

Influence of Traditional Information Communication in Conflict Resolution Among Bassa and Egbura Ethnic Groups in Toto Local Government Area of Nasarawa State, Nigeria

¹ADAMU, Yahaya, ²MAIFATA, Nurudeen Mu'azu and ³IBRARHIM Idi Ahmad

^{1&2}University Library, Nasarawa State University, Keffi, Nigeria

³Federal Polytechnic Daura, Katsina State- Nigeria

¹yahayaadamu17519@gmail.com, ²maifata@nsuk.edu.ng and ³ibrahimiatodarya@gmail.com

Abstract

This study investigated the influence of traditional information communication in conflict resolution among Bassa and Egbura in Toto LGA of Nasarawa State Nigeria. The study adopted a survey research design and questionnaires were used as an instrument for data collection. The population of the study was made up of the Bassa and Egbura communities in Toto LGA. However, 398 members of the communities were selected as sample for the study; two objective and one hypothesis were formulated and tested. Descriptive statistics were used to analyses the data collected. The study established, among other things that power struggle, political exclusion, and non-compliance with rules and policies of the land. Others are lack of information, dominion and oppression, exploitation and unjust violation of human right. The study also discovered that non-tolerance, victimisation, discrimination, among others are the causes of ethnic conflicts between the Bassa and Egbura communities. The study recommends power-sharing, equal distribution of resources, provision of social amenities and infrastructures, information sharing, dialogue, hearing and respecting the views of others, open-mindedness, inter-ethnic interactions, use of town crier, social media, radio, and newspaper should be employed to avoid conflict between the affected communities.

Keywords: Communication, Conflict Resolution, Influence, Traditional Information

Introduction

Every society may be either in a state of conflict or peace. Conflict is a state of disharmony between or among people/persons, institutions, communities, societies, and nations with opposing ideas, views, values, goals, vision, and mission (Muhammed 2015). This suggests that societies cannot exist without experiencing one or the other situation. Abubakar (2004) asserted that conflict is a part of all human interactions, and it is inevitable in society. Nigerian society is faced with societal conflicts as a result of boundary struggles, land disputes, socio-economic and political power struggles. Others are high level of illiteracy, frustration and aggressive displacement, unequal distribution of wealth among the people. The domination and oppression by the majority group and its collaborators, cultural, traditional and religious misunderstanding, falsehood accusations and allegations, exploitation and unjust violation of human rights, non-tolerance, victimisation and discrimination and high level of poverty are not

left out in Nigeria. Different types of conflict may exist between and among individuals in any given society and groups.

Conflict takes place when a misunderstanding arises among different communities. Other factors may fuel this type of conflict. Some of the factors may include a rivalry in resource allocation or demarcation of boundaries set by a group to establish their own identity as a community. Varvar (2000) indicated that increased demand for land for agriculture, unemployment, rural hunger, poverty impoverishment as communal conflict triggers. Angya and Doki (2006) highlighted deprivation, exploitation, and domination of minority groups by major ethnic groups and leadership problems as factors that can exert a communal crisis in the community.

Similarly, domination, religious differences, competition for livelihood resources and traditional chieftaincy tussles were enumerated by Oboh and Hyande (2006) as potential communal conflict sources in the country. Others are competitions for land, and chieftaincy tussle is also some of the significant causes of communal conflicts in the Northern part of Nigeria. For instance, in Nasarawa State in 1993, the Alago, Hausa and Tiv communities clashed over land and chieftaincy from 1995-2005, the Egbura and Bassa in Toto local government area (LGA) clashed over land, chieftaincy and political differences from 1998-2001. In Taraba State, there was a clash between the Chamba/Jukun and Kuteb over chieftaincy tussle since 1996 when it started and is still ongoing. In 2004 in Adamawa State, there was a clash between the Bachama and Hausa/Fulani over land ownership, politics and religion. On 5 March 2005, there was a communal clash between the Maruta (Jigawa) and Burmin (Bauchi) communities over market relocation. In June 2003, the Ogori and Ekepedo community clashed over land ownership in Kogi and Edo States. The destructive tendencies of communal conflicts are such that have affected mainly the developmental prospects of the country. The consequences range from mere envy, suspicion, jealousy to considerable scale destruction of lives and properties. The research work of Ekeh (1999) on Aguleri-Umuleri communal conflict in Anambra State lucidly revealed that the two communities have for decades, lived and farmed side by side but with mutual distrust and enmity. However, in September 1995, when the conflict exploded, public property including schools, banks, post offices, town halls, and even churches, were razed to the ground; further, some 200 private houses were destroyed and a countless number of people killed (Ekeh, 1999).

