

Boundary and Land-Related Violent Conflicts and Its Implications on the Education of the Female Child in Igboland: A Case Study of Amagu-Adadama and Aguleri-Umuleri Conflicts

Stanley Ikechukwu Uwakwe
Institute for Peace and Strategic Studies, University of Ibadan, Nigeria

Abstract

This paper examines boundary and land-related conflicts and its implication on the education of the female child in Igboland using the Amagu-Adadama between Ebonyi and Cross River states and the Umuleri-Aguleri land conflict as case studies. The paper provides a historical background insight of the conflicts. In addition, the paper discusses the concept of female child education, the need for education of the female child in Igboland and the implications of boundary and land-related conflicts on the education of the girl-child and finally, recommends that government and families should take steps towards eradicating all obstacles to female child education.

Introduction

The interface between man and his socio-physical environment involves a continuous process of dependence and interdependence which has the potential of breeding contradiction and conflict. Accordingly, Otite & Albert (1999), noted that conflict, generally is a reality of social relations. Conflicts at any level arise from divergences of interests, desires, goals and values aspirations in the competition for resources to meet imposing demands on social life in a defined socio-physical environment. According to Ajala (1983:177), boundary can be described as a wall or a partition between the peoples on opposite sides, an artificial (man-made) lines that partitions the people to restricts their movement and trade relations across frontiers and to impact on their cross-border nationalities and payment of customs duties. Rezek (1995) defined boundary as a line that establishes where the sovereignty of one state ends and that of another state begins.

Boundary and land related conflicts at the grass root especially between states over land, water, oil wells or other important natural resources have continued to be on the increase in Nigeria. It is gradually becoming a recurring and annual phenomenon in Igboland, South-Eastern region of Nigeria. This region comprises of Ebonyi, Abia, Amambra, Enugu and Imo states. Oji (2014) argued that one of the common features of these conflicts is their confrontational and violent dimension which led to the loss of lives and property of people who hitherto lived together in relative harmony. Some of these boundary and land related conflicts includes the Amagu-Adadama boundary conflict between Ebonyi and Cross River states and the Aguleri-Umuleri land conflict between two communities in Anambra state, Nigeria.

Amagu is one of the communities that make up Ikwo local government area of Ebonyi state while Adadama community is found in Abi local government area of Cross River state. The disputed boundary between the two states transverse these two communities. Cross River State is a coastal state in South-South region of Nigeria. It shares boundaries with Benue State to the north, Ebonyi, Enugu and Abia, States to the west, to the east by Cameroon Republic and to the south by Akwa-Ibom and the Atlantic Ocean. It's capital is Calabar. Ebonyi State is an inland south-eastern state of Nigeria, populated primarily by Igbos. Its capital and largest city is Abakaliki. The state which is situated in the South-eastern part of the country shares boundaries with Benue to the north, Enugu to the northwest, Abia to the south-east and Cross River to the east.

The Aguleri and Umuleri people are a sub-group of the Igbo ethnic group who live in two neighbouring communities in Anambra East local government of Anambra State in the Southeastern geo-political region of Nigeria. The two communities are located along the coast of River Anambra. Awka is the capital of Anambra state while Onitsha is the commercial nerve center of the state. Under colonial administration, both communities were administered as part of Onitsha District. Today, they are grouped under the administrative authority of Anambra East Local Government with headquarters in Otuocha, a strip of land owned by Aguleri and Umuleri and situated on the left bank of River Anambra.

Over the years, there has been occasional eruption of violent conflicts between the Amagu-Adadama and Aguleri-Umuleri people. It is the confrontational nature of the conflicts and the associated implications on the education of the female child that motivated this study. The female child in the context of this paper refers to the biological girl up-springs from birth to 18years.

Historical Background of the Amagu-Adadama and Umuleri-Aguleri Conflicts

The boundary conflict between Adadama community in Abi Local Government Area of Cross River State and Amagu Community in Ikwo Local Government Area of Ebonyi state dates back to the 1920s. Prior to the

amalgamation of the Northern and Southern Protectorates in 1914 by Sir Fredrick Lugard, the people of Ikwo in the present Ebonyi State and the people of Agbo in the present Abi Local Government Area of Cross River State, had lived together for several generations. Administratively, the Ikwo Clan and Agbo Clan were part of the old Ogoja Province and the old Afikpo County Council. While the people of Ikwo speak a variant of Ibo dialect known as Wawa or Nteke, the Agbo people on their part speak a variant of Ekoi dialect known as Legbo. The Amagu people have their kinsmen comprising of the Okpitumo, the Alike, the Ohozara, the Onicha in the present Ikwo local government area of Ebonyi State. The Adadama also have their kinsmen comprising of the Ekureku, the Itigidi and the Igbo Imabana, all in the present Abi Local Government Area of Cross River State.

