

## THE IMPACT OF VIOLENT CONFLICTS ON FOOD-SECURITY IN WUKARI LOCAL GOVERNMENT AREA, TARABA STATE, NIGERIA

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### **Abstract**

*In recent times, hundreds of thousands of Nigerians have lost their lives and properties mostly in various forms of conflicts arising from divergence of interests in political, social, religious and economic spheres of life. Conflict which can be described as a situation of disharmony in an interactional process, seems to now be a normal condition. In an ethnic fragmented society like Nigeria where different groups live in close proximity, inter communal relations are mostly characterized by stiff political, social, religious and economic competition. The resultant effect of this situation is acrimony, hatred and mutual suspicion that frustrates the development of a sense of common loyalty that would overcome the social differences among the various groups, and thereby engender development is totally lacking. The case of Southern Taraba State, and Wukari Local Government, that has a potential of becoming an education center, is no exception. In recognition of the obvious challenges posed by the militating violent conflicts, this paper entitled “impacts of conflicts on food security in Wukari Local Government Area, Taraba State” is put together as a modest contribution to addressing the problem of violent conflict in our study area. The paper adopts a qualitative method of data collection and analysis. The findings corroborates the fact that the prevalent conflicts in our area of study have negative impacts on food security.*

**Keywords:** *Conflicts, Herdsmen, Food, Security and Wukari*

### **Introduction**

Wukari Local Government Area in Taraba State is a complex entity with diversity of culture, religion, language, ethnic groups and so forth. The existing ethnic groups rather than nurture unity tend to create pre-conditions for crises because of conflict of interests in political, economic, religious and social spheres. Thus, conflicts have become a normal phenomenon in the lives of the people. In recent times, our area of study, Wukari Local Government Area has witnessed a number of conflicts such as herdsmen, ethno-religious and Jukun-TIV conflicts. These conflicts have impacted negatively on food security in Wukari Local Government Area. Therefore, the focus of this paper is to examine such impacts on food security with a view to proffering useful suggestions to prevent future re-occurrence. In view of the significance attached to the prevailing theme, TETFUND through Federal University Wukari considers it necessary to sponsor the research project as part of the university's corporate social responsibility to Wukari Local Government Area, the host community.

### **Wukari Local Government Area**

In contemporary parlance, Wukari is one of the Sixteen (16) Local Government Areas of Taraba state-Nigeria. It is located in the Southern part of the state and has common boundaries with the following areas: it is bounded by Gassol Local Government to the North and Ukum Local Government Area of Benue state to the South. In the east, it shares boundary with Ibi Local Government Area of Taraba state. While its Western boundaries are shared by Takum and Donga Local Government Areas of Taraba state. It also shares a little portion of its boundary around Abako along Takum road, with Katsina Ala Local Government Area of Benue state.

Wukari Local Government Area was created in 1976 by the then military government of Murtala/Obasanjo as part of the defunct Gongola state. With the creation of Taraba state in 1991 by the Abacha government, Wukari Local Government Area became one of the sixteen (16) Local Government Councils that made up the new state. The Local Government occupies a total land mass of 4,391.812km<sup>2</sup> and is located within latitude 7.87 and longitude 9.78.

Presently, Wukari is characteristically a multi-ethnic society, comprising of several groups with varying population strength. The most predominant group is the Jukun, though Tiv, Hausa, Fulani and Chamba constitute other significant groups in Wukari. Apart from these groups, Wukari has continued to be host to several other groups like the Igbo, Yoruba, Igede, Idoma, Igbirra, Kanuri etc. The presence of these diverse groups has made modern scholars describe her as a multi ethnic town. The Jukun, who are the dominant groups in Wukari are comprised of different elements such as; Wapan, Wanu, Ichen, Kpazun, Kuteb etc. They are said to be the oldest/earliest settlers in Wukari, though no consensus yet reached regarding to when they migrated into Wukari. But a popular tradition among the Jukun has it that they migrated into Wukari in the 16<sup>th</sup> century. This tradition contends that the Jukun are of the Arabian peninsula provenance, who entered Nigeria through the Mandara hills and Lake Chad, where they first established a base at Ngazargamu. From Ngazargamu, the Jukun moved their base to upper Gongola valley before finally settling in the Middle Benue valley. This legend has it that the Jukun migrated together with Kanuri to Lake Chad Basin. After a stint at Ngazargamu, the Jukun later moved to the South Western part of Borno around 12<sup>th</sup> AD, and through a gradual process, they came and settled at various places in the Benue Valley, including Kwararafa, Biepi and finally Wukari.<sup>i</sup>