Problem Statement

Misunderstanding of land boundaries and leadership tussles among Bassa and Egbira ethnic communities triggers conflicts that resulted in the loss of thousands of lives and properties worth millions of naira. The conflict thwarted commercial activities in the area and truncated the peace and harmonious relationship enjoyed by the two ethnic communities. This led to an increase in the proliferation of arms, high crime rate, tension, and a state of insecurity, lawlessness, and social vices.

Empirical evidence shows that traditional information and communication have preserved the element necessary for expressing the identity of many ethnic groups, and it plays a significant role in promoting peaceful co-existence. Traditional information and communication are critical tools for identifying and preventing conflicts in society. This assertion pointed to the

need to investigate the influence of traditional information and communication in conflict resolution among the Bassa and Egbira ethnic communities in Nasarawa State.

Objectives

The objectives of the study were to:

1. determine the causes of Bassa and Egbura ethnic conflicts in Toto Local Government Area of Nasarawa state
2. determine the influence of information communication on ethnic conflict and resolution between the Bassa and Egbura communities in Toto Local Government Area of Nasarawa State.

Hypothesis

- 1 There is no significant difference between the mean opinion of Bassa and Egbura ethnic communities on the causes of the ethnic conflict in Toto Local Government.

Literature Review

Scholars have identified various factors as responsible for the communal conflict in the country. The causes vary from one area to another. Yecho (2006) indicated that the causes of communal conflicts are not static but instead dynamic and varied in nature, depending on the socio-economic and geopolitical circumstances at the time. Onwudiwe (2004) listed social conditions such as population explosion, economic migration, and the anti-poor policies of the government as triggers of communal friction. Horowitz (1990) pinned down communal conflict to revolve around politics, politicians, and their pursuit of group advantage. Albert (2001) identified indigene/settler problems, religious differences, ownership of land and its resources, goals and aspirations of people as some of the factors that can ignite communal conflict in the country. Hembe (2000) indicated that political struggle and colonisation are causes of communal conflict, while Lyam (2000) mentioned the loss of soil fertility, soil erosion, deforestation, bush burning and flooding as some of the causes of communal conflict. Yecho (2006) pointed out that the fundamental causes of communal conflict are poor economic conditions, high level of illiteracy, the quest for, and fear of domination by other groups, land disputes, market ownership, chieftaincy tussle and party politics.

Varvar (2000) indicated that increased demand for land for agriculture, unemployment, rural hunger, poverty impoverishment as communal conflict triggers. Deprivation, exploitation, and domination of minority groups by major ethnic groups and leadership problems were highlighted by Angya and Doki (2006) as factors that can exert a communal crisis. Equally, religious differences, competition for livelihood resources and traditional chieftaincy tussles were enumerated by Oboh and Hyande (2006) as a potential for communal conflict in the communities. Best (2006) argued that in Benue Valley, the pressure on land from all directions heightens the proliferation of ethnic and communal conflicts in the region, including the political ones, most of them arising from the land question. In essence, the causes of communal conflict from the above analysis are:

1. *Economic factor: The factors manifest in the forms of competition for inadequate resources such as land and its content; problems of distribution of available resources; unemployment and poverty.*
2. *Social factor: This has to do with issues that border on deprivation, envy, jealousy, marginalisation, and exploitation of people. Fear of domination by major groups is equally a social factor that attracts communal conflict.*
3. *Political factor: It involves the contest for available political positions in a community and leadership failure. Also added to this is traditional chieftaincy tussle imminent in communities in the country.*
4. *Ecological factor: This factor manifests in the forms of encroachment problem, farming and pastoral problems, deforestation, flooding, soil erosion, and bush burning. Communal conflict creates room for people to drift from place to place as a survival mechanism and in search of livelihood.*
5. *Colonial factor: Colonialism is believed to be the background cause of communal conflict in Africa, and Nigeria inclusive. Most of the communal conflicts have a direct attachment to the colonial formation, while others manifesting in the post-colonial period have an explanation in colonialism.*

