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# **Artificial Intelligence as a Tool for Conflict Resolutions in Obio/Akpor Local Government Area of Rivers State**

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## **Abstract**

So many conflicts are found in the society, both in the family, community and nation, which have often caused more harm than good. In view of this, the paper discussed artificial intelligence as a tool for conflicts resolutions in Obio /Akpor Local Government Area of Rivers State: It explained how conflicts in the society such as domestic issues, land disputes, chieftaincy issues, family rights and properties, communal clashes, ritualism, marital divorce, killings among others can be amicably resolved using artificial intelligence. Vital topics related to conflict resolutions were covered. It was concluded that conflicts are inevitable aspect of human society, which calls for the need to learn how to manage, resolve and deal with them effectively using artificial intelligence. It was thus recommended among others that traditional institutions should embrace artificial intelligence in conflict resolutions due to its many advantages, members in the family should know their responsibilities and place in order to ensure cohesion and tranquility, community members should be informed of their rights and responsibilities in order to maintain peace and that offending members should be properly sanctioned to maintain discipline in the respective communities.

## **Introduction**

Every society is made of human and material resources which can be harnessed to meet certain goals (personal, economic, social or political) in the good of all. It follows that the society is basically made up of different people with different beliefs, backgrounds, personality, interests, aspirations, needs and expectations. It is expected that members of the society live in

peace and harmony for their collective good but sadly, this is not always the case. Apparently, individual differences exist among these persons which manifest in one form or the other at different times.

Both Ajayi and Buhari (2014) noted that every society is expected to function maximally by harnessing the differences among its human resources in line with its set objectives. Nevertheless, periodically, there is bound to be conflicts among the citizens which may threaten the people's peace, unity and goals. Conflict is a common social phenomenon that is related to any form of group activity or social interaction among people for a common purpose. It connotes the struggles, disputes, disagreements, fights, wars, quarrels, frustrations and structural imperfections existing within, between and among individuals and groups in any society (Abdulsalam et al, 2020). It is further seen as disagreements arising from human interactions due to the fact that individuals and groups perceive issues differently on account of individual differences and competition for allocation of resources.

Nweke (2012) and Ezenwoko and Osagie (2014) noted respectively that conflict is a behaviour intended to obstruct the achievement of some other person's goals. That is, conflict is the incompatibility of goals which arises from opposing behaviours. It can be viewed at the individual, group or organisational level. It can equally arise over multiple organisational experiences such as incompatible goals, differences in the interpretation of facts, negative feelings, differences of values and philosophies or disputes over shared resources.

Essentially, conflicts have been experienced in Obio/Akpor Local Government Area (LGA) of Rivers State for decades. In this wise, Folarin in Abdulsalam et al (2020:53) noted that:

the causes of conflicts are diverse and are premised on a broad spectrum of factors which include competition over goals and interests that cannot be shared, usurpation or attempt to usurp the authority and position of one component by another component of a society, inconsistencies in goals, increasing desire for autonomy or authority by the different individuals or groups in the community, scarcity or inadequacy of resources to meet the needs of the various components, various kinds of communication breakdown among others.

Likewise, Albert (2012) identified conflicts according to their causative agents such as conflicts emanating from the struggles for the control of scarce or limited resources and conflicts emanating from perceived injury to the society's value system which may manifest in people's preferences for certain things or their ideologies and religious beliefs. They also include psychological needs of individuals and groups in terms of personal and group contradictions and manipulation of information which may be used to induce others for conflict or peace building. The harmful effects of conflicts in the society are devastating and incalculable and as such, it is germane for measures to be put in place to curb their prevalence (Hamisu et al, 2017).

As observed by Malami (2011), conflict resolution describes the process that is primed towards the reduction, elimination or termination of conflict. More so, it comprises a broad range

of activities which involves mediation, negotiation, bargaining and arbitration. In different societies, traditional institutions are best positioned to handle conflict resolutions. In view of its direct or indirect essence in the society, the role of traditional institutions (rulers / leaders) as prime custodians of culture cannot be overemphasised.

