

The Intermittent Conflict and the Challenges of Rural Development in Guma Local Government Area of Benue State, Nigeria

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Abstract: *The intermittent conflict in Guma Local Government Area of Benue State has become a recurrent nightmare that kept re-occurring despite several interventions by both the local, state and national government to put a lasting solution to it. The conflict is chiefly between the herders who are predominantly the Fulani and the farmers who are the Tiv. The recurrent conflicts has impacted negatively on rural development; this is manifested in the form of poor agricultural production, food insecurities, decline in socio – economic activities, population displacement and many others. The study adopted a combination of methods; first, we relied on secondary data drawn from an array of published and unpublished materials relevant to the study – books, journals, magazines, conference and seminar papers and newspaper. Other sources of secondary data were archival materials, memoranda, reports, white papers of investigation panel and commission of inquiry. Primary data was generated using a two pronged participatory method which combined key informants, interview and focused group discussion. In interpreting out data, the relationship between the conflicts and rural development was established at both theoretical and empirical levels. Empirically, we used a qualitative and historical method that was critical and analytical in providing descriptive and historical details. The study established that land, land resources and crop damages are at the heart of the protracted conflicts in Guma Local Government Area of Benue State. Recommendations such as: the need for developmental programme, reform of agrarian policies to cater for both the farmer and the herder, redesigning of functional mechanism to nip the conflict in it bud and many others were proffered.*

Keywords: Intermittent, Conflict, Guma and Rural Development.

1. Introduction

Guma Local Government Area is one of the 23 Local Government Areas in Benue state that for long has been engulfed with the protracted conflicts between farmers and herders. The local government has an area of 2882k2 and a population of 191,599 as at the 2006 census (NPC, 2006). The local government is situated in Benue West and blessed with a lot of resources such as *barites*, common *salt*, *kaolin* and *clay* (Saleh, 2016). The local government is one of the major tributary of *River Benue* and *River Katsina Alla*; this development and its massy type of soil has made it possible for the cultivation of a lot of food crops and grazing of livestock (Sani, 2014).

Most of the areas in the local government were subjected to annual floods which made it economically very productive (Sani, 2014). Large quantities of rice, vegetable and fruits were produced annually through rain fed irrigation. The area also provides large quantities of fish, fire wood and fodders for animal crazing (Yusuf, 2018). It is widely acknowledged to be of national importance in the quantities of rice, fish and livestock produced. Thus it provided subsistence means of livelihood to its estimated 190 thousand inhabitants and made a significant contribution to the regional and national economy (Cinjel & Akende, 2015).

The climatic condition of Guma varied in cycles over the years. Rainfall was notably seasonal, concentrated in the three months of July, August and September and the current annual rainfall fell to 15 and 20 mm over the last 29 years (Saleh, 2016). The major ethnic groups in the area are the *Tiv* who are the main users of the natural resources – land and water and the herders who are predominantly the Fulani and are mostly nomadic or semi nomadic and increasing numbers of them were becoming sedentary farmers due to their close relationship with the *Tiv* that was built in the past (Cinjel & Akende, 2015).

The increase need for natural resources – land and water by both the farmers and the herders has led to high pressure and competition on land and land resources. The farmer due to increasing demand encroached on some grazing reserve and traditional cattle routes and the herders who practices open access grazing and browsing system capitalizes on these windows as they move their herds on cultivated fields. The two groups took a different shape and approaches on how the land resources can be managed and judiciously be utilized; and thus the rising cases of protracted attacks and reprisal attacks. Oral sources indicated that increase in population of both the indigene’s cultivators and the herders, as well as that of the animals, meant an increasing pressure on the limited available natural resources – land and water. This pressure led to keen competition among the users of the resources. The

competition sometimes culminated into open clashes. This factor operated under both underlying and immediate causes of violent clashes between the Tiv cultivators and the Fulani herders in *Guma* Local Government.

