

Communal Conflict and Socio-economic Development Process in Nigeria: Evidence from Ukum and Shitile Communities in Sankera Benue State.

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Abstract

This study investigated the effect of communal conflict on socioeconomic development process in Nigeria: evidence from Shitile and Ukum communities in Sankera Benue State. The study adopted the survey research design to generate primary data using questionnaire administered on 308 respondents comprising of people in IDP camps in Shitile, Ukum and Makurdi local government areas. Descriptive statistics and percentages were used to analyze the data at 0.05 level of significance. The test of hypotheses was done using multiple regression analysis and the result showed that land dispute, political thuggery and Fulani invasion have negative significant effect on socioeconomic development with Fulani invasion having the highest effect while chieftaincy affair has significant positive effect on socioeconomic development. The study concluded that communal conflict has significant negative effect on socioeconomic development in Nigeria. Based on the findings, it is recommended that Shitile and Ukum communities should strive to live peacefully and avoid land disputes of any type; They should tolerate one another and avoid conflicts so as to reduce burning down of school buildings and interruption of farming and economic activities; there should be government intervention to control the problem of political thuggery within Shitile and Ukum communities. This will reduce the rate of killings and kidnapping thus creating ample opportunity for farmers to carry out their farm work as well as encourage vibrant economic activities. Government should also provide adequate security to these affected areas in order to checkmate Fulani invasion and protect the people's lives and properties.

Keywords: Communal Conflict; Socio-Economic Development; Sankera; Benue; Nigeria

1. Introduction

The Nigerian historical landscape is dotted with cases of conflict and violence which in the early sixties climaxed into Nigerian civil war of 1967 to 1970. Since then, Nigeria has consistently experienced crises of different dimensions with adverse consequences on the social, economic, political and emotional development of the society. The highlight of it is the recent Fulani invasion to almost every part of the country's territory. Abubakar, 2013 identified communal tension in Nigeria as multidimensional comprising religious, economic, social and ethno-linguistic etc. Communal crisis is a divisive force in the sociopolitical environment. Globally, communal crises exist as a result of politics, ethnicity and religion factors. The social and economic consequences of these communal stressors are devastating to the rural economy.

Conflicts in Nigeria especially in Shitile and Ukum Local Government Area of Benue State may be explained from economic theory. The basis for such explanation could be understood from the feelings of grievance or injustice as well as political thuggery. In Shitile and Ukum L.G.A, human participants in conflict situations are the result of compulsory struggles in their respective institutional environments at all social levels aimed at satisfying primordial and universal needs. These needs include: political, security, identity recognition and land disputes. They strive increasingly to gain the control of their environment that is necessary to ensure the satisfaction of these needs. This struggle for primordial needs is theoretically related to the Frustration Aggressive Theory (FAT) developed by Dollard et al., 1939. The struggle by two or more groups over political powers, status and control of resources, in which the aims of the opponents are to neutralize, injure, kidnap or eliminate their rivals constitute yet another factor for communal conflict in these LGA. The poor state and performance of the rural sector especially in Shitile and Ukum LGA of Benue State is an indicator and a pointer at underdevelopment and this is further worsened by series of communal crisis (Ekot, 2022).

Rural communities in Shitile and Ukum are in a precarious and abysmal state. Communal crisis has been a significant source of disharmony in these LGA where several people have been allegedly killed, wounded and kidnapped. These several provocative attacks, harassment, abduction and killing have resulted into loss of manpower, destruction of properties, stagnation of economic activities like businesses including farm work, increasing children who are out of school, cannibalistic acts etc. Hundreds of people have been displaced from their original homes and rendered homeless as refugees in neighbouring communities as a result of brutal and inhuman acts of communal crisis.

However, several studies have been carried out on communal conflict in Nigeria among which included Wosu, 2011; Alimba, 2014; Samuel and Evangeline, 2016; Alabi and Famakinwa, 2017. Most of the studies were purely descriptive and lack rigorous statistical analysis, which can help to predict the onset of similar crisis in future. In addition, they have not comprehensively assessed the effects of such community conflicts on livelihood and development indicators; therefore, quality of such data cannot be guaranteed for decision making and rural urban planning. This study will enlighten the government and other developmental actors regarding policies on resolution of conflict as well as prevent anything that can lead to violence resulting in damages to lives and properties resulting in a fall in socioeconomic activities of people in a particular place.

