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**CONFLICT AND DISTORTION IN RESOURCE  
UTILIZATION AND PEACE-BUILDING IN KOGI  
STATE, NIGERIA**

Mohammed Nasiru Ibrahim<sup>1</sup> & Abdullateef Ahmed<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Department of Political Science, Faculty of Social Sciences, Kogi State University, Anyigba, Nigeria. Correspondence: nasiruomoejuku@yahoo.com  
<sup>2</sup> Department of Geography and Environmental Studies, Faculty of Social Sciences, Kogi State University, Anyigba, Nigeria.

## **Abstract**

*Conflict always generates insecurity. Peace scholars recognise conflict as a non-economic factor that impacts negatively on economic growth and development. The conflict escalated by resource control is prevalent partly because of multiple and competing demands for resources. In Nigeria, various conflicts among interest groups in different parts of the country attract national discourse because they impact negatively on the nation's security. This study investigates the causes of conflict provoked by resources and the attendant peacebuilding efforts in Kogi State and the nation at large. The paper's main objective is to create a sustainable and peaceful way forward. Data were generated from primary and secondary sources through Key Informant Interviews (KII), and a structured questionnaire administered in six randomly-select local governments, namely: Abejukolo, Bagana, Bagaji, Akpacha, Icheke, and Ofeji. This study used Peacebuilding Theory. Qualitative and quantitative analyses were done. Findings reveal that conflict precipitates the destruction of human lives; causes humanitarian crises such as internally displaced persons (IDPs); creates extensive damage to physical and agrarian structures; causes disruption of psychological well-being; breakdown of law and order, among other negative outcomes. A major proposition of this study is that peace-building mechanisms should be instituted and managed by all stakeholders because non-state actors in conflict theatres sometimes allow grievances to smoulder because of fear, distrust, peer pressure, financial constraints, exclusion from certain conflict resolution procedures, or for strategic reasons.*

**Keywords:** Conflict, Distortion, Resource Utilization, Peace, Peace-Building.

## Introduction

Natural resource conflicts are disagreements and disputes over access to, control over and usage of natural resources such as forests, water, pastures and land. These conflicts often emerge because people have different usages for resources or want to manage them in different ways. Appelbaum et al 1998, cited by Osisoma (2004), define conflict as an interpersonal dynamic which is shaped by the internal and external environments of the parties involved, and is manifested in a process which affects group performance either functionally or dysfunctionally. Conflicts arise when two or more individuals, groups, communities, or nations pursue mutually exclusive or non-harmonious goals. Oftentimes, the underlying factors include scarcity of resources, clash of interests, the incongruence of values, standards and principles, and a perception of being displaced by other parties in pursuit of desired goals.

The predominant form of violent conflict involves wars by national armies (state actors) fighting each other (inter-state wars) to protect their sovereignty; fighting for independence, separation or political control (intra-state or civil wars). According to Okpaleke (2016), conflict is characterised by extreme aggression, economic disintegration and irrationality, social disruption and usually high mortality. At other times, the army fights non-state actors such as rebels, gangs and organized criminals that threaten the nation's peace. However, there has been a relative reduction in human carnage since the end of the cold war in the 1980s. Given the changing nature and cycles of conflict, the post-conflict phase is not always easy to identify, particularly when there is no peace agreement.

Conflicts can be intra-personal, intra-group, and intra-national. Conflict can reflect incompatible actions between contrasting groups or persons leading to interpersonal, intergroup or international conflicts. Many scholars have attributed conflicts to different causative factors such as the cultural/historical backdrop of nomadic pastoralism (Adogi, 2013). Others have also attributed the causes of conflicts to migration due to climate change, policy on land law and land resource control systems (Okpaleke, 2016). Disagreements often arise when these interests and needs are incompatible, or when the priorities of some user groups are not considered in policies,

programmes and projects. This usually causes conflicts of interest and it is inevitable in human communities.

