



Full Length Research

Reconciliation as an Essential Ingredient in Peace Building: A Case Study of Crude Oil-Related Conflicts

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Abstract: Reconciliation is a vital component of conflict resolution. This is true because, dispute settlement without genuine reconciliation will only result in compromise without necessarily uniting the aggrieved and the aggressor. This study has explored the extent of oil related conflict and effectiveness of reconciliation initiatives in Ilaje and Ese-Odo Local Government areas in Ondo State. Both online and physical approach was used to gather data from a total sample of 150 participants drawn across the study areas and descriptive research approach was adopted. Five research questions were raised and answered. Descriptive analysis reveals the following: factors contributing to oil related conflict in region include unequal distribution of royalties, government and company policies as well as competition for oil related resources. Oil related conflict is an occasional incident in Ilaje and Ese-Odo Local Government Areas of Ondo State. There have been reconciliation efforts (64% agreement) in Ilaje and Ese Odo aiming to address oil related conflict. The effectiveness of the reconciliation attempts was judged moderate pointing to the fact that they are still unresolved grievances among the affected parties. The major setbacks found to effective reconciliation initiatives include greed, cultural differences, distrust, political interferences and sentiment. The study recommends, among others, that oil companies, government agencies fulfil should fully implement all the promises/agreements reached with the oil producing region and that the royalties should not only end in the

pockets of selected few.

Keywords: Reconciliation: Crude Oil Related Conflicts: Peace Building: Nigeria.

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1.0 Introduction of the Study

The Ilaje and Ese-Odo local government areas of Ondo State have been marked by persistent conflicts related to oil exploration and exploitation. Just like other oil-rich regions in Nigeria, these conflicts often arise from competing interests and environmental concerns, thereby posing significant challenges to the region's stability and development. Mohammad (2017) observed that exploration of oil resources, while promising economic benefits, has led to disputes over lands, resources, and environmental degradation. The historical context of oil-related conflicts in this region can be traced back to the impact of oil exploration on the livelihoods of the local communities (Akinyemi & Ojo, 2019). Issues such as displacement, pollution, and resource control have fueled tensions, creating a complex web of challenges that demand attention (Smith, 2020). The persistent nature of oil-related conflicts in Ilaje and Ese-Odo local government areas raises critical questions about the root causes, intensity, and consequences of these disputes (Okoh, 2005). The failure to address these conflicts adequately can lead to prolonged instability, hindering social and economic progress in the affected areas. Hence, reconciliation could be a vital tool for lasting peace, as dispute settlement without its corresponding reconciliation could breed contempt.

This research aims to address these gaps by examining the factors contributing to oil-related conflicts, evaluating the current level of conflict, and investigating reconciliation efforts in Ilaje and Ese-Odo local government areas of Ondo State. By doing so, the study seeks to provide insights into the effectiveness of reconciliation initiatives and the key factors influencing their success or failure. Etta & Aigbe (2020), citing Liu et al. (2005) pointed out that major causes of pollution that seriously harm the ecosystem are oil-related activities. The impunity with which some oil firms have operated has made it worse. The Niger Delta's oil activities have resulted in constant oil spills. For example, only 14% of Shell's global production comes from its oil activities in Nigeria, although over 40% of its oil spills occur there (Gilbert, 2010). According to the Department of Petroleum Resources (DPR), there were over 9,000 instances between 1976 and 2005 that resulted in the release of over 4 million barrels of oil into the environment (Egberongbe et al., 2006; Emuedo, 2010). Rejecting these numbers, some studies claim that real numbers are three times greater (Nassiter, 2010). In addition to undermining traditional livelihoods, the oil-induced environmental disruption in the Niger Delta Areas has also resulted in disputes within, and across communities (Imobighe, 2017). The oil industry's massive contamination of the land and water, the government's failure to develop the area and the ensuing growth of extreme poverty, the oil firms' inadequate compensation, and the violent acts of militant groups and security forces have been identified by Etta & Aigbe (2020) as the main causes of the multifaceted conflicts.

Ukeje (2011) added that the region's disenfranchised and marginalized youth groups have been one of the primary tools of violence in these confrontations. This could be true as compensation from oil exploration are often shared among the prominent members of the community leaving out the less informed ones and this action makes them resentful. On this, Onosode (2003) noted that security forces frequently respond to the violent actions of the resentful youths with more destructive counter violence (Onosode, 2003). In addition to jeopardizing human security, these confrontations have delayed and hindered efforts to lessen the effects of the oil spill and its aftermath.

