

Crisis and Crisis Management in the Legislature: the Rivers State House of Assembly Experience, 2011 - 2015

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Abstract

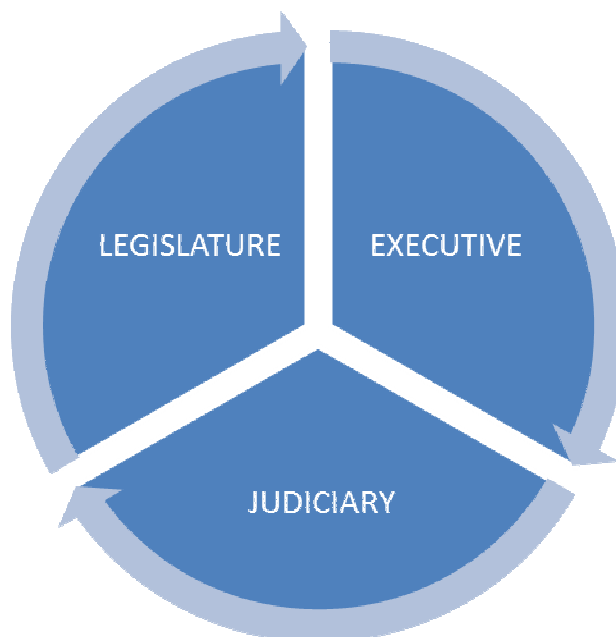
The legislature is an assemblage of the representatives of the people, elected under a legal framework to make laws for the good governance of the State. The Legislature like every other institution of the State hardly functions without crisis. Crisis is a change, which may be sudden or which may take some time to evolve, that results in an urgent problem that must be addressed immediately. Although crisis events are unpredictable, they are not always unexpected. Crisis management is the process of identifying a potential issue or crisis and coordinating organisational or inter-organisational response as necessary to resolve the crisis. The methodology for this study is qualitative, using documentary evidence and the ex-post-facto research design in terms of reviewing necessary literature. The scope of this study is the Rivers State House of Assembly, 2011-2015. Furthermore, we utilized the Frustration – Aggression Theory (F- A) as a framework of analysis. The study revealed two paradigms in the crisis that engulf the Rivers State House of Assembly in the period under review. The study recommends full autonomy of the Legislature, respect for rule of law and House Rules, continuous training, reorientation of Members and Staff, making parliamentary offices as part - time and less attractive as well as institutional strengthening as the prospects for political stability in the Legislature.

INTRODUCTION

As noted by Ekegwe, (2015,24), political power is that particular graduation of this natural, neutral power which enables man to recognize his society and act in concert with others the better for each person to fulfill herself or himself. The fulfillment of this in a liberal society is anchored on liberal democracy.

Democracy functions effectively where there is an elected body saddled with Law making, often referred to as the Legislature or Parliament, an Executive that implements the Law made by the Legislature and a Judiciary that interprets the Law, when in breach. These arms of government are as represented in the segmented cycle below.

Fig.1: Segmented cycle indicating the three organs of government



Governance entails the process of making decisions and implementing them based on different considerations such as popular participation, respect for the rule of law, observance of human rights, transparency, free access to information, prompt responses to human needs, accommodation of diverse interests,

equity, inclusiveness, effective results and accountability (UNICEF, 2002). Failure to adhere to these considerations usually results in crisis of governance as the political situations in many African countries demonstrate. The Nigerian experience of crisis of governance can be examined from different perspectives with reference to a number of issues such as colonialism, decolonization, constitutional development, political instability and reforms.

Sections 4(1) and 4(7) of the 1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria provide for the law making function of the legislature at both the Federal and State levels (FGN, 1999). Consequently, there is a bi-cameral National Assembly made up of the Senate and House of Representatives at the Federal level, and the 36 unicameral State Houses of Assembly, all legislating for peace, order and good governance of the Federation and States respectively (Egobueze, 2013:1). Since the return to democracy in Nigeria in 1999, four Legislative Assemblies have been elected at both the Federal and State levels. These are 1999-2003, 2003-2007, 2007-2011 and 2011-2015. Most of the Legislative chambers at the National and State levels have witnessed one form of crisis and or conflict or the other. Each of these crisis or conflict were propelled by either internal or external or a combination of these factors.

