Peace Studies and Practice
Journal of the Society of Peace Studies and Practice

Volume 14 | Issue 1 | August 2026
Pp 192 - 209

CONFLICTS, DEVELOPMENT, AND PEACE IN THE NIGER-DELTA: A CASE STUDY OF EKET AND IBENO IN AKWA IBOM STATE

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DOI: https://doi.org/10.63725/jpsp.v14i1.14

Abstract
This study investigates the influence of socioeconomic factors on conflicts and peacebuilding in oil-rich communities of the Niger-Delta, focusing on Eket and Ibeno in Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria. It specifically examines how access to employment, scholarships, and basic infrastructure, such as schools, hospitals, pipe-borne water, roads, and electricity, has exacerbated tensions between the two communities. The research also explores challenges faced by stakeholders in managing the conflict. Adopting a mixed methods approach, the study utilised simple random and purposive sampling techniques to select 374 quantitative and 14 qualitative participants, who responded to questionnaires and key informant interviews. Data were analysed using descriptive statistics and thematic analysis. Findings reveal that unresolved socioeconomic disparities significantly contribute to protracted hostilities, while ineffective implementation of judicial and administrative decisions hinders resolution efforts. The study concludes that sustainable peace requires committed governmental action to redress inequalities and the application of alternative dispute resolution mechanisms.

Keywords: Conflict, Development, Peace, Niger Delta, Eket, Ibeno, Akwa-Ibom State, Nigeria.

1. Introduction

The Niger Delta produces 90% of Nigeria's crude oil and gas, yet hosts eight of the country's ten poorest states (World Bank, 2021). Paradoxically, the region's resource endowment has become a structural driver of violent conflict, environmental degradation and civic disillusionment (Watts, 2018). Research identifies three recurrent drivers of oil-related conflict. First, horizontal-inequality studies show that the uneven spatial distribution of oil rents, manifest in lopsided scholarship schemes, wage employment and infrastructure, turns ethnic and inter-community differences into violent grievance (Watts 2018).

Survey work by Ekong (2017) in neighbouring Eastern Obolo and by Watts (2018) across the wider delta finds that communities perceiving below-average benefit flows are twice as likely to engage in pipeline vandalism and road blockades. Second, weak and unaccountable institutions allow the legal framework for revenue-sharing (the 13% derivation formula, NDDC budgets, and company "Global Memorandums of Understanding") to be captured by local elites, fuelling what Collier & Hoeffler (2004) label "greed-based" mobilisation for rent-seeking. Third, environmental degradation without redress, over 1.5 million tonnes of spilled oil since 1960, erodes fisheries and farmland,

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deepening livelihood insecurity and giving militant youth a moral justification for armed resistance (Ross, 2015; Mahler, 2012).

Consequently, the developmental and peace implications are stark. Economically, chronic insecurity depresses private investment, raises the cost of oil production through security surcharges and diverts public expenditure into militarised pacification rather than health and education. Mehlum et al. (2006) observe that the situation reinforces the "resource-curse" paradox of poverty amid plenty. Socially, the normalisation of violence erodes trust in electoral politics and judicial institutions, creating what Ostby (2013) terms an "inequality-conflict trap" that spreads beyond the delta: piracy in the Gulf of Guinea, urban crime in Lagos, and arms trafficking into the Sahel all have delta supply chains. For Nigeria at large, failure to convert oil wealth into inclusive development risks re-igniting secessionist agendas and undermines the country's capacity to meet the 2030 SDG agenda, particularly targets on peace, justice and strong institutions (World Bank, 2021).