In recent years, the scope and magnitude of natural resource conflicts have increased and intensified. Such conflicts often escalate into violence, cause environmental degradation, disrupt projects and undermine livelihoods. Acknowledging that conflict is a common feature of any resource use system is a prerequisite for sustainable management that is participatory and equitable. In recent times, developing and under-developed regions of the world have experienced economic growth and reductions in poverty (Fiki and Lee, 2005). Unfortunately, the trajectory of development in Africa is different because economic growth has been limited and the increase in wealth has not kept pace with population growth. This has often resulted into conflict especially in a multi-ethnic, multi-cultural and multi-religious community like Nigeria.

Conflict causes retardation, and promotes underdevelopment, causes destruction of lives, farmlands and property. In Nigeria, violent conflict, just as in other parts of the world, have created rift in human relations, and caused a serious threat to food security, among many other negative effects (Abass 2012). The conflict has increased in the last two decades in Nigeria. Natural resources underpin livelihoods for the vast majority of populations worldwide and are often the building bloc of economic development, industrial growth and gross domestic product (GDP). Amartya Sen cited in Otive Igbuzor, (2009) opines that we live in a world of opulence, of a kind that would have been hard even to imagine a century or two ago... And yet we also live in a world with remarkable deprivation, destitution and oppression. So, whenever there is perceived opposition to needs, values and interests, conflict erupts.

Official laws and sometimes, communal beliefs usually impose restrictions on certain communities and groups of people and exclude them from ownership and access to natural resources. This is most evident with regard to land tenure but also extends to access and usage of renewable resources, such as water, and benefit-sharing from extractive resources. Other resources with actual or potential sources of wealth include timber,

water, fertile land, wildlife, minerals, metals, stones and hydrocarbons. Such exclusions usually cause structural inequalities and, discrimination and provoke conflicts.

Okpaleke (2016) explains peacebuilding as a term describing outside interventions which are designed to prevent the start or resumption of violent conflict within a nation by creating sustainable peace. In other words, peacebuilding involves a range of measures targeted at strengthening national capacities at all levels for conflict management and laying the foundations for sustainable peace and development. Peacebuilding often takes place in a dynamic and fluid political environment, in which transitional authorities may be established, elections prepared and national constitutions revised or rewritten.

Local-level governance structures may also change as new leadership is established and local institutions are reformed. In many cases, the governance of natural resources also undergoes major reforms linked to inclusive decision-making, benefit-sharing, transparency and sustainability. Therefore, the peacebuilding phase provides a critical entry platform for increasing and strengthening women's profile and political participation. Conflict always degrades natural resources such as land, agricultural crops, and water and devastates rural dwellers that generally depend on these resources for their livelihoods. Conflict often significantly disrupts social and cultural management systems for natural resources.

Some of the far-reaching damages of conflict include environmental degradation of local resource base such as intensified land usage, deforestation, encroachment of forests and reserved or protected areas. Consequently, the resultant environmental degradation prevents access to medicinal plants; mining and grazing and imposes further marginalization on impoverished communities. In most cases, peacebuilding interventions (whether focused on livelihoods or institutional and legal reform), often misses specific challenges such as lack of access to renewable resources and inability to capitalise on opportunities facing the community.

The aim of this study, therefore, is to analyse the conflict between users of resources and their host communities. In other words, it is to re-examine resources utilization of interest groups and through it, assess the nature of conflict; examine the causes, effects, and alternative ways of de-escalating conflict; and assess the impact of conflict on natural resources in select communities.

### **Peacebuilding Theory**

This paper adopts John Paul Lederach's Peacebuilding theory because the theory addresses the issues in a very comprehensive manner. According to John Paul Lederach, peacebuilding involves the conflation of "processes, approaches, and stages needed to transform conflict toward more sustainable, peaceful relationships." Essentially, this implies the transformation of relationships among people as well as the ending of violence. This theory is apt because it is central to the transformation from war to peace. In this paper, the theory is deployed to address how to de-escalate conflict over common resources between herdsmen and host communities in Omala local government in Kogi state, Nigeria.

