

Communal Land Conflicts and State Response in Nigeria: A Study of Amasiri-Oso (Edda) Crisis in Ebonyi State, Nigeria

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ABSTRACT

Objective: The communal land conflict continues to be a problem in Nigeria which affects governance, security and socio-economic development especially in agrarian communities. This study deals with the Amasiri-Oso (Edda) crisis in Ebonyi State to analyse the dynamics of communal land dispute, and evaluate the effectiveness of state response to this crisis. While these conflicts can be traced back to historical and cultural background, the prolonged existence of such conflicts do raise critical issues concerning the capacity of states, institutional legitimacy and sustainable conflict management. **Method:** Qualitative research design, semi-structured interviews, and secondary data sources (government reports, media accounts, and scholarly literature) were used in this study. Thematic and content analysis were used to analyse the data and find patterns in conflict drivers and state intervention strategies. The analysis draws on State Capacity Theory that theorizes the importance of constraints on institutional coordination, enforcement, and legitimacy on the outcomes of governance in conflict settings. **Results:** The results indicated that historical uncertainties of land ownership, socio-economic stress on land, political manoeuvres and identity claims are the forces driving the conflict. Reactive responses, such as deployment of security forces, administrative measures and lack of effective inter-agency coordination, have been inadequate to address root causes. Legitimacy and effectiveness of interventions are further undermined by perceptions of bias, lack of integration of traditional conflict resolution mechanisms and implementation gaps. The conflict also has an impact on the governance of the area, loss of trust in institutions, displacement, loss of livelihoods and reduced productivity. **Novelty:** The research finding is the need to move from reactive crisis management to integrated and preventive approaches to conflict resolution for sustainable outcomes. It calls for improved land governance, institutionalised hybrid conflict resolution mechanisms, better inter-agency coordination, as well as conflict-sensitive development policies for lasting peace and governance stability.

INTRODUCTION

In Nigeria, communal land disputes continue to be one of the most enduring and deeply ingrained issues affecting security, governance, and socioeconomic development. This is especially true in rural and semi-urban areas where land serves as both a major economic resource and a fundamental component of identity and cultural continuity. Conflicts over land ownership, boundary demarcation, and access to natural resources have often turned violent throughout the Nigerian federation, leading to fatalities, property destruction, displacement, and long-term disruption of livelihoods [1], [2]. These conflicts are deeply rooted in historical land tenure systems shaped by pre-colonial communal ownership patterns, colonial administrative restructuring, and post-colonial legal frameworks such as the Land Use Act of 1978, which centralized land ownership while leaving customary claims contested and ambiguous. In southeastern Nigeria, particularly in states such as Ebonyi, the high population density, increasing pressure on arable land, and fragmentation of inheritance systems intensify these disputes,

transforming land into a scarce and highly contested resource. Empirical evidence from Ebonyi State shows that communal conflicts often arise from boundary disagreements and competing ancestral narratives, reflecting the intersection of history, identity, and economic survival [3]. The persistence of such conflicts raises fundamental questions about the capacity of the Nigerian state to manage local disputes effectively, the legitimacy of its interventions, and the broader implications for peacebuilding and development in multi-ethnic societies.

The Amasiri-Oso (Edda) communal crisis in Ebonyi State exemplifies the complexity and persistence of land-related conflicts in Nigeria, demonstrating how localized disputes can escalate into protracted cycles of violence when structural issues remain unresolved. The conflict involves neighboring communities in Amasiri, Afikpo North Local Government Area, and Oso/Edda, Afikpo South Local Government Area, whose relationship has been shaped by long-standing disputes over land ownership and boundary demarcation. Contemporary reports indicate that the crisis is rooted in a decades-long disagreement over a specific tract of land claimed by both communities, with each side relying on historical narratives to justify its claims [4]. These competing claims are often reinforced through collective memory and identity, making compromise difficult and fueling a zero-sum perception of territorial control. Recent developments highlight the severity of the crisis, as violent clashes have resulted in deaths, destruction of homes, and displacement of residents, with reports confirming that at least four people were killed and properties destroyed in renewed hostilities [5]. The discovery of shallow graves and mutilated bodies further underscores the intensity of violence associated with the conflict, indicating a pattern of escalation that extends beyond ordinary communal disputes [6]. These developments illustrate how the Amasiri-Oso crisis has evolved into a significant security concern, necessitating sustained scholarly and policy attention.

