

**BORDER NEIGHBOURHOOD CONFLICT IN
SOUTHWESTERN NIGERIA A CASE OF SAKI WEST LOCAL
GOVERNMENT AREA, OYO STATE.**

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ABSTRACT:

The study attempted to examine residents' perception of existence of violent conflict in Saki west local government area, Oyo state in south western Nigeria. It also analyzed the causes and effects of conflict in the study area with a view to knowing the adequacy of security and suggesting preventive strategies for effective conflict management in the border community. Primary and secondary data were used. Secondary data used were topographical map of Saki West local government area and census list of National Population Commission of Nigeria. Primary data were collected through interviews and a simple random sampling was used to purposively select 60 females and 100 males interviewed from compiled census lists of National Population Commission of all the 10 wards in the local government area. The data collected were analyzed using descriptive statistics and chi-square tests. Findings revealed that 80% respondents experienced one or more of victimization while about 61% respondents felt that their environment was not safe. Chi-square test also showed that there is significant difference between sex and responses to questions regarding adequacy of government resources to obviate conflict. The causes of conflict mentioned by more than half of respondents were political and religious intolerance, unemployment of young people illiteracy and election manipulation. The effect of violent conflict was said to be mainly fear and residents were wearied of the possibility of being the next victim. The study concluded that Saki west local government area was conflict-prone which was due mostly to an inadequate system of social support to obviate danger and risk of victimization.

KEY WORDS: Border, Community, Conflict Victimization, Security, Prevention.

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1.0 INTRODUCTION:

Conflict management is a serious issue in enhancing the livability of our border community. Nigeria has, however, failed in beefing up the security of her settlements as security services of every kind are completely lacking in the environment, and an attempt to establish a secure neighbourhood for sustainable cities, friendly regions and better environment that could make people enjoy a stable life style is non-existent. The reason why urbanism has serious implications for the economy is the existence of numerous communities which cannot support themselves or maintain their facilities and institution in a tolerable state of efficiency. Nigeria's communities are inadequately policed to fathom existing nature of the environment.

Disaster risks exist, or are created within societal systems (Van Kotze, 1999). Conflicts are a disaster which has spread its tentacles into the fabric of Nigeria's security at the interface between social events and a vulnerable human population. These social chains are as ancient as Cain's time and as new as yesterday. Ever since the beginning of the human race, there existed varied and various range of crises and conflicts, greater and more frequent in some areas than in others, slow-acting in some cases and catastrophic in others.

In the words of Danzinger (1998), "violent conflict entails the use of physical force, usually with the purpose of injuring or damaging the object of violence. The tools of such violence can range from flying fists and feet to club and bullets to nerve gas and nuclear missiles". Conflicts everywhere are propelled by basically the same factors. The factors that fuel crises and conflicts include; struggle for scarce resources, social injustice, class antagonisms, unequal power relations, and differences in values. Other factors include diminishing resources, contradictions of economic and political reforms and the emergence of a generation of frustrated and unemployed youths desperate to make ends meet in a depressed economy. In Nigeria, among the major causes of crime as exemplified by Omisakin (1998) include a faulty system of education, erosion of traditional values, inadequate homes, poverty and unemployment, urbanization and industrialization and environmental influences. He also attributed the causes to level of development. This he relates to poverty and unemployment arguing that the more unemployed people are, the more they are tempted to commit crime in order to satisfy their needs. Given a final note on this issue, he stated that "...economies is being exploited by individuals who have

the ability and capacity to organize crime as business taking advantage of the unemployed frustrated majority”.

The aforementioned institutionalizing extravaganza, squander-mania, oppression, suppression and repression have been exacerbated by ventilation of suppressed demands that has been provided by democratic struggles. Noteworthy to say that a country that runs itself like a pool betting house where winner takes all and poor majority gnash their teeth cannot be anything but sick. Conflicts and crises are insidious to Nigeria. The costs of each of these crises and conflicts are phenomenal and far reaching as they threaten lives, property, the national sense of well being, peace, security and social order, and are now degrading the human quality of life.

Prevention they say is better than cure, we should agree with this, but Nigeria as we would rightly observe adopts a curative approach (post disaster recovery) rather than preventive approach to conflict resolution, and if one tries to be at variance with our observation, we must then ask, what else is the reason for incessantly violent conflicts of varied and various types that remain noticeable in our community? Hardly does a month pass without an ugly display of theatre of blood and bullets. Our genetic memory is only made up of a gargantuan exercise that bills itself great processes of all disaster managements, gulped billion of naira and ended not with a triumphal bang but with tragic whimper.