The above highlights further suggest that implementation of reconciliation programmes is essential in Ilaje and Ese-Odo communities. Again, the effectiveness of the approach should be observable by members of the communities. Gifts and all forms of compensation, if properly employed could make reconciliation efforts easier, however effective reconciliation should go beyond schedule gifts and compensations but aim at bringing lasting peace in the age-long oil crisis in Ondo State and Nigeria at large. Scientific information about oil exploitation's long-term effects is beginning to surface, in addition to its immediate effects on the environment and the standard of living in host communities. As noted by Mohammad (2022) although the Niger Delta region has devised and executed numerous measures aimed at reducing poverty, the sobering truth in the places that produce oil is that these plans and initiatives have not lessened the pressing issues of human deprivation and social marginalization. Therefore, true reconciliation comes when any oil producing community could boast of being free of the above noted issues. In order to examine the essence of reconciliation in oil producing regions like Ilaje and Ese-Odo localities, this study offered empirically based insights into the dynamics of the use of reconciliation as a tool in tackling oil-related crisis.

1.1 Objectives of the Study

The main aim of this study is to examine the prevalence of conflict and effectiveness of reconciliation mechanism in Ilaje and Ese-Odo localities. The specific objectives are to:

- i) Identify factors contributing to oil-related conflicts in Ilaje and Ese-Odo local government areas of Ondo State.
- ii) Ascertain the level of oil-related conflicts in Ilaje and Ese-Odo Local Government Areas of Ondo State.
- iii) Investigate level of reconciliation efforts towards peace building in Ilaje and Ese-Odo Local Government Areas of Ondo State.
- iv) Investigate the effectiveness of reconciliation initiatives addressing oil-related conflicts in Ilaje and Ese-Odo Local Government Areas of Ondo State.
- v) Identify factors contributing to success or failure of reconciliation attempts in Ilaje and Ese-Odo Local Government Areas of Ondo State.

1.2 Research Questions

- i) What are the factors contributing to oil-related conflicts in Ilaje and Ese-Odo local government areas of Ondo State?
- ii) What is the level of oil-related conflicts in Ilaje and Ese-Odo Local Government Areas of Ondo State?
- iii) What is the level of reconciliation efforts towards peace building in Ilaje and Ese-Odo Local Government Areas of Ondo State?
- iv) How effective is reconciliation initiatives addressing oil-related conflicts in Ilaje and Ese-Odo Local Government Areas of Ondo State?
- v) What are the factors contributing to success or failure of reconciliation attempts in Ilaje and Ese-Odo Local Government Areas of Ondo State?

2.0 Literature Review of the Study

2.1 Overview of Ilaje and Ese-Odo Communities of Ondo State

In Ondo State in southwest Nigeria, there is a local government area called Ilaje. Its headquarters are located in Igbokoda town. Originally composed of four geopolitical units, Ode Ugbo, Ode Mahin, Ode Etikan, and Aheri, the Ilajes are a unique migratory coastal linguistic group of Yoruba peoples dispersed along the coastal districts of Ondo, Ogun, Lagos, and Delta State. The towns and villages of the other three geopolitical kingdoms—Ugbo, Aheri, and Etikan—are dispersed along the beaches and marshy terrains of the Atlantic Ocean coast, but the majority of towns and villages of the Mahin kingdom (Ode Mahin) are located on fertile plains. In contrast, the Ijaw (Izon) ethnic subgroup of the Western Apoi tribe and the Arogbo tribe inhabit Ese Odo, a Local Government Area in Ondo State, Nigeria. Its main office is located in Igbekebo town. Within this Local Government Area, Arogbo, Igbobini, Agadagba-Obon, and Igbekebo are the largest towns.

Ilaje and Ese-Odo are coastal Local Government Areas (LGAs) serving as the focal points for this study. Both Ilaje and Ese-Odo boast rich cultural heritages, primarily shaped by the Ilaje people. Situated along the Atlantic Ocean, these LGAs are pivotal hubs for fishing and trade, forming the backbone of their economies. The cultural identity and economic activities of the local populations are deeply intertwined with the coastal landscape. The coastal location of Ilaje and Ese-Odo exposes them to environmental challenges, exacerbated by oil exploration. The impact of oil activities on the delicate ecosystems, coupled with potential disruptions to traditional livelihoods like fishing, poses a considerable threat to the well-being of the communities (Etta & Aigbe, 2020; Oke et al., 2023).