It is on this basis that this study is approached. The study began with a general background which encapsulates the introduction, the identified problems, the raised questions and the objectives of the study. Key variables were conceptualized, followed by overview of conflicts in the study area and a theory was adopted to provide an explication to this study. Finding of the study will be discussed alongside the drawn conclusion and a way out will be defined at the tail end of the paper.

2. Statement of the Problem

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

Herders-Farmers conflicts have been one of the problems that dwindled rural development in Benue state and *Guma* Local Government in particular. In *Guma* Local Government, protracted conflicts between farmers and the herders have rendered many citizens homeless, powerless and sometimes without access to resources necessary for human living such as: food, shelter, health and education among others which are fundamental to rural development. Despite all these, not much empirical studies have been carried out to establish the nexus between the conflict and rural development or to ascertain the effect of the protracted conflicts on rural development. The fundamental question therefore is what is the relationship between the protracted conflicts and rural development in *Guma* Local Government of Benue State? This study is therefore designed to examine the relationship between the protracted conflicts between the herders and the farmers and rural development with particular reference to *Guma* Local Government Area of Benue State.

Based on the foregoing, the following research questions were posed to guide the study:

- i. What are the causes of protracted conflicts in *Guma* Local Government Area of Benue state?
- ii. What are the effects of the protracted conflicts on rural development in *Guma* Local Government Area of Benue State?
- iii. What mechanism can be put in place to manage the protracted conflict in *Guma* Local Government Area of Benue State?

The main objective of this study is to examine the intermittent conflicts and challenges of rural development in *Guma* Local Government Area of Benue State.

The specific objectives of the study include to:

- i. Ascertain the causes of the intermittent conflicts in *Guma* Local Government Area of Benue state.
- ii. Examine the effects of the intermittent conflicts on rural development in *Guma* Area of Benue State.
- iii. Suggest ways of managing the intermittent conflicts in *Guma* Local Government Area of Benue state.

3. Methodology

The research approach to this study is the documentary research design. It mainly entails the study of documentary materials. The research relied on secondary data drawn from an array of published and unpublished materials relevant to the study such as books, journals, magazines, conferences and seminar papers and newspapers. Other sources of secondary data were reports of white papers of investigation panels and other qualitative publications related to the problem of the study.

Interview was the major primary instrument used in the study. Both structured and unstructured outlay was adopted for precision, diversity, and for in-depth discussion of the phenomenon under study. Fifteen interviews were administered in five districts in the Local Government Area. The interviewees were experts and persons with knowledge on the intermittent conflicts in the study area.

In interpreting our data, the relationship between conflict and development was established at both theoretical and empirical levels. Empirically, we used a qualitative and historical method that was critical and analytical in providing descriptive and historical details. This was also complemented by descriptive qualitative analysis. The qualitative and historical method provided us with clear perspective into our research problem by giving us the opportunity to understand the historical details and accurate account of the past and to use the past to discuss the present scenario.

4. Conceptual Explications

(a) The Concept of Conflict

Conflict arises from the pursuit of divergent interests, goals and aspirations by individuals or groups in defined social and physical environments. Change in the social environment, such as access to new political position, or perceptions of new resources arising from development in the physical environment, are fertile grounds for conflicts involving individuals and groups who are interested in using these new resources to achieve their goals. By thus recognizing the inherent nature of conflict in heterogeneous

and competitive situations, people, more or less compellingly, sustain their societies as ongoing social system through the resolution, transformation and management of conflicts (Cinjel & Akende, 2015).

One of the most quoted traditional definitions of conflict regards it as “a struggle over values claims to scarce status, power and resources in which the aims of the opponents are to neutralize, injure, or eliminate their rivals” (Coser, 2010: 10). In the same direction, Park and Burgess (cited in Abdu, 2010) argue that “conflict is designed to resolve divergent dualism and achieve some kind of unity even if it is through the annihilation of one of the conflicting parties”.

