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RESEARCH ARTICLE

Public Conflict and Food Security in Nigeria: An Example of the ISA-Esilo Conflict

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Abstract
This paper undertook a holistic study of the series of issues involved in the character of the Ezillo-Ezza Communal conflict. An underlined point in this paper is the chain and systemic impact of this conflict on food security and the general wellbeing of the people. In the literature review I made a deliberate effort to put the conflict in proper viewpoint, through conceptual review of conflict, communal conflict, and food security. A critical review of the causes like need for land and territory, political, socio-cultural and indigene-settler notions was undertaken. Existing literatures are of the view that communal conflict are caused by a variety of factors. Similarly, the destruction of farms, killing of farmers, disruption in transportation of food, increase in food prices in the face of these conflicts are the major triggers of food insecurity in many Nigeria communities including Ezza-Ezillo. The relational and Structural Functionalist theories forms the theoretical framework for the paper. The main thrust being that conflicts only arise when communities or individuals are engaged in some kind of relationship with another and such hostilities have negative spillover effects in other structures of such society including food supply and access. Following from my review of extant literature and analysis, it was discovered that issues such as competition for scarce resources, land ownership, identity crisis, poor government policies were responsible for the conflict and that food availability and accessibility grossly declined within the conflict period. In light of these unresolved issues the paper offered valuable recommendations.

Key words: Conflict, Communal Conflict, Food Security.

1 | INTRODUCTION

In Africa, people have historically existed as ethnic and communal groups and interactions between these communal groups have not been devoid of conflicts. As commonly known, communal conflict is associated with incompatibility of interest between or among various communal groups. According to Horowitz (2000), "communal conflict refers to the situation where violence is perpetrated along ethnic lines and victims are based on ethnic group membership". Communal conflict must be connected to any form of incompatibility, struggle, contest, violence or attacks which in one way or the order are propelled by communal sentiments or attachments. This is supported by Vash-

ney (2002) describing communal conflicts as being birth-based (ascription), and based on other group identities such as race, language, religion and caste. This understanding of communal conflicts presents us with the Ezza-Ezillo conflict as a readily available example. Raleigh and Kniveton in (Sambe et al, 2013) communal conflict is conceptualized as "… organized violence conducted between ethnic Militia". Kahl (2006) corroborated this by arguing communal conflict involves groups with permanent or semi-permanent militias that do not involve the government. The description argues that for any conflict to be described as communal conflict the government presence is totally invisible. However, in some occasions, the government through her officials may be directly or indirectly involved in communal conflicts

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as there have been cases of accusations pointing fingers at certain government officials as sponsors of certain communal conflicts in Nigeria. For instance, Sahara Reporters (2009) noted some unnamed politicians were sponsoring the Ezza-Ezillo conflict. In communal conflicts, goals and activities become incompatible when one's own group interests are threatened by the actions of another. According to Pruitt and Kim (2004), "the essential nature of communal conflict situation is easily understood in terms of the difficulties involved in meeting everyone's interest simultaneously". Therefore, communal conflicts are conflicts that emerge from tensions essentially due to the pursuit of different outcomes or disagreement in an attempt to attain the same end by communities.

The Ezza-Ezillo conflict alongside other communal conflicts have posed threats to food security in Nigeria. As a result, policies and resources have been put forward by government towards reducing communal conflicts in Nigeria but such policies and resources have not yielded optimally due to certain factors. Progress has been slow and the number of hungry people has continually increased in Nigeria because of communal conflicts.

According to Sambe et al (2013) "communal conflict has the propensity to directly and indirectly influence the socio-economic activities among communities in the warring camps". Consequently, Osunbi (2006) agreed, "in countries of traditional stability, communal conflict is becoming an increasing factor and poses a threat to food security".

This availability and access to food has been a great problem in Nigeria as more people continue to suffer from malnutrition.