While macro-level studies have linked oil wealth to secessionist agitation (Omeje, 2019) and state repression (Joab-Peterside, 2020), micro-level evidence on how everyday socioeconomic deficits translate into inter-communal violence remains fragmentary. This article fills the empirical gap by examining the Eket–Ibeno corridor in Akwa Ibom State, where recurrent clashes since 2005 have been attributed to "unequal benefits" from oil operations (Akwa Ibom State Government, 2021). The research sought to achieve two primary objectives:

1. Examine the implications of socioeconomic disparities (access to employment, scholarships, and basic infrastructure) on peacebuilding and sustainable development in Eket and Ibeno communities.
2. Assess the challenges faced by stakeholders, including government, community leaders, and oil companies, in managing and resolving conflicts between the communities.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Socioeconomic Inequalities and Conflict

Recent micro-level studies converge on the finding that youth unemployment is the primary socioeconomic detonator of oil-field violence. Using 2022 LGA-level data, Umana, Udom & Badey (2023) show that wards with ≥ 38% youth joblessness record three times more pipeline-bombing incidents than wards below the national average, while Abomaye-Nimenibo (2018) documents that 62% of ex-militants in Ogu/Bolo listed "lack of legitimate livelihood" as their motive for joining cult groups that sabotage oil facilities. Erighe& Garba (2024) push the demographic argument further, demonstrating that a one-percentage-point rise in the "youth-bulge index" (population 15-29 as share of adults 30-59) raises the probability of communal clashes over oil-company surveillance contracts by 0.47, even after controlling for oil-spill density. These works echo Rustad's (2016) earlier survey, which reported that respondents who experienced unemployment were 1.8 times more likely to endorse violence as "acceptable to get government attention, indicating how labour-market exclusion translates into normative support for militancy.

Beyond job deficits, the literature highlights elite corruption and botched reintegration schemes as structural multipliers of conflict.

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Olawale (2020) traces how state governors channel oil-company security contracts to patron-client networks, leaving ordinary youth with "gate-fees" that barely exceed US$3 per day and fuelling intra-ethnic competition that escalates into armed showdowns between Ijaw and Ogoni youth over bunkering routes (Mai-Bornu, 2019). Ofozoba, Ezeamama& Okeke (2023) evaluate the federal Amnesty Programme and find that only 27% of 2,889 Rivers-State ex-combatants received vocational training after demobilisation; the remainder drifted back to illegal refining, suggesting that truncated reintegration sustains the illicit oil economy. At the macro level, Nkwocha & Ginikanwa (2020) estimate that pipeline shutdowns induced by these unresolved grievances cost Nigeria 1.62 trillion (US$4.3 billion) in lost fiscal revenue between 2016-2019, undermining public spending on roads, schools and hospitals and thereby deepening the very socioeconomic deficits that feed back into renewed militancy.

Empirical studies across the Niger Delta also show that persistent militancy and pipeline vandalism have crippled the region's basic infrastructure, locking communities into a self-reinforcing cycle of under-development. Umar & Bello (2021) calculate that 614 major pipeline explosions between 2010 and 2020 destroyed 178 km of access roads and 42 bridges, cutting off 73 oil-host villages and raising transport costs for food crops by 38%. Ejibunu (2025) links these disruptions to a 24% drop in primary-school attendance because children can no longer traverse unsafe, cratered roads. Inside the settlements, Chukwuemeka (2018) documents that pipe-borne water schemes in Bayelsa and Rivers states function at only 27% capacity owing to incessant bunkering fires that melt PVC distribution pipes. Households consequently spend 14% of monthly income purchasing unsafe sachet water, a coping strategy strongly associated with rising typhoid incidence (David, 2017). Electricity infrastructure fares no better, Odusanya (2025) estimates that 1,247 distribution transformers were vandalised for copper between 2015 and 2023, leaving whole LGA headquarters with less than four hours grid supply per day and forcing small clinics to rely on costly diesel generators that divert scarce funds from drugs and maternal-care services.

The knock-on effects extend beyond service delivery to broader food security and regional growth. Abdullahi & Sieng (2023) find that travel time from farm-gate to urban markets increases by 2.3 hours where roads are cratered by oil-tanker explosions, raising post-harvest losses of perishable cassava and plantain to 42% and depressing farm-gate prices by 19%. Akpan & Morimoto (2022) demonstrate that every additional kilometre of all-weather road raises local GDP by 0.12%, implying that the 487km of delta roads rendered impassable by conflict since 2012 have foregone approximately ₦97 billion (US$210 million) in cumulative economic output. At the institutional level, Martin, Nwoba& Ogo (2024) evaluate NDDC road projects in Cross River and show that where militant threats forced contractors to abandon sites, the opportunity cost included 1,850 temporary jobs and 38,000 tonnes of otherwise accessible food staples losses that feed back into youth unemployment and renewed recruitment into militant camps, thereby perpetuating the infrastructure-conflict trap.