This study attempts to explore the reasons, types, dimensions, management and effects of crisis in the Legislature, especially, the Seventh Assembly of the Rivers State House of Assembly, 2011 -2015.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

In this research, we are adopting the frustration aggression Theory (F – A) as our conceptual framework. In psychology, frustration is a common emotional response to opposition. It arises from the perceived resistance to the fulfilment of individual will. The greater the obstruction, and the greater the will, the more the frustration is likely to be. Aggression is overt, often harmful, social interaction with the intention of inflicting damage or other unpleasantness upon another individual. In humans, frustration due to blocked goals can cause aggression. It is an action with the intent to harm, and can be physical and non-physical (Baron, & Richardson, 1994). The frustration-aggression hypothesis attempts to explain why people scapegoat. It attempts to give an explanation as to the cause of violence. In 1939, Dollard, Doob, Miller, Mowrer, and Sears published a monograph on aggression in which they presented what has come to be known as the frustration-aggression hypothesis (F-A). In this theory, Dollard and *et al*, (Ibid) and Mbah, (2014:127) opine that frustration causes aggression, but when the source of the frustration cannot be challenged, the aggression gets displaced onto an innocent target.

The frustration-aggression theory principally argues that social movements occur when frustration leads to collective, often aggressive behaviour. Frustration has a variety of sources and can take two forms. First, it can be absolute, which happens when people do not have enough to survive, and second, it can be relative, which happens when people have enough to survive but have less than those around them.

The choice of this theory is anchored on the underpinning that the crisis that confronted the 7th Assembly of the Rivers State House of Assembly was predicated on the 2015 Project. It was a battle over the control of economic and political powers in the State which is the engine room for the propagation of the 2015 agenda. The principal actors in the crisis are the Presidency, Governor of Rivers State, Members of the Rivers State House of Assembly, some elites from Rivers State extraction, the PDP, State Security apparatus, especially, the men of the Nigeria Police Force. These men were used by the ruling party to suppress and propagate their will, resisting the above culminate to violence. Poverty and unemployment have therefore served as nursery bed for much violence in Nigeria, especially the Rivers State House of Assembly crisis, because unemployed persons were hired for little stipends for political advantage of the political gladiators. The country now has a reservoir of poor people who are determined to sell their conscience at the altar of making money through illegal sources. Serving as political thugs to acquire political power at all cost, provides the key to the heavens' gate, thus, they serve as mercenary fighters, bunkers, kidnappers and electoral thugs. What this means theoretically is that frustration caused by poverty and unemployment increase the number of people who are prepared to unleash aggression against perceived enemies, and they are ready to kill or be killed for a given course at token benefit. This explains why all crises that ever occurred in Rivers State in particular and Nigeria at large have a large turnout of people (including the under-aged) as fighters.

In conclusion, while the Rivers State Governor and Members of the Rivers State House of Assembly loyal to him felt aggrieved by the taking away of the party structure from the Governor as a result of his perceived none support for Mr. President in his 2015 Presidential bid through court, frustrated at this, the Governor, through the Assembly suspended the democratically elected Obio – Akpor Local Government Council, the perceived conduit for the support of the PDP in the State. Aggrieved by this, the Presidency, acting through the Minister for State – Education, the PDP and five Members of the House loyal to the Minister, then attempted to impeach the House Leadership, The removal of the Speaker and the House Officer was rumour as a precursor for the impeachment of the Governor. Thus, the above explanation justifies our choice of this theory.

CONCEPTUAL CLARIFICATION OF TERMS:

Crisis:

A crisis is a change, which may be sudden or which may take some time to evolve, that results in an urgent problem that must be addressed immediately. Three elements are common to a crisis: These are threat to the organization, surprise, and a short decision time – line.

Crisis Management:

Crisis management is the process by which an organization deals with a major event that threatens to harm the organization, its stakeholders, or the general public. Crisis management includes action in the following areas: Crisis prevention, crisis assessment, crisis handling and crisis termination. The aim of crisis management is to be well prepared for crisis, ensure a rapid and adequate response to the crisis, maintaining clear lines of reporting and communication in the event of crisis and agreeing rules for crisis termination.

The Legislature:

The legislature is an assemblage of the representatives of the people, elected under a legal framework to make laws for the good governance of the State. Through legislation, the Legislature controls all economic, social and political activities of the State. It also scrutinizes the policies of the Executive and provides the framework for the Judiciary to effectively discharge its function. The Legislature is “the institutional body responsible for making laws for a nation and one through which the collective will of the people or part of it is articulated, expressed and implemented.