Conflict may not be regarded only in a negative light of dysfunctional or disjunctive process and a breakdown of communication as some scholars tend to suggest (Lundberg, 1939). Conflict is a conscious act involving personal or group contact and communication. Together with, though distinct from competition, struggle, and contest, etc. conflict is a normal process of interaction particularly in complex societies in which resources are usually scarce. Although conflict may generally exist “wherever incompatible activities occur” (Deutsch, 1973:156), and may result in a win-lose situation; the resolution, transformation and management of conflict may produce a “win-win” outcome.

Hence Coser (2010: 10) elaborate definition of conflict becomes a useful clarification:

Social conflict may be defined as a struggle over values or claims to status, power, and scarce resources, in which the aims of the conflicting parties are not only to gain the desired values but also to neutralize, injure, or eliminate their rival. Such conflict may take place between individual, between collectivities, or between individuals and collectivities. Inter-group as well as intra-group conflicts are perennial features of social life.

Conflict can hardly be discussed outside the concept of pluralism. As Smootha (1975) cited in Abdu, (2010) points out, both pluralism and conflict are related in complex ways. Furnivally (1948) as cited in Otite and Albert (2004) subscribed that plural societies are vulnerable to conflicts and this is as a result of divergences in goals.

(a) The Concept of Rural Development

According to Ake (2001) Development is thus the process by which people create and recreate themselves and their life circumstances to realize higher levels of civilization in accordance with their own choice and values. It is also a type of social change in which new ideas are introduced into a society in order to produce higher per-capita income and levels of living through more modern production methods and improved social organization.

The concept of rural development in Nigeria lacks a unified definition as different scholars tend to view it from varying perspective. Some scholars look at rural development from the aspect of educational training like Adekanye (1995), and Obi (2001). Obi (2001) perceived rural development to involve creating and widening opportunities for individuals to realize full potential through education and share in decision and action which affect their lives. Others like Ijere, (1992) view rural development as means for the provision of basic amenities, infrastructure, improved agriculture productivity and extension services and employment generation for rural dwellers.

Idike (1989) and Akude (1992) viewed rural development from various perspectives. However, there is a consensus among them about the need for improvement in rural living condition and standard of living of the rural populace. Ayichi (1995) stated that rural development is based on the need to balance the pattern and direction of government for the benefit of both the urban and rural sectors and provide technical requirements for speeding up economic growth in the development. Adekanye (1995) sees the concept of rural development to include resettling displaced communities or adopting new types of housing unit. He continues that rural development should include alongside land-use development, economic factors such as land carrying capacity for each area of farmland, irrigation improved farming method and finance. Maboguje (1980:30) opines that:

Rural development is concerned with the improvement of the living rural standards of the low-income people living in the rural area on a self- sustaining basis through transforming the socio-spatial structures of their productive activities. It implies a broad based reorganization and mobilization of the rural masses and resources, so as to enhance the capacity of the rural populace to cope effectively with the daily tasks of their lives and with the changes consequent upon this.

Three features of importance in the above definition are:

(a) Improving the living standards of the subsistence population through mobilization and allocation of resources to achieve desirable balance over time between the welfare and productive services available to the rural subsistence populations.

(b) Mass participation aimed at achieving both allocating rationality plus equity with distributive efficiency.

(c) Making the process self-sustaining: It requires appropriate skills acquisition and development; capacity building; and availability/presence of functional institutions at local, state and federal levels to facilitate optimal use of available resources and the development of the rural areas. Self-sustenance implies grassroots participation in development programmes geared at transforming their lives. Lele and Nyako (1991) posit that the realization of above objectives hinges on the interaction of the under listed crucial variables:

- i. National policies: which include land tenure systems; commodity pricing and marketing systems; wages and interest rate structure
- ii. Administrative systems impinging on devolution in governmental structures
- iii. Scope for institutional pluralism: which imply devolution with the distribution of development responsibility among the normal government structures; semi-autonomous governmental institutions and structures, private, commercial and traditional institutions; and elective bodies?