Traditional Information and Communication Resources

Furthermore, traditional communication or information dissemination are twin concepts that are interchangeably used to describe the tools used in spreading news within a society or community and the traditional society in Nigeria has different means of disseminating information from one ethnic group to another. In whatever form, the traditional system is used to achieve its aim; it is undoubtedly a success factor in a developing society (Lucky & Frank, 2010). The system serves not only as a source of information but education and entertainment to the people at the grassroots. Unfortunately, the general notion of the traditional system of communication is that they are outdated or better put, primitive. This same view often envisages traditional systems as being mutually antagonistic to what is generally known as modern systems of communication (Field, 1973 cited in Lucky & Frank, 2010). However, the fact is that although the systems may be old and different in their principles from the new systems, they remain what virtually sustain the information needs of the rural population. In traditional African society, information is disseminated through recognised officials, recognisable sounds, signs and symbols. "The town crier" as the newsmen or newsvendors are popularly called, combined all the information agencies in the performance of their duty. The tools employed in the course of disseminating information in the traditional environment varied from place to place, with their attendant problems afflicting the development of the system.

The traditional media served its purposes to the satisfaction of the rural people in the pre-colonial era. –The people's desire for information about local people and events, the satisfaction of news hunger stimulated war or rumours of war, the necessity to spread information about political and religious decisions as well as threats to security. Omu (1978), classified the agencies of communication in pre-colonial Nigeria into two groups; The oral communication or informal transference media and The organised communication or formal transference media. According to Omu, the first category, that is the oral or informal communication, operated through informal

contact, between individuals and persons, and did not go beyond the circulation or dissemination of rumours and "unofficial" information. A primary example of an oral communication media system is family visitation. It was common means of exchanging information between relations and friends in their homes either from within the immediate community or beyond.

Information dissemination was also enhanced through organised and spontaneous gatherings which were reasonably frequent in Nigeria society. Examples are birth and burial ceremonies. These ceremonies have always attracted large congregations from far and near as the ceremonies progressed amidst tears and wailing, the bereaved found time to exchange information, particularly about people and events. The same cross-transference of 'news' took place when a new baby was born, and during village festivals, marriage, circumcision feasts, public meetings, and traditional court sessions, moonlight gatherings to mention but a few. In all these, information was circulated. Trade was another informal media system in preliterate Nigerian society.

Most communities have markets that did not only serve as centres of trade but also as principal agents of communication, information, and recreation. The trading forum provided the most convenient opportunities to meet friends and kin from far and near distances during which the traders exchanged news and other information. Some markets were also the terminal points of trade routes linking different parts of the country with neighbouring states, the caravans and traders who plied the routes helped to distribute information (Onuora, 1981 cited in Lucky & Frank, 2010). The second category of traditional media known as a formal transference media system was concerned with the more systematised dissemination of information between the traditional administrative organ and the people (subjects). The way traditional government reached out to her subjects varied from sounds, signs to a symbol, and the central disseminator was the "town crier".

Methodology

This study adopted a descriptive survey design. The population for the study comprised Bassa and Egbura ethnic groups in the Toto Local Government Area of Nasarawa State. The sample size of the study, therefore, comprised of the representatives of Bassa and Egbura in the three development areas in the local government. Two sampling techniques; Cluster sampling and Proportional random sampling procedure of 0.012 were adopted to determine the sample size in each cluster and 183 Bassa and 262 Egburawere selected. This agreed with Douglass (2006) who opined that sample size has to be large enough to enable a researcher to detect the smallest effect or relationship between variables, the researcher used a simple random technique of YES or NO to select the respondents in each of the clusters. In this regard, those who picked YES constituted the sample of the study.

