

The Impact and Challenges of Crises in Ebiraland Since 1999

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Abstract

It is not an exaggeration to say that crisis of any kind in any given society is full of iniquities. Its anti-social posture causes disorder. The incessant nature of crises experienced in Ebiraland since 1999, no doubt, had left its negative mark on the people and the land. The causes cut across her socio-cultural, political and economic aspects and defied all efforts at containing it. The impact on the people and the land are incalculable and immeasurable. The challenges created require serious efforts to meet. One of such is the issue of political and traditional leadership that will have the competency of leading Ebiraland to greater height. This paper is therefore structured to examine the impact and challenges of the crises on Ebiraland with emphasis on the socio-cultural, political and economic aspects of Ebira people. It will also review the efforts made at containing the various waves of the crises that failed to achieve success. Furthermore, it critically discussed these problem areas and challenges posed to all Anebira (Ebiras), because they have not been comprehensively articulated in a scholarly manner.

Key words: Impact, Challenges, Crises, Ebiraland

Introduction

The concept of crises has always been regarded as a negative social phenomenon that is multi-dimensional. Crisis is an action that leads to mutual mistrust, division of relations and or hostility among groups in apparently competitive interaction within a given society. This can arise from explosion of identity as groups begin to ask for greater participation and rights. The derogatory terminologies of crises are endless and this goes to affirm its iniquity and anti-social posture because it causes disorder. It is in the light of the above that Ebiraland is today haunted by the phenomenon of incessant crises that have prevented the people from harnessing their ideas and potentials that would have moved them to greater height in terms of general development.

On the eve of the crises (1989-1999) the socio-cultural, political and economic life of Ebira People witnessed tremendous changes that it impacted so much on their traditional institutions. These transformations cut across urban growth, education, health care services, commerce, finance, civil service, including private sector and the population growth with its attendant consequences such as unemployment and insecurity. However,

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partisan politics, religious fanaticism and clannish chauvinism have continued to threaten the peace, stability and progress of a hitherto cohesive Ebiraland.

Apart from clannish sentiment which has become an inescapable feature of Ebara socio-political life, the structural imbalance of the Kogi State Government and bad governance have resulted in the regeneration of crises and violence in Ebiraland. The government lip service to the general security of the Kogi Central Senatorial District and massive youth unemployment helped to escalate crises in Ebiraland. The Ebara militants were well organized in terms of recruitment, weaponry, tactics, strategies, logistics and supplies, propaganda machineries in both specific and general terms. They also used designated sites as hideouts known as "Barracks" to unleash terror on their victims. These boys were also alleged to have indulged in drug abuse and addictions. This is called "solution" which makes them temporarily mad and when in this condition human life becomes nothing. The crises that engulfed all the five districts of Ebiraland, although at different times, have been described as horrendous, because it appears to have defied all forms and methods of containment, until the intervention of the Joint Task Force/Army Task Force that eventually helped to put checks on the insurgency in Ebiraland.

Scholarly works about the various forms of crises abound in Nigeria; none focuses on the crises in Ebiraland before the period of this study. The incessant nature of Ebara crises have created serious impact and challenges which no literature has captured.

This has created a gap which this study intends to fill. Beyond that, the study intends to achieve the following aims and objectives:

- * To examine the socio-political and economic impact of the crises in Ebiraland.
- * To assess the challenges created by the crises for the people.
- * To examine the various efforts at crisis management and why they failed.

This study covers the period 1999-2012. The period is politically significant in Nigeria and witnessed a radical departure from the previous mode of conflicts in Ebiraland. This made interviews and other assessments difficult. Despite the difficulties, enough information was gathered upon which this study is based. Furthermore, this work examines the many variables that have contributed to the incessant crises in Ebiraland of Kogi State. It equally assesses the impact and challenges created by the crises on the people of Ebiraland.

The work relied on primary and secondary sources. Primary sources were collected through oral interviews mostly with elders, youth leaders, victims of the crises, observers, clan heads, title heads, politicians, security agents, religious clerics, government functionaries, etc individually and in group using guided questions and structured questionnaire. The proceedings of the interviews were recorded in memory cards and in long notebooks. Unpublished panel reports and official government documents served also as primary sources. Published books, articles, magazines, newspapers, unpublished theses and other relevant materials served as secondary