Communal conflict has a negative impact on food security. Over the years' communal conflicts have affected food security in Nigeria and Africa at large. This is confirmed by FAO (2002), "civil strife is the major cause of food scarcity and shortages in fifteen countries that suffered exceptional food emergency in Africa". When there is communal conflict it affects the production and distribution of food which increases the risk of food insecurity. Pierre and Fred (2006) argued that "civil strife affects food security in developing countries due to its detrimental effects on the agricultural sector and the economy as a whole". In the twenty-first century Nigeria,

communal conflicts have been very popular and that has adversely affected the production of food in the country. This leaves the populace with little available and accessible food on daily basis. Such conflicts include the Ezza and Eziulo crisis in Ebonyi state, conflict between Adadamma community in Cross River State; and Amagu community in Ebonyi State; the Fulani herdsmen clashes with farmers and communities in the Eastern and other parts of Southern Nigeria, etc. These conflicts leave lands in the warring communities uncultivated and prevent the transportation of already produced goods to different locations.

In Nigeria a large number of its citizens reside in the rural areas, communal conflict has serious implication on food production because agriculture which is the major occupation of the rural population is affected during such conflicts. Sambe et al (2013) aptly puts, "the production of crops and rearing of livestock is the major economic activity of the people". Therefore, communal conflict has serious implications on food security in the twenty-first century Nigeria. Yahaya, Hussainatu and Yelwa (2010) observed that "it is an irony of fate that Nigeria is endowed with abundant resources (human and natural, including vast fertile land for farming, i.e. about 23% (21 million hectares) arable land, while only 0.9 million hectares (1%) is under permanent cultivation". Consequently, Messer and Cohen (2004) noted that food insecurity is a product of communal conflict.

United Nations (2005) noted that one of its major goals set at 2000 millennium is to eradicate hunger and poverty globally. Therefore, this work sets to explore the impact of communal conflicts in on food security in Nigeria using the Ezaa and Eziulo communal conflict in Ebonyi state as a case study.

Conceptual Clarification

Conflict: this is one of the major realities of social interactions. Conflict therefore is a contest between people with opposing needs, interests, ideas, beliefs and values. Diez et al (2006) argued, "Conflict denotes incompatibility of subject positions". This invariably means that incompatibility is at the heart of conflict whether between individuals or among groups.

As was observed by Emily and Diez (2007), "conflict

is not always characterized by violence. Yet, conflict might escalate and lead to destructive results". Conflicts, no matter the dimension, are therefore first and foremost divisive in nature, Jabri (1996). Conflict can be understood in terms of violence (behavior) or hostility (attitude), but also include incompatibility or differences in issue position (Niklas and Amaikael, 2005). The foregoing tells us that conflict is an inter-personal or an inter group affair and it portrays tensions and upheavals between or among such parties.

In trying to unravel the nature of conflicts, (Darendorf 1959), observed that conflict is broadly associated with tensions surrounding decisions on various choices, sometimes being manifested in confrontations between social forces. Meanwhile, the nature of such contest that lead to conflict can be illustrated in terms of how issues arising from variety of competitive social relationships are defined and framed. More so, conflict can be associated with either short term or long term grievances. This view is supported by Azar (1986) when he opined that long-term grievances over economic and social inequalities could lead to conflict.

In a broader sense however, Ho-Won Jeong (1980) observed that the concept of conflict has been stretched and molded to describe any discord resulting from almost every aspect of social relations. Thus it was declared long by Mark and Snyder in Ho-Won Jeong (1980) that "the distinctions between conflict and non-conflict are fuzzy at best and at worst are not made at all". However, some scholars such as John (1990) has often used 'conflict' and 'dispute' synonymously without making clear distinctions. According to him "conflict is interpreted in the contest of serious nature and challenges to the existing norms and relationships".

Consequently, there are so many causes of conflict in various societies. Ho-Won Jeong (1980) identified power disparities, misconception and miscommunication as the causes of conflict which encompasses other broad causes. More so, substantive issues of conflict can be tied to a range of contested objects such as wealth, power, prestige and their conditions of availability. In addition to this, reasons for the struggle may be based on feelings of deprivation, injustice, inequality and frustration beyond incompatible roles and positions.

Communal conflict:

Nigeria like many other African countries is characterized by communal conflicts. Some more recent communal conflicts in Nigeria are: farmers-herders clashes in Benue, Tiv-Jukun crisis in Taraba State, Zango-Katif crisis in Kaduna State, Ogoni-Adoni crisis in Rivers State, Itsekiri-Ijaw crisis in Delta State, Ife-Modakeke crisis in Ogun State etc.

