

Conflict Management Strategies and Development of Rural Communities in the Niger Delta Area of Nigeria

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DOI: [10.56201/jpslr.vol.11.no4.2025.pg77.109](https://doi.org/10.56201/jpslr.vol.11.no4.2025.pg77.109)

Abstract

Conflict management strategies and their implications for societal renewal and advancement have been a major area of focus for peace and conflict resolution experts, especially as it pertains to rural communities of third world countries such as, Nigeria. This paper examined conflict management strategies and development of rural communities in the Niger Delta Area of Nigeria. The study is anchored on the Anomic theory as its theoretical framework of analysis. The study adopted the mixed research design. A sample of 400 respondents drawn from a population of 44,112,908 representing the nine (9) Niger Delta States of Nigeria by the use of Taro Yamene Formula. A 4-point modified Likert scale questionnaire was used to glean data from the respondents. This was supplemented by relevant information gotten from textbooks, journal articles and other secondary sources as well as interview. Generated data were analyzed using simple percentages and tables, while hypothesis was tested by the use of Chi-square. The study concluded that the dynamic nature of communal conflicts in the Niger Delta Area of Nigeria is alarmingly high due to the richness of the area with petroleum oil. The study thus found amongst others that incessant land disputes, leadership tussles, local control over territories, political struggles and greed were significant causes of communal conflicts. The study recommends that; the varied conflict management strategies or conflict resolution processes adopted should be deliberately aimed at developmental programmes for the communities not merely for punitive measures of offenders.

Keywords: *Conflict, Management, Communities, Development, Rural.*

Introduction

The development woes of Niger Delta area of Nigeria, according to Onuche & Onu (2024), is compounded with a deluge of intercommunal and intracommunal conflicts like factional rulership, local control, land dispute and tussle over chieftaincy title. Others are migration/invaders' conflict such as herders/farmers, human trafficking and cultism. Implicitly moments of tension, conflict, and violence, often fuelled by competition for resources, political power, and historical grievances

have adverse effect on the development of rural communities. These situations are influenced by various factors, including leadership, historical narratives such as land dispute, and economic disparities (Oladisu, 2014). Alapiki (2010) contends that disputes are not uncommon and are a part of growth and development. He noted that dispute can arise from diverse parties, amongst individuals, families, institutions, corporate bodies, different levels of government, communities etc. These disputes have diverse causes either from a claim of ownership over a property, or a violation of human right by an individual, state or political party. Ushie, Igbaji & Agba (2015) argued that conflict is gaining prominence and has become almost synonymous with the existence of human organizations the world over. According to them, this reality is somewhat paradoxical when one considers the enormous amount of energy and resources expended by organizations to prevent and/or resolve conflicts, the envisaged development of these local or rural communities seems to be a mirage. Idakwoji (2018) argued that community development would be hindered or become a mirage if communal or any other form of conflict persists.

Sofiri, Kiale and Jack (2019), had noted that during the past decades, the Niger Delta area has been confronted with different forms of social conflicts and complex security challenges, and this has stagnated community development. They opined that militancy marked by the struggle for resource control and self-determination significantly defined the security landscape of the states in the Niger Delta area. There seems to be a mismatch between the huge revenue accruing from crude oil and the infrastructural and economic development of the oil producing communities in the area. These communities are economically and industrially backward with serious implications for unemployment and community underdevelopment.

Synopsis of conflicts between and among rural communities in the Niger Delta indicates that it centred on herders/farmers clashes, local control, resource allocation, chieftaincy tussles, cultism, and land ownership/dispute situated along border communities, issues that deal with local control, origin of local governments and states arising from boundary adjustments (Ajang, 2019). These issues are underlying factors that are responsible for the perennial conflict between Aladja (Urhobo) and Ogbe-Ijaw (Ijaw) in Udu and Warri South-West LGAs respectively. There is also a significant indication of land disputes between the Itsekiri and Okere-Urhobo over the ownership of Urban Warri town in Warri South LGA (Ofogbor, 2004). Others are Okrika and Eleme in Okrika and Eleme LGAs respectively, Nko and Oyadama communities in Yakurr and Obubra LGAs, respectively (Ukpong-Umo, 2019). While some communities in Bayelsa, Edo, Ondo, and the Orashi area of Rivers are characterized by cult-related activities, Imo and Abia States suffer the nefarious activities of the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB) which currently led to wanton killings and destruction of valuable properties. Communal conflicts between Ikot Offiong in Cross River State and Oku Iboku in Akwa Ibom over the control of natural resources claim many lives and property as well as occupational displacements and decline (Nigeria Watch, 2021).

The various state governments in the Niger Delta area have set up several commissions of enquiries to investigate immediate and remote causes of identified communal conflicts and recommend measures to compensate affected victims of these crises while proffering long-lasting solutions. Interestingly, different conflict management skills such as dialogue, mediation, negotiation, communication and conflict education for the purpose of stability and enhancing community development have been applied at the time or the other yet the envisaged peace-driven purpose seems to be a mirage as most communities would rather prefer to avenge for the losses they had experienced where such effort(s) seems to make any process. The progress so achieved is either short lived or vaulted. Thus making conflict a protracted phenomena in these communities.

Theoretical Framework

The Anomie Theory

The anomie theory was first proposed in the nineteenth century by a French philosopher and poet, Jean-Marie Guyau between 1854 - 1888. Guyau argued that in the future, morality would be determined by no universal laws - what he called anomic morality (Lester & Turpin, 1999). Emile Durkheim used the theory in his influential books, *the Division of Labor in Society* and *Suicide* in 1893 and 1897 respectively. He adopted the theory to outline the social causes of societal division, conflict and suicide, characterized by a rapid change of the standards or values of societies (often erroneously referred to as normlessness), and an associated feeling of alienation and purposelessness. Robert King Merton also adopted the idea of anomie to develop strain theory in 1938, defining it as the discrepancy between common social goals and the legitimate means to attain those goals. In other words, an individual suffering from anomie would strive to attain the common goals of a specific society yet would not be able to reach these goals legitimately because of the structural limitations in society. In 2003, José Soltero and Romeo Saravia analysed the concept of anomie in regards to Protestantism and Catholicism in El Salvador. Ifeanyi (2020) adopted the theory to describe conflict of interest between and amongst individuals and group(s). As a result, the individual or group would exhibit deviant behaviour.

Again Durkheim argued that anomie is a social condition defined by an uprooting or breakdown of any moral values, standards or guidance for individuals to follow. He noted that crises in general, suicides or even crimes are signs of social pathological conditions that endanger the new structural principle of a division. A state of anomie (irregularity) is threatening. Anomie arises more generally from a mismatch of goal between personal or group standards and wider social standards; or from the lack of a social ethic, which produces moral deregulation and an absence of legitimate aspirations. Anomie is believed to possibly evolve from conflict of interest or belief systems and causes breakdown of social bonds between an individual and the community (both economic and primary socialization). According to Ojomah (2001), anomie literally means without norm. He used it to describe a social context in which normal structural constraints on behaviour becomes inoperative, i.e. a state of “normlessness”. Anomie, according to Wickert (2023), is a state of normlessness, disorder, or confusion in a society when the standard norms and values are weak or a perceive psychological differences between and amongst individual or group. A condition of normlessness means being without values and norms which result from the weakening or dissolution of the social ties between the people. It is a situation or state in which moral orders have lost their cohesive power which propel people to some forms of conflict. This lack of social or ethical standards can lead to disconnection, deviance, and social instability among individuals.