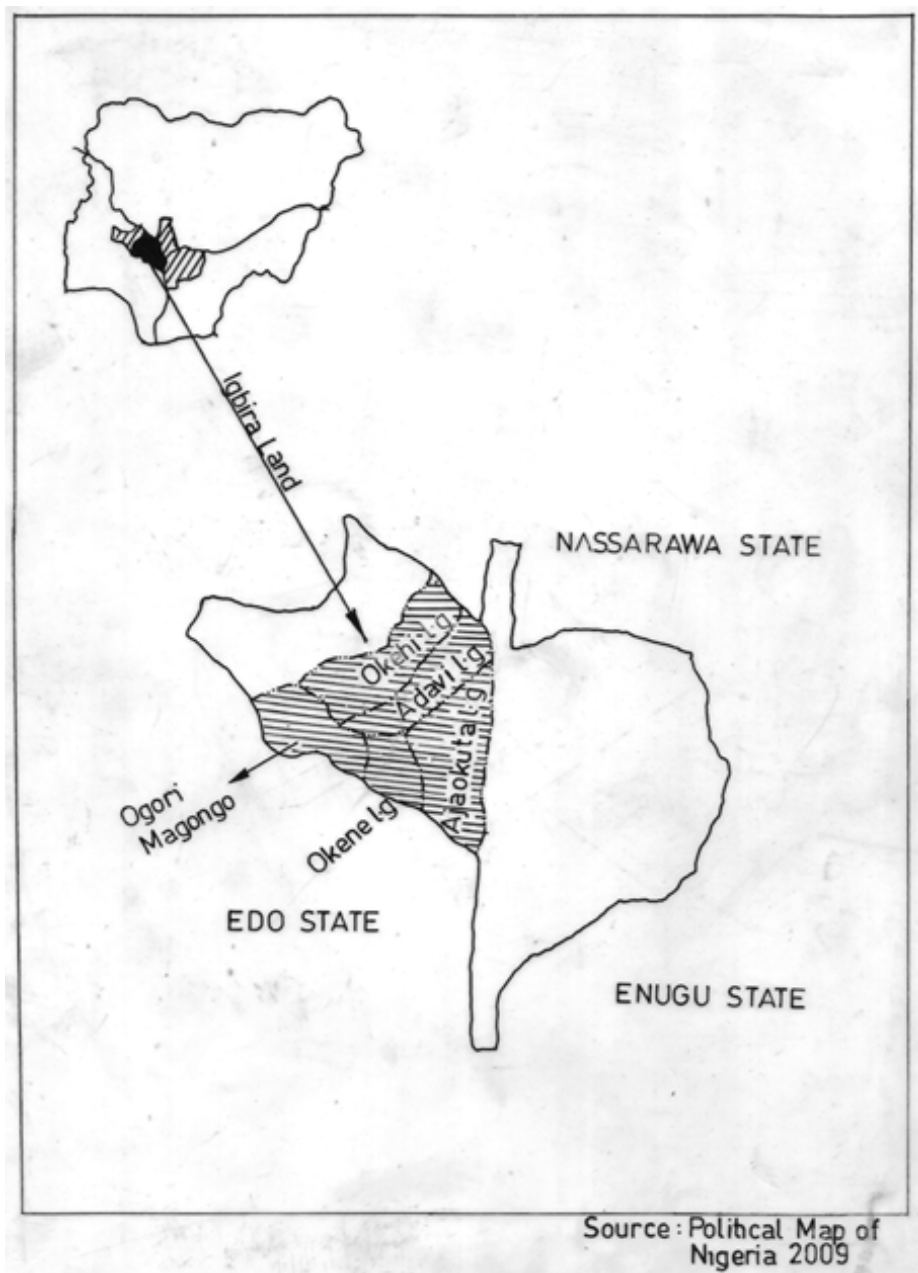
sources and which were consulted at various institutions across Nigeria.

A concise review of existing literature on crises in Nigeria with emphasis on Ebiraland was examined. A corpus of literature has been turned out on Ebira and its environs. Apart from newspaper reports, there has not been any literature on armed conflicts in Ebiraland that delved into the

magnitude of impact and challenges it created. It is this gap the study sought to fill.

Ebiraland lies on the latitudes 7° 12'N and 7° 44'N and longitude 6° 0' E and 6° 51' E covering an area of about 114sq miles (293km²) located in Central Senatorial District of Kogi State, North Central Nigeria. It has a rainfall of about 125-150cm between April and October annually. This is adequate

Map of Nigeria showing Ebiraland



Socio-Economic Impact

It is a fact that in the society where insecurity of life and property reign, there can never be any development, retrogression will become noticeable at all levels of social and human endeavours. In assessing insecurity in Ebiraland, Okene, assert that, "security means development".¹ This is supported with MacNamara's positions that "In modernizing society, security means development, security is not military force though it may involve it, security is not traditional military activity, though it may involve it, security is development and without development, there can be no society".² Indeed, Ebiraland and its people have retrogressed immensely in the economic and social spheres.

In the socio-economic sphere, the crises led to the death of several people which has been tentatively put at about one thousand (1000) since 2004.³ The clash between, (Emani and Ohonwa) clans in Ihima in 2005/2006 left about one hundred and five (105) people dead; the Police massacre in Ogaminana between 24th and 25th February, 2008, left about forty (40) persons dead; about eighty (80) people died in Okene in August 2008 and those who died as a result of phobia from gun sounds, with those who fell to stray bullets and whose numbers can't be ascertained, all account for the high incidence of depopulation.⁴ Many of those who lost their lives were between the productive age bracket of fifteen and fifty

years,⁵ meaning that all their potentials in economic activities like farming, commerce, artisanship, and other productive sectors were adversely affected.

The incessant attacks on Okene central market (Ohu Variki) equally crippled the economy of the land. For instance, the market was in 2004 burnt by political thugs and on 2nd September, 2008 the same central market was attacked by militants who terrorized traders; wares and cash carted away⁶ was estimated to be worth over half a billion naira. It should be noted that Okene central market is one of the biggest not only in Kogi Central Senatorial District but in Kogi State and environs. Many traders of different ethnic groups like the Igbos, Igalas, Yoruba and Hausas make fortunes in the market.

Between 1999 and 2009, many businessmen and investors found it difficult to continue with their investment in Ebiraland as they divested to a more peaceful environment. Other markets like "Ohumanaka" in Ovehira area, Ohu-Ogaminana in Adavi LGA, and Ihima market, etc all were severally invaded at different times within the period under review and many traders lost some valuable goods which were carted away by the urchins.⁷

The effects of all these were the drastic fall in the internally generated revenue of the local government areas of the Central Senatorial District and Kogi State. It was so bad that the LGAs found it difficult to meet-up with their

1. A.A.Okene, "Ebira Crises Since 1999: The Way Forward" A paper presented at the Annual Ebira Week and Sentforth Ceremony, NAES, A.B.U., Kongo Campus Zaria, 15th November, 2008, p. 11.

2. *Ibid.*

3. *Ibid.*, p. 12.

4. M. A., Bello, (2016) "Crises and Militancy in Ebiraland 1999-2012" A Phd Thesis submitted to the Dept of History and International Studies, Nigerian Defence Academy (NDA) KADUNA. PP. 141-144.

5. *Ibid.*

6. *Ibid.*

7. Abdul Jabal, 45 years, Community Leader, interviewed in his residence at Ihima in Okehi LGA on the 26th December, 2013.

8. *Ibid.*

monthly financial obligations; they depended only on federal allocations.⁸ As a result, many other social services suffered as each LGA expended their allocations on

security. Prior to this financial anomaly and since 1991, Kogi Central Senatorial District had maintained the lead in the internally generated revenue (IGR) of Kogi State,

Source: culled from "A History of Party Politics in Ebiraland 1954-2003", p.165.

