Research Paper

Local Government Council and Conflict Management: A Study of Ikwerre Local Government Council, Rivers State, 2012-2021

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ABSTRACT
The study examined the role of local government council in conflict management with focus onIkwerre Local Government Council, Rivers State, from 2012-2021. Conflicts are not uncommon and are also a part of growth and development. Conflict can arise from diverse parties, amongst individuals, families, institutions, corporate bodies, different levels of government, communities, among others. Hence, conflict is gaining prominence and has become almost synonymous with the existence of human organizations the world over. This reality is somewhat paradoxical when one considers the enormous amount of energy and resources expended by organizations world-wide to prevent and or resolve conflicts. It is therefore not unusual to expect conflicts in the administration of Ikwerre Local Government Council in River State.The paper adopted a triangulation method of data-gathering techniques.The analysis of primary data produced through a questionnaire was tested with descriptive statistical methods. The content analysis was used in the interpretation of secondary data. Also, conflict transformation theory was adopted as theoretical analysis. The study unraveled that the struggle for political relevance has further open doors for class struggle, status difference, bad leadership, conflicting policies, among others leading to conflict in the local government council. The study recommends amongst others that the council should pay more attention on the conflict phenomena. It should increase qualification and gain/improve skills related to conflict management.
Key Words: Conflict, Conflict Management, Governance, Local Government Council, Ikwerre

I. INTRODUCTION

Egobueze(2021) opined that"Nigeria and other parts of the world have been characterized by recurrent violent and non-violent conflict over issues involving the right of choice, freedom from ignorance and want, empowerment and capability, respect for the rule of law and equality before the law, promotion and defence of human rights, accountability, decentralization of power and authority, among others" (p.128). Conflict also emanated in domestic marital matters, scarce resources, land, gender discrimination, clashes of interest, sexual assault, child abuse, family discrimination, economic burden, political clash, social disagreements, industrial disharmony, etc. It has assumed ethnic, religious, political, resources, and family dimension with its attendant negative effects cannot be overemphasized etc. It is a natural and an integral part of human existence in every society. It is a disagreement between two people or groups; the process of living and interacting with one another makes dispute inevitable. They are products of social structure and character of society of which local government council is an integral part (Ojum&Egobueze, 2022).

Alapiki (2010) contends that disputes are not uncommon and are a part of growth and development. The scholar stressed that dispute can arise from diverse parties, amongst individuals, families, institutions, corporate bodies, different levels of government, communities etc. These disputes have diverse causes either from a claim of ownership over a property, or a violation of human right by an individual, state or political

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party. Supporting the above, Ushie, Igbaji&Agba (2015) argued that conflict is gaining prominence and has become almost synonymous with the existence of human organizations the world over. This reality is somewhat paradoxical when one considers the enormous amount of energy and resources expended by organizations world-wide to prevent and or resolve conflicts. Flippo (1980) volunteered an explanation with a remark that a total absence of conflict would be unbelievable, boring and a strong indication that conflicts are being suppressed. The inevitability of conflict is further underscored by Kerzner (1998), who argues that conflict is part of change and therefore inevitable. It is therefore not unusual to expect conflicts in the administration of Ikwerre local government council in River State. As a reality of management and organization behaviour, conflict is an inherent feature of organizations, which is induced in part by the very structure of the organization. However, the benefits to be derived from a work setting with less conflict in terms of efficiency and effectiveness in production cannot be less stated (Ushie, 2002).

Zartman (1991) noted that conflict is an unavoidable aspect of human interaction and an unavoidable concomitant of choices and decisions. The problem then is not to court the frustrations of seeking to remove inevitability but of trying to keep conflicts in bound. In short, conflict is not an anathema; it is the whole essence of governance. It thus follows that any responsive government has the responsibility of responding to conflicts arising from the operations and activities of the political agents and the political subjects within the political system. In fact, how a government succeeds in this process of conflict management eventually determines the longevity of the regime, and as well determines the intensity and brevity of any social conflict arising within the system. The political and economic cost of managing a conflict at its formative stage is less expensive than when it is allowed to escalate, for the latter leads to a lot of debilitating outcomes, blockage of the governing process, a widening gap in the state-society relations, outbreak of violence and finally, state collapse. Strictly speaking then, violence is the escalation of conflict. In other words, violence occurs when conflicts are allowed to escalate.

