

**ETHNIC AND COMMUNAL CONFLICT DYNAMICS IN AKWA IBOM STATE:
EVIDENCE FROM THE IKOT AKPAN UDO-AMAZABA CONFLICT**

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ABSTRACT

Ethnic and communal conflicts remain significant obstacles to peace, social cohesion, and sustainable development in Nigeria, particularly in rural communities where historical grievances, territorial claims, and identity politics converge. This study examined the dynamics of ethnic and communal conflict in Akwa Ibom State using the Ikot Akpan Udo–Amazaba conflict (1996–2019) as a historical case study. Employing a historical research design, data were obtained from primary sources, including oral interviews, and secondary materials such as archival records, government documents, books, journal articles, and unpublished theses, which were analysed qualitatively through historical interpretation and source criticism. The study found that the conflict was driven by the interaction of unresolved historical grievances, competing claims to ancestral land ownership, ethnic identity, political interests, and economic competition over territorial resources. These factors collectively contributed to repeated cycles of violence, deepened mistrust between the communities, and undermined successive conflict resolution efforts. The findings further reveal that the persistence of the conflict resulted not only from boundary disagreements but also from institutional shortcomings and the failure to address the underlying historical and structural causes of the dispute. The study concludes that sustainable management of communal conflicts requires an integrated approach combining historical reconciliation, participatory boundary demarcation, inclusive governance, and community-driven peace-building initiatives. It contributes to the literature on communal conflict by providing a historically grounded analysis of one of Akwa Ibom State's most protracted boundary disputes while offering policy insights for conflict prevention and peaceful coexistence in multi-community societies.

KEYWORDS: Ethnic Conflict, Communal Conflict, Boundary Disputes, Land Ownership, Ikot Akpan Udo, Amazaba, Akwa Ibom State.

INTRODUCTION

Communal and ethnic conflicts have remained among the most persistent security and development challenges confronting Nigeria, particularly in communities where questions of land ownership, territorial identity, and access to natural resources intersect with historical grievances. While Nigeria has experienced numerous conflicts driven by religion, politics, and resource control, communal disputes often emerge from deeply rooted historical claims that are sustained across generations through oral traditions, cultural identities, and competing interpretations of ancestral boundaries. These conflicts frequently escalate beyond localized disagreements to become violent confrontations that disrupt social cohesion, undermine economic activities, and weaken institutional



governance. Scholars have therefore argued that communal conflicts should not merely be understood as spontaneous outbreaks of violence but as complex historical processes shaped by political, economic, and socio-cultural forces operating over extended periods.¹

Akwa Ibom State, despite its relative reputation for peaceful coexistence, has witnessed several communal and boundary disputes involving neighbouring communities competing over territorial ownership, access to economic resources, and political recognition. Conflicts involving communities such as Ikot Offiong–Oku Iboku, Oku Iboku–Ikot Ekenam, and Ikot Akpan Udo–Amazaba demonstrate that ethnic homogeneity alone does not eliminate the possibility of violent communal confrontations. Instead, historical migration patterns, colonial boundary demarcations, population growth, and the increasing economic value attached to land have continued to generate disputes among communities with shared linguistic and cultural affinities. Consequently, communal conflicts in Akwa Ibom have increasingly attracted scholarly attention because of their implications for local governance, rural development, and sustainable peace.²

Among these disputes, the Ikot Akpan Udo–Amazaba conflict represents one of the most enduring communal crises in Akwa Ibom State. Although the immediate manifestations of the conflict became more visible from the mid-1990s, its origins extend far beyond contemporary political developments and are rooted in competing historical narratives regarding settlement, boundary ownership, and customary land rights. The conflict has evolved through repeated episodes of violence, destruction of property, displacement of residents, and strained inter-community relations despite numerous interventions by traditional authorities, government agencies, security institutions, and judicial bodies. The persistence of the dispute illustrates how unresolved historical grievances, when reinforced by socio-political interests and economic competition, can transform local disagreements into protracted communal conflicts that resist conventional mechanisms of conflict resolution.³

