

# **Theatre and Conflict Resolution in Nigeria: The 2012 Assakio Ethnic Conflict as Paradigm**

**By**

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## **Abstract**

All across the world, but especially within the African continent, conflicts caused by either man or nature are evident. Almost all countries in Africa have stories of one conflict or the other engraved in its history. Nigeria has been witnessing its own conflicts which cut across the length and breadth of the country. From the North to the South, from the East to the West conflicts of different magnitudes- ethnic, religious, political, economic, communal among others have ravaged the country's unity, peace and development. However, one major conflict that has become a recurrent decimal and so prominent within the Nigerian body polity today is ethnic conflict. This is because Nigeria is a multi-ethnic and developing federation richly endowed with both natural, human and material resources; hence contestation for space, recognition, relevance and resources has become the order of the day. Again, the return to democratic rule after a very long period of military rule as well as the proliferation of militia groups jostling for space and recognition in the country's polity seemed to have opened the floodgates of ethnic conflicts. With the democratic opening, the space now exists for these pent-up feelings to come to the fore, often leading to clashes amongst the various ethnic groups inhabiting the country. Unfortunately, the so-called democracy which many clamoured, scrambled, fought and died for over the years has not been able to resolve the numerous inter-ethnic conflicts that have contributed in no small measure to the undermining of Nigeria's democratic experiment and the subversion of the goals of nationhood. Assakio Development Area of Nasarawa state is one of the communities that witnessed inter-ethnic conflicts over the years with its devastating consequences which remain the bane of her development. This paper therefore looks at the 2012 ethnic conflict at Assakio Development Area as well as its aftermath and how Theatre for Development can be utilized to engage the people to participate actively in conflicts mitigation, mediation and resolution. The paper concludes that, for Nigeria to remain on the right side of history, it must always pursue an agenda for conflict management and resolution via the instrumentality of the theatre.

## **Introduction**

Ethnic conflict is part of the most recurring issues in Nigeria's body polity. It has been at the heart of Nigeria's development problems and has permeated the Nigerian landscape since the colonial period and up till the present time, there seems to be no solution in sight. Its impact has been detrimental to national unity and socio-economic well-being of the country. It is imperative to note that most of these ethnic conflicts were caused by colonialism which compounded inter-ethnic conflict by capitalizing on the isolation of ethnic groups in its divide and rule strategy, as well as the pursue of political power, insatiable desire for primitive accumulation and recognition after independence by some so-called political elites. During the colonial period for instance, the divide-and-conquer method was used to pit ethnic groups against each other, thus keeping the people from rising up against the colonizers. Distribution of economic resources was often skewed to favour a particular group pushing marginalized groups to use their ethnicity to mobilize for equality. These tendencies and many others were transferred to the post colonial period by some so-called political elites and traditional leaders who did not mean well for the country.

The dominant and minority ethnic groups treat each other with suspicion and clash at the slightest provocation. Institutional efforts which were made to satiate these tendencies since independence has proved inadequate. The long years of military rule increased the gap of distrust as the elites deliberately employed state power to pursue primordial sentiments thereby increasing the gap of intolerance between the "Haves and Have Nots". Unfortunately, the current political battle is fuelled by certain quarters and individuals who benefit at the expense of the state and citizens. According to Claude Ake "the elites show no restraint in manipulating the people to capture political power. He maintains that as the pull apart, they place more value on capturing political power for themselves and grow increasingly fearful about what seems to them

to be the grave consequences of loosing to their rival”(7).For him, political power is everything.By this it means that, political power is not only an access to wealth, but also a means to security and the guarantor of general well-being of the people.Again, Ake posits that:

In post colonial Africa, the premium on power is exceptionally high and the institutional mechanisms for moderating political competition are lacking. As a result, political competition tends to assume the character of warfare and the struggle for political power is regarded as a matter of life and death because, the state controls the means of acquiring wealth. Thus, everything else, including development is marginalized(8)

What this means is that, the competition for political office which is the root of whatever material or economic benefit that will occur to an area, tends to bring people in to a particular situation in which they would want to compete. The competition often leads to conflict and sometimes violent conflict because one group would want to dominate a particular group or area. Today, the demand for ethnic and cultural autonomy, competing demands for land, money, power and the marginalization of one region by the others have necessitated the incessant ethnic conflicts jeopardizing and denting the peaceful co-existence of the Nigerian people. These have been the situation in Nasarawa state among the Eggon and Alago ethnic groups in Assakio.