The challenge facing Nigeria and indeed most developing countries under undemocratic governments is that the use of force as an article of faith for managing conflicts has led to the further intensification of conflicts. Apart from competing demands serving as the basis for conflicts, there are other important economic, religious and social factors. In this direction, Mkandawire (1992) has argued that the economic conjectures have fuelled a whole range of goals including those that are not limited to human rights and ethnic identity. In the present day Nigeria, conflicts have become a celebrated concept in view of its manifestation in virtually all aspects of human life. It exists very strongly in people's mind even when it is not physically manifesting (Ekwe-Ekwe, 1990, pp.5-10).

The view that conflict is universal, since every human relation is so characterised constitutes the weak notion of conflict. However, the actual incidents of conflict which do not only exist in the mind but in physical display and manifestations, whereby there are physical exchanges of assaults; expression of contradictory opinion on issues of policies; serious disagreement between two or more agents; and instances of strained relationships well as calculated attempts by some agents to frustrate the efforts of others in an implicit or explicit manner, altogether constitute the strong notion of conflict. Moreover, the notion of local governance coincides with that of Landell-Mills (1991, p.3) in his writing for the World Bank on a special project bordering on governance. According to him, governance entails the use of political authority and exercise of control over a society and the management of its resource for socio-economic development. He further contends that the concept encompasses the nature of functioning of a state's institutional and structural arrangements, decision making processes, policy formulation, implementation capacity, information flow, effectiveness of leadership and the nature of the relationship between rulers and ruled.

The Ikwerre local government council which was formally established in 1991 has its headquarters at Isiokpo, Rivers State. The council is the closet tier of government which is responsible for the administration of local needs and aspirations of the local people. The 4th schedule of the 1999 constitution clearly spells out the functions of the council with regards to economic development and political participation in running its affairs including conflict management. The council is structured to administer its affairs through a number of staff to man the various departments, sections and units for convenient and peaceful existence.

The nature and types of conflicts that are prevalent in the local government council varies. The common types of conflicts in the council according to Ushie, Igbaji&Agba (2015) usually occur between the executives and legislative, National Union of Local Government Employees (NULGE) and Local Government Service Commission, and Career Civil Servants and political appointees. Other forms include conflict between Nigeria union of Teachers (NUT), and state government, and interpersonal conflict among staff in the councils. The study is particularly relevant at a time of lingering crisis between federal and state governments and the local government councils over the quest for local government autonomy. An investigation into the nature of conflicts, their causes, as well as their effects on local government performance is important to ensure harmony in the area council. This will facilitate higher productivity and the delivery of democratic dividends to the rural

populace. It is against this backdrop that this study investigates local government council and conflict management in Ikwerre Local Government Council of Rivers State, 2012-2021.

II.   THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Structural-Functionalism Conflict Transformation Theory: Hilal, Andi& Joseph (2013) opined that the theory was the work of Johan Galtung in 1965 and was popularized by John Paul Lederach in 1998 in the field of social sciences. Senghaas and Krippendorf (1973) noted that the idea of conflict transformation was already present in the work of the European structural theorists who analysed conflict transformations but it was later adopted by scholars to analyse social behaviour and phenomena (Ojum&Egobueze, 2022).

Lederach (1998) in Ojum&Egobueze (2022) contended that the term is a relatively new invention within the broader field of peace and conflict studies. As a relatively new field, it is still in a process of defining, shaping, and creating terminology. He stressed that during the 1990s, a number of theorists have assisted in solidifying what they called "a shift" toward conflict transformation in the language used in the field and practice of peace research and conflict resolution. During the early 1990s, the term conflict transformation was not in common use among peace and conflict theorists. Meanwhile, it has accrued a number of meanings, including transformation of individuals, transformation of relationships, and transformation of social systems large and small. However, the idea of transforming conflict in order to mitigate or even end protracted social conflicts has now become an integral part of the lexicon used in the peace and conflict studies field (Hilal, Andi& Joseph, 2013).

Conflict transformation refers to outcome, process, and structure oriented towards long-term peace-building efforts, which aim to truly overcome some forms of direct, cultural, and structural violence. It moves beyond the aims of conflict prevention approach, while at the same time taking up many of the ideas of conflict resolution, and particularly deducing from an adequate explanation of phenomenon of conflict, including its human dimensions, not merely the conditions that create an environment of conflict and the structural changes required to remove it, but more importantly, the promotion of conditions that create cooperative relationships (Wallensteen, 2002).

The scholars opined that it usually involves a broad range of actors, who make use of a wide repertoire of practices. These can, however, be categorized into four main groups of actors, who shape the development of contemporary practice:
1.   States and inter-governmental organization;
2.   Development and humanitarian organizations;
3.   International NGOs concerned with conflict prevention and transformation; and
4.   Parties to the conflict and other relevant groups within the affected societies.

