

## INTEGRATING SOCIAL WORK INTO ETHNIC RECONCILIATION STRATEGIES IN OBI LGA, NASARAWA STATE

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### **Abstract:**

*Since Nigeria's return to democratic governance, Obi Local Government Area in Nasarawa State has faced persistent ethnic conflicts that have undermined government-led reconciliation efforts. This study explores the causes of these conflicts, documents victimization experiences, evaluates community perceptions of reconciliation, and identifies factors contributing to reconciliation failures and sustainable peace. Using multi-stage, systematic random, and purposive sampling, 216 respondents—including displaced returnees—were surveyed through qualitative and quantitative methods. Findings show that conflicts are widespread and deeply rooted, with significant victimization across ethnic groups. Major causes include land disputes, farming clashes, and crop destruction. Reconciliation failures were largely due to socio-political and religious manipulation. The study recommends broad-based consultations involving all ethnic groups, active female participation, counseling support for victims, the institution of a universally accepted peace celebration day, and the cessation of political manipulation of ethnic conflicts. These strategies are essential for healing divisions and fostering lasting peace in Obi LGA.*

**Keywords:** Ethnic Conflict, Reconciliation, Nasarawa State, Peacebuilding

### **Introduction**

North Central Nigeria (NCN) lies within a contiguous geographical area with similar cultural history and ethnic groups. It used to be called the 'Middle belt Region' (MBR) during the postindependence era of 1960 - 1967. Unlike other regions in the country: Northern, Western, MidWest and Eastern region, the middle belt region never achieved political recognition. During the General Abacha Military regime (1983 – 1998), the MBR was christened the 'North Central geopolitical zone, comprising of six states: Benue, Kogi, Plateau, Nasarawa, Kwara, and Niger. Although NCN is politically seen as the part of the old Northern Region, it is strategically located, in that it shared boundary with the southern part of the country and the core northern geopolitical zones of North-East and North-West. In the

advent of global warming and intense desertification in the fringes of the core North as well as Boko Haram insurgency in the Northeast geopolitical area, NCN has remained a melting pot for migrants from the core-North.

Nasarawa State is one of the six states in the NCN sharing a boundary with Kaduna State in the Northwest geo-political zone and Taraba State in the North-East geopolitical zone. Its proximity to Abuja, the Federal Capital Territory (FCT), makes it home to many migrants who cannot afford high

cost of accommodation in Abuja. The indigene includes Alago, Aho, Ake, Agatu, Bassa, Eggon, Tiv, Gandara, Hausa and Kanuri, amongst others. The non-indigene population includes principally, the Igbo and others drawn from other ethnic groups in the country who either reside here temporally (transmuting every day to work in the FCT) or engaging in the ever-expanding commercial businesses in Nasarawa including farm produces and solid mineral. Others including the Fulani reside here to herd their cattle as the green grass in the core north is vastly giving way to intense desertification.

Since 1999 ethnic and political manipulation has resulted into a remarkable classification of the population into 'indigenes and settlers' (Alubo, 2005) classes. It has re-enacted age-long violence known for the Middle-Belt region of the early 1960s (Egwu 1998). Unlike past violence which causes were found to include religion and politics, recent violence tended to be migration induced and involve not only religious sentiments between Christians and Muslims, but also ethnicity, politics and resource control (land, farmland, solid mineral, etc). In Obi Local Government Area

(Obi LGA) of the State, known for its agrarian nature and diverse ethnic groups, violence has claimed several lives and properties in recent time (Nathaniel, Agbese, Tahire & Isa, 2017). What makes the crises and the violence in the LGA unique is the intractable nature of it. The inter-ethnic conflicts have become long-term and with different phases. The conflicts are not only between the 'settlers versus indigenes' but also between 'indigene versus indigenes', and between 'indigene/settler versus indigene'. In the latter grouping, some ethnic groups with the tag of indigenes would enlist the support of 'settlers' to fight another indigenous ethnic group, especially when they are of similar religious affiliation. These have been demonstrated in the conflict and violence between Fulani versus Eggon, Migili versus Gwandara, and Alago/Fulani versus Eggon. The causes of these crises and violence are speculative, ranged from land disputes, farming, crops' destruction due to cattle grazing, to settler-indigene disputes. The failure of several committees set up by government to settle the differences among the ethnic suggests the existence of feud whereby each of the ethnic groups is finding it difficult to reconcile with the other. Many politicians are catching on the feud to manipulate each ethnic group, especially with religious colouration to prolong the conflict. The consequences have been incessant ethnic crises and violence with destruction of lives and properties.

Breaking news from the mass media (Nathaniel, et al, 2017) and documentation from conflict researchers (Okoli & Atelhe, 2014) have shown that ethnic related violence occurs more frequently in Obi LGA. Evidence is also abounded to show that government have been trying to solve the problem but with very little success of preventing a reoccurrence (Adogi, 2013). In the circumstance even government and politicians have been fingered as having hand in the incessant conflicts. Such observation may not be far from the truth. As Wika (2014, p.64) argued "ethnic and religious popularism, populism and patron-client relationship at the expense of the public and/or general good" is becoming a national problem. Many politicians are polarizing communities along ethnic and religious lines for political gains instead of working for the realization of harmonious relationship between and among them; and this has serious negative consequences in a multi-cultural, multi-ethnic country like Nigeria. Given this ugly development, the objectives of the research were to: (a) find out the causes of incessant ethnic conflicts among ethnic groups in Obi LGA, (b) find out conflict victimization experiences among ethnic group members that have hindered reconciliation, (c) understand the perception of reconciliation from the stand points of ethnic group members, and (d) factors that

influence reconciliation failure, as well as (e) find out what can be done to achieve reconciliation from the standpoint of ethnic group members.

The concern about conflict and associated violence and the need for peace and harmonious coexistence in human society is not new. It has been articulated severally by the United Nations and the United States Institute of Peace (USIP) (Kritz 1995, 2009), especially where conflict has become intractable, and people involve live in close proximity. Conflict in such instances is often marked by ‘a loss of trust, inter- generational transmission of trauma and grievances, negative interdependence and assertion of each group’s identity” (Fisher, 2012, p.145), while negating the other groups’ identity. When such antagonisms in community relations are not addressed, the likelihood of the conflict becoming spiral is high, and may result in inter-generational one. In this context the benefits of reconciliation are immense, ranging from peaceful co-existence to enhanced socio-economic development. In the case of OBI LGA, the outcome of this study will have significant policy inputs. By providing bottom-up input, it could help in strengthening vertical connection strategies. Reconciliation experts can now understand the real causes of incessant crises in the area and factors that constrained reconciliation efforts. The report may also help civil societies and NGOs in planning and implementing intervention programmes that have both government and community members’ inputs.

The work is presented in themes beginning with the introduction, description of the study area, conceptual and literature review, and methodology. Thereafter, the findings are presented, followed with discussion, conclusion and recommendations.

### **Study area**

Obi is one of the 13 Local Government Areas in Nasarawa State, Nigeria. Its headquarters are in the town of Obi. It has a land mass of 967 km<sup>2</sup> and a population of 148,874 as at the 2006 census. The 2015 population projection put the population at 194,800. Seven ethnic groups, viz: Migili, Alago, Eggon, Tiv, Gwandara, Kambari, and Fulani dominate the population. Each ethnic group lives in proximity of large and small villages, as well as farm settlements. Identity is effectively formed not by indigenship of Obi LGA, but by ethnicity and religious affiliation. As the incessant conflict engender mistrust and fear among the people, identity is further being narrowed, and each ethnic group tends to intensify internal cohesion.

While the Fulani are cattle herders, the rest are predominantly farmers. Although ethnic differences are often given as the reasons for violent crises between them, access to land and resources tend to be at the root of both the natives and the Fulani herdsmen’s confrontations. In recent years, the Fulani herdsmen have taken more sophisticated dimensions with the use of new types of weapons and mercenaries. In consequence, the native farmers have also resorted to self-defense with the employment of local vigilante groups (Nathaniel et al, 2017). The crises appear to be in recurrence phases; either between the Eggon and the Alago, or between the Tiv and the Fulani, or between the Eggon and Kambari and Alago, spanning different month with different justifications. As the crisis keep revolving and changing opponents, it has created a conflict trap, with generation of unforgiveable opponents. Each time a phase ended warring sides count losses that include materials and human lives.