However, research has shown that theatre today has become a medium or a testing ground for conflict resolution and peace building.Richard Wilbur argues that: “The theatre is a great medium of correction and for the majority of people, there is no better way of reproof than depicting their faults to them... The most effective way of attacking vice is to expose it to public ridicule through dramatization” (102).By this it means that, Theatre for Development is a great medium of reproof, correction and mediation that has the capacity and wherewithal to depict people’s faults to them and build peace and peaceful co-existence in society. This is precisely what this paper tries to explore as we progress in the discourse.

## **Understanding the Concept of Ethnicity**

The concept of ethnicity refers to a social identity formation that rests upon culturally specific practices and a unique set of symbols and cosmology; a belief in common origins and a broadly agreed common history which provides an inheritance of symbols, heroes, events, values and hierarchies, and conformed social identities of both insiders and outsiders (Tsaku, 31). By this it means that, ethnicity is one of the important ways people conceive of themselves, their culture and identify. On the other hand, Okwudibia Nnoli posits that “ethnicity is an important tool for mobilization which is inevitable under the condition of inter-ethnic competition for scarce valuable resources particularly in societies where inequality is accepted as natural and wealth is greatly esteemed (8). This again explains how the political class uses ethnicity for political ascendancy in the society. The fear of being confined to the bottom of inter-ethnic ladder of inequality generates divisive and destructive socio-economic competition which has anti-social effects. It becomes possible for the in-group to accept the expression of hostility towards the out-group and aggressive behaviour may then be used to limit competition in favour of the in-group. Therefore, demonstration, rioting and various forms of violence agitation become instruments of inter-ethnic relations.

Linking the above argument for the purpose of practical analysis, Nnoli again has argued that “in their competition for national resources, the various factions of political class employed both institutional and non-institutional means to limit competition in favour of one faction or combination of factions” (9). The zoning policy in Nigeria today for instance, is an institutionalized form, while nepotism is a non-institutionalized method of limiting such competition and a changing inter-ethnic stratification inevitably. Such strategies lead to the growth of ethnic consciousness with its negative consequences for the development of common

national consciousness. No wonder today, Ethnic militia has taken the front seat in any contemporary discourse on Nigeria and its emerging democracy. The restoration of democratic rule in Nigeria on 29<sup>th</sup> May, 1999 also signaled the emergence and continued proliferation of vigilante groups, ethnic and sectional militias as well as secessionist or separatist groups that have tremendously fuelled ethnic conflicts across the country. Charles Okechuwu posits that:

Prominent among these are O' odua people's Congress (OPC), formed in 1994 as a militant arm of *Afenifere*, a pan- Yoruba group and National Democratic Coalition (NADECO) that were in the forefront of protesting the annulment of the June 12, 1993 general elections. The short lived Arewa peoples' Congress (APC) appears to have been formed to serve as a check on OPC incessant attacks on the Hausa/Fulani population in Lagos and other Yoruba towns. The Igbo's Peoples Congress (IPC), a militant arm of Ohanaeze Eastern Mandate in response to, OPC and others that frequently vandalize their goods and properties across the country was formed in 1999. Others are the Bakassi Boys, a vigilante outfit set up by Abia and Anambra State governments to curb criminal activities in 1999, the Egbesu Boys (1998), the Movement for the Actualization of the Sovereign State of Biafra (MASSOB) 2000, Tiv Militia 2001, Jukun Militia 2001, Ijaw Militia 1999, Itsekiri Militia 1999, and the Militia arm of Movement for the Survival of the Ogoni People (MOSOP) 1992 among others (2).