Responses from the state to communal conflicts in Nigeria, such as the Amasiri-Oso crisis, have usually been multifaceted, comprising security, administrative, and mediated peace processes, but often with inadequate results. Common responses include police and military deployment to restore order, the imposition of curfews, and the establishment of investigation committees to ascertain the causes of conflict and recommend solutions. For the Amasiri-Oso crisis, security agencies were deployed to the areas affected by the violence, and investigations were launched at the state level, involving local leaders in peace talks [5]. Also, political leaders have highlighted the historical nature of the conflict and the fact that it is not a problem of the current administration, as it has defied several attempts at intervention [7]. Often, however, these are reactive responses that address immediate violence but do not go further to resolve structural problems such as unclear boundary demarcation, competing historical claims, and socio-economic inequalities. The reliance on military solutions to address crimes and violence undermines peace and can lead to further community concerns, as seen in reports of communities fearing excessive force and its associated risks, which can increase fear and mistrust [8]. This proclivity reflects more general governance problems in

Nigeria, where state actions are often constrained by political interference, inadequate incorporation of local dispute settlement mechanisms, and limited institutional capacity.

The dynamics of the Amasiri-Oso crisis also reflect broader theoretical concerns about the legitimacy of governance, state capacity, and conflict resolution in multiethnic communities. Communal conflict can be avoided and managed by governments, but weak state capacity, characterized by limited administrative capacity, weak enforcement of policies, and poor security provision, weakens this ability [9], [10]. In these situations, traditional rulers, community leaders, youth groups, and other non-state actors often have significant influence on conflict dynamics. At times, they act as mediators, but they can also mobilize and retaliate, thereby exacerbating conflict. In Ebonyi State, despite government efforts to halt the Amasiri-Oso conflict, it has continued to be a problem, indicating that formal institutions or informal mechanisms alone cannot ensure lasting peace. Furthermore, although state measures are sometimes effective, their legitimacy is challenged when communities perceive them as biased or ineffective, causing compliance to be undermined and increasing the risk of renewed violence. Accusations and counter-accusations from the communities, along with mutual distrust, have fueled tensions, and empirical reports suggest that despite the state's efforts, perceptions of injustice and exclusion continue to sustain the conflict [11]. This highlights the need to investigate state responses as well as their legitimacy and influence on affected communities.

The Amasiri-Oso issue has underlying implications that are not only local but also have overt implications for the growth, security, and governance of Nigeria. In agrarian states such as Ebonyi, where agriculture is a major source of livelihood, communal conflicts affect economic operations, hinder land access, and negatively affect agricultural production. The instability created by such conflicts not only increases poverty but also displaces farmers and reduces productivity, thereby establishing a vicious cycle of underdevelopment [12]. Furthermore, infrastructure and property damage during conflict poses huge economic costs to communities and government that are a drain on development. Communal conflict also makes people feel that the government response is inadequate or inadequate; it affects social cohesion and undermines public trust in government institutions. Through a thorough analysis of the Amasiri-Oso crisis, this research advances our knowledge of how communal conflicts impact governance and development as well as how to create more efficient, inclusive, and long-lasting conflict resolution techniques to deal with these issues.

Statement of the Problem

The Amasiri-Oso (Edda) communal conflict has continued despite numerous interventions by the Ebonyi State government, security agencies, and community leaders. This raises serious concerns about the effectiveness and sustainability of government responses to communal land disputes in Nigeria. The frequent outbreaks of violence, including killings, destruction of homes, and displacement of residents, indicate a pattern of cyclical instability that existing efforts have failed to resolve. The situation remains critical, as credible reports of killings, burnings, and disfigured bodies have been linked to renewed hostilities [5], [6].

These developments suggest both the continuity and intensification of the conflict, with major implications for human security, local stability, and regional peace. While the state has responded by deploying security forces and launching investigations, these measures have largely been reactive, focusing on containment rather than conflict resolution. They have also failed to address underlying structural causes such as unresolved boundary disputes, divergent historical narratives, and growing socio-economic pressures on land use. As a result, the continued reliance on short-term crisis management has not produced a long-term and sustainable solution to the conflict.

Moreover, the persistence of the Amasiri-Oso crisis indicates deeper structural and institutional gaps in Nigeria's conflict management framework. There is considerable evidence that the recommendations of panels, commissions, and peace initiatives established by successive administrations are rarely implemented or consistently enforced, thereby reducing their impact and allowing tensions to re-emerge over time [5]. The overlapping mandates of security agencies, boundary commissions, and local government authorities also contribute to the complexity of the situation, as poor coordination makes coherent policy implementation difficult. Furthermore, the use of curfews and troop deployments has drawn criticism from local stakeholders, as such actions can increase fear and mistrust without necessarily resolving the root causes of conflict [8]. This trend reflects broader governance challenges in Nigeria, where limited institutional capacity, political interference, and weak accountability mechanisms constrain the state's ability to manage communal conflicts effectively. Consequently, state interventions are often perceived as unpredictable, reactive, and inadequate, leading to a loss of public trust and institutional legitimacy.