HISTORICAL TRAJECTORY OF THE RIVERS STATE HOUSE OF ASSEMBLY

The Rivers State House of Assembly is the Legislative arm of the Government of Rivers State, Nigeria. It is a unicameral Legislature with thirty- two Members representing thirty-two State Constituencies (Egobueze, 2012:2). The Rivers State House of Assembly like other legislatures world over has two structures – the political leadership and the bureaucracy. While the Speaker of the House heads the political leadership, while the Clerk of the House heads the bureaucracy. The Clerk is assisted by the Deputy Clerk who heads the Legislative Department, Section 93 of the 1999 Constitution as amended provides for the office of the Clerk and such other Staff and it states that:

There shall be a Clerk to a House of Assembly and such other staff as may be prescribed by a Law enacted by the House of Assembly, and the method of appointment of the Clerk and other staff of the House shall be as prescribed by that Law.

The House has had a chequered history. The first Assembly was inaugurated on 1979 with forty two Members. This Assembly lasted till 1983 when its live span ended. The Second Assembly commenced full legislative assignment on October, 1983 with about forty two Members, and ended its life span abruptly on December 31st after a military interregnum led by General Muhammad Buhari. The third Assembly came into being in 1990 -1993 through a diarchic structure at the centre, and presidential system at the Sub- national level. This Assembly was again sacked by General Ibrahim Babangida. The fourth and Fifth Assembly were inaugurated on May, 1999 and May, 2003 respectively. Unlike the other Assemblies that predated it, this Assembly had thirty two Members; this was as a result of the creation of Bayelsa State out of the present Rivers State. The thirty two State Constituencies have continued to exist till date. The Sixth Assembly, of the Rivers State House of Assembly was inaugurated on 30th May, 2007, while the Seventh Assembly was which our case study is, was enthroned on May. Like other Houses since after the creation of Bayelsa State, This House has 32 Members returned as elected.

The House in the Second Republic was controlled by two parties, viz, National Party of Nigeria (NPN), Nigerian Peoples Party (NPP) he Peoples Democratic Party (PDP), All Peoples Party (APP), later All Nigerian Peoples Party (ANPP) and Alliance Democracy (AD), while all the others have had only members of the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) without an opposition party member in the House. However, the crisis of the 9th July, 2013 led to the division and the disintegration of the robust relationship that once flourished in the House, the umbilical- cord was separated between the mother and child, feud ensued mother. The House currently has the following Officers: the Speaker, Deputy Speaker, House Leader, Deputy House Leader, House Whip and Deputy House Whip. Worthy to note is that all other Members of the House are Chairmen of Committees and each of them is a member of not less than four Committees. Finally, there is an effective bureaucracy headed by the Clerk, who is the Accounting Officer House.

The legislature is the yardstick for measuring the views of the people in a democracy. It is also the watch dog of public funds in that it not only appropriates for the State but scrutinizes how the funds so appropriated are spent. Finally, the legislature is constitutionally mandated to direct investigations into the conduct of the affairs of State, institutions, organizations and individuals within the State. In other words, the legislature has the right to summon any public or private organization or individual to appear before it to answer questions based on petitions received and or motions made. The Rivers State House of Assembly as a legislative

body upholds these mandates. The tripartite functions of the legislature namely, Representation, Legislation and Oversight are central to this research because they manifest in the intervention of the legislature in conflict management.

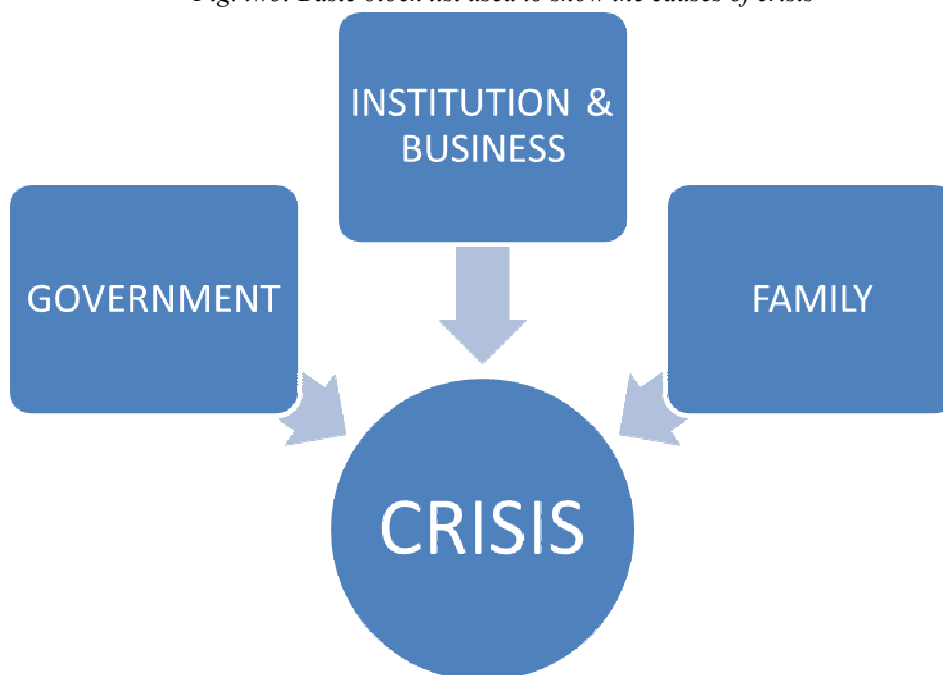
TYPES OF CRISIS:

Crisis may assume one or some of the following forms:

1. Natural disaster
2. Technological crises
3. Confrontation
4. Malevolence
5. Organizational Misdeeds
6. Workplace Violence
7. Rumours
8. Terrorist attacks/man-made disaster

These crises may affect one or all of the following:

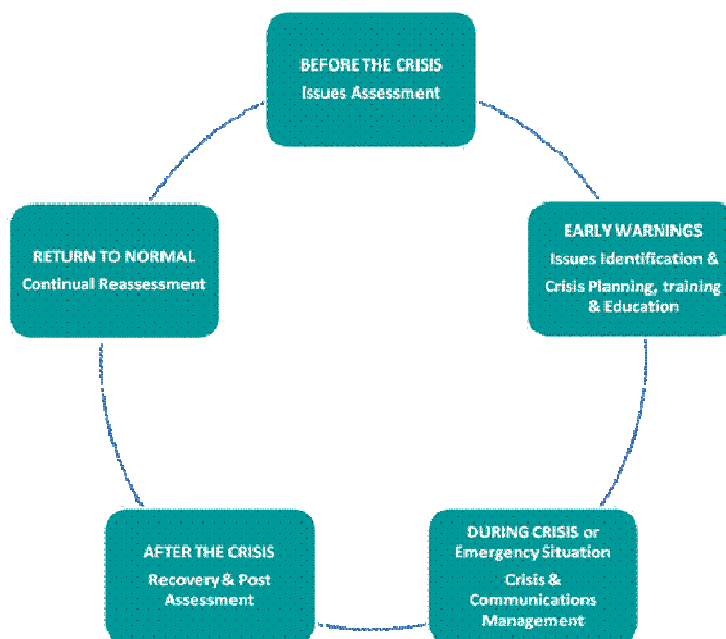
Fig. two: Basic block list used to show the causes of crisis



Crisis could take the following stages;

1. Before the crisis
2. Early warning (Triggering event)
3. During Crisis (Planning and preparation)
4. After Crisis (Assessment and Modification)
5. Resolution (Return to normalcy)

Fig. 3: Steps in crisis prevention



Bernstein Jonathan, a Management expert identifies ten steps to crisis prevention, these are:

1. Reverse-engineer your industry's crises
2. Conduct a Vulnerability Audit
3. Engage in crisis planning and training
4. Collect Intelligence
5. Optimize physical systems for crisis prevention and response
6. Make sure you can talk to each other during a crisis
7. Create your crisis response teams by capability, not just by position
8. Backup, backup, backup
9. Ensure that all employees' crisis-related knowledge and skills remain current
10. Regroup regularly to reverse-engineer, self-audit and adapt plans accordingly

Strategies for crisis prevention

- 1 Identify and Isolate the Issue – This allows one to step back and assess the situation.
 - 2 React quickly – Communicate often – timing is critical. No one wants to wait for information in the 24-hour news world we live in.
 - 3 Take control and set the agenda – in other words tell your own story. Be the first to set the record straight.
 - 4 Hire a professional – the issue won't simply go away – Enough said.
 - 5 Make changes, communicate what they are – If changes are made such as an improvement in product design, new rules or employee changes – talk about them. Everyone likes to know that action was taken to fix a situation.
 - 6 Reflect, Review & Resolve – Take a moment to think about what has happened. Review what worked and what did not and how the crisis would be addressed going forward.
- Lastly, plan to proactively make an impact.

Issues that may trigger crisis in the Legislature

Crisis and Conflict have remained dominant features of modern democracies. This as a result of lack of service delivery by the State to the citizens, and unhealthy rivalry of the ruling elites for access to political and economic power as well as wide spread corruption. Nations are almost sliding to self destruction as a result of crisis and conflicts. Contributing to the fore - going, USAID argues that:

Civil' conflict has become the dominant mode of violence in the post-Cold War era. In 2001, all but one of the world's wars was internal, and widespread, deadly violence now affects nearly 60 percent of the countries of the world. While conflict can be an inherent and legitimate part of social and political life, in many places the costs and consequences of conflict, crisis, and instability have become unacceptably high (USAID,1997).