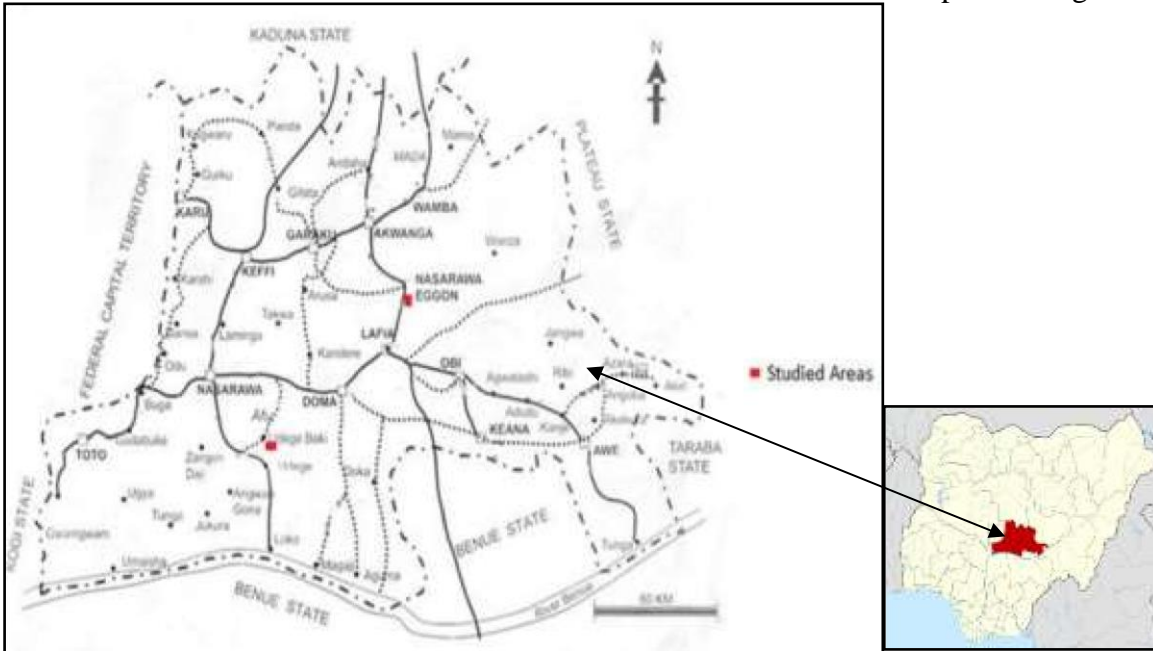


Fig. 1: Map of the Nasarawa state, Nigeria, showing the study area (Obi LGA)

### **Conceptual Clarification, Literature Review and Theory.**

From the micro (family and village) level to macro (State, international community) level, scholars and international institutions have shown concern for peace and harmonious co-existence. The emergence of society from Durkheim's "mechanical solidarity to organic solidarity" has been marked by conflicts, which Marx later regarded as being inherent and would pave the way for change. But whether such change was to result in peaceful co-existence has not yet been articulated by Scholars. In his earlier work and perhaps worried by conflict and its associated crises and violence, Georg Simmel (1858 - 1918) had posed the question, how is society possible? In trying to provide answer years later, Ross (2009, p.32) argued that Thomas Hobbes (1588 - 1679) had postulated earlier on that the "relationship between the state and individual liberty" is organized around a primary tension between the pursuit of individual and collective interest" and can only be resolved through the authority of the State (Krieken, 2003). The right and wrong of that argument confront us daily today given the emergence of liberal democracy. Today sustainable social order tends to be realized not from the authority of the State, but from a system of shared norms and values. In Krieken's (1991, p.16) analysis, for a society to exist, "there must be a significant degree of integration of ultimate ends in terms of a system common to the bulk of the individual composing it". Working toward the realization of such 'significant degree of integration of ultimate ends' confronts all reconciliation scholars.

### **Reconciliation:**

In his seminal work, Verdeja (2009) provided a definition of reconciliation that cover many overlapping concepts and variables including intergroup respect, trust, harmony, social cohesion, coexistence, justice, and peace. Kelman (2001) acknowledged the important of these overlapping concepts especially in ability to positively reinforce one another in "a momentum-building process" that can result in realizing broad normative changes in identities and intergroup relationships (McIntosh, 2014,p.61).

Reconciliation therefore is not only a method of conflict prevention, but also a method that can prevent conflict from re-occurring. In its Latin form, the word reconciliare means "re-establish peace or



friendship". It has a religious connotation that seeks "forgiveness and forgetfulness" (Erickson, 2001). According to Bar-Tal (2000) reconciliation is a process through which the parties in conflict form new relations of peaceful coexistence based on mutual trust and acceptance, cooperation, and consideration of each other's needs. The fact that reconciliation is seen as a process suggests that it is not an "end state or outcome, aiming at building relationships between individuals, groups and societies" (Fisher, 2012, p. 415) but a process "through which a society moves from a divided past to a shared future"; looking at the past in a way that allows people to see it in terms of "shared suffering and collective responsibility" (Bloomfield, Barnes, & Huyse, 2003, pp.12-21), which can help to build trust, confidence and reliability (Lederach, 1995).

In his work on ethnic identity and reconciliation in Bosnia- Herzegovina, Hjort (2004) observed that reconciliation and reconstruction can be used interchangeably. While reconstruction primarily refers to the restoration of economic, political and physical infrastructure, reconciliation concerns the social fabric. In this context reconciliation may be thought of as social reconstruction; as one is the essential condition for the being of the other. Several other scholars have sought to define reconciliation differently based on what they consider as important. For instance, Rigby (2001) sees apology and forgiveness as being central to reconciliation, whereas for Bar-Tal (2000), reconciliation requires the formation of an ethos of peace. Ethos is regarded as moral ideas and attitudes that belong to a particular group or society. In this context therefore, conflictive ethos exist during conflicts and shaped individual and society's coping behavior during such time. As the society returns to normalcy, such conflictive ethos needs to be changed. Bar-Tal (2000, cited in Hjort, 2004, pp.16-17) identified five core changes that have to take place in order for conflictive ethos to become peaceful:

a). Beliefs about societal goals, which provide cognitive foundations and influence the outbreak of conflict must be abolished and replaced by realistic goals that include all parties; b). Beliefs about the adversary group(s) must change. These beliefs include stereotypes, de-legitimization and de-humanization; c). Beliefs about the in-group also have to change. Former self-glorifying must change into more objective, complex and critical self-images. This includes reducing the monopolization of victimhood and admitting responsibility for acts related to the conflict; d). Beliefs about inter-group relations need to change as regards past, present, and future. The collective memory of the past should be reconstructed, so that beliefs about the past are objective and balanced; beliefs about present relations to the former enemy should be normalized; and beliefs about the future should emphasize the mutual dependence between the groups; e). Beliefs about peace, finally, must be subject to change. These must be realistic, admitting compromises.

In his contribution to the reconciliation debate, Lederach (1995, p.24) provided a missing link in what he called "the relational aspect". According to him, "a sustainable peace building must address and engage the relational aspects of reconciliation as the central component". In this context, reconciliation becomes a focus and a locus. "A focus on the relational aspects of conflict and solution, and a locus or a social space, where people, ideas and stories come together. Such relations may be between individuals, between communities or between an individual on one hand and a community on the other. Reconciliation therefore becomes rehumanizing as the change in relations acknowledges others. Thus Gibson (2006) acknowledged that reconciliation is regaining empathy for the other. Through empathy the other is perceived as a distinct and individual, and his or her perspective is fully understood and experienced (McIntosh, 2014).

In Hjort (2004) observation, achieving reconciliation may be a painful and complicated process especially where the conflicts have become intractable, and have been going on for decades. The onset of conflict is often characterized by dramatic behavior on the part of participants. The breaking down of norms signaled the arrival of normlessness which generates behaviours that are out of sync with social order. In the absence of law and order, destruction of unimaginable magnitude that include life and property may occur, such that even when the conflict is brought to a halt, memory keeps lingering on that may continually influence recall of the ugly incident that took place. In communities where younger society members have become socialized into the conflictive ethos, they developed conflict sub-cultures that shape their daily living and relationship with other communities. Where such violent sub-culture becomes a social identity, it could hinder a change to peaceful ethos. For a solution, Bar-Tal (2000) believed that societal institutions and organizations (NGOs, civil societies) could play important role in the process of reconciliation of feuding communities. Institutions such as the educational system can socialize entire generation of youth raised in the ethos of violent sub-culture into an ethos of peace, and in so doing sustain harmonious relationship among community members.

#### **Ethnicity and ethnic group:**

The concepts of ethnicity and ethnic group have been severally defined. For instance, Horowitz (1995, p. 52) defined ethnicity as “a myth of collective ancestry, which usually carries with it traits believed to be innate. Some notion of ascription, however diluted, and affinity deriving from it are inseparable from the concept of ethnicity.” In a definition offered by Max Weber and highlighted by Hutchinson and Smith (1996, p. 35), ethnic groups are seen as “those human groups that entertain a subjective belief in common descent because of similarities of physical type or of customs or both, or because of memories of colonization or migration”. This belief is held onto seriously for the “propagation of group formation; conversely, it does not matter whether or not an objective blood relationship exists.”

However, Fearon and Laitin (2000) found the attribute of ‘descent’ very central to the definition of ethnic group. In a work he later authored alone, Fearson (2003, p.7) argued that a typical ethnic group is one that has several of the following six features:

(a) Membership is reckoned primarily by descent (b) Members are conscious of group membership (c) Members share distinguishing cultural features (d) These cultural features are valued by a majority of members (e) The group has or remembers a homeland (f) The group has a shared history as a group that is “not wholly manufactured but has some basis in fact.