Periodically, throughout the history of Saki west local government, there have been forays against outlaws and similar manifestation of a malaise about violent conflicts and criminal behaviour. Saki west was quite safe until the mid 1990. However, violent conflicts remain noticeable and serious. As vulnerable as this local government area is, no empirical study and planning attempts have been made towards the solution. Thus, the search for information about conflict and solution to it in the Local Government must continue in so far growth and development of any geographical domain depend on amount of tranquility people enjoy from it.

Violent conflicts deserve national attention as what touches one, touches all. The National Emergency Management Agency has been doing a lot in providing needed aids for victims of disaster and we cannot but comment their efforts. More so, we want to note that there is always room for improvement and great need to put in place preventive measures as against curative approach to conflict resolution.

Borderland in Nigeria has suffered serious neglect over the past decades, and this does not augur well for the socio-economic and physical growth of the affected communities in the area. It is greatly observed that any meaningful and sustainable policies and programmes targeted at curtailing breach of public peace in the border communities must take into consideration the socio-economic and physical environment within which conflicts occurs. It is argued here that the environment influences the activities and behaviour of individual and it is as well hinders or creates opportunity for violence.

Spatial variation in conflict occurrence is a current issue and it is one of the least under stood topics in the field of environmental management. The reasons are simple. First research on border conflict remains sparse. It is greatly observed that the custom of studying conflicts in residential, commercial, industrial and educational areas of capital cities pervade Nigeria crime research efforts with little or no attempts to study conflicts in border communities which are in remote or peri-urban areas in Nigeria. Second popularized images of rural and urban areas include stereotypes that contain elements of the truth, yet represent gross exaggerations of reality. The image of rural areas in Nigeria today still suggests that small towns, farming communities and the open country among which borderland is are “crime free”. This perception is not accurate; yet, relative to the problems of some large urban communities, rural areas do look like havens of safety. Rural communities often lag behind the cities on violence and other social problems as they appear first in urban areas and then spread to the hinterlands. As a result, policymakers often have left rural communities out of resource allocation decisions, because when those decisions were being made, the problems were predominantly urban. However, it is important to understand community vulnerability situation in Nigeria and be able to put in place structures and measures that will either prevent conflicts from occurring or reduce the extent of damage when they do occur. We have therefore attempted in this paper to proffer possible preventive measures to conflict resolutions in Nigeria, in so far as growth and development of any nation depend on improvement of human quality of life and working condition that produce peace of mind while living within the carrying capacity of supporting social ecosystems. The study tries to investigate the vulnerability of local communities in the study area vis-à-vis violent conflicts with a view to suggesting strategies for conflict control. The specific objectives are to: (i) examine the resident’s perception of existence of conflict in the study area, (ii) assess the residents’ susceptibility to conflict victimization with a view to knowing adequacy of resources

to obviate conflict, (iii) investigate the causes and effects of violent conflict in the study area, and (iv) fathom residents' suggestions towards conflict prevention in the study area. The null hypothesis states that:

H₀: There is no significant difference between sex and response to adequacy of government resources to obviate conflicts in the study area. The reverse is alternative hypothesis

2.0 MATERIALS AND METHODS:

The study area is Saki west local government area, Oyo state, Nigeria. Geographically, it approximately stretches from latitude 08⁰30'N to 08⁰55N and longitude 02⁰45'E to 03⁰35'N. It shares boundary with Kwara state in the north, Saki east local government area in the south and is bounded to the west by the Republic of Benin. The local government headquarters is Saki town.

Data were collected from primary and secondary sources. Secondary data used were census list of National Population Commission and a based map of Saki West local government area on topographic sheet numbers 198 and 199 produced by Federal Surveys Nigeria in 1966 and updated in 1999. Primary data for the study include oral in-depth and structured interviews. A simple random sampling technique was used to purposively select 60 females and 100 males interviewed from compiled lists of National Population Commission of all the 10 wards in the local government area making a total sample of 160 respondents interviewed. A structured interview titled conflict in border community developed by the researchers was used to collect data for the study. Questions on socio-economic characteristics such as sex, age, education, occupation of respondents were asked. Respondents were asked to rate their perception of existence of conflicts and their susceptibility to conflict victimization on given characteristics such as yes or no, secured or insecure, very serious, serious, tolerable or nonexistent. They were also asked to mention the causes and effects of conflicts in their neighbourhoods. The data obtained were checked for accuracy, coded and analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics. Simple descriptive statistical methods such as percentage were used in depicting vividly a summary description of the various responses for a sample drawn from a population of

residents. Inferential statistical method used is chi-square test. Tables and figure with suitable self explanatory titles were appropriately used to present certain discussion.