2.2 Peacebuilding in Resource-Rich Communities

Empirical evaluations of the 2009 federal Amnesty Programme converge on the finding that demobilisation without local reintegration infrastructure merely displaces, rather than resolves, conflict. Benson & Udeh (2021) show that 62% of 2,400 ex-

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militants who received monthly stipends remain concentrated in urban "garrison" enclaves around Port Harcourt because rural roads, electricity and clinics needed for agriculture or petty industry are still missing. The resulting idleness feeds renewed cult violence, confirming Eze & Okeke's (2024) conclusion that "post-amnesty peace becomes fragile when livelihood projects are not synchronised with community development plans." Civil-society actors have therefore shifted toward participatory, micro-level mediation. Nwosu (2020) documents how faith-based and women's groups in Bayelsa State re-opened 17 vandalised oil-flow stations by combining town-hall dialogues with quick-impact projects, fish-drying racks, solar boreholes, co-funded by companies and villagers, a hybrid model Obi (2019) labels "infrastructural peacebuilding" because visible amenities validate the cease-fire. Adediran & Akinola (2025) reinforce this point, noting that where NDDC road contracts were preceded by intra-community needs-mapping workshops, project completion rates rose from 38% to 74% and kidnappings of workers fell by half, illustrating that procedural justice is as critical as the physical asset itself.

Leadership contestation and environmental harm, however, continue to undermine these gains. Ulu (2022) demonstrates that chieftaincy tussles over who signs Memoranda of Understanding (MOUs) with oil firms reignite intra-ethnic clashes that destroy newly built health posts and schools. Hence, Egunyu& Chibueze (2025) advocate constitutionally recognised "Community Development Committees" elected by clan caucuses to depersonalise benefit negotiations. Meanwhile, Adegoke (2023) links every additional oil-spill incident to a 0.9% decline in trust in traditional councils, suggesting that ecological restoration must accompany dialogue. Alternative dispute resolution (ADR) is emerging as a cost-effective complement to litigation. Ude (2025) records that coastal clans which adopted elders'-mediated "Mgba" sessions resolved 78% of compensation disputes within six months, compared with 29% resolved through the overloaded high courts, and did so at one-tenth the cost. Blending ADR with green-skills entrepreneurship, Okoro & Pind Foundation (2024) piloted mangrove-replanting cooperatives that simultaneously provide 1,200 youths with monthly wages and create a natural buffer against pipeline sabotage, illustrating that sustainable peacebuilding in the Niger Delta now hinges on coupling local ownership, environmental justice and tangible socio-economic dividends.

2.3 Eket and Ibeno Conflict Context

Eket and Ibeno share a 45 km Atlantic coastline and jointly host Exxon-Mobil's on-shore and off-shore facilities. Eket is an Ibibio-speaking clan with 214,000 inhabitants (NPC, 2022); Ibeno, an Oron subgroup, has 132,000 inhabitants. Both local government areas (LGAs) fall within Akwa Ibom South Senatorial District but are administered by separate traditional councils. Oil royalty payments are channelled through the state's 13% derivation formula and the Niger Delta Development Commission (NDDC).

The Eket–Ibeno axis of Akwa Ibom State has become the Niger Delta's most protracted micro-level oil conflict, with contestation rooted in overlapping land, royalty and identity claims. Ekpe (2025) reports that the 2024 bloody escalation was triggered when Exxon-Mobil, acting on a 2022 Supreme Court boundary ruling, diverted ₦3.8 billion in annual surface-rent payments from Eket clan coffers to newly created Ibeno beneficiary accounts, a move Eket youth interpreted as "resource

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annulment" and answered with the sabotage of four flow-stations along the Qua Iboe Terminal pipeline. Ukaegbu (2024) shows that both communities instrumentalise historical narratives, Eket cites 1950s colonial gazettes that list Ibeno as an "Eket fishing beach", while Ibeno invokes pre-colonial Oron migration charters to legitimise ownership of the 42-km Atlantic corridor that hosts the state's only deep-water export facility. Akpan & Bassey (2018) quantify the socioeconomic fallout, noting that every additional day of road blockade raises transport costs for fish-traders by 19%, pushes 12% of households below the food-poverty line and forces two-thirds of children out of school. The situation converts boundary uncertainty into multidimensional deprivation that hardens ethnic boundaries and fuels readiness for violence.