In his recent work, Chandra (2016, p.6) outlined the role of ‘descent’ in the definition of ethnic groups to include, “a common ancestry, a myth of common ancestry, a myth of a common place of origin and a “descent rule” for membership”. Although “a common culture or language and a common history” were added attributes, the author argued that “a common culture broadly as ‘a shared set of symbols, values, codes and norms’ do not specify which symbols, values, codes and norms it is important to share”. In this context some ethnic group members do not necessarily share a common culture; some only speak different dialects of their main language. In Martha’s (1998) analysis, identity becomes “a self-structure – an internal, self-constructed, dynamic organization of drives, abilities, beliefs, and individual history”.

#### **Theory**

One of the main tasks of reconciling feuding ethnic groups is the rebuilding of social bridges between them. Such effort starts with recognizing the concept of ethnicity and the identity formation that

influence behaviour between them. This is because when ethnicity becomes a factor that primarily determined “an individual’s self-concept” (Levine, 1972), it may exert a negative influence on relationship with ethnic others in a multi-ethnic society, thus Horowitz (1995) observed that conflicts along ethnic lines are more likely to turn violent. A large body of literature also exists that argued that ethnicity also “matters” not only for violence, but also for democratic stability, for institutional design, for economic growth, and for individual well-being (Rabushka & Shepsle 1972; and Geertz 1973). We can therefore only worry about negative ethnicity, which motivated by emotions such as fear, hatred or resentment would trigger violence (Petersen, 2002). Reconciling violent situation for peace co-existence called for dialogues. In this study, we adopt a combination of theory: ethnic identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979) and dialogues for change theory (Church & Roger, 2006; Crocker, Hampson & Aall, 2015) to explain reconciliation among feuding tribal members.

In theorizing ethnic identity formation, Tajfel and Turner (1979) observed a process similar to ego identity formation. It takes place over time as the individual explores the ethnicity in his or her life. The process of identity is “located in the core of the individual and yet also in the core of his communal culture” (Erikson, 2003). Individuals within their familiar cultural setting find security, since they are culturally at par with the other people they meet. “Strangers, who behave differently are a potential threat as long as one does not know more about them and does not understand them” (Dubbeldam, 1995, p. 15). In this context, “ethnic groups motivated by resentment will choose as their target those ethnic others who are farthest up the status hierarchy whether or not they are the greatest threat”, while those “motivated by hatred will target ethnic others with whom they have battled in the past, regardless of their threat potential and their position on the status hierarchy” (Chandra, 2016, pp. 19 – 20)

Ethnic identity structure develops gradually with age and experience. A well-developed identity structure provides the individual with a clear sense of what distinguishes him from others and in what aspects he is similar to them. It is flexible and open to changes in society as well as in relationships, growing stronger through each crisis. This theory includes several assumption including the argument that ‘ethnic identities can change even in the short term as individuals combine and recombine elements from their fixed set of attributes differently; and that a multiethnic society is likely to experience incessant violent due to ethnic identity manipulation.

The theory of ‘dialogue for change’ seeks to find a way out for a multi-ethnic society enveloped in violent conflict. The theory explains reconciliation intervention strategies after conflicts through dialoguing with community members. The objectives for community dialogue vary, but at its heart is the notion of transforming people and relationships. Dialogue may start from the individual, interpersonal, community, and then to national levels. On the individual level, sharing experiences is conceptualized as personal healing. Through conversation, people gained an awareness of who they were and why they held certain attitudes and behaviors. In participatory dialogues facilitated through FGDs, which may include perpetrators, victims and non-victims, the truth-telling element contributed to a sense of justice for past atrocities (Church & Roger, 2006).

Dialogue always entailed openly discussing the goal of transforming relations between people across lines of division. Such discussing may provide the first step of rehumanizing divided peoples. Hearing other narratives may help to reduce intergroup fear and break down stereotypes and misconceptions. The theory has several important assumptions: First is that community members are allowed to participate in the study; second, such participation generally create positive dialogue experience that

can contribute to bottom-up inputs; third, the public can come to understand the narratives and experiences of conflict victims and their suggestions on how best to resolve the conflicts. The finding can therefore help to bridge the vertical gap that hinders possible reconciliation in the past (Crocker, Hampson & Aall, 2015).

### **Method**

A combination of quantitative and qualitative instrument was used in this study. Apart from the strengths of each of the instrument and ability to compensate for the weaknesses of the other, the triangulation in instrument helps to enhance its validity. We drew participants from both the male and female members of the community across all the ethnic groups including community leaders, the youth, married and single women, and councilors, using questionnaire, in-depth interviews (IDIs), focus group discussion (FGDs) and key informant interview (KIIs).

**Questionnaire:** The use of questionnaire was necessary for gaining confidential information about the causes of conflict in the study area and type of victimization suffered by ethnic groups' members. It was also necessary for the evaluation of reconciliation and assessing the causes of reconciliation failures from the perception of ethnic groups' members, as well as what can be done to achieve reconciliation. The questionnaire, which was administered on 134 community ethnic groups' members, also elicited information on available community mechanisms that can assist in the achievement of sustainable peace and hence harmonious co-existence in the area.

**In-depth interviews (IDIs):** were conducted on ethnic groups' leaders and community elders. Each of the community (consisting of group of villages and or settlements) has elders (called Maiangwa) and leaders of 'Ethnic Associations'. While the Mai-angwas are recognized as the head of the community who take charge of the affairs of the community including day to day's activities in settling disputes and quarrel among members, the leaders of the ethnic association are responsible for the coordination of social activities, and meetings of ethnic group associations that gather for their common interest. They coordinate the activities of ethnic group members even beyond their community, including linking them in case of problems that need financial and material assistance. Their participation in the study was for the purpose of understanding factors that influence incessant conflicts among ethnic groups in Obi LGA. Their contributions also help in understanding factors behind reconciliation failures and what can be done to achieve reconciliation in the community. Twenty-one (21) leaders were interviewed as part of the study.

**Focus group discussions (FGDs):** This instrument helped to understand general community-level definitions of reconciliation and their expectation, and victimization experience. It presented views and experiences across gender divide, including the views of the youth and youth leaders (regarded in the community as foot-soldiers). Participants in the FGDs included men and women (married and single). In all, seven FGDs (consisting of 8 participants each) were conducted during the study.

**Key informant interviews:** In order to find out more about reconciliation failures and incessant conflicts in the study area, five Councilors who represented different political wards (the smallest political unit recognized by government) in Obi Local Government Council were interviewed. Their information helps to know in detail effort of past reconciliation trials, and to verify suspicion of religious and political manipulations, as well as what can be done to facilitate reconciliation in the community.

**Sample:** Questionnaire was administered on 134 respondents drawn proportionally from seven communities (ethnic groups) in Obi LGA. The sampling universe included all adults (18 years of age or



older) living in the selected villages and hamlets. A multi-stage sampling strategy was used in the selection of communities. Thereafter we used systematic random sampling techniques to select the villages/settlements, and then the households. At the time of the survey some of the residents were trying to complete the re-building of their houses from the building materials given to them by the State government after the 2016 crises between Eggon and Fulani ethnic groups. In Eggon and Fulani communities, therefore, we purposively encourage the returnees to participate in the FGDs.

Respondents administered questionnaire included 21(15.67%) from the Migili ethnic group, 26 (19.40%) from the Fulani ethnic group, 28 (20.90%) from Alago ethnic group, 13 (9.70%) from Eggon ethnic group, 18 (13.43%) from the Tiv ethnic group, 16 (11.94%) from Gwandara ethnic group, and 12 (8.96%) the Kambari ethnic group. The gender distribution was 91 (67.91%) males against 43 (32.09%) females. In all 216 respondents participated in the study: 134 (responded to questionnaire), 56 (participated in FGDs), 26 (participated in in-depth interviews), and 5 (participated in key informant interviews).

### **Variable Measurement:**

The survey instrument covered 29 topics including socio-demographics, involvement in conflict with other ethnic groups, causes of conflicts, conflict victimization experience, relationship with members of ethnic groups, perception of fear and safety, desire for reconciliation, meaning and perception of reconciliation, causes of reconciliation failures, readiness to embrace, and suggestions that can prevent future conflict in Obi LGA.

Socio-demographic variables: Socio-demographic characteristics of respondents included age, gender, and marital status. Gender was measured as female = 1, male = 0, while marital status (single, married, co-habit, divorced, and widow/widower) was nominally coded on a scale of 1 –

5. The age range of respondents included  $\leq 20$  years (1.49%), 21 – 25 years (21.64%), 26 – 30 years (13.43%), 31 -35 years (32.09%), 36 – 40 years (14.185), 41-45 years (8.96%) and 46 years and above (7.46%). The Mean and standard deviations of the socio-demographic variables are reported in Table 1.

Involvement in conflict and causes of conflicts variables were meant to assess inter-ethnic group conflict among the respondents. Although the frequency of conflict (in terms of time frame) was not assessed, the question elicited responses on inter-ethnic conflicts within the LGA and the causes of the fighting. The question was an open-ended one and respondents were at liberty to mention the ethnic groups they have fought with and the causes of the conflicts.