They argued that conflict transformation is a comprehensive approach, addressing a range of dimensions (micro-to macro-issues, local to global levels, grassroots to elite actors, short term to long term timescales). It aims to develop capacity and to support structural change, rather than to facilitate outcomes or deliver settlements. It seeks to engage with conflict at the pre-violence and post-violence phases, and with the causes and consequences of violent conflict which usually extend beyond the site of fighting. It is an open-ended, long-term, multi-track, and dynamic process, which significantly widens the scope of actors involved. As far as outcomes are concerned, conflict transformation aims to achieve a settlement of substantive issues raised by the needs and fears of the conflict parties. This has two elements: first, a process orientation approach emphasizing the need to change mutually negative conflict attitudes and values among parties in order to increase cooperation and communication between them; and second, a change oriented approach stressing the political imperative to create a new infrastructure for empowerment and recognition of underprivileged, disadvantaged, and subaltern groups, thus fostering and enabling social justice.

Lederach (1998) identified four dimensions that should be taken into consideration in order to transform conflict as follows:
1.   Personal or individual changes in the emotional, perceptual, and spiritual aspects of conflict;
2.   Relational, or changes in communication, interaction, and interdependence of parties in conflict;
3.   Structural, or changes in the underlying structural patterns and decision making in conflict; and
4.   Cultural, or group/ societal changes in the cultural patterns in understanding and responding to conflict.

According to the scholar, the lenses of conflict transformation focus on the potential for constructive change emergent and catalyzed by the rise of social conflict because the potential for broader change is inherent in any

episode of conflict, from personal to structural levels. The lenses can easily be applied to a wide range of conflicts.

He went further to explain four basic steps to transforming conflict. Within each step, different methods can be used move the process toward a positive outcome. Remember, transforming conflict is a process, not a single event or activity. The four basic steps to transforming conflict are as follows:
1.   All groups that are affected by the conflict should acknowledge that there is a problem and commit to working together to deal with the conflict;
2.   The root causes of the conflict should be identified, made explicit, and reconciled collectively by the groups;
3.   The groups involved should develop a common vision for what they can do together and how they can do it; and
4.   The groups should determine what they need in order to sustain their ability to continue to work together to manage or eliminate the causes of the conflict and to promote peace.

In a nutshell, conflict transformation emphasizes on increase interaction, cooperation, communication, social reconstruction, interdependency and reconciliation of conflicting parties with the aim to preventing social inequalities, discrimination and social violence.

Conflict is an integral part and essential development process inherent in human existence. It is as a result of faults, weaknesses, and deviations leading to social inequalities, discrimination and social violence between and among workers in local councils. The foregoing theoretical analysis revealed that local government council is a state actor that operates as third party mediation in conflict management. It employs conflict transformation technique to interact, communicate, reconcile and foster social reconstruction, interdependency and cooperation of conflicting parties with the aim to preventing social inequalities, discrimination and social violence between and among staff in the council.

To achieve these roles, local government council adopted the four dimensions of conflict transformation as discussed by Lederach to achieve a settlement of substantive issues raised by the needs and fears of the conflict parties in the order below:
a.   Individual changes in the emotional and perception in conflict;
b.   Changes in communication, interaction, and interdependence of parties in conflict;
c.   Changes in the underlying structural patterns and decision making in conflict; and
d.   Group/societal changes in the cultural patterns to understand and response to conflict.

The role of local government council in conflict management is to build peace between conflicting parties particularly in local settings and seek social justice using ADR. Thus, local government council imports the ideas of conflict transformation by bringing:
a.   All groups that are affected by the conflict should acknowledge that there is a problem and commit to working together to deal with the conflict;
b.   The root causes of the conflict should be identified, made explicit, and reconciled collectively by the groups;
c.   The groups involved should develop a common vision for what they can do together and how they can do it; and
d.   The groups should determine what they need in order to sustain their ability to continue to work together to manage or eliminate the causes of the conflict and to promote peace.

