

## **Effects of Communal Violence on Edikwu Communities in Apa Local Government Area**

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**Abstract:** This paper examined the effects of communal violence on Edikwu communities in Apa Local Government Area. The study was guided by one objective and research question. Descriptive survey research design was adopted for the study. The population of the study were selected adult population of male and female residents of Edikwu communities. The sample for the study were 200 participants randomly selected from the seventeen (17) communities that constitute Edikwu clan. Out of the 200 copies of questionnaire administered, 184 copies were returned representing 92% response rate. The findings of the study revealed that communal violence has led to increased displacement and migration of community members, disruption of social cohesion and community relationships, fear and mistrust among community members have increased, loss of lives and properties and has reduced access to health care services. The study concluded that the basic duty and function of the government is to provide security for the citizens of the country, it is rather unfortunate that the level of insecurity occasioned most recently in Edikwu communities in the Benue State in the most recent times is caused by herders/farmers conflict. The study recommended among others that there is need to implement policies reducing economic disparities, promote education and awareness as well as encourage interfaith dialogue and people-to-people initiatives. By addressing these factors, communities in Edikwu can reduce violence, promote social cohesion and sustainable peace.

**Keywords:** Communal violence, Edikwu communities, Apa Local Government Area

### **Introduction**

The interface between man and his socio-physical environment involves a continuous process of dependence and interdependence which has the potential of breeding contradiction and conflict. Violent conflict refers to the fact that the parties use lethal violence to gain control over some disputed and perceived indivisible resource, such as a piece of land or local political power. Demarcation along such lines often causes 'sons of the soil' conflicts where the indigenes perceive themselves as the rightful owners of the land [1].

Communal violence is a situation in which the relationship between members of one ethnic community and the other is characterized by lack of cordiality and mutual understanding, usually resulting from suspicion, fear, and a tendency toward confrontation [2]. The nature and composition of the state are central to the nature of relationships within it, and most importantly, the government's disposition in handling such unfriendly relations. In communities that evolved on platforms of consensus and fair play, there is a tendency for serene domestic politics, but this

is not always the case.

The situation in Edikwu communities in Benue State often bypasses due legitimization processes, posing serious consequences on its political stability. To rural community dwellers, communal restiveness has become despicable acts perpetrated by miscreants and is no longer ignored. These acts are frequently influenced by politics, where elite individuals anoint unqualified protégés into public positions, violating party guidelines and due process.

Communal violence involves individuals of a group whose involvement is defined by the group, with any threats to group identity resisted drastically [3]. Such conflict alters societal structure and can prevent access to basic needs like water, food, and shelter, increasing vulnerability. Vulnerability arises from physical, social, economic, and environmental factors that reduce a community's ability to respond to hazards [4]. It includes the capacity to anticipate, cope, and recover from hazards and risks [5].

### **Statement of the Research Problem**

Over the years, there has been occasional eruption of violent conflicts among the people of Edikwu community. According to Vanguard [6], over seven lives were lost and houses were razed during a communal fight between the Okwiji clan in Edikwu district and the Ugbobi community. Independent News also reported on September 5, 2020, that an unspecified number of people were killed and properties destroyed in what appeared to be a communal clash in Edikwu–Ukpogo [7].

Villages in Edikwu have frequently engaged in land disputes, which often escalate into boundary conflicts. The confrontational nature of these conflicts stems from the struggle over scarce resources like land, as well as from contests for political power and leadership, such as chieftaincy tussles. These persistent confrontations have significantly hindered the development of Edikwu communities.

Unfortunately, Edikwu communities are among the few in Benue State where governmental presence and provision of basic infrastructure and social amenities are minimal. The repeated outbreaks of communal violence—rooted in prolonged leadership tussles and rivalry—have transformed from isolated disputes into widespread group conflicts, reaching a climax where lives and properties are wantonly destroyed [8]. The occurrence of the communal conflict in the community poses adverse effects not just on development but the entirety of lifestyle of the people of Edikwu. It is against this backdrop that this study seek assess the effects of communal violence in Edikwu communities in Apa LGA.

### **Aim and Objective of the Study**

The aim of this study is to assess the effects of communal violence with focus on Edikwu communities in Apa L G A. The specific objective is to:

1. Examine the effects of the communal violence on indigenes in Edikwu communities in Apa L. G. A.

### **Literature Review**

#### **Communal Violence**

Violence or the threat of violence is a universal phenomenon. Throughout history, individuals and groups have resorted to violence or its potential use as a tactic of political action. As a social science concept, violence suffers from an excess of meanings [9]. When a person or group is persistently denied what they perceive as legitimate rights, feelings of impotence and eroded self-esteem may ultimately lead to violence.