Conflict victimization experience variables: In order to measure conflict victimization experience, respondents were asked to mention their own experience or victimization experience of their friends or household member. The question was “did you or anybody you know experience the following victimization during the incessant conflict in Obi LGA?” Respondents were asked to tick as many of the victimizations they have experienced.

Relationship with members of other ethnic group were assessed as a way of finding the impacts of conflicts on not only interpersonal relations between members of the feuding ethnic groups, but also socio-economic relations and the willingness to forget and forgive. The questions seek to test the level of inter-ethnic groups fear and prejudice. While the interpersonal relation variables assessed continuation of inter-ethnic groups' friendship, in spite of the conflict situation, (like do you break off relationship with your friends in the ethnic groups that fought with your ethnic group? Can you marry

from there? Do you talk about them in a bad way? Would you want to take revenge? Etc.), the socio-economic variables measured trust and reliability like drinking from similar source of water, allowing children to attend same school, etc, and being favourable dispose to doing business (like farming) together and working in the same office. The indicator on interpersonal relation was grouped into seven categories: avoidance, not talking with them, break off relationship, cannot marry from there, shall take revenge, talk about them in bad way, and, had received help from them before. The socio-economic indicators measured trust (continued trust of people from opposing ethnic group) under 'yes or no'.

**Understanding reconciliation variables:** Reconciliation variables were operationalized into three types of indicators (a) the meaning of reconciliation (b) desire for reconciliation, and (c) readiness to accept reconciliation. Certain theoretical understanding informs these steps in measurement. The theory of 'dialoguing change' (Crocker, Hampson & Aall, 2015) emphasized that reconciliation is ultimately about improved intergroup relationships, and that such change must first come from within the conflicting individuals. It is a way of measuring shift in behavior about the conflict. The 'desire for reconciliation; and 'readiness to accept reconciliation' were measured on a 3-point Likert scale [how would you rate your desire for reconciliation with other groups you fought with?; (3 = very desirable, 2 = fairly desirable, and 1= not at all)] and [how ready are you to accept reconciliation?; (3 = very ready, 2 = fairly ready, and 1 = not at all)]. The meaning of reconciliation was measured by five indicators, viz: renewing friendship, absence of violence, unity and cooperation, freedom from worry, and forgiving and forgetting. Responses during indepth interview (IDIs) and key informant interview (KII) also generated other meaning of reconciliation based on the perception of ethnic group members.

**Causes of reconciliation failure variable:** Respondents were asked to indicate on eight options: political manipulation, religion, hatred, ownership of farm land, lack of leadership, bad leadership, poverty, and mutual suspicion, as the likely causes of reconciliation failure in the community. Other causes were solicited during IDIs, FGDs and mentioned key informant interviews.

**Suggestions for Reconciliation variable:** Respondents suggestions were seen as bottom-up inputs that can sustainably bring about reconciliation among the feuding ethnic groups. Several suggestions were therefore solicited from respondents using four related questions: what should be done to people responsible for incessant conflict in the area, factors that can promote reconciliation, type of compensation for conflict victims, and strategies that can prevent future conflict. On 'what should be done to people responsible for conflict in the area', both close-ended and open-ended questions were included. Respondents rated actions ranging from paying compensation, prosecution, asking for forgiveness, be forgiven, remove from the community, confession, other (mention). Following such rating, respondents were asked: "what factor do you think can promote reconciliation in Obi LGA?" Options included forgiving, confession, apology, payment of compensation, performing of traditional ceremony, and religious ceremony, others (mention). In terms of payment of compensation by government, options ranged from 'cash payment, development project, supply of building materials, food items, crop seedling, memorials', others (mention). Overall, respondents made suggestions on socio-cultural strategies that can sustain reconciliation in the area, including yearly traditional ceremonies across the seven ethnic groups.

Table 1: Mean and Standard Deviation of some descriptive variables

Migili	<u>Ethnic Groups</u>
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Variables		Fula ni	Alag	Eggo n	Tiv	o Gwandar a	Kamb ari	Total
<b>Sample size</b>	15.28	17.1	18.5	11.57	13.4	12.96	11.11	<b>216</b>
<b>Mean Age</b> (Std Deviation)	29.19 (8.68)	32.2 3 (8.68)	4 (7.73)	33.00 (7.64)	7 (98.6)	35.50 (6.83)	35.92 (8.65)	
<b>Gender</b>								
Male	53.30	84.5 0	52.7 0	58.30	53.6 0	72.50	61.32	<b>129</b>
Female	46.70	15.5 0	47.7 0	41.40	46.4	27.50	38.68	<b>87</b>
<b>Marital Status</b>								
Single	14.29	7.69	14.2 9	23.08	11.1 1	12.50	8.33	<b>27</b>
Married	66.67	84.6 2	57.1 4	61.54	66.6 7	62.50	66.67	<b>132</b>
Co-habit	4.76	0.00	7.14	7.69	5.56	0.00	8.33	<b>8</b>
Divorce	9.52	0.00	7.14	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	<b>4</b>
Widow/Widower	4.76	7.69	14.2 9	7.69	16.6 7	25.00	16.67	<b>45</b>
<b>Instrumentation</b>								
			2 31.6		3	3 33.1		
<b>Questionnaire</b>	15.67	19.4 0	20.9 0	9.70	13.4 3	11.94	8.96	<b>134</b>
In-depth interview	14.29	14.2 9	14.2 9	14.29	14.2 9	14.29	14.29	<b>21</b>
Focus Group	14.29	14.2 9	14.2 9	14.29	14.2 9	14.29	14.29	<b>56</b>
Key Informant	20.00	0.00	20.0	20.00	0.00	20.00	20.00	<b>5</b>

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## Findings

The findings of the study is presented in six main parts: involvement in conflict and causes of conflicts, conflict victimization experience, relationship with members of other ethnic group, understanding reconciliation, causes of reconciliation failure, and suggestions for achieving sustainable reconciliation.

### Involvement in conflict and causes of conflict

The observation in the study area was that conflict has become incessant and intractable between the ethnic groups. We decided therefore to investigate conflict experience and causes. Respondents from

each ethnic group were asked to name the ethnic group they have fought with in the Local Government Area, and the cause(s) of the fight. Tables 2 and 3 below suggest the causes and endemicity of conflicts in the study area.

**Table 2:** Involvement in conflict and causes of conflict

S/N	Ethnic Group	Ethnic Group Fought with:	Causes of Conflict
1	Migili	Gwandara Kambari Eggon Fulani	-Land dispute -Grazing of cattle on farmland -Crops and farm destruction -Religion
2	Fulani	Eggon Tiv Alago Migili Kambari Gwadara	-Farmland -Crop destruction by cattle -Killing of cattle by Tiv people
3	Alago	Eggon Tiv Fulani Kambari Gwandara	-Farming along grazing reserve land -Land dispute -Indigeneship dispute -Death of Emir of Azara -Leadership dispute -Political crisis.
4	Eggon	Fulani Alago Tiv Gwandara	-Land dispute -Crop destruction by Fulani cattle - Indigene- Settler dispute -Grazing inside farmland
		Migili Kambari	-Political marginalization
5	Tiv	Fulani Alago Eggon Kambari	-Farm land dispute -Crop destruction by Fulani cattle - Non recognition of Tiv as indigene by Alago. -Political marginalization
6	Gwandara	Alago Eggon Fulani Migili	-Land dispute -Farm land destruction -Crop destruction by Fulani cattle - Politics
7	Kambari	Alago Eggon Fulani Tiv Kambari	-land dispute -Farm land destruction -Crop destruction -Politics and leadership struggle



As shown in Table 2, major causes of conflicts among the ethnic groups were land, farm and crop destruction. Apart from the Fulani who rear cattle, the rest of the ethnic groups are farmers. Land dispute often result in farm destruction. While crops and farm produce constitute the economic life-wire of the farmers, the Fulani depends on their cattle for income and source of livelihood. In the absence of map-out grazing area, Fulani cattle often feed on crops and farm produce, with or without the control of the herders. The reaction of the farmers in attacking the cattle and the herdsman often results in conflict. This situation has become so rampant that the Fulani ethnic group has fought with all other ethnic groups in the area. Beside farm and crop destruction by cattle, the Fulani ethnic group (hitherto pas toral)

Ethnic Groups	Conflicting ethnic opponents						
	Mig ili	Fula ni	Alag o	Eggo n	Tiv	Gwandar a	Kamb ari
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Migili	VS	√	X	√	X	√	√
Fulani	√	VS	√	√	√	√	√
Alago	X	√	VS	√	√	√	√
Eggon	√	√	√	VS	√	√	√
Tiv	X	√	√	√	VS	X	√
Gwandara	√	√	√	√	X	VS	X
Kambari	√	√	√	√	√	X	VS

\* VS = Vesus; √ = Fought with; X = Not fought with.

### Conflict victimization experience

have decided to settle in Obi LGA as well as other places in the state, but the indigenes still refer to them as settler, who should have limited rights to land. In this context settler-indigene ship problem also has a hand in the conflict situation in the area.

