

NAVIGATING COMMUNAL CHALLENGES FOR SUSTAINED FOOD SECURITY IN AKWA IBOM STATE, NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

The escalation of communal disputes over natural resources, particularly land, has significantly impacted the state of peace and food security in Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria. This study investigated the dynamics of communal conflicts and their effects on food production and distribution in Akwa Ibom State. Findings underscored the insecurities' adverse effects on food accessibility, availability, and stability. Despite governmental efforts to enhance food security through farmer empowerment and conflict resolution mechanisms, challenges persist. The study advocates for strengthening local conflict resolution mechanisms, enforcing legal frameworks, and improving agricultural practices through infrastructure investment, training, and technological integration. Additionally, educational campaigns are recommended to foster communal understanding and mitigate the impacts of disputes on food security.

Keywords: Communal disputes, Conflict, Food security, Management, SDG.

Introduction

Conflict is ubiquitous in human societies, manifesting in various forms globally. Nigeria, like many other regions, grapples with several types of intergroup conflicts, native-settler identity, farmers' herders' conflict, ethno religious conflict communal and land disputes. (Jeong 2008). More often than not, these are as a result of competition for scarce resources in human society (Ikezue&Ezeah, 2007). In Akwa Ibom State according to Akpaeti (2005), one of the causes of conflict is land disputes. A release from the Department of State Services (DSS) cited by the Institute for Peace and Conflict Resolution (IPCR, 2002) noted that since the creation of Akwa Ibom State from Cross River State in 1987, several bloody communal clashes have occurred. For instance, Oku Iboku and Ikot Offiong, Mbiakong and Ifianyong Usuk, Ngwa and Ikot Umo Essien in 1996 to 1997, Ikporom communal conflicts in Ini Local Government Area and Edem Aban, as well as between Usaka Ukwu in Akwa Ibom State and Azunchia Ariam in Abia State.

These conflict fuel by institutional, economic, political factors and poor boundary adjustment have displace persons from their piscatorial activities and have had grave consequences for food production, accessibility and security. Food ranks first in the hierarchy of man's needs in any society (Olsson, Greenberg, Bergman and Wysujack 2006). It is the nucleus in which every individual's survival anchors. One eats food to live and to have the required energy to do work and contribute to the economy. One can do without adequate shelter, and enough clothing but no one can do without food (Roman, Sánchez-Siles & Siegrist, 2017). Hence, it is always asserted that food is a frontline basic need of human beings (Daniel, 2008).

Despite governmental efforts to address these challenges occasioned by communal conflicts, violence displacement, communal tensions persist, necessitating a deeper understanding and sustainable solutions to promote peace and food security in Akwa Ibom State. This study aims to investigate the complex dynamics of communal disputes and their impacts on food security, with the goal of proposing enduring solutions to mitigate the situation.

The Literature: Communal disputes

Land conflicts can be understood as misuse, restriction, or dispute over property rights to land (Wehreman, 2005). According to Horowitz (2000) communal disputes refers to the situation where violence is perpetrated across ethnic lines and victims are based on ethnic group's membership. To Horowitz, communal violence may also be called ethnic violence. According to this understanding, communal dispute ranges from Muslim-Christian conflict in Northern Nigeria, Black and White conflict in United State and apartheid South-Africa, Anti-Chinese riots in Indonesia, Tiv-Jukun crisis in Nigeria and Shia-Sunni troubles in Pakistan.

Raleigh and Kniveton (2010) also conceptualized communal violence as a form of organized violence conducted between informal ethnic militias. Such conflicts are primarily over local issues and occur between traditional hostile parties. It exhibits spatial and temporal trends which is rooted ethnic competition, resource access and wealth acquisition. This dispute overall can take various forms including pitched battles and attacks on unsuspecting civilians. In the conception of Kahl (2006) communal dispute could lead to a violence that involves groups with permanent or semi-permanent armed militias that does not involve the government. However, communal violence can often escalate to include government forces when it is perceived that government is supporting tacitly or otherwise one of the communal groups at the expense of the other. The above definitions and conceptualizations point to the fact that communal dispute is a form of violence that is rooted in ethnic background of individuals and groups. It is based on indicators such as tribe, race, religion, sect, language etc

