

ETHNIC CONFLICTS IN NIGERIA: A STUDY OF TIV JUKUN SOCIO ECONOMIC PERSPECTIVE

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ABSTRACT

Tiv-Jukun conflict has a long history of occurrence and reoccurrence over a period of time. In many instances, the conflicts have resulted in the destruction of lives and properties and internal displacement of civilians. The conflict has affected the relationship between the two ethnic groups who have been living together cordially. Previous studies on the conflict have not given proper attention to the socio-economic perspective on the conflict. This paper presents the root and remote causes of the Tiv Jukun conflict. Identifying the triggers and drivers of conflict between the two ethnic groups could help in bringing about a lasting solution to the crisis. Interviews were used to illicit the opinion of various demographics of both ethnic groups. Findings indicate among others competition over land resources and the desire for each ethnic group to attain political position for the benefit of its ethnic group in terms of socio-economic amenities such as education, healthcare services and employment. In order to promote a peaceful co-existence, the Nigerian government should implement the report of the previous committees, a proper sharing formula between the two ethnic groups and address the issue of citizenship rights constitutionally.

Keywords: Ethnicity and identity, Ethnic conflict, Human development

1.0 INTRODUCTION

Tiv-Jukun conflict has had a long history of occurrence and reoccurrence over a period of time. According to Moti(2010), there has been periodic fighting between these two groups since the late 1950s, with sporadic outbreaks in 1959, 1964, 1976, 1990-1992, and again in 2000-2001. In many instances, the conflict has resulted in the destruction of lives and properties and internal displacement of civilians. The conflict has affected the relationship between the two ethnic groups who have been living together cordially. There has been contention on citizenship between them. In broad terms, the Jukun claimed to be the original inhabitants of Wukari or indigenes and consider the Tiv as settlers. The Tiv refused to accept this view on the basis that they too have been living there for decades and therefore have equal rights; they complain of being marginalized and rejected in Taraba. Also, the Jukun minority in Benue also complain of marginalization, lack of employment opportunities, and insecurity. The Tiv, who are seen as “settlers”, are deprived of many rights given to indigenous groups such as discrimination in education, economic opportunities, employment, political representation and etc. The Tiv therefore say that they are fighting for equal rights

which they believe they are entitled to as indigenes of Taraba state. Over the years, the communities have found increasing difficulty in living together in peace. These two tribes have been at war and like the Israelis and Palestinians, they live with each other, depend on each other and yet, fight each other. Benue is often referred to as the Tiv state, and Taraba as that of the Jukun. This position gives leverage to political polarization which gradually turned into physical segregation. As violence has intensified in Taraba, an increasing number of Tiv have fled to the neighboring state, Benue. The Tiv outnumbers the Jukun and have always used their population advantage to decide electoral contests in Wukari and Taraba state in general. This has not been acceptable for the Jukun. Towards peaceful co-existence, the Nigerian government should implement the report of the previous committees, a proper sharing formula between the two ethnic group and address the issue of citizenship rights constitutionally.

2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Ethnicity and Identity

The term “ethnic” is derived from an ancient Greek word, *ethnos* meaning a number of ‘distinct’ people living and acting together (Tastsoglou, 2001). Ethnicity refers to a collection of people with a common socio/cultural identity such as language, religion, common cultural traits and common worldview (Boateng, 2000, Boateng, Matadamas, Sharma, & Winkler, 2015). Hence, these ethnic groups are social formations distinguished by the communal character (such as language and culture) of their boundaries (Nnoli, 1995). Culture is an important component of ethnic identity and not only refers to beliefs, language, distinct customs and food, but also includes sharing and identifying with the unique experience of a group. Nagel, (1994) added that ethnic identity consists of internal and external aspects and is a socio-psychological process whereby, individuals situate themselves in a community internally by states of mind and feelings, and externally by behavior appropriate to the internal psychological states. Nevertheless, even though the external and internal aspects of ethnic identity are interrelated, their degree of importance varies between individuals. External aspects are linked to observable behaviors, and include: speaking a particular language, practicing ethnic traditions, participating in ethnic personal networks, such as family and friendships, involvement in ethnic institutions like churches, schools, enterprises, and media, participating in ethnic voluntary association like clubs, societies, and youth organizations and participating in functions sponsored by ethnic organizations such as picnics, concerts, public lectures, rallies, and dances (Isajiw, 1993).