The incessant nature of conflicts among the ethnic groups is demonstrated in Table 2. Nearly all the ethnic groups in the area have had to fight with each other. For instance, the Fulani has in one time or the other engage in conflict with each of the ethnic groups. Similarly, the Eggon ethnic group has experienced conflict with all other ethnic groups in the area. The Alago ethnic group fought with all other ethnic groups except the Migili. The Tiv ethnic group was yet to fight with the Migili and the Gwandara. Incessant ethnic conflict was reported among the Gwandara and Migili, Gwandara and

Table 4: Conflict victimization experience by ethnic group members in Obi LGA

Victimization experience	Ethnic Groups %							Total
	Migili	Fulani	Alago	Eggon	Tiv	Gwandara	Kambari	
Forced to run away	14.41	16.95	20.34	10.17	12.25	12.71	10.17	<b>118</b>
Witnessed war related fight	16.67	11.76	19.61	9.80	17.65	12.75	11.76	<b>102</b>
Witnessed family member /friend killed	16.28	12.79	19.77	8.14	12.79	17.44	12.79	<b>86</b>
Farm destroyed	15.31	13.67	22.45	11.22	13.27	14.29	10.20	<b>98</b>
Animal killed	15.66	15.55	21.69	9.64	12.05	14.46	10.84	<b>83</b>
House destroyed	13.86	12.87	23.76	12.87	9.90	14.85	11.88	<b>101</b>
Property destroyed	17.14	11.43	24.76	11.43	10.48	14.29	10.48	<b>105</b>
Seriously injured	15.22	14.13	18.48	10.87	16.30	14.13	10.87	<b>92</b>
Family member injured/maimed	12.20	6.10	21.95	8.54	20.73	17.07	13.41	<b>82</b>
Family member killed	13.41	15.85	19.51	7.32	17.07	13.41	13.41	<b>82</b>
Family member disappeared	17.46	11.11	17.46	6.45	14.29	15.87	17.46	<b>63</b>
A friend killed	10.99	14.29	25.27	7.69	15.38	14.29	12.09	<b>91</b>
Threatened with death	15.73	9.18	23.60	7.87	16.85	14.62	11.24	<b>89</b>
<b>Mean rating</b>	<b>13.69</b>	<b>16.08</b>	<b>19.77</b>	<b>8.77</b>	<b>13.46</b>	<b>14.08</b>	<b>10.85</b>	<b>8.90</b>

Fulani, Gwandara and Alago, as well as Gwandara and Eggon. In all, interethnic conflicts were more frequent among the Fulani and Eggon ethnic groups than other ethnic groups in the study area.

Table 3: Ethnic groups and conflicting opponents

Table 4 reports the victimization experience of each of the ethnic groups during the conflicts. In the questionnaire and in-depth interview as well as the focus group discussions, respondents were asked to indicate the victimization they suffered during the conflicts. The mean experience among the ethnic groups differs, ranging from 8.77 conflict victimization experience among the Eggon to 19.77 recorded by the Alago people. Majority of the respondents reported running away from their homes. This suggested internal displacement of people, with consequences of homelessness as many of their houses were destroyed by the invading enemy ethnic group. The least victimization in terms of destruction of houses during the conflict occurred among the Tiv ethnic group (9.90%). Property destruction including both individuals and collective, as revealed during FGDs (religious houses and business premises) were also recorded during the conflicts. Destruction of property was therefore reported by all the ethnic groups, although it was greatly elevated among the Alago (24.76%) ethnic group.

Economic consequences of the conflict were reported in the destruction of farms and animals. Although these may have caused the onset of the conflict, it is suggestive that in the course of the conflict may farms may have been destroyed with the produce carted away as war booties. Similar fate was suffered in terms of animal stolen and or killed during conflicts. As respondents reported, and confirmed in the literature (Nathaniel, 2017), the prosecution of the conflicts usually resembled real war situation with sophisticated guns, ammunitions and charms being used by all parties. Such instrument of warfare informs the number of casualties that was recorded in the incessant conflicts. Other than those killed, 92 (68.66%) respondents reported having sustained injury, with majority being of the Alago (18.46%), Tiv (16.30%) and Migili (12.22%) ethnic groups.

In addition to destruction of houses and property therefore, victims of the conflict recorded the loss of family members and friends. Many respondents reported having witnessed their family member/friends killed. As many as 82 respondents had their family members injured and or maimed during the conflicts; 13.41% of this took place in Kambari compared to 17.07 % in Gwandara. The number of family members who could not be accounted for after the conflicts was significantly reported among the Migili, Alago and Kambari with 17.46% respectively. In spite of the death recorded, those who survived the conflicts still live under threat. In addition to 89 (66.42%) of the respondents who reported threat to life after the conflicts, a key informant in Alago said he was “ambushed for a revenge killing after the 2013 crisis”. Others reported increase in theft and outright armed robbery. An in-depth interview in Tiv and Gwandara reported general atmosphere of insecurity. Another informant from Tiv said:

My brother’s hand was cut off by the Fulani who invaded his farm; I still entertain fear of staying in the village.

### **Inter-Ethnic Relationship**

Given the background of conflict victimization reported by respondents across the ethnic groups, we asked them about their current relationship with opposing ethnic groups. According to Bloomfield et al (2003), it is only when a new relationship between conflicting parties is built on respect and a real understanding of each other’s needs, fears and aspirations, that socio-economic and interpersonal relations enhanced by trust can be realized. Such characteristics can be realized when respondents understand the extent of conflict victimization suffered by other ethnic group members and measured are undertaken to guarantee the future of peace and safeguard against a return to conflicts.

Relationship between the ethnic groups was measurement by three variables: trust, interpersonal and social. In order to test trust that enhanced confidence and reliability in relationship, we asked respondents: can you still trust people from the ethnic groups that fought with you? Table 5 contains summary of the findings. Responses were surprisingly tied (67 vs 67) of the 134 respondents. Although this finding confirms the intractable nature of the conflict, it suggests also that some level of friendship across the ethnic groups were still possible. For instance, majority of respondents from Migili (61.90%), Fulani (53.85%), Gwandara (81.25%) and Kambari (83.33%) were in affirmative. The reason was not farfetched; many respondents had reported during the FGDs and confirmed during assessment of interpersonal relationship (table 6) that they had benefited from friendship in other ethnic groups before the conflicts and still expect robust relationship in future. However, responses from Alago (64.29%), Eggon (61.54%) and Tiv (88.89%) were not too confident of trustful relationship. This finding suggests that some people from these ethnic groups still live with pains of victimization experience of the conflicts, and such painful experience must be overcome for genuine reconciliation to take place. In Fisher’s (2012) analysis, personal friendship with an out-group member can bring about tolerance toward outgroups in general and reduced ethnocentric pride.

Table 5: can you still trust people from opposing ethnic groups?

Rating of trust	Responses %							Total
	Mig ili	Fula ni	Alag o	Eggo n	Tiv	Gwandar a	Kamb ari	
Yes	61. 90	53.8 5	35.7 1	38.46	11. 11	81.25	83.33	<b>67</b>
No	38. 10	46.1 5	64.2 9	61.54	88. 89	18.75	16.67	<b>67</b>
Total	100 .0	100. 0	100. 0	100.0	100 .0	100.0	100.00	<b>134</b>

In assessing interpersonal relationship (table 6), 84 (62.69%) of the respondents recalled having had useful friendship with people from opposing ethnic groups before eruption of conflicts. Such report was very noticeable among the Migili (19.05%), the Fulani (17.86%), and the Gwandara (16.67%). However, majority of the respondents who reported the adoption of 'avoidance relationship' were from the Fulani (19.28%), and the Alago (15.66%), suggesting that opening embrace of friendship has to be cautious. In the circumstance, 70 of the respondents who participated in the study, mostly Fulani (20.00%) and Kambari (17.14%) were not communicating with people of other ethnic extraction in the area, while 47 respondents, mostly from Alago (25.00%), Tiv (15.00%) and Migili (21.28%) had severed personal relationship with people from opposing ethnic groups. These findings confirmed once again the intractable nature of the conflicts and the existence of fear of safety among the ethnic groups earlier expressed during key informant interviews. Such perception influence hatred and hate speeches among the ethnic groups. "Talking about other ethnic groups in a bad way" was mostly reported by the Fulani (28.00%), the Tiv (17.33%) and the Alago (16.00%), while the promise to take revenge was reported mostly by the Fulani (29.63%), the Migili (25.95%) and the Alago (18.52%). A trigger of hope that remained in interpersonal relation among the feuding ethnic groups was reported by 'marrying from other ethnic groups". Cross-ethnic marriage can help to build social-bridge of friendship and paves the way for reconciliation. However, only 55 (41.05%) 55 respondents indicated their willingness to engage in cross-ethnic marriage.

