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 conflict have resulted into destructions of lives and properties and internal displacement of the citizen. The conflict have affected the relationship between the two ethnic groups who had been living together cordially. Previous studies on the conflict have not given proper attention on socio-economic perspective on the conflict. This paper present the root and remote causes of 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. Interview method was used to illicit the opinion of various demographics of both ethnic groups. Finding 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. Towards peaceful co-existence Nigerian government should implement the report of the previous committees, proper sharing formula between the two ethnic group and need to address the issue of citizenship rights constitutionally.

Keywords: Ethnicity and identity, Ethnic conflict, Human development

INTRODUCTION

Tiv-Jukun conflict has 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 have resulted into destructions of lives and properties and internal displacement of the citizen. The conflict have affected the relationship between the two ethnic groups who had been living together cordially. There has been contention on citizenship between them. In broad terms, the Jukun claim 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, etc. The Tiv therefore say they are fighting for equal rights which they believe they are entitled to as indigenes of Taraba state. For over the years, the communities have found increasing difficulty in living together peaceably, these two tribes have been at war and like the Israeli 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 give leverage to Political polarization which gradually turned into physical segregation, as violence has intensified in Taraba, an increasing number of Tiv have fled into neighboring Benue state. The Tiv outnumber 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 to the Jukun. Towards peaceful co-existence Nigerian government should implement the report of the previous committees, proper sharing formula between the two ethnic group and need to address the issue of citizenship rights constitutionally.

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 custom and food, but also includes sharing and identifying with the unique experience of a group. Nagel, (1994) adds that ethnic identity consist of internal and external aspect 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).
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 cause 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 exist 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), overlord of (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 & Wolff, 2009) argued that, inter-ethnic conflicts are mostly caused by feelings of superiority by one ethnic group (mostly the indigenes) overs 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 however within community this or ethnic identity play significant role towards 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.

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, should exhibit a high level of literacy and good life expectancy. To ensure human development and growth (United Nation 2003) declare fundamental human right 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 low budget in these countries. On the other hand countries with low level of development have less capacity to improving institutions, increasing productivity and hampers growth rate are at risk of conflict (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 are of pivotal concern. Since the end of the Civil War in 1970, Nigeria has experienced conflicts of varying proportions and origins of both inter-ethnic and intra-ethnic respectively. 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 Nigeria civil war of 1970 funds meant for meaningful development was spent on national reconstructions (Luckham, Ahmed, Muggah, & White, 2001). In the crisis zones schools, hospitals and business sectors were closed down hence low human development.

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. Instrument involved semi-structured questions administered to the respondent by 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 were interviewed. 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 following themes emerged with land issue, fear of domination, citizenship and political positions. There were different opinions among respondents whether the land factor is the main cause of the conflict. The majority of the respondents interviewed, mostly Jukun interviewees 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).

While another Tiv respondent gave his view as 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).

On analysis of the two strand of opinion on the major causes of Tiv Jukun conflict. While most Tiv respondent claim that there is enough land for the two ethnic group to farm, land issue is used as a cover for the fear of domination by
Tiv ethnic group. On the issue of availability of land enough for both tribes majority of the Jukuns claimed ownership. For example

* A jukan 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 respondent lamented on indigenship / settler issues due to difficulties encounter 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 indigenship / settler issue to apply to all citizens irrespective of the ethnic tribes.

Analyzing the three main causes of the conflict, the land resources, fear of domination and indigenship from the perspective of horizontal inequality. Group are easily mobilized to violence by leaders on the basis of political, social and economic inequality (Stewart, 2011). Each group want 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 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 position are linked with a power to attract project to their side and an opportunity to employing of its membership. The fear of domination has reflected through 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.

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, 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, non-indigenes will only tear the country apart rather than join 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 humanness 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.

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 in another part of the world like USA, Canada, France, etc. Diversity has been managed well to produce socio-economic and political atmosphere that has 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 states that Nigerians have rights of residence, have access to social benefits such as employment, participate in politic, health care services, education and scholarships and own land to farm. By so doing it will lessen the tension amongst the various ethnic groups that are sparsely spread around almost all towns and cities of the country. Land matter must also be addressed, in a situation where some are denied access to land because they are perceived to be visitors or non-indigenes that can tear the country apart rather than uniting the country, this is where the role of traditional leaders is important. 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 worsen by the weak nature of the Land Use Act of 1979 in the 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).

REFERENCES