Senatorial Districts	Population 1991	Kogi IGR	Appointments	Civil servants	
Kogi East	949,345=44.2%	07%	163= 67.9%	15,600= 60%	
Kogi Central	753,456=35.1%	71%	24= 10.0%	1,560= 06%	
Kogi West	444,885=20.7%	22%	53= 22.1%	8,840= 34%	
Total	2, 147,771=100%	100%	240 Top Administrators	26,000 workers	

The crises equally affected properties especially residential houses. It has been estimated that on the average, houses burnt since 2004 stood at seven hundred (700) and above, while other properties destroyed such as vehicles, motorbike, electronics and other house-holds equipment were conservatively put at over two billion naira.⁹ For instance, in the Ihima crises of 2005-2006 alone, it has been estimated that more than 278 buildings were burnt down and occupants rendered homeless. Similar situations occurred in Okene, Ogaminana, Ovehira and Okengwe areas of Ebiraland.¹⁰

The consequence of the above was the migration of large number of the population from these areas into the neighboring towns of Lampese and Ibillo in Edo State. Some moved to Owo, Ago-pan, Uto-ose and Akoko areas of Ondo state where many became refugees and strangers facing obviously new life styles.¹¹

Many prominent Ebiras went into self-

exile to other notable towns like Lokoja, Abuja, Benin, Kaduna, Minna, Kano, Lagos and Jos for fear of being killed by the political hoodlums. One of such exiles was the Attah II (Alhaji Muh'd Otaru) who hibernates in Gwagwalada area of Abuja because his residence was burnt to ashes and his life threatened.¹² Dr. Umar Farouk, a popular politician and a title holder (Tafida of Ebiraland) whose edifice located along Kuroko road in Adavi LGA was burnt has since then relocated to Lagos and Ilorin. Some other exiles died in Lagos, Abuja, Kaduna, etc. For instance, Grp Capt. M. J. Ohida (Rtd) died in Lagos. Professor Albert Ozigi (OON) though not in exile, died due to psychological trauma when his father's (Obongara) compound was burnt down in January 2008.¹³

Many educational institutions in Ebiraland were closed down for several months which made the pupils/students to lose time from their academic calendar. This

9. Okene, "Ebira Crises...", P. 12.

10. *Ibid.*, p. 13

11. *Ibid.*

12. Alh. Mohammed Otaru, 85+years, Traditional Ruler, interviewed at Gwagwalada, FCT, on the 25th March, 2013.

13. *Ibid.*

in effect has contributed to the educational backwardness of the land. The schools were not only closed down, they eventually became the hoodlums' den and political "barracks" from where they carry out their nefarious activities including robbery, intimidation, extortion and harassment of innocent people and passers-by.¹⁴

Rather than punishing these culprits, they were either glorified or officially patronized by the political leaders. Some became body-guards or advisers to the local government Chairmen in the area. The resultant effect of this was that thuggery became perceived as economically viable. It is not unlikely that some of the youths in the schools voluntarily withdrew their studentship and took to thuggery while those of school age rejected enrollment. What this scenario suggests for Ebiraland in the near future would be negative. Poverty, backwardness and retrogression may become the norm.¹⁵

In view of the enormity of the crises, it is surprising why the National Emergency Management Agency (NEMA) or the Kogi State Emergency Management Authority (SEMA) did not make any effort at relieving the victims of the crises. Perhaps, to them, this may not be too far from the fact that the crises in Ebiraland were self-inflicting or the agencies were not officially informed. And possibly too, if any, may encourage further crises in the course of relief sharing.

Political and Cultural Impact

The dividend of democracy is derived from the benefits of good governance. It includes, among other things, better welfare and the provision of secured environment for economic growth and other meaningful developments. But all of these depend on the political class and leadership whose focus and thinking is on the community they represent. If this is what democratic dividend is all about, Ebiraland had since 1999 not witnessed any change as the political class has not been able to attract any notable dividend to the land. What most of them have succeeded in doing is inflicting a fatal damage on the noble virtues and norms of Ebiraland through crises.¹⁶

It appears that a significant number of Ebira politicians engage in the politics of "do-or-die". Thus, they use all available means to achieve their inordinate ambitions. They recruit the services of the youths and conscript them as thugs and bodyguards armed with different weapons to intimidate and harass their opponents. They equally apply clannish sentiments to divide the people against themselves. These ultimately have culminated into the series of crises in Ebiraland leading to wanton destruction of lives and properties. Value systems such as respect for life, elders, mutual trust, and brotherhood have been lost to callousness.¹⁷

The Ebira youths just like those of other ethnic groups are supposed to be the veritable assets if positively groomed and developed; rather they were being trained by the politicians in the art of becoming

14. Dada Ahmed, "Towards an Enduring Peace in Ebiraland", in *Ebiraview News*, Vol.4 No. 7 June 2010, p. 4.

15. Adu, "Political and Leadership...", p. 20

16. A.O.Suberu, "A History of Party Politics in Ebiraland: 1954-2003 AD" Ph.D Thesis, BUK Kano, 2008, p. 168.

17. *Ibid.*

18. Okene, "Ebira Crises...", p. 5.

gangsters, bandits, vandals and murderers.¹⁸

These “boys” were armed with various makes of sophisticated weapons ranging from AK-47 (“kala”), pump action, Sub Machine Gun (SMG) and so on. They were equally provided with coded hand-sets for communication and motor-bikes for easy mobility. These motor-bikes were also used as part of the convoy anytime the “so called” political leader is visiting Ebiraland.¹⁹ This has also become a norm among the politicians in Ebiraland.

Since 1999, no meaningful and noticeable constituency project has been attracted to the land by the politicians in office either from the State or Federal level. Cynically, a school of thought, contends that the only project attracted by politicians has been the importation of arms and ammunitions. They failed to impress on the relevant authorities towards the completion and take-off of the two gigantic “white elephant” projects, the Iron and Steel at Ajaokuta and Iron Ore Mining Company at Itakpe which could have engaged the teeming unemployed Ebira youths. According to a scholar, what mattered to some Ebira politicians was their preparedness not only to sacrifice Ebira blood and her value system, but to mortgage the land for their inordinate political position.