### **Conceptual classification**

#### **Conflict**

Within the context of Wukari Local Government Area as it is world-wide, the concept of conflict is mostly seen as an opposition of interests, contradictions of conditions and differences of views between individuals, groups, clans, ethnic differences of views between individuals, groups, clans, ethnic nationalities or states (Yakubu, et al, 2005:29-30). This occurs wherever and whenever people come together in the form of family, city-state or country. The outcome of such mixtures normally leads to struggles or contentions of various forms of intensity over diverse interests.

Conflict is an intrinsic and inevitable part of human existence. According to David I. Francis, "Conflict is the pursuit of incompatible interests and goals by different groups." (Best, Shedrack, et al, 2005:6). Some conflict resolution scholars do argue that conflict has an ontological basis in human needs, and that it is the denial of the basic needs of life to enhance human existence that causes violent conflicts, which degenerate into armed violence, or armed conflict. To R.M. Kwankwaso (former Nigeria's Minister of Defense) (Yakubu, et al. 2005:9), the definition or concept of conflict has remained controversial over the years due to the divergent perceptions among scholars. According to him, Marxian scholars argue that conflictual situations do emanate from contradictions among social classes while the liberal scholars may contend that the failure of the state to successfully arbitrate the divergent personal and inter-group interest is the source of conflicts in the society. We are, therefore, left with two contending views of conflict between the Marxists and Liberal Scholars. According to some other conflict theorists such as John Burton and Edward Azar, conflict should be defined within the context of three related dimensions. The first is the distant past, which may span back to centuries or decades. The second is the immediate past, which shows the deterioration in the relationship among parties. And the third is the current event that remains fresh in the mind of the aggrieved party (Best, S.G, 2005:47).

#### **Food Security**

The *Food and Agriculture Organization* (2002) of the United Nations, identified the four pillars of food security as availability, accessibility, utilization, and stability. However, at global, national and

local levels, most African countries have remained victims of hunger and threatening food insecurity which is why Africa is currently spending about US\$35 billion a year on the importation of food. It is simply doubtful how many Africans can afford the imported grains, even one (50kg) bag of parboiled rice. Some persons cannot on a monthly basis, some, cannot even once in a year and without exaggeration, never in their life time (Idachaba, 2008:2).

### **Food Insecurity**

Watts in his work, "*Silent Violence, Food, Famine and Peasantry in Northern Nigeria*" maintain that food insecurity on the other hand is a situation of "limited or uncertain ability to acquire acceptable foods in socially acceptable ways" (40). It is also a perpetual state of hunger. Today as always, there is more hunger in the world than the opulent and the well-fed. In the midst of huge natural resources, hunger should be seen as a socio-economic problem and a human creation which is totally inexcusable. Eradicating hunger, and by extension poverty in Africa is like remaking the continent which should constitute one of the most significant strategies of economic growth and sustainable development in Sub-Saharan Africa. This is one of the most difficult things to achieve due to the untamed and fast population growth, corruption, slow pace of economic growth as well as problems inequity and inequality in society.

### **Root causes of conflicts**

The root causes of conflict between individuals, groups, organizations and communities stems from a common thread which runs through them:

- **Notably Differences:** Notably differences are the major root cause of conflict in Wukari Local Government Area, Taraba State. It might be difference in opinions, beliefs, perceptions, views, interests, needs or goals. The very characteristics of the populace, geological landscape and type of leadership from the onset of the Local Government Area and the state abound with diversities which provide grounds for differences and hence conflicts.
- **Natural Resources:** prominent among the root causes of conflicts in Wukari Local Government Area, Taraba State is the fact that the area is endowed with varying natural resources which are exploited by the settling group at different times at the expense of the original owners, with varying adverse consequences on original owners of the resources. Exploitation of fertile land is one of such cases.
- **Poverty:** Poverty is one root cause of conflict in Wukari Local Government Area. The area under study is characterized by the slow pace of systemic reforms, lack of jobs, clean drinking water, schools, electricity and clinics. Consequently, many youths resort to militancy as a result of frustration due to poverty. Most poverty alleviation programs introduced in *the area* do not have direct bearing on the people's life in terms of health, job creation, education and provision of social infrastructures, amenities and facilities particularly in their rural areas (Osuntokun, 2001).
- **Religious leaders Stake:** Changes in societal values as witnessed in religious intolerance; religious leaders' quest for material gains at the expense of giving their flock virtuous spiritual guidance; and the use of bouncers by the clergy seems to send out a message that violence is accommodated.
- **Massive Influx of Weapons & Militias from Neighboring counties into the LGA:** It is imperative to assert that another conflict aider and perhaps the root cause of conflict in the area is the ease and frequency with which weapons and militias terrorist groups from neighboring countries find their way into our area of study through the country's borders. Report from the media also states that there is ample evidence to show that some weapons