Existing scholarship on communal conflicts in Nigeria has largely concentrated on broad explanations such as ethnic competition, resource scarcity, identity politics, environmental pressures, and governance failures.⁴ While these studies provide valuable theoretical insights into the causes and consequences of communal violence, relatively few have undertaken detailed historical analyses of localized conflicts within Akwa Ibom State, particularly the Ikot Akpan Udo–Amazaba dispute. Much of the available literature treats communal conflicts as isolated incidents without adequately examining the historical processes, conflict

¹ Louis Kriesberg, *Constructive Conflicts: From Escalation to Resolution* (4th edn, Rowman & Littlefield Publishers 2015); Johan Galtung, 'Twenty-Five Years of Peace Research: Ten Challenges and Some Responses' (1985) 22(2) *Journal of Peace Research* 141–158

² Onigun Otite, *Community Conflicts in Nigeria: Management, Resolution and Transformation* (Spectrum Books 1999); Okwudibia Nnoli, *Ethnic Politics in Nigeria* (Fourth Dimension Publishers 1995)

³ George [Author], *Ikot Akpan Udo–Amazaba Ethnic Conflict in Akwa Ibom State of Nigeria, 1996–2019* (Unpublished PhD Thesis, University of Uyo, 2025)

⁴ J. G. Affia, *Ikot Akpanudo – Amazaba Ethnic Conflict in Akwa Ibom State, 1996-2019*. Unpublished PhD Thesis in the Department of History and International Studies, University of Uyo, Uyo Akwa Ibom State.



dynamics, and interaction between local actors and state institutions that sustain such disputes over time. This limitation creates an important gap in understanding how localized communal conflicts evolve and why they often persist despite repeated peace initiatives.⁵

It is against this background that this article examines the dynamics of ethnic and communal conflict in Akwa Ibom State through the case of the Ikot Akpan Udo–Amazaba conflict. Rather than focusing solely on the episodes of violence, the study explores the historical evolution of the dispute, the interaction of identity, land ownership, political interests, and resource competition, as well as the factors responsible for its persistence between 1996 and 2019. By situating the conflict within broader debates on communal violence and conflict dynamics in Nigeria, the article contributes to existing scholarship on peace and conflict studies while providing historical evidence capable of informing policy interventions aimed at preventing and managing similar communal conflicts across the country.

Literature Review

The phenomenon of ethnic and communal conflict has attracted considerable scholarly attention owing to its implications for political stability, social cohesion, and sustainable development. Conflict scholars generally agree that communal conflicts arise when two or more groups pursue incompatible interests over valued resources such as land, political authority, cultural identity, or economic opportunities. Galtung conceptualizes conflict as a condition resulting from incompatible goals among social actors, emphasizing that structural inequalities and perceived injustices often provide fertile ground for violent confrontations. Similarly, Ross argues that conflict emerges when parties perceive divergence in material or symbolic interests and consequently adopt antagonistic behaviours toward one another. Akpuru-Aja further maintains that conflict is not merely a physical confrontation but also an attitude and behavioural disposition through which one party perceives another as an obstacle to the realization of desired objectives. These perspectives collectively demonstrate that communal conflicts are multidimensional phenomena shaped by both objective material interests and subjective perceptions of exclusion and injustice.⁶

Within the Nigerian context, scholars have consistently identified communal conflicts as recurring manifestations of historical grievances, weak governance structures, and intense competition over land and natural resources. Otite contends that the creation of new administrative boundaries following state and local government restructuring generated fresh territorial disputes by separating

⁵ Olufemi Fatile, *Management of Inter and Intra-State Boundary Conflicts in Nigeria: An Empirical Approach* (Dorrance Publishing 2011); Martin Ikejiani-Clark, *Peace Studies and Conflict Resolution in Nigeria* (Spectrum Books 2009).