III.   LOCAL GOVERNMENT

Studies have revealed that no country or state can effectively and efficiently administer its entire land mass/people from the center alone. Consequently, there is decentralization of governmental powers from the center to a sub-level of government referred to as local government. In the light of the above, Barber (1978) cited in Bagayi, (2002) has pointed out that some degree of local government characterizes every state in the world, and the significant point is not the mere existence of local government but the degree of such local powers. To Barber therefore, local government connotes "a sub- level of government smaller than that of the state or central government which has and enjoys some degree of autonomy to determine and to execute matters within a restricted areas". In line with the above, Ezeani (2004, p.25) defined local government as "a unit of government below the central, regional or state government established by law to exercise political authority, through a representative council within defined area". It is important at this junction to examine this concept vis-à-vis the contributions of various scholars on this subject matter. As a concept and one of the subordinate units

in federal political system arrangement, it has attracted definitions of various scholars. Therefore, there is not unanimous agreement between these scholars on the definition of local government. However, the United Nations Office for Public Administration quoted in Ola and Tonwe (2009) defines local government as thus:

> A political subdivision of a nation or (in a federal system) state, which is constituted by law and has substantial control of local affairs, including the powers to impose taxes or to exact labour for prescribed purposes. The governing body of such as entity is elected or otherwise locally selected (p.4).

Along this dimension, the International Encyclopedia of Social Sciences cited Ijewereme (2015) defines it as:

> A political subdivision of a Nation or Regional Government which performs functions which in nearly all cases receives its legal power from national or regional government but possesses some degree of discretion on the making of decisions and which normally has some taxing power (p.7).

Hence, the definition of local government was made clearer by Kirk Green in (Ola and Tonwe, 2009) who submitted thus:

> Each unit of local government in any system is assumed to possess the following characteristics: a given territory and population, an institutional structure for legislative, executive and administrative purposes, a separate legal identity, a range of powers and functions authorized by delegation from the appropriate central or intermediate legislature and lastly, within the ambit of such delegation, autonomy, subject always, at least in Anglo-American tradition, to the limitation of common law such as the test of reasonableness (p.4).

The Guidelines for Local Government Reform of (1976) in Idakwoji and Stephen (2003) defines local government as:

> Government at the local level exercise through representative council established by law to exercise specific powers within defined area. These powers should give the council substantial control over local affairs as well as the staff and institutional and financial powers to initiate and direct the provision of services and determine activities of state and federal; government in their areas, and the ensure, through devolution of functions to these councils and through the active participation of the people and their traditional institutions, that local initiative and response to local needs and conditions are maximized (p.1).

Despite the wide appeal or acceptance of the above definition, it has some flaws. The assertion that the governing body of a local government can be "locally selected" is faulty. It implies that in the case of Nigeria for instance, all the Caretaker Committees of management and Sole Administrator system instituted by the various military administrations and even civilian administrations as we have in Nigeria presently can still be seen as local government whereas, in actual fact, such appointed bodies are mere brands of local administration rather than local government (Onah, 2003).

Furthermore, the definition of local government as contained in the "Guidelines for a Reform of Local Government in Nigeria (1976, p.1) quoted in Bagaji, (2002, p.93) aptly captures the essential characteristics of local government when it states that local government is government at the local level exercise through representative council, established by law to exercise specific powers within defined areas. These powers should give the councils substantial control over local affairs as well as the staff, institutional and financial power to initiate and direct the provision of services and to determine and implement projects so as to complement the activities of the State and Federal Government in their area and to ensure, through active participation of the people and their traditional institutions, that local initiative and response to local needs and conditions are maximized.

From the foregoing, Ezeani, (2003, pp.26-29) has outlined the following as the cardinal characteristics of local government.
i.   Localness: Local government is the lowest tier of government. It is government at the grassroot level. Hence, it is subordinate but not subservient to the higher levels of government – Federal, State or regional governments.
ii.   It has a legal existence enshrined in the constitution. This   protects it from arbitrary actions of higher authority. As a legal entity, it can sue or be sued.

iii.   It enjoys substantial autonomy: This implies that although local governments are creations of the State or federal government, and therefore, are subjected to State or federal government control in certain areas, nevertheless, they enjoy a reasonable degree of independence in administrative and financial affairs. For example, the local governments enjoy considerable autonomy in the preparation of annual estimate (budgets), hiring, control and discipline of their own staff subject to a certain upper limit and the execution of certain projects (Ozor, 2003, p.19).

iv.   It exists within a defined territory, local government is a political sub-division of a nation or state and it exists within a geographical and political territory which has well defined boundaries (Ozor, 2003, p.18).

v.   Local government exercises its authority over a given population.

vi.   It exercises specific powers and performs certain functions as enshrined in the constitution (In the case of Nigeria, see 4th schedule, section 7 of 1999 Constitution).

vii.   The council is composed of elected representatives of the local people.

viii.   Local government is usually divided into departments, division and units including wards which facilitate the accomplishment of its goals, objectives and functions.