used in recent communal clashes, and even for armed robbery were sourced from government military armory of our neighboring countries (Tell Magazine, 2000 in Onimajesin, 2011).

- **Feeling of Alienation:** The feeling and expression of alienation experienced by some Members of ethnic groups when they live within a domineering ethnic group are believed to be a cause of conflict. They felt that they have been sidelined from the main stream of local politics, given the usual ethnic political practices cum winner takes it all. (Alabi, 2010; Osuntokun, 2001.).
- Mazuiri (2001) also argue that the traditional law advocacy in some local wards was triggered by the resentment to the shifting of traditional head from one ward to another without any remarkable transformation in the economy of the original ward. Again, the local political elites with their penchant for cross carpeting, creating divisions and making provocative statements that cannot be substantiated have also contributed to conflict generation in the area.
- **Mass Media:** The mass media is a source of worry, as it is not left out in conflict generation. Popular perception is that journalists have sometimes been paid to blackmail those in position of power or having political influences. They report misleading information without investigation on sensational stories. They also exaggerate their reportage, thereby triggering reprisal or contributing to the escalation of conflicts (Alabi, 2010).
- Today, more worrisome in Wukari Local Government Area are the herdsmen who are also religious extremist which derides from differences in value systems. These extremists are presumed to have ties with world known terrorist organisations like Al Qaeda, Taliban and others. Wukari has a scenario of Herdsmen conflicting with the farmers between 2017 and 2018 and this is the most recurring form of conflict today in wukari and its environs (Alabi, 2010). However it is pertinent to state here that conflict might often not be as a result of one factor but rather might be as a consequence of interplay of many root causes.

## CONFLICTS AND THEIR IMPACTS ON FOOD SECURITY IN WUKARI LOCAL GOVERNMENT AREA

### The Ethno-religious conflict in Wukari

In August 2010, conflict between Muslims and Christians occurred arising from controversy over construction of a Mosque at the Wukari Police Divisional Headquarters. [Sa'as 2010:4]. Violent confrontation between the antagonistic religious groups—Muslims and Christians broke out just a few days before the planned visit of the Sultan of Sokoto, Muhammed Sa'ad Ahubakar III. The incident recorded mass destruction of lives and property. On February 23, 2013, a disagreement among youths over a football match provoked one of them to kill his mate not long after; the town of Wukari was thrown on fire with lives and property destroyed [Sa'as 2010:4]. Thus, business within the town was put on hold for some days.

A funeral rite of a Late Jukun traditional ruler, third in command to the Aku Uka of Wukari gave vent to a violent confrontation among the indigenes and Muslims in Wukari. [Sa'as 2010:4], A group of mourners of Jukun extraction were said to be on funeral procession of the late ruler, a rite which the Muslim in town resisted alleging that it obstructed the preparation of Juma'at prayer as the event occurred on Friday, 10 May, 2013. Within a short spell, the misunderstanding between the parties involved culminated in a violent clash that once again resulted in massive destruction of lives and property. Commenting on the complaints arising from the conflict, the executive secretary of State Emergency Management Agency (SEMA) Mr Nulvaga Dan Habu, said "...there are about 13 Internally Displaced Persons Camps (IDPS) currently at Wukari "with some of them hosting as much

as 400—500 persons" [Sa'as 2010:4]. However, to checkmate the crises, the state government promptly imposed 24 hours curfew and dispatched security personnel to enforce the curfew.