Communal violence, in this context, is a form of violence perpetrated along communal lines, where the aggressors and victims are identified by group affiliation. This includes conflicts, riots, and other violent acts between communities of different ethnic or religious backgrounds. Victims are targeted based on ethnic identity [10]. Communistic violence is specific to conflicts between two or more communities over land, farmland, or water rights [11]. Such definitions categorize

communal conflict as fundamentally ethnic or community-based.

Communal violence can stem from religion, land, politics, governance, and chieftaincy matters. It occurs among identity-based groups within communities and is deeply tied to communal identity. Communal identity is described as a subjective group association founded on shared history, culture, or values [12]. According to Egwu, communal violence is “defined in ethnic, communal, regional and religious terms,” often turning either inward or against the central government [13]. A distinctive feature is that combatants are often citizens of the same state [14].

Communal violence is fundamentally a struggle for control over resources and may involve organized conflict between informal ethnic militias. These may engage in direct clashes or civilian-targeted attacks [15]. In summary, communal violence is embedded in ethnic identity and is driven by factors such as tribe, religion, language, and socio-political rivalry, often involving both advanced and crude weaponry in the contest for land, political influence, and resources.

### **The Causes of Insecurity and Violence in Benue State**

The reasons for the prevalence of insecurity in Benue State include the following:

#### **Youth Unemployment and Poverty**

Benue State occupies the 21st position out of the 36 states in Nigeria, with a poverty rate of 32.9%. The National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) defines poverty using indicators such as access to education, health services, employment, income, and asset ownership [16]. A significant consequence of this poverty is the rising rate of youth unemployment, which fuels a variety of social crimes including prostitution, armed robbery, oil bunkering, Internet fraud, drug abuse, human trafficking, rape, and kidnapping.

Unemployment is strongly linked to economic deprivation and feelings of frustration and helplessness, often pushing youths into dangerous and criminal behaviors. In Benue State, this problem is exacerbated by the swelling urban labor force, outdated educational curricula, and a general lack of employable skills. Furthermore, rural-urban migration is encouraged by pressure on land in rural areas and underemployment due to climate-related factors.

The concentration of infrastructural development and amenities in urban centers further diminishes the appeal of rural living. Nigeria’s education system, which tends to emphasize liberal rather than vocational or entrepreneurial training, also contributes to the inadequacy of practical job skills among graduates. The rapid expansion of education has led to an oversupply of educated manpower, thereby intensifying the unemployment crisis among youth in Benue State [16].

#### **The Desperation or ‘do or die’ Politics among Benue Politicians**

Youth unemployment in Benue State is attributed to politicians' desperation to win elections and occupy political offices, leading to violence in the political landscape. This "do or die" politics, which became more concerning after the return to civil rule in 1999, has been exemplified by thuggery, violence, blackmail, and vendetta. Politics is seen as a lucrative business in Nigeria, and some politicians use violence to maintain power and influence. This do-or-die policy has resulted in numerous politically motivated assassinations.

#### **Proliferation of Small and Light Weapons**

The proliferation of small arms and light weapons (SALW) is considered one of the most pressing security threats globally, contributing to civil wars, organized criminal activities, insurgencies, and terrorism. These dynamics undermine sustainable peace and development. Nigeria's extensive and porous borders make it both a conduit and a recipient in the flow of such weaponry, with arms trafficking routes extending through neighboring countries such as Benin, Cameroon, Chad, Gabon, Guinea-Bissau, Niger, and Togo [17]. The availability of these weapons means they are frequently exploited for personal or group interests, further exacerbating the insecurity within the state.

## Weak Security System

This is a major contributor to the level of insecurity in Nigeria and can be attributed to multiple factors, including the underfunding of police and other security agencies, outdated weaponry and training facilities, poor welfare conditions for personnel, and an overall shortage of security manpower [17]. According to Olonisakin, Nigeria's police-to-population ratio is 1:45, which is below the United Nations standard, indicating a severe lack of adequate policing nationwide [18]. This shortfall is a significant reason behind the Nigerian Police Force's limited capacity to effectively address criminal activities and insecurity.

## Pervasive Material Inequalities and Injustices

A major factor contributing to Nigeria's security challenges is the growing public awareness of inequalities and disparities in life opportunities, which often provoke violent reactions. A widespread perception of marginalization in government policies and political patronage has fueled disaffection, resentment, and, in some cases, open revolt [19]. Strikes by labor unions and professional bodies, as well as protests by civil society organizations, are largely driven by systemic material inequalities and perceived injustices. These actions are efforts to gain public sympathy and pressure the government into offering fairer and more equitable treatment.

## Methodology

This study employed a survey research design, which allows for the systematic and comprehensive collection of data concerning the opinions, attitudes, beliefs, feelings, and behaviors of individuals. The target population consisted of 200 adult male and female residents of Edikwu communities. A random sampling technique was utilized in selecting the participants. Data were gathered using a structured questionnaire, of which 184 copies were retrieved and deemed valid, representing a response rate of 92%. The data collected were analyzed using descriptive statistical tools, including frequency counts, percentages, mean, and standard deviation.