Martin, Desmond, Nnamani and Gowind, 2018 conceptualize communal conflict as a situation in which two or more human beings desire goals, which they perceive as being obtainable by one or the other, but not both. Each party is mobilizing energy to obtain a goal, a desired object or situation and each perceives the other as a barrier or threat to that goal. According to Oke, 2020 conflict is an incompatible feeling between groups or people. It may also be described as an open clash between two opposing groups or individuals in form of war, battle, and struggle, opposing ideas or disagreement or quarrel between individuals.

Adidi, 2017 posited that communal conflict might arise due to different causes such as land ownership, ethnic rivalry, overgrazing, land boundaries religious differences and unequal distribution of government resources.

In this study, communal conflict is understood as a collision of interest between different persons and groups who are motivated by the economic, political, cultural and social rewards they are likely to enjoy by having a kin. Over time the periodic clashes between herders and farmers in Northern and North-Central Nigeria have precipitated a general climate of insecurity. This widespread insecurity both allow for and is perpetuated by acts of broader criminality, in which gangs of bandits target locations in the area for raids, mass kidnappings, and looting (Muhammad, Tanko Shittu 2022).

According to Berk, 2019 socio-economic development refers to a gradual increase in variety of social economic indicators such as literacy rate, occupational level, income accumulation, gender balances as well as administrative system awareness and implications of good health and disease preventive methods in daily life, increase of economic activity, higher participation in national development (socially, economically, culturally, and politically) and modern agricultural practice. In this study, socio-economic development involves people-centered development in respect to improvement on their health, education, peace of mind, empowerment, gender equality, improving infrastructure, promoting human right, improving security and general wellbeing of the society.

2. Statement of the problem

Nigeria has been backward in its development process such that it remains underdeveloped in this 21st century. What could be the reason for this underdevelopment? Agriculture which has contributed to economic growth in many developed countries has not been able to do so in Nigeria. This is as the result of communal conflict/herder-farmer unrest and Fulani invasion which has escalated from the North, middle belt as well as other parts of the county causing so much damage in the farming/agricultural sector. In the middle belt of Nigeria, Benue State which is known as the food basket of the nation is now unable to feed the population as well as the entire nation. The specific problems of Shitile and Ukum communities in Sankera Area is socioeconomic development challenges, due to conflict and this has made Benue State to be sweeping in absolute poverty, malnutrition, loss of human capital, destruction of buildings, disruption of normal economic activities, destruction of educational network/normal educational activities (lack of conducive learning teaching processes), destruction of markets, disruption of farmers livelihood, poor farming activities, destruction of health care facilities, unemployment and underemployment is reportedly very high and almost all the households are living in extreme conditions of poverty and deprivation while so many are taking refuge in various IDP camps (Luwis 2022).

The indicators of this problem are that hundreds of thousands of Shitile and Ukum Local Government Area civilians lost their lives, robbed, raped, the level of human right violation is the highest ever in the world, total economic collapse which means the GDP in the country at large is lowest ranking rate, massive internal and external displacement hence so many indigenes fled from the LGA to refugee camps within the state. Negative consequences of this are that, if these problems continue to exist, as a result, many more people from Shitile and Ukum Local Government Area will be dead, poverty trap will affect the entire society, hundreds of thousands of refugees will have no place to camp as millions more of people will be displaced internally and externally, thus making the majority of the Shitile and Ukum aid-dependent. While all these causes of the problems are there in Shitile and Ukum Local Government Area, this study will focus on the “communal conflict and socio-economic development because all other previous researchers did not conduct their studies from this approach thus leaving a gap which this research is intended to fill.

3. Objectives of the study

The major objective was to investigate the effect of communal conflict on socio economic development of Shitile and Ukum communities Sankera Benue State Nigeria. Specifically, the study is set to:

- i. examine the effect of land dispute on socio-economic development of Shitile and Ukum communities in

Sankera, Benue State, Nigeria.