Rural development is concerned with the improvement and transformation of social, mental, economic, institutional and environmental conditions of the low income rural dwellers through the mobilization and rational utilization of their human, natural and institutional resources aimed at enhancing their capacities to cope with the daily tasks of life and the demands of contemporary times (Okoli & Onah, 2002:162). Similarly, it involves multi-sectorial activities including advancement in agriculture, promotion of rural industrial activities and the establishment of appropriate decentralized structures that fosters mass participation in the development process. It is however, observable that government policies geared toward rural development in Nigeria have always been to the advantage of few individuals in the privileged class.

In addition, the administrative systems surrounding the implementation of rural development programmes do not usually function in the interest of the majority of rural dwellers that such programmes ought to capture or accommodate. This fact is applicable to existing institutions, whether commercial, private or traditional. Okoli and Onah (2002) assert further that “all these institutions which are intended to function in the interest of the rural people, invariably promote the interest of a few individuals who control and manipulate them.

5. Overview of Nature and Causes of Conflict in Nigeria

Conflict, generally is a reality of social relations. Conflicts at any level arise from divergences of interests, desires, goals and values aspirations in the competition for resources to meet imposing demands on social life in a defined socio-physical environment (Otite, 1973). As a matter of fact, Man in a socio-physical environment lives in continuous process of dependence and interdependence which often produces contradictions and conflicts. Herders and farmers conflicts constitute one of the major recurring problems bedevilling the socio-political landscape of Africa. To be sure, communal conflicts are not new, particularly in socio-cultural complex societies defined by a high number of ethnic nationalities and language groups such as Nigeria. Pre-colonial and colonial Nigeria experienced inter-kingdom dynastic feuds, and inter-community conflicts (Ikime, 1986). Many contemporary Nigeria communities have experienced several cases of communal conflicts. Some of the notable examples include the *Zango-Kataf* conflict in Kaduna State (1999-2001); *Tiv and Jukun* of Wukari conflict in Taraba State(1999-2001); *Itsekiri and Urhobo* of Warri crisis, (1999-2000); *Yelwa-Shendam* conflict (2003- 2005), *Mwaghavul* and *Ron* crisis(1988-1999), the *Ife-Modakeke* crisis (1999-2000) (Best 2007). One of the common features of these conflicts has to do with their confrontational and violent dimension which led to the loss of lives and property of people who hitherto lived together in relative harmony. The Tiv farmers and Fulani herdsmen conflicts has shown how communal co-existence could be ruptured with attendant disastrous consequences on the social, cultural, political life of the people and above all, affect agricultural development.

Various factors have been identified by scholars as responsible for communal conflict in the country. The causes vary from one area to another. Yusuf (2010) indicated that the causes of communal conflicts are not static but rather dynamic and varied in nature depending on the socio-economic and geopolitical circumstances at the time. Idode (1989) listed social conditions as population explosion, economic migration, and the anti-poor policies of the government as triggers of communal friction. Horowitz (1990) pinned down communal conflict to revolve around politics, politicians, and their pursuit of group advantage.

Albert (2001) identified indigene/settler problem, religious differences, ownership of land and its resources, goals and aspirations of people as some of the factors that can ignite communal conflict in the country. Ayichi (1995) indicated that political struggle and colonization, while Ikime (1986) mentioned loss of soil fertility, soil erosion, deforestation, bush burning and flooding as some of the causes of communal conflict. Yusuf (2010) pointed out that the fundamental causes of communal conflict are poor economic conditions, high level of illiteracy, the quest for, and fear of domination by other groups, land disputes, market ownership, chieftaincy tussle and party politics.

