

The Impact Of Ethnic Conflict On Socio-Economic Development In Sardauna Local Government Area Of Taraba State, Nigeria (2015 - 2022)

Tanko Abdulmumini

Department of Political Science and International Relations, Taraba State University Jalingo, Nigeria.

Correspondence Email Address: henryishaya@gmail.com

Abstract: This study examined the Impact of ethnic conflict on socio-economic development in Sardauna Local Government Area of Taraba State, Nigeria (2015 - 2022). The primary objective of the study is to examine the socio-economic impact of ethnic conflicts in Sardauna Local Government Area. This study adopted the Human Needs Theory as its theoretical basis framework. Survey research design was utilised using both primary and secondary sources of data. The primary source of data was from structure research questionnaire while the secondary sources were from peer-reviewed journals, newspapers and e-books. Purposive and random sampling techniques were used in administering the research questionnaire and the data collected and analyzed using frequency table and simple Percentage. Findings show that ethnic conflict in Sardauna Local Government Area has significantly undermined agricultural activities leading to increasing hunger and food crisis. It has also affected economic activities as many small-scale businesses were closed. Furthermore, the study established that the ethnic conflict also affected tourism and investment as many tourists and investors deserted the area completely. Also, that government intensify security surveillance in addressing the conflict. The study recommended that the need for government at all levels to assist farmers and business persons who have lost their capital as a result of ethnic conflicts with profit-free loan facilities and other aids to enable them start again or improve on what they have so as to boost the economy of the area.

Key words: Ethnic Conflict, Socio-Economic, Development, Sardauna, Taraba State.

Introduction

Nigeria is often regarded as the linguistic crossroad of Africa (Idike and Eme, 2015). This is because there are many ethnic nationalities that were before now independent ethnic nationalities but were brought together through the amalgamation process that took place in 1914. According to Mbalisi (2017) there are more than 250 ethnic groups in Nigeria. In Taraba State, Oruonye (2012) asserts that there are numerous ethnic groups spread across the 16 Local Government areas. Over the years, violent ethnic conflict has continued to erupt across various communities in Taraba State and in Nigeria. These struggles have been shaped and sustained by the structure of the post-colonial State and that colonialism had far reaching impact on ethnic group consciousness. Both political scientists and analysts alike developed a pessimistic view of amalgamation which they describe it as a "mistake" and "unholy marriage" hence the over dramatized conception inevitability of instability theory of the Nigeria nation (Dudley, 1970). Lenshie and Abel (2012) clearly posit that African countries, beyond the impasse of colonial rule, have increasingly become internally fragmented more than when they were inherited from departing colonial and social changes brought under colonialism. In their contest for power and resource control, they whip up ethnic and citizenship identity to ignite conflicts.

According to Imobighe (2003) cited in Mbah and Nwangwu (2014), Nigeria has witnessed the outbreak of not less than forty violent communal or ethnic conflicts since the return of democratic rule. These conflicts are both inter and intra-ethnic in nature. Among the prominent recent ones are: Zango-Kafaf in Kaduna State; Tiv-Jukun in Wukari, Taraba State; Ogoni-Adoni in Rivers State; Chamba-Kuteb in Taraba State; Itsekiri-Ijaw/Urhobo in Delta State; Ife-Modakeke in Osun State; Aguleri-Umuleri in Anambra State; Yoruba-Hausa Community in Shagamu, Ogun State; Ijaw-Ilaje conflict in Ondo State; the intermittent clashes in Kano, Kano State; Basa-Egbura in Nassarawa State; Eleme-Okrika in Rivers State; Hausa/Fulani-Sawaya in Bauchi State (Imobighe, 2003). Of recent there is also the crisis of Fulani ethnic groups and many groups such as Tiv in Benue State, Bwatiye in Adamawa State among others. These conflicts have become so pervasive that there is hardly any part of the country that has not witnessed similar type of one conflict or the other. Typical example of ethnic crisis in Taraba State is the Kuteb-Jukun/Chamba in Takum Local Government Area, Tiv-Jukun conflict in Wukari and of interest to the study are the various clashes that bedeviled ethnic groups in Sardauna Local Government Area, Taraba State.