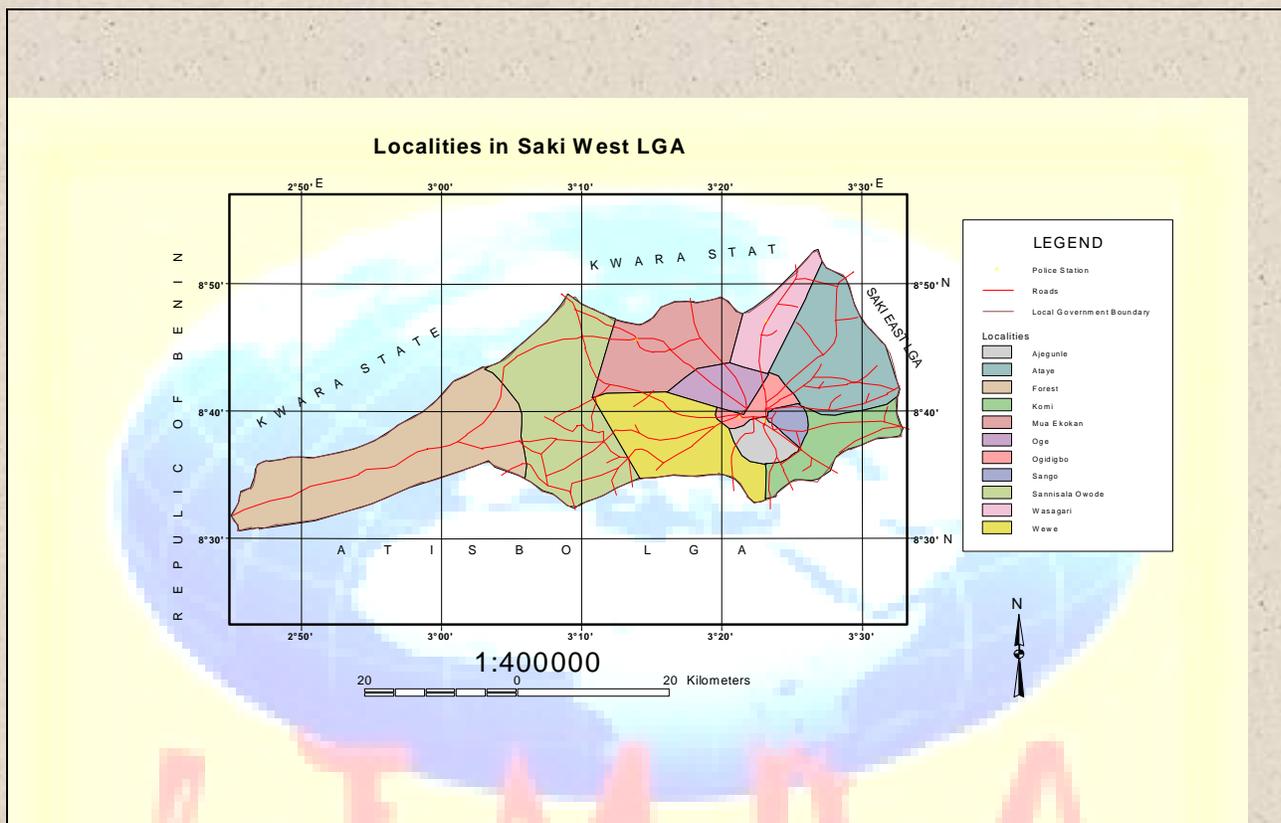


Fig.1 Map of the Study Area

3.0 ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION:

(A). RESIDENTS' PERCEPTION OF EXISTENCE OF CONFLICT.

Table 3.1 revealed the various degree of residents' perception in Saki to recurrence of violent conflict. 58.8% of all respondents believed that violent conflict was serious at existence level and more than 29% .believed that violent conflict was tolerable while about 12% are skeptical about the existence of violent conflict in the study area.

Table 3.1 Residents' Perception of Existence of Violent Conflict.