Communal disputes have been persistent throughout human history, spanning from ancient times to contemporary society, often arising from conflicts over land ownership and resource control. These disputes, which occur between contiguous communities, involve conflicting interests in property rights, land use, and resource management. Mostly, communal disputes have significant implications for food security as it disrupts food production, transportation, and distribution channels. Studies have shown a correlation between communal violence and food insecurity in Africa, highlighting the detrimental impact of conflicts on agricultural productivity and livelihoods (Abbass, 2012). Examples from various regions illustrate the destructive consequences of communal disputes, underscoring the urgent need for sustainable conflict resolution mechanisms to mitigate their effects on food security and societal stability (Moritz, 2010). Sambe, Avanger, & Alakali (2013) painted the following scenario: Communal disputes are enemies of food security. The conflict disrupts food production through physical destruction and plundering of crops and livestock, harvest and food reserves.

Communal disputes also prevent and discourage farming and interrupt the lives of transportation through which food exchanges and even humanitarians relief takes place.

Food Security

Food security is a multidimensional concept encompassing availability, accessibility, affordability, suitability, and sustainability of food for all individuals at all times. It ensures that people have reliable access to sufficient, safe, and nutritious food to meet their dietary needs and preferences for an active and healthy life. This involves both physical access to food through production, storage, or imports, and economic access through purchasing power in markets. At the household level, food security implies adequate access to food that is safe, culturally acceptable, and nutritionally adequate for each person's needs. Food security may be defined as access by all people at all times to adequate food for active life (Kigutha, 1994; Nyariki and Wiggins, 1997).

In support of this, FAO (1996) argues that "food security takes place in a situation that all the people at all times have physical and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food to meet their dietary and food preferences for an active and healthy life". This means for any society to be described as food secure, people in such community must have the physical capability mental ability, and financial ability to purchase and produce necessary food for consumption. However, numerous challenges threaten food security, including communal disputes over land and resources. Communal conflicts disrupt agricultural activities, leading to destruction of crops and livestock, displacement of farmers, and disruption of food supply chains. This can result in food shortages, increased food prices, and reduced investment in agriculture, ultimately undermining food security, especially for vulnerable populations.

Maya Tech (2010) observed that food is nutritious to people and animals and must be available and accessible at all times. For food security objectives to be achieved, 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 sufficient amount of food available on a consistence basis both at the household level and in society

At the national level, food security exists when all people at all times have the physical and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food to meet their dietary needs and food preferences for active and healthy life, while at the household level, food security implies physical and economic access to food that is adequate in terms of quantity, safety and cultural accessibility, to meet each person's need (Ingawa, 2002). Ibeno LGA has been reportedly exposed to oil spills. Fishing communities have protested the criminality of youth. Several people were reportedly killed during this period, including villagers, in October 2012, a violent land dispute between the Ibeno community and another in neighbouring Eket LGA led to the deaths of five people and the destruction of dozens of homes, displacing several families.

This conflict situation of this kind does not support absolute food security. According to FAO (2010) food insecurity refers to the consequences of inadequate consumption of nutritious food,

Insecurity for 2010 assesses that nearly 1 billion people are estimated to be undernourished, representing almost 16 percent of the population of developing Countries. And the report complements the usual assessment of food security and nutrition with projections of what the world may look like in 2030 if trends of the last decade continue. The projection shows that the world is not on track to achieve zero Hunger by 2030 and, despite some progress; most indicators are also not on tractor meet global nutrition targets. The food and nutritional value is likely to deteriorate further due to the health and socio-economic impacts of the covid-19 pandemic.

The State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World 2017 (SOFI) has revealed that global hunger is on the rise again after declining for more than two decades. Global hunger raised from 777 million in 2015 to 815 million people in 2016. Food security is not just merely the availability of foodstuff to feed the populace, it is not an increase in the production of food items alone. A nation can produce enough food and maintain adequate reserves from which it can feed its present and future generations at affordable prices (Daniel, 2008). In the same vein, Momoh (2008), maintained that food security exists when all people at all times have access to safe nutritious food to maintain a healthy and active life.