Idike (1989) indicated that increased demand for land for agriculture, unemployment, rural hunger, poverty impoverishment as some of the causative factors. Deprivation, exploitation and domination of minority groups by major ethnic groups and leadership problem were highlighted by Akude (1992) as factors that can exert communal crisis. Equally, religious differences, competition for livelihood resources and traditional chieftaincy tussles were enumerated by Ijere (1992) as potential

factors. Competitions for land and chieftaincy tussle are the major causes of communal conflict in the North. For instance, in Nasarawa in 1993, *Alago, Hausa* and *Tiv* clashed over land and chieftaincy from 1995-2005, the *Egburra* and *Bassa* in *Toto* clashed over land, chieftaincy and politics. In 1989, 1990 and 1997, intra-communal conflict occurred in *Ipav* in *Gboko* based on land problem. In Taraba State, between the *Chamba/Jukun* and *Kuteb* over chieftaincy tussle since 1996 when it stated, it is still on-going. In 2004, there was a clash between the *Bachama* and *Hausa/Fulani* over land ownership, politics and religion in Adamawa State. On March 5, 2005, communal clash between *Maruta (Jigawa)* and *Burmin (Bauchi)* occurred over market relocation. On June 2003, *Ekepedo* and *Ogori* clashed over land ownership in Kogi and Edo States.

Best (2006) argued that in Benue Valley, the pressure on land from all directions heightens the proliferation of ethnic and communal conflicts in the region, including the political ones, most of them arising from the land question. In essence, the causes of communal conflict from the above analysis are:

- a. **Economic Factor:** This factor manifests in the form of competition for inadequate resources such as: land and its content; problems of distribution of available resources; unemployment and poverty.
- b. **Social Factor:** This has to do with issues that border on deprivation, envy, jealousy, marginalization and exploitation of people. In fact, fear of domination by major groups is equally a social factor that attracts communal conflict.
- c. **Political Factor:** It involves the contest for available political positions in a community and leadership failure. Also added to this, is traditional chieftaincy tussle imminent in communities in the country.
- d. **Ecological Factor:** This factor manifests in the forms of encroachment problem, farming and pastoral problems, deforestation, flooding, soil erosion, and bush burning. Communal conflict creates room for people to drift from place to place as a survival mechanism and in search of livelihood.
- e. **Colonial Factor:** Colonialism is believed to be the background cause of communal conflict in Africa and precisely, Nigeria. Most of the communal conflicts have direct attachment to colonial formation, while others manifesting in the post-colonial period.

It can be observed that all animals including human beings have a sense of territoriality and would like to patrol, secure and defend their own environment. This applies to physical territory, wives, families, friends, as well as nations states and ethnic groups or communities (Cosser, 2010).

6. The Nature of Conflict in Guma Local Government Area

The history of Guma local government area dates back to 1981 when the civilian administration of governor *Aper Aku* determined to bring government closer to the people, created additional local government areas in the state. The lifespan of the local government was however short lived, because of the military takeover of December 12, 1983, which abolished all those newly created local governments across the nation.

On May 1989 however, the yearnings of the people for a local government of their own found support once again, when Guma local government was created. The local government derives its name from River Guma, which traverses the local government area from North-West and flows into River Benue. Guma local government area is situated in the North-Eastern part of Benue State. It has a land mass of 240,000 square kilometres and is one of the largest local government area in *Makurdi*, (Guma local government in brief). By the 1991 population census, Guma local government area has a population of 115,750 while the 2006 national population census figures presented Guma's population as 191,599. Guma Local Government Area shares boundaries with *Gboko* and *Katsina-Ala* to the North-East; *Makurdi* Local Government Area to the South, *Keana* and *Awe* local government areas of Nasarawa State to the North and *Doma* Local Government Area of Nasarawa state in the West. The headquarters of Guma Local Government Area is *Gbajimba* town which is located on the confluence of *River Benue* and *Katsina-Ala*.