IV.   PECULIAR CONFLICTS IN LOCAL GOVERNMENT SYSTEM

According to Mayowa (2019), two dominant conflicts feature in every Local Government Councils in Nigeria namely, Elites' conflict and Inter-Departmental/Intra Departmental Conflict in LGCs, which is a variant of Administrative Conflicts. The Elite conflict in the LG is a latent form of conflict that is not readily visible even though it is about the most cogent defining force underpinning virtually every other form of conflict in the Local Government system. This form of conflict manifests in the background manipulations and manoeuvres orchestrated by the powerful elites in the political society whereby the Local Government Chairman is remotely controlled and influenced to do recruitment, award of contracts and execution of projects in the line of interests of the power elites. An attempt by the Chairman of the Council to pursue an autonomous line of interest inevitably leads to conflict.

Intra departmental conflict is another major form of conflict in the local government system. This is common between very senior technical staff who are on GL 10 - 12 and who have risen along the line to that status; and young professional staff with university degrees. These senior technical staff do find it difficult to co-operate with their younger professional superiors and this is a major form of conflict in the local government system. Another form of this conflict is visible in the works department where technical and professional staff conflict on superiority and seniority. While the technicians lay claim to long years of experience in the service, the professional staff lays claim to professional qualification. This is also visible among director of finance and vote controllers using the same argument as above. In general department, conflicts do ensue sequel to envy from other departments in the local government council. Other departments for example, see the general department headed by the Director of Personnel Management (DPM) as a cog in the wheel of progress of other departments. At this juncture however, the truth of the matter is that some Heads of Department are themselves not in line with the day-to-day administrative system of the local government. They do not attend departmental meetings where and when they are expected to present cases in respect of their departments' staff. Staff requests such as conversion, maternity leave or even application for annual leave are deliberately held up in their offices and yet the buck-passing is always on the administration and general department.

V.   RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

In this study, we adopt the survey research design which allows researchers to focus on a particular phenomenon and allows thoroughness on the part of the researcher to collate information from large documents and analyze data from a sample or group in which their responses are used for the purpose of generalization.

The Ikwerre Local Government Council has a total population of 1080 staff. The council is made up of different categories of staff who had witness the effects of conflict on the performance of the local government council directly or indirectly. The study targets management/directors, senior, junior and contract/support staff of all departments which include Budget, Planning & Statistics, Administration & General Services, Finance, Education, Youth, Sports & Culture, Agriculture, Works, Housing, Land, Survey & Transport, Primary Health Care and Procurement as the population of the study. These departments coordinate several sections and units for effective service delivery. The contributions of the various staff were aggregated which form parts of our decision. To solicit or gather reliable information, equal chances or number of questionnaires and opportunity were given to personnel irrespective of their departments to participate in the exercise for the purpose of making generalization.

The simple random sampling method was adopted due to inability to study the vast population of the council thereby giving the group equal chances to participate in the process. Thus, the population was thus

divided into eight groups for easy assessment. The questionnaire were administered and collated via the help of researcher's representatives.

The instruments for data collection include questionnaires, interview, textual materials such as journal articles, published and unpublished books, etc. The internet was also regularly surfed to gather data that were relevant to the study. Closed or in another word multiple questions were included in the questionnaires. The study questionnaires were structured in 4 options Likert scale type of: strongly agree, agree, strongly disagree, and disagree

The used of table is employed to analyse data. The responses from the respondents are arranged, grouped, tabulated and analysed using the simple percentage statistical method. By this method, it means that the degree of percentage score of one response to another or others will determine the acceptability or rejection of a particular statement or hypothesis. Chi square (X^2) was adopted for test of hypotheses.

Thus:

$\frac{f}{N} \times \frac{100}{1}$ Where;

f = frequency of response

N = number of respondents

Table Investigates the nexus between local government council and conflict management in Ikwerre Local Government

Questionnaires	Strongly Agreed f (%)	Agreed f (%)	Strongly Disagreed f (%)	Disagreed f (%)	Total
Ikwerre local government council helps in conflict analysis and institutes non-violent working relationship in conflict management	130 (52%)	70 (28%)	20 (8%)	30 (12%)	250 (100%)
Ikwerre local government council brings staff or parties involved in conflict to dialogue in conflict management in the council area	95 (38%)	85 (34%)	50 (20%)	20 (8%)	250 (100%)
The council area introduces measures to curtail conflict situation among staff in conflict management.	125 (50%)	55 (22%)	50 (20%)	20 (8%)	250 (100%)
The council establishes communication link to enlighten the council about conflict.	80 (32%)	95 (38%)	50 (20%)	25 (10%)	250 (100%)
Good leadership engender team work in conflict management in the council.	102 (41%)	101 (40%)	37 (15%)	10 (4%)	250 (100%)

Source: Field Work, 2022.