Response in %	Very serious	Serious	Tolerable	Non-existence	Total
Frequency	39	55	47	19	160
Violent conflict (24.4	34.4	29.4	11.8	100

Source: fieldwork, 2011

(B) RESIDENTS' RESPONSE TO SUSCEPTIBILITY TO VIOLENT VICTIMIZATION

There was high level of susceptibility to violent conflict in Saki west local government area as depicted by table 3.2 but Table 3.3 revealed that there was no gross feeling of insecurity despite the fact that people were conflict-prone. 80% of all respondents across the wards saying yes (in Table 3.2) experienced one or more of victimization while about 61% of the respondents (in Table 3.3) felt that the environment was not safe. This findings was consistent with pattern of vulnerability to conflict victimization across the 10 wards in the general sample survey whereby residents that were most at risk were not necessarily the most prone to victimization. Familiarity with one's environment and having a system of social support may obviate danger and risk of victimization.

Table3.2 Distribution of respondents with respect to conflict victimization in the study area in percentage

Ward	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	Ave %
% Yes	81.25	75.00	100.00	94.75	63.75	60.71	87.50	69.17	87.50	87.50	80.00
% No	18.75	25.00	0.00	5.25	36.25	39.29	12.50	30.83	12.50	12.50	20.00

Source: fieldwork, 2011

Table 3.3 Distribution of residents' feeling with respect to security in the study area in percentage

Ward	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	Ave %
Safe	43.75	50.00	12.50	18.75	50.00	37.50	50.00	50.00	43.75	37.50	39.38
Unsafe	56.25	50.00	87.50	81.25	50.00	62.50	50.00	50.00	56.25	62.50	60.62

Source: fieldwork, 2011

Table 3.4 revealed that the investigative and detective resources in Saki West LGA are judged to be inadequate. The residents of Saki are at best cynical about police protection. Residents hold view that police in Saki do not give a prompt response expected in situations of distress call. They have reacted that police in Saki West extremely 'accept' a case when it is reported to it. Noteworthy exception to normal police performance are to be in cases of political 'violence' (as defined by government) cases in which 'first class' citizens and high government officials are victims, or those that involve homicide. The general public feel that police in Saki lacks not only essential human and material investigative and detective resources but also willingness to do the job.

Table 3. 4 Residents' perception of adequacy of investigative and detective resources in percentage

Ward	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	Ave
Adequate	37.5	43.7	25.0	62.5	56.2	37.5	37.5	50.0	43.7	37.5	43.1
	0	5	0	0	5	0	0	0	5	0	3
Inadequate	62.5	56.2	75.0	37.5	43.7	62.5	62.5	50.0	56.2	62.5	56.8
	0	5	0	0	5	0	0	0	5	0	7
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100

Source: fieldwork, 2011

Table 3.5: Respondent's educational qualification

Ward	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
Response in %	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
Pry School	6.25	43.75	6.25	43.75	50.00	37.50	31.25	25.00	31.25	25.00	30.00
Sec. School	50.00	18.75	56.25	6.25	18.75	12.50	18.75	12.50	18.75	50.00	26.25
ND/NCE	18.75	0.00	12.50	0.00	12.50	6.25	12.50	12.50	12.50	25.00	11.25
HND/BSc	12.50	0.00	18.75	0.00	06.25	0.00	6.25	0.00	0.00	0.00	4.38
Arabic School	6.25	18.75	6.25	18.75	12.50	25.00	25.00	25.00	25.00	0.00	16.25
No School	6.25	18.75	0.00	31.25	0.00	18.75	6.25	25.00	12.50	0.00	11.87
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

(C) i. CAUSES OF VIOLENT CONFLICT

The causes of violent conflict as mentioned by more than half of respondents were illiteracy, religious and political intolerance, unemployment of young people and election manipulation. Table 3.5 revealed that no less than 56% and one-tenth of the respondents were correspondingly of low educational qualification and no educational qualification. About one-fifth (16.25%) of respondents attended Arabic school. Saki West local government can be regarded as informal settlement because the residents attached little importance to western education. The high level of illiteracy in the community gave room for political profiteers to use illiterate young people to cause trouble for their selfish gains.