Traditional institutions therefore, are leaders or persons by virtue of heredity or people with proven track records who are nominated, appointed or installed in line with the provisions of their native laws and customs (Wadama, 2013). They include traditional rulers such as Akpor Council of Chiefs, Oba of Benin, Alaafin of Oyo, Emir of Kano, Women community leaders, Youth community leaders, family heads, etc. They possess the key to the success or failure in any political administration in the society because they operate at the grass-roots, interact closely with people in their daily activities and are highly respected. According to Orji and Olali (2010), traditional institutions are respected and unique symbol of tradition, culture, customs and their preservation; and as such, they are instrumental in ensuring growth and development in their communities through a proper system of communication.

A traditional ruler for instance, is in charge of an ethnic unit or clan and for the time being, is the holder of its highest traditional authority whose title is recognised by both the state and federal government as well as the citizens. Given that the essence of the traditional institutions is to preserve the tradition, customs, cultural heritage of the people and to manage, settle and resolve disputes / conflicts arising from among members of the community by the instrumentality of laws and customs of the people in that particular community or society, traditional institutions are seen and referred to as the custodians of their people's norms, cultural values and practices (Nweke, 2012; Cookey, 2010).

The rationale for selected traditional institutions in the process of conflict resolution in Obio/Akpor is premised on the fact that they have a vast knowledge of the acceptable traditional methods and procedures that have been passed from one generation to another. Also, traditional institutions have a deep understanding of the moral values and ethics of the society. It is no secret thus, that every society recognises and mandates its traditional institutions with some measures of power to maintain law and order, ensure security, manage, control and resolve conflicts among individuals and groups (Ezenwoko & Osagie, 2014).

Interestingly, the people have to find their way to the 'Obokoro' or town hall for their cases to be heard and handled. Equally, both the traditional ruler and his cabinet or those concerned have to be present which could be cumbersome at times. One will not expect the traditional ruler or his representative to go to the house of the complainant to resolve cases. It is the complainant who approaches the ruler. This age long bottleneck / tradition may however be corrected, modified or improved using artificial intelligence which is currently being multi-purposely utilised globally.

Artificial intelligence (AI) is a technology that, when used alone or in conjunction with other technologies, enables computers and other machines to mimic human intelligence and problem-solving abilities. Tasks that would normally require human intelligence or intervention can be completed by it. In recent times, the emergence of artificial intelligence has had a tremendous influence on human activities in almost all human spheres. Artificial intelligence is

now widely utilised to facilitate social interaction, changes how people interact with and perceive one another in pro-social and anti-social ways. Ultimately, it has been developed to help solve human problems and help improve the society (Fitch, 2010). This paper thus, attempts to highlight how artificial intelligence can help in conflict resolutions in the society.

### **Artificial Intelligence (AI)**

The emergence of artificial intelligence (AI) has had a tremendous influence on human activities globally. AI is a branch of computer science which involves developing computer programs to complete tasks which would otherwise require human intelligence (Mohammed, 2019). The term artificial intelligence was coined by John McCarthy in 1955. He defined it as the science and engineering of making intelligent machines. It is the ability to hold two different ideas in mind at the same time and still retain the ability to function (Singh et al, 2013). It connotes systems that display intelligent behaviour by analysing their environment and taking action with some degree of autonomy to achieve specific goals. Artificial intelligence algorithms are able to tackle learning, perception, problem-solving, communication and logical reasoning (Hohenstein et al, 2023). Hence, artificial intelligence can be applied in many ways within the modern society, making so many people to dazzle at its accent and ability to perform human tasks and also speak human languages.

Going further, AI is now widely used to facilitate social interactions as well as solve human problems from various fields. It changes how people interact with and perceive one another in pro-social and anti-social ways. By using algorithmic responses, communication efficiency increases the use of positive emotional language, and positive evaluations by communication partners (Guzman & Lewis, 2020). One of the most visible AI applications is AI-generated reply suggestions in text-based communication, commonly known as a smart reply, which seems to help users compose messages with “just one tap” (Hohenstein et al, 2023).

In as much as communication is the basic process through which people form perceptions of others, build and maintain social relationships and achieve cooperative outcomes, generative AI that draws from large language models (LLMs) is poised to fundamentally change how one communicates (Hohenstein et al, 2023). Also, AI applications such as visual assistants, chat GPT, chatbots and Ask-AI are increasingly utilised to produce any kind of language, from text messages and social media posts to computer programs and speeches. It also answers our questions and speaks with us in a comprehensible manner (Rainie & Anderson, 2017).