According to Durkheim, anomie, which refers to a widespread lack of commitment to shared values, standards, and rules needed to regulate the behaviours and aspirations of individuals, is an intermediate condition by which social (dis)organization impacts individual distress and deviant behaviour. He argued that anomie resulted from rapid social change and the weakening of traditional institutions, particularly the reduced authority of such institutions in the economic sphere, as well as changes in the principles legitimizing social inequality. He believed that anomie is common when the surrounding society has undergone significant changes in its procedural processes and economic fortunes, whether for better or for worse and, more generally, when there is a significant discrepancy between the ideological theories and values commonly professed and what was actually achievable in everyday life. This was contrary to previous theories on suicide which generally maintained that power disequilibrium and economic disparity were precipitated

by negative events such as crime, conflict and suicidal actions in a person's life and their subsequent depression. According to Wickert (2023), anomie is a state of social disintegration due to a far-reaching social change with increasing social and other forms of differentiations. The disappearance of older principles of structure and order (often seen as favourable by a group or faction) weakens social cohesion. As a result, general social rules are no longer observed; the collective order dissolves and a state of anomie emerges. He opined that crime has a ubiquitous character, i.e. there was and is no society in which there were no deviations from the norm. In this respect, conflict or crime should not initially be understood as a social pathology – in the sense of a fundamental disturbance of the social. On the contrary, conflict or crime in modern societies characterized by the resources has a function of clarifying the norms. Only through the deviation itself and the sanctioning of the breach of the norm does the validity of the norm become visible to all members of society and confirm its validity. Conflict and associated criminality are therefore functional in a society based on the availability of resources and affirms collective consciousness. Only an excess of crime is an indication of a lack of observance of social rules and a dwindling collective consciousness. If deviation in society becomes the rule and hedonistic-egoistic action as well as human instincts take over, there is the danger of an anomie. The consequences of these are increased conflicts associated with violence and crime rates.

Dickson (2021) outlined the following highlights of the theory:

- a. Anomie or normlessness is the breakdown and blurring of societal norms that regulate individual conduct (Durkheim, 1893).
- b. This could happen when a society undergoes rapid social change (e.g., revolutions) when people become unsure of what society's norms and values are (Durkheim, 1897).
- c. Anomie belongs to a class of theories about deviance called strain theories (Inderbitzen, Bates, & Gaaney, 2016).
- d. Anomie comes into exhibition when there is absence of mutual benefit that causes conflict of interest (Ifeanyi, 2020).
- e. These conflicts are mostly embedded in property ownership dispute such as land, mercenaries, equipment, and political power, control over resources, leadership tussle, cultural values caused by poor attention and change of perception (Ifeanyi, 2020).

Typically, this relates to situations in which the personal interest of an individual or certain group might adversely affect a duty owed to make decisions for the benefit of the society. An interest in this case is a commitment, obligation, duty or goal associated with a specific social role or practice, and when these indices are missing (anomie), the end-result is usually conflict. According to Thompson (1993), anomie occurs when there is conflict of interest within a particular decision-making context. An individual is subjected to two coexisting interests that are in direct conflict with each other. Such a matter is of importance because under such circumstances the conflict transformation process can be disrupted or compromised in a manner that affects the integrity or the reliability of the outcomes.

Conceptual Clarification

Concept of Conflict

The term “conflict” has manifested itself in many dimensions which has consistently offered so many definitions in the lexicon of political science. According to Ikporukpo (2020), the concept ‘conflict’ is used interchangeably with war, clash, strife, confrontation and many others. Egobueze (2016) noted that conceptualizing the term conflict is nebulous due to divided opinions provided by scholars. Thus, the phenomenon has been defined as the existence of non-compatibility or

disagreements between two actors (individuals, groups, organizations or nations) in their interaction over the issues of interests, values, beliefs, emotions, goals, space, positions, scarce resources, etc (Egobueze, 2016). He opined that conflict is an expressed struggle between two interdependent parties who perceive incompatible goals, scarce rewards and interferences from the other part in achieving their goals; it could also be inter personal. It is a situation in which people, groups or countries are involved in a serious disagreement or argument; this could be a violent or fighting, or a situation where there are opposing ideas, opinions, feelings or wishes, a situation where it is difficult to choose.

Otite & Albert (2016) noted that the dynamics of conflict arise from the inherent diversity in human interests and aspirations. They contended that as long as different groups and individuals vie for their distinct objectives within a limited pool of resources and opportunities, conflicts will continue to emerge, shaping the interactions and outcomes in various social contexts. Conflict is commonly understood as a state of incompatibility in thoughts or goals, where parties hold conflicting attitudes or values, leading to tension and a failure to reach a peaceful agreement or compromise. This inability to find common ground may prompt one or both parties to resort to violence in pursuit of self-oriented objectives. In the view of Mullins (1996) conflict is a product of opposing behaviours based on incompatibility of goals. It is a behaviour intended to obstruct the achievement of some other person's goals. Gardiner & Simnions (1992) defined the concept as any divergence of interest, objectives, or priorities between individuals' groups or organizations or non-conformity to requirements of a task activity or process. Ihejiamaizu (1996) associated conflict with an overt behaviour that results when an individual or group of individuals thinks a perceived need or needs of the individual or group of individuals has been frustrated or is about to be frustrated. DeCenzo (1997) on the other hand submitted that whenever two people come together, there are bound to be disagreements at times. Sometimes, these differences can grow to enormous proportion where they become detrimental to the parties involved and the organizations. When that occurs, conflict is present. He added that organizational conflicts can take the following forms: horizontal conflict, vertical conflict and role confusion/conflict. According to Chima and Alokpa (2015), conflict is any action oriented intentionally to carry out actor's own will against the resistance of the other party or parties. He further asserts that conflict is an everyday normal on-going for institutionalized process that is natural of social reality.

For Cross (2013), conflict is a struggle over status, power and scarce resources in which the aims of the group in conflict are not only to gain the desired value but also to neutralize, injure or eliminate rivals. In tandem with this, Azeez (2018) argues that violent conflict is a particular kind of interaction marked by efforts at hindering rivals. Therefore, violence (whether politically, religiously or ethnically motivated) are means of identifying the imperfection of a plural society and of suggesting remedies to remove or solve the problems of inequality, marginalization, exploitation, misuse of majoritarian democracy and national government in a prejudicial manner (Osaghae, 2005).

Concept of Communal Conflicts

Issues surrounding communal conflicts are multi-faceted and complex with dynamics that change over time. This is because communal conflict becomes problematic when it explodes into violent-conflict of all kinds (Fadeyi & Muhammed, 2023). Communal conflict, as defined by Sixtus & Nafiasah (2019), arises when individuals or groups have competing interests over valuable and

scarce resources, both tangible and intangible. Such conflicts can occur within a community (intra-group) or between different communities (inter-group). In general terms, communal conflicts are those conflicts in which the participants are communal groups whose primary identity prevails over other identities. Communal conflict according to Azuonwu (2002) is a conflict that occurs between two or more communities. Oboh & Hyande (2006) described communal conflict as conflict involving two or more communities engaging themselves in disagreement or act of violence over issues such as claims of land ownership, religion and political differences leading to loss of lives and destruction of properties.