⁶ Johan Galtung, 'Twenty-Five Years of Peace Research: Ten Challenges and Some Responses' (1985) 22(2) *Journal of Peace Research* 141–158; Oliver Ramsbotham, Tom Woodhouse and Hugh Miall, *Contemporary Conflict Resolution* (4th edn, Polity Press 2016); S. O. Akpuru-Aja, *Basic Concepts, Issues and Strategies of Peace and Conflict Resolution* (Kenya & Brothers 2007)



communities with longstanding social and cultural relationships. Nnoli similarly attributes many communal conflicts in Nigeria to the politicization of ethnicity, unequal distribution of public resources, and struggles for political representation. Fatile further observes that the increasing complexity of inter- and intra-state boundary disputes necessitated the establishment of institutional mechanisms such as the National Boundary Commission to manage persistent territorial disagreements. Together, these studies suggest that communal conflicts in Nigeria are rarely isolated events but rather products of historical, administrative, and political processes that reinforce local rivalries over time.⁷

Several scholars have examined the historical evolution of boundaries and territoriality in Africa to explain the persistence of communal disputes. Anene argues that colonial boundary demarcations fundamentally altered pre-colonial systems of flexible territorial governance by imposing rigid administrative borders that often ignored existing patterns of settlement and cultural interaction. Herbst likewise contends that most African boundaries were created primarily to satisfy colonial administrative interests rather than indigenous socio-political realities, thereby institutionalizing future conflicts. Kapil further notes that many colonial delimitation exercises were undertaken without adequate geographical knowledge, resulting in ambiguities that continue to generate disputes across the continent. These historical interpretations are particularly relevant to communal conflicts in Nigeria, where competing claims over inherited boundaries frequently become sources of prolonged violence and litigation.⁸

Literature relating specifically to Akwa Ibom State has largely concentrated on the historical origins, migration, and socio-cultural organization of the Ibibio and neighbouring ethnic groups. Edet Udo provides a comprehensive account of the historical development, political institutions, and cultural practices of the Ibibio, while Ukpong traces the migration patterns that shaped the settlement of communities within the Qua Iboe River Basin. Abasiattai similarly documents the historical dispersal of Ibibio communities and their interactions with neighbouring groups before and during the colonial period. Although these studies significantly enrich understanding of the historical foundations of intergroup relations in Akwa Ibom State, they devote limited attention to the dynamics of contemporary communal conflicts, particularly the processes through which historical claims over territory evolve into violent confrontations. Consequently, their contributions provide important historical context but insufficient explanation of the mechanisms sustaining recent communal disputes such as the Ikot Akpan Udo–Amazaba conflict.⁹

⁷ Onigu Otite, *Community Conflicts in Nigeria: Management, Resolution and Transformation* (Spectrum Books 1999); Okwudiba Nnoli, *Ethnic Politics in Nigeria* (Fourth Dimension Publishers 1995); Olufemi Fatile, *Management of Inter and Intra-State Boundary Conflicts in Nigeria: An Empirical Approach* (Dorrance Publishing 2011)

⁸ J. C. Anene, *The International Boundaries of Nigeria, 1885–1960* (Longman 1970); John Herbst, 'The Creation and Maintenance of National Boundaries in Africa' (1989) 43(4) *International Organization* 673–692; R. Kapil, 'On the Conflict Potential of Inherited Boundaries in Africa' (1966) 18(4) *World Politics* 656–673

⁹ Edet A. Udo, *Who Are the Ibibio?* (Africana-FEP Publishers 1983); Edet Ukpong, 'The Origin and Migration of the Ibibio People' (1999) 8 *Ibom Journal of History and International Studies* 60–61; Monday B. Abasiattai, *Akwa Ibom and Cross River States: An Introduction to the Land, the People and Their Culture* (Wusen Press 1987)