2.2 Development Initiatives in the Oil Producing Areas of the Niger Delta

Since before independence, there have been several initiatives in the oil-producing regions of the Niger Delta to modify the direction and speed of growth in order to enhance the standard of living for the local population (Babatunde, 2010). Multiple development intervention agencies have been established by the Nigerian government. For communities in the Niger Delta, however, the legacy of these endeavors primarily translates into deep disappointment because their expectations and dreams have been built and then continually dashed. The Niger Delta is still rife with poverty and underdevelopment, with insufficient physical infrastructure—such as roads, electricity, portable water supplies, schools, hospitals, and shelter—among other necessities (Mohammad, 2020).

The Niger Delta Development Commission was established as a noteworthy measure by the federal government to tackle the Niger Delta problem. The NDDC was founded by the Obasanjo administration in December 2000 to replace the Oil Mineral Producing Areas Development Commission, which was abolished. In order to improve OMPADEC's operating efficiency, it was required that NDDC take over OMPADEC's liabilities and assets (Adekoya et al., 2022). According to the National Assembly Act that established the commission in July 2000, the commission's main duty was to sustainably coordinate the development efforts of multiple regional stakeholders. In addition to the state government's efforts and the oil multinationals' contributions to corporate social responsibility, the NDDC is an ad hoc framework designed to identify and address the immediate needs of the people in the Niger Delta.

2.3 Ondo State Oil Producing Areas Development Commission (OSOPADEC)

OSOPADEC was established by the Laws of Ondo State CAP. 106 in 2001 to intervene in the development of the oil producing and impacted areas of Ondo State (OSOPADEC, 2023). The vision of the commission is 'to be the most proactive and responsive interventionists agency that satisfies stakeholders aspirations with excellency in service delivery' (OSOPADEC, 2023). Its mission is to 'transform the lives of the people and ensure total prosperity and sustainability development through intervention programmes in oil producing areas of Ondo State'. The intervention programmes include but not limited to scholarships, bursaries, community and infrastructural development (OSOPADEC, 2023).

The commission has claimed to have been up and doing in the afore mentioned intervention programmes, however in reality it seems that the commission's efforts have not gotten to all the parties that should benefit from the intervention programme. It was expected that 40% of oil derived resources should go to the Federal

Government while 60% should be used by the State to address the intervention programmes outlined by the Commission (OSOPADEC law amendment, 2003). However, some parts of the oil producing areas like Ijaws believe that Ilajes do not think they deserve to be part of the intervention programme and also some indigenes of Ilaje and Ese-Odo who claim to be the rightful beneficiaries are also lamenting of improper circulation of royalties. All these for over the years have call for incessant conflicts, grievances among the people of the region.

3.0 Materials and Methods

3.1 Research Design

The study adopts a descriptive survey research design (Ani et al., 2014; Amaihian et al., 2022). Data was collected with a questionnaire designed by the researcher. A cross section of adult indigenes in the area of study was sampled. Descriptive survey was especially suitable for this study because it enabled the researcher to describe the situation as it is.

3.2 Population and Geographical Location

The population of this study is every adult male and female who lives or conversant with Ilaje and Ese-Odo localities in Akure, Ondo State. For lack of data update, it is currently difficult to estimate the total population of adults living in the areas.

3.3 Sampling and Technique

Based on convenient sampling technique, the total sample for this study is 150 adult participants drawn from different locations of population under study. Simple random sampling was used to sample 150 adults from different locations in Ilaje and Ese-Odo local government areas of the state. This sample size was based on convenient sample approach applicable where it is difficult to estimate a given population or when such population is large (Amusat et al., 2022; Erude et al., 2023).

3.4 Research Instrument

The research instrument for data collection was a researcher's designed online questionnaire. The questionnaire is made up 6 sections. Section 1 contains items on demographic distribution of the respondents, the sections 2-6 contains items for addressing the research objectives and answering the research questions. The draft of the questionnaire was subjected to face validation. Twenty-five copies of the questionnaire were pilot tested in another location. The test yielded a Cronbach alpha coefficient of 0.75, which indicates that the instrument is very reliable.

4.0 Method of Data Collection and Analysis

The researcher with help of research assistant distributed the questionnaire link to the eligible participants through online while some of the questionnaires were also given physically. Before the questionnaire items were introduced, the purpose of the research was explained and consent was sought, assuring the participants of confidentiality of their responses. Data analysis was done using Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS version 22.0) and Microsoft Excel (2016 version) (Erude et al., 2023; Erude et al., 2023; Shu'ara & Olaolu, 2023). Tables, charts, frequency and percentage counts were used to make judgement regarding the research questions.