- ii. determine the effect of political thuggery on socio-economic development of Shitile and Ukum communities in Sankera, Benue State, Nigeria.
- iii. assess the effect of chieftaincy affairs on socio-economic development of Shitile and Ukum communities in Sankera, Benue State, Nigeria.
- iv. determine the effect of religious belief on socio economic development of Shitile and Ukum communities in Sankera, Benue State, Nigeria.

4. Literature Review

4.1 Theoretical Framework

This study is anchored on the economic theory of conflict propounded by Dube and Vargas, 2013. The school of thought explains the link between economic deprivation and conflict which exist between communities especially those with common boundaries. They contend that because many people compete for scarce and limited economic resources as well as other interests, there is bound to be conflict when a group is threatened with lack or scarcity of livelihood (Bazzi and Blattman, 2013). They further argued that the perceived threat of deprivation of farmlands, grazing lands and political power are often the causes of conflict in agrarian societies. This theory is significant to this study because it suggests that because many people compete for scarce and limited economic resources as well as other interests, there is bound to be conflict when a group is threatened with lack or scarcity of livelihood. This is exactly what is applicable to the Shitile and Ukum communities as their communal conflicts is based on the perceived threat of deprivation of farmlands, grazing lands and political power.

4.2 Conceptual Framework

Different scholars under different ideological, historical and cultural influences have defined communal conflict variously. Francis, 2017 defines communal conflict as the 'pursuit of incompatible interests and goals by different groups'. According to Apende, 2016 communal conflict is a situation in which two or more human beings desire goals which they perceive as being obtainable by one or the other, but not by both; each party is mobilizing energy to obtain a goal, a desired object or situation and each party perceives the other as a barrier or threat to that goal. Thus, communal conflict is seen in terms of the struggle between parties over desirable values. It refers to 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 rivals. Such conflicts may take place between individuals and collectivizes. Although communal conflict may be conceived from different perspectives, one crucial defining element of it is the presence of two or more actors struggling to secure a thing of value or adjudged to be valuable of which the gain by any of the actors amounts to a loss or deprivation to the other actor(s). The benefit that goes with access to or control of the 'valuable' and the deprivation or insecurity that follows denial of access underlie all conflicts. Similarly, Ho Won Jeong, 2018 contends that a key element of all conflicts is the existence of resource scarcity where the wants of all actors cannot be fully satisfied and where the quests for such resources result in conflict behaviour. Christopher and Ndubuisi, 2018 views communal conflict as a condition in which one identifiable group of human beings in a given environment (whether tribal, ethnic, linguistic, cultural, religions, socioeconomic, political, among others) is engaged in conscious opposition to or more identifiable human groups because these groups are pursuing what are or appear to be incompatible goals. The measures of communal conflict used in this study were adopted from the work of Abdirahman, 2016 which include land dispute, political thuggery, chieftaincy affair and fulani invasion.

Land conflict can be defined as a social fact in which at least two parties are involved, the roots of which are different interests over the property rights to land: the right to use the land, to manage the land, to generate an income from the land, to exclude others from the land, to transfer it and the right to compensation for it. A

land conflict, therefore, can be understood as a misuse, restriction or dispute over property rights to land (Wehrmann, 2018). Conant, 2014 observed that there are more than 150 existing disputes that involve territory, mostly in Africa, Asia, and the Pacific region, but also in Europe and the Americas. Studies revealed that a major factor of communal conflicts in most parts of Nigeria, particularly in the southeast and middle belt zones is land or boundary disputes. This shows that land is becoming a very scarce factor of production either due to population pressure, land alienation or concentration of land in a few hands (Dunmoye, 2013). Conflicts between farmers and herders can be understood as a problem of access to land.