Communal conflict is said to be in place when the people no longer enjoy tranquility in their communities. According to Tadjoeddin (2002), "communal conflict may be defined as a conflict that occurs between different communal groups…". This shows that communal conflict is an inter group affair. It may occur between a village and another, a kindred and another or in other communal groupings. It is in line with this that Horowitz (2000) saw communal conflict as "a situation where violence is perpetrated along ethnic lines and victims are based on ethnic group membership".

It is important to state however, that communal conflicts can either be inter-ethnic or intra-ethnic. Communal conflict can as well toe interest lines by certain classes in the community or communities. In the view of Izugbara, Ugal, and Ukwayi (2003), "competition for access to and control of socially valued environmental and economic goods such as land, water resources, and economic trees is responsible for many of the communal clashes in Nigeria". Adesina (2015) and Akpeti (2005) consequently held the same opinion on the role of socially valued economic goods in driving conflict.

In the view of Karl (2006) "communal violence and conflict could be seen as violence that involves groups with permanent or semi-permanent armed militias that do not involve the government". In addition to this debate Warren (1998) observed that communal conflict arises over the production and consumption of goods, socialization, social control, and social participation. This by implication means that communal conflict is a product of socio-economic relation within, between or among communities.

From the foregoing, it can be deduced that communal conflict is rooted in tribal, ethnic and kinship background which revolves around economic interest. Secondly it is based on group interest, religion, language, sects etc.

According to Ikurekong et al (2012) "the foundation of the present stage of communal conflict in Nigeria could be said to be the offshoot of civil war". However, some other people don't agree with this because conflicts especially at the communal level in the post-civil war Nigeria has been closely linked to communal factors which cannot be traced to the civil war. In fact, communal conflicts in Nigeria have been accentuated most times by the struggle for land and economic goods between or within communal groupings.

This internal conflict and violence have become a serious plague that had eaten deep into the fabrics of the economy and leaving the people with little or no food. It is in line with this that Banjo (1998) said "there is hardly a year without a major violent conflict in Nigeria". So, communal conflicts have seemed to be on the rise in Nigeria in recent years. That is why Osunbi (2006) argued that in countries of traditional stability communal conflict is becoming an increasing factor. In Africa we have seen countries like Sudan, Kenya, Rwanda, Egypt among others suffer communal conflicts in different dimensions.

Food Security:

Food security encompasses every strategy that makes food available and accessible to people at every point in time. This argument is widened by Amartya Sen (1981), he viewed food security as an 'absence of starvation'. The opposite of food security is food insecurity. From the view of World Food Forum (2001) "food security refers to the people's right to define their own policies and strategies to sustainable production, distribution, and consumption of food that guarantees the right to food for the entire population". In support of this, FAO (1996) argues that "food security is a situation when all people at all times have physical and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food to meet their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life". This means, for any society to be described as food secure, people in such societies must have the physical ability, the mental ability and the money to purchase food or to produce food for consumption. MayaTech (2010) observed that food is nutritious to people and animals and must be available and accessible at all times.

In the foregoing, it should be noted that food security does not only end in food production but access to already produced food and foodstuffs. In an attempt to corroborate this, FAO (2007) associated food security with "people being able to obtain the food they need for an active and healthy life".

Generally, food security means that people must have choices as regards the food they want to eat at any point in time. Food being one of the basic needs of man has to be made available and accessible to every human being at all times irrespective of the environment where people inhabit. Justifying this, Johnston in Sambe et al (2013) contended that food security is "the situation which exists when all people at all-time have affordable access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food…" Omeje and Ogbu (2015) supportably summarized food security as having to do with food availability, food access and food utilization. Therefore, the scholarly views on food security above present us with three variables that define food security to include availability, access and utilization of food at all time by people.

Food security is an essential dimension to sustainable development. It is a common knowledge that the quality of food a people eat reflects the quality of their lives.

Concerns about food security are traced back to the Hot Springs Conference of Food and Agriculture in 1943, after which the issue has undergone various redefinitions. As noted by UN (1975) "every man, woman and child has the inalienable right to be free from hunger and malnutrition in order to develop fully and maintain their physical and mental faculties. Accordingly, the eradication of hunger is a common objective of all countries of the international community, especially of the developed countries and others in a position to help".