### Understanding reconciliation

In testing respondents understanding of reconciliation, we needed their own inputs on reconciliation strategies. It was a way of asking ethnic groups members to take responsibility to understand and overcome incessant conflict situation. The lack of such consideration may have caused past reconciliation failures because negotiations for reconciliation were always held in Lafia (the headquarters of the state) with political elites from Obi LGA, without inputs from ethnic group members who are directly affected; only for conflict to erupt again after few months. Other than the



Table 6: Assessment of interpersonal relationship among feuding ethnic groups in Obi LGA

Interpersonal relationship variables	Ethnic Groups %							Total
	Migili	Fulani	Alago	Eggon	Tiv	Gwandara	Kambari	
Avoidance	18.07	19.28	15.66	12.05	13.25	12.05	9.64	<b>83</b>
Don't talk with them	11.43	20.00	14.29	11.43	14.29	11.43	17.14	<b>70</b>
Broken off relationship	21.28	12.77	25.53	12.77	25.53	2.13	2.13	<b>47</b>
Can marry from them	20.00	10.91	14.55	12.73	5.45	20.00	16.36	<b>55</b>
Will take revenge	25.93	29.63	18.52	7.42	7.41	7.41	3.70	<b>27</b>
Talk about them in a bad way	12.00	28.00	16.00	9.33	17.33	13.33	4.00	<b>75</b>
Had received helps from them before	19.05	17.86	14.29	9.52	9.52	16.67	13.10	<b>84</b>

understanding of the concept of reconciliation, their desire for and reality of accepting reconciliation were assessed.

The meaning of reconciliation rated on the questionnaire is summarized in table 7, while the meaning obtained during FGDs are listed at the foot of the table. 'Renewing friendship', 'unity and cooperation', and 'forgiving and forgetting the past' were considered as 'reconciliation' by majority of the 134 respondents who participated in the study (112 vs. 114 vs. 108 respectively). Although between ethnic groups' rating differs, 'renewing friendship' was rated highly by the Fulani (21.43%), followed by the Migili (18.75%). The Fulani (21.83%) and the Alago (17.54%) also regarded the achievement of 'unity and cooperation' among the ethnic groups as reconciliation. 'Forgiving one another' and forgetting past atrocities caused by the conflicts' was rated highly by the Alago (20.37%), Migili (16.67%) and the Tiv (15.74%). However, among the Eggon and Kambari (11.11% respectively) and the Fulani (12.04%), so many people were still living with conflict victimization experience, to regard 'forgiving and forgetting' as necessary for reconciliation. More than a half of the respondents (19 vs. 90) referred to reconciliation as 'absence of violence' and 'being loved by neighbours. Again, between ethnic group differences was observed. While

'absence of violence' received high percentage score by all ethnic groups except the Migili (1.43%), the definition of reconciliation as 'love by neighbours' was highly shared by all other ethnic groups. When 'within ethnic groups' differences were assessed, only 'absence of violence' was lowly rated as reconciliation variable by the Migili (1.43%). The Fulani ethnic group rated 'forgiving and forgetting' low (12.04%) when compared to the rating they gave other reconciliation variables. Only 8.04 per cent of the Eggon ethnic group regarded 'renewal of friendship' as reconciliation. There was also a wide disparity in rating between 'renewal of friendship' (9.82%) and other variables by the Kambari ethnic groups when the meaning of reconciliation was assessed. Within ethnic groups' differences in rating of reconciliation variables were quite low among the Tiv and Gwandara ethnic groups.

Table 7: Distribution of respondents by meaning of Reconciliation

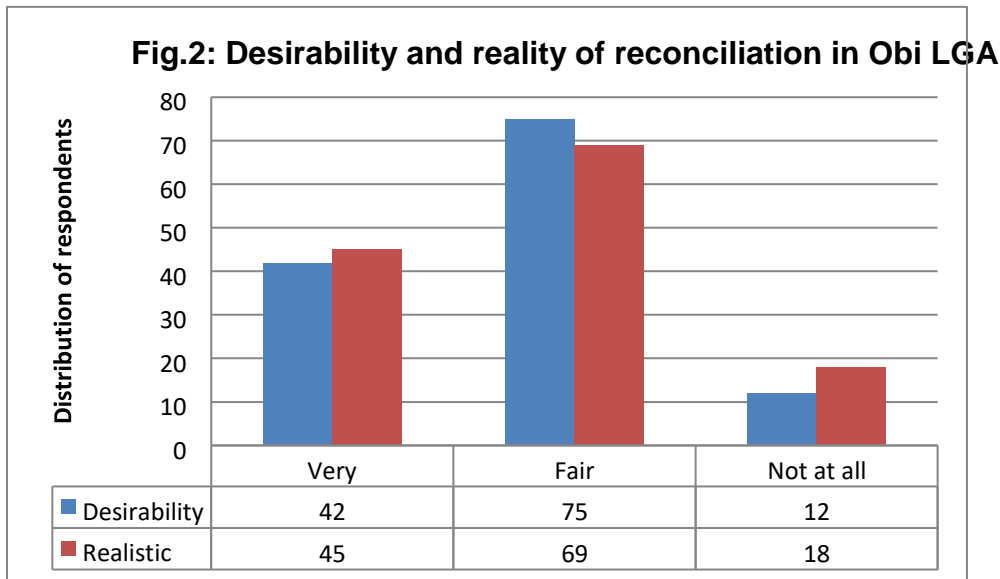
Meaning of reconciliation	Rating by Ethnic Groups %							Total
	Mig ili	Fula ni	Alag o	Eggo n	Tiv	Gwandar a	Kamb ari	
Renewing friendship	18. 75	21.4 3	14.2 9	8.04	14. 29	13.39	9.82	<b>112</b>
Absence of violence	1.4 3	15.3 8	14.2 9	12.09	16. 48	14.29	13.19	<b>91</b>
Unity and cooperation	13. 16	21.9 3	17.5 4	9.65	13. 16	13.16	10.53	<b>114</b>
Being loved by neighbours	11. 11	18.8 9	15.5 6	11.11	14. 44	15.56	13.33	<b>90</b>
Forgive and forget	16. 67	12.0 4	20.3 7	11.11	15. 74	12.96	11.11	<b>108</b>

Other meanings of reconciliation obtained during focus group discussions were:

Kambari ethnic group: Living in peace; sharing things in common. Gwandara ethnic group: Living together without fighting; Tiv ethnic group: living in peace; freedom from worry about Fulani herdsmen. Alago ethnic group: Inter-marriage, living together, consultation and solving problems amicably, living without suspicion.

Besides requesting for meaning of reconciliation, respondents were asked to assess reconciliation in terms of 'how desirable and realistic' they consider it to be. Assessments were indicated on a 3point Likert scale ranging from 'not at all', 'fairly' to 'very desirable' and 'very realistic'. The results presented in Figure 2 below shows that 42 (32.56%) of the respondents considered reconciliation as 'very desirable' as against 45 (34.09%) that considered reconciliation as very realistic. Those who considered reconciliation as 'fairly desirable' had no remarkable difference from those who considered it as 'fairly realistic' (58.14% vs. 52.27%). These findings suggest near convergence opinion in both rating as opposed to those on 'not at all' (12 or 9.30% vs. 18 or 13.64%). This is a positive indication of the willingness to embrace reconciliation by the different

ethnic groups.



### Causes of reconciliation failure

Having known about past reconciliation attempts by government and subsequent failures, the survey posed questions that requested feedback on the causes of reconciliation failure. We canvassed opinion and rated them ranging from political manipulations, religion, hatred, resource control, governance shortcomings, to mutual suspicion. Table 8 is a summary of the findings. The causes of reconciliation failure were not uniformly rated by respondents. When the data were disaggregated by 'causes of reconciliation failure' it revealed that 'political manipulation, followed by 'hatred' and 'struggle for farmland ownership' significantly elevated reconciliation failure. Inability to address these factors was also acknowledged during the FGDs.

Differences among the ethnic groups on 'causes of reconciliation failure' showed that the Alago (22.36%) were more likely to complain of political manipulation than the Fulani (16.36%), the Tiv (13.63%), Gwandara (13.64%) and the Migili (12.73%). Religion was a serious factor in reconciliation failure, except among the Eggon (6.74%) who would rather complain of 'bad leadership' (11.24%), 'crisis in farm ownership' (8.82%) and hatred (7.48%). As many as 102 respondents, majority of whom were from Fulani (17.65%) and Alago (17.65%) ethnic extraction saw crisis associated with farmland ownership as the cause of reconciliation failure. Similar opinion was shared by the Tiv (16.67%), the Gwandara (14.71%) and the Migili (12.75%).

The findings also gave insight into governance failure in reconciliation management. For instance, 'lack of charismatic leadership' and 'bad leadership' were reported. Although the ratings low among the Alago (11.11%) and Eggon (9.88%), the Fulani (19.75%) and the Tiv (19.75%) blamed governance neglect for reconciliation failure and hence incessant conflict in the area. This finding suggests that inability of government to reconcile the feuding ethnic groups elevated tension between the ethnic groups and intensify periodically outbreak violence in the area.

Many respondents across the ethnic groups also reported that poverty has a hand in reconciliation failure. The rating differs with the Fulani (18.07%) and Gwandara (18.07%) having similar opinion. When probed further during FGDs, respondents argued that poverty makes it easy for ethnic group

members to be manipulated by some religious and political leaders, for their selfish interest; and that some politicians make it a duty to see that the ethnic groups are permanently divided so that they can keep their political strong holds. This finding tallies with Chandra's (2004) who argued that visibility of ethnic identities enhances patronage-democracy and politicians are likely to activate it for voter and party behaviour than non-ethnic identities. Mutual suspicion was therefore reported by all ethnic groups as a factor in reconciliation failure.