### **Crisis in Omala Local Government**

Given the context of this study, extant literature had to be sourced from media reports. *Daily Post* Newspaper of March 28, (2019), there was a serious conflict involving various interest groups in Omala Local Government Area (LGA), two of the major interest groups were cattle herders and local farmers of the community. Mr Steve Shaibu the Special Adviser to the Sole Administrator of Omala LGA on Security Matters stated that more than 20 people were killed in the attack. Several others were injured while over a hundred people were displaced and disengaged from their main economic activities. *Leadership* Newspaper April 21, (2019) also reported that an ambush was carried out on Abejukolo- Bagana road in the same local government and three people lost their lives while several others sustained injury. Hon. Musa Hilarion Collins Attai a member representing Omala Local Government in the Kogi State House of Assembly condemned the attack. According to him, the conflict had claimed the lives of over 200

people while property worth millions of naira had been destroyed. He then called on the state government to set up a committee of enquiry to look into the remote and immediate causes of the conflict and proffer ways to resolve the conflict. In an official statement, DSP William Ovyé Aya Public Relations Officer of Kogi State Police Command confirmed the incident and said that his men had been drafted to the area to forestall the breakdown of law and order.

### **Methodology**

This study was conducted in Omala, the conflict theatre. Omala is the eastern part of Kogi state. Omala is a significant area because the region has abundant fertile soil that greatly supports the cultivation of arable crops. A stratified random sampling procedure technique was used to select respondents for the research. Omala is one of the twenty-one local governments in the state and has recorded conflict in eleven wards. For this study, the authors did a random selection of six wards, namely: Abejukolo, Bagana, Bagaji, Akpacha, Icheke, and Ofejiji. In each ward, sixty-five (65) structured questionnaire samples were distributed. A total number of three hundred and ninety (390) questionnaires was completed and returned.

Data collected were content-analysed with the view to identifying the causes and implications of incessant conflicts among the interest groups on the uses of land resources and its effects on peacebuilding and economic development of Kogi State at large.

### **Results and Discussions**

From the study conducted, it was seen that conflict is a permanent feature of human coexistence in all societies. To a large extent, conflict is inevitable and indeed, a necessary corollary to social change, as it exposes tensions and incompatibilities among different, mutually interdependent parties over respective needs, interests and values. It was discovered that conflict escalates during the phases of profound socioeconomic change and political transition. The findings show resource conflicts as a negative phenomenon which often leads to loss of lives and properties and impacts

negatively on resource utilization and peacebuilding. Following the conflict in some of the villages, the local resources were destroyed by aggressors. The affected communities refused to be restrained and therefore retaliated by invading the aggressors' community because they felt that their common resources had been destroyed by other parties (See Table 1). Resources destruction was strongly agreed as 66.8% attest to that as the cause of the crisis, non-control of resource uses is another factor as 57% strongly agreed as the cause while cultural difference shows 38.7% Prolong settlement in the area and stealing of property was also contributed.

The retaliation escalated to a major conflict and resulted in the disruption of human and economic activities. One of the manifest effects of the conflict is widespread poverty. Others include non-sustainability of the socio-political and economic development; and destruction of the environment.

**Table 1: Causes of the Crisis**

Perceived causes of conflict in percentage	Strongly agree	Agree	Not sure	Disagree	Strongly disagree
Resources destruction	66.8%	31.6%	1.6%	-	-
Cultural difference	15.0%	38.7%	27.4%	12.6%	-
Prolong settlement in the area	28.4%	35.3%	30.5%	2.6%	-
Non-control of resources uses	54.7%	30.8%	9.7%	4.7%	-
Stealing of property	24.5%	29.2%	24.5%	21.8%	-

**Source:** *Field Study, 2019*

Many of the conflict actors who were also respondents reported that they suffered various outcomes (repercussions) as a result of the conflict. These include physical, economic and socio-psychological effects. The result of the investigation of the socio-economic repercussions of conflict among respondents is presented in Table 2. Conflict outcome experienced by the respondents was actually determined as the loss or gain of any of the listed resources.