Likewise, Dzurgba (2006) sees communal conflict as conflict which occurs between two or more communities over territorial land, farmland and territorial water for fishing. The existence of shared bonds or commonalities across groups often exacerbates the intensity of the competition. Communal conflicts are a result of complex social interactions, including issues of control, participation, production, and consumption within a society. Depending on the degree of escalation, managing these conflicts can become challenging (Sixtus & Nafiasah, 2019). In rural areas in Nigeria, conflicts erupted or organized around ethnic divide and most of the time over grazing areas and over cattle rustlings amongst pastoral people. There are also dispute over cultivable land amongst farmers within the same ethnic group and also between ethnic groups. Pastoralist Fulani ethnic group in Nigeria most of the time had conflict with rural farmers over grazing lands which later escalate into ethnic armed conflict between the farmers and the grazers. Most of these rural conflicts over land and cattle have been going on over a long period of time and is happening silently, unreported to the authorities concern, unless large scale killing and destructions takes place and the government intervenes.

According to Obona (n.d), communal conflicts is described as a struggle between non-state groups that are organized along a shared communal identity over the control of power and the available scarce resources. In his views, Lyam (2000) describes communal conflict as a struggle over scarce resources that are not controlled by share rules. Communal conflict is defined as a conflict between non-state groups that are organized along a shared communal identity. They are products of social relations. It involves threat or action of one party directed at a community's rights, interests or privileges or of another party, because of differences over economic issues, power or authority, cultural values and beliefs. This may constitute attempt to eliminate or destroy rules, ones rival among others. It is always associated with antagonistic interest between two or more opposing forces or groups within the society and can be seen in a continuum range from early signals to violent crisis or war as opined by Imobighe (2003). This was corroborated by Akinwale (2010), when he states that this situation usually arises when those concerned are dissatisfied with existing social conditions and as a result seek the same goals. Communal conflict in itself refers to the fact that the parties use lethal violence to gain control over some disputed and perceived indivisible resource, such as piece of land or local political power, which follows a generally accepted conceptualization of armed conflict as stated by Galtung, (2011). The groups involved are non-state groups, meaning that neither actor control the state and armed forces (although state actors may be involved as an important supporting actor in a communal conflict). Furthermore, the groups are organized along a shared communal identity, meaning that they are not formally organized rebel groups or militias but that the confrontation takes place along the line of group identities. Some would equate the concept of communal identity with ethnic or religious identity,

but as conceived here, the conflict is along village identity. The bottom line is that what constitutes the basis for a communal identity may differ across time and space.

Concept of Conflict Management

The concept of conflict management has received several meanings; while some scholars view it as techniques applied to prevent and control conflict, others view it as resolution, peace building process and transformation. Be that as it may, this study adopted the concept and used it interchangeably to mean conflict prevention, resolution, transformation and peace building process. The way out is to manage the conflict. Conflict management therefore refers to the techniques and ideas designed to reduce the negative effects of conflict and enhance the positive outcome for all parties involved. The process of conflict management involves the establishment of mechanisms that detect early warning signals and record specific indicators that may help to predict impending conflict. This is undertaken in order to avoid the occurrence of violence and its escalation. Conflict management is the process of limiting the negative aspects of conflict while increasing its positive aspects (Rahim, 2011). It is the principle that all conflicts cannot necessarily be resolved, but learning how to manage conflicts can decrease the odds of non-productive escalation. Dalung (2013) asserts that conflict management entails the long-term management of intractable conflicts. He further explained that it is the variety of ways by which people handle grievances standing up for what they consider to be right and against what they consider to be wrong. Conflict management therefore involves acquiring skills related to conflict resolution, self-awareness about conflict modes, conflict communication skills, and establishing a structure for resolving conflict in the environment. It is a process that embraces all articulated strategies, interventions and institutional mechanisms in controlling the escalation of conflict. Conflict management is the application of resolution and stimulation techniques to regulate the level and impact of disruptive conflict within an entity, while harnessing the more positive and constructive aspects of collaboration, cooperation and compromise. It is a process that seeks to remove cognitive barriers to agreement and group synergy. It often covers an array of measures of conflict resolution: problem solving, super-ordinate goals, expansion of resources, avoidance, smoothing, compromise, authoritative command, and altering the human and structural variables (Obona, n.d).

Conflict management is deliberate action to deal with conflictive situations, either to prevent or to escalate them. Unlike conflict behaviour, conflict management encompasses cognitive responses to conflict situations, which can vary from highly competitive to highly cooperative. Conflict management does not necessarily involve avoidance, reduction, or termination of conflict. It involves designing effective strategies to minimize the dysfunctions of conflict and to enhance the constructive functions of conflict in order to improve team and organizational effectiveness (Rahim, 2002). Conflicts are not necessarily destructive (Euwema, Munduate, Elgoibar, Pender & Garcia, 2015), and research has shown that constructive conflict management is possible (Coleman, Deutsch & Marcus, 2014). The benefits of conflict are much more likely to arise when conflicts are discussed openly, and when discussion skilfully promotes new ideas and generates creative insights and agreements (Chinwokwu, 2023). To make a constructive experience from conflict, conflict needs to be managed effectively. ` Successfully managing conflict cooperatively requires intellectual, emotional, and relational capabilities in order to share information, to contribute to value creation, and to discuss differences constructively (Dalung, 2013).

Conflict management in this context would mean the deliberate action to deal with conflictive situations to prevent them and the application of resolution and stimulation techniques to regulate the level and impact of disruptive conflict within an entity, while harnessing the more positive and constructive aspects of collaboration, cooperation and compromise. Conflict management would not necessarily involve avoidance, reduction, or termination of conflict. It involves designing effective strategies to minimize the dysfunctions of conflict and to enhance the constructive functions of conflict in order to restore peace and order between and among two conflicting parties. According to Miller & King (2005), conflict management implies the interventionist efforts towards preventing the escalation and negative effects, especially violent ones, of ongoing conflicts. Since it is believed that conflict is part of human existence, it can be said that its management is also a constant process.

Concept of Community Development

It appears that there is no consensus on the meaning and goals of community development. Hence, the diversity of definitions. Anikeze (2014) sees community development as any action in a locality by any agency with the primary intention of bringing some benefits to such locality. In the same vein, Okonkwo (2018) refers it as a group of people living together in one place practicing common ownership such as close-knit fishing community. Alternatively, according to him, it is a group of people with a common background or with share interest within societies, e.g the business community. He further opines that community development can be conceived to mean a group of nation with a common history or common economic or political history. In this instance, the international community therefore comes to play. Onwuka (2018) defines it as a place considered together with its inhabitants such as rural community, university community, etc. Meanwhile, Idakwoji (2018) sees it as a group of people having a religion or any characteristics in common. It could therefore be conceived as the public or society in general. Premium Times (2015) holds a similar view and affirms that community development is an educational process; it is something of the spirit more than something material. It must reach into deep cultural pattern of people, examining them and testing them as principle of faith. It is not a temporary, physical construction. It stressed that it is a building within the heart and mind of men not a recreation centre in the middle of a field. Okafor (2017) defines it as efforts provided for advancement of communities, hesitated that the major emphasis of the concept was upon those activities which aim at prorating the improvement of the basic condition of the community's non material needs.