4.1 Result Presentation and Discussion of Findings

4.1.1 Demographic Distribution of the Respondents

The targeted sample size for this study was 200 participants. However, out of the 180 questionnaires sent out, 150 valid responses were retrieved and used for analysis. The above Table shows the distribution of the respondents by gender. It shows that 48 (32%) of the respondents are female and 102 (68) of the respondents are male. This implies that majority of the respondents are male. The Table above shows the marital status of the respondents. One hundred and twenty-three of them (82%) are married, 27 (18%) of them are single. This result indicates that that majority of the respondents are married. The Table above shows that the respondents are of various age ranges. Six of them are between ages 18-25, 18 are between ages 26-35, 63 are between ages 37-45 and 46 years and above respectively. This result indicates that majority of the respondents are within 37 years and above. Furthermore, the result also shows that all the participants are adults of 18 years and above. The above Table contains information on occupation of the respondents. Eighteen of them are, business owners, 105 of them are civil servants while 27 of them engage in other forms of livelihood such as farming, fishing etc. This result indicates that majority of the respondents (70%) are civil servants.

4.1.2 Answering of Research Questions

Research question one: What are the factors contributing to oil-related conflicts in Ilaje and Ese-Odo local government areas of Ondo State?

Competition for oil-related resources is a key factor resulting to conflict in Ilaje and Ese-Odo communities

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Agree	72	48.0	48.0	48.0
Disagree	18	12.0	12.0	60.0
Strongly agree	51	34.0	34.0	94.0
Strongly disagree	9	6.0	6.0	100.0
Total	150	100.0	100.0	

The Table above shows that majority of the respondents 72 (48%) and 51 (34%) agree and strongly agreed respectively, that competition for oil-related resources is a key factor resulting to conflict in Ilaje and Ese-Odo communities. The information on the above is further shown on the chart below.

How would you rate the influence of external actors (e.g., oil companies, government policies) on the conflicts in Ilaje and Ese-Odo communities

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
High	49	32.7	32.7	32.7
Low	28	18.7	18.7	51.3
Moderate	46	30.7	30.7	82.0

Very high	27	18.0	18.0	100.0
Total	150	100.0	100.0	

To buttress the earlier response, the Table above further points out that influence of external factors (e.g., oil companies, government policies) contributes to conflict in the region. This was rated 32.7% high, 30.7% moderate, 18% very high and 18.7% low. These responses are further represented on the chart below.

Sharing/distribution of royalties, compensation and rewards for oil exploration contribute to conflicts in Ilaje and Ese-Odo communities

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Agree	69	46.0	46.0	46.0
Disagree	15	10.0	10.0	56.0
Valid Strongly Agree	57	38.0	38.0	94.0
Valid Strongly disagree	9	6.0	6.0	100.0
Total	150	100.0	100.0	

Finally, on attempt to answer the question on the factors contributing to oil-related conflicts in Ilaje and Ese-Odo local government areas of Ondo State, the above Table shows that majority of the respondents agree 46% and strongly agree 38% that sharing/distribution of royalties, compensation and rewards for oil exploration contribute to conflicts in the region. Hence, this study confirms in line with previous studies such as (Edun & Olaniyi, 2021; Oyefusi, 2017; Babatunde, 2010) that factors contributing to oil related conflict in Niger Delta of Nigeria include unequal distribution of royalties, government and company’s policies as well as competition for oil related resources.

Research question two: What is the level of oil-related conflicts in Ilaje and Ese-Odo Local Government Areas of Ondo State?

Have you witnessed or heard of any conflict in Ilaje or Ese-Odo community traced to oil exploration

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
I can't remember	24	16.0	16.0	16.0
Valid No	27	18.0	18.0	34.0
Valid Yes	99	66.0	66.0	100.0
Total	150	100.0	100.0	

The above Table shows that majority of the respondents (66%) have witnessed or heard of oil related conflicts in the region, while minority stated otherwise.

If yes, how frequent have you witnessed or heard of oil-related conflicts in the communities?

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid Always	15	10.0	10.0	10.0
	3	2.0	2.0	12.0

Never	24	16.0	16.0	28.0
Occasionally	75	50.0	50.0	78.0
Often	33	22.0	22.0	100.0
Total	150	100.0	100.0	

From the above Table, out of those who witnessed or heard of conflict in the region, 2% claim that it occurs always, 50% claim it happens occasionally while 22% claim it occurs often.