The Food and Agricultural Organization (2008) identified dimensions of understanding food security as follows: 1.Physical Availability of Food

2.Economic and Physical access to Food

3.Food Utilization

4.Stability of the other three dimensions over time: Even if your food intake is adequate today, you are still food insecure if you have inadequate access to food on periodic basis. Adverse weather conditions,

political instability, communal conflicts, or economic factors (unemployment, rising food prices) may have an impact on your food security status.

For food security objectives to be achieved, all the four dimensions must be fulfilled simultaneously. This is supported by Toit and Ramonayi (2011), "food security has three dimensions namely food availability, food access and food use". This by implication means that nations and countries must have sufficient amount of food available on a consistence basis both at the household level and the wider society. According to Food and Agricultural Organization (1996), "food security is a situation where all people at all times have physical or economic access to sufficient safe and nutritious food to meet their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life". In support of this, Mc Harry, Scott and Green (2002) described food security as both access to supply of food, and to the entitlement of food (i.e. the financial and human ability to obtain food). This focuses on people's capacity to eat whatever they need for their diet at any point in time. Food is delicate and should be made readily available and accessible at all times.

More so, when people are not food secure, they are simply food insecure. That is why World Food Programme (2006) in an attempt to understand food security identified two general type of food insecurity which is:

1. Chronic Food Insecurity: which is long term food insecurity where people are unable to meet their minimum food requirement over a sustained period of time. It results from extended periods of poverty, lack of assets, communal conflicts, and inadequate financial resource. This type of food insecurity can be overcome through long term measures to address poverty such as education, credits and as well government resolving communal conflicts at early stages.

2. Transitory Food Insecurity: is short term food insecurity where there is a sudden drop in the ability to produce or access enough food to maintain a good nutritional status. This is caused by variations and fluctuations in annual food production, food access, food prices and household incomes. This type of food insecurity can be tackled through early warning capacity and safety net programs.

In support of the above, FAO (2008) argued "the concept of seasonal food security lies between chronic and transitional food security".

Food security is not only availability of food but also include a wide range of food choice at all time for the people. Linking it to human right, Idabacha (1993) described food security as the right of everyone to be free from hunger.

A sign of obvious threat to food security is that, sometimes during the year, the food intake of household members is reduced and their normal eating patterns are disrupted because the household lacks money and other food resources, (Eme 2009).

From the foregoing, food security as a concept emphasizes the availability and accessibility and use of food by individual's to meet their daily dietary needs all seasons.

2 | THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Both the Relational theory and Structural Functionalist theory are used to provide an understanding of both the causes of communal conflicts and the consequent effect on food security in Nigeria. The relational theory was first of used in Physics by Gottfried Willheim Leibniz in the year 1715 according to Jan Futse (2014). He used the relational theory as a framework to understand motion by arguing that the positions and other properties of objects are only meaningful relative to other objects. He said that a space does not exist unless there are objects in it. In essence, Leibniz is of the view that in physics, objects exist in relation to other objects. This means that objects do not exist in a vacuum.

However, scholars of social science have adopted the theory in the explanation of social conflict. One of the earliest scholars to adopt the relational theory into social science is Silverstine and Demick (1994), as seen in their essay titled *Towards an Organizational-relational Model of Open Adoption.* Here they tried to know the role or advisability of closed communication system and open communication system in organizations in order to avoid organizational conflict. Another scholar, Simpson (2014) adopted the theory in understanding conflicts arising from inter-group relationships.

Relational theory here attempts to provide explanation to violent conflicts between groups by exploring the sociological, political, economic, religious and historical relationship between such groups. The belief is that cultural and value differences as well as group interests all influence relationships between groups in various ways. Conflict can only exist where there is an established relationship between groups or individuals. Conflicts can also grow out from past history of conflicts between groups in a particular society. The argument of relational theory is that since conflict is an interpersonal and intergroup phenomenon, conflicts only arise when a person or a group goes into any form of relationship with another. So conflict arises when there is a clash of interests between parties who are in a relationship.