2.2 Ethnic Conflict

Conflict is a global and normal part of social living. It can be an expressed disagreement between “at least two interdependent parties who perceive conflicting goals, limited resources and interference from others in reaching their goals” (Hocker & Wilmot, 2003). Ethnic conflict is the type of conflict that exists between and among ethnic groups. It can be caused by the struggle for power or authority, chieftaincy, land or boundary, dominance, exclusion or marginalisation as well as superiority and recognition. There are two main categories under ethnic conflict. These are intra-ethnic conflict and inter-ethnic conflict. The former is the type of conflict that exists between the same ethnic group for example the Dagbon violent conflict between the Abudus and the Andanis which led to the death of the Yaa Na (Yakubu Andani) (Anamzoya, 2004). Tonah, (2012) described it as a war of emancipation or secession. The latter, is the type where conflict exists between and among different ethnic

groups. Cordell and Wolff (2009) argued that inter-ethnic conflicts are mostly caused by feelings of superiority by one ethnic group (mostly the indigenes) over others. For example, the underlying interest is either over land ownership, chieftaincy succession, competition over land usage or location of institutions and services. Ethnicity has been a major source of violent ethnic conflict despite the existence of peaceful and cooperative ethnic groups in Africa (Horowitz, 1985). Ethnic conflict has been defined as one of the greatest hurdles to meaningful development in Africa. In Nigeria, this type of competition and struggle among various ethnic groups is seen as a product of colonial contact. Ethnic identity played a significant role in conflict and violence. The ethnic aspect however, did not decrease with the coming of independence; rather, it became a criterion for allocating and sharing of power and economic resources.

2.3 Human Development

Human development connotes the nation's standard of living, life expectancy and literacy of her citizenry. People living within a defined boundary or state should live above the poverty level, exhibit a high level of literacy and good life expectancy. To ensure human development and growth, the United Nations (2003) declared fundamental human rights and freedom to live together without violence, intimidation or fear. Conflict human development form a self "reinforcing cycle". In countries where conflict abound, long term investment in times of both physical and human cannot be secured, resulting in a sloppy economy in these countries. On the other hand, countries with a low level of development have less capacity to improve institutions, increase productivity and this hampers the growth rate of a country (Conceição, P., Kim, N., & Zhang, Y. 2009). This mandate has reinforced the need for governments all over the world to ensure that there is security of lives and properties of inhabitants within their territorial space, and the promotion of good governance for healthy development and growth is of pivotal concern. Since the end of the Civil War in 1970, Nigeria has experienced conflicts of varying proportions consisting of both inter-ethnic and intra-ethnic conflicts. Such conflicts among others are Mangu versus Bokkos conflict in Plateau state, Ife – Modakeke in Oyo state, Zangon Kataf of Kaduna state and Tiv Jukun of Taraba State. For example, after the Nigerian civil war of 1970, funds meant for meaningful development was spent on national reconstruction (Luckham, Ahmed, Muggah, & White, 2001). In the crisis zones, schools, hospitals and business sectors were closed down hence resulting in low human development.

3.0 METHODOLOGY

The research work centers on the appraisal of ethnic conflict in Nigeria with a focus on Tiv and Jukun ethnic groups. It is the intention of the study to analyze main and remote causes of the crises between the two ethnic groups. Interview method was used for the study. The instrument involved semi-structured questions administered to the respondents via a purposeful sampling method. Categories chosen are elderly men, women, community (including women) leaders, government officials, scholars and youth in the communities who are familiar with the conflicts.

4.0 FINDINGS

From the analysis, conclusions are drawn in line with the objectives of the study. Most of the interviewees were eyewitnesses and participants in the conflicts or individuals who represented their communities to work out modalities for terminating the conflicts amongst themselves. The themes which emerged were land issue, fear of domination, citizenship and political positions. There were different opinions among respondents on whether the land factor is the main cause of the conflict. The majority of the respondents (Jukun) interviewed, admitted that land is the major cause of ethnic conflict between the Tiv and the Jukun in Taraba State for decades. For example, according to a Jukun respondent; “The factor responsible for the Tiv-Jukun conflict is land”.

When the Tiv came to our town in Taraba, we gave them land to farm after which they later try to claim the ownership of the land. They trespass on the land of Jukun without the permission of the ward head, district head or any authority. (He went ahead by saying that the) we the jukuns will not fold arms to see the Tivs take our land and that resulted into conflict. (Research Interview, January 2015).

Another Tiv respondent gave his view that the fear of domination was what caused conflicts between Tiv and Jukun in Wukari Taraba State and not just the land factor:

The jukuns just use Land to trigger conflict while the main cause is fear of domination. The jukuns feel with the large number of Tiv coming to Wukari the Tiv will take over the control of political post, employment and land ownership as well. Land can never be a problem because we have enough land for Tiv and Jukun in Taraba State. There was mutual co-existence between us because we (Tiv) marry them (Jukun) and they marry from us (Research Interview, January 2015).

Two strands of opinion emerged on the major causes of the Tiv Jukun conflict. While most Tiv respondents claimed that there is enough land for the two ethnic groups to farm, the land issue was used as a cover for the fear of domination by the Tiv ethnic group. On the issue of availability of land for both tribes, the majority of the Jukuns claimed ownership. For example:

A Jukun respondent said that Wukari belong to them, the Tivs have their land in the neighboring Benue state, they should go back to their kinsmen we have to protect our land for future generations.