A five (5) points Likert rating scale structured questionnaire was used. All items were measured using scales ranging from Strongly Agreed (SA) 5, Agreed (A) 4, Undecided (UD) 3, Disagreed (D) 2, and Strongly Disagreed (SA) 1. The respondents were restricted to indicate relative agreement with each item based on the scale.

In the analysis, a benchmark weighted mean score of at least 3.0 was considered to be agreed while those with less than 3.0 as disagreed. A benchmark of 3.0 was chosen because it is the average of the five rating scale $\{(5+4+3+2+1) \div 5\}$

In testing the Null hypothesis, the data collected were analysed using the statistical package for social science (SPSS). The researcher used SPSS to run a t-test to determine the null

hypothesis in the study. The choice of this tool was based on the suggestions of William (2008) and Christian (2008), who opined that the t-test is the best statistic tool use to test the null hypothesis about differences between two groups.

Results and Discussion

Table 1: Causes of Ethnic Conflict Between the Bassa and Egbura Communities

| S/N | Item | AG | UD | DA | TS | X | SD | Decision |
|-----|--|------|----|-----|------|-----|-----|----------|
| 1. | Power struggles are one of the causes of the conflict between the Bassa and Egbura ethnic Communities. | 1672 | 42 | 172 | 1886 | 4.2 | 1.8 | Agreed |
| 2. | Political exclusion between the Bassa and Egbura ethnic communities causes conflict among the two communities | 1195 | 33 | 152 | 1379 | 3.0 | 1.7 | Agreed |
| 3. | Non-Compliance with Rules and Policies of the land triggered conflict between the Bassa and Egbura ethnic communities | 1512 | 30 | 185 | 1727 | 3.8 | 1.3 | Agreed |
| 4. | Conflict can arise when one party feels it lacks important information, | 1509 | 60 | 202 | 1620 | 3.8 | 1.4 | Agreed |
| 5. | Socio-economic factors are one of the causes of conflict between the Bassa and Egbura ethnic communities | 1669 | 63 | 145 | 1877 | 4.2 | 1.5 | Agreed |
| 6. | Domination and oppression by the majority group and its collaborators cause conflict between the Bassa and Egbura ethnic communities | 1591 | 39 | 169 | 1800 | 4.0 | 1.2 | Agreed |
| 7. | Exploitation and unjust violation of human rights cause conflict between the Bassa and Egbura ethnic communities. | 1790 | 33 | 97 | 1921 | 4.5 | 1.8 | Agreed |
| 8. | Non-tolerance, victimisation and discrimination are some the factors that triggered conflict between the Bassa and Egbura in Toto local government | 1274 | 45 | 175 | 1494 | 3.2 | 1.1 | Agreed |
| 9. | Inequality and marginalisation are some of the factors that facilitate crisis between the Bassa and Egbura in Toto local government | 1752 | 54 | 166 | 1972 | 4.3 | 1.5 | Agreed |
| 10. | Boundary struggles and land disputes between the Bassa and Egbura ethnic communities' causes conflict among the two tribes. | 1512 | 45 | 174 | 1731 | 3.8 | 1.3 | Agreed |