Additionally, nearly all the in-depth interviews cited the problem of 'settler-indigene ship' discrimination as a factor that keeps the conflict alive because it sustained discrimination in the community including farm ownership, political appointment, traditional title recognition, and benefits of socio-economic empowerment programme of government.

Table 8: Distribution of respondents by causes of reconciliation failure

Causes of reconciliation failure	Ethnic Groups' Rating %							Total
	Migili	Fulani	Alago	Eggon	Tiv	Gwandara	Kambari	
Political Manipulation	12.73	13.36	22.73	10.00	13.64	13.64	10.91	<b>110</b>
Religion	15.73	19.10	12.36	6.74	13.35	13.35	12.36	<b>89</b>
Hatred	13.08	19.63	19.63	7.48	14.95	14.02	11.21	<b>107</b>
Ownership of farmland	12.75	17.65	17.65	8.82	16.67	14.71	11.76	<b>102</b>
Lack of charismatic leadership	12.35	19.75	11.11	9.88	19.75	14.81	12.35	<b>81</b>
Bad leadership	12.36	21.35	11.24	11.24	13.48	16.85	11.24	<b>89</b>
Poverty	15.66	18.07	16.83	3.61	18.07	13.25	83	
Mutual suspicion	13.98	18.28	19.35	5.38	13.98	16.13	12.90	<b>93</b>

### Suggestions for Reconciliation

Getting ethnic groups' members to make input on how to achieve reconciliation was one of the main objectives of this study. One way to do this was to ask respondents to rate suggestions for actions that can help to facilitate reconciliation. The suggestions ranged from sanction for perceived conflict perpetrators, type of compensation for those who suffered conflict victimization, suggestion of factors that can promote reconciliation, and strategies that can prevent re-occurrence of conflict. While sanction can help to heal the wound of conflict victimization, compensation can help in reconstruction of burnt and or destroyed houses and property as well as resettle displaced persons. There is therefore noticeable relationship between sanction, compensation, payment of compensation and reconciliation. Type of Sanctions suggested

In Table 9 below respondents offered suggestions on sanction that should be meted out to perpetrators of conflict in the community. Eighty-six respondent (64.18%) suggested asking them to pay



compensations to victims, while 78 (58.21%) suggested making them to ask for forgiveness. Those who suggested outright forgiveness (55.97%) argued during FGDs that confession before pleading for forgiveness will bring back sad memories. Although the request for prosecution was not foreclosed (49.25%), it was not popular across the ethnic groups. A negligible number of the respondents (27.61%) suggested removal (banishment) of perpetrators of violence from Obi LGA. The suggestions for retributive justice (prosecution and removal of perpetrators of conflicts) suggest existence of memories of traumatic experiences associated with the conflicts, which are still difficult to overcome.

Table 9: Distribution of respondents by suggestions of what should be done to people responsible for conflicts in Obi LGA

Suggested sanctions	Ethnic Groups' Rating %							Total
	Migili	Fulani	Alago	Eggon	Tiv	Gwandara	Kambari	
Let them compensate victims	20.93	34.89	11.63	8.14	16.28	10.47	5.81	<b>86</b>
Prosecute them	13.64	12.12	28.79	9.09	22.73	6.06	7.58	<b>66</b>
Let them ask for forgiveness	8.97	12.82	15.38	14.10	15.38	19.23	14.10	<b>78</b>
They should be forgiven	12.00	18.67	12.00	8.00	20.00	14.07	7.50	<b>75</b>
Remove them from Obi LGA	16.22	16.22	24.32	8.11	21.62	10.81	2.70	<b>37</b>
Make them to confess	19.70	12.21	19.70	7.78	19.70	9.09	3.03	<b>66</b>

#### Actions that can promote of reconciliation

While questions on what should be done to perpetrators of conflict suggest sanctions, suggestion on actions that can facilitate reconciliation (Table 10) seeks to highlight peaceful co-existence of ethnic groups in the area. More than a half of the respondents (75.37%) suggested that 'forgiving' one another can promote reconciliation. Those that suggested confession (103 or 75.87%) revealed divergence opinion across the ethnic groups, except between the Tiv and Gwandara (14.56% vs. 14.56%). The gap was significantly shown between respondents from Fulani and Eggon ethnic groups' extraction (22.33% vs. 6.80%). Many respondents (84.33%) also suggested outright 'apologies', as well as the payment of 'compensation by government (70.89%)'. Others suggested the institution of traditional ceremonies (61.94%) and religious ceremonies (60.45%).

Inspite of the difference in opinion rating expressed by the ethnic groups, the findings suggest that the different ethnic groups were ready for reconciliations. More than a half of the respondents talked about 'forgiving' and 'apologies', which are necessary for the formation of ethos of peace (Bar-Tal, 2000). Across the ethnic group a vast majority of respondents also believed that reconciliation can be achieved through declaration of 'traditional and religious ceremonies. Elsewhere in Uganda, annual traditional ceremonies were found to be useful in reconciliation of conflict among tribal members in Acholi districts (Pham, et al, 2007).

Table 10: Distribution of respondents by factors that can promote reconciliation

Suggested factors	Respondents by Ethnic Groups' Rating %							Total
	Mig ili	Fula ni	Alag o	Eggo n	Tiv	Gwandar a	Kamb ari	
Forgiving	20. 79	22.7 2	20.7 9	10.89	16. 83	15.84	11.88	<b>75.37</b>
Confession	17. 48	22.3 3	13.5 9	6.80	14. 56	14.56	10.68	<b>75.87</b>
Apologies	15. 93	18.5 8	21.2 4	7.08	14. 16	13.27	9.73	<b>84.33</b>
Compensation by Government	12. 63	18.9 5	18.9 5	7.37	15. 79	13.68	12.63	<b>70.89</b>
Traditional ceremonies	13. 25	19.2 8	16.8 7	4.82	15. 66	16.87	13.25	<b>61.94</b>
Religious ceremonies	11. 11	14.8 1	22.2 2	6.17 81	16.04	14.81		<b>60.45</b>

### Types of compensations

One way by which government respond to conflicts that result in destruction of life and property in Nigeria is by deploying security and thereafter provide relief materials through the National Emergency Management Agency (NEMA). Much has these help in restoring peace and the resettlement of people, the extent to which they facilitate reconciliation is not known. In order to find out this, respondents rated the type of compensations provided by government as means towards reconciliation (Table 11). Disaggregating the data by types of compensation showed greater appreciation for the provision of 'development projects' (82.84%), crop seedlings (74.63%), building materials (73.88%) and food items (72.39%).

Surprisingly only 82 (61.19%) of the respondents supported 'cash payment'. Information gathered during the FGDs gave an insight into abuse and corruption that are involved in the sharing of cash donations to households and victims of conflicts in the area:

We don't see money purportedly given by the government to us after each phase of the conflict. The money is either used by the leaders or shared between them and representatives of government.... (FGD, Kambari).

The last time the Governor came here after we were attacked by the Fulani and our houses destroyed, he gave us some money in addition to building materials and food items. Before the Governor, some criminals struggled over the money and stole some of it. The one that remain was not even shared.... (FGD, Eggon)

Cash compensation used to cause problems between the elders and the youths. Even people who are not victims of the conflict would want to pocket the money. It would be better if Government convert the cash to food items or crop seedlings. ----(FGD, Tiv).

Memorialisation initiatives were not supported by respondents during the survey (33.58%). In reconciliation literature, memorialisation is seen as something 'symbolic' that can help in remembrance (Deng, Lopez, Pritchard, & Lauren, 2015). It comes in many forms including erecting status and tombs for those who died in the conflicts, and museums and monuments for historical purpose of the

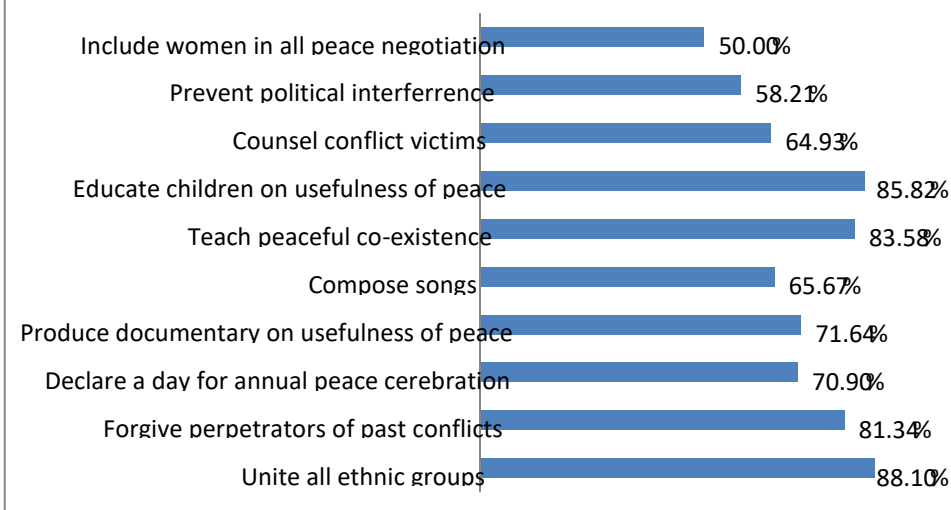
upcoming generations. During in-depth interviews, many respondents had argued that memorialisation may “cause another round of violence”; that “it is better to forgive and forget”; that memorialization may be “too painful” when loved ones who lost their lives during the conflicts are remembered.