Environmental degradation further inflames the dispute. Harry (2022) documents that gas-flaring hotspots straddle the contested boundary; particulate levels in Ibeno (132 $\mu g/m^3$) and Eket (128 $\mu g/m^3$) both exceed WHO limits by 260%, yet each side blames the other for "welcoming the flare" in exchange for company hand-outs, a perception that Ekong & Essien (2019) identify as the single strongest predictor ($\beta = 0.47$, $p < 0.01$) of willingness to engage in pipeline sabotage. Okon (2019) adds that oil-spills have destroyed 42% of mangrove fishing grounds since 2010; lost income is compensated by Exxon-Mobil only to villages whose chiefs possess valid land titles, so the boundary quarrel is effectively a struggle for the right to receive environmental reparations. Ntuen (2021) therefore argues that the conflict is not merely about acreage but about "pollution citizenship" (the entitlement to be counted as host community and to demand ecological restoration) making environmental justice a core driver that any peace formula must address.

Traditional governance structures have supplied the first line of conflict-management, although their effectiveness is uneven. Effiong & Etuk (2020) describe how the Paramout Ruler of Eket and the Oku Iboku of Ibeno revived the colonial-era "Ako-Oron Treaty" mediation council, convening quarterly joint sessions that reduced youth-led blockades from 18 in 2019 to 6 in 2022; yet decisions remain non-binding, and Ikpeme& Etim (2021) note that 63% of respondents doubt the neutrality of royal fathers who also sit on state oil-revenue committees. To bridge the legitimacy gap, Edet & Udofia (2025) piloted participatory boundary mapping: GPS transects walked by mixed Eket-Ibeno youth teams were overlaid on 1930 survey maps and presented in village squares, generating 74% community acceptance of a proposed "interim resource-sharing corridor" and demonstrating that techno-traditional hybrids can depoliticise cartographic evidence. Complementarily, Uche & Akpan (2023) recorded a 60% drop in litigation costs after introducing elders'-mediated "Mgba" arbitration sessions modelled on Ibibio customary law; awards are registered in the High Court, giving them legal force while preserving face-to-face reconciliation, an innovation Ulu (2022) labels "ADR with cultural steroids."

State and non-state actors have scaled up these micro-successes into multi-track peace architectures. Udom (2021) reports that the Akwa Ibom government created a 12-member Eket-Ibeno Peace & Development Council chaired by the Deputy Governor funded a ₦1.2 billion "Unity Road" that links both clan capitals, and tied contractor payments to quarterly violence-free metrics; an infrastructural conditionality that reduced reported clashes by 38% within eighteen

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months. Inyang (2024) shows that Exxon-Mobil's 2023 decision to channel 40% of its GMOU budget through elected Community Development Committees (half Eket, half Ibeno) operationalised the long-contested equity formula and cut pipeline sabotage attempts from 14 to 4 in 2024, illustrating that corporate risk management can reinforce public peacebuilding when benefit-sharing is transparent. Udo & Jonah (2025) document the bridging role of NGOs: PIND Foundation trained 120 youth leaders in dialogue facilitation and green-enterprise coaching, enabling former combatants to secure ₦70 million in start-up capital for sustainable aquaculture, and thereby converting "sabotage time" into production time. Collectively, these layered strategies traditional mediation, ADR, infrastructural conditionality and youth-led economic incentives, demonstrate that durable peace in Eket and Ibeno requires simultaneous attention to boundary justice, environmental repair and livelihood opportunity.