Table 4.3 shows the views of respondents on the nexus between local government council and conflict management in the Ikwerre Local Government. In their view on whether Ikwerre local government council helps in conflict analysis and institutes non-violent working relationship in conflict management, the table shows that 130 respondents which represent 52% of the 250 respondents strongly agreed with 70 respondents representing 28%. However, 20 (8%) "Strongly disagreed" while 30 (12%) "disagreed" that Ikwerre local government council helps in conflict analysis and institutes non-violent working relationship in conflict management. This infers that Ikwerre local government council helps in conflict analysis and institutes non-violent working relationship in conflict management.

The table also reveals that 95 (38%) and 85 (34%) respondents confirmed to "strongly agreed" and "agreed" that Ikwerre local government council brings staff or parties involved in conflict to dialogue in conflict management in the council area. 50 respondents representing 20% strongly disagreed with 20 respondents which represents 8% disagreed with the claim that Ikwerre local government council brings staff or parties involved in conflict to dialogue in conflict management in the council area. It indicates that Ikwerre local government council brings staff or parties involved in conflict to dialogue in conflict management in the council area.

On whether the council area introduces measures to curtail conflict situation among staff in conflict management, 125 (50%) respondents strongly agreed, with 55 respondents representing 22% agreed that the council area introduces measures to curtail conflict situation among staff in conflict management. While 50 respondents represent 20% strongly disagreed with 20 respondents representing 8% disagreed. This implies that the council area introduces measures to curtail conflict situation among staff in conflict management.

The question of whether the council establishes communication link to enlighten the council about conflict. The table above also displays 102 respondents representing 41% "strongly agreed" and 101 which represents 40% "agreed". 37 respondents which represent 15% strongly disagreed while 10 respondents with 4% disagreed that

the council establishes communication link to enlighten the council about conflict. The majority of the respondents strongly agreed that the council establishes communication link to enlighten the council about conflict.

On whether Good leadership engender team work in conflict management in the council, the table above shows that 80 (32%) respondents strongly agreed and 95 (38%) agreed that Good leadership engender team work in conflict management in the council. 50 representing 20% and 25 representing 10% of the respondents state that Good leadership engender team work in conflict management in the council. This implies that Good leadership engender team work in conflict management in the council.

Test of Hypotheses
There is no nexus between local government council and conflict management in Ikwerre Local Government.

Table 4.3.1 shows the various responses for calculating Expected Frequency (Fe)

Frequency of Response

Variables	SA	A	SD	D	Total
Male	20	15	70	35	140
Female	10	5	60	35	110
Total	30	20	130	70	250

Expected Frequency (Fe) = **(Row total)(Column total)**
Cumulative total

Computation of Expected Frequency (Fe)

a.	Fe	=	(30 × 140)	÷	250	=	17
b.	Fe	=	(30 × 110)	÷	250	=	13
c.	Fe	=	(20 × 140)	÷	250	=	11
d.	Fe	=	(20 × 110)	÷	250	=	9
e.	Fe	=	(130 x 140)	÷	250	=	73
f.	Fe	=	(130 x 110)	÷	250	=	57
g.	Fe	=	(70 × 140)	÷	250	=	39
h.	Fe	=	(70 × 110)	÷	250	=	31

Computation of Chi-Square (X^2)

Cells	Fo	Fe	Fo - Fe	$(Fo - Fe)^2$	$\sum(Fo - Fe)^2 \div Fe$
A	20	17	-3	9	0.529
B	10	13	-3	9	0.692
C	15	11	4	16	1.455
D	5	9	-4	16	1.778
E	70	73	-3	9	0.123
F	60	57	3	9	0.158
G	35	39	-4	16	0.410
H	35	31	4	16	0.516
			X^2		5.661

Degree of freedom (df) = (R-1)(C-1) = (2-1)(4-1) = 3.
A critical value of 5% (0.05) = 7.815 level of significance is used to compare the X^2 =5.661.
Decision Rule: The hypothesis is rejected if the value of X^2 is greater than the critical value. However, the hypothesis is accepted if X^2 value is less than the critical value. This indicates that there is a nexus between local government council and conflict management since the calculated value of X^2 (5.661) is less than the table or critical value of 7.815.
The Strength of the hypothesis/relationship: The results of chi-square test of hypothesis and data from both primary and secondary sources indicate that there is a relationship between local government council indicates that conflict management in Ikwerre local government council.