Guma Local Government Area is made up of 10 districts. These are *Ndzorov, Uvir, Mbabai, Mbawa, Nyiev, yandev, Abinsi, Kaambee, Sagbev* and *Mbadwem*. Guma Local Government Area is characterized by low level land and few hills. The vegetation is that of Guinea savannah type with fairly tall sparsely grown trees and grasses. As transition zone between the North and the South, the *Guinea Savannah* in vegetation favours the growth of both the root and grain crops simultaneously. To this end, rice, corn, millet, yams, cassava, yellow melon are grown on a large scale in Guma Local Government Area. Guma Local Government Area has a singular advantage of being drained by three important Rivers- the river Guma which traverses the local government area from the North-West, and *River Katsina-Ala* which flows into *River Benue* at *Gbajimba* town, the confluence headquarters of the local government area. These rivers have influenced the social and economic life of the people as the rich alluvial deposits favour agricultural production while fishing activities have been well developed.

The conflict in Guma Local Government of Benue State is more of herders and farmers confrontation than ethnic as it is being spelt out (Yusuf, 2010). The conflicts gains ethnic coloration because those that were targeted were the farmers and are chiefly the *Tiv* speaking group while the herders are predominantly the *Fulani* speaking group. The history of the conflict in the Local Government Area is as old as the history of the creation of the Local Government Area (Bello, 2015).

As it was rightly captured in the preceding part of this unit, Guma Local Government is situated in Makurdi west and it is blessed with a lot of resources such as barites, common salt, kaolin and clay and besides this listed features, it is one of the major tributary of *River Benue* and *River Katsina-Ala* also passes through the Local Government Area. This development has made the Local Government Area a marshy one; suitable for the cultivation of food crops such as rice, cassava, sesame, soy bean and many more (Sani, 2014).

This development has also attracted the presence of herders and predominantly the Fulani herders in the Local Government Area. The Local Government Area's natives have seen the presence of different herders in different period of time; there are those herders that have been staying in the area for a longer period of time and there were those that are seasonal and only come during dry season (Sani, 2014). Things have now changed with the anomalies associated with penetration of global warming such as: distortion of the weather decline in the rain and unpredicted rain pattern, drought in the far north coupled with issues such as challenges associated with urbanization, land fragmentation, land extension and occupation, increase in the population of farmers and collections of cows, blockage of the traditional cattle route and the loose and porous borders of the country which have encouraged the influx of non-indigenous Fulani in the country (Bello, 2015).

The conflict between herders and farmers in *Guma* is now a recurrent decimal and despite the several intervention of the state's actor's and non- state's actors, the conflict has continued to rear up its ugly head. The conflict in Guma started in the later parts of 1990s but it was not frequent and common as it is being seen in this contemporary time. The tune of the conflict conflagrate and became a nightmare in the early part of 2010. The passage of bill for anti-open grazing in 2017 by the Ortom's administration further exacerbated the condition. The tempo of the conflict kept up-swinging despite the effort of both the state and national government to curb the ugly incidence. There were several cases of attacks, reprisal attacks, protracted cases and increasing cases of cattle rustling and other crimes that have labeled the area to a conflict zone. The conflict and confrontation that used to be seasonal have now known no bound between seasons and has become unabated (Cinjel and Akende, 2015).

The conflicts have led to the destruction of a lot of human lives and properties worth billions of naira. A lot of people are homeless and thousand were disseminated. Settlements have been polarized and criminal elements have taken advantage of the scene to further perpetuate heinous activities. This has affected a lot of socio-economic activities in the local government area. The conflict has bred room for malaise such as cattle rustling, communal clash, and bandit and worse of it all is that, it is now being seen as a way of lives and the local government area is just a shadow of itself with surplus of victims such as: widow, orphans, fatherless and many vulnerable; wondering helplessly and without direction. This development has affected mutual co-existence that hitherto has been experiencing in the time past (Cinjel & Akende, 2015). Agricultural produce and their productions have declined due to the curious fact that marketers (merchant and investors) have not only lost confidence but have turned their back to this unwanted and ugly development that is so common in the area (Cinjel & Akende, 2015).