AI in addition, focuses on how to reproduce aspects of human intelligence, including the ability to solve human problems with the machine (Frankish & Ramsey, 2014). Recent advances in Artificial intelligence have led to more powerful and consequential AI technologies being integrated across daily life (Campolo et al, 2017). For instance, individuals routinely chat with Apple's Siri, Amazon's Alexa, Google Assistant and other digital assistants and people's interactions with smart devices are expected to grow more in the next few years. AI is currently turning out to be progressively available in rich organisations, government offices, schools and families which are able to utilise different AI-fueled apparatuses for different activities.

Moreover, artificial intelligence has already been applied widely in different functions of

higher education. It cuts across teaching and learning, research, administration and community engagement due to its ability to generate and access information (Sabzalieva & Valentini, 2023). AI can perform multiple roles in teaching and learning processes. It can improve the process and experience of learning for students. To actualise this, it is used as a stand-alone tool or can be integrated into other systems and platforms. AI also performs many simple or technical tasks such as calculations, basic research, proof-reading and so on. It can equally be used by researchers at different stages of the research process such as reviewing academic papers and so on. Likewise, it helps in improving administration due to its ability to complete huge and demanding tasks, respond to queries from students, complete course requirements, help students sign up for courses, etc (Campolo et al, 2017).

### **Recent Communal Conflicts in Obio/Akpor LGA**

In recent years, Obio/Akpor LGA has faced different arrays of political, communal and criminal issues, including cult and gang-related violence, protests and kidnappings. The LGA was pivotal in the 2023 general elections and experienced elevated levels of election-related malpractice and violence (Oputa, 2023).

For instance, since May 2015, political tensions have been high in the LGA and Rivers State as a whole after the disputed Nigerian Governor's Forum election. Formerly a member of the PDP, Governor Rotimi Amaechi, who is from Ikwerre (Rivers East Senatorial District), switched affiliation to the APC in November 2013. In spite of the zoning formula, which would have given the PDP gubernatorial candidacy to an aspirant from Rivers South-East, Nyesom Wike of Obio/Akpor LGA (Rivers East) won the PDP primaries and eventually the governorship election, upsetting the rotation and raising ethnic sentiments (Conflict Bulletin, 2014). In a surprise move, the Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND) apparently made a statement endorsing the APC candidate in the presidential election after claiming dissatisfaction with the sitting President and the PDP. In the run-up to the 2015 elections, cult groups and ex-militants lined up behind the two major parties and exerted influence through intimidation and violence.

The LGA has also witnessed conflict risk issues including robberies, kidnappings and gang/cult-related violence. As a major LGA in the State, protests and demonstrations are common. In the first half of 2012, large protests broke out over the government's removal of fuel subsidy programme. Later in the year, there were smaller protests reported over the delivery of public services. Again, in the first half of 2013, there was increased political tension between supporters and detractors of Governor Amaechi, including a protest where police fired tear gas on a reported crowd of 1,000 trying to storm the State House Assembly building (Nlerum & Epepe, 2015).

Further, there have been many cases of land disputes in the LGA. These have been among brothers, family members, vendor and purchaser, e.t.c. Many have died in the process while properties with millions of naira have been destroyed. Likewise, there have been marital disputes that have been brought before the council of elders for resolution; with either party asking for settlement, compensation, punishment for the offender and divorce in some instances (Max &



Wendy, 2011). These have been really disturbing which are capable of destroying / hindering peace, harmony and progress.

### **Ikwerre Family Heads and Disputes Resolution in Obio/Akpor LGA**

The Ikwerre ethnic nationality forms one of the major ethnic groups in Rivers State, with an estimated population of about 1.5 million people. It is spread in four Local Government Areas namely Obio/Akpor, Port Harcourt, Ikwerre and Emohua. The group is favoured with rivers, streams and a very fertile soil. The indigenes invariably are farmers, fishermen and traders. Their food crops amongst others include plantain, cassava, potato and yam while palm oil is their main cash crop. The history of the Ikwerre ethnic nationality is special and traceable to the cultural heritage of the Ibos. However, it has its own cultural practice, values, norms, customs and traditions which are similar to those of the Ibo cultural nomenclature (Ogoloma, 2013).