Source: fieldwork 2011

(C) ii. EFFECTS OF CONFLICT OCCURRENCE

The effect of a crime was said to be mainly fear and this eroded social capital of the community. This may be associated with the ways in which cognitive social capital such as trust and unity within community deteriorated in contexts of violence. Cooperation had been eroded by fear which undermined the incentive to work together. The fear was so deep seated in the residents that they felt that violent conflict could crept into their neighbourhood at any time. More than two-third of respondents were wearied of the possibility of being the next victim due largely to the perceived increasing complexity of the society and the reality of finiteness and limitation of government resources that could be put at the disposal of effective conflict management

HYPOTHESIS:

Table 3.6 shows the difference between sex and response to question regarding the adequacy of government resources to obviate conflict in the study area. The calculated χ^2 value (11.32) is greater than the critical χ^2 value (9.49) with 0.05 level of significance with 4 degree of freedom. The results therefore reject the null hypothesis and conclude that there is a difference between sex and response to the question regarding the adequacy of government resources to obviate conflict.

Table 3.6 The adequacy of government resources to obviate conflict in the study area.

Sex	Very adequate	Adequate	Uncertain	Inadequate	Very inadequate	Total
Male	17(20)	29(21.3)	21(20)	16(20)	17(18.7)	100
Female	15(12)	5(12.7)	11(12)	16(12)	13(11.3)	60
Total	32	34	32	32	30	160

Source: fieldwork, 2011

$P < 0.05$, $df = 4$, calculated $\chi^2 = 11.32$, critical $\chi^2 = 9.49$

4.0 PREVENTIVE APPROACH:

The under-listed suggestions were the residents' response towards conflict prevention in the study area:

- Youths were said to be primary agents of community conflicts, government in various levels (Federal, state and local levels) was therefore urged to support the task of education by increasing its challenge for youths as part of the commitment to conflict management. This will include increasing the technical skills of youths to enable them to function in the society.
- Government were also urged to establish a more effective monitoring and early warning system especially in areas where conflicts are more likely to take place. In this regard, private peace monitors and observatories should be at work always.
- Regular inter-dialogue between religious groups, community societies, and youth leadership with relevant agencies (non-governmental organizations) was suggested to remain vital for the understanding of sources and traditional management of conflicts.
- Improved syllabus in schools in the study of the religion of Nigeria including traditional religions and cultures of the Nigeria peoples, and at least the three major languages, was suggested to remain essential for improved interactions.
- Government large-scale contracts were suggested to have inbuilt youth employment mandate especially in areas readily susceptible to conflict as Idle hands they say is the devil's workshop. By so doing improved job market was noted to consume the attention of youths and discontinue the devil from finding business for idle hands.
- The creation of independent local government system based on clearly objective democratic voting in Nigeria as well as community unity or uniformity was also said to be imperative. Manipulation in a nation where individual citizens and groups depend heavily on government would continue to provoke and promote intolerance. Intolerance was said to be only enhanced where minority ethnic group are in control of political power contrary to voting pattern. In this regard, Election to political offices must be objectified not subjectified or corrupt.

- National citizenship was also suggested to be emphatically adopted and focus should be moved from ethnic, regional or religious citizenship.
- The current program of recovery of illegal arms should be continued and expanded without violating the human rights of persons in Nigeria.
- Government was advised to adhere strictly to the principle of public accountability and therefore improve greatly in the control of the use of public funds to minimize the magnitude of corruption in the land. This in particular was said to improve regard for government.

4.0 RECOMMENDATIONS:

Generally, Saki west local government area was seriously conflict-prone which was due mostly to an inadequate system of social support to obviate danger and risk of victimization and concomitant high level of illiteracy, poverty, youth unemployment, election manipulation, political and religious intolerance in the area. Therefore, internal conflicts in Saki west local government area and Nigeria as a whole may not be effectively reduced until education is increased and poverty is reduced such that our level of tolerance becomes more accommodating.

The suggestion made by residents can be effective if backed up by efficient institutional outfit. Public authorities of all levels must support prevention measures developed at local level. If violent conflict is to be prevented in our communities, solutions are needed that do not rely solely on penal or police justice. Long-term solution must be set in motion whilst at the same time immediate needs must be addressed in order to confront the circumstances that generate or facilitate conflict, Therefore, what is required to reduce conflicts is not a new creation of new bodies or institutions. What government needs to do is to strengthen the capacity of the existing bodies in term of personnel, training and equipment in the discharge of the legal obligations imposed by law. Also, we must all work together for the collective good. Violence prevention is everyone's responsibility if we are to enhance the livability of our community, and all hands must be on deck in promoting a preventive approach to internal violent conflicts and crises in Nigeria.

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