The struggle over land is a basic factor responsible for ethno-religious crises in Wukari and Nigeria as a whole. For instance, majority of the indigenes in Plateau and Wukari, Taraba State are Christians whose major occupation is farming while the minority Muslims are Hausa farmers and cattle rearing Fulani. The land thus remains as important factor to regions that are predominantly inhabited by peasant farmers and cattle herdsman. Thus,

*Land which used to be available to those who used or needed it became a prized possession. Both the host communities and settlers alike began to rationalized their inability to acquire and possess land in the presence of the other group, thereby undermining the imperative of their coexistence and the basis of consensus and confidence building [Hamman, 2003:8].*

Therefore, land is central to the survival of the people, so conflict often occur over access to pastoral and arable land. Differences in ethnic and historical background, religion, and otherwise between Muslims and Christians only serve to compound the conflicting interests over land. Attempt at establishing indigene—settler status in most parts of Nigeria has given birth to conflicting relations between ethnic nationalities and between different religious groups in the country. The histories of migration and settlement patterns for the purpose of exacting exclusive claims and relegate the claims of the others considered as settlers over political, economic and social rights. The reality is that indigene—settler distinction negates contemporary patterns of integration and the cardinal political objective of promoting unity which is central to nation building. Religion in Nigeria has provided a tangible element of easy identification such as language, dress code, names, music, food, marriages and burial rites. Religion is a basic factor for gaining recognition and advantage in the competition for political and economic values in Nigeria. Therefore, religion as one of the factors fueling Ethno-Religious crises has presented many challenges some of which border on security. Transfer of aggression from one grievance to innocent Nigerians is what manifested itself in ethno-religious crises. The crises in Wukari have served as a clog to national unity where the Muslims has been pitched against Christians thereby intensifying hatred, bitterness and acrimony between the two interacting groups. Lamenting over the situation an indigene, Audu Sanfo Said

*Violence has reached an alarming level and scores of people have been killed with much more wounded or displaced from their homes and business premises due to the crises. Businessmen lost billions of naira and properties worth billions of naira have equally been destroyed. Schooling for Children has equally become unsafe venture (Audu, 2016).*

In Wukari the Muslims settled separately along the old market area. Investors have fled from Wukari and prospective investors feel insecure to visit Wukari for investment purposes. The resultant impact is that Wukari Local Government that was booming because of the conducive atmosphere created for investment is deserted as a result of frequently outbreak of ethno-religious crises. Both Taraba State and Federal Government of Nigeria are bearing the burden of huge expenses in managing the socio-economic consequences of the collapse of securities and the break-down of law and order. Whenever and wherever crises occur within the area of study troops are mobilized to ensure cease fire between the warring factions, relief materials provided to the war victims in refugee camps among several other measures to contain the crises. Losses in terms of property such as goods, houses and business premises are unquantifiable. Some people who survived the crises have permanently lost all that they laboured for years. The situation has increased the magnitude of employment and destitution in Wukari enclave Victims of ethno-religious crises are forced to abandon their economic activities to take refuge in the refugee camps for a long time before they could find a conducive environment to settle. Commenting on the complaints arising from the crises, the Executive Secretary of State Emergency Management Agency (SEMA), Nulvaga Dan Habu Said, "There are about 13 internally

displaced Persons camps (IDS) currently in Wukari with some of them hosting as much as 400 - 500 persons" (Lukpata: 2015:234).

Despite the importance of housing to human existence and the seeming inadequacy of housing for man use the primary object of attack in ethno-religious crises is houses. This is because housing is one of the most valued material assets in Nigeria as Nigerian place high premium on home ownership because it is a legacy that individual aspire to bequeath. Therefore, destruction of the home of a perceived enemy amount to rendering the enemy not only homeless but useless. In Wukari the old market and its environs where the Muslims settle is wearing a sorry sight as the destruction of houses is visible, monumental, unquantifiable and regrettable. The consequences is the creation of reduction in housing supply with its attendant increase in the number of homeless and internally displaced persons in the locality.

### **Herdsmen-Farmers Conflict**

In recent times, there have been escalations of attacks by Fulani herdsmen in Wukari Local Government Area who brutally killed natives of the invaded farming communities including women and children. The Fulani herdsmen armed with sophisticated weapons usually attack their targeted communities at the time they are most vulnerable such as mid-night or on Sundays when they are in their churches, killing people indiscriminately, burning houses and looting property. The conflict between the Fulani herdsmen and the farmers usually arise when the Fulani herdsmen invade community farm land with their cattles and let them graze without restriction both on cultivated and uncultivated land and by so doing destroying valuable food and cash crops which are the mainstay of the economy of the host community, Wukari. This attitude naturally provoked reprisals attacks by the Jukun, who are mostly farmers, on the herdsmen. Several Jukun communities such as Sondi, Tsokundi, Gindin Dorowa, Akwana, Tunari etc were serially attacked by the herders. In retaliation, the Jukun also looted and destroyed Lives and properties of the herders. The attendant impact of this situation is a fall in food production, hunger and increase in the poverty level of the people.