Thus, the ethnic nationalities in Sardauna Local Government Area of Taraba State, Nigeria are very unique due to their colonial and cultural history that has a blend of both Nigeria and Cameroon experiences and its rich land for agricultural activities and tourism. Unlike many multi-ethnic communities in Nigeria, it seems reasonable to assume that identity-based conflicts would be minimal in such a setting like Sardauna Local Government Area. However, the area has over the years, continued to record incessant clashes among the different ethnic groups in the area, which causes loss of lives and properties. Thus, the focus of the study is to examine the impact of ethnic conflict on socio-economic development in Sardauna Local Government Area of Taraba State, Nigeria.

Statement of Research Problem

The dynamism of ethnic conflicts and its sophistication has overwhelmed the government and the general conditions of living in Nigeria are truly a nightmare with respect to conflict and insecurity. Nigeria has witnessed unprecedented State of insecurity occasioned by terrorism, kidnapping, ritual killings, cultism, corruption, injustice, poverty, inflation and bad governance. The spate of violence and high level of insecurity has continued unabated in Nigeria. On daily basis, innocent and unarmed Nigerians are brutally slaughtered due to religious, ethnic, tribal or political differences, ritual killings or boundary disputes, for example, the Benue State massacre in 2018. As the world is making efforts to conquer COVID-19 pandemic in 2020, the Tiv-Jukun boundary and community crisis are ongoing, claiming hundreds of lives, far more than the corona virus in the two States of Taraba and Benue. The death toll arising from insecurity and conflict is rising on daily basis, but worse still, the deaths are easily forgotten and the matter swept under the carpet. The governments are making little or no efforts at bringing the perpetrators of these barbaric and dastardly crimes to book.

This State of anarchy and mayhem is capable of consuming the economy and the entire nation. The State of violence, conflict and insecurity in Nigeria is likely attributable to leadership, bad governance, poverty, poor justice system, and poor service delivery. Governments seem to have spent so much of tax payers' money to procure military soft and hard wares to fight insecurity with little or no success. This has caused serious economic and social problems such as declining economic productivity, unemployment, poverty, corruption, injustice, hunger, fear and general insecurity.

The situation in Sardauna Local Government Area of Taraba State is quite pathetic. The series of ethnic conflicts in the area have caused lots of socio-economic damage ranging from loss of lives and properties, destruction of farmlands and food crops, abandonment of farmlands, destruction of houses, school buildings and other basic infrastructure. The spate of these conflicts has not only retarded the socio-economic development of the area but has continuously threatened the corporate existence of Nigeria. The government at various levels has adopted measures aimed at addressing the menace, however, the conflict has continued. What are the socio-economic impacts of the conflicts? What has the government done to address the impact? What can be done to address the impact? These are questions this study seeks to answer.

Research Questions

- i. What are the impacts of ethnic conflict on socio-economic development of Sardauna Local Government Area of Taraba State, Nigeria?
- ii. What has been done to address the socio-economic impact of ethnic conflict in Sardauna Local Government Area of Taraba State, Nigeria?
- iii. What can still be done to address the negative impact of ethnic conflict on socio-economic development of Sardauna Local Government Area of Taraba State, Nigeria?

Objective of the Study

The primary objective of the study is to examine the impact of ethnic conflict on socio-economic development in Sardauna Local Government Area of Taraba State, Nigeria. From 2015-2022)

Specific objectives include:

- i. To validate the socio-economic impact of ethnic conflict in Sardauna Local Government Area of Taraba State, Nigeria.
- ii. To verify what has been done to address the impact of ethnic conflict on socio-economic development of Sardauna Local Government Area of Taraba State.
- iii. To explore what can be done to address the negative impact of ethnic conflict on socio-economic development of Sardauna Local Government Area of Taraba State.

Conceptual Clarifications

The Concept of Ethnic Conflict

Ethnic conflict, a form of conflict in which the objectives of at least one party are defined in ethnic terms, and the conflict, its antecedents, and possible solutions are perceived along ethnic lines. The conflict is usually not about ethnic differences themselves but over political, economic, social, cultural, or territorial matters. The term conflict is also subject to a plethora of definitions. According to Nwoli cited in Segun (2013), conflict means clash, contention, confrontation, a battle, struggle or quarrel.