Despite efforts to address food insecurity, global hunger is on the rise, with millions of people experiencing undernourishment and malnutrition. Achieving food security requires not only increasing food production but also addressing underlying issues such as poverty, inequality, and environmental degradation. Investments in rural infrastructure, market development, and agricultural technologies are crucial for boosting agricultural productivity and income, particularly in rural areas where agriculture is the main source of livelihood.

Also Gahukar, (2011) observed that security is best assured when food is locally produced and made available on a continuous basis at an affordable price (maximizing stability in flow of supplies), regardless of climate and other variations. But most farmers in rural areas of developing nations lack the capacity to produce food, making them vulnerable to food insecurity situations.

The communal dispute between Eket and Ibeno in Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria, can potentially affect food security in the state. This is because the two communities are agriculturally productive areas, with many farmers relying on their lands for food production. The conflict has led to the displacement of farmers and the destruction of farmlands, which can lead to a reduction in food production. Furthermore, the conflict can also cause a disruption in food supply chains, as farmers may find it challenging to transport their produce to markets due to security concerns.

This can result in a shortage of food in markets, leading to an increase in food prices, which can negatively affect food security, especially for vulnerable populations. The communal dispute can also discourage investment in agriculture in the affected areas, as investors may be reluctant to invest in an environment of insecurity. In Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria, the communal dispute between Eket and Ibeno communities poses a significant threat to food security. These agriculturally productive areas have been affected by violence and displacement, leading to disruptions in food production and supply chains. Without

sustainable solutions to address communal conflicts and promote agricultural development, food insecurity is likely to persist, jeopardizing the well-being of the population and hindering economic growth.

This can result in a reduction in the development of agriculture and agribusiness in the state, leading to a long-term negative impact on food security.

Theoretical Framework

The Marxist theory has its roots in the works of Karl Marx (1818 - 1883) and his friend Frederick Engels. The starting point for the analysis of society is determined mainly by social production. That is what is produced, how it is produced, and how the product is shared. The theory, therefore, insists that society is composed of contradictions and conflicts over scarce resources by the various competing groups. These contradictions are a result of the competition and struggle for power and economic resources. This competition and struggle over resources have made conflict inevitable in society.

The Marxist theory emphasizes interest rather than norms and values as being central in the discussion of conflict in society. This conflict is seen as a normal aspect of society's life rather than an abnormal occurrence. Competition over resources is often the source of conflict. Three levels of theory are (a) society is composed of different groups that compete for resources (b) There is a continual power struggle between social groups and they pursue their interest. (c) Social groups will use their resources to their advantage in pursuit of their goals. The conflict theory has been adopted for this study because of its recognition of the struggle by the various communities in Ibeno and Eket Local Government Area of Akwa Ibom State for political and economic control. It is the competition and the struggle that breeds communal disputes and conflicts.

The perspective, therefore, sees communal conflicts as resulting from the contradictions inherent in the course of material production. To understand communal conflicts, Magubane (1996) stressed the role of social structure and urges special consideration to: The material basis of the society, the nature of the social system, the political organization, the structure of social consciousness, the ideological and socio-psychological orientation of the members of the society, views of the ruling class and various social groups, and rivalry between various groupings within the ruling circles. It is in the contention of the Marxist approach that communal conflicts should be examined and analyzed using historical materialism.

To the Marxists, ethnic formation is a historical entity that encompasses and penetrates all social formation including class structures. It is therefore misleading to assume that communal conflicts operate independently. They operate alongside economic, political, and religious variables. Keen (1997) asserts that economic motives are the primary factor behind warfare and violence. To him, economic goals are central and conflict may highly affect food security.

Drawing from the above, communal conflict is the result of economic competition between ethnically or socially differentiated segments of the working class or ethnically differentiated traders, customers, or farmers. Horowitz (1998) asserts that elite competition and the action

of ethnic or group entrepreneurs drive communal conflict and affect food security. Elites manipulate ethnic identities in their quest for power through the construction of communal conflict.