The dissatisfaction with the structure, operation and power configuration under Nigeria federalism' is responsible for the unprecedented emergence of the groups. The increase in crime rate and the helpless attitude of law enforcement agencies towards this have been cited by their founders and admirers to claim legitimacy for these groups. Recently, the emergence of the "OMBATSE" group in Nasarawa state has created a lot of hullabaloo in the polity. This means that, as ethnic consciousness thus increases in scope and intensity, the socio-economic and political atmosphere become charged with tension. Under this circumstance, the ethnic factor assumes a self-fulfilling and self-sustaining dynamics of its own. This implies that, ethnicity is a very complex phenomenon. Its complexity is not always adequately reflected in socio-political thought along, but in every sphere of human endeavour.

## **Ethnic Conflict in Nigeria**

Conflict is an inescapable reality of social existence. Nations, communities, identity groups, families and even individuals experience conflict in their interactions with similar constituted entities. All conflicts if not managed well are tantamount to resulting into violence. For instance, Nigeria has been confronted with numerous conflicts that have inflicted monumental damage on the economy, politics and peaceful co-existence amongst groups. Gowan Doki decries the country's backwardness and asserts that:

Upon the attainment of independence, Nigeria has been plagued with one conflict to the other: civil war in 1967, sharia conflict in 1977, maitatsine conflict in 1980, the oil conflict in 1986, the declaration of jihad in Kaduna state in 1996, the Kaduna and Abia religious riot in 2000, Tiv/Awe communal clashes in 2001, Tiv/Udam conflict in 2002, and a host of other sporadic attacks at different times and places (142)

These conflicts which often assume ethnic and religious forms, have led to heavy depletion of human resources and/ or the displacement of persons, weakening of state apparatus, increasing threats of successions and are increasingly challenging the rights of many Nigerian citizens.

Tsaku posits that, "a situation of conflict is one in which the activity of one is actually or forcibly imposed at unacceptable costs, materials or psychic, upon another(41). It means that conflict is a condition of disharmony in an interactional process. For ethnic conflict to occur, Tsaku puts forward three required factors which have intensity of the issues at stake. These include the status and legitimacy of the ethnic groups, the clustering of interests and the coincidence of cleavages within the community. These factors determine the extent to which conflict can stretch. On the other hand, Otite and Albert as cited by Ziporrah Tanko have articulated the view that "conflict is a fact of life and could be the precursor of positive change as it challenges the rational man to think of alternative ways of meeting contesting human needs and interest" (113).

By this it means that, conflict could take several forms: physical, psychological, social, political, economic and even cultural depending on its capacity. In other words, it could occur at any level of human interaction.

Bolaji Akinyemi as cited by Tsaku has given an external explanation that causes ethnic conflicts in Nigeria. He argues that “prior to the advent of colonialism in Nigeria; the land space now called Nigeria was occupied by autonomous and independent nations based on clearly defined nationalities. These nationalities were in different state of relationships with themselves. Some were in the state of war; some were in varying states of economic, cultural and religious relationship among others” (45). Impliedly, the subjugation of one ethnic group by the other which causes ethnic conflicts in the post colonial Nigeria is engendered and enhanced by the aftermath of colonialism and other post colonial quagmires perpetrated by the people. This therefore means that, the phenomenon of ethnic conflicts in Nigeria is attributed to multiplicity of factors such as: the mismanagement of ethnic grievances by Nigerian state and its agents, the diffusion of violence into Nigerian state by prolonged military rule, the general discontentment of component units of federation with the allocation of power and resources, the increase level of poverty and unemployment, the collapse of state welfare and growing ineptitude of state security apparatus.

Also, the exclusive use of power for political repression and its increase level is such that fosters the formation of groups and classes with conflicting materialistic conception and interest which tends to divide the society into hostile camps of people often armed with strong ideological conviction on how society should best be organized. This formation has also made some leaders to keep on feeding their people with ethnic prejudice and the bells of ethnic solidarity are perpetually rung to rally group support against other ethnic groups in the nation. It is these problems in addition to the general problem of the state in Nigeria that have led to the emergence

of guerrillas and warlords swelling their numbers of informal entrepreneurs of violence in the country.

Therefore, it is imperative to say that ethnic conflict and identification in Nigeria are passed on to successive generations through the process of socialization. The family, the press, private and public organizations and other agencies of socialization are infected by ethnicity. Which is why even when the original bases of ethnicity, socio-economic and political competitions among individuals are eliminated, there remains the problems posed by internalized dimension. Under such conditions, the persistence and sometimes growth of ethnicity is assured.