Since independent till date, contemporary Nigeria has become a hot bed for crises. These crises which most often result into conflicts orchestrated by political elites and their allies have been for selfish realization of regional sentimentalism, ethnic chauvinism, religious bigotry, economic materialism and political domination of the State (Egobueze).

Within a democratic system for instance, crisis refers to those disputes that cannot be resolved

according to the rules of the democratic game. Democratic crisis resolution consists of an application of the existing rules of the democratic game, either through the clarification, interpretation and enforcement of these rules and policies by the existing organs of government, or through a process of peaceful discussions and consensus-building among different stakeholders around an outcome that is acceptable to all parties concerned. If this is not possible, policy-making bodies can amend the rules of the game in an attempt to mobilize the support of the main stakeholders to the crisis. In contrast to democratic political crisis management, crisis management in authoritarian or totalitarian states frequently comprise a reliance on more unilateral, top-down enforcement actions by the bureaucracy, police or military forces, rather than attempts to mobilize popular support and consent for a specific outcome.

Democracy is based on the notion that a people should be self-governing and that the representatives of the people should be held accountable for their actions by the people. The legislature unquestionably occupies the most important place as it formulates and expresses the will of the state. The Legislature, which represents the people and acts as their agent, is therefore at the core of the Western democratic tradition. Although the Legislature is known primarily as a lawmaking body, it is important to recognize that this institution has many other important responsibilities. The foremost function of the Legislature is law making, which is achieved through representation. Landell-Mill, & Ismail, (1992) states that ‘in a representative democracy, the Legislature acts as the eyes, ears, and voice of the people’. Representation provides the basis for legislative behaviour. In the capacity of representatives, Legislators participate in law-making and other Legislative business and the represented generally accept legislative decisions as authoritative (Egobueze, 2012, 4). As the elected representatives of the people, Legislators provide legitimacy to the government. In the many decades of military rule in Nigeria, the Legislature was completely sacked, while the Executive and Judicial institutions were still functional, this accounts for while the Legislature is regarded as the symbol of democracy. Certain legislative actions are determined by the specific interest of the Legislators.

Every organization, be it public or private, agrees and or disagrees on issues. These agreement or disagreement could be intra or inter and internal or external. The Legislature is no exception. The Legislature as noted earlier is an Assemblage of persons with diversity in culture, historical antecedents, economic strata, religious inclination, amongst others. Since the Legislature is an arena for interest articulation and aggregation, the prevalent of crisis therefore is not an utopia. Crisis would arise in course of the defence of the specific interest of the Member(s). This in a long way may affect their voting patterns.

Some issues that may ignite crises in the Legislature are as follows:

- ❖ Leadership
- ❖ Corruption
- ❖ Political affiliation
- ❖ Greed and selfishness
- ❖ Societal influence
- ❖ Unbridled ambition
- ❖ Impunity of Members
- ❖ Independence of the Legislature
- ❖ Management / Staff relations
- ❖ Leadership/ Management relations
- ❖ Disrespect to the House Rules, and absence of the Rule of Law
- ❖ Ignorance

ISSUES IN THE RIVERS STATE HOUSE OF ASSEMBLY CRISIS, 2011 – 2015

It started slowly, but only a very few vicious persons took notice. Others may not have understood the context, dynamics, implications and its eventual trajectory. From the drips of 6th May, 2013, when some of the Law makers brought militants that disrupted the House Sitting, acting on the rumour, that the five of them would be suspended by the House, it began to flow faster. It becomes a tornado of sorts, sweeping everything along its path to perdition and doom. At the national level, from the mathematics of the historic 16 being greater than 19 as witnessed in the sham and shameful election into the Chairmanship of the Nigeria Governors’ Forum, it permeated into the madness of five being greater than twenty – seven. This was an epic battle over the impeachment of the Speaker of the Rivers State House of Assembly, Rt. Hon. Otelemaba Daniel, as a fore runner for the eventual impeachment of the Governor of Rivers State, His Excellency, Rt. Hon. Chibuike, Rotimi Amaechi. The attempt by the five Law Makers is a reminiscence of the Fourth Assembly and Fifth Assemblies in Nigeria, where Houses of Assembly without forming the required two-third quorum were used by the Presidency, Governors, Chairmen of Councils and ‘Godfathers’ to remove Governor, Deputy Governors, House Leaderships and Council Leadership. This catastrophic ill wind blew off Governors Alamiesima of Bayelsa, Peter Obi of Anambra, Joshua Dariye of Plateau, Ladoja of Oyo, Ayodele Fayosie of Ekiti ana scores of Deputy Governors, Speakers and other House Officers. The macabre dance, ignited the interest of the Judiciary at a time, and some

of those Governors regained their mandates from the courts. This disgraceful events that characterized our nascent democracy at the time, are beginning to manifest in different shapes and scales in different States of the Federation, specifically, Ekiti State, where only seven Law Makers sacked the rest of their colleagues and performed very significant functions like the passage of the State Appropriation Bill, clearing of Commissioner nominees , Edo, amongst others.