Furthermore, there are no sufficiently inclusive, participatory, and context-sensitive conflict resolution mechanisms capable of addressing the socio-cultural dynamics underlying the dispute. Most interventions so far have been top-down, with limited involvement of critical stakeholders such as youth groups, women, and traditional authorities, whose participation is necessary for sustainable peacebuilding. This exclusion weakens the credibility of peace processes and reduces community ownership of peace outcomes, thereby increasing the risk of non-compliance and renewed violence. Evidence from similar communal conflicts in Nigeria suggests that actors who are actively involved in communication, negotiation, and agreement implementation are more likely to achieve sustainable peace [1]. In the case of Amasiri-Oso, continued mutual distrust, contrasting narratives, and recurring accusations between the communities demonstrate that existing mechanisms have not been effective in promoting reconciliation and building trust [11]. The lack of academic studies relating specifically to the crisis, with the majority of existing studies being generalised, also limits the possibilities of evidence-based policymaking as the historical, cultural and political context of the conflict are not taken into account in the analysis. This knowledge deficit not only hinders research and scholarly knowledge but also makes it difficult to come up with focused and successful solutions, thereby perpetuating the environment for conflict

and raising the urgent need for a comprehensive, context-specific analysis of the Amasiri-Oso problem.

Research Questions

To guide this inquiry and ensure analytical precision, the study is structured around the following research questions:

- 1) What historical, socio-economic, and political factors drive the Amasiri-Oso communal land conflict?
- 2) How have state responses shaped conflict dynamics and governance outcomes?
- 3) What are the socio-economic and developmental implications of this conflict?

Objectives of the Study

The broad objective of this study is to examine the dynamics of communal land conflict and state response in Nigeria using the Amasiri-Oso (Edda) crisis in Ebonyi State as a case study. **Specifically, the study seeks to:**

- 1) Examine the underlying causes and structural drivers of the Amasiri-Oso communal land conflict, including historical, socio-economic, and political factors.
- 2) Assess the nature, effectiveness, and limitations of state responses to the conflict, with particular emphasis on security interventions, administrative measures, and conflict resolution mechanisms.
- 3) Evaluate the implications of the conflict for governance, human security, and institutional legitimacy, and identify pathways for sustainable conflict resolution and peacebuilding.

Theoretical Underpinning

This research is based on State Capacity Theory, which highlights the capacity of the state to formulate, implement, and enforce policies, maintain order, and provide critical services to citizens [9], [10]. The theory reveals that state capacity is multidimensional, encompassing coercive power, administrative competence, institutional legitimacy, and resource mobilization. This explains why interventions in the Amasiri-Oso communal conflict have failed to bring lasting peace. Although institutions and policies exist, the state's ability to manage communal disputes effectively is hindered by persistent violence, weak coordination, poor enforcement, limited preventive governance, and inadequate integration of local systems.

Using this theory, the study investigates the impact of the institutional weaknesses, implementation gaps and limited institutional reach on the conflict management outcomes in Ebonyi State. Lack of effective state response in terms of proactively countering violence, inconsistencies in the application of sanctions and the inability to engage in traditional forms of conflict resolution suggest that the state's capacity is reactive and geared towards immediate containment rather than long-term structural solutions. Thus, the State Capacity Theory can be powerful means for analysing the relationship among States capacity, legitimacy and sustainable conflict resolution, which can lead to better understanding of how well connected, adaptive and capable governance institutions can reduce communal conflict and improve development outcomes.