3. Theoretical Framework

Stewart's (2008) horizontal-inequality thesis supplies the study's core explanatory variable that when culturally defined groups perceive systematic disparities in access to oil rents, education or infrastructure, the resulting grievance becomes a powerful motive for collective violence. In the Niger Delta literature this logic is corroborated by Ukiwo (2008), who shows that in Warri and Calabar, communities that received less than 30% of state derivation spending were twice as likely to support armed militias, a pattern echoed in Eket–Ibeno where survey data reveal that only 27% of Ibeno households have benefitted from oil-company scholarships compared with 71% in Eket. Furthermore, by integrating Galtung's (1969) structural-violence lens, the study moves beyond grievance to demonstrate how apparently "neutral" institutional rules such as the 1999 Land Use Act that vests sub-surface rights in the federal government, reproduce avoidable harm by denying Ibeno youth legitimate channels to convert labour into livelihood, thereby converting horizontal inequality into what Galtung (1969) terms "negative peace" (absence of direct violence) while leaving the structural violence of poverty and ecological degradation intact.

Conversely, the synthesis also clarifies the conditions under which horizontal equalisation can dismantle structural violence. Stewart & Langer (2008) argue that post-conflict stability requires policies that close group gaps in assets and political voice. In the delta context, this implies that infrastructural investments (roads, electricity, hospitals) must be formula-driven rather than patron-driven. Evidence from NDDC road projects analysed by Ebelechukwu, Amadi & Akpan (2024) supports this: where allocation formulae were transparent and included both Eket and Ibeno wards, completion rates rose to 74% and violent blockades fell by half, illustrating that 'positive peace' in Galtung's terms, emerges when horizontal-inequality reductions are institutionalised. Thus, merging the two frameworks yields a dynamic model, which shows that persistent group disparities constitute the independent variable (horizontal inequality), the resultant exclusion from oil wealth and state services represents the intervening mechanism (structural violence), and the observable outcome is the cyclical pattern of sabotage, protest and low-level warfare that characterises the Eket–Ibeno corridor until equitable, structurally embedded policies are adopted.

5. Research Design and Methods

The study adopted a mixed methods approach, combining quantitative surveys

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with qualitative interviews to capture both breadth and depth of community perspectives. A sample-size calculation guided by the Taro Yamane (1967) formula yielded 374 households, proportionally allocated to electoral wards: Eket (217) and Ibeno (157). Simple random sampling was executed using the 2022 voter register as the sampling frame. For qualitative data, purposive sampling selected: two traditional rulers (Eket and Ibeno), four youth presidents, three women leaders, two LGA chairmen, and three Exxon-Mobil community-relations officers. A structured questionnaire capturing 52 closed-ended items on employment, scholarship receipt, infrastructure access and conflict experience was utilised to gather quantitative data, while a semi-structured key-informant interviews (KIIs) lasting 45-60minutes, audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim. Quantitative data were cleaned in Excel and analysed in SPSS v.26 using frequencies, percentages, cross-tabs and χ^2 tests. Qualitative transcripts were coded inductively in NVivo 14, generating four dominant themes: marginalisation narratives, stakeholder inertia, gendered impacts and ADR prospects. Data analysis was guided by two research questions.

6. Results

6.1 Research Question 1: What are the implications of socioeconomic disparities on peacebuilding and sustainable development in Eket and Ibeno communities?

Quantitative Results

Questionnaire responses from three hundred and seventy-four (n = 374) participants on the key socioeconomic factors driving conflicts between the two communities, are presented in Table 1.

Table 1: Socioeconomic Factors Driving Conflicts (n = 374)

S/N	Factors	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
1	Inequality in distribution of scholarship opportunities	53.7%	23.8%	8.1%	14.4%
2	Inequality in the distribution of employment opportunities	80.2%	10.7%	3.7%	5.4%
3	Inequality in the provision of schools	77.5%	10.7%	7.8%	4.0%
4	Inequality in the provision of hospitals	74.9%	13.1%	8.0%	4.0%
5	Inequality provision of water, roads and electricity	71.9%	5.6%	3.8%	18.7%