### **Brief Description of Assakio Development Area**

Assakio is the Headquarters of Lafia East Development Area. The area was carved out from the then Lafia Local Government Area of Nasarawa state by the administration of Governor Abdullahi Adamu in 2002. The area lies in the North Eastern part of Lafia; about 40 kilometers from the state capital on the Lafia- Shendam highway. The area has savannah type of vegetation with well drained loamy soil. However, the clay soil is found around the riverine areas. The people in the area are predominantly farmers as the area is blessed with rich arable soil for farming, pasturing, and water for grazing of cattle as well as the large and cheap labour force. The major crops grown are maize, melon, cassava, yam etc. Assakio is inhabited by Eggon, Alago, Koro, Akye, Tiv, Jukun, Rindere, Fulani, Doemak, Nupe and Goemai people. It is these characteristics that attracted people to the area and also provided platform for recurring conflicts which persistently undermine the developmental effort of the government in the area occasioned by the high level of poverty with its effects on the populace.

## **Remote and Immediate Causes of the Conflict**

The contending ethnic groups that engaged in the ethnic conflict at Assakio in 2012 are the Alago and the Eggon, the so-called two major ethnic groups inhabiting the state. Majority of them are farmers who always scramble for fertile land for farming purposes. The quest for land and political power are therefore central in the incessant conflicts between the Alago and the Eggon in the area. In addition, the Alago believe that as the first settlers in the area, they own and should determine the traditional and modern political leadership, a position other ethnic groups like the Eggon are now challenging. However, it is important to note that, different accounts or reasons were advanced by the parties to the conflict distorting facts in their favours in order to wipe sentiment and to attract public sympathy. In view of the above, we shall make conscious effort to analyze the causes both remote and immediate objectively and dispassionately based on the interviews conducted and the reasons advanced in Eggon News newspaper.

## **The Alago Version**

In 2007, many people contested for the governorship position in Nasarawa State including Solomon Ewuga who is from Eggon extraction. Despite the well established socio-cultural relationship between the Eggon and the Alago, on 30<sup>th</sup> March, 2007 Solomon Ewuga who was a governorship candidate went to Assakio for his political campaign with a large convoy of Eggon followers brandishing sharp knives, sword, cutlasses with the intention to demonstrate their overwhelming numerical superiority and to intimidate the Alago in Assakio. However, in the process of demonstrating valour and their impregnability with all these sharp objects, one of Ewuga's thugs trying to exhibit his expertise with a sharp knife accidentally split his own stomach opened. The source maintained that, instead of the victim to seek medical attention,

hewiped up sentiment and rushed to the Osakyo's palace (traditional chief's palace) where Solomon Ewuga was being received in audience (Eggon News, 7).

Furthermore, the victim alleged that he was attacked by the Alago people but the Alago maintained that it was the victim stupid belief in magical charms and amulets that failed him. With the victim intestines in his hands, his Eggon kith and kins and the member of Ewuga's entourage within the premises of the Osakyo's palace started attacking the Alago. In relation, the Alago people pursued members of Ewuga's entourage who were mostly Eggon Cultural Development Association (ECDA) militia popularly called *Ombatse* out of town and the two ethnic groups started burning each others' residences and properties. On 31<sup>st</sup> March, 2007, being the next day, the Eggon militia launched a fresh attack in Assakio, burnt houses, killed many people and left others wounded (Eggon News, 8).

Also, it was alleged that the then Osakyo of Assakio (Akushonye Anya) being the paramount ruler of Assakio appointed UmaruTsaku (an Eggon man) as "Wakilin" Eggon in Assakio after the demise of the immediate past Osakyo of Assakio. UmaruTsaku continued as the WakilinEggon in Assakio until the present Osakyo of Assakio was appointed. The WakilinEggon is supposed to be the spokesperson for the Eggon in Assakio and in turn answerable to the Osakyo of Assakio. However, because of the absence of this arrangement in Eggon traditional system, the WakilinEggon (UmaruTsaku) has assumed equal status with the Osakyo because according to him, his people are many in number. As such, he was not ready to take instructions from the Osakyo. Rather, he has assumed parallel authority with the Osakyo of Assakio, thereby mobilizing his Eggon brothers to flaunt the orders of Osakyo of Assakio. One of such instances was when the said WakilinEggon instigated his kinsmen not to recognize a ward head (AuduEbe) who was appointed by the Osakyo of Assakio (AkushonyeAgbo interviewed 15<sup>th</sup> December, 2013).