Most Tiv respondents lamented on indigeneship/settler issues due to difficulties encountered in obtaining indigene certificates that are linked to employment, admission into schools, scholarships and other social amenities.

A Tiv respondent said other ethnic groups in Nigeria, for example, the Fulani tribe are considered indigene in so many states outside their regions of concentration, why only the Tivs are considered nonindigene. The government should address the indigeneship/ settler issue to apply to all citizens irrespective of the ethnic tribes.

The three main causes of the conflict, the land resources, fear of domination and indigenship were analysed from the perspective of horizontal inequality. Groups are easily mobilized to violence by leaders on the basis of political, social and economic inequality (Stewart, 2011). Each group wants its members to drive benefit from political positions, social amenities and good quality of life. In the context of this conflict, the three causes are triggers, while these three dimensions of inequalities are the main drivers of the conflict. Furthermore whether it is for political, social or economic reasons, the bond of contention is the socio- economic dimension. Land to the Tivs and Jukuns is a means of livelihood. The quest to occupy political positions is linked to a power to attract projects to their side and an opportunity to employ its members. The fear of domination was reflected through the indigene certificate as a requirement for employment and other social services as a means to protect limited resources. Therefore, the socio-economic dimension is the main driver of the Tiv Jukun conflict.

5.0 RECOMMENDATION

The struggle for ownership and control over land between Tiv and Jukun has remained the main trigger of conflicts. However, the tempo of the conflicts has been heightened by the elite struggle for power and economic resources and the lack of will power on the part of the government to effectively manage the conflicts. The denial of the rights of Nigerians residing in places other than their native lands has enormous effect on national unity. It is imperative to reconsider the status and character of the Nigerian citizenship.

First, the land issue must be addressed. Land reforms are overdue and as such must be carried out. The reforms should make land a resource that is accessible to all. A situation where some Nigerians are denied access to land because they are perceived to be visitors or non-indigenes will only tear the country apart rather than uniting Nigerians together as one. This is where the roles of traditional rulers and community heads become relevant. They can build up harmony amongst Nigerians through peaceful resolution of interpersonal conflict, getting the people of their community to understand Nigeria's diversities and the need to accommodate one another despite the differences. The citizens should be taught to respect the cultures of others and to see the humanity in other Nigerians. This will unite rather than separate a large number of Nigerians who live in other parts of the country thus providing a soothing relief to the fear created by contestations.

Secondly, it is equally important for the government of Nigeria, in its drive towards peaceful coexistence to include some members of each ethnic group involved in the conflict to participate in the management strategy process, listen to their view and suggestion on how they feel the conflict can be curtailed. This way, Nigerians will embrace the culture of love for their country and love for fellow Nigerians; these are ways to follow to regain national unity and development.

Thirdly, there is a need to address the issue of citizenship constitutionally. This can only be achieved through a constitutional amendment that should states that Nigerians have unchallengeable rights of residence, contest for public office, own land, have access to social benefits such as employment, healthcare services, education opportunities and benefit from scholarship in any part of the country. The treatment of any Nigerian by any local and state authorities should be based on justice and fairness. This will drench tension among the different ethnic groups that are spatially distributed in almost all the towns and cities of the

country. In this way, Nigerians will build up a spirit of accommodating one another thereby nurturing the much needed national integration and unity for development to take place.

6.0 CONCLUSION

In conclusion, ethnic groups are said to engage in violence when they feel uncertain about their wellbeing or security following the loss of a power base during a general election. Nigeria is a society with diversities such as languages religion and culture, as a result of poor and inadequate management of conflicts arising from these divergences. The problem of nationhood has given way to crisis that has remained the subject of the debate. However, this does not mean we cannot exist as one nation, despite the fact that some Nigerians are denied certain rights in other parts of the country. Unlike other parts of the world like USA, Canada, France and etc, diversity has been managed well to produce socio-economic and political atmosphere that have improved development. Therefore, the denial of rights of a citizen to reside in places other than their own should be addressed. This can only be achieved through the constitutional amendment that should plainly state that Nigerians have rights of residence, have access to social benefits such as employment, political participation, health care services, education, scholarships and own land to farm. By so doing, it will lessen the tension amongst the various ethnic groups that are sparsely spread around all towns and cities of the country. However, in Nigeria, the long-standing hatreds between the various ethnic groups arising from conflicts over ownership and control of land appear to have been worsened by the weak nature of the Land Use Act of 1979 in rural areas. Prevention diplomacy (PD) offers the best strategy for managing and sustaining conflicts within Tiv and Jukun land. The causes of conflicts in Tiv and Jukun land are complex, and, therefore, require a strategy that recognizes this complexity (Utsaha, Ugbah, & Evuleocha, 2007).

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