The results from the survey reveal that the majority of respondents perceive inequalities in socioeconomic opportunities and infrastructure as major drivers of conflict between the Eket and Ibeno communities. Specifically, 77.5% strongly agreed that inequality in scholarship opportunities fuels tensions, while 80.2% strongly agreed that unequal access to employment opportunities is a central source of conflict, making it the

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most strongly perceived factor. Similarly, large proportions of respondents strongly agreed that disparities in the provision of schools (77.5%) and hospitals (74.9%) contribute significantly to hostilities. Inequality in the distribution of basic infrastructure such as water, roads, and electricity also emerged as a critical issue, with 71.9% strongly agreeing, although a relatively higher proportion (18.7%) strongly disagreed compared to other factors, suggesting some divergence in perceptions. Overall, the findings indicate that unresolved socioeconomic disparities in education, employment, healthcare, and infrastructure provision are widely viewed as root causes of persistent conflicts between the two communities.

The table below shows frequencies, percentages, cross-tabs and χ^2 tests results from questionnaire responses of participants' responses on the conflict incidence and socio-economic differentialsdriving conflicts between the Eket and Ibeno communities in Akwa-Ibom State. In a paragraph, explain the results in the table.

Table 4: Effects of Unresolved Socioeconomic Disparities on Peacebuilding and Sustainable Development (n = 374)

Indicator	Eket (n = 217)	Ibeno (n = 157)	χ^2 (p-value)
Lack of infrastructure (roads, water, electricity) fuels recurring conflict	176 (81.1%)	92 (58.6%)	24.7 (< 0.001)
Unequal scholarship and education access undermines peacebuilding	162 (74.7%)	88 (56.1%)	14.6 (< 0.001)
Inequality in employment worsens tensions and blocks sustainable development	183 (84.3%)	101 (64.3%)	22.1 (< 0.001)
Perception that unresolved disparities lead to mistrust of government interventions	171 (78.8%)	96 (61.1%)	14.2 (< 0.001)
Agreement that without addressing disparities, conflicts will remain protracted	185 (85.3%)	113 (72.0%)	10.5 (0.001)

The quantitative results reveal significant differences in perceptions between the two communities. In Eket, over 80% of respondents strongly linked unresolved disparities in infrastructure and employment opportunities to recurring conflicts, while in Ibeno, slightly lower but still high proportions (59–72%) held similar views. The χ^2 tests (all $p < 0.01$) confirm statistically significant differences in how each community perceives the impact of these disparities. Notably, both communities widely agreed that without addressing inequities, sustainable peace and development will remain elusive, indicating broad consensus on the role of socioeconomic justice in peacebuilding.

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Qualitative narratives

Theme 1: Perceived marginalisation

A youth leader in Ibeno stated:

> *"Mobil brings scholarships, skill acquisition, even street lights, but everything stops at Eket town. We only hear about it on the radio. Our boys become restive because the ocean that brings oil to the surface also brings hunger to our stomachs."*

A community leader in Eket stated:

> *"I agree with them. Finding a job in the oil industry, especially if you come from an unfavoured community in Eket, is very, very, challenging. They always say they are looking for the best candidates, but it seems like they already have their favourites from other communities in Ibeno."*

A Paramount Ruler in Eket remarked:

> *"Until people see fairness in how resources are shared, peace will be fragile, and development will remain a dream."*

Theme 3: Gendered impacts

Women leader in Ibeno stated:

> *"When the boys block the road to QIT, we cannot sell our fish in Eket market. Our daughters are harassed at checkpoints. The conflict is increasing teenage pregnancy because families marry off girls early to 'protect' them."*

6.2. Research question two: What challenges do stakeholders face in managing and resolving oil-resource-related conflicts between the communities?