Another source claimed that the ethnic conflict was as a result of some problems between UmaruTsaku (a.k.aAVRE) the former WakilinEggon of Assakio along with some Eggon farmers on one hand, and the Osakyo of Assakio (OsulaInarigu) over a swamp (fadama) and a fishing pond known and calledOmulanya situated at Dadinkowa in Assakio. The traditional practice has always been that any farmer irrespective of his tribe who wishes to cultivate this parcel of swampy (fadama) land or fish pond has to pay a tribute from whatever is cultivated from the piece of land to the Osakyo. Hitherto, all farmers who have been cultivating this specific piece of land had been complying with this tradition. However, some Eggon farmers led by UmaruTsaku (a.k.aAvre) deliberately refused to pay their tribute as usual. On the 17<sup>th</sup> November, 2011, the Osakyo of Assakio delegated some of his title holders to collect the usual tribute from Eggon farmers but they resisted. Furthermore, all effort by the Administrator of Lafia East Development Area and the Nigeria Police Nasarawa State Command to settle this matter proved abortive.

Again, on Thursday 31<sup>st</sup> May, 2012, some Eggon elders led by Agyo Musa, a member of the NasarawaState House of Assembly representing Lafia North, AdamuMu'azu, former member who represented Lafia North at the same State House of Assembly and ShaibuZanwa the immediate past Administrator of Lafia East Development Area went to the palace of Osakyo to broker peace with the people of Assakio. Being Honourable members representing these areas at one time or the other, the Osakyo of Assakio and the entire people of Assakio welcomed this peace initiative in full confidence believing that peace had come at last. While the Alago people of Assakio went to sleep with their two eyes closed believing that peace had returned, the Eggon to the surprise of Alago, struck in the early hours of Friday, 1st June, 2012 burning houses, killing and maiming (Danjuma Musa, interviewed December 15<sup>th</sup>, 2013)

## **The Eggon Version**

The problem of Eggon in Assakio started in 2002 when Lafia East Development Area was created by Abdullahi Adamu led administration. It became serious in 2003 when Assakio chiefdom was created by the same regime. Following the creation of the chiefdom, the Eggon people in Assakio were totally alienated from the power sector and became subject to the estranged chiefdom. This was done despite the presence of the Eggon natives in Assakio who inhabit the bulk of the area of the district at all material times to the creation of Assakio chiefdom. The chiefdom was used according to Eggon as an instrument to alienate and suppress the Eggon natives from their means of livelihood. The Eggon in Assakio have continuously paid their taxes through the Wakilin Eggon of Assakio to the District Head of Assakio since 1917 when the district was created with its headquarters at Adogi. This goes to show that the Eggon in Assakio have never been subordinated to any aliened institution in Assakio in particular and any where in general and this cannot be changed. Therefore, the Eggon in Assakio vowed to only identify with Wakilin Eggon in Assakio and will continue to recognize him as their only head. (Ambla Usman interviewed 20<sup>th</sup> December 2013).

In another development, conflict erupted on 30<sup>th</sup> March, 2007 when Solomon Ewuga who was then vying for the seat of the governor of Nasarawa State under the platform of All Nigeria People Party (ANPP) took his campaign to Assakio. During the visit, the leaders of Alago and other indigenes placed some demands on Solomon Ewuga, one of which was for him to tap pipe borne water from Tunga Dam to Assakio and also to construct road from Assakio to Obi, if he becomes the governor of Nasarawa state. Solomon Ewuga was then given the time to speak and immediately he was done with his speech, there were sporadic gun shots everywhere. Shortly after that, some police men in uniform rushed inside the palace of Osakyo of Assakio with a corpse of a young Eggon man with his intestines outside, having been stabbed by the Alago people who were supporting Aliyu Akwe Doma who was also at that time vying for the

governorship of Nasarawa state under the platform of the PDP. AliyuAkweDoma was considered by the Alago people of Assakio as their kinsman and therefore, they were ready to fight with their tooth and nail to support him. However, following the death of the Eggon chap and the pandemonium that ensued, the Eggon people who were left at the mercy of the Alago militias who were battled ready with weapons of varying capacities had to run for their lives from the palace of the Osakyo. This led to the killing of some Eggon people and the burning of their houses(Eggon News, 10)