However, in 1926, following skirmishes of disputes over farmland between Amagu and Adadama natives, the District Officer of the then Afikpo District, Mr. G.G. Shute erected concrete pillars to demarcate the boundary between Agbo and Ikwo people; this was referred to as 'the Shute Boundary Pillars'. However, consequent upon urbanization and expansionist drive in the 1980s, the communities began destroying the Shute boundary pillars with each accusing the other of encroachment. The aftermath of this was the protracted conflict and commencement of boundary crises which necessitated several dispute resolution meetings held at various times in Abuja, Calabar and Abakaliki at the instance of the National Boundary Commission (NBC).

Pursuant to these peace moves, Both Local Government Authorities set up a Peace Committee called Adadama-Amagu Development Committee (ADAMADA) in 2001 to maintain peace between the two neighbors. The ADAMADA peace committee under the leadership of the Vice Chairmen of the two local governments supervised the return and re-erection of the boundary Pillars. The re-erected pillars were again destroyed when conflict broke out between the two communities. The National Boundary Commission in 2006 in what it termed "give and take principle" proposed re-demarcation of the boundary. However, this was vehemently rejected by one of the parties. Consequently, the boundary conflict has continued to "die and resurrect".

The Aguleri-Umuleri conflict was principally about ownership of the Otuocha land. Paul (1934, cited in Onwuzurigo, 2008) traced the conflict to 1900 when the British colonial administration revoked the powers and authority of the Royal Niger Company. According to him, The Niger Lands Transfer Ordinance of February 25, 1916 was made to facilitate the transfer of land titles of the Royal Niger Company to the colonial government. Section 2 of the Ordinance transferred the land Umuleri sold to the Royal Niger Company in 1898 to the Governor of Nigeria. This meant that the land became Crown Land. Once again, there emerged different interpretations of the intention and provisions of the Ordinance. Umuleri interpreted the Ordinance as an invitation to exercise its hitherto suspended right of ownership of the land. Aguleri saw the Ordinance as providing it opportunity to reclaim the land it strongly considered as belonging to it. Corroborating this view, Idigo (1990), provided a robust explanation of Aguleri and Umuleri conflicts. He argued that for the conflict to be understood, one must incorporate significant aspects of the forces of migration and rapid urbanization initiated by the activities of European trading companies, Christian missionaries and colonial administrators in the communities in the late nineteenth century epitomized by upheavals, conflicts and colonialism. Idigo gave a historical documentation of the origin of Aguleri-Umuleri and its response to the processes of social change triggered by European intrusion in the affairs of the community. According to Stones (1932:5 cited in Onwuzurigo 2008):

by the beginning of the colonial era, the territory had become a sprawling commercial town. B. G. Stone, Assistant District Officer in Onitsha Province, noted that 'the opportunities for trade have attracted a cosmopolitan crowd to what is known as the waterside town in the Anambra River'.

Chinwuba (1981) focused on the legal tussles and court judgments emanating from the numerous litigations between Aguleri and Umuleri. Fagbemi and Okonkwo (2002) examined recent manifestations of the conflicts in terms of the violation of economic, social and cultural rights of women and children in the course of establishing Nigeria. Contributions of civil society organizations in managing the 1995 and 1999 clashes between Aguleri and Aguleri was the focus of Ibeanu (2003). The growing pecuniary interest in Otuocha land has over the years escalated the conflicts. Reported skirmishes and spasmodic violent confrontation has become consistent pattern of Aguleri and Umuleri relations.

