The Role of Umumgboto in Maintaining Peace and Conflict Resolution in Akpoku Etche of Niger Delta.

By

Emmanuel Echezolochi Amadi, Ph.D
Department of Religious and Cultural Studies
Rivers State University
Port Harcourt
Email: emmanuel.amadi8@ust.edu.ng
Tel: 08062942929

Abstract

This essay examines the role of Umumgboto in maintaining peace and conflict resolution in Akpoku Etche. In Akpoku, Umumgboto are Akpoku daughters who are married outside Akpoku town. They are well respected, selfless, cherished and valued for their sense of judgement. As a strong social group with a strong social network, they are able not only to reduce and resolved minor internal squabbles relating to husband and wife misunderstanding, excessive smoking among the Akpoku Youths of present generation, boundary encroachment through such resolution mechanisms as house to house visits, warning, roundtable meetings with community leaders. The methodology adopted was oral interviews (report of Umumgboto and Handed down tradition from the repositories of custom and traditions of Akpoku and secondary sources (published materials). The study adopts phenomenological approach to describe and interpret the roles of Umumgboto relating to maintaining peace and conflicts resolution. Findings reveal that there is so much Umumgboto has to offer our contemporary society especially in the process of resolving conflicts relating to cultism, war which have become the hallmark of today's society.

Keywords: Akpoku, Umumgboto, Peace, Conflict and Conflict Resolution.

Introduction

Generally speaking, no human society or nation can grow in an atmosphere of rancur and acrimony. That is why Morris (2000) explains that it is practically

impossible for a war turn out nation, violence ridden nation, crisis engulfed nation to experience advancement in every facet of life. According to him, such scenarios not only frustrate developmental efforts, but also a cog on the wheel of human capital and technological development (P. 23). In other words, peace, here, is fundamentally priceless and as such an essential ingredient necessary to facilitate unity and promote interpersonal relations. Thus the principle or ethics of peace is worthwhile and as such must consciously be uphold in our everyday life for unward socio – religio – economic and political advancement.

This paper, therefore, intends to examine the forms of Akpoku social conflicts and the resolution mechanisms.

The Akpoku Background

Akpoku is located at the North – East margin of Niger- Delta having boundaries with Umuoye Etche and Unuekwuene Ngor- Okpala in Imo State. On the East with Mba clan of Etche, Okehi clan of Etche, Obite Etche, Opehi, Umuikoro and Orishieze Ngor- Okpala in Imo State. On the South with Odufor , Nihi, Opiro and Egwi Etche and on the West with Ozuzu clan of Etche. The town itself is made up of six villages namely, Umuoria, Umuaghara, Ummekw.uene, Umuorde, Umudim and Okomoko which are bounded by common ancestry. At present, Akpoku is one of the towns that make up Etche Local Government Area of Rivers State (Amadi, 2022, p. 33)

As for their economic life, the people of Akpoku are predominantly farmers. They engage in tapping of palm wine, fishing , hunting, but the most important are yam and cassava which are planted in large qualities.

As a people located within the Niger Delta region of Nigeria, they experience the normal Niger Delta climate condition with the two main seasons namely, the rainy season and dry season. They rainy season takes place between March and November, the dry season occurs between November and February.

As regards their spiritual life, Akpoku strongly believe in the existential reality of a Supreme Being to which the people refer to as Chineke (the God who created

everything in the universe).. Akpoku, like other traditional African societies, do not approach Him directly, rather He is approached and worshipped through the pantheon of divinities. (Amadi, 2015, p.2019).

Conceptual Definitions

Umumgboto

In Akpoku standard, Umumgboto as earlier noted, are Akpoku daughters who are married outside Akpoku town. In fact, their Motto" Udokanma" "Peace is better" further explains the reason they are committed to fostering peace in Akpoku. They have a strong social not work through which the coordinate among themselves and gather enough intelligence on issues capable of truncating peace and orderliness in the land. By virtue of their sense of reasoning and maturity in conflicts resolution they are respected and accorded a place of pride in the land. Thus, as my interviewee, Amadi Joseph, intimated, Umumgboto are known for certain qualities; as they are known to be respectful, honest, reliable, courageous, etc. In fact, they are experienced, seasoned and full of wisdom. Apart from this, they are educated women who have distinguished themselves in various fields of endeavor. Equally important, is their proactiveness and unbiased depositions in the whole process of ensuring peace and resolving feuds in the land (Amadi , J. 20/03/2025, oral Interview).