Again, it was alleged that on 20<sup>th</sup> September, 2008, the leader of Alago was said to have sent for the leader of Eggon people (ArenAssakio) to his residence in Assakio instructing the leader of Eggon in Assakio to tell all the Eggon that every household must give a bag of rice each to the Osakyo of Asakio else, the Eggon people would not be allowed to cultivate their farm land in Assakio. The leader of Eggon appealed to the Osakyo of Assakio stating how the Eggon people suffered in 2007 conflict and have not even finished rebuilding their burnt houses for another task to be added to them as a royalty to the ruler. However, the Osakyo of Assakio insisted on the payment of the said royalty and reported the issue to the paramount ruler of the Eggon people (ArenEggon) in NasarawaEggon to the effect that, all the Eggon people in Assakio must pay a bag of rice each or relocate to NasarawaEggon, a place believed to be an ancestral home to all Eggon people. This emerging situation was vehemently opposed by the Eggon people because it was considered as a strange development and an attempt to enslave the Eggon people in their native land. They stood very firmly on the basis that, there was no justification to pay royalty for the land that was originally acquired by them.

Furthermore, the request made by the leader of Alago was premised on the fact that the ownership of all land in Assakio belongs to him because; he is the chief of Alago. More so, he had severally stated that, the Eggon did not vote AliyuAkweDoma their kinsman instead, the

voted for the CPC candidate (Umaru Tanko Al-makura) during the last governorship election in the state. Consequent upon that, the Arewa Eggon invited the leader of Eggon and Alago respectively to his palace in Nasarawa Eggon urging them to live in peace but disagreed with the issue of payment of royalty which the Eggon people saw as a breach of their fundamental human rights. Upon these unwanted, unjustifiable and repeated demands by the leader of Alago, the Eggon people wrote a petition to the Commissioner of Police Nasarawa State dated 2<sup>nd</sup> May, 2009 seeking for protection of their lives and properties. The chief continued with his unjustifiable demand of a bag of rice from Eggon people in total disregard of the petition written against him. Tension was high in Assakio and it was due to this insatiable demand of unlawful royalty by the leader of Alago that necessitated the Eggon to write another petition dated 8<sup>th</sup> Feb, 2012 duly served to the Commissioner of Police Nasarawa State, the chief of Alago and all other relevant stakeholders responsible for the maintenance of peace, law and order. Despite all these, the chief of Alago persisted with his seizure of one bag of rice from every Eggon household in Assakio. These eventually resulted into full blown crisis which led to loss of many lives of the Eggon people and the destructions of their properties (Eggon News, 10).

### **Theatre for Development: The Way Forward**

In past recent years, scholars in different disciplines, development agents, and donor agencies have engaged and encouraged new perspectives of development thinking and approaches. For instance, the perspective that considers 'People first' and other critical determinants other than structures as prerequisites in community development planning and action. Indeed, a perspective that promotes the involvement of the communities directly in the entire project circle. This approach creates a democratic process where the community members are involved in identifying and resolving their vast community needs and problem militating against their growth and development. The opportunity this perspective provides is that it mobilises community

action and collective responsibility. Also the people hope to become more challenged and committed to initiate structures and execute programmes that make meaning to them through Theatre for Development practice.