The foregoing literature demonstrates that while substantial scholarship exists on conflict theory, territorial disputes, Nigerian communal conflicts, and the historical development of communities in Akwa Ibom State, relatively little attention has been devoted to understanding the dynamics of specific communal conflicts through detailed historical analysis. Existing studies predominantly offer broad theoretical explanations or historical narratives without integrating the interplay of historical grievances, ethnic identity, land ownership, political interests, and conflict escalation within a single localized case. This article addresses that gap by examining the Ikot Akpan Udo–Amazaba conflict as a representative case through which the broader dynamics of ethnic and communal conflicts in Akwa Ibom State can be understood. In doing so, it contributes empirical evidence to the growing literature on communal conflict, boundary disputes, and peacebuilding in Nigeria.

Methodology

This study adopted the historical research design to examine the dynamics of the Ikot Akpan Udo–Amazaba communal conflict in Akwa Ibom State between 1996 and 2019. The design was considered appropriate because it facilitated a systematic reconstruction and interpretation of past events through the collection, evaluation, and synthesis of historical evidence. Data for the study were obtained from both primary and secondary sources. Primary data comprised oral interviews with community leaders, youth representatives, traditional rulers, members of conflict resolution committees, government officials, and other knowledgeable participants directly connected with the conflict. Secondary data were sourced from archival documents, government reports, books, journal articles, newspapers, unpublished theses, and other relevant documentary materials on communal conflicts and boundary disputes in Nigeria. The collected data were subjected to qualitative historical analysis involving source criticism, corroboration of evidence, thematic organization, and narrative interpretation to ensure the validity and reliability of the findings while situating the Ikot Akpan Udo–Amazaba conflict within the broader context of ethnic and communal conflicts in Akwa Ibom State.¹⁰

Historical Evolution of the Ikot Akpan Udo–Amazaba Conflict

The historical evolution of the Ikot Akpan Udo–Amazaba conflict is closely linked to the settlement patterns and territorial history of the two neighbouring communities. Oral traditions indicate that both communities have occupied adjoining territories for several generations and maintained cordial relations characterized by social interaction, inter-community trade, and cultural exchanges before the emergence of violent hostilities.¹¹ Historical accounts reveal that their proximity encouraged cooperation in farming, fishing, and other economic activities, while traditional institutions played significant roles in regulating relationships and

¹⁰ Louis Gottschalk, *Understanding History: A Primer of Historical Method* (2nd edn, Alfred A Knopf 1969); George [Author], *Ikot Akpan Udo–Amazaba Ethnic Conflict in Akwa Ibom State of Nigeria, 1996–2019* (Unpublished PhD Thesis, University of Uyo, 2025)

¹¹ J. G. Affia, *Ikot Akpanudo – Amazaba Ethnic Conflict in Akwa Ibom State, 1996-2019*. Unpublished PhD Thesis in the Department of History and International Studies, University of Uyo, Uyo Akwa Ibom State.



resolving minor disagreements. Like many indigenous communities in southern Nigeria, land constituted not only an economic asset but also a symbol of ancestral heritage, identity, and communal sovereignty. Consequently, issues relating to territorial ownership were regarded as matters of collective survival and cultural continuity.¹²

Although the two communities coexisted peacefully for many years, competing historical narratives concerning the ownership and demarcation of portions of their common boundary gradually created tensions between them. Each community relied on oral traditions, ancestral occupation, and customary land tenure practices to justify its claims over disputed territories. These competing claims became increasingly contentious as successive generations interpreted historical events differently and sought to reinforce their respective territorial rights. The absence of clearly defined boundary demarcations under customary arrangements created opportunities for conflicting interpretations of land ownership, thereby laying the foundation for future disputes. What initially existed as occasional disagreements over territorial limits gradually transformed into a more organized struggle over communal identity and ancestral inheritance.¹³