RESEARCH METHOD

The study relies on a qualitative research approach to gain a comprehensive knowledge of the issues of communal land conflicts and the state response to the case of the Amasiri-Oso crisis in Ebonyi State. The qualitative approach is suitable as it can capture the context, historical grievances, effectiveness of governance, and the importance of traditional mechanisms in conflict resolution (Creswell, John W.; Silverman, David). The study employed data collection methods such as field interviews conducted between January and February 2026, involving semi-structured interviews with selected residents of the study areas [13]. These were complemented by secondary sources, including peer-reviewed journal articles, government reports, and credible local media publications [14], [15], [16], [17]. It is a purposive sampling to ensure relevance and thematic and content analysis to find the pattern, narrative and the theme that is related to the research questions. Ethical issues such as confidentiality and informed consent were adhered to. This approach allows for a comprehensive and evidence-based understanding of the conflict, its governance dimension, and ways to improve the conflict's resolution in a more effective, inclusive and sustainable manner.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Historical, Socio-Economic, and Political Drivers of the Amasiri-Oso Communal Land Conflict in Ebonyi State

A constellation of deep seated historical, socio economic and political drivers, typical of communal conflict all over Nigeria, underpins the Amasiri – Oso communal land conflict in Ebonyi State. The disagreement over these has been a historical ambiguity in land tenure and demarcation of boundaries. Before colonial intervention, land in southeastern Nigeria was largely governed through customary systems, where control was based on lineage, collective memory, and negotiated boundaries between neighbouring communities [18]. Oral histories and traditional narratives, passed down through generations, were previously used to resolve disputes and allocate land access within and between communities. However, these traditional systems were disrupted by colonial administrative processes, which introduced official maps and government-determined boundaries without careful consultation. Post-colonial changes, such as the Land Use Act of 1978, which transferred control of land to state governments, further complicated customary rights [19]. Disputes such as those between Amasiri and Oso/Edda are therefore based on contested interpretations of history, tradition, and law as a result of the structural void created at the intersection of customary practice and statutory authority. African scholars argue that these historical ruptures involve structural grievances that cannot be resolved through formal adjudication alone, making them central to understanding communal conflicts in multiethnic contexts [2], [3].

Rural livelihoods remain dependent on land, and socio-economic pressures further exacerbate the conflict. The economy of Ebonyi State is largely agrarian, with the majority of households relying on agriculture and land cultivation as sources of income and food supply [20]. The struggle for fertile land is therefore not merely symbolic; it is a matter of survival, livelihood, and economic security. Land scarcity resulting from population

growth, fragmentation of land holdings through inheritance, and the monetisation of land has increased the stakes of boundary disputes. Empirical peace and conflict research shows that where institutional mechanisms for equitable resource distribution and conflict management are weak, resource competition becomes a major driver of communal violence [12]. The socio-economic dimension of the Amasiri-Oso case is reflected in recurring violent clashes at critical periods of the agricultural calendar, affecting agricultural productivity and creating food insecurity during planting and harvest seasons [16], [15]. Field interviews conducted between January and February 2026 further show that these experiences reflect wider structural pressures in agrarian economies, where high land value, poverty, and limited livelihood alternatives create anxiety over farmland loss and reduced access to productive spaces [13].

Political considerations also influence the nature of communal land conflicts, shaping how they are escalated, handled, or sustained. Land conflicts are rarely apolitical; they are often entangled with local governance structures, party politics, and the authority of state actors. Political intervention in the Amasiri-Oso dispute reveals the interplay between community grievances and state authority, particularly under the administration of Governor Francis Nwifuru in Ebonyi State. Local media reports indicate that in early 2026, Governor Nwifuru imposed a curfew, suspended traditional rulership titles in Amasiri, closed schools, removed community representatives from development centres, and ordered the deployment of security forces to end renewed violence [14], [21]. These measures were presented by the state as necessary to ensure order and hold responsible actors accountable. However, many residents and civil society observers interpreted them as punitive, unequal, and possibly biased, particularly because the Oso/Edda community was not subjected to similar sanctions [15], [14]. Academic studies of ethnic conflict and governance suggest that politically motivated or partial state interventions can reduce institutional legitimacy, deepen mistrust, and increase reliance on self-help justice systems [22], [3]. This is not peculiar to Amasiri Oso, as in many communal clashes in Nigeria, political responses shape the trajectory of the conflict and the level of engagement, trust and acceptance by communities affected by the violence of formal governing structures.

Formal governmental organisations and customary authority are also a problem in the conflict, which makes it unsolvable. Indigenous conflict resolution norms and restorative practices have historically been important in resolving land conflicts through the mediation of traditional rulers and elders [18]. However, the role and influence of traditional institutions have been politicised, sidelined, or irregularly recognised as statutory legal systems have become more dominant, thereby limiting their capacity to function as impartial mediators. When dispute mediation structures are dissolved or suspended by state actors through the removal of traditional titles, as reported by The Cable (2026), the legitimacy of dispute mediation and its cultural foundations are undermined, which can increase tensions [21]. Peer-reviewed research on Nigerian governance suggests that formal judicial structures often need to be supplemented by customary methods, recognising the legitimacy and social capital that customary

structures contribute to communities in achieving effective and sustainable conflict resolution [2], [3]. When such integration does not occur, or is perceived as forced, communal actors may reject negotiated settlements, escalate the conflict, or adopt other forms of protest and resistance.

