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**INTRA-HOUSEHOLD CONFLICT AMONG RURAL DWELLERS IN ANAOCHA
LOCAL GOVERNMENT AREA OF ANAMBRA STATE**

Ifeanyi-obi, C.C., Abuta, C.M., Familusi, L.C., Adesope, O.M. and Agumagu, A.C.

Department of Agricultural Economics & Extension, Faculty of Agriculture,

University of Port Harcourt, Rivers State. Nigeria

Corresponding author's email: Clara.ifeanyi-obi@uniport.edu.ng

ABSTRACT

The study assessed rural intra-household conflict in rural communities of Anaocha Local government area of Anambra State. The study assessed rural household perception of conflict with a view to capture their understanding of conflict hence making it easy to effectively assess the rural conflict trend as well as adequately addressing their peace building needs. Five out of ten towns in the Local Government Area was used for the study. Five Focused Group Discussions and In-depth interviews were used to collect data. Findings showed that intra-rural household conflict is mainly perceived among the respondents as disagreement over values, beliefs, interests and needs. It is mainly caused by lack of communication, poor understanding of roles and status, selfish interests, extended family and friends interference, economic hardship, childlessness, unresolved prior conflict, infidelity and unhealthy personality or temperament. Intra-rural household conflict effect the psychological and behavioural development of children and household sustainability as well general town development. Resolution could be achieved through better understanding of self and household members, respect for each person's role and status in the family, better knowledge of marriage/family life and family heads, kindred or village chief's intervention. Expansion in the scope of agricultural extension programme to incorporate household conflict management, more effective marriage classes by the different Christian denominations and increased social services by government and NGOs were recommended.

Keywords: intra-household; rural dwellers; conflict; causes; management; resolutions

INTRODUCTION

The changing socioeconomic, political, environmental and climatic atmosphere in Nigeria and other developing countries across the globe has continued to aggravate the living conditions of most households especially those living in the rural areas (Isaac, 2009), thus leaving households with a lot of recurrent intra-household issues to contend with. Conflict has been described from different perspectives but most times from the perspective of the area of interest in a specified context. Generally, it is seen as a disruption in the procedural process of decision making; an obstruction in the orderly process of decision making in a social system. Simon in Onyeche (2013) defined conflict as a breakdown in the standard mechanism of decision-making; so that individuals or groups experience difficulty in selecting alternatives. Coser in Onyeche (2013) looked at conflict from the industrial point of view, and defined it as any perceived divergence of interest, between groups that are involved in the direction, coordination and execution of work processes in any work organization. Ashimolowo and Otufale (2012) described conflict as fight, struggle, quarrel, a bitter argument, opposition, difference and strong case between contradictory impulses or wishes. Many authors hold the view that conflict is an inevitable occurrence in every relationship, institution or organization but the difference lies in manner and method of resolution (Agboeze, 2004; Peters, 2006; Aja, 2007)

Conflict is a dynamic process and how it is handled will determine the resulting post conflict circumstance. The World Bank, International Monetary Fund (IMF) and Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) are beginning to recognize that conflict is one of the major obstacles to development (The causes of conflict in Africa-consultation document-March 2001). Peace and security depend on major changes in attitude within society, the rural societies inclusive Ekong (2010) defined conflict as a form of social interaction in which the actors seek to obtain scarce reward by eliminating or weakening other contenders thereby militating against community development. On the other hand, Okonkwo (2016) describes conflict within the context of family life. It explained a necessary part of healthy relationship since two people cannot be expected to agree on everything at all times hence learning how to deal with conflict rather than avoiding it is very crucial. He further explains that when conflict is mismanaged, it can harm the relationship but when handled effectively, it provides opportunity for growth and strengthening of bonds between family members. The contribution of rural households to the economy of a nation cannot be overemphasized; this is evident in their contribution to national development through various activities particularly farming. Ashimolowo and Otufale (2012) stated that for any meaningful agricultural development to take place in Nigeria, the entire farm-family structure (household) which includes the men, women and the children has to be properly coordinated and united in agricultural production activities. These rural households serve as the bedrock of rural development as most of the rural community development activities stem from the households. The households are the basics of the rural community, hence could be addressed as the basic or primary rural communities. The preliminary or first interaction of every human begins in the household, hence, the great role household socialization play in the formation of human behavior. When household members are properly nurtured with the basic and fundamental knowledge of the society, they tend to have respect for other humans, resources and the society at large. Tendencies towards social vices are reduced to the barest minimum through healthy household education. This facilitates rural development efforts as the inhabitants are better disposed to appreciate these developmental efforts as well as support them.

Rural development goes beyond infrastructural development. It involves the development of the inhabitant's intellectual, better understanding and disposition to resources and project, increased respect for and acceptance of other humans as well as public projects, improved team working spirit, better understanding of ethics and etiquette, increased appreciation and acceptance of one's strength and weaknesses. Establishing gigantic developmental projects among poorly orientated rural dwellers is one of the major reasons for vandalism, theft and neglect. Personal development is a prerequisite for rural community development. Rural dwellers will appreciate developmental efforts better when they are properly enlightened. It is against this background that this study assessed the intrahousehold conflict among rural dwellers in Anaocha local government area of Anambra state with a view to address their peace building needs and as well identify possible windows of opportunities in intrahousehold conflict hence contributing to the overall sustainable development in the rural area. The specific objectives include examining rural household perception of conflict, identifying causes of conflict among rural households, and identifying the effects and effective methods of managing and resolving conflicts among the rural households in the study area.