The conflict assumed greater significance during the post-colonial period as administrative restructuring and changes in local governance altered traditional patterns of territorial administration. Colonial and post-colonial boundary adjustments introduced formal administrative boundaries that often failed to correspond with indigenous conceptions of land ownership. As government institutions increasingly relied on official maps and administrative records rather than customary arrangements, disagreements over jurisdiction intensified between the neighbouring communities. Population growth, expanding agricultural activities, and increasing economic dependence on land further heightened competition for territorial control. Consequently, the disputed boundary acquired greater political and economic importance, making compromise increasingly difficult to achieve.¹⁴

The dispute escalated into violent communal conflict in the mid-1990s, particularly from 1996, when competing claims over the disputed territory became more confrontational. Episodes of violence resulted in the destruction of residential buildings, farmlands, and other valuable property, while several residents were displaced from their ancestral homes. The conflict disrupted farming activities, interrupted local commerce, and weakened long-established social relationships between the two communities. Despite repeated interventions by traditional rulers, security agencies, local government authorities, judicial institutions, and the Akwa Ibom State Government, tensions periodically resurfaced as neither community was

¹² George [Author], *Ikot Akpan Udo–Amazaba Ethnic Conflict in Akwa Ibom State of Nigeria, 1996–2019* (Unpublished PhD Thesis, University of Uyo, 2025). ; M. D. W. Jeffrey, *Intelligence Report on the Andoni* (National Archives, Enugu, 1930)

¹³ Edet A. Udo, *Who Are the Ibibio?* (Africana-FEP Publishers 1983); Edet Ukpog, 'The Origin and Migration of the Ibibio People' (1999) 8 *Ibom Journal of History and International Studies* 60–61.

¹⁴ J. C. Anene, *The International Boundaries of Nigeria, 1885–1960* (Longman 1970); John Herbst, 'The Creation and Maintenance of National Boundaries in Africa' (1989) 43(4) *International Organization* 673–692



fully satisfied with the outcomes of various mediation efforts. The recurring nature of the violence demonstrated that the underlying historical grievances remained unresolved despite temporary cessation of hostilities.¹⁵

Between 1996 and 2019, the Ikot Akpan Udo–Amazaba conflict evolved from a localized boundary disagreement into one of the most persistent communal conflicts in Akwa Ibom State. Over time, the dispute became increasingly influenced by political interests, community mobilization, economic competition, and the symbolic importance attached to ancestral land ownership.¹⁶ The inability of successive interventions to produce a mutually acceptable settlement reinforced distrust between the communities and contributed to the cyclical recurrence of violence. The historical trajectory of the conflict therefore illustrates that communal conflicts are rarely the product of a single event but rather evolve through the interaction of historical memory, territorial identity, institutional weaknesses, and changing socio-political conditions. Understanding this historical evolution is essential for explaining the broader dynamics of ethnic and communal conflicts in Akwa Ibom State and for designing more sustainable conflict management strategies.¹⁷

Historical Grievances

Historical grievances constituted one of the principal dynamics underpinning the Ikot Akpan Udo–Amazaba conflict. Competing narratives regarding the origins of settlement, ancestral occupation, and ownership of disputed territories fostered divergent historical memories that shaped the attitudes of both communities toward one another. Each community relied on oral traditions and inherited claims to legitimize its territorial rights, while simultaneously questioning the historical legitimacy of the opposing group. These unresolved historical grievances were transmitted across generations, transforming what may have begun as localized disagreements into entrenched communal identities centred on territorial entitlement. Consequently, every new episode of confrontation was interpreted through the lens of accumulated historical injustices, making reconciliation increasingly difficult.¹⁸

Ethnic Identity and Communal Solidarity

Ethnic identity significantly influenced the dynamics of the conflict by strengthening internal cohesion while simultaneously deepening divisions between the two communities. As tensions intensified, residents increasingly identified with their respective communities, reinforcing collective perceptions of belonging,

¹⁵ George [Author], *Ikot Akpan Udo–Amazaba Ethnic Conflict in Akwa Ibom State of Nigeria, 1996–2019* (Unpublished PhD Thesis, University of Uyo, 2025).

