The effects of inter communal conflicts in Nigeria, The case of Takum Local government area Taraba state

Ololo Kennedy Okechukwu (PhD)
Department of Sociology, Psychology, Criminology and Security Studies
Federal University, Ndifu-Alike Ikwo Ebonyi State, Nigeria

Accepted 27 November, 2017; Published 30 November, 2017

The paper focused on the effects of inter-communal conflict in Nigeria with particular reference to Takum Local Government Area of Taraba State. Conflict has been a reality to human existence since pre-historic times, due to struggles between various factions of the society to satisfy their interests and needs. Conflict in Nigeria is a product of antagonistic interests between two or more opposing forces or groups within the society. Takum Local Government Area has witnessed series of communal conflict in recent times with its attendant consequences. The objectives of this paper is to unravel the immediate and remote causes of this conflict, to examine the consequences of communal conflict in Takum Local Government Area as well as finding lasting solutions towards ameliorating inter-communal conflicts in Takum Local Government Area of Taraba and other parts of the country. The method used in gathering data is through personal observation and documentaries in journals and literatures. The major findings of this study show that there are high levels of mistrust, residential segregation as well as ethnic bias in Takum Local Government Area. The study recommends that government should meet periodically to dialogue with youth leaders, community leaders and traditional/religious leaders in the area on issues that affect them, issues of political marginalization and suppression should be tackled through creation of more political units/wards states and federal constituencies which will increase political representation at local state and federal levels. This will give every state of the society a sense of belonging and reduce conflicts to small and manageable dimension in Takum Local Government Area in particular and Nigeria at large.

Key words: Conflict, Society, Government, Representation, Dialogue, Marginalization.

Introduction:

Contemporary Nigerian Society is characterized by identity crisis. Forces attempting to assert or reassert the ethnic identities are increasingly contending with the state. These identities as asserted by Egwu (1998) are not only competing for control of the Political space, but also pose a fundamental threat and challenge to the state. These command conflicts have eroded the current attempts at institutionalizing a virile and durable democracy in Nigeria, as well as threaten the very foundation of the present process of entrenching democratic values and institutions after almost two decades (1983-1999) of military rule in Nigeria.

Conflict, generally is a reality of social relations. Conflicts at any level arise from divergence of interests, desires, goals and values aspirations in the competition for resources to meet impressing demands in social life in a defined socio-physical environment (Otite, 2001). As a matter of fact, man in a socio-physical environmental lives in continuous process of dependence and interdependence which often produces contradictions and conflicts.

Conflict has been a reality of human existence since
pre-historic time, due to struggle between various factions of the society to satisfy their interests and needs. According to Alemika (2002), conflict is a product of antagonistic interests between two or more opposing forces or groups within the society. Communal conflicts constitute one of the major recurring problems confronting Nigeria in particular and Africa at large.


Several factors have been responsible for these conflicts. These factors vary with the nature and location of the conflict. But most conflicts in the middle belt regions of Nigeria have almost the same causes or sources due to several small tribes who want to identify with their cultures, protect their political interest, religion and ethnicity. It is difficult to isolate which conflict is primarily engendered by economic, ethnic, religious and political-competitions (Alemika, 2002).

The report of internal conflicts by the Federal Ministry of Information and National Orientation (FMINO, 2002) identify the sources/causes of conflicts in Nigeria to be among others – (i) perceived marginalization, (ii) improper delineation of boundaries, (iii) Seeming insensitivity and slow response of government to security issues, (iv) neglect of responsibilities by leader at local levels (v) over-dependence on government for provision of basic infrastructures. Others are (vi) Increased pressure on land (vii) Rising influence of settler population (viii) Fear of political domination, (ix) Unemployment and (x) Poverty.

The most common features of these conflicts has to do with their confrontational, destructive and violent dimension which lead to the loss of lives and properties of people who hitherto lived together in relative harmony.

CONCEPTUALIZING COMMUNAL CONFLICTS

Communal conflict could be defined as a “struggle over values or claims to status, power and scarce resources in which the aim of the conflicting parties are to gain the desired values but also to neutralize, injure or eliminate their rivals”.

Lyman (2001) contends that “Communal crisis or conflict is any disagreement or dispute between two or more communities which is capable of even degenerating into riots or wars, thus disrupting the peace, tranquility and economic life and progress of anyone or all the communities concerned. Such disruption or disturbance may leads to loss of life and property often valued at high cost.

Ilvento (1995), in his definition of communal conflict, underscored the imperative of components like place, interaction and subsistence which provides an insight into dynamics of communal life for instance, people inhabit a geographic area, and work together in turn which provide opportunity for interaction, which engender conflict. Importantly, as Oji etal (2014) opined that even the ubiquity of modern communication technology has not replaced the fundamental relationship between propinquity and interaction. In this regard, Mulin (1996) notes that conflicts in any social system (society), result from differences in perception, limited resources, role conflicts, inequitable treatment, violation of territory etc.