Kesterner and Ray (2002) defined conflict as a situation in which two or more persons struggle for goals which only one of the persons can attain, or when incompatible means is to be used to achieve a certain goal. This simply suggests that conflict involves struggles over valuable rights including claims to power and scarce resources whereby the objectives of those involved are to remove rivals along the way and get their desired results.

Hocker and Wilmont (2011) reported that, conflict is "struggle between two or more interdependent individuals or groups over perceived and incompatible differences in beliefs, values, and goals, or over differences in desires for esteem, control and connectedness". This definition concurs to assertion by Nnoli (2007) who states that, ethnicity is exclusiveness manifested in inter-group competition and the consciousness of being one in relation to others. A combination of the two concepts "ethnic" and "conflict" according to Jega (2002) described a situation in which the relationship between members of one ethnic group and another, or generally amongst ethnic groups, in a multicultural polity such as Nigeria, is characterized by a lack of cordiality, by heightened mutual suspicions and fears, by quarrelsomeness and by a tendency towards violent confrontations. It is a situation in which at least the interests or goals of members of an ethnic group are in opposition to the interests or goals of another ethnic group.

The Concept of socio-economic development

Socio-economic development is a multidimensional concept that describes the process through which a society experiences improvements in economic conditions, social welfare, human capabilities, and overall quality of life. Unlike economic growth, which primarily focuses on increases in income or output, socio-economic development considers whether economic progress translates into better living conditions for the population.

Todaro and Smith (2020) define development as a multidimensional process involving major changes in social structures, popular attitudes, national institutions, and the acceleration of economic growth, reduction of inequality, and eradication of poverty. From this perspective, socio-economic development involves not only increasing national income but also improving the social and material conditions of people's lives.

Sen (1999) conceptualizes development as the expansion of people's substantive freedoms and capabilities to live the kinds of lives they have reason to value. Thus, socio-economic development goes beyond material wealth to include access to education, health care, employment, political participation, and other opportunities that enhance people's capabilities and freedom.

United Nations Development Programme (UNDP, 2024) approaches development through the human development perspective, emphasizing the expansion of people's choices and capabilities, particularly the ability to live a long and healthy life, acquire knowledge, and enjoy a decent standard of living. This suggests that socio-economic development should be assessed in terms of improvements in human well-being alongside economic advancement.

Theoretical Framework

The study adopted Human Needs Theory as its theoretical framework. There are several theories that can be used to explain ethnic conflict and insecurity in Nigeria. Scholars have often viewed the Human Needs Theory as the most suitable explanatory framework which can analyze the causes and solutions to ethnic conflicts that threaten the security of a nation. Therefore, its application in this study is essentially germane as it can be employed to analyze ethnic conflicts and insecurity in Sardauna Local Government Area of Taraba State. Some scholars who have written on human needs theory include Rosait et al (1990), Burton (1990), Azar (1994), Gur (1994), Max-Neef (1991), and Faleti (2005) among others. The assumption of the Human Needs Theory is that there are basic human needs which individuals seek to fulfill, and that the denial and frustration of these needs by other groups or individuals could affect them immediately or later, thereby resulting in violence and conflict. The theory posits that human beings have fundamental needs which include identity, security, recognition, participation, and distributive justice, among others. The frustration of these basic human needs often leads to aggression and conflict (Burton, 1990). The theory is relevant to this study because the ethnic conflicts in Sardauna Local Government Area can be explained by the denial or frustration of basic needs such as land, economic resources, political participation and recognition among the various ethnic groups.

Methodology

The research design adopted for this research work was a survey design. Survey approach was used to collect large and standardized data from the field (specified population). Quantitative and qualitative data are mostly generated through field survey research design. The population of the study was Sardauna Local Government workers and citizenry. The Population of the inhabitants of Sardauna is 224,359 according to the 2006 National Population Census (NPC, 2006). Taro Yamane's (1967) sampling formula was used to determine the sample size therefore, the sample size for the study was 399 Sardauna Local Government workers and its residents. Purposive and simple random sampling was used to distribute the research questionnaires to the selected respondents. Both Primary and Secondary sources of data were used, the primary sources of data for the study were the questionnaires administered to the respondents. The secondary sources of data for this study included textbooks, journals, articles, newspapers, magazines, internet sources, and reports from government and non-governmental organizations. The data collected was analyzed and interpreted using frequency table and simple percentage.