Peace

Peace means freedom from quarrel, strife, conflict, rioting, disorder hostility, violence or war. It is also freedom from fear anxiety, uncertainty, disturbance or tension. It is an atmosphere of calmness, security and safety (Akpenpaun, 2000, P,73). For Okwueze, (2003), is a condition in which there is no war between two or more nations, a period in which there is no war, a state of freedom from disorder within a country with the citizens living according to the law, a state of agreement or friendliness among people living and working together (P.79). It is according to Okai (2008) a state of existence where the claims and needs of all are satisfied; where there is relationship of communion between God and humans and nature, where there is fulfillment for all creation" (p.111). Peace as the Second Vatican explained, according to Okwueze 2003) " is not merely the absence of war, nor can it be reduced solely to be maintenance of a balance of power between enemies nor

is it brought about by dictatorship, instead it is rightly and appropriately called an enterprise of justice (pp.97-98).

Explaining further Eboh, (2012) argues that in Africa, peace is not only the absence of war, conflict, fear, destruction and human suffering (negative peace) but also the absence of unequal and unjust structures and cultural practices, about security, democratic participation, respect for human rights, development, social progress and justice (p.77).

For Nwobueze (2022) peace means non violence and constructive management of disputes. Indicators of peace as he further noted include good governance, respecting the rights and dignity of others, sound business environment, high level of human capital, low level of corruption, efficient and effective communication and information system, freedom from want and fear, sustainable human security and good neigbourliness (p.272).

According to Rowdy (1998) is a state in which those entrusted with the destiny of the people treasures it with utmost care by providing the necessary infrastructure to improve on the welfare of the people (p.10) For Ram (2011) it consists of being committed to the business of governance by ensuring equitable representation directed towards addressing the needs and aspirations of the people (p.24). According to sympathy (1997) It is when people's interest values, including justice security of life and property are ultimately taken care of at the times deviod of flimsy excuses (p.102).

Conflict

Ibenwa (2009) defines conflict as the expression of disagreement over something important to two individuals, groups, states or nations when the different views, different goals, different needs and different values and they fight over limited resources to address them (p.393). According to Okechukwu and Ironya (2022)" Is an Interactive process manifested in incompatibility, disagreement or dissonance within or between social entities (i.e. individuals, group, organization, etc) . Is the opposition of forces, the action of individuals or groups to realize their interests over those of others (p.22).

Conflict Resolution

Conflict resolution be is defined as the process of finding a lasting solution to a disturbing pressing problem (Ibenwa, 2009, P.5). France (2006) defines conflict resolution to includes the efforts and intervention to limit contain or regulate conflict " (P.21). Accorging to Aja (2007) conflict exists either by perception or real and it is the function of the mindest of a group or parties involved. It is an integral part of man; a natural part of our daily lives. According to him, conflicts takes place within a particular context and these contexts include the society in conflict and the wider international and regional levels. It is simplistically, defined as the pursuit of incompatible interests and goals between different individuals, groups, states or nations (p.15).

Causes of Conflict

Arbitrators:

These are impartial third parties in a formal dispute process who make judgments about faults and hand down decisions, which could have some binding force on the parties. They are usually experts in the subject of the dispute. Following this are conciliators. These are third parties to the point where they will be ready to resolve their dispute. In addition to this are facilitators. These try to make the process of dispute resolution a lot easier; through meeting and discussions they help disputing parties reach agreement. Following closely are the negotiators. These are parties to a dispute who have resolved to work and mutual agreement or contract. In addition to this are mediators. These are third parties who intervene in negotiator/conflict, helping the parties to reach a mutual agreement out of their own volition. Mediation could be formal or informal. These are categories of mediators, for example, "benevolent authoritative mediators" who use their influence to help disputing parties reach agreement (P. 20).