The condition of communal conflict in Amasiri and Oso/Edda is further influenced by cultural identity and collective memory. Land is not merely a resource; it is also a site of ancestral heritage, group identity, and social belonging. When land is viewed as a matter of communal dignity and continuity, compromise becomes difficult because communal narratives are often framed in moral and historical terms. African conflict studies have highlighted that land conflicts linked to identity and historical memory are more difficult to resolve because their costs are not only economic but also symbolic [1], [3]. The significance of land in the social fabric of these communities is evident in local reports of clashes, mass displacement, and ritualised assertions of territorial claims [16], [15]. These historical, socio-economic, political, and cultural factors entrench the Amasiri-Oso crisis, showing that many overlapping factors contribute to the recurrence of the conflict and make it difficult to resolve.

In conclusion, this study indicates that the Amasiri-Oso communal land dispute cannot be treated as a simple case of one cause and one effect, but rather as the product of cumulative pressures from various communal structures. Historical experiences of colonial and post-colonial land governance, socio-economic struggles over scarce resources, political processes shaped by governance dynamics, and entrenched cultural identities all contribute to a persistent conflict environment. Therefore, resolving such conflicts requires holistic measures that consider their complex causes and include not only statutory reforms but also socio-economic development approaches, participatory governance, and culturally grounded reconciliation processes.

State Intervention Strategies and Conflict Management (Amasiri-Oso) Crisis

The state's responses to communal land conflicts – in particular the Amasiri-Oso conflict in Ebonyi State – are reactive, coercive, lack structural solutions and exhibit an institutional fragmentation, reflecting widespread governance weaknesses in the management of communal land conflicts in Nigeria. A recent example of this pattern is the escalation of violence that occurred between January and February 2026. To restore order and enforce accountability, Francis Nwifuru's administration introduced several extraordinary administrative and security measures after attacks on Okporojo village along the Oso/Edda axis resulted in several deaths, with bodies allegedly buried in shallow graves [16], [17], [4]. As is common in official responses to communal violence, these measures involved the deployment of security forces, the imposition of curfews, and the initiation of investigative processes. In addition to these common responses, the government tried to pursue a series of punitive steps that severely affected the governance system of the Amasiri community, thereby showing a significant increase in government response to the conflict compared with the previous conflict cycles.

The Ebonyi State government ordered the removal of all political appointees in Amasiri, the suspension and dethronement of traditional rulers, and the collapse of the

community leadership structure, thereby dismantling the formal political and traditional authority of the community [4], [21]. Other measures included the closure of schools, markets, banks, and other socio-economic institutions, alongside the imposition of a near-total lockdown through extended curfew restrictions [14], [15]. In addition, the government reportedly derecognised Amasiri as a development centre and began the legislative process of formalising this derecognition, thereby cutting the community off from institutional mechanisms linked to resource allocation and development planning [17]. These actions were justified in official commentary as necessary to demand responsibility and respond to non-cooperation with investigative procedures. The government also indicated that sanctions would not be lifted until crucial evidence relating to the killings was found [16]. These actions underscore the state's attempt to assert its authority both symbolically and coercively, and they represent one of the severest administrative responses to a communal conflict in recent Ebonyi political history.

Although these interventions indicate the state's capacity to act quickly and decisively, their impact in relation to wider criteria of conflict resolution, legitimacy, and sustainability remains highly controversial. One significant issue raised by media coverage and academic analysis is the unequal imposition of sanctions: while the Oso/Edda community was part of the conflict dynamics, comparable sanctions were not immediately imposed on it. This differential treatment created perceptions of selective enforcement, which contributes to the persistence of conflict. Political science literature suggests that state intervention perceived as biased can reduce legitimacy, lower compliance, and strengthen identity-based grievances, making reconciliation more difficult [3], [22]. Field evidence also supports this interpretation, as some respondents perceived the measures as disproportionately targeted against Amasiri, thereby fuelling mistrust toward government institutions [13]. These perceptions are especially significant during communal conflicts because they can perpetuate cycles of retaliation.