One striking political effect of the crises in Ebiraland is that when an election into another tenure in office draws near, the

Ebira people are always gripped with fear. This is because electioneering processes and campaigns are usually characterized by crises and violence. In the end, after an election, people with questionable characters occupy the offices with stolen mandate; a situation that can be described as an “election without electorates”, because the elections are rigged and ballot boxes snatched by force in favour of mediocre and never-do-well politicians.²¹

The legitimacy of political contestation or competition for elective office in a liberal democracy is not arguable, but not where it is absolutely based on geo-centrism and totalitarianism. It is important to stress that, though there were some structural transformations especially in Okene LGA between 1999 and 2003, since then, Ebiraland is feeling the sudden diversion of local government resources to pursue clannish programmes and for her militants at the expense of the community.²² It has been observed that, thugs and bodyguards had become officially organized, patronized and glorified while the ruling party, PDP, at the state level silently and tactically too approved of it as these actions were not condemned or criminalized.²³ An ex-caretaker Chairman of Okene LGA confirmed this trend, that “thugs became officially patronized, given good welfare and money” by successive regimes so as to protect them.²⁴

This attitude became the norm

19. *Yahaya Junior, 30 years, Youth Leader, interviewed at Inike on the 23rd March, 2014.*

20. *Suberu, “A History of Party...”, p.169.*

21. *A.O. Onukaba, “The Crisis of Leadership in Ebiraland”, Being Text delivered at a ceremony organized by the Kogi Central Media Practitioners Association held at F.C.E. Okene, on the 18th September, 2010, p. 5.*

22. *Okene, “Ebira Crises...”, p. 5.*

23. *Ibid.*

24. *Mohammed Omuya, 47 years Politician and Ex-Caretaker Chairman for Okene LGA, interviewed at Lokoja Kogi State Capital on January, 2013.*

25. *Ibid.*

especially among the political leaders at the local government areas in Kogi Central Senatorial District, that most of these “official thugs” became arrogant. They clashed with opponents to unleash mayhem, terror and cultural devastation on the people of Ebiraland.²⁵

Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs)

These are 'persons or group of persons who have been forced or obliged to flee or to leave their homes or places of habitual residence in particular as a result of or in order to avoid the effects of armed conflict, situations of generalized violence, violation of human rights or natural or man-made disaster and who have not crossed an internationally recognized state border'.²⁶

As earlier discussed, the wanton destruction of lives and properties in places like Ihima, Ovehira, Ogaminana, Adavi-eba and Okene had rendered many families homeless. People therefore, began to migrate to other places for shelter and security of their lives. Some of these exoduses could be likened to the Great Trek in South Africa, or the movement that took place during the Nigerian civil war in the Eastern region. From Ebiraland, they moved towards Edo and Ondo States, while others became tenants at Otite, Abobo and Osara. Apart from Otite where Federal College of Education is located and Osara hosting a section of Kogi State Polytechnic, Abobo is a village settlement near the National Iron

Ore Mining Company staff quarters. All these places were scarcely populated between 1999 and 2003.²⁷

Between 2004 and 2009, these areas had witnessed tremendous growth in population as displaced people from Ihima, Ovehira and other places came to settle as tenants. Within this period many houses sprang up to meet the housing demands of the migrants. In these new settlements there is no discrimination in respect to clan identity, as they are heterogeneously settled unlike in Ihima, for instance, where they settled on clan basis which made it easy for the enemies to locate where a particular clan was concentrated. The usual cultural festivities which also breed crises are not being observed here too.²⁸ This situation is a mixed bag, exchanging culture for security. Accommodation in these places have skyrocketed due to high demand. For instance, before 1999, a room apartment used to go for about four hundred naira a month, while a flat which was not in demand went for between thirty and forty thousand naira a year. But with the influx of migrant from various places seeking accommodation, the rents have doubled.²⁹

This situation has also created a new class of intermediaries called estate agents. These people mediate between the landlords and the tenants. Similarly land speculators have become operational in the area. They are the consultants for both the land owners and buyers. These agents

26. H.I.Haji Hassan, “Economic Migrants or Internal Displaced Persons? An Empirical Analysis of Urban IDPs in Bosaso City” Somalia, M.A. Thesis, Global Refugee Studies, AALBORG University, June 2012.

27. Abdullateef Suberu, 50years, Civil Servant, an emigrant from Okene who settled at Otite in Okehi LGA in the wake of crises in Okene town, explained what life was at Otite before the saga.

28. *Ibid.*

29. *Ibid.*

depend on a certain percentage from the sale of the land. This situation has been described by some people as a positive development. However, it is not to others, especially the displaced people, who had to pay more as a result of the necessity. More so, these agents are not professionally organized and as such their actions are subject to abuse.

These IDP's were equally faced with the lack of social amenities such as water, road network and power supply as the available ones were over stretched and the area not yet planned to accommodate these infrastructures that can support human habitat.

Many other economic activities like buying and selling were equally boosted by the influx of these emigrants who demanded for essential commodities. While the hot-spots such as Ihima, Ovehira, Okengwe and Idoma especially, that were formally busy and bubbling, became the shadow of themselves as people deserted them leaving behind the remains of the burnt buildings.

Efforts at Crises Management in Ebiraland

In the world over and especially in Africa, there are various mechanisms for managing crises or conflicts. These include: traditional mechanism, formal or official mechanism and of course informal mechanism. The traditional mechanisms which involve mediation of the elders require the willingness of the parties in

conflict to agree to the dispute settlements. In most cases, this method proved to be inefficient in Ebiraland, due to the decay in the core value system. But it is still sometimes being used depending on the aggregate of the crises.³⁰

In Nigeria, the chief security officer in the country is the President and Commander-in-Chief of the armed forces, while at the state level, the state Governors are in charge and at the local government level, the Chairman. So in Ebiraland, there was a security committee which comprised of the Chairman of the local government area, the Ohinoyi of Ebiraland, who is the paramount ruler and Chairman, Ebira Area Traditional Council, the Divisional Police Officers in the area including the State Security Service Chief in the area, head of paramilitary agencies (Immigration, Prison, Customs, and Civil Defence Corps). It was hoped and believed that this structure could maintain law and order in the local area. But it failed.³¹

The Federal Government of Nigeria had equally earmarked certain amount of money as security votes monthly for all the tiers of government. But in Ebiraland the Chairmen are fond of lamenting over the inadequacy of fund to tackle security problems in their domain. Hence they constantly request for additional money from the state fund which are never approved. The little they got was either mismanaged or used to settle "boys" who are their bodyguards.³²

It has been observed that the Local Council

30. S.S.Wassara, "Traditional Mechanism of Conflict Resolution in South Sudan" March, 2007, pp. 8-

31. Adu, "Political and Leadership...", p. 229.

22. *Ibid.*

33. *Ibid.*, p. 230.