The beginning of the 21st century witnessed an expansion of the agriculturist population and its cultivated land at the expense of pasturelands in the Middle Belt. In an already politically unstable region, it has never always been possible to ascertain a legal title to land for every farmer. As a result, transhumance routes of herders were no longer available, especially in a context of global warming (Blench, 2020). Oni, 2014 describes **political thuggery** as an inappropriate way of acquiring political power or an act of suppression, violence, hooliganism, brutality, and intimidation. Nigeria has suffered a rising spate of insecurity in recent times; this insecurity includes armed robbery, kidnapping, insurgency, ritual killings, etc. In a study Ogaboh and Coker, 2010 examined political thuggery and democratic dividends in Nigeria, employing secondary data and personal observation, the study revealed that poverty unemployment, financial attractiveness of elective positions, the value system of wealth accumulation, and an ineffective security agency account for the occurrence of political thuggery in Nigeria. Ekong, 2013 sees **leadership/chieftaincy affairs** as being synonymous with decision-making and therefore regards decision-makers as community leaders. He further posits that an effective means of identifying leaders should include a systematic observation of which decision-makers are for various community issues. A leader/chief is a person who guide, influence and motivate other (followers) towards goal achievement (Oxford, 2016). Leaders provide the basis for improving the quality of life in communities. So many factors have enabled the widespread migration of Fulani herders into the southernmost and middle belt areas of Nigeria, one of the reasons being where they could easily sell their livestock for higher prices due to strong demand for beef and other meat products as well as in pursuit of a grazing land for their cows.

Religion is a system of social unity commonly understood as a group of beliefs or attitudes concerning an object, person, unseen or imaginary being, or system of thought considered to be supernatural, sacred, divine or highest truth, and the moral codes, practices, values, institutions, and rituals associated with such belief or system of thought. It is a structure within which specific theological doctrines and practices are advocated and pursued; usually among a community of like-minded believers (Johnson and Samson, 2014). Religion can be found in all known human societies. **Socio-economic development** involves people-centered development, where the focus is put on the improvement of the various dimensions affecting the well-being of individuals and their relationships with the society such as health, education, entitlements, capabilities, empowerment, gender equality, improving infrastructure, promoting human right, improving security and general wellbeing of the society (Artalist 2014).

Socio-economic development has a variety of social economic indicators such as literacy rate, occupational level, income accumulation, gender balances as well as administrative system awareness and implications of good health and disease preventive methods in daily life, increase of economic activity, higher participation in national development (socially, economically, culturally, and politically) and modern agricultural practice (Berk 1999). UNESCO, 1999 defines **Literacy** as a continuum of learning and proficiency in reading, writing and using numbers throughout life and is part of a larger set of skills, which include digital skills, media literacy, education for sustainable development and global citizenship as well as job-specific skills. Life expectancy is the statistical age that a person is expected to live until, based on actuarial data. By definition, life expectancy is based on an estimate of the average age that members of a particular population group will

be when they die. It is important to note that life expectancy changes over time. The National Population Commission (NPC), 2019 has said that the current overall life expectancy of Nigeria stands at 52.2 years. One of the reasons for a very short life expectancy in Nigeria is as a result of incessant killings that take place in the country which is mostly associated with communal conflicts or insurgency.

4.3 Empirical Review

David and Ojo, 2019 examined the specific impacts of land disputes on the development of communities in Inyimagu district Ikwo local government area of Ebonyi state Nigeria. In achieving this, three hundred and seventeen (317) questionnaires were retrieved from the residents of the various villages that make up Inyimagu community in Ikwo local government area, a community that has been ravaged by communal clashes using a self-structured questionnaire. Data collected were presented and analyzed using simple descriptive statistics while the stated hypotheses were tested using regression analysis. Finding showed that village claim of long-time settlements, long-term enmity amongst families among other factors are the major reasons for the incessant land disputes in these communities. The study recommended that understanding the major factors responsible for land disputes in rural communities and the effects of such disputes to the socio-economic growth and development is necessary so as to initiate settlement of the affected communities.

In another study, Umar, Doho, and Sule, 2018 investigated the effects of political thuggery on sustainable development in Kaduna State, utilizing Elite theory and qualitative data analysis. Data were collected from a population of 112 selected communities and analyzed using descriptive statistical tools such as percentages and tables. The test of hypothesis was done using f-statistics at 5% level of significance. The findings revealed that thuggery instilled fears among candidates which impeded political participation of the electorate.

In a related study, Mbaya, 2018 analyzed the implication of political thuggery on socio-economic and political Development in Borno State. The study employed both primary and secondary data and the findings indicated that poverty, high rate of unemployment, high rate of illiteracy among youth, and families having so many children they cannot carter for by their income are the root cause of the high rate of thuggery in the state. Similarly, Adeleke, 2016 examined political thuggery and voter turnout in the fourth Republic general elections in Southwestern Nigeria. Utilizing the Social exchange theory and descriptive statistics the study revealed that thugs were hired to engage in all forms of electoral malpractices and the fear of being killed and psychological trauma has given rise to voters' apathy.