Commenting on the major cause of the crisis in Rivers State, Hon. Dakuku Peterside, the standard flag bearer of All Peoples Congress (APC) in the Governorship election in 2015 general election states:

A party congress was conducted peacefully in March 2012. Nobody raised issues until December 2012 when the interest of certain elements in the Presidency converged with certain elements in Rivers State who are incurably ungrateful and who do not fear God. Then, some characters in the judiciary gave themselves to be used and a controversial judgement surfaced. An Abuja High Court gave judgement in an issue it has no business with. One Felix Obuah who never participated in any of the party congress processes started parading himself as Chairman of PDP, Rivers State. The same Felix Obuah has gone about making inflammatory remarks. If history teaches any lesson, it is that these ones too will be consigned to the dust bin of history very soon. I have watched how a certain colleague of mine from Rivers State sold his conscience and tried helplessly to defend the indefensible on television to prove that the INEC monitored single PDP congress in Rivers State produced any other person other than Chief G. U. Ake as state Chairman of the party. All members of PDP in Rivers State know who their leaders are and know who the charlatans are. Rivers people are more intelligent than the ignorance been displayed by the characters parading themselves as officials of PDP in the State. Rivers people know them and know their history (ThisDay).

Further to the above, Peterside asserts:

The new leadership of the PDP in Rivers State, recently issued a statement suspending elected members of the State House of Assembly and threatened to work towards impeachment of Governor Chibuike Amaechi..... It is laughable. (ThisDay).

In a demonstration of the prevailing madness that characterize bourgeois politics in Nigeria, the attempt by five lawmakers to impeach the Rivers State Governor, Rotimi Amaechi set in motion series of drama of infamy in the State. Another angle to the crisis was the attempt by the Rivers State Government to seize control of the Obio/Akpor Local Government that was in the hands of anti-Amaechi forces. The Governor using the State Legislature, suspended a democratically elected Council.

This scenario, seen by many working class elements is the usual in-fighting between the Rivers ruling elite, which does not have any link with the urgent need for the socio-economic transformation of the state. The struggle between Amaechi and the anti-Amaechi forces is cantered on who controls political power come 2015 in Rivers State and to some extent in 2015 general election. Governor Amaechi is not in the good books of the Presidency and top Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) members, this created the factionalization of the PDP at the National Level, especially in Rivers State and fuelled the crisis in Rivers State House of Assembly which eventually led to the exit of the Governor and twenty five Members of the Rivers State House of Assembly from the PDP to the All Progressives Congress (APC).

To worsen matters, the Rivers State Commissioner of Police, Joseph Mbu, constituted himself into an alternative governor of the state, refusing to perform his duties, displaying sheer arrogance, crudity, insubordination and a lack of respect for duly constituted authority. Under the watchful eyes of this super policeman, mayhem was unleashed in the State House of Assembly and he confessed to being non-challant about a request to provide security for the lawmakers to sit and perform their statutory functions until the Brigade Commander of the 2 Amphibious Brigade in Port Harcourt pleaded with him to do so. Everyone can see the quality of the security a police commissioner provided – the type that enabled thugs and all manner of miscreants to gain access into the hallowed chambers of the House fully armed with various weapons, including guns, despite the fact that Mbu's men were supposedly searching everyone going into the premises (Eze,2014)

The Commissioner of Police was not apologetic for his infamous role, his demeanour and utterances showed he would do more, if the opportunity arose again. Incidentally, the then Inspector-General of Police, instead of redeploying him from the Rivers State simply left him there in breach of the Resolution of the bi-cameral National Assembly and set up a team to investigate the circumstances surrounding the mayhem. The Senate Committee on States and Local Government in its Report on the crisis in Rivers State noted; 'his relationship with the governor has broken down irretrievably' (NASS, 2013).

The storm in the Rivers State House of Assembly reverberated nationwide on 10th July, 2013 as the National Assembly, the ruling People's Democratic Party (PDP), opposition parties and Nigeria Police Force

(NPF) all waded into the crisis, played the blame game, with some calling for the removal of the state's Commissioner of Police (CP), Mr. Joseph Mbu (ThisDay). The House of Representative on 10th July, 2013 invoked Section 11(4) of the constitution (NASS, 2013), which empowers the National Assembly to take over the functions of any State Legislature that is unable to perform its constitutional functions due to a breakdown of law and order. However, the invocation of Section 11(4) of the constitution would only have effect if the Senate concurs with the House on the matter.