In agreement with the result of hypothesis one, Chima&Alokpa (2015) noted that the emergence and entrenchment of conflict within the local government council has its manifestation within the various political and administrative experiments. The feeling of belonging and rejection in conflict situation helps the local council in conflict analysis and institute non-violent working relationship in conflict management. This has become the basis for distinguishing political staff from the administrative staff within the system as evidenced in the behaviour of political elite with lack of cohesiveness and threat to productivity in the administrative business or service delivery in the council. Therefore, absence of good leadership in the council does not engender teamwork in conflict management. Workplace conflict is an endemic feature of most developing heterogeneous political institutions. This is particularly true where local government policy most time leads to conflict, crises

and even violence which eventually became essential characteristics of the work process in the council (Osabiya, 2015).

Indeed, local government councils in Nigeria have and can play a potentially important role in conflict management. Several studies among others have recommended avoidance, mediation, dialogue, containment. Since the inception and creation of local councils, local government has had to grapple with one continuous issue that has threatened her survival and service delivery as a political unit in issue of conflicts. As we have earlier mentioned, successive local government administrators in Nigeria have attempted to curtail/manage these council conflicts by adopting various strategies and yet conflict persist. This is gradually assuming the status of cancerous growth that is terminally destroying the body of the local council (Olufemi&Adewale, 2012).

VI.   DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS
Nexus between Local Government Council and Conflict Management
The complex and fluid nature of local government councils made tracking its involvement in conflict management a challenging task. Current thinking has essentially moved from models of its influence derived from debates on categorizing LGCs, to models oriented around the activities that LGCs undertake and strategies that they use. According to Debiel&Sticht (2005)

> The UN World conference of the 1990s offered major incentives for the establishment and expansion of existing organizations engaged in development and conflictual issues. The increasing power of mass media and the globalization of communication by electronic information technologies which supports transnational networking activities of non-state actors. Local government councils function as substitutes for state-driven welfare services (p.133).

Since Nigeria's attainment of independence on October 1st 1960, she has had to grapple with one contentious issue that has threatened her continuity and survival as a political unit-the issue of conflicts. As we have earlier mentioned, successive governments in every local government inherited some forms of conflict and have attempted to curtail/manage these conflicts by adopting various strategies with little or no role for local government councils and yet conflict persist. The question then is what role the local government council can play in conflict management.

Chima&Alokpa (2015) noted that the emergence and entrenchment of conflict within the local government council has its manifestation within the various political and administrative experiments. The feeling of belonging and rejection in conflict situation helps the local council in conflict analysis and institute non-violent working relationship in conflict management. This has become the basis for distinguishing political staff from the administrative staff within the system as evidenced in the behaviour of political elite with lack of cohesiveness and threat to productivity in the administrative business or service delivery in the council. Therefore, absence of good leadership in the council does not engender teamwork in conflict management. Workplace conflict is an endemic feature of most developing heterogeneous political institutions. This is particularly true where local government policy most time leads to conflict, crises and even violence which eventually became essential characteristics of the work process in the council (Osabiya, 2015).

An interviewee responded that:

> The Ikwerre local council has helped in the area of conflict analysis. We have been able to gather information, monitor developments and provide support in conflict situations that can erupt into crises, disagreement and violent conflict in the council. The reactiveness of the local council is a sine qua non of conflict prevention, useful as it is, also requires an evaluation of when a conflict is likely to explode (D. Worlu, personal communication, May 25, 2022).

In reaction to the above response, Osabiya (2019) noted that local government council can play crucial role in conflict management in the area of conflict resolution. He stressed that conflict resolution means going beyond negotiating interests in order to meet all sides' basic needs. Local government councils can be instrumental in this respect. He emphasizes that the council have access to the parties involved in conflict and the ability to bring parties to dialogue. He noted that it can as well induce political and administrative staff to get involved in long-term reconciliation efforts. By working directly with political and administrative staff on the ground, local government councils are able to assess the situation more effectively than top levels of governance or external actors.