The Ikwerre ethnic nationality system of conflict settlement is based upon the family group; which follows a horizontal pattern. Each family has its own recognised head who has certain powers, privileges and responsibilities. That is why many families regard their ancestors as controlling their welfare and pay homage to them regularly (Jaja & Ogoloma, 2011). The family has its own land and the right to farm in it. The land is shared by the family head. A number of family groups are related to one another through the blood line that formed a kindred; and each village consists of a number of kindred that are related in one form or the other (Albert, 2012).

Governance in the area is executed by all the family heads which basically comprised the men folk. The elders, as they are called, seat together with the chiefs and Owbor holders. In each group of elders, one would be recognised as senior to the other and styled as Opara (Allan, 2011). He is the eldest in some cases and an influential voice at the family or village meeting and would usually preside over many issues of conflicts including that of land. The Opara is not normally the oldest man in the senior family group of the village. Nevertheless, he is not a chief in the normal sense of it, does not rule outside his family and has no authority except when sitting with other chiefs and Owbor holders of the family or village, especially when matters concerning the family appear for discussion or there is a dispute or meetings that the family will participate (Ekundayo, 2017).

As a general rule in Ikwerre ethnic nationality, nobody has authority over an area greater than the village except he is the paramount ruler of the kingdom. Conversely, if a kingdom consists of many families and sub families, there is the possibility for a man with wealth or powerful personality to become recognised as a local leader and acquire authority over an area covering several villages. However, men of this sort play a purely personal role in the governance of Ikwerre land. Their position is not normally handed on to any successor at their death; with their powers based on their titles, together with their personal qualities, whereas, that of the chiefs, elders and Owbor holders are based on their positions and influence with the ancestors (Okajile in Ogoloma, 2013).

Again, the chiefs, Owbor holders and elders have the prerogative to make the local laws and give whatever order(s) that are necessary from time to time. Where the elders want to give a

land particular strength, they will go to the village shrine called Eli/Ali-the Earth Goddess to make sacrifice and ask her to punish anyone who breaks the law (Jaja & Ogoloma, 2011).

There are many types of conflicts that can be seen in Ikwerre land. Some of them include family conflicts, age grade conflicts, marriage conflicts, individual vs individual conflicts, community vs community conflicts, land conflicts, chieftaincy conflicts, Owbor-holders (Ancestral leadership) conflicts, etc. The list is not exhaustive; which could be between two or more persons, between families or community as the case may be (Fatile, 2010). Men play a very crucial role in most aspects of the conflict settlements in any of the above categories due to their role as youths and elders, chiefs and Owbor holders of their various communities. It is only in few cases that women are involved such as issues of quarrelling, theft and assault. Even then, they may serve as observers or witnesses (Max & Wendy, 2011).

Below is an example from the Ikwerre ethnic nationality in Obio/Akpor LGA concerning land encroachment between Mr. Nweke and Mr. Amadi of Apari kingdom? Whereas the former is the complainant, the latter is the accused. It has been handled under three stages - preliminary, continuing and concluding stages.

### **Preliminary stage**

The preliminary stage incorporates a process by which a case can be established for hearing. It includes the following:

1. **Summoning (Otuomu):** Summoning is the first stage of instituting a case against someone in the traditional way. The person being the complainant is the one seeking justice. In Ikwerre land, he is called – Otuomu Ikpe. It is treated in the home of a family head, a village Chief, the paramount ruler or the chief in council. In present case, Mr. Nweke is undertaking the responsibility of summoning; otherwise referred to as the complainant.
2. **Summoning fees and other requirements:** At the second stage, the complainant is expected to pay a certain amount that may be agreed in respect of the case. It is paid according to the weight of the matter on ground. Mr. Nweke will further provide to the Chiefs, Owbor holders and elders two bottles of native gin and a given amount of money for the summoning.
3. **Message or letter of invitation:** Having fulfilled the preliminary requirements for institution of the case, the Chief in- charge of that sends a message inviting or summoning the accused on a certain date that has been agreed upon by the chiefs, Owbor holders and elders involved in the settlement. The town crier or messenger undertakes the task of communicating such date and notifies the accused (Mr. Amadi) of the case or summons given and delivered as agreed.
4. **Fixing of venue:** It is the duty of the chiefs, Owbor holders and elders to decide the venue, whether it will take place at the Chiefs residence or the village meeting hall called Obiri, the palace of the paramount ruler or the venue of the native court as the case may be (Ogoloma, 2013). The Obiri in Ikwerre serves as a place for important meetings of chiefs, Owbor holders and elders. It also serves other purposes including a place for traditional rites and festivals or native court. It is believed that the spirits of the gods are living inside this place and cases are