In another study Oluwagbohunmi, 2017 investigated curbing political thuggery and violence among Nigerian youths, using qualitative data the findings revealed that political thuggery and violence constitute political problems that climax into political instability and endanger democracy. Similarly, Umar, 2019 investigated the causes and effects of political thuggery in Nigeria. The study critically examined the reason for the rising spate of political thuggery in Nigeria especially during political campaigns for elective offices. Employing secondary data, findings revealed that poverty, unemployment, financial attractiveness of elective positions, and ineffective security agency account for the incidence of political thuggery in Nigeria.

In another study, Ozoigbo, 2019 analyzed insecurity in Nigeria: Genesis, consequences, and panacea. Using qualitative data, the study revealed that, unemployment, poor leadership, porous borders, and arms proliferation non-obedient to the rule of law are the causes of insecurity. Gamel, 2018 conducted the study on the effects of chieftaincy conflicts on local development, in Bawku East Municipality of Nigeria. The study employed primary data which was sourced through the use of well-structured questionnaire. Data collected were analyzed using regression analysis and the findings revealed that conflict negatively affected the livelihood and socio-economic development dimensions in the society. The finding with respect to the general effects of the chieftaincy conflict in all aspects of individual and communal livelihoods have been negatively

affected; the conflict has led to the militarization of the youth, indiscipline, political chaos and insecurity; the violence and insecurity has in turn retarded the socio-economic development of the Municipality. With regard to the municipal economy the research found that: production in agriculture, commerce and industry have been adversely affected; disputes over farmlands, disruption in transportation networks, and the inability of many farmers to cultivate their farms during periods of violence outbreaks has negatively affected agricultural production; the general insecurity has made the Municipality unattractive to business people. Thus, many businesses have relocated to relatively peaceful parts of the country; the violence discourages heavy investment in all three economic sectors due to loss of assets. Renneboog, 2022 investigated the effect of religious belief on economic performance among households in South Africa. The selected households of 230 constituted the study population. Primary data was used to elicit information from the respondents and the data were analyzed using simple descriptive and inferential statistics. The result found that religious belief has positive relationship for economic performance. This study proves that the intensity of religious beliefs and household income indicates a positive relation hence religious household is more likely to save.

5. Methodology

5.1 Research Design

This study adopted survey research design; the choice for this survey design is to have an effective descriptive and data analysis of the study and to ensure reliable quantitative data. The population in regard to this study was derived from the record of the population in the various IDP camps in Shitile, Ukum and Makurdi local government areas as well as some traders at Zakibiam and Abaji yam markets. The reason for selecting these LGA and the yam markets within the LGAs is because they have experienced much communal conflicts over time and most of them are living in the various IDP camps around the State. A total of 108 adults taking refuge in IDP camps and yam traders were selected for the study excluding children. The primary source of data collection was through a well-structured questionnaire and the validity and reliability was confirmed using a confirmatory factor analysis (KMO) and Bartlett's Test of Sphericity .821 and approximate chi-square 829 with .000 level of significance), as well as Cronbach's Alpha ($\alpha=127$ for each component). The results showed that each scale has a high reliability. The analysis in this study involves two statistical techniques: descriptive statistics and regression analysis with the aid of Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS 25). The distribution of the questionnaire was through census sampling method.

5.2 Regression model: In examining the effect of communal conflict on socio economic development process in Nigeria, David and Ojo, 2019 and Gamel, 2018 use regression analysis. Thus, this study employs the multiple regression models to examine the impact of communal conflict on socio economic development process in Nigeria.

$$SED = F(COC) = F(LAD, PTH, CHA, REB) + e$$

Where:

SED = Socioeconomic Development
 COC = Communal Conflict
 LAD = Land Dispute
 PTH = Political Thuggery
 CHA = Chieftaincy Affairs
 REB = Religious Belief

The explicit form of the model is presented below:

$$SED = b_0 + b_1LAD + b_2PTH + b_3CHA + b_4REB + e$$

Where

b_0 = Intercept of the regression
 b_1, b_4 = parameter estimates
 e = error term