Factors Affecting Food Security

Global data suggested that 800 million people around the world were considered food insecure in 2012 – 2014. (Paulsen 2015). Multiple factors are responsible for food insecurity worldwide. According to the World Food Program (WFP), food insecurity mostly affects people living below the poverty line especially due to economic factors (Osmani 2016). Food security can be mainly influenced by: Low per-capital income, Low and unequal distribution of income, Poor and highly unstable growth performance especially in agriculture, Unemployment, and underemployment, Low and declining farm size, Inequalities in land distribution, Low land utilization, Social discrimination, Population growth, market access, Food taboos: certain restrictions in the food consumption due to cultural and social norms.

Poverty, Climate-induced insecurity: climate change, deforestation, landslide, declining soil fertility, Political instability, Poor, marginalized, ethnic group & lower caste groups, High maternal and infant mortality. The major constraint to the attainment of food security in the study area is high food prices due to an insufficient supply of food produced as a result of the dispute affecting the two communities (Ibeno and Eket) in Akwa Ibom State. The food security status of Nigeria will be viewed from the standpoint demand, supply, food importation, food prices, GNP per capita and intake. As reported by Egbutah, (2009) and Adebayo, (2010). Nigeria domestic food production though increased annually fails short of food demand.

Way Out of the Challenges

Agricultural Development Projects which aimed at enhancing the National Special Food Security programs innovative for low cost approaches both technical and institutional to improving the productivity and sustainability of agricultural system with the ultimate objective of contributing to better livelihoods for poor farmers on a sustainable basis and the National Fadama Development Projects (Fadama II and III) which were aimed at addressing some of the factors that militate against the full realization of the potential benefit of agricultural production activities. (Orefi, 2012).

Operation Feed the Nation: Operation Feed the Nation (OFN) was introduced by the former head of state and president, Olusegun Obasanjo in 1976. It was saddled with the responsibility of increasing the food production capacity and to tackle nutritional challenges among Nigerians; and second increase the engagement of youths in agriculture, facilitating knowledge from institutions of higher learning to sites of food production, the farmland.

Agricultural Development Project (ADP): Following the 1962-1968 development plans, ADP was launched in 1972 to increase food production, to raise the income of small-scale farmers. The experiment which began Ftintua (1974), Gusau (1974) and Gombe (1974) blossomed into having ADP in each state of the country including the federal capital territory' ADP system had been rated the most viable Agricultural Development in Nigeria. But today it is sad to

note that ADPs have become shadows of past. Auta and Dafwang, (2010) have attributed cause of this to include poor funding, inadequate staffing and lack of support Government. They documented that 6.3.6% of the ADPs have weak or *weak* funding status.

Green Revolution: The Green Revolution programme was introduced in, 1980 by formal president Shehu Shagari to succeed operation feed the nation was intended to ensure self-sufficiency in food production and to is modern technology introduced the Nigerian agricultural sector, largely the introduction of modern inputs such as high yielding varieties of seeds, farm tools and tractors. The programme encompassed a wide range of projects to the nation's agricultural development. This included the second River Development Authorities, the Ministry of Water Resources, National Production Programme, and the Agro Service centres. Improving production was a major focus of the programme. However, the same provisions were also criticized as growth opportunities for wealthy investors without relief for small farmers.

Impact of Communal Dispute on food security in Akwa Ibom State

It is common knowledge that every actions or in-actions come with many consequences, either for good or bad. In likewise manner, the land and communal disputes that have engulfed the Mbono Nnito Ibeno and Ulok Ulok people and their Esit Eket neighbors' people over time is in itself, not without grave implications for both groups as it should be noted that growth and development are hardly recorded wherever there is conflict. What then are these implications? Before going further to discuss these implications, it must be pointed out that the implications of the various land disputes on the Mbono Nnito Ibeno and Ulok Ulok people and their Esit Eket neighbors cut across every aspect that had before colonial and post-colonial times.