According to Faleti (2006) cited in Alozieuwa (2015), "such history of conflict between groups over a particular resource leads to development of negative stereotypes, racial intolerance and discrimination". In the view of Alozieuwa (2015), "the fact that 'others' are perceived as different makes us feel they are entitled to less or are inferior by reason of values". This "we" and "others" notion to a significant extent disrupts communication between communal groups, and to that extent, twists the perceptions that such communal groups have about one another.

On the other hand, the structural functionalist theory as postulated by Emilie Durkheim sees the society as a structure with component parts which must work together for social progress. That means, if a part or sector of the society is affected the entire society is affected. According to this theory, if communal conflict arises, other component units of the society such as agriculture, education, transportation, commerce, food production, food availability and access and others are also affected.

The communal conflict between Ezza-Ezillo communities is as a result of a relationship between two communal groups of incompatible interests. As can be drawn from Usen (2008), existence and endurance of conflict can best be explained by social, political and economic relationship between parties. Some of the key elements of relationship between communities such as political, historical, religious issues are germane in Ezza-Ezillo conflict.

As a result of the conflict the entire social structure of the waring communities and Nigeria at large has been affected and has led to food shortage, hunger, poverty.

3 | CAUSES OF THE EZZA-EZILLO CONFLICT

Economic Factors : the high value placed on land has made it a conflict factor in Nigeria and Africa at large. As noted by Oji and Eme (2012), "studies reveal that a reasonable number of communal conflicts in Africa and Nigerian communities are traceable to land scarcity, territorial disputes and competition for the use of land resources". In support of this Uchendu (1966) noted that land even holds a cultural significance to the people of Africa especially the Igbo people. In his words, "land means many things to the Igbo. It is the domain of earth goddess, a burial place for the ancestors, a place to make live on and make a living". It is the economic, religious and cultural value placed on land that communities struggle for territories which brings communal conflict. And the effect of such conflicts is that it creates food scarcity. According to Francis et al (2013) "the major cause of communal conflict in Nigeria is boundary dispute since the boundary area is becoming a very critical factor for agricultural production". This argument is supported by Goshit (2004) who observed that communal conflicts is fueled by increasing boundary disputes and this is compounding the problem of food insecurity in Nigeria. Dunumoye (2003) held, "the cause of communal conflict is land dispute and territorial disputes". And consequently, Akpaeti (2005) noted as well that the cause of communal conflict is land dispute.

However, conflicts over land are antithetical to allocation and use of land based resource, by implication threatens food security. For instance, the Aguleri-Umuleri conflict in Anambra State, Akaeze and Osoo Eda conflict in Ebonyi State, Tiv-Jukun conflicts in Taraba State are plausible examples-(Ebonyi State Government White Paper, 2005).

It is worthy of note that the Ezza-Ezillo conflict is a land based communal conflict. There is a land struggle between the two communities which has led to the loss of many lives. Ugbo et al (2008) in Oji

et al (2014) observed that Ezza-Ezillo people came from Ezza South and Ezza North on invitation of the Ezillo people to settle a land dispute between them and their Ngbo neighbour at Egu-Echara in the early 1930s. Ever since the end of the dispute, the Ezza people continued to live amongst their host community, Ezillo. Meanwhile the relationship between the two groups has been that of conflict as it has degenerated into indigene settler dispute.

The Indigene and Settler Stereotype: Nigeria is an ethnically divided country and contestation arise from who an indigene is and who an indigene is not, and has contributed to communal conflicts in Nigeria. The indigene and settler notion breeds what can at best be described as identity crisis. Osghae and Suberu (2005) define identity as "any group attributes that provides recognition, definitions, reference affinity, coherence and meaning for individual members of the group acting individually or collectively". And as a matter of fact this values shape the attitude and behavior of the community towards settler communities. In support of this Egwu (1999) noted that the settlers import their culture and tradition into their new-community to create discomfort for the host communities". It is such that creates the identity crisis of who owns what between indigenes and settlers in the communities

4 | SCIO-CULTURAL FACTORS:

Reverence to traditional and cultural values such as deities, shrines and ancestors characterize the African society. Otite (2001) observed that supernatural beings are part of Nigerian thought. Just as noted by Oji and Eme ((2012), "the Ezillo attributes the denigration of their cultural and traditional heritage by Ezza as some of the causes of dispute between them. These include flouting of new yam festival rules- bringing new yam into Ezillo market by Ezza before the cultural rites of new yam in Ezillo". Some other socio-cultural factors explained to be triggering the conflict include fishing in sacred ponds, desecration of the chieftaincy institution as evident in the beating of the traditional ruler of Ezillo. Therefore, people go into conflict to preserve and protect their socio-cultural values.