In similitude with the House of Representatives, Senate President David Mark, who described the festering crisis in the state as an embarrassment to the entire country, added that the situation was totally unacceptable and condemnable. In the resolutions, the Senate condemned in strong terms the crisis in Rivers State, which it said "portends danger for our democracy". It also mandated its committee on State and Local Governments to investigate the immediate and remote causes of the crisis and report back to the upper chamber within one week. The Senate also resolved that in the interim, all parties to the crisis should maintain the status quo and refrain from acts capable of jeopardizing peace in Rivers State, adding that the Senate would uphold the constitution at all times (NASS, 2013). Finally, the Senate Committee sent on fact finding mission to Rivers State, laid its Report on the Table on 20th July, 2013. Part of the findings of the Committee as contained in its Votes and Proceedings read:

The crisis at the Rivers State House of Assembly on July 9, 2013, was the expression of deep-rooted political crisis occasioned by the alleged highhandedness of Rivers State Governor Rotimi Amaechi and the perceived undue interference with the political and security structure of the State by President Goodluck Jonathan, his wife Patience and the national hierarchy of the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP), a Senate report considered and adopted at plenary declared yesterday. (Votes and Proceedings, 2013)

The Senate accordingly concurred with the position of the House of Representatives and invoked Section 11 (4) which states inter alia:

At any time when any House of Assembly of a State is unable to perform its functions by reason of the situation prevailing in that State, the National Assembly may make such laws for the peace, order and good government of that State with respect to matters on which a House of Assembly may make laws as may appear to the National Assembly to be necessary or expedient until such time as the House of Assembly is able to resume its functions; and any such laws enacted by the National Assembly pursuant to this section shall have effect as if they were laws enacted by the House of Assembly of the State:

Provided that nothing in this section shall be construed as conferring on the National Assembly power to remove the Governor or the Deputy Governor of the State from office (1999 Constitution)

Since the 9th of July, 2013, the complex of the Rivers State House of Assembly had been under lock and key, with the presence of Mobile Police – men and two armoured carriers position on the front of the gate. The underpinning effect of this is, the symbol of democracy had been desecrated. This was an attempt to truncate legislative process, stiffen democracy and cause economic hardship on the citizen in order to ignite uprising by the people, which in the final analysis may lead to the declaration of a emergency rule in the whole State.

However, a Federal High Court in Abuja presided over by Justice Ahmed Mohammed, nullified the takeover of the functions of the Rivers State House of Assembly by the National Assembly. This order precipitated and exacerbated the frontiers of the crisis as the pro – Amaechi Law Maker (the 26 at this time), made effort to go back to commence their Legislative duties. This effort was met with strong opposition by the other six Law makers loyal to the PDP and the Abuja Government. The 26 Law – makers and their supporters were tear – gassed and hindered from taken possession of the House by the Police.

Consequently, the 26 Law – maker on 6th January, 2014, vide a Motion by the Deputy House Leader met at the Old Auditorium, Government House and designated the building as its temporary Chamber. Part of the text of the motion reads thus:

Mr. Speaker and my colleagues, history would not prove me wrong, as I remember with nostalgia; the crisis that engulfed the House on the 9th of July, 2013. The crisis left the Chamber of our House damaged. Furthermore, considering the fact, that the damage left the Chamber and indeed the Complex inhabitable till proper renovation work is done and in view of the fact, that the conduct of Legislative business in such a Chamber may put the lives of the Hon. Members and Staff in jeopardy, this Honourable House is invited to resolve as follows:

1. That the old Auditorium of Government House, Port Harcourt be designated as the temporary Chamber of the House till such a time that the renovation work on the Chamber of Rivers State House of Assembly is concluded by the Executive.
2. And any other order this august House may deem necessary (RVHA, 2014)

This action was followed by a white paper released by the Rivers State Government, formally designating the Auditorium as the temporary chamber of the House. The Legislature had continued to function there till date.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR CRISIS MANAGEMENT IN THE LEGISLATURE