KEY: AG=Agree, UD=Undecided, DS=Disagree, TS= Total Score, X= Mean, SD=Std. D

Figure 1: Causes of ethnic conflict between the Bassa and Egbura communities

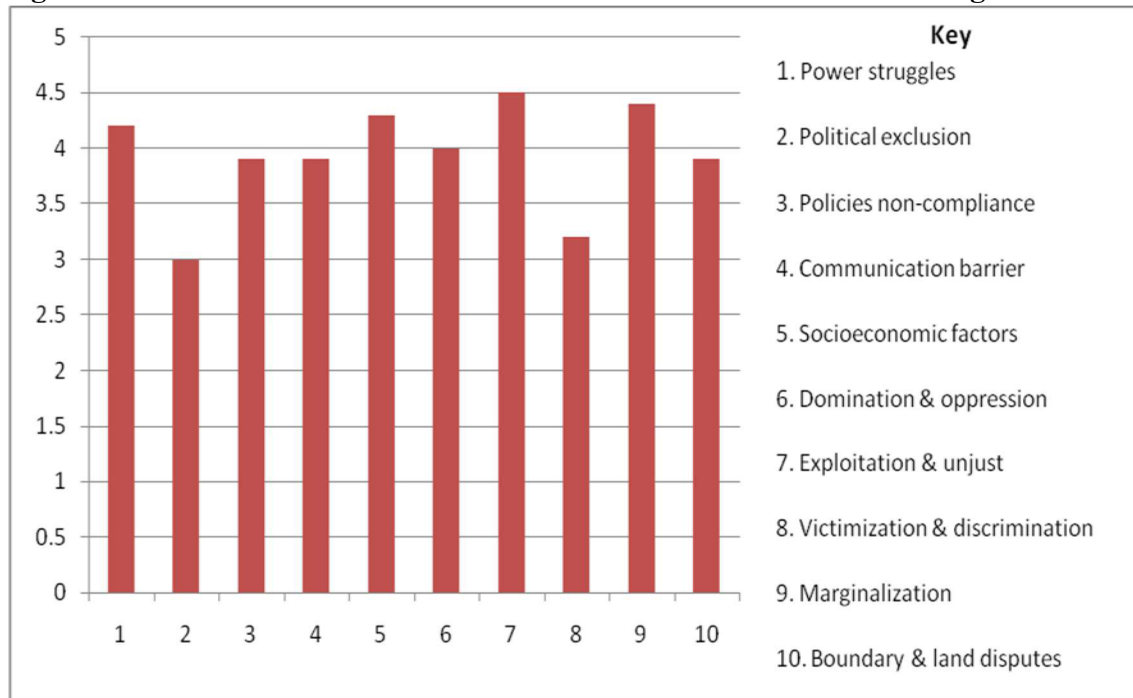


Figure 1, presented the position of respondents on the causes of conflict between the Bassa and Egbura ethnic communities in Toto local government area of Nasarawa state. From the analysis, power struggles, communication barriers, exploitation and unjust violation of human rights, among others are the constituted the significant causes of the conflict with a weighted mean score of 3.5 and above. Mild factors that cause conflicts are policies non-compliance, domination and oppression and boundary & land disputes with weighted mean less than 3.5. This finding agreed with the assertion of Angya and Doki (2006). They reported that deprivation, exploitation and domination of minority groups by major ethnic groups and leadership problems were the factors that exert a communal crisis. Oboh and Hyande, (2006) also opined that domination, religious differences, competition for livelihood resources and traditional chieftaincy tussles, and competitions for land are the major causes of communal conflicts in the North. This, therefore, shows that Bassa and Egbura must appreciate the identified major causes of conflicts such as power struggle, communication barrier, marginalisation, domination and oppression in order to avoid and adequately handled for peaceful co-existence in the community.

Table 2: Analysis of the influence of Traditional Information and communication in promoting and sustaining of peace and sociocultural stability between the Bassa and Egbura communities in Toto LGC, Nasarawa state

| S/N | Item | AGR | UD | DS | TS | X | SD | Decision |
|-----|--|------|----|-----|------|-----|-----|-----------|
| 1. | Sharing of information between ethnic communities through media houses will help in promoting peaceful co-existence in society | 1432 | 85 | 220 | 1737 | 3.6 | 1.3 | Agreed |
| 2. | Dialogue and sharing of information influence solving the inter-ethnic crises among communities. | 1511 | 36 | 84 | 1632 | 3.8 | 1.1 | Agreed |
| 3. | Hearing and respecting the views of others is essential in conflict resolution | 1473 | 36 | 249 | 1757 | 3.7 | 1.0 | Agreed |
| 4. | Openness is very important in peaceful co-existence among different ethnic community | 1353 | 54 | 57 | 1464 | 3.4 | 1.8 | Agreed |
| 5. | Inter-ethnic interactions have the potentials of settling ethnic, communal clash. | 1112 | 38 | 84 | 1234 | 2.8 | 1.4 | Disagreed |
| 6. | The utilisation of local means of communication through town crier will help to the sustenance of peace between ethnic groups in Toto local government | 1185 | 43 | 58 | 1286 | 3.2 | 1.5 | Agreed |
| 7. | The use of media information service will help in promoting sociocultural stability between Bassa and Egbura | 1750 | 42 | 61 | 1853 | 4.4 | 1.1 | Agreed |
| 8. | Sociocultural stability among ethnic groups can be enhancing through dialogue and sharing of information among communities. | 796 | 45 | 189 | 1030 | 2.0 | 0.9 | Disagreed |
| 9. | Open-minded through the use of radio and newspaper will help to promote sociocultural stability between Bassa and Egbura | 1591 | 33 | 175 | 1799 | 4.0 | 1.3 | Agreed |
| 10. | Information through social media can threat the peaceful co-existence among ethnic groups | 1709 | 57 | 155 | 1921 | 4.3 | 1.3 | Agreed |