¹⁶ J. G. Affia, *Ikot Akpanudo – Amazaba Ethnic Conflict in Akwa Ibom State, 1996-2019*. Unpublished PhD Thesis in the Department of History and International Studies, University of Uyo, Uyo Akwa Ibom State.

¹⁷ Onigu Orite, *Community Conflicts in Nigeria: Management, Resolution and Transformation* (Spectrum Books 1999); Olufemi Fatile, *Management of Inter and Intra-State Boundary Conflicts in Nigeria: An Empirical Approach* (Dorrance Publishing 2011).

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loyalty, and shared victimhood. Community leaders, youth groups, and traditional institutions mobilized support around the defence of ancestral heritage and communal dignity, thereby transforming individual grievances into collective struggles. This process of identity mobilization reduced opportunities for compromise because concessions were often interpreted as betrayals of communal interests rather than practical steps toward peaceful coexistence. Identity therefore became both a source of resilience within each community and a driver of prolonged confrontation.¹⁹

Competition over Land and Economic Resources

Competition over land and associated economic resources represented another critical dynamic sustaining the conflict. Beyond its cultural significance, land served as the primary source of agricultural production, settlement expansion, and economic survival for both communities. Control of disputed territories therefore carried substantial economic implications, particularly as population growth increased pressure on available land. The possibility of benefiting from natural resources located within contested areas further heightened the determination of each community to defend its territorial claims. Consequently, economic interests reinforced historical grievances, making the dispute increasingly resistant to negotiated settlements based solely on customary reconciliation mechanisms.²⁰

Political Interests and Elite Influence

Political actors and local elites also shaped the trajectory of the conflict through actions that occasionally reinforced communal divisions. During periods of heightened tension, influential individuals often aligned themselves with their respective communities in pursuit of political legitimacy, local influence, or strategic advantage. In some instances, political rhetoric and selective support for particular community positions contributed to mistrust between the disputing parties. Furthermore, disagreements over administrative jurisdiction and local political representation occasionally intersected with the boundary dispute, increasing its political significance beyond the immediate issue of territorial ownership. These developments illustrate how communal conflicts may be prolonged when political interests become intertwined with local historical disputes.²¹

Conflict Escalation and Cyclical Violence

¹⁹ S. O. Akpuru-Aja, *Basic Concepts, Issues and Strategies of Peace and Conflict Resolution* (Keny & Brothers 2007); Johan Galtung, 'Twenty-Five Years of Peace Research: Ten Challenges and Some Responses' (1985) 22(2) *Journal of Peace Research* 141–158

²⁰ Okwudiba Nnoli, *Ethnic Politics in Nigeria* (Fourth Dimension Publishers 1995); Onigu Otite, *Community Conflicts in Nigeria: Management, Resolution and Transformation* (Spectrum Books 1999)

²¹ George [Author], *Ikot Akpan Udo–Amazaba Ethnic Conflict in Akwa Ibom State of Nigeria, 1996–2019* (Unpublished PhD Thesis, University of Uyo, 2025). ; Kalevi Holsti, *Peace and War: Armed Conflicts and International Order 1648–1989* (Cambridge University Press 1991)



The Ikot Akpan Udo–Amazaba dispute exhibited a cyclical pattern of escalation characterized by repeated outbreaks of violence following periods of relative calm. Minor incidents such as alleged encroachment on disputed land, destruction of farm crops, or disagreements over boundary activities frequently triggered larger confrontations because they occurred within an atmosphere of deep mutual suspicion. Each violent episode generated new grievances through the destruction of lives, property, and livelihoods, thereby reinforcing retaliatory attitudes within both communities. This recurring cycle of violence created a self-perpetuating conflict environment in which temporary peace agreements failed to address the underlying structural and historical causes of the dispute.²²