7. Theoretical Framework

Theoretical framework is very crucial in all research as it tries to help us explain the problem or subject under investigation and guide the research. This study adopts conflict theory because it gives account of the reasons why the intermittent conflict occurs in *Guma* Local Government Area of Benue state. Marxism is most commonly associated with the German Philosopher, economist and sociologist- *Karl Marx*. Base on a dialectical materialist account of history, Marxist posited that capitalism would inevitably produce internal tensions leading to its own destruction. According to the theory, the history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggle. Freeman and slave, patrician and plebeian, lord and serf, guild-master and journey man, the rich and the poor, capitalist and labourers, classes verses classes in word, oppressor and the oppressed, stood in constant opposition to one another carried on an uninterrupted now hidden, now open fight, a fight that each time ended, either in a revolutionary reconstitution of society at large or in the common realm of the contending classes.

Conflict theorists claim that conflict is caused by the structure of the society. They claimed that the existence of class division is the major factor causing conflict, but they also acknowledges that conflict is related to lifestyle. To the conflict theory, the basis for class struggle is dominance. Those with most resources are able to position the condition of others without resources. The poor are the low income earners who receive small wages from the labour. These wages are insufficient to meet their need. The low class and the poor experiences inequality, that extends to areas other than just income. They are deprived of certain benefits and privileges.

Relating the theory to the topic under investigation, the theory is considered pertinent because Guma Local Government Area of Benue state is always characterized with the communal conflict due to divergent interest over land matters. Therefore, conflict theory is adopted hence conflicts always occur due to divert interest of the Tiv farmers and the Fulani herdsmen have among themselves. The weakness of the conflict theory is that conflict does not always occur at all times. Sometimes there is cooperation.