## Results and Discussion

The effects of communal violence were examined through participants' responses, highlighting issues such as displacement, disruption of social cohesion, fear and mistrust, and reduced access to healthcare services. These outcomes are summarized in Table 1.

**Table 1.** Effects of Communal Violence.

S/N	Statements	SA	A	D	SD	n	FX	$\bar{x}$	STD	Decision
		4	3	2	1	184				
1	Communal violence has led to increased displacement and migration of community members	78	64	23	19	184	569	3.05	0.55	Agreed
2	Violence has disrupted social cohesion and community relationships	86	57	28	13	184	584	3.17	0.63	Agreed
3	Fear and mistrust among community members have increased due to communal violence	88	57	24	15	184	586	3.13	0.63	Agreed
4	Communal violence has resulted in loss of lives and properties	98	61	24	1	184	624	3.34	0.84	Agreed

5	Violence has separated families and caused emotional trauma	70	54	20	40	184	522	2.84	0.34	Disagreed
6	Communal violence has reduced economic activities and trade in the community	57	67	37	23	184	526	2.81	0.31	Disagreed
7	Communal violence has reduced access to health care services	73	63	29	19	184	558	3.05	0.55	Agreed
	Weighted mean							3.05		

Key: Strongly Agreed (SA), Agreed (A), Disagreed (D) and Strongly Disagreed (SD), n = Number of Retrieved Copies of Questionnaire,  $\bar{X}$ =Mean and (Weighted mean = 3.05).

Table 1 shows the responses of adult population of males and females on the effects of the communal violence on community development. Out of the seven items listed, five items produced high mean scores, which were above the average weighted mean of 3.05. These items include item 4: Communal violence has resulted in loss of lives and properties ( $\bar{x}$ =3.34; SD=0.84), item 2: Violence has disrupted social cohesion and community relationships ( $\bar{x}$ =3.17; SD=0.63), item 3: Fear and mistrust among community members have increased due to communal violence ( $\bar{x}$ =3.13; SD=0.63), item 1: Communal violence has led to increased displacement and migration of community members ( $\bar{x}$ =3.05; SD=0.55) and item 7: Communal violence has reduced access to health care services ( $\bar{x}$ =3.05; SD=0.55). On the other hand, two items produced low mean scores which were below the weighted mean of 3.05. These items include item 5: Violence has separated families and caused emotional trauma ( $\bar{x}$ =2.84; SD=0.34) and item 6: Communal violence has reduced economic activities and trade in the community ( $\bar{x}$ =2.81; SD=0.31). The weighted mean of 3.05 and above is considered as the mean rate of the causes of communal violence in the study areas. Above all, the highest mean score was discovered from item 4 on communal violence has resulted in loss of lives and properties. This is not far from the fact that violence in whatever form leads to the destruction of lives and properties. From the analysis, the study revealed that item 1, 2, 3, 4 and 7 was strongly agreed by the respondents, while item 5 and 6 were strongly disagreed as effects of the communal violence on community development.

## Discussion

In relation to research question 2, the study found that the effects of communal violence on community development are moderately high. Both male and female residents of Edikwu communities reported that communal violence has led to increased displacement and migration, disruption of social cohesion and interpersonal relationships, heightened fear and mistrust among members, significant loss of lives and properties, and reduced access to healthcare services. These findings are consistent with Gisaor's report, which documented that no fewer than 28,997 individuals have lost their lives due to insecurity in Benue State, with over 54,476 houses and vast amounts of farm produce—valued at over ₦21 billion—destroyed [20]. However, respondents in this study disagreed with the notion that communal violence has significantly reduced economic and trade activities within their communities.

## Conclusion

The crucial role and critical position of communal violence in the rural communities of Edikwu communities of Benue State cannot be overemphasized. It is on this premise that this research sought to find out one of the major issues that have affected the rural communities in Edikwu, Benue State from delivering on community development mandate which communal conflict have actually deterred in the most recent times. According to the constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, it is the basic duty and function of the government to provide security for the citizens of the country, it is rather unfortunate that the level of insecurity occasioned most recently in

Edikwu communities in the Benue State in the most recent times is caused by herders/farmers conflict against what the status quo has been now.

### Recommendations

Consequent upon the findings, the research makes bold to recommend as follows;

1. There is need to implement policies reducing economic disparities, promote education and awareness as well as encourage interfaith dialogue and people-to-people initiatives. By addressing these factors, communities in Edikwu can reduce violence, promote social cohesion and sustainable peace.
2. There should be proper review of the security apparatus to provide maximum security in the rural communities. This will ensure that the lives and properties of individuals is secured as well as remove fear and mistrust.

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