Chairmen in Ebiraland were unable to tackle security headlong due to the fact that they were not elected but “selected” through zoning and via clans to which they pay allegiance. They also have to protect culprits who are from their clan or party affiliation from arrest and or secure their release from detention even if they are held for having committed crime against the land.³³ Even the committees and panels set up at the local government level to determine the level of crimes so as to appropriately deal with them were, in most cases, never brought to book or face the law and thus the outcome always get jettisoned. This was because the offenders, if any, would be a political party loyalist or from the clan group of the Chairmen.

Since elective offices of the local council in Ebiraland are based on zoning via clan, mediocre personnel and people with low intelligence quotients and citizens of ill-repute eventually control the local government administration. As such, they do not have the wherewithal to manage and contain crises in the land. The electorate did not only lose confidence in them but have accused them of incompetence, corruption, ineptitude, etc, and so cannot mediate over any crises situation.

On the part of the state government, interventions in the various crises in Ebiraland have always been the use of anti-riot policemen and the deployment of the military to trouble spots. This was usually followed with the announcement of curfew sometimes from 6pm-6am to curtail

movement and the situation. The use of tribunals, panels or committees to investigate the remote and immediate causes, identify culprits and proffer recommendations to curb future occurrences were other mechanisms employed by the state. Some of them include, the Judicial Panel of enquiry into the causes of Adavi-eba and Upopuvete crises of 2001, the Justice Ochimana Panel on the 2002 new local government creation crises in Ebiraland, Major-General Chris Alli committee which probed into the recurring crises in Ebiraland that fingered politicians and cultural festivals as major causes; the Rev. Anthony Akande peace committee in Ebiraland set up in March, 2008 to broker peace and many more.³⁴

All these committees and panels pointed accusing fingers at the activities of the political class, clan irredentism and cultural dysfunction and made recommendations appropriately but the government never acted. The information commissioner under Governor Ibrahim Idris, Dr. Tom Ohikere, announced an interim measure to the crises with a ban on masquerade activities. The government had approved for Okene area which was the centre of crises, some vigilante groups to monitor the activities of youths.³⁵ Again this was not done by the government, rather individual communities established their own vigilante groups.

On the part of the community concerned, elders of Ebiraland under the aegis of Kogi Central Forum (KCF) Chaired by Alhaji Musa Etudaye met at the

34. *Ibid.*, p. 230.

35. Dada Ahmed, “Towards...,” in *Ebiraview News Magazine*, Vol. 4, No. 7, June, 2010, p. 4.

Abdulrahman Okene town hall, Okene, in 2009, to explore means of resolving the crises. Part of their resolution was the cautioning of politicians to conduct themselves responsibly and peacefully.³⁶

Other voluntary bodies took up the challenge to foster peace in Ebiraland; they include Kogi Central Media Practitioners Association (KOCEMPA) under the Chairmanship of Alhaji Abdulkarim Abdulmalik who said "Peace is the alternative to violence....," They embarked on dialogue with all the stakeholders through conferences and visits to schools in Ebiraland. The Ebira Youth Congress (EYC) organized series of conferences where eminent Ebira sons and daughters converged to brain storm on the way forward to achieve permanent peace. Other mediation groups include Pals Collective (PC), Social Front for Ebira (SFE), Club 10 Nigeria, Ebira Youth Consultative Forum (EYCF), Front for Ebira Solidarity (FES) and others woke up to the challenge of brokering peace, promoting discipline in Ebiraland, checkmating the erosion of the core-value system and above all to channel the vigours of the restive youths towards productive communal development.³⁷ The impact of these efforts to some extent were felt but still, the crises persisted.

The traditional rulers in Ebiraland under the Chairmanship of the Ohinoyi of Ebiraland, Ado Ibrahim, set up a committee for the crises in Ihima in 2006 to determine the causes of the crises and came out with

recommendations for the government to look at for implementation. All these efforts did not yield any positive gains as the crises continued recurring and unabated with overwhelming consequences until the military was drafted to restore peace, law and order in 2012.³⁸ However, the efforts of the military and their impact is beyond the scope of this paper.

It is important to review the efforts of some individuals like Justice Moses Bello who brought the warring political actors and the elders of Ogu-Omoye clans together in Abuja in 2008 for peace to reign in Ebiraland. He also made personal visits to the "Boys" at their various "Barracks" on the need for them to embrace peace.³⁹ A religious scholar Sheikh Amin Abdulsalam equally made frantic efforts at preaching to the "Boys" at their various "Barracks" on the need to disarm and embrace peace.⁴⁰

The emergence of Omoye-Ogu Forum under the Chairmanship of Abdullateef Bello Babamba in 2008 made tremendous efforts at achieving relative peace. This forum comprises of the members of warring clans in Okene Township. They were able to mediate and bring together all aggrieved parties and their stake holders to dialogue but the pleas fell on deaf ears as the "boys" intensified their heinous crime.⁴¹

The proactive nature of the military, with the imposition of curfew gave Ebiraland a relative peace. However, despite the army's proactive stance, gun men still attacked the Deeper Life Church at Otite in Okehi LGA and

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37. Audu, "Political and Leadership...", p. 233. Also see *EbiraView News Magazine*, vol.4, No. 7, June, 2010. P. 4.

38 Ahmad Badamassiyu, 90+years, Community Leader, interviewed in his residence at Iruvuchebe, Okene, on the 22nd December, 2010.