KEY: AG=Agree, UD=Undecided, DS=Disagree,
TS= Total Score, X= Mean, D=Std. Deviation

Figure 2:Traditional Information and communication in promoting and sustaining of peace and sociocultural stability between the Bassa and Egbura communities in Toto LGC, Nasarawa state

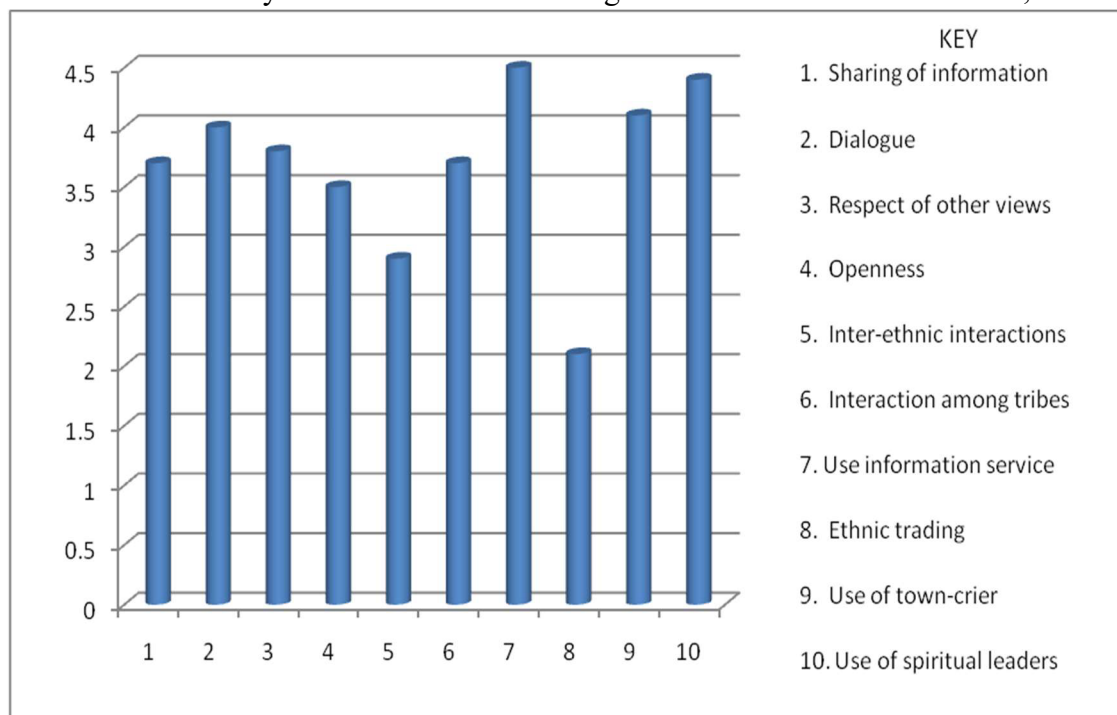


Table 2 and figure 2 showed that sharing of information, dialogue, respect of other views and openness are the primary information and communication system employed for the promotion and sustenance of peace and sociocultural stability among the Bassa and Egbura ethnic communities in Toto Local Government in Nasarawa State with mean score 3.7 and above. Other essential means include interaction among tribes, use information service, town-crier, and spiritual leaders. On the other hand, it was discovered that inter-ethnic interactions and trading have less effective with a mean score of less than 3.0. The result of the study found to be similar to that of Varvar, (2000), who stated that dialogue, hearing and respecting the views of people, information sharing openness, inter-ethnic interactions, radio and newspaper are the common means of information and communication services use for sensitisation in the Nigerian society. In the same vein, Adamu & Usman (2014) opined that cordial relationship and interaction are a very vital tool for preventing conflict in society. The finding implies that to promote and sustain peace and sociocultural stability, proper utilisation of information services such as town-crier and cultural display to disseminate information and the use of spiritual/religious leaders to preach the gospel of togetherness and avoidance of hate speeches in the communities.

Results of data used to test the null hypotheses presented in table 3

Null Hypothesis One: There is no significant difference between the Bassa and Egbura ethnic communities on the causes of ethnic conflict in Toto Local Government Area of Nasarawa State.

Table 3: t-test analysis of the difference between the Bassa and Egbura ethnic communities on the causes of ethnic conflict in Toto Local Government Area of Nasarawa State.

| Variables | | Mean | SD | N | Df. | t-cal. | Sig. (2-tailed) | Decision |
|------------------|--------|------|------|-----|-----|--------|--------------------|----------|
| Bassa community | ethnic | 2.4 | 1.34 | 398 | 396 | 2.683 | 0.867 | Retained |
| Egbura community | ethnic | 2.6 | 1.13 | | | | | |