Persistence of the Conflict

The persistence of the Ikot Akpan Udo–Amazaba conflict resulted from the interaction of historical grievances, identity politics, economic competition, and inadequate resolution of underlying issues. While numerous interventions temporarily reduced hostilities, they often focused on immediate security concerns without addressing the deeper historical and socio-political factors driving the dispute. Consequently, unresolved questions relating to boundary demarcation, ownership rights, and historical legitimacy continued to fuel mutual distrust between the communities. The conflict therefore evolved into a protracted communal dispute in which successive generations inherited unresolved tensions, demonstrating how localized conflicts can persist when root causes remain insufficiently addressed despite repeated mediation efforts.²³

Discussion

The findings of this study demonstrate that the dynamics of the Ikot Akpan Udo–Amazaba conflict cannot be explained by a single causal factor but rather by the interaction of historical, socio-political, and economic variables that reinforced one another over time. Historical grievances provided the foundation upon which competing claims of territorial ownership were constructed, while ethnic identity strengthened communal solidarity and heightened resistance to compromise.²⁴ The findings corroborate Galtung's structural conflict perspective that unresolved incompatibilities in interests and perceptions create conditions for recurring violence, as well as Akpuru-Aja's assertion that conflict is sustained by attitudes and behaviours that perceive opposing groups as obstacles to the realization of collective interests. The cyclical nature of the conflict further demonstrates that communal

²² Olufemi Fatile, *Management of Inter and Intra-State Boundary Conflicts in Nigeria: An Empirical Approach* (Dorrance Publishing 2011); John Herbst, 'The Creation and Maintenance of National Boundaries in Africa' (1989) 43(4) *International Organization* 673–692.

²³ Louis Kriesberg, *Constructive Conflicts: From Escalation to Resolution* (4th edn, Rowman & Littlefield 2015); George [Author], *Ikot Akpan Udo–Amazaba Ethnic Conflict in Akwa Ibom State of Nigeria, 1996–2019* (Unpublished PhD Thesis, University of Uyo, 2025)

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violence is often the culmination of accumulated historical tensions rather than merely the consequence of isolated incidents.²⁵

The study also reveals that the persistence of the conflict was reinforced by the convergence of identity politics and economic competition over land. Rather than functioning solely as an economic resource, land represented a symbol of ancestral legitimacy, communal identity, and political relevance. This finding is consistent with the works of Holsti and Vasquez, who argue that territorial disputes become particularly difficult to resolve because they involve both material interests and symbolic attachments. Similarly, the findings support Otite's and Nnoli's observations that communal conflicts in Nigeria are frequently sustained by historical boundary ambiguities, politicized ethnic identities, and competition for scarce resources. However, unlike many studies that emphasize ethnic diversity as the principal catalyst of communal violence, the Ikot Akpan Udo–Amazaba conflict illustrates that even culturally and linguistically related communities can engage in prolonged violent confrontation when historical claims to territory remain unresolved.²⁶

Furthermore, the findings reinforce the central proposition of Conflict Trap Theory, which explains how unresolved disputes tend to reproduce themselves through recurring cycles of violence, mistrust, and retaliation. Each episode of confrontation generated new grievances that deepened hostility and reduced confidence in peaceful resolution, thereby creating conditions for subsequent outbreaks of violence.²⁷ The inability to resolve the underlying historical and territorial issues allowed the conflict to become self-sustaining despite repeated intervention efforts. This suggests that sustainable peace in communal conflicts requires approaches that address not only immediate security concerns but also the historical narratives, identity perceptions, and structural conditions that perpetuate conflict. Consequently, the Ikot Akpan Udo–Amazaba conflict provides important empirical evidence that communal conflicts in Nigeria should be understood as evolving historical processes requiring long-term, multidimensional solutions rather than short-term crisis management strategies.²⁸