Theatre for development is not a theatre by professionals for entertaining people. Rather, it is a theatre in which people themselves engage issues about their own lives for their own immediate consumption. It promotes development, good governance and peace building. It stresses participation, critical consciousness, sensitization and social transformation by stimulating dialogue within the people using their own familiar artistic expressions to the extent that they take positive action towards the improvement of their lives in the interest of communal stability and nation building. It enables communities to identify their needs, the types of development they desire, the place of development and the means of attaining such a development. Steve Abah reiterates this when he says that: "Theatre for Development has become an instrument for instigating people-centred development in the field outside of the academe... An instrument for mobilization and for instigation of participation in the development process" (xiv-xv). Tor Iorapuu on the other hand, defines it as "a theatre approach that seeks to make possible development education and action from the perspective of the people through the use of familiar cultural and democratic forms" (4). This means that, Theatre for Development is an alternative, interventionist and democratic theatre of the people by the people and for the people. The essence is about the people playing people. This form of theatre is a theatre that advocates for social, political, religious, cultural, economic and psychological developments and experiences about human society. It is an educational drama or theatre for social change. It is aimed at raising consciousness by exploring issues affecting the society in creative and exciting ways. Paulo Friere describing the process of change in behaviour says that, the mind of the individuals that participate in this exercise becomes open to new ideas such that people begin to perceive a new

awareness of selfhood and begin to look critically at the social institution in which they find themselves (9).

Therefore, it is imperative to say that the relationship between Theatre for Development, conflict resolution and peace building cannot be overemphasised. This is evident in the roles Theatre for Development plays and the values placed upon it, as it reflects, refracts and mediates human experiences and values that build and promote peaceful co-existence in human society. For the researcher here, one of the fundamental ways and strategies to promote peaceful co-existence and conflict resolution between the Alago and the Eggon in Assakio Development Area is via Theatre for Development Practice. Here, theatre practitioners and development experts having understood the reasons for the incessant ethnic conflicts in the community through research can intervene by engaging the contending parties directly using the instrumentality of Theatre for Development to reflect and mediate the contending issues. This is important because, when people play and engage themselves and reflect the issues militating against their development and peaceful co-existence and key into them vehemently, then the likelihood for peace building and conflict resolution will be attained.

Kwabena Bame agrees with this assertion and posits that “any development oriented ideas disseminated through the instrumentality of Theatre for Development are more likely to involve and motivate a larger number of people to participate in the development process” (65). Similarly, any success of development requires popular participation through action. For instance, in an event where the state does not have the necessary resources to assume all of its responsibilities regarding human basic needs like socio-economic and political development, peace and conflict resolution, one of the basic ways to achieve them is to promote community self-organization through what Guy Bessette called **Participatory Development Communication**, which can also be referred to as Theatre for Development in some places. This is because whether it is Participatory Development Communication or Theatre for Development,

the whole essence is about people participating in the development initiative of their communities. Bessette says that “Participatory Development Communication is a powerful tool to facilitate this process. It is about encouraging community participation with development initiatives through a strategic utilization of various communication strategies” (7). It means that participation is central to the task of defining and achieving peace and conflict resolution in our society.

## **Conclusion**

It is pertinent that conflicts whether religious, ethnic, political and otherwise are parts of the human life because strife, disagreement and sometimes hatred can erupt at any time as people sojourn and struggle for space, identification, political power and limited resources in society. Hence, the tendency for ethnic conflict to erupt among people that had previously lived together peacefully is possible. Such actually typifies the ethnic conflict experienced in Assakio in 2012. However, the role of theatre in such situation is of paramount important. In this paper we have established that the theatre has a role to play in mediating and resolving already bad situation by mapping out the part to peace and reconciliation. This means that Theatre for Development is an effective tool for conflict resolution of any magnitude. This theatre has not only emerged to be an effective weapon in raising the consciousness of the people towards the maintenance and sustenance of peace and peace building, but for the struggles toward a nation where peace and justice shall reign, where the Nigerian people will be seen doing the right thing at the right time.

What this means is that, a practical schema for theatre intervention must be based on the analysis of what went wrong, why it went wrong and deal with the perceptions associated with the feeling of those who feel wronged through performance. This is why most socio-political theatre practitioners practice, not to please anyone, but to expose social miasma inherent in the society through the instrumentality of Theatre for Development. On the other hand, all that is needed to bring ethnic conflicts like these to a halt in Assakio in particular and Nigeria in general, is the necessary political will by restoring confidence and hope to the people through responsible and purposeful leadership, good and exemplary governance, attitudinal change and community participation in decision making and implementation for conflict resolution, peace building and development.

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