39 K.S.Okiri, *A Diary of Incessant Crises in Ebiraland*, Abuja: Visible Concepts, 2012 p.59.

40 Ibid.

41 Ibid.

42. *The Punch Newspaper Thursday, 9th August, 2012*

killed many worshipers in 2012. As if that was nothing, two military personnel were also killed at the Okene LGA Secretariat also in 2012. For this action, if the military were to revenge, the consequences on the innocent Ebira people would be disastrous.⁴²

Why the Failure

Assessing the efforts put up to achieve peace for Ebiraland by all and sundry who are concerned, it is expected that a permanent solution to the recurring crises in this historic town could have been found. In Ebiraland, clannish sentiments and politics have become inescapable feature of her political life and these have attained a phenomenal height.

Some sections of Ebira society are of the view that the fundamental issue that has stalled success at curtailing crises in the land has to do with the relegation of her traditional value system to the background. They argued that in the past, part of the responsibilities of a clan chief was crisis management and resolution. This was done by organizing a meeting with the aggrieved parties and the decision reached becomes binding and respected. This mediatory role had proved to be effective. But the reverse is the case nowadays as sentiments and influence have characterized the current clan arrangement. Another school of thought blames the failure on the partisanship of the Ebira traditional institution which has led to the abandonment of the core value system in

Ebiraland.⁴³ As such, this has actually incapacitated the clan chiefs towards containing any crisis no matter how small. This situation has left many, including the paramount ruler of Ebiraland, Ado Ibrahim confused and paranoid.

Experts in crisis management and resolution believe that a long-standing dispute could be driven to disastrous heights if not immediately mediated upon. Such was the case in Ihima where the crises was driven from bad to worse to an extent that the Emani and Ohonwa clans were left with so much bitterness. By the time a mediatory process was considered it was not only too late but it was discovered that the groups were already armed to the teeth waiting for an opportunity to fire a shot.⁴⁴

The local government council is the next closest authority to the grassroots. The Chairman is constitutionally recognized as the chief security officer of the local government and is provided with a monthly security vote in the annual budgetary allocation to enable him maintain law and order. It is expected that he will discharge this duty creditably and provide the security cover to all within his jurisdiction. But the local government officials were discovered to play politics with the security of lives and property of Ebira people. They have been accused by the generality of the people of using the local government resources to officially organize and patronize thugs who are engaged as bodyguards and to intimidate their political opponents. Others were of the

43. A.O. Salami, 71-year, retired Civil Servant and Community Leader, interviewed at his residence, Kuroko, Adavi LGA, on 18th October, 2013.

44. Also Ibrahim Bello, 70years+, Traditional Ruler, interviewed at Ogaminana, Adavi LGA, on the 26th December, 2012. See Audu, "Political Leadership...", p. 233.

45. Charles Hauss, *International Conflict Resolution London: Continuum, 2001*, p. 37.

Audu, "Political and Leadership...", p. 232.

46. *Ibid.*, p. 230.

47. *Ibid.*

opinion that the processes that brought the chairmen to power was fraudulent, thus they display ignorance, mediocrity and they are not intelligent enough to manage the magnitude of the crises in Ebiraland. Still some other persons lament that the chairmen use their security vote to oppress their perceived political enemies, so whatever step taken in the peace process either initiated by them or any other group constitute mere window dressing, because they are the sponsors.⁴⁵

Sometimes, they, as chief security officers, influence the release of culprits from police custody, especially those who are politically loyal to them or are from their clans back to the society to continue to sustain their nefarious activities.⁴⁶ At the community level, vigilante groups were set up to curb and report any security breach to the security agents and anytime as explained by one of the leaders of the vigilante group at Inike quarters, when a culprit is arrested the next day he is on the street. The vigilantes had to withdraw their services as their lives were usually threatened by the culprits after their release from police custody.⁴⁷

The security agents especially the police force have been accused of thwarting the efforts at achieving peace in Ebiraland. Police were fond of protecting the culprits in all respects. Apart from being used by the chief security officer of the local government to officially intimidate and hound their opponents in detention, the real culprits are on the street to further perpetrate terror

with the protection of the police. In addition, the police collaborate with some powerful politicians and individuals in the community to undermine the rule of law and also to reveal the identity of the brain behind a culprits' arrest thereby putting the life of their informants in danger.⁴⁸ People no longer trust and rely on the police for cover and protection hence the incessant crises in Ebiraland. This development, according to Bajehson, is not to be blamed on the police force. To him somebody made advances and pressurized the police with threat to their lives too; what else do they do or expect from them?⁴⁹

Joined in this accusation are the prison officials, who are less desirable, as convicted culprits are usually released from the prison, especially if they are in the ruling party. This scenario has not and cannot resolve any dispute rather it has aggravated it because the opponents will be well prepared and ready to challenge the released culprit in case he or she strikes again.⁵⁰

Assessing Kogi State government in the mediation of Ebira crises, apart from the usual deployment of anti-riot police force and sometimes joint security forces, many panels and committees were set up to investigate and determine the level of intervention that could avert its occurrence. But it has been discovered that the recommendations were most often doctored in favour of the accused or not implemented. As a scholar observed, the government and its officials were not

48. *Ibid.*

49. M.J. Bajehson, 75years, retired Civil Servant and Ebira Title Holder, interviewed at his residence, Angwan-Dosa GRA Kaduna, on the 26th January, 2013.

50. Audu, "Political and Leadership...", p. 232.

51. *Ibid.*, p. 230. Also see M. A., Bello, (2016) "Crises and Militancy in Ebiraland 1999-2012" A Phd Thesis submitted to the Dept of History and International Studies, Nigerian Defence Academy (NDA) KADUNA. PP. 141-146.

52. *Ibid.*

53. *Ibid.*

54. Hassan a.k.a. Ejima, 30+years, civil servant, and one of the Masquerade enthusiasts who spoke to the author on the road at Inike during one of their masquerade outings on 1st January, 2013.

sincere, and politically unwilling to mediate in the crises situation in Ebiraland. If not, why were the reports, recommendations, and even the white papers of these panels and committees never considered for implementation?⁵¹ Indeed, in support of this argument, the Maj. General (Rtd) Chris Alli's committee recommended the ban of masquerades in Ebiraland and was so announced by the state government through the Commissioner of Information, Tom Ohikere. This was not implemented as masquerades come out on daily basis and at will.⁵¹ Commenting on this development, the scholar argued that party loyalists and supporters flagrantly abuse the state laws with impunity in collaboration with government officials and the law enforcement agents.⁵³ To buttress this, one of the masquerade enthusiasts confided that for their masquerade Aneku Opanyi from Idoji to come out, they had to "settle" the top echelon of the police in Okene who also provided them with official protection to perform.⁵⁴

Many factors have been attributed to the government's failure to achieve results in the management of crises in Ebiraland. One of such is government's reluctance in setting up the panels initially, to look into the crises and the problems of having to deal with those who are unwilling or unable to move beyond the anger and the hatred that brought them into the crises especially in Ihima, Ovehira and Okene. All these contributed in the inaccurate findings generated in their recommendations.