In a broader sense of the foregoing definitions, the United Nations (1962) defines community development as a process where community members come together to take collective action and generate solutions to common problems. Also, the Federation for Community Development Learning as contained in the document of the United Nation defines community development as a set of values and practices which plays a special role in overcoming poverty and disadvantage, knitting society together at the grass roots and deepening democracy. The organization opines that there is a community development profession, defined by national occupational standards and a body of theory and experience going back the best part of a century. They stressed that the term designates the utilization under one single programme of approaches and techniques which rely upon local communities as units of action and which attempt to combine outside assistance with organised self-determination and effort, and which correspondingly seek to stimulate local initiative and leadership as the primary instrument of change. Following the adoption of the UN's definition, the associations have gone on to produce international standards for community

development practice. The values and ethos that should underpin practice can be expressed as commitment to rights, solidarity, democracy, equality, environmental and social justice. In agricultural economies in an economically underdeveloped areas, major emphasis is placed upon those activities which aim to promote the improvement of the basic living conditions of some of non-material needs (Idakwoji, 2018).

According to UNESCO, community development is often linked with community work or community planning, and may involve stakeholders, foundations, governments, or contracted entities including non-government organisations (NGOs), universities or government agencies to progress the social well-being of local, regional and, sometimes, national communities. More grassroots efforts, called community building or community organizing, seek to empower individuals and groups of people by providing them with the skills they need to effect change in their own communities (Jacob, Ugben & Akujuru, 2024). These skills often assist in building political power through the formation of large social groups working for a common agenda. Community development practitioners must understand both how to work with individuals and how to affect communities' positions within the context of larger social institutions. Public administrators, in contrast, need to understand community development in the context of rural and urban development, housing and economic development, and community, organizational and business development. In this vein, community development can be defined as both an occupation (such as a community development worker in a local authority) and a way of working with communities.

Okonkwo (2018) drew a line of difference between community and rural development and noted that community development is the participation of the people themselves in efforts to improve their level of living with as much reliance as possible on their initiatives. He also notes that it is the provision of technical and other services in ways which encourage initiatives, self-help and mutual help and make these more effective. It is expressed in programmes designed to achieve a wide variety of specific improvements. Obi & Nwanegbo (2006) note that community development draws a great inspiration from the desire to have a change and in the ability of men to learn and change through voluntary methods and through voluntary methods the participation of individuals and groups in development process for the achievement of some definite goals. According to them, community development involves the stimulation of communities to desire progress and to pursue methods for achieving it. By this method, people try to obtain for themselves by their own joint efforts, what they need in an accepted order of priority. According to Arthur Wilden, community development is the process by which people in an area choose to think as a community, go about analysing a situation, determining its needs and unfulfilled opportunities, deciding what can and should be done to improve the situation, and then move in the direction of achievement of the agreed upon goals and objectives. Yet for others, community development is no more than a movement. Okoli sees it as a movement to promote better living for the whole community, with the active participation, and is possible on the initiative of the community but if this initiative is not forthcoming, by the use of technique for arousing and stimulating it in order to secure the active and enthusiastic response to the movement. It includes the whole range of development activities in the districts, whether these are undertaken by government or unofficial bodies.

Method

The study adopted the mixed research design. The population of the study is projected at 44,112,908 based on the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) population projection 2022, covering nine (9) states of the Niger Delta Area of Nigeria.

Table 1: State-by-State Population in the Niger-Delta Area of Nigeria

S/N	States	2006 Census Population	Projected Population
1	Abia	2,833,999	3,841,943
2	Akwa Ibom	3,920,208	5,451,581
3	Bayelsa	1,703,358	2,934,725
4	Cross River	2,888,966	4,175,020
5	Delta	4,098,391	5,636,100
6	Edo	3,218,332	4,461,137
7	Imo	3,934,899	5,167,722
8	Ondo	3,441,024	4,969,707
9	Rivers	5,185,400	7,474,973
	TOTAL	31,224,577	44,112,908

Source: National Bureau of Statistics, 2022

The sample size for this study was determined using the Taro Yamane technique for sample size determination.

$$n = \frac{N}{1 + N(e)^2}$$

Where;

n = Sample size
N = Population size = 44112908
e = Sampling error = 5% (0.05)

Applying the above formula to 44112908 population of the Niger Delta area under study is as follows:

$$\begin{aligned}
 n &= 44112908 / [1 + (44112908 \times (0.05)^2)] \\
 &= 44112908 / [1 + (44112908 \times 0.0025)] \\
 &= 44112908 / (1 + 110282.27) \\
 &= 44112908 / (110283.27) \\
 &= 399.9
 \end{aligned}$$

Sample Size = 400

The study relied on both primary and secondary data. The use of table was employed to analyze generated data while their responses were arranged, grouped, tabulated and analysed using the simple percentages. The formula for the simple percentage statistical method is provided as:

$$\frac{f \times 100}{n}$$

Where:

f = frequency of response
n = number of population or respondents

By this method, it means that the degree of percentage score of one response to another or others will determine the acceptability or rejection of a particular statement or response. Also, hypotheses will be tested using Chi-Square (X^2). The formula for Chi- Square is:

$$X^2 = \frac{(O - E)^2}{E}$$

Where:

O = Observed Frequencies

E = Expected Frequencies

The degree of freedom for Chi-Square is calculated as:

Degree of Freedom (df) = (R-1)(C-1)

Level of Significance = 0.05%.

Decision rule: The null hypothesis will be rejected if the value of chi-square (X^2) is greater than the table value while the alternate hypothesis will be accepted if the table value is greater than the chi-square.

Data Presentation

Table 2: Socio-demographic Analysis of Response Rate

Administration of Questionnaires	Frequency (f)	Percentage (%)
Number of questionnaire administered	400	100
Number of questionnaire not returned	50	12
Number of questionnaire retrieved	350	88
Number of questionnaire valid for the study	350	88

Source: Field Work, 2025

The table above revealed that out of the 400 questionnaire that were administered to respondents, 50 respondents making 12% of the questionnaires were not returned, 350 respondents representing 88% were successfully completed, retrieved and valid for proper analysis. The response rate is 88% and this is a mark of excellent for the study.

Table 3: Socio-demographic Analysis of Returned/Valid Questionnaire

Administration of Questionnaires	Frequency of Questionnaire Distributed	Frequency of Returned Questionnaire	Percentage (%) of Returned Questionnaire
Community dwellers	162	150	93
Development/business owners	108	80	74
Religious leaders	130	120	92
Total	400	350	88

Source: Field Work, 2025

Data in table 3 above reveal that out of the 400 questionnaire, 150 questionnaire returned out of 162 that were administered to respondents. Also, 80 questionnaire were returned out of 108 that were administered while 120 returned out of 130 questionnaires that were administered to respondents making 93%, 74% and 92% respectively. The response rate of total questionnaire returned is 88% which is a mark of excellence for the study.

Table 4: Socio-demographic Analysis of Gender

Gender of Respondents	Frequency (f)	Percentage (%)
Male	200	57
Female	150	43
Total	350	100

Source: Field Work, 2025

Table 4 above showed that 200 respondents representing 57% are male while 150 respondents representing 43% are female. This indicates that the majority of the respondents are male. Irrespective of their genders, their responses do not in any way interfere with the outcomes of the study as they are not bias in their views.

Table 5: Socio-demographic Analysis of Academic Background

Educational Qualifications	Frequency (f)	Percentage (%)
HND/BSc/PGD	200	57
MSc/MPA/MBA/PhD	150	43
Total	350	100

Source: Field Work, 2025

The table 5 above depicted the educational qualifications of respondents and thus revealed that 200 respondents making 57 possess the Higher National Diploma (HND)/Bachelor of Science (BSc) and Postgraduate Diploma (PGD) while 150 respondents representing 43% are holders of Master of Business Administration (MBA)/Master of Public Administration (MPA)/Master of Science (M.Sc) and Doctor of Philosophy (Ph.D). This suggests that the respondents have good knowledge of communal conflicts and its effect on community development in the Niger Delta.