Communal conflicts arise over the production and consumption of goods, socialization, social control and social participation (Warren, 1978). Communal conflicts are therefore products of social relations. Communal conflicts are threat or action of one party directed at territory rights, interests or privileges – of another party, because of differences over economic issues, power or authority, cultural values and beliefs (Robinson, 1989).

However, the tendency in human beings is to suppress and dominate their fellow beings and that cannot be done smoothly without some form of struggle. In doing this the general existence of man is threatened and as a result, conflict persists in human societies.

THEORETICAL UNDER PINNING

Scholars have outlines many theoretical paradigm that could be used to analyze communal conflict in its entirety. The theoretical underpinning of this study is centered on Marxist Theory of conflict and the theory of pluralism.

The thrust and premises of these theories are as follows:

(a) There is a pathological strain between the nature of societies and the way they are structured which often leads to contested citizenship and national cohesion.
(b) In post-colonial states, divided stated conflicts are contingent upon territorial claims in a context of (i) Cultural cleavages, (ii) competition for highly valued, but relatively scarce, resources, including land, new administrative boundaries and headquarters, bureaucratic and political placement, infrastructures, trading opportunities and other goods (iii) Actual and perceived horizontal inequalities in access to diverse resources and (iv) State failure or mismanagement of
inter-ethnic relations. (Nnchi, 1980, Egwuu, 2004, Mazrui, 2008). However, Marx theory of conflict suffices in this study. This theory looks at society as a system of perpetually conflicting and divergent special interest, group, association or classes held together through compulsion, constraints and domination. This perspective went further to polarize the society into, antagonist group that is the bourgeoisies and the proletariat. In other words the existence and endurance of conflicts are best explained in terms of economics relationship, because people in conflict are perceived to be fighting over something material (Usen 2008). Conflicts issues transform and undergo mutation over time. These changes represent at the most basic level, a contest over economic assets, resources and system.

Application of theoretical framework

The conflict in Takum Local Government Area between Chamba/Tukum and Kuteb conflicts is aptly captured by the philosophical underpinning of the Marxist theory. This is based on the interlocking and multivariate states of the conflict in terms of the causes, the roles of the state and the elites. The conflicts in this Local Government in particular and Taraba State in general were generated by the interplay of both remote and immediate factors. According to Ahmed (2000), and Isa (2001), Chieftaincy tussle, mutual feeling of political domination factors etc were the remote causes while the adjustment of the boundaries within Takum Local Government Area (LGA) was attributed to the immediate cause of the 1997-2006 conflicts. The role of government and elites through manipulations of the people along ethnic, religious and class differences, this create suspicion and with that, people are unable to face their common adversaries of poverty and under development. Hence there is struggle for the ownership of Chamba/Tukum and Kuteb land in the boundary.

Furthermore, applying this theory to explain the study, it is seen in Nigeria with many ethnic groups cannot isolate themselves from competition for scarce resources which leads to conflicts or crisis.

CAUSES OF COMMUNAL CONFLICT IN TAKUM LOCAL GOVERNMENT OF TARABA STATE:

The major causes of the conflict as identified by Santsokwa (1998), Aliyu (1998), Andefika (2002), etc were found to be political oppression/suppression and chieftaincy tussle, boundary adjustment and elites/government, tribalism/nepotism influence among others. Chieftaincy tussle, mutual feeling of political domination and other historical factors were the remote causes while the adjustment of the boundaries within Takum Local Government was attributed to the immediate causes of the conflict between 1997, 1999 and 2006 and 2008.

Distribution of the respondents reaction to interview and focus group discussion on the causes of the Takum crisis, show that some of the respondents strongly agreed that chieftaincy tussle is a major cause of the crisis, both Chamba/Tukum and Kuteb tribes claims over the throne is so firm that none is willing to concede to the other.

Apart from chieftaincy question, other respondents claimed that political influence and tribalism/nepotism form the second category of the causes of the crisis. On the other hand, majority of the respondents agreed that boundary adjustment and elites/government contributed significantly to the communal conflict in Takum Local Government Area. Government is held responsible for the crisis based on the fact that 1975 gazette on Takum Chieftaincy introduced Chamba?Tukum families which were mere ward heads of their Kinsmen into the Kuteb Chieftaincy that is completely alien to them (Yoroms 1998, Isa 2001). Similarly, the composition of Takum and Ussa Local Government Areas as contained in government circular No GHQ/228/PM of 12/4/1997 that altered the boundary between the two Local Government Areas was the governments’ contribution towards the ignition of the crisis (Isa 2001).