### **Jukun-Tiv conflict**

The recent Jukun-Tiv conflicts in Wukari Local Government Area is basically prompted by the fact that, Kidnapping, armed robbery and other related criminalities have been a recurrent decimal around Wukari area, particularly along Wukari-Takum road, and Takum-Katsina ala roads where there are substantial Tiv settlements and communities. There has been a general perception by the Jukun, who are the major victims, that the Tiv are the ones perpetrating and abetting these criminal activities. Such perception gradually led to stereotyping and resentment of the Tiv people by the Jukun people in and around Wukari: in the face of these continued criminalities, the government and stakeholders were seem to be doing less. This situation naturally created rift between the Jukun and the Tiv in Wukari, to the extent that an issue between just two people quickly snowballed into a major ethnic conflict between the Jukun and Tiv in Wukari. As such a prompt and necessary action to check criminalities, such as kidnapping, armed robbery etc should have substantially addressed the issue and reduced the high rate of destruction of properties and lives.

It is equally important to note that the issue of indigene – settler relationship has been a factor in the Jukun-Tiv conflict in Wukari. The Jukun, based on historical claims, see themselves as the indigenous people, while perceiving the Tiv as settlers, based on their later arrival. This relationship tended to have occasioned an attitude toward each other from both groups. While it is important to note that the constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria gives all law abiding individuals the right to live and pursue their legitimate businesses in any part of the Country. Be that as it may, when individuals residing in a particular place decide to engage in activities that endanger the lives of other innocent citizens residing in that place, without being checked by the relevant security agencies this may lead to citizens taking law into their hands for the purpose of self defence in protection of their lives and property. This may further lead to mutual suspicion between the parties involved and lead to

further conflict. As such, the agencies responsible for maintaining law and order should not keep folding hands while allowing citizens take law to their hands.

The Jukun and Tiv conflict in Wukari has overtime exacerbated into a larger conflict between the two nations in the Benue valley. What started as a conflict between the nations within Wukari Local Government has become a conflict between two states- Taraba and Benue leading to tensions arising from the border of solidarity for their "brothers" in diaspora. This is majorly because the two nations hold a predominant majority in each of the states. This external influence and interference in the conflict has continually posed a threat towards national unity not to forget the slow pace of development it has caused in the states. Border communities in the two states have become a snare for both residents and other Nigerians particularly when plying the federal highway connecting both states. The impact of this cannot be overemphasized; the role of external influence in the conflict has led to a larger effect not just between the Jukun and Tiv in Wukari or Benue and Taraba state but the country as a whole. For the purpose of peaceful resolution of this conflict between the parties involved, third parties must be warded off as they contribute majorly to spreading false and malicious reports about the conflict.

### **Conclusion**

Conflict, in general, is an inevitable part of relationship within and between groups and societies. It is intrinsic and thus natural to human and is expressed in diverse forms: differences in opinion, views and sentiments etc. when conflict occurs, interests are always at stake. The values attached to these interests mostly define the nature and character of such conflict. The most disturbing is the violence that often leaves in its wake several loss of lives, destruction of valuable properties and a general sense of insecurity. The present conflicts in Wukari have assumed such a character with these attendant consequences of violent conflicts, fast becoming the "normal" reality of our time. This is not only dangerous and unacceptable, but it calls for what should be done in order to address the issue before it is too late. In the light of this, we have looked at the nature and character of the various violent conflicts confronting Wukari local Government area in recent times. As much as each of them has some level of peculiarity, there seem to some common denominators not only in terms of nature and character, but their general impact on food security in Wukari Local Government Area of Taraba State. It is not news that Wukari has an arable land mass that is envious, but the insecurity, destruction of properties and loss of lives due to the violent conflicts have denied the people for deriving maximum benefit that is accruable from the land. Indigeneous methods of conflict resolution and management based on retributive justice should be emphasized in addressing the issues that are causing the violent conflicts in Wukari Local Government Area, rather than just the applications of the western methods of conflict management, which seems to have only recorded little success.

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