²⁵ Johan Galtung, 'Twenty-Five Years of Peace Research: Ten Challenges and Some Responses' (1985) 22(2) *Journal of Peace Research* 141–158; S. O. Akpuru-Aja, *Basic Concepts, Issues and Strategies of Peace and Conflict Resolution* (Keny & Brothers 2007)

²⁶ Kalevi Holsti, *Peace and War: Armed Conflict and International Order 1648–1989* (Cambridge University Press 1991); John A. Vasquez and Marie T. Henehan, 'Territorial Disputes and the Probability of War, 1816–1992' (2001) 38(2) *Journal of Peace Research* 123–138; Onigu Otite, *Community Conflicts in Nigeria: Management, Resolution and Transformation* (Spectrum Books 1999); Okwudiba Nnoli, *Ethnic Politics in Nigeria* (Fourth Dimension Publishers 1995).

²⁷ J. G. Affia, *Ikot Akpanudo – Amazaba Ethnic Conflict in Akwa Ibom State, 1996-2019*. Unpublished PhD Thesis in the Department of History and International Studies, University of Uyo, Uyo Akwa Ibom State.

²⁸ Paul Collier and Anke Hoeffler, 'Greed and Grievance in Civil War' (2004) 56(4) *Oxford Economic Papers* 563–595; Paul Collier and Nicholas Sambanis (eds), *Understanding Civil War: Evidence and Analysis* (World Bank and Oxford University Press 2005).



Conclusion

The Ikot Akpan Udo–Amazaba conflict demonstrates that ethnic and communal conflicts in Akwa Ibom State are products of complex historical processes rather than isolated episodes of violence. The study has shown that historical grievances, competing claims to territorial ownership, ethnic identity, economic interests, and political influences collectively shaped the emergence, escalation, and persistence of the conflict between 1996 and 2019. The findings further reveal that while violent confrontations often appear to be triggered by immediate incidents, they are fundamentally sustained by unresolved historical narratives and institutional weaknesses that perpetuate distrust and recurring hostility between neighbouring communities. Consequently, effective management of communal conflicts requires interventions that extend beyond security responses to include historical reconciliation, participatory boundary demarcation, inclusive dialogue, and equitable governance capable of addressing the structural drivers of conflict. By providing a historical analysis of the Ikot Akpan Udo–Amazaba dispute, this study contributes to the growing body of literature on communal conflict in Nigeria and offers valuable insights for policymakers, scholars, and peace practitioners seeking sustainable approaches to conflict prevention and peaceful coexistence in multi-community societies.

Recommendations

1. **Participatory Boundary Demarcation:** The Akwa Ibom State Government, in collaboration with the National Boundary Commission, traditional institutions, and representatives of both communities, should undertake a transparent and participatory boundary demarcation exercise to establish mutually accepted territorial boundaries and eliminate ambiguities that continue to fuel disputes.
2. **Community-Based Peacebuilding:** Sustainable peace should be promoted through continuous dialogue involving traditional rulers, youth leaders, women groups, religious organizations, and civil society actors. These platforms should focus on rebuilding trust, addressing historical grievances, and fostering inter-community cooperation beyond periods of active conflict.
3. **Strengthening Early Warning and Conflict Prevention Mechanisms:** Government and security agencies should establish community-based early warning systems capable of detecting emerging tensions before they escalate into violence. Regular monitoring, intelligence gathering, and rapid response mechanisms should be institutionalized in conflict-prone communities across Akwa Ibom State.
4. **Integrated Rural Development Programmes:** The government should implement equitable socio-economic development initiatives, including improved infrastructure, agricultural support, employment opportunities, and social amenities in affected communities. Addressing economic inequalities and competition over scarce resources can significantly reduce incentives for communal confrontation.



5. **Institutionalization of Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR):** Traditional conflict resolution mechanisms should be integrated with formal legal and administrative institutions to provide accessible, culturally acceptable, and timely avenues for resolving communal disputes. Such institutional collaboration would enhance public confidence in peaceful dispute settlement while reducing dependence on violence as a means of asserting communal claims.