Table 6: Socio-demographic Analysis of Residency in the Niger Delta

Number of Years	Frequency (f)	Percentage (%)
01 – 09	40	11
10 – 20	100	29
21 – 30	200	57
31 – above	10	3
Total	350	100

Source: Field Work, 2025

The table above shows that 40 (11%) of the respondents have been engaged or stayed in the service for a period between 0 to 19 years while 100 (29%) of the respondents have spent between 10 – 20 years. 200 respondents representing 57% fall between 21 – 30 years. 10 respondents representing 3% have spent between 31 years and above. By this presentation, it implies that majority of the respondents have spent reasonable number of years in the region. Thus, their responses have very serious implication to this study.

Data Analysis

What is the effectiveness of conflict management strategies on community development in rural communities in the Niger Delta area? Computation of response rate on the effectiveness of conflict management strategies on community development in rural communities in the Niger Delta area.

Table 7: Shows Item 1 of Research Question: Dialogue in conflict management strategies enhances collective coherence and a participatory consciousness in community development.

Options	Community dwellers	Development agent/business owners	Religious leaders	Total % of Response	
Strongly Agreed (SA)	95	50	80	225	64.3
Agreed (A)	50	25	35	110	31.4
Disagreed (D)	5	5	0	10	2.6
Strongly Disagreed (SD)	0	0	5	5	1.4
Total	150	80	120	350	100

Source: Survey Data, 2025

The question of whether dialogue in conflict management strategies enhances collective coherence and a participatory consciousness in community development, the table above also displayed 225 strongly agreed that dialogue in conflict management strategy enhances collective coherence and a participatory consciousness in community development with 110 respondents agreed that dialogue in conflict management strategy enhances collective coherence and a participatory consciousness in community development. However, 10 respondents disagreed that dialogue in conflict management strategy enhances collective coherence and a participatory consciousness in community development while 5 respondents strongly disagreed that dialogue in conflict management strategy enhances collective coherence and a participatory consciousness in community development. The highest percentage score of 95.7 signifies that dialogue in conflict management strategy enhances collective coherence and a participatory consciousness in community development.

Table 8: Shows Item 2 of Research Question: Negotiation brings about compromise and concession through transformation of the conflict situation in community development.

Options	Community dwellers	Development agent/business owners	Religious leaders	Total % of Response	
Strongly Agreed (SA)	70	30	50	150	42.9
Agreed (A)	70	30	50	150	42.9
Disagreed (D)	5	10	15	30	8.6
Strongly Disagreed (SD)	5	10	5	20	5.7
Total	150	80	120	350	100

Source: Survey Data, 2025

Table 8 also revealed that 150 respondents strongly agreed that negotiation brings about compromise and concession through transformation of the conflict situation in community development with 150 respondents agreed that negotiation brings about compromise and concession through transformation of the conflict situation in community development.

Meanwhile, 30 respondents disagreed that negotiation brings about compromise and concession through transformation of the conflict situation in community development with 20 respondents strongly disagreed that negotiation brings about compromise and concession through transformation of the conflict situation in community development. By virtue of the highest percentage score of 85.8, it indicates that negotiation brings about compromise and concession through transformation of the conflict situation in community development.

Table 9: Shows Item 3 of Research Question: It is less risky for conflicting communities to adopt mediation since it does not assume control over them but demonstrate voluntary, non-coercive, and non-binding capacity in conflict management and community development process.

Options	Community dwellers	Development agent/business owners	Religious leaders	Total % of Response	
Strongly Agreed (SA)	90	30	60	180	51.4
Agreed (A)	40	35	50	125	35.7
Disagreed (D)	10	10	5	25	7.1
Strongly Disagreed (SD)	10	5	5	20	5.7
Total	150	80	120	350	100

Source: Survey Data, 2025

On whether it is less risky for conflicting communities to adopt mediation since it does not assume control over them but demonstrate voluntary, non-coercive, and non-binding capacity in conflict management and community development process, 180 respondents strongly agreed that it is less risky for conflicting communities to adopt mediation since it does not assume control over them but demonstrate voluntary, non-coercive, and non-binding capacity in conflict management and community development process, with 125 respondents agreed that it is less risky for conflicting communities to adopt mediation since it does not assume control over them but demonstrate voluntary, non-coercive, and non-binding capacity in conflict management and community development process. While 25 respondents disagreed that it is less risky for conflicting communities to adopt mediation since it does not assume control over them but demonstrate voluntary, non-coercive, and non-binding capacity in conflict management and community development process with 20 respondents strongly disagreed that it is less risky for conflicting communities to adopt mediation since it does not assume control over them but demonstrate voluntary, non-coercive, and non-binding capacity in conflict management and community development process. The highest percentage value of 87.1 implies that it is less risky for conflicting communities to adopt mediation.

Table 10: Shows Item 4 of Research Question: Reconciliation which is an Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) process is adopted by a conciliator to lower tensions, improve communications, interpret issues, provide technical assistance, explore potential solutions, and bring about a negotiated settlement in community development.

Options	Community dwellers	Development agent/business owners	Religious leaders	Total	% of Response
Strongly Agreed (SA)	140	30	70	240	68.6
Agreed (A)	10	40	30	80	22.9
Disagreed (D)	0	5	15	20	5.7
Strongly Disagreed (SD)	0	5	5	10	2.9
Total	150	80	120	350	100

Source: Survey Data, 2025

On whether reconciliation which is an Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) process is adopted by a conciliator to lower tensions, improve communications, interpret issues, provide technical assistance, explore potential solutions, and bring about a negotiated settlement in community development, the table above shows that 240 respondents strongly agreed that reconciliation which is an Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) process is adopted by a conciliator to lower tensions, improve communications, interpret issues, provide technical assistance, explore potential solutions, and bring about a negotiated settlement in community development with 80 respondents agreed that reconciliation which is an Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) process is adopted by a conciliator to lower tensions, improve communications, interpret issues, provide technical assistance, explore potential solutions, and bring about a negotiated settlement in community development. 20 respondents disagreed that reconciliation which is an Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) process is adopted by a conciliator to lower tensions, improve communications, interpret issues, provide technical assistance, explore potential solutions, and bring about a negotiated settlement in community development with 10 respondents state that reconciliation which is an Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) process is adopted by a conciliator to lower tensions, improve communications, interpret issues, provide technical assistance, explore potential solutions, and bring about a negotiated settlement in community development. The highest percentage score of 91.5 agrees that reconciliation which is an Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) process is adopted by a conciliator to lower tensions, improve communications, interpret issues, provide technical assistance, explore potential solutions, and bring about a negotiated settlement in community development.

