers State Fisheries Bill, 2005	Hon. Kitchner
51	8/12/05	Rivers State Appropriation Bill, 2006	House Leader
52	8/1/08	Rivers State Sustainable Development Agency Law (Amendment) Bill, 2008	Hon. Kitchner

53	22/01/08	College of Health Science and Technology Law (Amendment) Bill, 2008	Hon. Inimgba I.
54	3/6/09	Rivers State Traffic Management Authority Bill, 2009	House Leader
55	16/8/09	Rivers State Political and Public Office Holders Remuneration Law (Repeal and Re-Enactment) Bill, 2009	House Leader
56	26/8/09	Rivers State Finance (Control and Management) bill, 2009	Hon. Chidi Lloyd
57	2/9/09	Rivers State Public Private Participation in infrastructural Development Bill, 2009	House Leader
58	28/9/09	Rivers State Hotel Licensing Bill, 2009	Hon. Chidi L.
59	12/10/09	Rivers State University of Education Bill, 2009.	Hon. Chidi L.
60	14/10/09	Rivers State Contributory Pension Scheme for Employees in the Public Services bill, 2009	Hon. Brown O.
61	22/10/09	Rivers State Child Right Bill, 2009	House Leader
62	23/10/09	Rivers State Office of the Public defender Bill, 2009	Hon Okeah A.
63	9/11/09	Rivers State Prohibition of Smoking in Public Places Bill, 2009	House Leader
64	9/11/09	Rivers State Arbitration Bill, 2009	House Leader
65	23/11/09	Rivers State University of Science and Technology (Amendment) Bill, No. 1, 2009	House Leader
66	30/11/09	Rivers State Multi-Door Court House Bill, 2009	House Leader
67	25/1/09	Rivers State Appropriation, Bill, 2010	House Leader
68	8/3/10	Rivers State Statistics Bill, 2010	House Leader
68	12/4/10	Rivers State Public Procurement Law, (Amendment) Bill, 2010	House Leader
70	13/4/10	Rivers State Land Use (Prohibition of Extortion) bill, 2010	House Leader
71	14/4/10	Rivers State Primary Health Care Management Agency Bill, 2010	House Leader
72	20/5/10	Rivers State Law of Property and Conveyance bill, 2010	House Leader

Source: Office of the Clerk, Rivers State House of Assembly