Conceptualizing Education

The Oxford Advanced Learners Dictionary defined education as a process of training and instructing children and young people in schools and colleges which is designed to give knowledge and develop skills. The planned and systematic training giving in an institution of learning is formal education, while informal education is the type of education that is not planned, the training is haphazard and accidental. Whether formal or Informal, education is the process through which individuals are made functional members of their society. Education is one of the fundamental rights of an individual. Article 26 of the Universal Declaration of Human Right which was adopted by the United Nations General Assembly in Dec, 1949 stipulated that:

- ❖ Everyone has the right to education. This shall be free at least in the elementary and primary stages;
- ❖ Elementary education shall be compulsory while technical and professional education shall be made generally available;
- ❖ Higher education shall be equally accessible to all on the basis of merit;
- ❖ Parents have a prior right to choose the kind of education that shall be given to their children (Nwangwu, 1976)

Female Child Education

Female child education is the education given to the girl child between ages birth to 18 years; it covers early childhood (0-5years) primary (6-12 years) and secondary (12-18 years). During this period, the young child is totally under the care of a guardian who is usually an adult or parents. In this period, the female child builds and develops her personality and character. She is very dependent on those she admires through observation, repetition and imitation. Through proper education, the girl child develops her physical, mental, social, spiritual and emotional characteristics necessary for her to properly fit into the society (Uwameiye, 2013)

Implications of Boundary and Land Related Conflicts on Education of the Female Child

The violent confrontations which often accompany the Amagu-Adadama and Aguleri-Umuleri conflicts has immense impacts on the education of the female child. First, it affects her rate of school attendance and enrolment. While the conflict last, movement for the female child is restricted. In some cases, schools are burnt or shut down. This is coupled with some cultural practices like forced marriage, inheritance law, and domestic responsibilities that tend to compete with enrolment and attendance of girls in schools. Second, the loss of lives, destruction of properties and means of livelihood of families brings poverty which affects the education of the female child. During conflict, some families loss the breadwinner of the home. This could be the father or mother. Either way, the female child is affected. If the female child losses her father, she may withdraw from school due to lack of fund while the loss of her mother could entail drop out of school so as to take care of the home. Parents or guardians whose means of livelihood is affected by conflict may find it difficult to meet up with school fees payment and other obligations. Also, at this point, families may decide to send only the male children to school. Third, it affects access to education for the female child. Access implies the availability, convenience and ability to be educated. The violence associated with boundary and land related sometimes force families send their female children to other communities which are considered safe. These female children are made to abandon school to serve as house-helps and baby care-givers (Okeke et al 2008). Finally, the violence associated with boundary and land related conflicts affect the female child mentally and psychologically thus impacts on her performance in school. The WHO (2010) explained that abused girls are more likely to suffer depression, anxiety, psychosomatic symptoms, It further pointed out that violence against the girl child affect their ability to learn or even the willingness to takes part in school activities.

Discourse On Need for Education of the Female Child

Jayinka (2010), aptly captured the need for education of the female child thus “a woman’s inability to read and write could make her to be prone to the misuse of medicine. Her ignorance of healthy living habits and measures to prevent illness also affect her welfare, her family and society in general”. Education enlightens the female child to know her right and become less vulnerable to exploitation. Over the years women in Nigeria have been discriminated against, exploited, violated and denied their right by the society; with education a woman can object to such practices. Also, an educated female child has increased potential for success in the society as well equipped to contribute to the economy of the nation. Females have excelled in various aspect of their chosen careers due to education.

Education increases female productivity and enables her to contribute to her family income. It empowers women to participate in politics as voters and contestants, which thus give them opportunity to partake in vital decision, that affect their lives. Education of a female child has ripple effect as it is said that “when you educate a woman, you educate a nation”.

Conclusion

Violent conflict is a wind that blows no one any good. When it comes, it leaves behind tears, sorrows, pains and blood. Boundary and land-related conflicts is an obstacle to the education, peace, progress and happiness of the female child. It is a threat to the realization and manifestation of the potentials of the female child. Therefore, efforts should be made prevent the outbreak of boundary and land-related conflicts so as to checkmate its impacts on the education of the female child. Finally, where such violent conflicts cannot be prevented, the female child should be protected from it.

Recommendations

In order to reverse the negative impacts of violent boundary and land-related conflicts against the female child and improve on the education of the girl child in Nigeria, the following recommendations have been suggested:

1. Government through the relevant agencies should ensure that conflicts are not allowed to degenerate into violent confrontations.
2. Non-governmental organizations, traditional rulers and government should organize and support campaigns, seminars and workshop to sensitize people against using violence to settle scores
3. Families and government should make education of the female child a priority.
4. Government should enact and and/or reinforce penal, civil, labor and administrative sanctions in legislations to punish and redress, any act of violence done to women and girls, whether during conflict or at home, workplace, community or society.
5. Established cases of deliberate attempts to deny the female child education through cultural practices should be sanctioned by the government.

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