Tribalism/Ethnicism

Ethnicity for Otite (1960) is the contextual discrimination by members of one group against others on the basis of differentiated systems of socio-cultural symbols (p.60). This has affected not only every aspect of our but also responsible for the failure of the first republic. Thus, the formation of political party along region/ethnic lines has affected the voting behaviour of Nigerians and also created

a bane for national unity and stable government". In addition to this Nye (1967) defines corruption as behaviour which deviates from the formal duties of a public role because of private (personal, close family, private clique) pecuniary status gains; such behaviour includes bribery (use of reward to pervert the judgment of a person in a position of trust), (nepotism) (bestowal of patronage by reason of ascriptive relationship rather than merit), and misappropriation (illegal appropriation of public resources for private use) (p. 419). Here, corruption is one of the greatest problems facing Nigeria in the recent times. Every successive government institutes one form of anti-corruption agency or another like the War Against Indiscipline (WAI) Economic and Finance Crime Commission (EFCC), ICPC and others. At the end of the day the hope and the aspirations of the people are dashed as corruption continues to increase day by day thereby promoting crimes and conflicts of various kinds and forms. Following this is youth unemployment. Youth unemployment is one of the causes of crises in Nigeria today. Remember the common saying that "an idle mind/hand is a devil's workshop". Owing to state of unemployment the youth resort to becoming crime perpetrators, as they find these an opportunity to make ends meet. That is why corruption in Nigeria cannot be adequately handled if youth unemployment/development is not adequately addressed". In addition, is social injustice/human right violation. Human rights are trampled upon with impunity. Some people had made themselves demigods, out laws, sacred cows and as such the rule of law does not have any power over them. They go to any length to violet human rights and this creates problems and disharmony resulting in the loss of lives and properties, rape, slavery, genocide, torture, perpetuated during religious riots, denial of right of freedom of religion, expression and as well as the press, discrimination are among the causes of ethno-religious crises in Nigeria, inequitable distribution of resources or its denial and the deliberate violation of human rights have led to conflict (Ibenwa, 2009, p.51).

Types Of Akpoku Social Conflict And Resolution Mechanism

In Akpoku, crimes such rape, cultism, stealing (crops, domestic animals, adultery, incest deforestation. Others include wife beating, discarding of wife' box wrapper, according to my interviewee Njoku Maorice are offences that causes conflicts and social disorderines Njoku, M. 25/03/2025, oral interview).

One noticeable way of resolving the conflict is to interface with the Akpoku council of traditional rulers and chiefs, and Akpoku central Development Committee. As my interviewee, Nwankwo Glory, obliged, this is to a situation where appropriate decisions are made for appropriate disciplinary action (Nwankwo, G. 10/03/2025, oral interview). Another important way of resolving conflicts in Akpoku is to apportion blame on the offender (s). According to my interviewee, Igbokwe Blessing, blame, here, involves a situation where the Umumgboto express of dissatisfaction and disapproval towards the behaviour of the offender or offenders. Such spontaneous expressions of mass disapproval may influence his future behaviour (Igbokwe , B. 15/03/2025, oral interview).

In addition to this is house to house visit. This strategy is a situation where the Umumgboto deliberately organize visit to families. They do this by organising themselves into six groups since they are many in their number. The reason for this as our interviewee Anele Maria, disclosed, is to ensure that they go round the communities and return home early enough to take care of their families. The essence of this visit according to her is to sensitize couples on the danger inherent in beating their wives and other related domestic violence. Also, through this strategy they sensitize the youths of Akpoku present generation on the danger and implications of indulging into reckless life style such as excessive intake of hard drugs, consumption of alcohol, smoking, etc that can destroy their future, to discourage them from exposing the forest to porosity by deforestation (Anele, M. 27/03/2025, oral interview).

Conclusion

In Akpoku, the role of Umumgboto in maintaining peace and conflict resolution is cherished and considered so significant.. Through their social network with which they gather information and verify source and by extension their proactiveness and undaunted dispositions in the whole process of maintaining peace has helped to reduce social conflicts to the barest minimum.