METHODOLOGY

Anaocha local government is one of the twenty-one local government in Anambra state. It is made up of ten towns namely: Aguluzigbo, Agulu, Neni, Ichida, Adazi-ani, Adazi-Enu, Adazi-Nnukwu, Akwaeze, Nri and Obeledu with Neni as the headquarters. Focused Group Discussions (FGD) and In-depth Interview (IDI) were used to collect data for this study. Out

of the ten towns that make up the local government area, five were randomly selected for the study. Two FGDs and five IDIs were conducted in each town giving a total of ten FGDs and twenty-five IDIs conducted for the study. The discussants in each FGD comprises of two male and female household heads (married for at least 20 years), two kindred heads, the village head, one male and female married for at most seven years and three youths between the ages of eighteen to thirteen while the IDIs were conducted for the village heads in charge of settling family disputes, village heads, town union president and key informants. These discussants were purposely selected to include people who are known to have experienced conflict in their households and as such could give relevant answers to the questions. The discussion guide focused on their perception of conflict, causes and effects and ways of managing and resolving intra-household conflict.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Rural dwellers perception of intra- household conflict

Majority of the discussants perceive intrahousehold conflict to be misunderstanding between members of a household. It could be between the mother and father, father and children; mother and children, parents and children, between the biological children of the household and extended family children living with them or among children of same parents. According to them, the most common category is between father and mother. One of the discussant stated: “Even though we know that there is conflict between members of the family, the major one that is always causing big problem is the one between husband and wife who are the major custodians of the household”. Conflict does not just comprise minor misunderstanding; it could take the form of fist fight, strong opposition, threats or even total annihilation. Furthermore, conflict could even be within a household member thereby making the person to exhibit irritating behavior towards other members of the family resulting to intra-household conflict.

Causes of intra-household conflict among rural dwellers in the study area

The discussants mainly opined that the causes of intra-household conflict are numerous depending on the category of conflict. Majority agreed that lack of effective communication between household members is a major cause of intrahousehold conflict in the area. Communication leads to better understanding of issues and reduces discrepancies. According to them, many households do not have time for themselves again due to increasing economic pressure, they work longer than normal during the day and come back late exhausted and tired that they could hardly chat with family members. One of the discussant had this to say:

“I remember very well in the olden days, evening times are always for family discussions. We all gathered in the front of my father’s hut and discuss how our day has fared. Those that didn’t carry out their responsibilities well were scolded and corrected while “papa” and “mama” will thrash out some issues after they have dismissed us to retire inside. But today those things are no longer obtainable, almost every member of my family come back late and tired. Even the little time left before they sleep, they use it to press their mobile phones”

Another major cause of intra-household conflict is the finance. The discussant pointed out that the times are hard and many of them are finding it difficult to live up to their family financial needs resulting in undue stress and deprivations which culminate to conflicts among family. According to them the income generated from their farming and other activities is hardly sufficient enough to cater for their family needs. Unfortunately, sometimes members of the family failed to understand the situation causing misunderstanding and consequent conflict. Mr. A has this to say:

“When the economy was good and I was earning enough for my family upkeep, I command a lot of respect in my family and there was peace because I met everybody’s basic needs. But recently, it has not been possible for me to meet up in terms of their needs. This has resulted to insults of different manners from my family members including my wife”.

Also, one of the discussants has this to say;

“The English people say that a hungry man is an angry man. Many of our women are misbehaving because their husbands cannot provide their basic needs and that of their children. Some of them in order to ensure that their households are not exterminated by hunger do very tedious work meant for men leaving them very exhausted at the end. They come back home weak and sober thereby disrupting the family peace”

In-laws and extended family members and friends interference was also listed by the discussants as one of the major causes of intra-household conflict. For some people, lack of understanding of procedural family process and their limitations and boundaries as regards their relative’s families have caused a lot of chaos. One of the discussants noted that;

“There are people who naturally cannot mind their business. When you marry such person’s child, you must be ready for undue interruptions because they will always want to know and even control what is happening in your family. And some of their children who are not matured enough to stand their ground yield to the influence thereby causing conflicts in their families”

One of the village chiefs added that:

“Our town is known to live a communal life. People tend to care about what happen to their neighbours and relatives and in so doing some do not know where to stop hence they cross boundaries and interfere in their relatives households”