Discussion of Findings

This study sought to examine the effects of ethnic conflict on socio-economic development of Sardauna Local Government Area, Taraba. The study also sought to find out what has been done to address the socio-economic impact of ethnic conflict as well as measures that can still be taken to address the negative impact of ethnic conflict on socioeconomic development of the area. Based on the data collected and analyzed, it was found that ethnic conflict in Sardauna Local Government Area has significantly undermined agricultural activities leading to increasing hunger and food crisis, it has also affected economic activities as many small-scale businesses were closed. Furthermore, the study established that the ethnic conflict also affected tourism and investment as many tourists and investors shy away from the area in fear of their life.

Similarly, the conflict undermined infrastructural development causing worsening humanitarian crisis and discouraging developmental projects like establishment of infrastructural or social amenities and more so, the conflict contributed to loss of lives and properties. The findings above concur with findings of numerous existing studies. For example, Oji, Emma and Nwoba (2015) established earlier that in Africa communal conflicts have caused havoc to political and economic activities. They added that the destructive tendencies of communal conflicts are such that have largely affected the developmental prospects of the country. Describing the dysfunctional consequences of conflict, Collier (2007) noted that, conflict is a "trap" that keeps the developing countries including Nigeria poor and confines the billion people to a life of poverty in stagnation of shrinking economies. In the same vein, Gani (2008) observed that ethnic conflict across many communities including those in Taraba State have discouraged the provision of most infrastructural facilities such as electricity, health facilities, educational institutions, road network, and potable water and that where they are available, they are destroyed due to the incessant conflict that bedeviled these areas.

Furthermore, the study also found the major efforts used by government and stakeholders to tackle the problem of insecurity in area were intensifying security surveillance and use of traditional leaders. Though, relative peace was recorded in the area, it is not clear if the aforementioned efforts played the major role. The above result upholds previous findings by Joshua (2018) who averred that the deployment of security forces to conflict area has remained the major strategies for government in managing ethnic conflict.

In addition, the study uphold the significance of deployment security in terms of crisis however, it revealed mitigating the socio-economic impact of ethnic conflict particularly in Sardauna Local Government area several approaches which include provision of credit facilities to farmers and business persons who might have lost their capital and source of livelihood in the crises, provision of skill acquisition centers and programmes for the youth and establishment of industries in the area as well as organizing annual intercultural and peace festival where people from the different ethnic groups can come together to learn about each other as well as the need to promote peace at all times for development to thrive in the area. The findings somehow concur to several previous studies such as Idike and Eme (2015) and Raheem, Oyeleye, Adeniji and Aladekoyi (2014) among others who argued that unemployment among the youth in Nigeria is the key source of ethnic and other forms of conflicts and that effort to mitigate conflict in the conflict areas must start from tackling issue of unemployment and poverty.

Conclusion

Conflict is obviously a reality of human existence. Human history is characterized by conflict especially ethnic conflict. From the data collected and analyzed, it has been concluded that the incessant ethnic conflicts in Sardauna Local Government Area is a serious threat to the socio-economic development of the area. The conflicts over the years had impacted negatively on the development of trade and investment, tourism and education among developmental indices. Though some relative peace has returned to the area, it has been observed that more need to be done to avoid recurrence of such ugly situation in the future. This is important because the area has the needed natural resources to serve as catalyst for development of Taraba State and Nigeria especially in the area of agriculture and tourism. The implication of the findings is that the stakeholders in the locality and the State as a whole has the responsibility of ensuring that peace continue to exist among the various ethnic groups in the area.

Recommendations

Based on the findings and conclusions, the study recommended as follows:

- i. There is need for government at all levels to assist farmers and business persons who have lost their capital as a result of ethnic conflict with profit-free loan facilities and other aids to start again or improve on what they have so as to boost the economy of the area.
- ii. There is need for government should improve the infrastructure of the area by constructing modern roads, providing electricity and schools among others so as to attract businesses.
- iii. The youth cannot be ignored in any efforts toward peace and development; therefore, government should partner with NGOs at national and international levels to provide skill acquisition and capital for the teeming youth to start their businesses.

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