First, land and communal dispute between both groups have greatly affected negatively, their trade and commercial activities. In pre-colonial times, both groups, as historical studies and oral traditions have shown, interacted so much in economic terms as no group is self-sufficient, hence the need to trade with the other group for vital basic needs for continuous survival. However, the nature and scope of the groups' involvement with one another in the aspect of trade and commerce had to a large extent, reduced owing to these protracted conflicts that have characterized their relations in post-colonial times. This is regrettably so since it has become common for movement at some point within the various territories of both groups under discourse to be a source of worry (Udo 2015).

When tension is high, someone from one side could be slaughtered on the other side, on the assumption that the victim is an enemy. In most cases, the victim of such an act might not even be aware that he has crossed into the "enemies" zone because of how inter-woven the Mbono Nnito Ibeno and Ulok Ulok People and their Esit Eket neighbors had long lived side-by-side. The onslaught between both groups as a result of the various boundary skirmishes, this movement has been cautiously reduced for fear of losing their lives. The implication is that trade across local markets in both communities has not been cordial.

Conflict Situation over Akoiyak land, according to their elders in the past, led to the killing of people, especially women who either went to the farm to harvest non-timber products to earn a decent living for themselves. This harassment usually happens during the farming season

when land preparation commences, because of this, women have always been victims of the situation. To reduce, their husbands always follow them to farm during the planting season, which has not been easy for them to cope with their businesses. The situation is not always every year but one cannot determine when it will happen but they are always prepared for this situation when the planting season is approaching.

These conflicts always result from different value systems, aggressive competition for land, water, and political, resources, and the unhealthy completion of some community leaders. There is hardly a year where there is no major violent community conflict in Nigeria. (Banjo 1998, Obasanjo 1999 and Etuk et al, 2006) due to the desertion of several settlements and the consequent abandoning of economic activities across the two L.G.As, the conflict has left impacts and introduced dynamics that will likely affect income-generating activities, and food security for a long time, as fear exist among the people. The poverty level is soaring towards disturbing dimensions as marriages were being broken in households where men were unable to finance household needs as expected of them in the social systems. The Focus group reported re-surging cases of cultists, militancy, piracy, crime, child trafficking, and labour amongst women, girls, boys, and youth in displaced communities.

Recommendations

Local Government should strengthen community-based conflict resolution mechanisms so as to foster community participation and engagement in resolving communal disputes and equally encourage the utilization of traditional and customary conflict resolution methods, as they often hold local knowledge and cultural significance;

The Government should enhance legal frameworks, develop and enforce clear legal frameworks that will address communal disputes, land ownership, and resource conflicts. These frameworks should be inclusive, transparent, and accessible to all community members;

There should be improvement in agricultural practices and productivity by investing in infrastructure, training, and use of technology tools and implements to enhance productivity so as to promote sustainable farming practices. This will help reduce the vulnerability of food production to communal disputes and other disruptions; and The government should assist in conducting awareness and educational campaigns/programs to promote understanding of communal disputes, their impact on food security, and the importance of peaceful conflict resolution. This can empower communities to prevent and address disputes effectively.

Implementing these recommendations will require collaborative efforts, resource allocations, and sustained commitment from all stakeholders involved. By addressing communal disputes effectively, Akwa Ibom State can create an environment that supports peaceful coexistence, protects food production, and improve food security for all its communities and beyond.

Conclusion

This research underscores the profound impact of communal disputes on food security in Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria. It elucidates the diverse factors contributing to communal conflicts, ranging from land ownership disputes to economic inequalities, cultural tensions, and

resource competition, all of which directly impede the availability and accessibility of food for local populations. By delving into various methods of communal dispute resolution, including traditional, customary, and formal legal systems, the study illuminates the strengths and limitations of these approaches.

In essence, this research underscores the intrinsic connection between communal dispute management and food security, underscoring the necessity of holistic approaches that tackle both social and economic dimensions. By promoting peaceful resolutions and equitable resource allocation, the study contributes to the prosperity and resilience of communities in Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria, paving the way for a more secure and sustainable food system.

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