It is essential to state that the Executive has always been a dominant player in crisis and conflict management. However, the role of the Legislature has most often been considered tangential and assumed to be incidental, often limited to enactment of legislations to give effect to negotiated agreements or curb the proliferation of conflicts and conflicts. This is assumed to be the case for both international and domestic conflicts. In international conflicts for instance, the Executive arm of government takes the lead in foreign policy, especially in Treaty making and implementation. Although in some jurisdictions like Nigeria, the Legislature is required to domesticate international Treaties before they come into effect, in reality, once Treaties have been entered into, their domestication becomes almost a routine exercise (Egobueze, 2011). On the other hand, in domestic conflicts, it is assumed that the Executive and Judiciary take the lead. This is so for a number of reasons; first, it is principally in the process of implementing government policies that most domestic conflicts arise and the Executive arm, as the policy implementation arm of government, is at the fore of managing these conflicts. Secondly, as the arm of government which principally incarnates the capacity and authority of the state, the Executive arm has responsibility to manage crisis and conflicts, create political order and stability. Thirdly, the Judiciary is central to conflict management because of its role as the interpreter of policies and legislation. Finally, the role of the Legislative arm in crisis and conflict resolution is subdued because as a body, it incarnates the diversities of society and it is precisely such diversities that create the fault lines of conflicts in the first place. Some scholars however argue that:

Recognizing the minimal role played by most legislatures in the lawmaking and policy processes, scholars increasingly have attempted to account for the prevalence, persistence, and apparent regenerative capacity of legislative institutions in terms of their putative contributions to political stability. The argument usually advanced is that by providing an institutional forum for the representation of societal diversity and the expression of dissent, legislatures contribute to the integration of society and the legitimating of both government and regime. In so doing, legislatures are credited with reducing levels of political conflict, rendering conflict more manageable, and mitigating the effects of conflict on government and regime (Mishler & Hildreth, 1984)

In support of the above school of thought, Loewenberg and Patterson are careful to point out that:

Legislatures are not the only or even the most important institutions that perform these functions. They also note that some legislatures perform these functions better than others and that in some circumstances legislatures may even exacerbate political conflict and undermine stability. Nevertheless, they conclude that when political leaders collectively deliberate on political issues in public, that they do so, how they do so, and to what effect they do so have profound consequences for the survival of political system (Loewenberg & Patterson, 1979)

In countries divided by conflicts, and where the management of conflicts by the executive and judicial branches of government have been ineffective, there is an urgent need for reconciliation to enable all communities to work together towards a common vision of a peaceful future. The Legislature can exercise a leadership role in a broad reconciliation process by building relationships across party lines and by bringing to bear its oversight functions. Also, they can use their legislative role to promote reconciliation, for example by drafting laws that address grievances in representation (e.g. electoral or constitutional reforms), human rights legislation or minority rights legislation that lessens animosities between communities. By participating in the legislative process in a spirit of co-operation to produce such laws – and by strengthening judicial independence to support their implementation – parliaments can play a key role in supporting conflict prevention. In all, the role of the legislature in conflict management could be linked to the concept of Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR).

While the full application of the Principle of Separation of Power is in breach in all democracies around the world, due to the increasing involvement of the arms of government in the maintenance of political order, there is therefore interpenetration of governmental powers for the guarantee of good governance, this underscores the relevance of the Legislature in crisis and conflict management, an arena believed to be the exclusive reserve of the Executive and the Judiciary. While, the Legislature has been successful in the management external crisis and conflicts, the Chambers have been epic centres of internal crisis and conflict.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR STABILITY

The following are recommended for crisis management in the Legislature.

- ❖ Independence of the Legislature
- ❖ Respect for the House rule and the rule of Law
- ❖ Transparency and accountability of Members and Staff of the Parliament
- ❖ Transparency of the House Leadership
- ❖ Training and retraining of Members and Staff of the Houses emerging trends in the Legislature
- ❖ Informal meetings
- ❖ Strengthening of the House Committee on ethics and privileges
- ❖ Individual and Party discipline
- ❖ Regular interface with the Civil Society Organizations and the Press
- ❖ Respect for due – process

CONCLUSION

The crisis that engulfed the Seventh Assembly of the Rivers State House of Assembly 2011 – 2015 was predicated on political adventualism for the economic exploitation of the people by the political gladiators. It was a crisis of interest, by the ruling elites, for the control of the political machinery of the State in readiness for the 2015 general election by some political actors. As observed, the pre, during and post election events in the State are indicative of the political cum economic underpinnings of the crisis. The crisis was majorly externally induced, which to all intents and purposes is an infraction on the independence of the legislature, thus, a threat to the principle of separation of power in particular and democracy at large. As noted by Alapiki, (2015,27), ‘the culture of impunity became the dominant political culture in military politics and government in Nigeria’ the events of 9th, July, 2015, was a reminiscence of that. The Legislature must stand firm in order to shed off the ill wind of adversity that are ready to subvert its cohesion. A house divided against itself, cannot stand, therefore, the aggregation of interest of Members by themselves is *conditio sini qua non* for stability.

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