Table 3: presents the t-test analysis of the difference between the Bassa and Egbura ethnic communities on the causes of ethnic conflict in the Toto Local Government Area of Nasarawa State. The table revealed the mean and standard deviation of 2.4 and 1.34 for Bassa community and 2.6 and 1.13 for Egbura community. The t-cal. was so found to be 2.683 at significant confidence levels of 0.867. Since the alpha value of 0.05 is less than the significant confidence levels of 0.867, the null hypothesis that said that there is no significant difference between the Bassa and Egbura ethnic communities on the causes of ethnic conflict in Toto Local Government Area of Nasarawa State was retained. This means that there is no significant difference in the causes of ethnic conflict as perceived by Bassa and Egbura communities in Toto local government. Therefore, the different tribes must avoid the significant causes of conflict in their communities for peace to reign.

Summary of Findings

1. The study revealed that power struggle, political exclusion, non-compliance with the rules and policies of the land, lack of information, domination and oppression, exploitation and unjust violation of human right, non-tolerance, victimisation, discrimination, inequality, marginalisation, and land disputes are the causes of ethnic conflict between the Bassa and Egbura ethnic communities in Toto Local Government Area of Nasarawa State.
2. Information sharing, dialogue, hearing and respecting the views of others, open-mindedness, inter-ethnic interactions, use of town crier, social media, radio, and newspaper are the available types of information and communication system resource services employed for the promotion and sustenance of peace and sociocultural stability between Bassa and Egbura ethnic communities in Toto Local Government Area of Nasarawa State.

Conclusion

Based on the analysis and summary of the findings, it was concluded that power struggle, lack of information, domination and oppression, land disputes among others are the causes of conflicts between Bassa and Egbura ethnic communities in Toto Local Government Area of Nasarawa State. It was also discovered that the outbreak of conflicts leads to hatred, confusion, lack of trust, bitterness, lost lives and properties—consequently, these fueled hardships, poverty among the dwellers of the area. However, information sharing, dialogue, hearing and respecting the views of others, open-mindedness and inter-ethnic interactions played an essential role on conflict resolution among Bassa and Egbura ethnic communities in Toto Local Government Area of Nasarawa state.

Recommendations

1. Government and the native authorities concerned should adopt power-sharing and equal distribution of resources, compliance with rules and policies of the land, ensure equality and tolerance among Bassa and Egbura ethnic communities.
2. Government and native authorities should encourage information sharing, dialogue, hearing, and respecting the views of others, inter-ethnic interactions, through the utilisation of social media, radio and newspaper as information and communication system resources services in Bassa and Egbura ethnic communities in Toto Local Government Area of Nasarawa State Nigeria.

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