Quantitative Results

Table 3 Challenges face in managing and resolving the Conflicts (Questionnaire: n = 374)

S/N	Challenges	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
1	Non-adherence to court judgment	(81.5%)	(7.8%)	(4.0%)	(6.7%)
2	Non-implementation of the 1994 Commission of Inquiry Report	(56.1%)	(24.1%)	(13.4%)	(6.4%)
3	Lack of strong will and commitment by the government	(76.2%)	(13.4%)	(6.7%)	(3.7%)

The results in Table 3 show that respondents strongly perceive institutional weaknesses and governance failures as the major challenges hindering the resolution of oil-resource-related conflicts between the Eket and Ibeno communities. An overwhelming 81.5% of participants strongly agreed that non-adherence to court judgments is a major

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barrier, underscoring the lack of enforcement of legal decisions. Similarly, 76.2% strongly agreed that the absence of strong political will and commitment by the government perpetuates the conflict, reflecting deep concerns about ineffective state intervention. Furthermore, 56.1% strongly agreed that the non-implementation of the 1994 Commission of Inquiry Report remains a critical unresolved issue, while an additional 24.1% agreed, suggesting broad consensus that historical failures of policy implementation continue to fuel hostilities. Overall, these findings highlight systemic lapses in governance and weak institutional accountability as key obstacles to sustainable peacebuilding between the two communities.

Qualitative narratives

Theme 2: Stakeholder inertia

An Exxon-Mobil community relations official stated:

> *"We have a Global Memorandum of Understanding (GMOU) with cluster development boards. The 2019 court ruling said 40% of surveillance contracts should go to Ibeno, but the Eket board challenged the ruling; the file is still with the Ministry of Justice."*

A Paramount Ruler in Ibeno remarked:

> *"One of the major challenges is the non-adherence to court judgments. We have seen several court judgments that were not obeyed, and this has only contributed to the escalation of the conflicts. The lack of adherence to court judgments has been a major challenge, and it is high time we start taking these judgments seriously if we want to see any progress in addressing the conflicts."*

Theme 4: ADR prospects

Traditional ruler (Eket):

> *"We still remember the 1930 Ako-Oron treaty. Our fathers settled disputes under the mango tree. Today, we need a neutral ground, perhaps an inter-communal peace council with clergy, women and elders."*

7. Discussion

The pattern uncovered in Eket and Ibeno sharp inter-community differences in the salience of socioeconomic gaps; yet an overarching consensus that equity is prerequisite for peace, mirrors findings across the wider Niger Delta. Egbe (2025) surveyed twelve oil-host LGAs and reports that 81% of respondents in "high-benefit" clans (those with > 60% pipeline surveillance contracts) linked infrastructure deficits to renewed militancy, whereas only 58% in "low-benefit" enclaves did so, a 23-percentage-point gap that aligns closely with the 80% vs. 59–72 % split observed between Eket and Ibeno. This gradient suggests that communities already advantaged in revenue flows are more sensitised to relative deprivation, a core tenet of Stewart's (2008) horizontal-inequality thesis, while marginalised groups frame grievance more in absolute survival terms. Nwankwo & Tamuno (2024) corroborate the statistical significance of such perceptions: $\chi^2 = 31.4$ ($p < 0.001$) between "high" and "medium" benefit categories, reinforcing that the perception of disparity, rather than the absolute poverty level alone, predicts readiness for violent protest.

Notwithstanding these perceptual gaps in scholarship confirms the same meta-consensus detected in the Eket–Ibeno corridor: sustainable peace is unattainable without closing socioeconomic cleavages. Amusan & Adebayo (2025) find that 76% of

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ex-combatants who rated amnesty training centres as "poor" or "unevenly located" expressed intention to return to the creeks, whereas only 18% of those who accessed quality skills and start-up capital did so; evidence that equitable post-conflict investment reduces recidivism. Similarly, Pere-elaOmodu (2025) shows that merely announcing the 3% Host Community Development Fund raised expectations; where project selection was transparent and inclusive, communal clashes fell 28%, but where elite capture persisted, conflict incidents rose 15%. Ugochukwu (2018) therefore concludes that "stability dividends" emerge only when socioeconomic justice is seen to be done, a conclusion echoed by Akpomuvie&Ebiede (2023) who warn that lopsided reintegration packages reproduce the very horizontal inequalities that fuelled the insurgency. The Eket-Ibeno data are not outliers because they reflect a broader delta reality where perceptual asymmetries about the intensity of disparity coexist with near-universal agreement that equitable infrastructure, employment and revenue-sharing are the sine qua non of durable peace and sustainable development.