Beyond questions of legitimacy, the state's strategy indicates a structural problem: short-term, security-oriented policies are preferred over long-term preventive conflict management approaches. Measures such as curfews, military deployment, and administrative sanctions may contain immediate outbreaks of violence, but they do not address contested land boundaries, competing historical claims, population pressure on land, or socio-economic marginalisation [2], [1]. Nigerian conflict management literature shows that such approaches often produce temporary peace followed by renewed violence, a pattern reflected in the repeated cycles of the Amasiri-Oso dispute [22]. Although the 2026 interventions were more intense, the absence of a long-term resolution framework, such as enforceable boundary demarcation, institutionalised mediation mechanisms, or sustained community engagement, raises questions about the sustainability of the peace achieved. Field observations also suggest that security deployments are often episodic, arriving when tensions have reached a critical point and being withdrawn before tensions are fully resolved [13].

Institutional coordination and implementation capacity also constrain the effectiveness of state responses. In the management of the Amasiri-Oso conflict, several actors are involved, including the state executive, security agencies, local governments, and ad hoc committees. However, coordination among these actors remains weak, reflecting a common feature of Nigeria's governance architecture [9], [10]. Although boundary panels and investigative committees have been established, their recommendations are often poorly implemented, have limited enforcement power, and are vulnerable to political manipulation [16]. This "implementation gap" is common in Nigerian public administration and undermines policy credibility, as communities witness repeated investigative processes without tangible outcomes [2]. Further, lack of reliable systems of land documentation, conflict databases and coherent inter-agency frameworks add to the difficulties in designing evidence-based interventions, thus helping to perpetuate the reactive nature of state responses.

Another key factor is the disruption and marginalisation of traditional conflict resolution systems that traditionally play an important role in resolving conflicts in southeast Nigeria. The banning of the Amasiri traditional rulers was originally intended as a way of correcting and punishing, but was also a sign of undermining indigenous governance systems which would have facilitated communication and healing. Academic studies indicate that hybrid governance systems involving formal and state institutions and customary ones are often essential in achieving peace in African settings [18], [3]. State interventions have a potential to undermine locally legitimate processes of conflict resolution, reducing community ownership and compliance and sidelining these actors. Despite the state's mediation initiatives, field perspectives indicate that the traditional methods of mediation are still valued by community members, indicating a gap between state mediation policies and local realities [13].

State responses can also have socio-economic consequences, which further complicates the overall efficacy of the responses. Although these laws are often needed in the short term for security, they have adverse developmental impacts, particularly in rural communities where the day-to-day economic activity is the source of livelihood [14]. As per development literature these disruptions can negatively affect the development of human capital, increase poverty and sustain conflict conditions [12]. In the case of Amasiri, the loss of the status of a development centre, along with the exclusion from institutional frameworks more generally, raises concerns about the link between distributive governance and conflict management. These findings highlight the critical need to look at state actions in the context of broader impacts on governance, inclusion, and development as well as security.

In all, Francis Nwifuru's Ebonyi State government's actions in 2026 provide a contemporary and enlightening lesson on the nature of Nigeria's democracy in addressing communal issues. It is important to emphasize, however, that these are not unique to the present administration; but rather part of a wider historical trend that has seen administrations relying on a reactive, security-based and administratively decentralized approach to conflict management. The results of credible local media

reporting, peer-reviewed academic studies and limited fieldwork suggest that the conflict has been marked by recent interventions with greater intensity and decisiveness, but without significant change in the underlying structural dynamics that support it. The conditional and limited effectiveness of state responses, as well as the dismal lack of positive results in some places, signals a need for a shift to integrated, participatory and structurally informed conflict resolution approaches that focus on legitimacy, institutional coordination and long-term development outcomes.

Impacts of Communal Land Conflict on Governance and Development in Ebonyi State

The implications of the Amasiri-Oso communal land dispute are not just localized, but have structural ramifications for governance systems, institutional legitimacy, and development trajectories in Ebonyi State and beyond for the subnational political landscape in Nigeria. All these implications point to the breakdown of governance at the grassroots level, where communal conflicts tend to make administrative systems weaker, affect the implementation of policy and result in governance vacuums. The Administrative actions by government under Francis Nwifuru following the escalation in January – February 2026, are examples of the direct impact of conflict in shaping local governance architecture. Amasiri's traditional leadership system was weakened, political appointments were slashed and the development centre status was suspended [4], [17], which resulted in the reconstruction of the state's presence in the community. Although these acts are supposed to be remedial, they may have the effect of disrupting administrative coordination, governance continuity, and the issue of local authority and representation. Political science literature holds that the state's capacity to deliver services and maintain order is seriously constrained if its institutions are not stable and legitimate over time [9], [10].