Gleaning from above, Olufemi&Adewale (2012) opined that where the council can play active role in conflict management is that of conflict negotiation/peace talks. They claimed that negotiation is a process to achieve your goals through communication with at least one other party, with the presumed outcome-an agreement. Where two parties have grievances at workplace, or have differences that may result in conflict, the council can serve as a third party with the ability to prevent conflict or negotiate peace talks through behind-the-scenes diplomacy; urging compromise and in many cases building trust between the parties.

The local government council also play an important role in the area of information and enlightenment. Akinboye&Ottoh (2007) observed that information is very essential in conflict management and that in the process of peace negotiation in conflict situations, the general practice has been to use the state channels, actors and agencies to negotiate peace. Ezirim (2009) noted that while this is commendable, it may not be sufficient or very effective. He argued further that local government councils should be incorporated into peace negotiation processes, the reason being that they can popularize peace deals, put pressure on belligerent, and mobilize popular support for the peace process.

In spite of the foregoing, a respondent revealed that:
> The local government council is still faced with a number of persisting challenges. There are disparities in status, welfare packages, communication, rules and conduct between political and core civil servants. These disparities have created more tensions in productivity loss, withdrawal, strikes, lukewarm attitude towards work, etc. The contribution of local council to conflict management remains unknown due to the absence of a documentation culture (T. Iwedi, personal communication, May 30, 2022).

Indeed, 85% of the respondents revealed that the council have and can play a potentially important role in conflict management. 10% of the respondents revealed that since inception, local government has had to grapple with one contentious issue that has threatened her service delivery as a political unit in issue of conflicts. Successive local government administrators have attempted to curtail/manage these conflicts by adopting various strategies such as avoidance, mediation, dialogue, containment yet conflict persist which is assuming the status of cancerous growth that is terminally destroying the body of the local council (Olufemi&Adewale, 2012).

VII. CONCLUSION

The case of Ikwerre Local Government Council suggests that the introduction of in-house mediation can lead to a fundamental change in the way in which disputes are handled and conflict is managed. However, it also provides a number of important insights that inform our understanding of how such a change can occur. The findings outlined key elements, firstly, the development and success of workplace mediation at Ikwerre Local Government Council was dependent on, and shaped by, a number of key individuals.

The genesis of the scheme lay in the values of personnel who saw mediation as a way of improving employment relations and breaking down barriers between management and unions. However, while one manager initiated these changes, there were a number of 'champions' within different constituencies. Influential individuals were 'recruited' to the cause from both the trade unions and the human resource department. Therefore, responsibility for change was ceded to key actors and was not, ultimately, the responsibility of senior management. Secondly, the most distinctive element of the Ikwerre Local Government Council case was the way in which the manager driving the introduction of mediation scheme sought to involve trade union representatives to boost the relationship between the management and the staffs. To ensured that unions had a significant degree of involvement in the scheme and of the notion of mediation itself.

Indeed, the introduction of mediation was central to the continued development of partnership working; and respondents were unanimous that without mediation, partnership would not have become embedded within the council. Finally, the way in which the mediation training process was designed and conducted was crucial in developing trusting relations between management and unions. The structure of the training deliberately built in time to allow difficult issues between the trainees to be aired and discussed: As can be seen from the case study, this was a high risk strategy, but it was possibly the only forum in which managers and unions were stripped of their traditional hierarchical roles and therefore able to address issues in an honest and straightforward way. Staff were of the view that frequency of conflict in the council would reduce if staff were part of the decision-making and implementation processes. Majority of the employees in the council agreed that a greater number of conflicts were as a result of leadership style as well as local government policies which were rigidly implemented.

VIII. RECOMMENDATION

1. The council should pay more attention on the conflict phenomena. It should increase qualification and gain/improve skills related to conflict management. Funds should also be made available to organise trainings about conflict and its constructive and destructive outcomes.

2. Officers and staff should be more involved in decision-making process in Ikwerre Local Government Council so as to reduce to its lowest minimum the rate of conflict in the Council. Also, there should be effective communication links in the council that would allow to participate in decision making to enable them have sense of belonging. There should be sufficient and adequate information flow. Communication gap breeds conflict.

3. Good leadership structure should be put in place that would ensure that every worker would be carried along. Local government policies should be well spelt out. Workers should understand their management and those of their co-worker. The rules should be clearly documented for reference purpose. Management should also encourage team work among staff rather than a individualism.

4. Staff welfare should not be toil with. They should be remunerated as at when due. The local government policy on promotion and remuneration should as a matter of necessity, be strictly adhered to. Management should also ensure that they establish a cordial relationship with workers' representatives (union) so as to have a cordial industrial space.

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