5.3. Results and Discussion

Table 1: Regression Results

Frequency	Standardized Coefficients	Std. Error	T	Sig.
CONS	0.56776	0.09866		
LAD	0.07873	0.0705	7.47	0-.004
PTH	0.06438	0.06432	2.14	0-.000
CHA	0.08640	0.00484	5.14	0.003
REB	0.66755	0.66786	3.12	0.001
F value	4.92	0.00032		
Prob.		0.00022		
R-squared		0.34343		
Adj. R-squared		0.27185		

a. Depended Variable: Socioeconomic Development

Source: STATA Output 14.0

Table 1 show the coefficient of determination (R^2) of 0.34343 which signifies 34% strength of relationship between the variables and 0.27185 adjusted (R^2) revealing that 27% of total variation in socio economic development of Shitile and Ukum in Benue State Nigeria is caused by land disputes, political thuggery, chieftaincy affaires and religious belief. Similarly, the result of the F- statistics value of 4.92 and its corresponding P-value of 0.0002 implies that the model is fit. Table 1 also showed that land dispute has a negative and significant effect on socio economic development of Benue State Nigeria this is evidenced by the coefficient of 0.07873 with t-value of 0-.004 which is statistically significant. This suggests that, as land disputes orchestrated by herder-farmer disputes/Fulani invasion through killing farmers and disrupting farm and economic activities, burning down of school buildings increases by 1 additional dispute, socio economic development decreased by 0.07878%, but the result is statistically significant at all levels. The study therefore, inferred that land dispute has negative significant influence on socio economic development decrease during the period under review. The results from Table 1 also showed that, political thuggery has a negative effect on socio economic development of Benue State Nigeria, from the coefficient of 0.06438 with t value of 2.14 which is statistically but negatively significant at all levels of significance (P-value of 0-.000). This suggests that, political thuggery has the ability to reduce socio economic development as it involves killing, burning of houses and intimidation of political rivals.

Thus, this study finds that political thuggery has a negative significant effect on socio economic development in Benue State Nigeria. Furthermore, Table 1 showed that chieftaincy affairs and religious belief has a positive and significant effect on socio economic development. The result of the study revealed that there is positive and significant effect of chieftaincy affairs on socioeconomic development of Shitile and Ukum local government areas in Benue State Nigeria. This is confirmed by the value of standardized coefficient which is 0.08640 and that of the probability value of 0.003 < 0.05 significance level. The title holders are involved in conflict resolution and this has brought peace among the communities as well as socio economic development. On religious believe, the result of the study revealed that there is positive and significant effect of religious belief on socioeconomic development. This is confirmed by the value of standardized coefficient which is 0.66755 and that of the probability value of 0.001 < 0.05 significance level. The result of this study corresponds with the findings of Renneboog (2022) which shows positive significant effect.

6. Conclusion and Recommendations

This study was on the effect of communal conflict on socioeconomic development of Benue State Nigeria. The study literature and test of hypotheses indicates that land dispute, political thuggery are factors that contribute to poor and negative socioeconomic development while chieftaincy affairs and religious belief contribute positively to socioeconomic development. Hence, the study concludes that communal conflict significantly affects socioeconomic development Benue State Nigeria. From the findings and conclusion, the study recommends that Shitile and Ukum communities should strive to live peacefully and avoid land disputes of any type. They should tolerate one another and avoid conflicts so as to reduce burning down of school buildings and interruption of farming and economic activities. Considering the nature of political thuggery among Shitile and Ukum communities, there should be government intervention to ensure politicians desist from using thugs to intimidate their political counterparts. This will reduce the rate of killings and kidnapping thus creating ample opportunity for farmers to carry out their farm work as well as encourage vibrant economic activities. People can leave IDP camps and go back to their homes, children can also go back to school and this will in turn improve the literacy level of the community dwellers. There is need to encourage the chiefs and other title holders to ensure peace keeping with their positions, they should empower the regional house of chiefs or the national house of chiefs to lead mediations on resolving the conflict. The religious factor is also crucial; since religious belief contributes appositely to socioeconomic development, members of Shitile and Ukum communities should be encouraged to embrace religion at all cost. This will help them to avoid bad influence and negative action that can be detrimental to their religious belief which includes communal conflict.

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