Test of Hypothesis: There is no relationship between the adopted conflict management strategy and community development in the Niger Delta, of Nigeria. Item 1 of Research Question which states that “dialogue in conflict management strategy enhances collective coherence and a participatory consciousness in community development” was employed with chi-square (X^2) thus: $X^2 = \sum \frac{(fo-fe)^2}{fe}$

Table 11 Shows responses for calculating frequency expected (fe)

Options	Community dwellers	Development/business owners	Religious leaders	Total % of Response
Strongly Agreed	95	50	80	225
Agreed	50	25	35	110
Disagreed	5	5	0	10
Strongly Disagreed	0	0	5	5
Total	150	80	120	350

Source: Survey Data, 2025

$$fe = \frac{\text{Column total} \times \text{Roll total}}{\text{Grand total}}$$

Table 12: Computation of Chi-Square Test Statistics 1

Fo	Fe	fo – fe	(fo – fe) ²	(fo – fe) ² /fe
95	150(225)/350 = 96	-1	9216	96
50	150(110)/350 = 47	3	9	0.2
80	150(10)/350 = 4	76	5776	1444
50	150(5)/350 = 2	48	2304	1152
25	80(225)/350 = 51	-26	676	13.3
35	80(110)/350 = 25	10	100	4
5	80(10)/350 = 2	3	9	4.5
5	80(5)/350 = 1	4	16	16
0	120(225)/350 = 77	-77	5929	77
0	120(110)/350 = 38	-38	1444	38
0	120(10)/350 = 3	-3	9	3
5	120(5)/350 = 1	4	16	16
350	350			2864

X² Cal = 2864**Source: Survey Data, 2025**

Tabulated at 0.05 level of significance

Hence, df = (R – 1) (C – 1)

Where:

R – number of rows,

C = number of columns

$$= (4 - 1) (3 - 1)$$

$$= (3) (2) = 6$$

From the above analysis,

df = 6

level of significance = 0.05% while

Chi-Square (X²) = 2864

Table Value = 12.59

Decision Rule: The null hypothesis is rejected if chi-square (X²) value is higher than the table value. Here, the chi-square value = 2864 and the table value = 12.59. It therefore signifies that the null hypothesis which states that there is no significant extent of effectiveness of the adopted

conflict management strategies and community development in the Niger Delta, 2014 -2024 is rejected. This, in other words, means that, there is a significant extent of effectiveness of the adopted conflict management strategies and community development in the Niger Delta Area of Nigeria.

The effectiveness of the adopted conflict management strategies on community development of rural communities in the Niger Delta area: The question of whether dialogue in conflict management strategy enhances collective coherence and a participatory consciousness in community development, the table above also displayed 225 strongly agreed that dialogue in conflict management strategy enhances collective coherence and a participatory consciousness in community development with 110 respondents agreed that dialogue in conflict management strategy enhances collective coherence and a participatory consciousness in community development. The table also revealed that 150 respondents strongly agreed that negotiation brings about compromise and concession through transformation of the conflict situation in community development with 150 respondents agreed that negotiation brings about compromise and concession through transformation of the conflict situation in community development. On whether it is less risky for conflicting communities to adopt mediation since it does not assume control over them but demonstrate voluntary, non-coercive, and non-binding capacity in conflict management and community development process, 180 respondents strongly agreed that it is less risky for conflicting communities to adopt mediation since it does not assume control over them but demonstrate voluntary, non-coercive, and non-binding capacity in conflict management and community development process, with 125 respondents agreed that it is less risky for conflicting communities to adopt mediation since it does not assume control over them but demonstrate voluntary, non-coercive, and non-binding capacity in conflict management and community development process.

On whether reconciliation which is an Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) process is adopted by a conciliator to lower tensions, improve communications, interpret issues, provide technical assistance, explore potential solutions, and bring about a negotiated settlement in community development, the table above shows that 240 respondents strongly agreed that reconciliation which is an Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) process is adopted by a conciliator to lower tensions, improve communications, interpret issues, provide technical assistance, explore potential solutions, and bring about a negotiated settlement in community development with 80 respondents agreed that reconciliation which is an Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) process is adopted by a conciliator to lower tensions, improve communications, interpret issues, provide technical assistance, explore potential solutions, and bring about a negotiated settlement in community development. The question of whether community development is engendered when adjudication as a conflict management strategy which allows the parties present their case before a judge or jury is adopted, the table above also displayed 190 strongly agreed that community development is engendered when adjudication as a conflict management strategy which allows the parties present their case before a judge or jury is adopted with 145 respondents agreed that community development is engendered when adjudication as a conflict management strategy which allows the parties present their case before a judge or jury is adopted.

In line with data analysis above, conflict management can be viewed as a non-violent process that manages conflict through compromise, or through the assistance of a third party who either

facilitates or impose a settlement or resolution. Conflict resolution processes are many and varied and can be seen on a continuum ranging from collaborative, participatory, informal, non-binding processes (such as mediation, conciliation, third party negotiation) to adversarial, fact-oriented, legally binding and imposed decisions that arise from institutions such as the courts and tribunals. A participant noted that:

Non-adversarial practices such as mediation, negotiation, arbitration and conciliation are practices which have been associated with conflict resolution or alternate dispute resolution (ADR) procedures rather than adversarial institutions such as courts and tribunals where a settlement is imposed on the disputants by an external authority. Therefore, the key to resolving conflict is to focus on interest rather than positions, which is the solution one party seeks to impose on the other (C. Spiff, personal communication, January 10, 2025).

Tidwell (1998) has argued that resolution between two parties in conflict can only occur when relationships have been re-examined and realigned. Although this form of resolution may be regarded by some as more desirable it is not always practicable. Resolution in cases of marital separation or divorce can in some cases simply mean the settlement of an outstanding property dispute rather than the realignment of relationships. The transformation of relationships may be an ideal pursued by a third party who is intervening on behalf of the disputants, but it is not necessarily the goal of the disputants who may simply desire a solution to their problem.

On his own, Ogedi (2024) noted that dispute in the society is as old as man. This is because there must be misunderstanding among people in their efforts to relate with one another, solve their problems, and acquire earthly properties. Based on the needs to achieve peaceful co-existence in the society, there are traditional and modern dispute management strategies employed by people to achieve peace and development (Uzorka & Adiele, 2021). According to him, the modern way of conflict management is the court or judicial system. It was introduced by the colonial masters, as it's not in African tradition. The reality is that the above may not actually give positive results at all times; hence the need for alternative disputes resolution which will add positive values to community development. The alternative dispute resolution strategies are in line with African culture and tradition. According to Chukwu & Nwosu (2020), alternative disputes resolution are communal or traditional ways of settling conflict, instead of official court process. Historically, the alternative disputes resolution was practically used in different African countries during the pre-colonial era. According to Okafor, Ele, Mbam & Orji (2020), before 1900, the different ethnic groups that made up the present-day Nigeria used different community-based strategies for resolving conflicts. This situation continued till the British colonial rule which introduced the formal judicial system in practice today.

In fact, the ADR processes were in practice in Africa even prior to the colonial era (Ngo-Pondi, 2021). Our traditional societies settled disputes by referring them to the elders and other respected members of the society. Mazrui maintained that public participation and mediation are not alien to Nigeria. Dispute resolution is a universal issue. Every race achieves it in its peculiar way since the law, in the real sense, is a reflection of how people live. Francis (2006) noted that Africa had

developed rudimentary and, in most cases, sophisticated political, socioeconomic and political institutions, and with developed approaches to conflict management.

Another participant revealed that:

Without peaceful environment, community development would become a mirage. The need for effective strategies for conflict management must be a priority for any actor that prefer the growth and development of the community. Negotiation, dialogue, communication, etc have always been helpful and proven to be effective in any conflict situation. The situation of the Niger Delta is not an exception (T. David, personal communication, January 13, 2025).

Ajodo-Adebanjoko (2013), the atmosphere of insecurity created during and after the crises disrupts productive activities and discourages local and international investments. Crises encourage political instability and undermine government's legitimacy and ability to carry out its normal functions. The breakdown of law and order during the crises also undermine public safety. Furthermore, crises situations cause a great deal of human suffering, and leads to displacements and destruction of lives and property (Sanusi, 1996). Government's efforts to manage conflicts have always been confrontational and coercive, involving the use of the police and military which often heightens such crises. Considering that a poorly handled crises could become destructive thereby hindering national peace and security, the following strategies are advocated. The use of force in settling differences is discouraged.