Perhaps that was the reason why none of those politicians or powerful individuals indicted by the government panels and committees was ever apprehended let alone face trial or convicted. This goes a long way to reveal the relative powerlessness and weaknesses of the then Governor Ibrahim Idris-led government of Kogi State to implement the recommendations of some of these panels and committees.⁵⁵

The non-compensatory posture of the Kogi State government and the lack of humanitarian relief from the Federal government and non-governmental agencies across the nation did not help matters. Compensation has no doubt become a critical step in the management of crises globally. International experts in the management of crises have discovered that compensation or humanitarian relief in the form of aids to the victims of crises often serve as a political "carrot" which government could have used to get the antagonists into the negotiation table for peace. If really the government was sincere, and if such relief were properly dispensed to avoid one sidedness, it could equally have helped in the settlement of the various crises in Ebiraland. It has been decried for example, that the former chairman Yahaya Karaku from Ogu clan using this mode of one-sided intervention favoured Ezi-Ogu clan members more than the other clans in Okene LGA especially those whose houses were burnt during the crises.⁵⁶ This too created another tension in the land.

The Challenges of the crises in Ebiraland

55. Charles Hauss, *International Conflict...*, p. 67.

56. *Ibid.*

57. Adu, "Political and Leadership..." p. 230.

58. Onukaba, "The Crisis of Leadership..." p. 5.

59. *Ibid.*, p. 6.

60. *Ibid.*

Ebiraland had, in the recent, past been bedeviled with incessant crises that peace, which she hitherto enjoyed, has been breached. This in itself becomes a challenge to the area as the search for permanent peace has been a difficult task to achieve.

Apart from this, the challenge of political and traditional leadership is such that should be analyzed. Writing about leadership, scholars opined that the leader that Ebira people deserve is such that possesses qualities and skills of how a nation should be run. That leader, as Yakub suggested, should be the one that can promote the politics of inclusiveness, unity with ideas that can enhance the progress of the people.⁵⁷ Onukaba believes that "leadership is the ability to mobilize people to achieve a common goal. Thus a leader is a pathfinder (Otuoze), rallying point (Asuku) and the shining light (Ohiete Ohueyi)".⁵⁸ For these qualities to be sustained, the ingredients of leadership, according to him, should include discipline, humility, uprightness, vision, commitment, principled person, credibility, courage, passion, sincerity and of sound mind with high level of intelligence.⁵⁹ These are what can make the leadership competence to rise and stay above board. Such competence should be with the desire to move the people into action towards achieving the collective vision of the society.⁶⁰ However, the leadership in Ebiraland today, it is the opposite of the above. There are those glorifying brutality while criminality and anti-social vices are openly celebrated.

The crop of leadership in Ebiraland today can employ any tactic to ensure absolute control over the land, including the use of terror, murder, and arson of one's opponents.⁶¹

The traditional mode of ascension to clan chief and the democratic processes of electing leadership in Ebiraland are faulty to the extent that in the end questionable characters find their ways to the corridors of power ("elected but without electorates"), hence the travails of the land.⁶² The feudal monarchical leadership trait among the traditional rulers in Ebiraland as observed by Audu, have had "apparent innate structural image problem and mental attitudes reminiscent of the ancient monarchs".⁶³ This situation too has inhibited the people from harnessing the enormous resources and the potentials of the people in the land for their utmost benefits. For instance, the Ajaokuta Steel Company and Iron Ore Mining Co. Itapke located in Ebiraland failed to become productive after many decades spent on the construction. All these can partly be attributed to the leadership question in Ebiraland. Although the inconclusive posture of these companies can also be largely attributed to corruption in Nigeria and perhaps the international power politics brought to bear on it.

In his work, "The Trouble with Nigeria", Achebe argues that "Nigeria is not beyond change if we have leaders who have the will, the ability and the vision", so is Ebiraland too. Although, he acknowledges the fact that this

61. *Ibid.*

62. *Ibid.*

63. Audu, "Political Leadership...", p. 235. Also see Bello, (2016) "Crises and Militancy in Ebiraland..." P. 142

64. Chinua Achebe, *The Trouble with Nigeria*, Enugu: Fourth Dimension Publishers, 1998, p. 2.

65. L.O. Adeoye, "General Surveillance Techniques to Enhance National Security from the Grassroots", No details and nd, p. 10.

type of leadership is rare in any place except that the enlightened citizens lead the way to their discovery and with the emergence if conducive atmosphere is created. ⁶⁴This is the greatest challenge and tragedy to Ebiraland because her people are generally not enlightened to search for visionary leadership but a few that exhibit elements of such promise are not given the enabling environment to prove their mettle as clannish sentiment and political bigotry have over shadowed the thinking and behaviour of Ebira people.

In Adeoye's assessment, traditional institutions in Africa have been the agencies and custodians of traditional practices such as value systems, norms and the customary regulatory bodies that moderate ordinary life of a society. This structure has had remarkable adaptation as important institutions of governance during the colonial rule in the later parts and early parts of 19th and 20th centuries respectively. ⁶⁵But today, especially in Ebiraland, it has become an institution that promotes hatred and sentiments which has plunged her into political and socio-cultural retrogression and inertia. They are more entrenched in the clannish chauvinism and political bigotry.

The crises have left many families in the poverty line and have generated internally displaced persons (IDPs) in a strange environment. Rehabilitation and compensation as crises mediation mechanism which could have served as relief was not forth-coming. This has

presented another challenge to Ebiraland as these innocent victims, especially children and women are exposed to some inhuman social life. While children could not get back to school due to the loss of family and source of income from their breadwinners, some parents have been forced to either separate or live far apart from each other. This family dislocation has been assessed to further have negative social and psychological impacts on the society as these children can be vulnerable to violence and social vices.