References

Primary Sources

Amadi Joseph, Traditionalist oral interview at Umuorde Akpoku on 20/ 03/ 2025.

Amadi Maria, woman leader oral interview at Okomoko Akpoku on 27/03/ 2025.

Njoku Maurice, Traditionalist oral interview at Umuoria Akpoku on 25/ 03/ 2025.

Njoku Glory, secretary to Umumgboto oral interview at Umudim Akpoku on 10/03/ 2025.

Igbokwe Blessing, chairlady oral interview at Umuaghara Akpoku on 15/ 03/ 2025.

Secondary Sources

Aja, A. A. (2007). Basic Concepts, Issues and Strategies, Peacs and Conflicts Resolution. African Conflicts Case Studies. Enugu: Keny and Brothers Publishers.

Akpenpuun, D. (2000). Principles of Ethics. Ibadan: Agape Publications.

Amadi , E.E. (2022), "*The Culture of Illa Nne – Eze - Agbara* and Its Implications in Ushi Priesthood of Akpoku Etche in South – South Nigeria" in G. I.K .Tasie and Ben Onu O. (eds.) African Traditional Religion and Christianity in 21st Ccentury Nigeria Essays in Honour of Professor W.O. Wotogbe-Weneka. Port Harcourt: Pearl Publishers International Ltd.

Amadi, E. E. (2015) " Traditional Presthood in Mba Clan of Etche. *A journal of Religion and Culture, Department of Religious and Cultural Studies,* University of Port Harcourt, vol.15,No.1 P.209.

Francis, D. F. (2006)" Peace and Conflict Sudies: An African overview of Basic Concepts" Shedack Gya Prest (ed). Introduction to Peace and Conflict Studies in West African: A Reader Ibadan Spectrum Book.

Ibenwa, C.. (2009)" The Role of Religion in Conflict Resolution in Nigeria: *Nsukka Journal of Religion and Cultural Studies,* A publication of Department of Religion and Cultural Studies University of Nigeria, Nsukka Enugu State, Nigeria, Vol. 4 No. 1 pp. 49-51.

Marie, P.E. (2012) "Ethics of peace and conflict resolution Vis-à-vis youth restiveness and Militancy in Niger Delta, Nigeria" in Skepsis" A *Journal for philosophy and Interdisciplinary Research.*

Morris, M. (2000). The Fundamentals of Peace (www.//fundamentals of peace Extracted 4th April, 2025).

Nwobueze, C.C. (2022) . "The Church and Peace Building in Rivers State Nigeria in G.I.K. Tasie and Ben Onu O. (eds). African Traditional Religion and Christianity in 21st Century Nigeria" Essays in Honour of Professor W.O Wotogbe Wenka Port Harcourt: Pearl Publishers International Ltd.

Okai, M.O. (2008). Religion and Social Conflicts Management the Case of the Niger Delta Religion of Nigeria Port Harcourt: Cal Integrated Resources Limited.

Okwchukwu, N, and Ironya S. O. (2022)" Key Theories in Peace and Conflict Studies and their Impact on the Study and Practices", *Noun International Journal of Peace Studies and Conflict Resolution* (Vol.2, No.7, 2022, P22).

Okwueze, M.I. (2003).Ethics, Religion and Society Biblical, Traditional and Contemporary Perspective. Nsukka: Prize Publishers .

Otite, O. (1960). Ethnic Pluralism and Ethnicity in Nigeria. Ibadan: Stranson C.L. Limited.

Ram, M.N. (2011). Peace and Mind in the Structural Development of the Society (www.//.peaceminds//structureanddevelopment,extracted25thFebruary2025 10AM).

Rowdy, R.N (1998). The Essence of Peace in Human Affairs (www.//: the essence of paece in human affairs retrieved 25th February, 2025, 10 Am).

Sympathy, K.R. (1994). Governance in the Journey of Human Development (www.http/extracted25thFebruary2024,10AM).

Ukwaba (2002), " Political Corruption in Nigeria : An Assessment of the First, Second and Fourth Republics" in C.O.T. Ugwu (ed.) Corruption in Nigeria: Cultural Perspective A Book of Readings. Nsukka; Chuka Education Publishers.