Similarly, Obona (n.d) noted that community development lies on conflict management strategies. It is the fulcrum of any development to thrive. He discussed the following as conflict management strategies and the extent of their effectiveness in community development in the Niger Delta region and Nigeria wide.

Dialogue: This has proven to be effective in conflict situation. It should be embraced by all and parties involved in a crisis must be equally represented. Mediators on their part should be sincere and fair in making judgments; they should see their task as that of ending a conflict and must do all within their power to ensure this. Willingness to toe the line of peace on the part of the parties involved is imperative. In this regard, they must cooperate with mediators, be willing to make compromises if it becomes necessary and adhered to decisions arrived at (Alabi, 2010). Social amenities and infrastructural facilities should be provided. Government should create jobs in order to reduce the level of unemployment and poverty, which are breeding grounds for discontent, frustration and recourse to violence at the slightest provocation. Peaceful co-operation, respect for universal basic rights, ethno-religious tolerance and the functioning of real democracy are should be emphasized. People should be educated on the need to view one another as God's unique creatures and not on the basis of ethnic or religious affiliations. The different ethnic groups in Nigeria should view their differences as a gift from God, not a tool of violence. Collective peace should be encouraged. African elders such as politicians, economists, scholars, diplomats, church leaders, members of NGOs and elders in the village must be involved in the peace process (Kasomo, 2010). There is need for emphasis on being our brother's keeper. Every Nigerian should make it a point of living peaceably with their neighbours and pursue peace at all cost. Law enforcement agents should be constantly alert and a strong force and there is also need to create

an effective collective National Security System that will act as deterrence against the persecutors of different ethnic groups.

Negotiation: This is the process whereby the parties within the conflict seek to settle or resolve their conflicts. Also, negotiation is a direct process of dialogue and discussions taking place between at least two parties who are faced with a conflict situation or a dispute. The benefits of compromised solution, it is believed, out-weigh the losses arising from refusal to negotiate. The goal of negotiation is to reach agreement through joint decisions between parties. Negotiation is a key approach to peaceful resolution of dispute and conflicts that may arise among parties. It is also within the reach and control of parties. Negotiation is roger Fisher's approach to conflict resolution which introduced the term 'principled – negotiation'. The principle-based approach aims to resolve the conflict by deferring judgment to a moral principle. Such an approach advocates the need for interest-based negotiation in contrast to those based on a 'position' (Fisher & Ury, 1991). For example, interests include issues like security, esteem, and pleasures, while positions define how one achieved those interests. Fisher encourages the need for empathy and asks the question – why does one hold one position and another hold a different one. Empathy allows parties to discern the underlying interest which by creativity may result in an amicable solution (what this author would refer to as 're-negotiated position' to each party). Fisher & Ury (1991) define the most powerful interests as human needs, which they identify as security, economic well-being, a sense of belonging, recognition, and control over one's life. Another respondent revealed that:

When dialogue is involved, there is the opportunity to discuss the issues that led to communal conflict. However, when dialogue is not properly organized, negotiation become an academic exercise. There would be loss of synergies and the interested parties tend to create more conflict situation (T. Olowokere, personal communication, January 20, 2025).

Hence, Fisher & Ury (1991) observed that negotiation, therefore, constitutes the art of the dialectics of wills that use force and/or peaceful measures to resolve their conflict. Negotiation can be collaborative when synergies are displayed by the disputing parties and are able to constructively engage in positive simulation. The secret of negotiation is to harmonize the interests of the disputing parties. Thus, even when the conflict involves a number against his or her society, there is an emphasis on recuperation and reinsertion of errant member back into its place in society. The recovery of a dissident member can just as well be seen as the restoration of the harmony and integrity of the community, as the assertion of value consensus and social cohesion, so that the management of the conflict favours the concerns of both disputing parties (Ajaji & Buhari, 2014). In traditional African society, peace was negotiated. Apology for wrongs done to individuals and the entire community was a feature of negotiation. Such apology was channelled through elders in council, family heads, and chiefs of high calibre in the community. These groups of people share a common commitment to peace and universal human rights; they also bring with them a wealth of diverse expertise and experience. They are peacemakers, peacebuilders, and social revolutionaries. Thus, the negotiation is done on the representative level or quasi-representative (Olaoba, 2005).

Conciliation: Conciliation is close to mediation. It is a third-party activity, which covers intermediary efforts aimed at persuading the parties to a conflict to work towards a peaceful solution. Conciliation involves facilitation. Reconciliation is an Alternative Dispute Resolution

(ADR) process whereby the parties to a dispute use a conciliator, who meets with the parties separately in an attempt to resolve their differences. They do this by lowering tensions, improving communications, interpreting issues, providing technical assistance, exploring potential solutions, and bringing about a negotiated settlement. Reconciliation differs from mediation in that the main goal is to conciliate, most of the time by seeking concessions. At least, as characteristics of African traditional society, conflict resolution methods are the use of arbitration. The reconciliation function is practiced by an authority figure that mediates between conflicting parties but is empowered to make binding judgments. The purpose is not to render judgment is the law, but to reconcile the conflicting parties and its norms. The relationship between the authority and the community is cushioned by community representatives who advise authority (Ajayi & Buhari, 2014).

Mediation: Mediation has been presented by the United Nations University for Peace as the voluntary, informal, non-binding process undertaken by an external party that fosters the settlement of differences or demands between directly invested parties. Mediation is voluntary, non-coercive, and non-binding. Therefore, it is less risky for conflicting parties as it does not take away much of their control. With guidance from skilled mediators, the mediation process nudges disputants towards a mutually acceptable agreement and creates potential from transforming conflicts so that they do not recur (DeRouen & Bercovitch, 2012). A mediator can be an elder, a religious leader, a wise neighbour, or a respected businessman. In mediation, the mediator tries to guide the discussion in a way that optimizes parties' needs, takes feelings into account, and reframes representations. Olaoba (2005) described mediation as a method of conflict resolution that had been so critical to traditional African society. The mediators usually endeavoured that peace and harmony reigned supreme in the society. This is also usually couched with the dictum of no Victor no vanquished as buttressed by the maxim (Ajayi & Buhari, 2014). In Africa, the roles of mediators depend on traditions, circumstances, and personalities. These roles include "pressurizing, making recommendations, giving assessments, conveying suggestions on behalf of the parties, emphasizing relevant norms and rules, envisaging the situation if an agreement is not reached or repeating of the agreement already attained (BrightBrock, 2001).

Arbitration: This is another type of third-party intervention that is a step higher than mediation in the conflict management spectrum or process. The parties to a conflict who select to use arbitration, even though they choose a non-violent method of settling their disputes, lose more control over their situation than those who select mediation and other lower levels of intervention (Ajayi & Buhari, 2014).

Adjudication: Adjudication is another non-violent method of conflict management. This involves the use of the courts and litigation processes. Parties to a dispute may choose not to use any of the methods we have so far discussed. They may opt instead to take their case to a court of law, before a judge of competent jurisdiction. Legal counsel may represent them. Adjudication is the process in which parties present their case before a judge or jury. Here, it assumes that parties are unable to resolve their conflicts and a decision must be taken from outside (Wisslar, 2004). Adjudication is considered as a step taken either by the parties involved or by a mediator, who feels adjudication is the best process to resolve the lingering conflict or crisis. In traditional African society, adjudication involves bringing all disputants in the conflict to a meeting usually in the

chambers or compounds of family heads, quarter heads, and palace court as the case may be. The dialogue was linked with the adjudicatory processes in traditional (Ajayi & Buhari, 2014).