handled with due process and injustice will not be allowed nor evil does go unpunished. Any decision taken in this sacred place is believed to be binding on all parties no matter the social status of the persons (Egbo, 2018).

5. **A reminder notice:** Prior to the date of the case, the Chief relays a message of reminder to the parties involved in the matter billed for settlement. It is believed that both the accused and complainant have prepared themselves properly before the given date. This is done to ascertain any unforeseen event that may affect the process since situations or circumstances affecting people remain unpredictable. The date will still be certain if there is no appeal for change from any of those involved.
6. **A reminder notice:** Before to the date of the case, the Chief sends a message of reminder to the parties involved in the matter billed for settlement. It is believed that both the accused and complainant have prepared themselves properly before the given date. This is done to ascertain any unforeseen event that may affect the process since situations or circumstances affecting people remain unpredictable. The date will still be certain if there is no appeal for change from any of those involved.

#### **The continuing stage**

7. **The beginning of hearing (Obidoh Ikpe):** The beginning of the hearing of the case is the day that has been set aside by the judges or elders to entertain hearing of the case from both parties. The two parties involved in the land encroachment dispute are asked to appear at the agreed venue and at the agreed time. Both complainant and accused are expected to keep to time as lateness and delay may attract fine (Ezenwoko & Osagie, 2014)
8. **Requirement for hearing from both parties:** Before hearing proper begins, the parties involved are expected to honour the house with (2) two bottles of native gin each with some amounts of money as the custom/tradition as well as elders, chiefs and Owbor holders deem fit.
9. **Prosecution, hearing from both parties and cross-examination:** The scene of judgment represents a native court. Here, an elder serves as spokesperson and announces the beginning of the hearing and the nature of the case. The secretary of the court writes down the statements of the parties to the conflict. The eye witnesses and supporters watch and listen carefully as the case begins (Hamisu et al, 2017). Then, the complainant is given opportunity to air his grievances or complaints while standing after which he is seated. Next, questions from the accused person is allowed, the audience or and chiefs, Owbor holders and elders also seek as much questions as possible. This is immediately followed by narrating of statement of defence by the accused being Mr. Amadi. He does everything possible in his defensive statement to clear himself of the allegation as the case may be but lying is not permitted. Thereafter, he is questioned by the complainant, the observers and the chiefs, Owbor holders and elders. How

questions are thrown at him and the way he answers them determines his sincerity on the matter. The completion of this stage signals the end of question time and no question is allowed after that, not even from elders. Nevertheless, cross-examination is meant to ascertain and access the evidence and corroborate the facts of the dispute which can be seen as a legal display of wits and intelligence on the part of the legal officials (Ikechukwu et al, 2012).

### **The concluding stage**

10. **Investigation and evaluation of matter:** To ensure justice and fair play, the chiefs, Owbor holders and elders are expected never to be biased since they serve as the judges. The chiefs and elders will maintain credibility by setting up an adhoc investigative and evaluating committee. Members of the committee are drawn from amongst the chiefs, Owbor holders elders and some observers who are not members of the affected families. Their number may be between 10 to 15 persons. These persons carefully and critically examine the statement of the parties and evidences available so as to arrive at a fair justice. They also visit the sites of the disputed land after paying certain amount of money for the purpose of visitation by both parties to the case (Allan, 2011).
11. **Pronouncement of judgment (OWA IKPE):** In pronouncement of judgments, dialogue and negotiations are adopted in resolving the matters. In some conflicts, the parties agree to settle outside the purview of the courts. This happens when an influential person wades in to settle the matter. Sometimes consensuses are arrived at amongst the feuding parties before the Day of Judgment. In other instances such as land matter or chieftaincy cases, the court acts as the arbitrator and their pronouncement is binding. In the case of ugly situations such as rape, kidnapping, etc. a libation to the goddess of the land and the ancestors are made. Violators always meet with mysterious, severe and untold happenings to them. The goddess of the land and the ancestors are highly respected. No one tries to ignore invocations or libations made to them (Alagoa in Ogoloma, 2013).