Furthermore, other respondents confirmed that indigene and settler questions or squabbles led to communal crisis in Takum Local Government Area, especially the indigenes and the Fulani settlers due to land ownership crisis. It would appear that there is not enough land space for every citizen to use for productive purposes. However, the contrary is the case. The indigene and settler conundrum is far wider than land space or its adequacy, Udo (1999) posits that Nigeria is largely a tribal society in which various ethnic groups lay claims to territories to the exclusion of other groups. The nexus between citizenship and indigeneship creates an identity dilemma which often breeds hostile relationship between host communities and settler – communities as has been demonstrated in Takum Local Government Area crisis in Taraba State.

THE ECONOMIC EFFECTS OF COMMUNAL CONFLICTS IN TAKUM LOCAL GOVERNMENT AREA

The series of violent clashes have caused untold economic, political and social havoc in the study area (Takum Local Government Area), plus unbearable loss in human killing and injuries. The riots continue to pose serious problems for Nigeria’s socio-political
development, as well retard efforts at nation building. The effects of the conflict have therefore spread across all members of the community irrespective of individual occupations. The aftermath of the crisis was so great that people have to move from one activity to the other to overcome the difficult period.

Large proportion of the population is engaged in subsistence farming and it may be difficult for them to raise enough money to cater for their needs especially the rehabilitation of their homes, payment of school fees, health care etc contribute towards communal efforts. The crisis itself has retarded and impeded development activities in the area. Field information on output of farmers during the crisis years and past crisis years reviewed that farm yield dropped during the crisis periods and kept dwindling after the crisis, because all efforts made to increase food production during and after the crisis were greatly affected by the crisis. Instead available resources were channeled into rehabilitation and resettlement exercise than investment in agriculture and other business. Moreso, the scarcity of input like fertilizer, herbicides, far machineries and improved seedling which naturally results from and during the period of any crisis could also have been responsible for this crisis. Naturally results from and during the period of any crisis could also have been responsible for this decline.

Households’ incomes were highly affected and therefore, their inability to create wealth. Live better lives and contribute meaningfully to rural economy. The average annual incomes of households remained low throughout the instability period. The struggle to survive through subsistence becomes more important and paramount than any other form if intensive investment. Business activities have suffered major setbacks during the crisis periods and these have negative and adverse effects on rural development activities and processes. When businesses flourish, Local Government Council generates incomes in the form of taxes and this revenue, if properly utilized for lives of the people. Many years of recurrent crisis destabilized most businesses, which are major contributors as the revenue sources of individuals and the Local Government Council leading to loss of large share of revenues they would have generated from them. Individuals on their own parts have experienced regressive levels of profit in their business ventures. This poor performance in human activities implies limited contributions toward community development.

**Social Effects**

Reoccurrence of crises have therefore weakened the social relationship that existed among the people and caused mutual suspicion instead of the spirit of cooperation among them. Spirit of development among individuals will be stronger when they are investing in property that belongs to them than those rented. This is because the people hope to reap the benefits of their investments and not think that their landlords live at their expenses. Over 60% of the respondents claimed to be occupying their own houses; with this, more cooperation towards development can be achieved easily since the people are investing to improve on their properties. Thus, high level of participation and development of an area is expected among those living peacefully together than among those living in perpetual disagreement and conflicts. More so, people farming or doing business in their own property will have extra profit with which to re-invest unlike renters who pay exorbitant rates and rents.

The crisis created inconveniences and as well reduced the standard of living of most families and also further impoverished the already pauperized people of the area. Some households, which had better accommodation before the crisis, have to live in substandard houses with little no facilities. Before the crisis, there has been a steady increase in both duplex/bungalows and room housing types. This drop is associated with the destruction during the crisis and also limited resources to rehabilitate or develop new ones. However, what is found to be common is the same faith patterns of movement were meant to ensure safety of lives and property during the crisis period (Aliyu 1998; Lawson 1999; Bagudu 2003). The literacy level has not shown any significant change in the study area and Taraba State as a whole is one of the backward areas in terms of literacy rate. The low literacy rate is associated to poverty and lack of educational infrastructure. Basic infrastructure such as health, water, schools and electricity has suffered either destruction or disruption in the development process 80% of the respondents claimed that basic infrastructure such as electricity; road, health and water destroyed.

In terms of disruption of developmental projects, only few of the respondents indicated that some development projects were disrupted. Also Takum have suffered more from this act of disruption than other communities because Takum is the headquarter of the Local Government area where projects execution and the struggle for power is taking place.