One of the most significant longer-term impacts of the conflict is the legitimacy of institutions; this is closely tied to the disruption of governance. Legitimacy in this context is not only legal, but also involves legitimacy of the state's action as seen in its fairness, neutrality and accountability. The inconsistent application of sanctions during the 2026 crisis has, in particular, fueled narratives of selective justice and political bias, particularly in the targeting of Amasiri, as well as a failure to take similar steps towards Oso/Edda. These views are significant not only because of their impact on citizens' trust and obedience to the government but also because they are likely to shape the government's policies. Research in the field has consistently shown that if the community believes the government's action has been done in half measures, or has been politically motivated, then it loses its confidence in the institution and then compliance becomes resistance or disengagement [3], [22]. Some residents saw government actions as punitive, not reconciling, and this sentiment was confirmed by interviews in limited fields in early 2026, which further increased the level of mistrust [13]. This loss of legitimacy has a larger impact on the governance of democracies, as it undermines the social pact between governments and people, and thus the social base of good governance.

The war also has significant security governance and state capacity dimensions, in terms of the state's capacity to effectively prevent and coordinate its internal conflicts.

The overemphasis on reactive deployment of security is reflected in the use of curfew, military presence and emergency administration measures, and points to the shortcomings in Nigeria's conflict management architecture [1], [2]. Although they can temporarily lower the level of violence, these do not increase the security capacity or resilience in the long term. Instead, repeated rounds of violence and intrusion can create a culture of crisis and the governance environment can become one that is marked by crisis management. Institutional weaknesses, for instance, in land administration systems, the availability of reliable conflict information, and interagency coordination, limit the effectiveness of security measures and extend the period of vulnerability as was the case in Amasiri-Oso [10]. This has implications on local stability and the legitimacy of the state as a whole as citizens' expectations for government effectiveness increasingly include its ability to sustainably resolve conflicts and provide security.

The conflict has great socio-economic impact as it affects livelihoods, productivity and increases poverty. Land, as an economic resource, plays a significant role in Ebonyi State, as the state is predominantly agrarian and land related conflicts impact on food security and production. The economic activities in Amasiri were also drastically curtailed with curfews, market and school closures as well as restrictions on movements during the crisis in 2026, affecting other towns [14]. The literature in development economics highlights that these disruptions, particularly those involving the disruption of education can lead to permanently lower levels of human capital, increased unemployment and decreased income levels [12]. The loss of the development center status of Amasiri compounds these problems by potentially restricting Amasiri's access to government resources, infrastructure development and institutional support. These findings indicate that communal conflicts are not only security issues but also crises of development, which could hinder long term economic development and further consolidate structural inequality.

Beyond economic implications, the conflict also has an impact on social cohesion and inter-communal relations, essential for sustainable peace and development. These interventions can also help strengthen divisions of identity, fuel historical grievances and trigger cycles of retribution that can be passed down through generations in communal conflict situations. Recent acts of violence have added to the difficulty in reconciling the conflicting land ownership and historical entitlement narratives in the Amasiri-Oso case. The intensity of the conflict and official sanctions, which are not uniform in nature but rather selective, risk entrenched in the minds of citizens and communities mistrust of the State and of each other and thus weaken the overall social fabric [3]. Peace and conflict studies say that there is a difficult process in inclusive dialogues, recognition of each other's grievances and equitable treatment by State institutions, which is difficult to achieve in situations where interventions are perceived as biased and coercive, to rebuild social cohesion. If intentional efforts are not made to address the relational aspects of the conflict, it can continue to escalate even though it is not violent.

Another important aspect is the linkages between conflict management and development governance, in particular in terms of the allocation of resources and the

prioritisation of policies. The government's approach and efforts are concentrated on crisis management rather than long-term planning, to deal with regular communal clashes. The constant interventions over the Amasiri-Oso issue in Ebonyi State have required deployment of political will, government machinery and security personnel which can be deployed to other sectors like education, infrastructure development and economy. This is consistent with studies in development that conflict prone areas are considered to have opportunity costs in governance, as spending on security comes at the expense of investing in development [12]. Moreover, the shift of the development centre status by administrative decision is an important issue to consider regarding the effects of conflict on distributive politics, and access to state resources, which can lead to new forms of marginalisation and grievances.