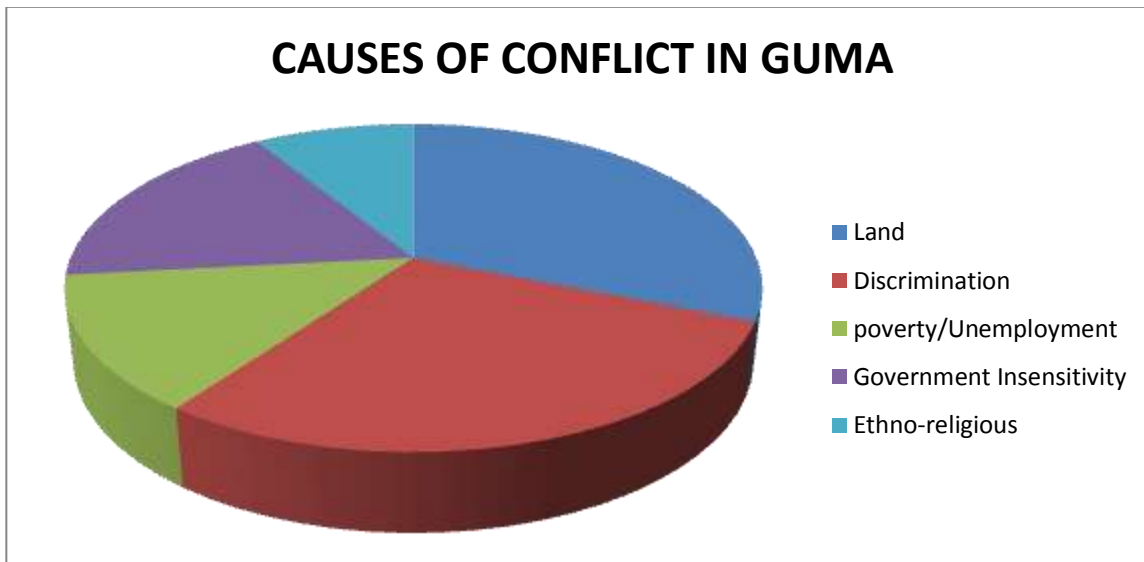
8. Discussion of Findings

Findings of the study on the causes of conflict in Guma Local Government Area shows that struggle for land is one of the causes of the conflict in the area. This is because the conflicting parties have much value on land and as such, they fight for ownership of the land. In the same vein, the study found out that damaging of crops is also a factor in the study area. This is because farmers do not like to see their crops being damage by herdsman’s cattle and this situation always led to conflict between farmers and herders. Again, findings of study revealed that ethnic sentiment contribute to the conflict in the study area. This is because farmers discriminated against herders and likewise herders.

Remote Causes of Conflict in Guma

Remote causes	Number of Respondents	%
Land	19	28
Discrimination	13	26
Poverty/Unemployment	6	12
Government insensitivity	8	16
Ethno – religious	4	8

Source: Field Survey, 2020



The table and chart above provides rural respondent’s understandings of the remote causes of the conflict in Guma LGA. The table indicates that 38% of the respondents associated the conflicts with issue of land and land resources. A total of 26% holds that the spate of the conflict is a function of discrimination. 12% of the respondents see the conflict as an effect of poverty and unemployment and 16 percent linked the conflict to government insensitivity and 8% acknowledged the conflict to poor ethno – religious relations.

Furthermore, the study found out that religion is also a contributory factor in the conflict. This is because the conflicting parties belong to different religion as some parties are Christians and others are Muslims and these parties do not agree with one another on the account of religion.

Again, population growth also contributes to the conflict. This population could be seen in terms of both human beings and cattle. That is, growth in population of cattle compelled herders to roam about in order to feed their cattle and in the course of moving about with their cattle to graze, these cattle sometimes damage or graze on the farmers’ crops and this situation propelled conflict easily.

a. Conclusion and Recommendations

The conflict in Guma Local Government Area of Benue State has become a recurrent decimal; it has led to death of several persons, the destruction of copious of properties worth billions of naira and the displacement of thousand people. This is a

serious setback to rural transformation. The conflict is mostly between herders who are chiefly the Fulani and the Tiv who are predominantly the farmers.

Competition for land and land resources such as: water and crop damages were mostly the predisposing factors. The conflicts are characteristically intermittent and reprisal in nature and also have an outlook of ethno – religious tune as the former are mostly Muslims while the latter professed Christianity.

Societal miscreants and hoodlums have capitalized on the ugly widows that were the creation of the conflicts to further wreak havoc, loot and indulged in menaces such as : rustling, burgling of shops and many more. The state government had made several efforts in the past and at the contemporary time to put an end to the protracted conflict but all to the contrary as the incident kept rearing its ugly face. This has negative impact on development and societal cohesion. Mutual suspicion, mistrust and contempt are common among the wearing.

It is based on this promise that the following recommendations were proffered:

- a. The federal government in collaboration with the Benue state government need to devise, structures, train requisite personal and deploy the necessary equipment for the monitoring of conflicting, deescalating existing conflict situations, transforming them into enduring and sustainable peace. The structure should involve all and sundry; including religious groups, ethnic nationalities and civil society.
- b. The state should provide critical interventions in education, healthcare, rural and urban infrastructure, poverty eradication, job creation and youth development. It must also provide – friendly policies for rural development, land use and agriculture.
- c. It is also important for the government to put the small holder farmers in the core of its policies. Their concerns and needs should be at the centre of government agricultural policies. They are the ones feeding the country and thus encouraging and protecting their interest will not only contribute to managing some of the tensions, it will also contribute to quest for sustainable development.
- d. The traditional institutions should be charged with the responsibility of promoting dialogue and understanding between different ethnic and religious groups for the purpose of either pre – empting conflicts or peace – building in conflict situation. In doing this, the traditional institutions should observe the principle of justice, fair play and equity in dealing with the people under their jurisdiction.

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