**CONCLUSION**

The reoccurrences of conflicts between Chamba/Jukun and Kuteb in Takum Local Government Area for more than decade have increased the poverty level of the people and hence falling standard of living. Though, the causal factors are known, the inability of stakeholders to resolve the crisis has made people to live in fear and mutual suspicion. In this state of insecurity and lack of trust no meaningful rural development programme can
succeed. Notwithstanding, the circumstances of the crisis there is a need to transform the socio-spatial and economic structure of the area to minimum living conditions. Also one can say that there is a relationship between poverty and crisis in the study area.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The finding throughout the study shows that peace is indispensable to development and a prerequisite to the thriving of human activities. Based on these findings, the following recommendations are proposed:

a) The Government, private individuals and communities should join hands to provide uninterrupted access to basic education, health services, employment and other physical development facilities for quality living. This can be done through the rebuilding of those facilities destroyed during the crisis years and also, the development of new ones. This will give people a sense of belonging and an empowerment which will avert reoccurrence of violent conflicts.

b) Skills acquisition centres should be established to train youths in the area that have not been privileged to be educated to harness their strengths and channel their energies into usable profitable ventures. This will reduce the rate of youth’s unrest and community conflicts in the area. On causes of the crisis, chieftaincy, land, boundary maladjustment, elites influence etc have been identified as the main causes of the conflicts. On this, the government should implement the report of various commissions of inquiries into the crisis in the area. The boundary within the Local Government Council be redefined to reflect the wishes of the majority of the people in the area.

c) Government should meet periodically to dialogue with youth leaders, community leaders, traditional rulers and religious leaders in the area on issues that affect them, seek their opinion and suggestions where necessary. This will give everyone a sense of belonging and foster the spirit of brotherliness among warring communities.

d) On land problems, the government should promote all appropriate measures to minimize the allocation of rural land for purposes not compatible with the interest of residents of rural areas and owners of the rural lands, which are not conducive to their welfare. (National Policy on Integrated Rural Development, NPIRD Draft 1991) On poor investments, resulting from destruction of infrastructure and business institutions, the government and the private sector should partner to promote the establishment of banking and credit institutions which are responsive to the needs of rural producers and artisans (NPIRD Draft 1991). This will go a long way in re-establishing the rural dwellers whose investments got eroded during the crisis periods. This will also boost agriculture by increasing the output and income levels of the rural people. Apart from compensating people who lost their properties and relations to the crisis, the government should expand the credit activities of Mortgage banks to cover housing in rural areas and promote the establishments of building cooperative societies as sources of credit for housing construction and reconstruction. This will go a long way in addressing the problem of homelessness, which was brought about by the war. The various groups should re-organize themselves into rural development groups such as Trade Unions, Community Development Associations, Tribal Unions, Farm groups, Cooperative societies and even age grades. These groups should be registered and given a workable mode of operation and a constitution by the government which should charge them to identify their problems and how best to solve same and also assist them financially, morally, and materially. By doing so, people will always think of developing themselves and their communities and the feeling of isolation from the scheme of things will be non-existent. This will avert communal conflicts in the area.

e) The leaders of the various communities should meet periodically to discuss issues that affect their development and also see areas they could come together to curb crime, conflicts and other negative developments in their immediate localities. Where major upgrading of traditional institutions are done, realties on ground like the aboriginal paramount institutions should be considered as the supervisory traditional institutions over other whose jurisdiction should be answerable to the aboriginal paramount ruler. In the case of the study area, the Ukwe Takum who now have authority over chief of Jukun, Lissam, Jenua, Yoruba, Hausas, Chamba, among others should and these chiefs should also regard the Ukwe stool as the authority and pay allegiance accordingly to the occupant of the institution as is obtainable in other areas, more so, since this is a traditional institution which has an institutionalized requirements to its ascension, those remotely connected to it be discourage by law from picking interest unduly to avoid conflict.

However, they should be given opportunity to contribute to general societal development through the institution and of course other areas too.

Finally, based on the issue of political marginalization and suppression, more political units like wards Local Government Councils, State and Federal constituencies be created to enable widespread representation at Local, State and the Federal Levels, this will give every strata of the society a sense of belonging and reduce conflicts to small scale and manageable dimension.
References

Abegunde, A. A (2011). Land as the Main Cause of Inter-Communal Conflicts in Africa, Key Natural Resource against Community Development of Third World Nations? Department Of Urban and Regional Planning, Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile Ife, Osun State, Nigeria Journal of Economics and Sustainable Development www.iiste.org ISSN 222-1700 (paper) ISSN-2222-2855 (Online)


Europe: Thompson Publishers.


Guardian.co.uk, Tuesday 9 March, 2010.


Odu and Iheijiaizu (2001). Statistics and Basic research methods in Education and Social Sciences, Calabar: Baye Communication Ltd.,


Okolo, G. (2005). Monograph on basic issues on Group and Inter-Group relations, Calabar: Baye Communication Ltd.