**Table 2 Record on Effects of the Crisis**

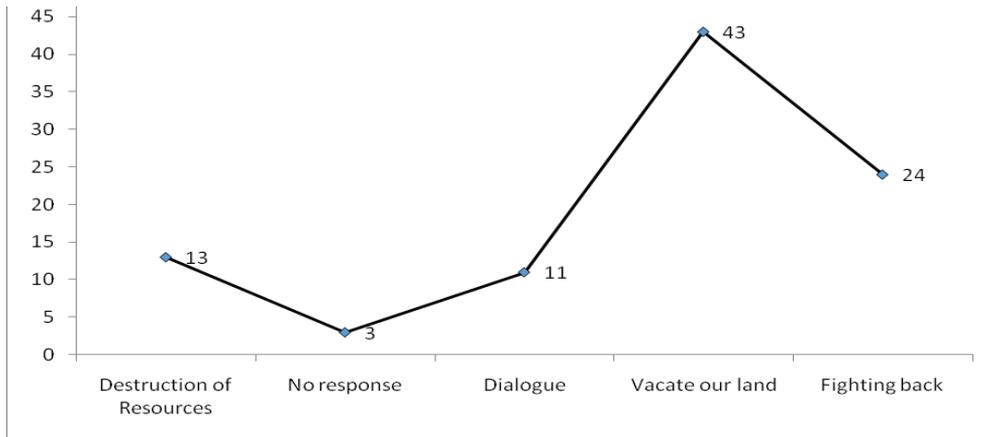
Perceived effect of conflict in percentage	Strongly agree	Agree	Not sure	Disagree	Strongly disagree
Reduction in resources	71.8%	22.4%	3.7%	1.6%	-
Loss of lives, injuries sustained and property loss	56.1%	39.5%	2.1%	2.4%	-
Forced relocation of farmers	33.2%	44.2%	12.6%	3.4%	3.9%
Shortage of income	69.7%	22.9	5.8%	0.5%	1.1%
Increased in the number of widows and orphans	39.2%	41.3%	15%	2.4%	2.1%

**Source:** *Field Study, 2019*

The findings show that the various interest groups reported non-material gains from the conflicts. 71.8% of respondents, for instance, strongly agreed with the loss of resources while forced relocation by other groups was put at 33.2% as a result of mutual conflict. Moreover, 56.1% of respondents indicated a loss in the quality of the relationships as a result of the conflict. However, concerning non-material resources, 56.1% strongly agree, and 39.5% agree to injuries and property losses. The outcome of the investigations on the socio-psychological repercussions of conflict on the quality of family life of respondents has also been summarized. Findings of separate studies by other researchers such as Ajayi and Allagenyi (2001), Johnson and Johnson (2002) and Daniels (2006) showed that family instability and intense frustration are negative consequences of conflicts.

The development of militancy and acts of terrorism has become noticeable consequences of conflict in Kogi State. It has been observed that wherever conflict occurred between herdsmen and the host communities, the host communities have developed the attitude of self-defence and readiness to react violently to any challenge. This situation has led to the emergence of militia and illegal vigilante groups (without control) in affected areas and neighbouring communities Onyegbula (2001); Elechi (2003); Ginifer and Ismail (2005).

**Figure 1: Alternative Method used in Combating Conflicts**



**Source:** *Field Study, 2019*

Figure 1 shows that most respondents prefer alternative methods such as vacation of farmland, dialogue, and fighting back in combating conflict. However, 43% preferred vacation of land; 24% of respondents chose to fight back, and 11% decided to adopt the part of peace. Since both conflicting groups and their supporters belong to different cultural groups, gross fear and suspicion of each other is often entertained (whether real or imagined). This will inevitably create and encourage divisive tendencies such as discrimination, segregation, ethnic cleansing, stereotype, prejudice, etc., in them. All these tendencies impact on peace building and are inimical to the peaceful coexistence and unity of the country.