Other causes of intra-household conflict mentioned by the discussants include; neglect of household chores and responsibilities, infidelity, poor understanding of roles and status, selfish interests, economic hardship, childlessness, unresolved prior conflict, bad habits and unhealthy personality or temperament. They noted that level of infidelity is on the increase and it is the root of many intra-household crises. According to them, once a spouse becomes unfaithful to their marital vows, other vices such as lack of respect for the spouse, neglect of household chores, selfishness etc. will set in. The village chiefs noted that over seventy percent of the household conflict cases brought to the palace was caused by infidelity. Okorocho (2001) stated that marital instability is attributed to such factors as sexual incompatibility between couples, insubordination due to equal social or economic status, age of spouses, polygamous marriage, tradition and culture. Ezea (2001) outlined the major sources of family conflict to be external interference particularly from in-laws, sexual incompatibility between couples, infertility of either of both couples, poverty especially of the bread winner, infidelity/lack of faithfulness, peer group influence, quest for women liberation, religious differences, differences in educational attainment, drunkenness and related social vices and procreation of only female children, etc. Childlessness is also noted to be one of the major causes of intra-household conflict in some cases; it is not actually childlessness but the quest for a male child. The town is a traditional Igbo setting that believes in the traditional inheritance system whereby a man’s name is upheld by his male children after his death. Any man without a male child is seen as lost as there will be no continuity in the family name upon his death hence some of the names they bear like “Amaefula meaning my name should not be lost”, “Uzoechina meaning my family should not be extinct”.

Effects of intra-household conflict on sustainable development in the study area

The discussants agreed that the household is the basic institution for developing a child's sense of responsibility and noted that intra-household conflict disrupts this development in children thereby pumping into the society uncultured and untamed children. This according to them result to various vices and social problems in the community like public juvenile delinquency, project vandalism, alcoholism, robbery, rape, prostitution, and truancy. Problems such as rape, vandalisation of properties, robbery, etc. are caused by children from problem households. This disrupts community development efforts significantly. The psychological and physical wellbeing of members of such household whether adult or children is affected. One of the women discussants described her experience as follows;

“The day I had quarrels and incidentally fought with my husband. I was not able to come out for almost two weeks due to the pain I suffered from his beating as well as the shame I feel. Most of the maize I planted was due for harvest but due to my inability to go to farm, a large quantity was eaten up by birds”

They noted that the energy and resources which would have been spent on beneficial tasks are sometimes wasted during conflicts. In addition, they stated that intra-household conflict has ripple effect in the sense that children brought up in such homes have a greater tendency to misbehave in their own family when they have theirs. Surprisingly, some of the discussants opined that conflict could also be beneficial if handled properly. According to them, conflict brings to light or awareness, some hidden problems that can degenerate to greater ones if not handled. Also, they noted that conflict sometimes bring about change, some persons cannot take correction unless more severe measures are taken to correct them. One of the discussants noted that;

“My wife cannot take my words seriously unless we quarrel about it. The only way to make her know am serious about a particular issue is to shout on her and this brings up quarrel between us”

They all agreed that well-handled conflict provides opportunity for growth and as well strengthen the relationship between household members

Effective methods of managing and resolving intra-household conflict in the study area

The study area according to the discussants has both individual and institutional ways of resolving conflict. The government has the customary court in place to deal with issues of household conflict but people rarely sought such services because of the fact that their kindred will regard such as a sign of disrespect to the traditional system of resolving conflict. Traditionally, when conflict arises in any household, most people first seek the intervention of their close friends or relatives, where the issue failed to be resolved by such individual arrangement, the extended family and family heads are invited. If the problem still could not be resolved, the kindred (umunna) or Umuada is invited into the case. The Umunna and Umuada are strong family institutions in the study area. Whatever they resolve in any household dispute is seen as final but where the parties do not agree to their resolution. The case is either taken to a more inclusive group comprising many traditional groups related to the parties involved such as the age grade, in-laws (ndiogo), neighbours (agbata obi) and the town union. They also noted that many people prefer to sort the intervention of the church leader's instead of the traditionally instituted groups. Furthermore, they opined that one of the facilitating factors in resolving intra-household conflict is to properly counsel the different aggrieved parties, enlightening them more on the need for peace and less self-centered actions.

This they said bring change in the individual's understanding, knowledge and attitude resulting in lasting peace when eventually the conflict is resolved.

CONCLUSION

Conflict is inevitable in any relationship. The role of conflict resolution is indispensable in the creation, maintenance and optimization of any form of relationship. It can be deduced from the study that intra-rural household conflict is majorly perceived among the respondents as disagreement over values, beliefs, interests and needs. It is mainly caused by lack of communication, poor understanding of roles and status, selfish interests, extended family and friends interference, economic hardship, childlessness, unresolved prior conflict, infidelity and unhealthy personality or temperament. Intra-rural household conflicts affect the psychological and behavioural development of children and household stability as well general town development. Resolution could be achieved through better understanding of self and household members, respect for each person's role and status in the family, better knowledge of marriage/family life and family heads, kindred or village chief's intervention.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- i. More effective marriage classes by the different Christian denominations in the area, an enhanced traditional system of marriage that could showcase the importance of peaceful family were recommended.
- ii. Furthermore, agricultural extension agency may consider expansion in the scope of their services to incorporate household conflict management as this will boost their agricultural activities.
- iii. In addition, government specifically the national orientation agency as well as NGOs should intensify efforts in rendering social services rather than infrastructural development.

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