The educational institutions especially the schools and their infrastructure were not spared by the crises. Apart from the dilapidation of school buildings, most of the schools were occupied and vandalized by hoodlums who converted some to "barracks" from where they operated. The renovation of these schools to guarantee effective learning and qualitative education will cost huge sums of money. This will require serious efforts from the people to realize and will surely retard education in the land. The impact is enormous.

Despite the indictment of many politicians in the land by the panels and committees set up by the Kogi State government on the crises in Ebiraland, none has been brought to face the law of the land and they still live within the people. The non-implementation of their recommendations have become a challenge to the land as many do not just perceive them as dangerous to the land but that the propensity for them to further plunge the land back to another crises especially during

66. K.S.Okiri, *A Diary of Incessant Crises...*, pp. 105-108.

67. *Ibid.*

68. *Ibid.*

any future electioneering process is highly probable.

The leadership of the National Association of Kogi State Students (NAKOSS) led by their President, Mamman Yahaya Junior, and other youth organizations led by Adams King believe in peace, thus, came together to form Ebira Youth Peace Initiative Movement with the objective of disarmament. The EYPIM anchored the various weekly street meetings held at the various flash points such as Inike, Idoji, Idozumi, Idogido, Inoziomi, Okene-eba, etc, to sensitize the “Boys” on the need for peace via disarmament. The relevant authorities, including the various security agents, supported this move and by the 13th day of August, 2012, the surrendering of three Pump-Action Rifles, two AK-47 Rifles, one G-3, one Double-Barrel gun, and two Local guns, was achieved. The submission was received by the Ag Commissioner of Police, and witnessed by other dignitaries led by “Ohi” of Okengwe, Alhaji A.Y.Yusuf.⁶⁶

The disarmament process was to some, inconclusive, as it was only limited to Okene LGA and the weapons submitted were said not to be the actual ones used during the crises. The “kala”, “pump action”, Sub-Machine Gun (SMG), Revolver, etc, were not submitted as some are still being kept by some of the thugs. More importantly, some light weapons can, according to an informant, be found in virtually every household in Ebiraland.⁶⁷ Retrieving these weapons has posed a very big challenge. Unless governments at all levels take critical step to its retrieval, the possibility of the crises in Ebiraland to resurface and the weapons being used for other social vices

like armed robbery, assassination and so on, will be very likely.⁶⁸

Conclusion

There is no doubt that the crises in Ebiraland during the period under review have created wide socio-economic and political gaps to be filled. The question is who fills these gaps and how, considering the fact that the leadership question is yet to be answered. Unless the political class and the traditional institution evolve a synergy to face the challenges of youth unemployment, thuggery, banditry and the down trend in education, Ebiraland may be heading for the worse.

In addition, the Kogi State government and all the local governments in the Central Senatorial District must reconsider compensation as a conflict mediation mechanism to those innocent ones who lost their wares and capital in the crises. This, if done, will ameliorate the psychological trauma and boost the economy of the land once again.

The crises in Ebiraland has been viewed to emanate from the struggle for accumulation of wealth by the contending groups coupled with the clannish sentiments, festival celebration, youth activities, the Islamic fundamentalist activities and inertia in the internal democratic processes which is characterized by factions within political parties as well as rivalries between political parties.

Summary of Findings and Contribution to Knowledge

This research work has contributed to knowledge of crises and conflicts in

Ebiraland in many ways as follows:

- * It has revealed that the crises in Ebiraland have threatened the peace and social cohesion she had enjoyed in the past years.
- * It has established that there is a high level of youth unemployment and this has made them restive and ready tools in the hands of politicians who manipulated them for their inordinate ambitions.
- * It also discovered that Ebiraland had lost her past glory and core-value system that the “value centre” can no longer hold.
- * It has also established the fact that the Kogi State government is reluctant in implementing the recommendations of the panels and committees it set up to investigate the crises. Those indicted by the panels were never prosecuted or brought to book. This has encouraged incessant crises in Ebiraland.
- * The study has also discovered that apart from the economy of the land that was ruined, many became internally displaced persons (IDPs) and had to take refuge in many neighbouring villages and states of Edo, Ondo, etc, while others went on self-exile for their safety as many who did not make such moves died.
- * One of the findings is that poverty and squalor have become entrenched as many can no longer meet up with their family up-keeps and financial obligations. And the relief agencies like NEMA and SEMA never showed any concern for the victims' plight in Ebiraland.
- * The crises have also created social problems as married couples are forced to separate and some have engaged in an ignoble social relations.
- * It has revealed that both political and traditional leadership had soiled their hands in the crises leading to leadership question. This is a big challenge to Ebiraland and her people.
- * The cultural festivals in Ebiraland have been labeled to foster crises, so their celebrations create apprehension to the people of Ebiraland and passers-by. The government needs to overhaul it for possible attraction to the tourists leading to revenue generation rather than crises.
- * It has also been found that all the clans in Ebiraland maintained youth wings that have become a standing gang that can be used to challenge any slightest provocation from any quarter.
- * The study found out that some elements of para military dimension and the use of sophisticated weapons now characterize Ebira crises even with the slightest provocation.
- * Virtually all the house-holds in Ebiraland is suspected to have acquired light weapons for defensive purposes.
- * The research has found that the creation of 'Ohi' stool meant to resolve clannish squabble produced mixed feelings and generated animosity among the traditional leadership in Ebiraland.
- * The Ebira crises have lingered because her politicians and the political class have no political ideology that can help them to aggregate their potentials for optimum benefits to the land because

every politician is a leader. Ebiraland has no political springboard that can be relied upon for purposeful political direction.

- * Finally as Chinua Achebe puts it, Nigeria can change if good leaders are chosen and given the enabling environment to function; Ebiraland can as well experience such change also.
- * The issue of drug peddling and abuse has been discovered to be rampant in Ebiraland with its attendant negative effects on the youth populace; this requires adequate government attention in stepping up the fight against drug peddling and policies that will curtail the indiscriminate sales and distributions of orthodox drugs.

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INTERVIEWS