#### Socio-cultural strategies for sustainable reconciliation

Table 11: Distribution of respondents by type of compensations

Type of Compensation	Respondents by Ethnic Groups' Rating %							Total
	Migili	Fulani	Alago	Eggon	Tiv	Gwandara	Kambari	
Cash payment	12.20	15.85	20.73	10.98	8.54	17.07	14.63	<b>61.19</b>
Development projects	17.12	17.12	19.82	8.11	14.41	12.61	10.81	<b>82.84</b>
Building materials	11.11	19.19	23.23	11.11	10.10	13.13	12.12	<b>73.88</b>
Food items	9.28	12.37	25.77	10.31	16.49	13.40	12.37	<b>72.39</b>
Crop seedlings	17.00	20.00	20.00	8.00	10.00	13.00	12.00	<b>74.63</b>
Memorials	15.56	11.11	13.33	6.67	2.22	26.67	24.44	<b>33.58</b>

In Tables 9, 10 and 11 respondents provided answers to ‘close-ended questions’ on actions that can facilitate reconciliation among the feuding ethnic groups. In order to seek for indigenous initiatives, we asked the open question: ‘In your view, what socio-cultural strategies exist that can sustainable make reconciliation possible?’ As shown in Figure 3, respondents placed emphasis on ‘uniting all ethnic groups’ (119 or 88.81%), ‘teaching children the usefulness of peace’ (115 or 85.82%), ‘teach the youth peaceful co-existence’ (112 or 83.58%), and ‘forgiveness’ (109 or 81.34%). Respondents were consistence on the need to ‘declare a day for annual peace cerebration in Obi LGA (95 or 70.90%), and ‘production of documentary on usefulness of peace’ (96 or 71.64%). ‘Composing songs’ to emphasize peaceful co-existence (88 or 65.67%) and ‘counseling victims of ethnic conflicts’ (64.93%) were recommended. Interestingly, respondents were aware of the political manipulation of ethnicity and its role in the incessant conflicts and the need to guard against it (58.21%). The need to include women in peace negotiation (50.00%) was also suggested.

**Fig 3: Suggestions for sustainable reconciliation in Obi LGA**

## Discussion

The general objective of this work was to find out the causes of reconciliation failure among the feuding ethnic groups of Obi LGA in North Central Nigeria. As a necessary step toward that realization, we decided to explore their understanding of causes of incessant conflicts, and their conflict victimization experience. Given these backgrounds, we inquire into their understanding of reconciliation and the causes of reconciliation failure in their community. From these understanding we solicited for suggestions that can facilitate sustainable reconciliation among the ethnic groups.

The findings revealed that the causes of conflicts centered mainly on sources of socio-economic livelihood of the people: land-farm-cattle nexus. Political and religious manipulations were secondary, and were involved to support the primary causes, and as a way of siding with the ethnic groups in order to curry favour and patronage of religious and or political followers. The indigenous ethnic groups (Migili, Alago, Eggon, Tiv, Gwandara, Kambari) are predominantly farmers, and depend on farm produces for their socio-economic activities. Since farm and farming constitute their economic mainstay, disputes associated with farmland ownership are common. In many instances disputes resulting from expansion in farmland-ownership between the indigenes have result in farms and crops' destruction.

The Fulani who used to be seasonal migrants on their pastoral activities are recent settlers in the area. In time past the Fulani herders used to come into the area during dry season to graze their cattle and went back to the core north when rain-induced green field had returned. In recent time climate change and desertification in the core north has changed their seasonal migration pattern to permanent settler, not only in Nasarawa and other areas in North Central Nigeria, but also in the southern part of the country. This pattern of migration and settlement is not likely to end soon because of what Okoli and Atelhe (20014) called the political ecology of 'cattle herder'. The Fulani's aggressive grazing lifestyle has put them in conflict with the farming natives, especially when they let loose their cattle on farms and crops. In the context of "an ever-shrinking ecological space" and "their desperation to protect and advance their livelihood interest" the Fulanis have created conflict that is defying remedies (Okoli & Atelhe, p. 80). It has resulted in several theatres of violent conflicts with consequent destruction of lives



and property. The manipulation of these conflicts using political and religious influence has exacerbated them and raised sworn enemies across the ethnic groups. As Wika (2014) would argue, the manipulation of these conflicts by political elites is a trick to instill fear into their opponents and thus increase their political public support. Unfortunately, as Horowitz (1995) found out, conflicts along ethnic lines are more likely to turn violent and hence the intractable nature of the conflict in stud area. The conflict seems to leave landmark memories across all the ethnic groups with destruction of live and property as well as internal displacement. In conflict theatres reported by respondents (76.12%) as reminiscent of war, several family members have either been killed (61.19%) or maimed (61.19%). In one instance the government had to deploy soldiers in order to avert further bloodshed and destruction and urged the National Emergency Management Agency (NEMA) to provide relief to the affected communities and survivors (Adogi, 2013). Such landmark memories and the attempt to push down reconciliation by government may have resulted in past reconciliation failure recorded in the area.

The State is yet to put in place an institutional framework that can handle reconciliation: such institution that can enhance the integration of top-down and bottom-up input into effective strategies is lacking. As the findings showed, respondents saw reconciliation not only as renewing friendship, unity and cooperation, forgiving/forgetting, but also absence of violence, the readiness of government to compensate victims of past conflicts, could create room for forgiving, apologies and open confession. In this context compensation in 'cash payment' was not appreciated as compensation via development projects, building materials, food items and crops seedlings.

When suggestions for sustainable reconciliation were solicited, respondents tended to place emphasis on socio-cultural strategies than restorative forms of justice. Although a few respondents had earlier requested for prosecution and banishment of perpetrators of conflict from the area, suggestion for sustainable reconciliation witnessed a shift in argument that favoured offering apologies and outright forgiveness, declaration of a day for annual celebration of peace, production of documentary on the usefulness of peace, counseling of conflict victims, and educating young ones on the usefulness of peace, among others. Inputs during FGDs suggested that ethnic group members could find acceptable meaning of reconciliation in socio-cultural practices that are abundance in the area. Suggestions ranged from joint organization of hunting expedition once a year, 'fishing festival', creating of 'cultural festival of peace by each ethnic group with invitation of other ethnic groups. Other suggestions included converting any of the cultural festival in the area into annual 'Peace Day cerebration'. While the Fulani ethnic group suggested the 'Shadi Fulani cultural day', the Alago ethnic group suggested 'Odu cultural festival; Amirhi Cultural festival; Eku and Oyarere cultural day. The Eggon people and the Gwandara suggested Odudu cultural festival. These suggestions have relevancy in the theory of change adopted for this work.

The implication of the theory of change is that if public events can draw large audiences from divided communities and if attendees have positive interactions participating in the event activities, this positive contact will set a precedent for further interaction that promotes greater tolerance and cooperation to widen and deepen reconciliation (Church & Rogers, 2006). Similarly, if people are more aware of the work being done to promote reconciliation at the different levels of society and if they have avenues through which they can engage in the work and discussions of the reconciliation process, they will have the knowledge and ability needed to effectively contribute to peace and peaceful co-existence (Narayan & Cassidy, 2001), thereby informing and amplifying the impact of

reconciliation policies and programs (Lederach, 1998).

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### **Conclusion and recommendations**

A widely acceptable definition of reconciliation is one that referred to it as an “overarching process which includes the search for truth, justice, forgiveness, and healing’ (Fisher, 2012). Given this context reconciliation may not necessarily create ‘love’ but can enhance peaceful co-existence among the ethnic groups (Bar Tal, 2000). Reconciliation may mean a new relationship that is built on respect and a real understanding of each other’s needs, fears and aspirations. The main objective of this study was to explore respondents’ understanding of reconciliation and the factors that contribute to its realization in their community, and hence cement the existing fractured relationships.

The disappointment of past reconciliation efforts in the study area informed the importance of understanding reconciliation from the standpoint of ethnic group members and designing reconciliation strategies that will enjoy their support. The following recommendations are based on respondents’ inputs:

- a) Social Workers should conduct widespread community mobilisation across the ethnic groups with women participating.
- b) Declare a day acceptable to all for annual celebration of peace.
- c) Produce documentaries of the usefulness of peace and make them popular among youths in the communities.
- d) Encourage youth to compose songs that encourage unity among ethnic group members.
- e) Provide counseling and support to past victims of ethnic conflicts.
- f) Institute annual sport competition for youth.
- g) Stop political manipulations of the conflicts.
- h) Encourage inter-ethnic relationship among women in the area.

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