Finally, the case of Amasiri-Oso underscores the need for rethinking the modality of conflict resolution in Nigeria's governance system in the light of enhancing the processes of preventive measures, modalities of community engagement, and formal and informal institutions. More inclusive 'bottom up' and structural approaches to conflict management are important, as evidenced by state responses that have both implementation challenges and legitimacy issues. Academic studies have shown that hybrid governance options with a mix of traditional dispute resolution approaches, the use of state power, clear and concise legal parameters and consistent policy implementation are essential for durable solutions [2], [3]. Therefore, the lessons learnt from this conflict are not unique to Ebonyi State but are more broadly applicable to Nigeria on how to manage a conflict among communities that will lead to socioeconomic development, institutional legitimacy, and stable governance.

Overall, the Amasiri-Oso communal conflict is a complex phenomenon in which security, governance and development are all intertwined with the communal violence being a cause and effect of institutional weakness. The occurrences of 2026, with the interventions of the Nwifuru's government, put these dynamics into perspective. While the state action has proved effective in asserting its authority and in temporarily curbing violence, the overall impact of these actions in terms of legitimacy, continuity of governance and development suggest that more comprehensive, inclusive and sustainable means of conflict resolution are needed, incorporating both immediate and structural aspects of communal conflict.

CONCLUSION

Fundamental Finding : This study has now confirmed that the Amasiri-Oso (Edda) communal land issue is steeped in past communal land disputes, conflicting claims of identity and the structural flaws in the Nigerian land governance and conflict management system. The findings reveal that interventions by the state, especially those conducted in the January–February 2026 crisis under the leadership of Francis Nwifuru, illustrate the potential for quick responses, but also highlight that they are largely reactive, security-focused, and do not go far enough in tackling the roots of the conflict. Continued problems with boundary demarcation, institutional coordination and short-

term measures continue to perpetuate violence and instability. Furthermore, the research indicates that the effectiveness of the state responses is greatly restricted by issues of perceived bias, limitations in the legitimacy of the state and lack of integration of traditional conflict resolution mechanisms. These elements are all pointing to the interdependency of security, governance, and development, as well as the socioeconomic disruptions caused by the conflict, including lost livelihoods, disruptions in education, and local governance mechanisms. **Implication :** There is a conclusion, therefore, that for sustainable resolution, episodic crisis management should be superseded by inclusive institutionalised and development-oriented conflict management practices that can help increase legitimacy, promote equity and address the structural aspects of intergroup conflicts. Recommendations On the basis of the results of this study the following is recommended: I. Institutionalization of an Integrated Land Governance and Boundary Adjudication System: Create a constitutionally-supported, technologically-based land governance system with geospatial mapping, cadastral digitization, and legally-binding boundary adjudication. This system should balance statutory land laws with customary land laws and practices, provide clarity, permanence and enforceability of land ownership and boundaries and remove the structural causes of communal conflict. II. Development of Multi-Level Preventive Conflict Management Architecture: Design a comprehensive early warning and response mechanism based on local intelligence, local community-based monitoring systems and state security agencies in an integrated approach. This architecture should focus on predictive analytics, ongoing interaction and quick mediation to move conflict management from a reactive containment to a proactive prevention. III. Implementing a Hybrid Governance Model for Conflict Resolution: Formalize and incorporate a state-traditional authority collaboration through embedding customary dispute settlement mechanisms in statutory frameworks. This blended model should be recognized as a legal model, appropriately resourced, and designed to increase the legitimacy, local ownership and sustainability of peace processes in communal conflict contexts. IV. Conflict-Sensitive Development and Governance Reforms: Plan, allocate resources, and provide governance in a way that makes explicit consideration of conflict sensitivity. This means, for example, equitable access to state resources, prevention of an administrative exclusion of vulnerable communities, and the connection of peacebuilding with socio-economic development programmes, in order to tackle the immediate and structural aspects of conflict. **Limitation :** A primary limitation of this study is its narrow empirical scope, as it focuses exclusively on a single case study of the Amasiri-Oso (Edda) crisis in Ebonyi State, which may limit the direct generalizability of the findings to other geopolitical zones in Nigeria experiencing structurally different communal or nomadic land disputes. Additionally, because the study relies heavily on qualitative interviews and secondary administrative accounts during a specific crisis window in early 2026, it may not fully capture the long-term, shifting dynamics of local identity politics or the hidden economic interests of undocumented non-state actors who influence the conflict behind the scenes. **Future Research :** Future research should expand on this framework by conducting

comparative, cross-regional studies that analyze communal land governance across multiple agrarian states in Nigeria to identify common institutional failure points. Furthermore, future investigations would benefit from integrating quantitative geospatial modeling and longitudinal socioeconomic tracking to measure the precise impact of boundary adjudication delays on local agricultural productivity, while evaluating the scalable success of newly implemented hybrid state-traditional mediation models elsewhere.

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