On a scale of 1 to 5, where 1 is no conflict at all and 5 is constant conflict, how would you rate the overall level of oil-related conflicts in Ilaje and Ese-Odo community?

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
1	12	8.0	8.0	8.0
2	15	10.0	10.0	18.0
Valid 3	105	70.0	70.0	88.0
4	12	8.0	8.0	96.0
5	6	4.0	4.0	100.0
Total	150	100.0	100.0	

To further confirm this rate of occurrence, the Table above indicates that oil related conflict is occasional incident in the region. However, the bar chart below is a typical representation of level of conflict occurrence in the region.

Research question three: What is the level of reconciliation efforts towards peace building in Ilaje and Ese-Odo Local Government Areas of Ondo State?

Are you aware of any reconciliation initiatives or programs in Ilaje and Ese-Odo community?

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
I can't remember	24	16.0	16.0	16.0
Valid No	30	20.0	20.0	36.0
Yes	96	64.0	64.0	100.0
Total	150	100.0	100.0	

The above Table reveals that there have been reconciliation efforts (64%) in Ilaje and Ese Odo local governments as a result of oil related conflicts. However, 20% of the respondents disagree to this while 16% are of neutral opinion.

If yes, how would you rate the visibility and accessibility of the reconciliation efforts?

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	27	18.0	18.0	18.0
Excellent	3	2.0	2.0	20.0
Fair	42	28.0	28.0	48.0
Good	48	32.0	32.0	80.0
Poor	30	20.0	20.0	100.0
Total	150	100.0	100.0	

The above Table reveals the perceived effectiveness of the reconciliation initiatives in the communities. It is a matter of diverse opinion, however, a good number of respondents see it to be good (32%), 20% see it to be poor as shown on the Table. This response points to the fact that there is still potential/unresolved conflict/grievances among the populace as they have not reach consensus on effectiveness of conflict resolution initiatives been carried out.

Have you personally participated in or benefited from any reconciliation efforts in your community?

Research question four: How effectiveness is reconciliation initiatives addressing oil-related conflicts in Ilaje and Ese-Odo Local Government Areas of Ondo State?

Have you taking part in reconciliation efforts in your community?

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	18	12.0	12.0	12.0
I can't remember				
No	81	54.0	54.0	66.0
Yes	51	34.0	34.0	100.0
Total	150	100.0	100.0	

The above Table shows that a good number of the respondents (34%) have taken part in one form of conflict resolution or the other. On the other hand, 54% decline that they have not done so, while 12% could not tell if yes or no. This result points out that, conflict resolution initiatives have been carried out in the region at one point or another. The Table and Chart below further reveal the effectiveness of reconciliation efforts in the two communities. The responses indicate that the reconciliation initiatives have not achieved its full potentials in the area as the residents hold diverse opinions on the effectiveness of reconciliation efforts.

Research question five: What are factors contributing to success or failure of reconciliation attempts in Ilaje and Ese-Odo Local Government Areas of Ondo State?

Finally, on this research question, the responses of the respondents on factors capable of contributing to success or failure of reconciliation efforts in the communities include: Insufficient resources, Culture differences, Political interference, Lack of trust among others.

5.0 Conclusion and Recommendations

Peace and reconciliation are seen as complimenting one another in promoting social justice and development. More people are realizing the importance of reconciliation and conciliation in addressing the legacy of violence and establishing long-lasting peace. There is neither a winner nor a vanquish in this alternative dispute resolution technique. Nevertheless, the disputing parties are able to come to an agreement, air their complaints, restore amicable cohabitation, and carry on leading fulfilling lives together. Reconciliation efforts, however, have not been able to have the transformative effect that is required to make room for inclusive peacebuilding. However, reconciliation is still a viable strategy for achieving lasting peace; for this reason, it need to be supported and accepted as a norm in every community. The following recommendations are made: Oil companies, government agencies fulfil should fully implement all the promises/agreements reached with the oil producing region and the royalties should not only end in the pockets of selected few. Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) should be given the power to check the implementation of various programmes, interventions aim at improving the well-being of oil producing regions. The officials in charge of distribution of royalties and other essential duties should be indigenous members of the oil producing regions, selected by the people themselves. All the concern parties in oil exploration should revisit the past unresolved issues and make restitutions if need be.

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