Education: Education is a means of fostering good understanding. Government should implement its policy on compulsory education to at least junior secondary school or its equivalent. This will assist to reduce the level of illiteracy especially in the communities where these conflicts occur frequently. This will increase the understanding of these illiterates that are normally used to generate these conflicts between communities (Uzorka & Adiele, 2021).

Communication: This is the process of sharing and exchanging information between individual, groups and potential parties in a conflict situation. It is also the process of interacting and relating with others, meaning that parties to a conflict situation still talk (Ogedi, 2024).

Collaboration: The collaboration process is one in which parties work together on their own to resolve problems through constructive dialogue or other activities like joint projects, sharing of community schools and health centres, markets, bridges and culverts, as well as other utilities (Alagoa, 2001).

Cross-Examination: This is an essential method employed in the process of conflict resolution in traditional African society. It is a means of weighting evidence through cross-checking and corroborating the facts of the conflict (Oloaba, 2005). In Nigeria, a good sense of justice is associated with cross-examination. In traditional African society, extra-judicial methods were employed in conflict resolution. These took the form of ordeals and the invocation of supernatural forces to expose all sides to the conflict. For example, Olaoba (2001) noted that the oath-taking weaving instrument and chiefly sceptre, royal shrine, or religious sanctuaries were the extra-judicial methods used for eliciting facts of the dispute. Also, the goddess of the river and the guardian of social morality were used to ascertaining the veracity of the story told by disputants (Olaoba, 2001).

Anierobi (2024) noted that to strengthen ongoing peacebuilding efforts, stakeholders should prioritize establishing community-based platforms for dispute resolution. Multistakeholder local peace platforms designed to incorporate traditional institutions and Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) mechanisms can significantly reduce communal conflicts by drawing on customary conflict resolution practices. Targeted capacity-building initiatives that blend traditional and modern conflict resolution models will reinforce community-led mediation efforts. By integrating traditional approaches with ADR techniques, these platforms can foster inclusivity and enhance the effectiveness of conflict resolution at the grassroots level. Furthermore, the handling of conflict in terms of its management is very vital as the process can either make or mar the conflict. That is to say, conflict could escalate if mishandled. Ikporukpo (2019) identified inter-communal conflict management strategies in the Niger Delta to include;

- a. Judicial intervention
- b. Government intervention through the establishment of peace and conflict resolution committees
- c. Military option
- d. Third party involvement

Studies have shown that these strategies largely address the immediate causes of intercommunal conflicts and the concern of visible actors of the conflict. For instance, the conflict between Aduku and Ikpidiama in Sagbama LGA over land dispute and claims over oil well. The matter just like some other land disputes that are in court, can last as long as ten years in some instance and even more than ten years in other times – this is because such cases get as far as the Supreme Court, by which time circumstances that can result in an irksome situation could have occurred (Ikporukpo, 2019). In Nigeria and in several other places, law and procedure in administering justice necessitate the following actions which cost a lot of money;

- i) Engaging the services of a lawyer.
- ii) Payment of court fees for various processes.
- iii) Appearance in court personally or through a lawyer until judgment is given.
- iv) Enforcement of judgments. In land dispute, judgment is such that the land is given to one of the parties of the conflict.

Thus, as Imobighe, Bassey & Asuin (2008) noted that as a dispute settlement system, the court's function is to decide cases based on the facts presented and the controlling laws that govern factual situation. Courts make decision on the evidence and the applicable law, considering only what is presented to them by the parties in an adversarial context. They allocate the decision (that is the impacts that flow from the decision) between the parties, usually along zero-sum line but occasionally to the left of the line to the suboptimal negative-sum or loss-loss settlement. It is often the case that while judgment is awaited, both communities suffer fatalities, economic and social activities are grounded, properties are destroyed, lives (of bread winners of families) are lost and an atmosphere of tension are created.

The difficulty associated with conflict management process particularly, the court has led to some respondents disagreed that dialogue in conflict management strategy enhances collective coherence and a participatory consciousness in community development while 5 respondents strongly disagreed that dialogue in conflict management strategy enhances collective coherence and a participatory consciousness in community development. Meanwhile, 30 respondents disagreed that negotiation brings about compromise and concession through transformation of the conflict situation in community development with 20 respondents strongly disagreed that negotiation brings about compromise and concession through transformation of the conflict situation in community development. While 25 respondents disagreed that it is less risky for conflicting communities to adopt mediation since it does not assume control over them but demonstrate voluntary, non-coercive, and non-binding capacity in conflict management and community development process with 20 respondents strongly disagreed that it is less risky for conflicting communities to adopt mediation since it does not assume control over them but demonstrate voluntary, non-coercive, and non-binding capacity in conflict management and community development process. Also, 20 respondents disagreed that reconciliation which is an Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) process is adopted by a conciliator to lower tensions, improve communications, interpret issues, provide technical assistance, explore potential solutions, and bring about a negotiated settlement in community development with 10 respondents state that reconciliation which is an Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) process is adopted by a conciliator to lower tensions, improve communications, interpret issues, provide technical assistance, explore potential solutions, and bring about a negotiated settlement in community development. However, 5 respondents disagreed that community development is engendered when adjudication as a conflict management strategy which allows the parties present their case before a judge or jury is adopted while 10 respondents strongly disagreed that community development

is engendered when adjudication as a conflict management strategy which allows the parties present their case before a judge or jury is adopted.

Conclusion/Recommendations

The dynamic nature of communal conflicts in the Niger Delta area is alarmingly high due to the richness of the area with oil. Over 25,000 people have lost their lives and property due to recurrent issues of communal conflicts within this region. These conflicts have become a serious issue of concern which also has prompted research in this direction. However, the study has uncovered the causes of communal conflicts plaguing the area, and examined the effectiveness of conflict management strategies. The study found that incessant land disputes, leadership tussles, local control over territories, political struggles, economic marginalization and greed were significant causes of communal conflict. The study therefore concludes that the negative roles of political actors, incompetent conflict mediators, and intention to avenge and carryout repraised attacks plans to avenge have been the factors militating against conflict management strategies in community development. As such, dialogue, negotiation, conciliation, arbitration and communication adopted as conflict management strategies do not enhance the development of rural communities in the Niger Delta area.

Accordingly, the study recommends that; government at all levels should continue to adopt all the conflict management strategies such as dialogue, negotiation, constant communication, conciliation, reconciliation, and arbitration to engage communities or individuals that are prone to conflict. But these should be enhanced with peace education. Also conflict resolution processes should be aimed at developmental programmes for the communities not merely for punitive measures on offenders.

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Table 4.4 Socio-demographic Analysis of Academic Background

Educational Qualifications	Frequency (f)	Percentage (%)
HND/BSc/PGD	200	57
MSc/MPA/MBA/PhD	150	43
Total	350	100

Source: Field Work, 2025

The table above depicted the educational qualifications of respondents and thus revealed that 200 respondents making 57 possess the Higher National Diploma (HND)/Bachelor of Science (BSc) and Postgraduate Diploma (PGD) while 150 respondents representing 43% are holders of Master of Business Administration (MBA)/Master of Public Administration (MPA)/Master of Science (M.Sc) and Doctor of Philosophy (Ph.D). This suggests that the respondents have good knowledge of communal conflicts and its effect on community development in the Niger Delta.