Political Factors: Politics is known for its importance in the social life of people, politics and conflict go hand-in-hand. Horowitz (2008) noted that "politics exist because conflicts exist". When people feel politically marginalized, conflict becomes inevitable. Ofuebe (1999) contended that "conflict is not so much about the scarcity of political resources than it is about perception of injustice, inequities-marginalization". So when a party to a conflict uses a leverage of political power to plunder the property of the other party, conflict is triggered.

However, some other scholars have given other view on causes of communal conflict. Osaghae (1995) sees conflict as largely ethnic or identity problem. Meanwhile mounting evidence from various researches (Ihonvbere and Shaw 1988, Omoweh, 2001, 1998) suggests or holds that violence and conflicts in Nigeria are far from being ethnic or identity crisis. That means that outside land, there are also some other factors that can lead to communal conflicts.

Ibeanu and Mba (2011), Dunomoye (2003) and Oji et al (2014) all agree that political boundaries occasioned by colonialism is responsible for communal conflicts in post-colonial Nigeria.

5 | EFFECTS OF THE CONFLICT ON FOOD SECURITY

The feedbacks gathered from respondents in the waring communities and from the multiple secondary sources consulted in this work, it was found that the Ezza-Ezillo conflict affected food security in Nigeria in the following ways:

1.During the conflict, water could not be distributed to other parts of Ebonyi state from the Ezillo Water Plant. Since water belongs to the six classes of food and also an essential item in crop cultivation, livestock breeding and food preparation, the lack of water at this period led to food scarcity.

2.It was also discovered that the Ezza-Ezillo conflict led to a wanton destruction of farmlands and livestock thereby increasing the rate of hunger in Ebonyi State and Nigeria at large.

3.Human movement and productive activities such as transportation of food items and other commodities were hampered in the affected areas during the

conflicts.

4. More so, most of the lands in the area could not be cultivated because people were rather running for their lives than engaging in agriculture.

5. It was also gathered that most of the victims who died in the conflict were farmers. So this led to a decline in the labour force needed for sufficient food production. Ojo (2015) observed, "not only does communal conflict affect food production and food distribution but also destroy the labour force of a particular community". In the case of the Ezza-Ezillo conflict Enuke (2011) identified forty-one (41) individuals killed in the conflict amongst whom were farmers.

6 | RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings of this work, the following recommendations are therefore made:

i) The National Boundary Commission (NBC) in collaboration with different community leaders should take time to trace, mark and establish traditional communal boundaries to prevent future clashes.

ii) In order to manage existing communal conflicts so that food security is not affected, the government should timely deploy adequate security personnel to affected areas so as to stop violence.

iii) The government should also constitute peace committees to mediate between waring communities. Such peace committees should be comprised of government representatives, community leaders and some members from the affected villages or communities.

IV) Inter-communal games and sports should be organized between communities in order to promote the culture of cooperation.

V) The National Orientation Agency should educate communities against communal stereotypes.

7 | CONCLUSION

This study engaged in a detailed study of communal conflicts and their effects on food security in Nigeria using the Ezza-Ezillo. From the feedback of the respondents interviewed in conjunction with the series of existing literature consulted, the causes of the conflict point at such factors as land disputes, indigene-settler stereotypes, cultural (socioeconomic) and political factors as the source of the conflict. Consequently, the respondents mainly noted that food security was affected by the conflict through disruption is food distribution, water reticulation, killing of farmers and destruction of farmlands. This view is corroborated by conflict Enuke (2011) as he took time to list the names of people, farms and food banks destroyed during the conflict. Consequently, advises the government and policy makers on how to prevent food insecurity through proper management of communal conflicts by making valuable .

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