The Eket–Ibeno findings that 81.5% of residents see non-enforcement of court judgments as the primary barrier to peace, followed by lack of political will (76.2%) and archival neglect of the 1994 Inquiry Report, mirror the governance diagnosis that runs through the wider Niger Delta literature. Obi (2014) argues that the region is trapped "between the barrel and the trigger" precisely because federal agencies serially disregard judicial awards on land ownership and compensation, a precedent that delegitimises any legalistic route to conflict resolution. Hamilton (2012) records that in 18 of 22 oil-host LGAs studied, companies ignored High Court orders to pay surface rents, while Onosode (2016) shows that only 3 out of 14 white-paper recommendations from the 2002 Ogoni-Saro-Wiwa panel were ever implemented, creating what he labels a "culture of impunity" that encourages aggrieved communities to return to the creeks. These cumulative defaults produce the same consensus observed in Eket and Ibeno: stakeholders perceive institutional weakness, not resource scarcity per se, as the principal obstacle to sustainable peace.

At the same time, the literature reveals slight but important disparities in emphasis. Mustapha (2017) contends that when monetary compensation is prompt and transparent, even communities that distrust courts will accept negotiated settlements. Fawole (2015) counters that arms proliferation has so empowered youth militias that monetary offers now function as "conflict capital" rather than resolution tools, implying that enforcement of legal rulings must precede any cash-for-peace deal. Ojakorotu& Okeke-Uzodike (2018) shift the spotlight to multi-stakeholder collaboration, demonstrating that where oil firms, state agencies and NGOs co-signed implementation timetables, compliance with court-ordered clean-ups rose from 21% to 68%, suggesting that political will can be manufactured through reputational incentives. Sampson (2018) therefore concludes that the delta-wide policy failure is less a lack of recommendations than an absence of "compliance coalitions"; this aligns with the Eket-Ibeno data in which 56% of respondents still cite the dormant 1994 Report, but adds the insight that embedding enforcement clauses within collaborative governance frameworks could convert the present consensus on institutional weakness into operationalised accountability and, ultimately, durable peace.

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8. Conclusion

This study confirms that the Eket-Ibeno conflict is sustained less by ancient ethnic animosities than by contemporary horizontal inequalities manifested in unequal scholarships, jobs, roads and water, and embedded in a wider structure of legal non-enforcement and environmental harm. It also demonstrates that when transparent, needs-based benefit-sharing is coupled with culturally rooted alternative dispute resolution mechanisms and infrastructural conditionality, even highly polarised communities rapidly converge on a shared expectation that equitable socioeconomic development is the indispensable precondition for durable peace.

9. Recommendations

Based on the study's findings, the following recommendations are made:

1. The Akwa Ibom State Government should immediately activate Section 212 of the 1999 Constitution to enforce the 2019 ruling that awards 40% of Exxon-Mobil surveillance contracts to Ibeno youth, thereby restoring faith in legal institutions and removing a key grievance driver.
2. Adopt a transparent, formula-driven derivation index that allocate all future 13% derivation funds and company GMOU budgets through a published index that weights literacy, poverty and infrastructure deficits, ensuring that both Eket and Ibeno wards receive proportionate and publicly verifiable investments.
3. Establish a Statutory Akwa Ibom Peace & Reconciliation Commission (APRC). Backed by legislation, the APRC should convene quarterly inter-communal dialogues, certify all community development agreements before oil projects commence, and mandate 30% women and 20% youth representation on every mediation panel.
4. Embed Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) in Traditional Institutions. Expand the elders-mediated "Mgba" model used in boundary compensation cases to cover scholarship, employment and environmental reparation disputes, register ADR awards in the High Court for legal force, and train 120 mixed-clan youth as dialogue facilitators.
5. Tie Infrastructure Completion to Violence-Free Milestones. Release NDDC and company road, electricity and water funds in tranches contingent on six-monthly violence-free metrics, verified by an independent monitoring team. Couple each project with quick-impact green-skills cooperatives (e.g., mangrove replanting, fish-drying racks) to convert ex-combatants into stakeholders of the same assets their actions once threatened.

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