Before pronouncement of judgment or final decision, both parties are addressed. They are asked if they will be satisfied with the decision and judgment that will be pronounced without taking offence. They will also ask them whether any of the parties to the conflict have anything to say. For there could be out of court settlement just as in the conventional court. This is where there is resemblance between the Traditional Court and the Conventional one. When they have answered in the affirmative, the final judgment or decision is pronounced on both parties by one appointed by the chiefs, Owbor holders and elders. If the atmosphere is tensed up, they may decide to postpone the pronouncement of the judgment till a more suitable date and time when they feel that tension has been reduced.

When an accused person is found to be innocent, he is cleared of all the accusations; otherwise, he is made to comply with the terms of judgment. Using the case under investigation, if Mr. Amadi is cleared of all accusations levelled

against him, he will have to go justified. However, if investigation reveals that charges against him are correct, he is fined or penalised. Sometimes, in a land case, men of the community will be assigned to adjust the boundaries in accordance with the judgment. It must be mentioned here that, not all the cases that go to the local court are treated with the aim of allotting punishment. Some cases might call for tendering apology. This is to be understood within the basic knowledge that, peace and harmony in the community/group is paramount than conflict, rancour and hatred.

12. **Sealing of covenant of peace:** In order to ensure that none of the parties denies or breaks the terms of agreement or judgment, a covenant of peace is sealed between them in the presence of all witnesses. It sometimes involves exchange of pleasantries or sharing of common drinks, water or libation to signify acceptance of judgment and willingness for peaceful coexistence (Fatile, 2010).

### **The Place of Artificial Intelligence in Conflict Resolution**

It is not impossible for AI to perform the role of traditional institutions at least in some cases.

This will help in reducing the number of cases that are tabled at the Obiri or town hall. It will also help to save time as much as possible. Below are some instances:

1. In terms of lands in the community, a good historian can feed the AI computer or machine with names of land owners in that community, in terms of families or individuals. It will also incorporate when such lands were acquired, bought, sold, inherited, leased, borrowed, etc. among other evidence. Hence, when people have land disputes and approach the traditional institution involved, the AI can be used to ascertain the rightful owner.
2. Issues regarding marriage and marital conflicts can be programmed into the AI. Hence, when couples come with marital issues, such can be resolved with less time since there are covered areas on the subject presented.
3. Other issues such as crime, rape, kidnapping, ritualism, etc can be handled in such manner by the traditional institution involved. This may lead to more accurate resolutions where the majority will feel fulfilled / satisfied.
4. Very importantly, the customs and traditions of such a society are properly documented using the AI which periodically will be read to the citizens. This can be helpful in reducing conflicts in such communities.

### **Conclusion**

Conflict is indeed an inevitable aspect of human interaction. The fact that conflicts are an integral part of human interactions necessitates the need to learn how to handle them in a way that prevents escalation and destruction. In the case of Obio/Akpor, disputes occur in families and in larger societies. There are still cases of conflict begging for resolution. The utilisation of artificial intelligence can be very helpful in this regard. It therefore, behoves on all the traditional institutions to rise up to the challenge of managing conflicts in their domain using AI due to its vast applications.

## Recommendations

The following are hereby recommended:

- 1) For sustainable peace to be attained in the society, there is need for government to pursue policies that encourage unity and social integration in communities in the area.
- 2) Community chiefs and elders should be known for truth-telling and honesty for greater respect and regard.
- 3) Traditional institutions should key into the use of AI in resolving conflicts due to its many benefits such as accuracy, time and energy saving, etc
- 4) As early as possible, family members should know their responsibilities and place in the family to ensure cohesion and tranquility.
- 5) Community members should be informed of their rights (e.g. inheritance and entitlements) and responsibilities in order to maintain peace.
- 6) Offending members should be properly sanctioned to maintain discipline in the respective communities.

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