### Way Forward

For harmonious and peaceful coexistence between herdsmen and farmers the following is hereby proposed:

- Government needs to design policies to ensure that herdsmen have access to grazing without compromising crop production and other farm produce because the policies will reduce insecurity and mitigate the spate of conflict. This will bring about peaceful coexistence between the herdsmen and host communities.

- The law on the grazing route should be amended and improved to further enhance peaceful and harmonious coexistence between herdsmen and host communities.
- For a more sustainable and enduring peace-building effort, there must be a deliberate design to enlighten and mobilize the conflict parties to understand the ecology and the resources available in the communities. This will open the window for interdependence and complementarities among interest groups for the optimal usage of the resources for collective benefit and equitable access.
- Factors associated with the conflicts must be properly documented, studied, harnessed and managed by appropriate institutions engaged in conflict resolutions. In this regard, local governance and the input of stakeholders as well as shadow parties in the conflict must not be overlooked. Traditional methods need to be combined with the emerging strategies and dovetail into how communities create local structures and networks for the purposes of engagement, participation, inclusiveness, mutual partnership and transformation of the environment through equity in resource utilization.
- Structures must be created for and by communities to generate networks and feedback by ensuring that people relate to each other amicably for the common use of resources and ensure the principle of “safety first” in cattle grazing and pasture as well as crop production. This is in tandem with the peacebuilding theory of bringing different groups together to build trust and promote reconciliation. Kogi State Government needs to ensure compliance by both the herdsmen (to agreed routes) and farmers (avoid farming across grazing routes) in host communities in other words, as indicated in peacebuilding theory, the government has to ensure that development programmes remain sensitive to conflict dynamics so that they can consciously promote peace process of conflict. Just as indicated in the peace building theory, this implies transformation of relationships among people as well as the ending of violence.

## **Conclusion**

The periodical struggle for scarce resources has degenerated into violent conflicts between interest groups. These conflicts have become more intense, widespread and destructive. This study identified the factors responsible for the conflict between interest groups and their socio-economic implications in Kogi State. Notable among the factors is the struggle over the use of land resources which is the main trigger of the conflict as the conflict groups regard land resources as their major economic source of livelihood. Other factors include but are not limited to poor policy framework; deficient response/poor policy implementation; and ecological/demographic factors such as climate change; soil degradation; increasing population increase of human and general development activities affecting land. All these have exacerbated insecurity and encouraged the conflicting parties to take responsibility for their own security and engage in self-defence, an action that poses a major threat to peacebuilding and the security of the nation.

## **Recommendations**

There should be an improvement in communication and information sharing among interest groups. Engaging an itinerant group like herdsmen can be done through formal organisations like the Miyetti Allah Cattle Breeders Association of Nigeria (MACBAN). There should be a more robust usage of available platforms offered by the human rights commission, civil society organisations, law enforcement agents, education and community engagement.

- i. The causes of conflict should be addressed in a collaborative manner. This involves deploying the spirit of tolerance and sanctioning hate speech and inflammatory pronouncements.
- ii. Transform the conflict management process into a force promoting positive social change. This will promote peacebuilding. In light of this, all stakeholders including traditional and religious as well as community leaders need to be involved in all the peace building processes and cycle.
- iii. The various security agencies in the state like the Nigeria

Police Force and Civil Defence must ensure that perpetrators of herdsman and farmers conflict are punished to deter future perpetrators.

- iv. Peace-building mechanism that targets the two groups (herdsmen and farmers) should be initiated in all the affected areas. This will be in line with efforts of the Institute for Peace and Conflict Resolution in bringing a sustainable peace to the entire northern region through the support of the United Nation High Commission on Refugee (UNHCR).

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