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Land Encroachment and Banditry as emergent trends in Communal and inter-ethnic conflicts in Nigeria

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ABSTRACT
This paper exposes land encroachment and banditry as social phenomenon in Nigeria. Each of the phenomena supplants local cultures and ideologies, creates terror, kills and dispossesses communities of their land and properties. Many communities fight over land for farming space especially during farming seasons. On the order hand, hundreds of people are killed across Nigeria by bandits. Hundreds flee their ancestry homes due to conflicts caused by land encroachers or bandits afraid to return. Factors such as unemployment, land ownership questions, bad governance, poverty, marginalization and social imbalance each play a role in producing land grabbers, bandits and terrorists. The multiplier effects include food insecurity, unemployment, poverty and marginalization fuelling communal and inter-ethnic crises in Nigeria. The crises have also scared away foreign investments and as a result. The rate of inflation increases creating hunger. This paper adopted the Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) as a panacea for communal conflicts and inter-ethnic conflicts in Nigeria. It revealed that through dialogue and mediation, communal land and inter-ethnic issues would be resolved. Good governance, greater tolerance, respect of one another and pro-active approach by States in conflict resolutions are recommended
Keywords: banditry, inter-ethnic conflict, Community, Land-encroachment.

INTRODUCTION

The growth in population, desertification, natural disasters and violent displacement has affected the life of some communities and nations in Africa. This phenomenon is especially noticed in sub-Sahara Africa and thus, becoming increasingly sources of conflict. In these areas, the rush for land, land encroachment and migration are rampant. We notice clashes over ancestral lands, dispute between family members, and boundary disputes between communities and nations. Some of the notable examples include the Zango-Kataf conflict in Kaduna State (1999-2001); Tiv-Jukun Wukari

conflict in Taraba State (1999-2001); Itsekiri-Urhobo Warri crisis, (1999-2000); Yelwa-Shendam conflict (2003-2005), Mangu-Bokoss crisis (1988-1999), the Ife-Modakeke crisis (1999-2000). Land disputes due to land encroachments have their economic effects on the social life of the people and development purposes (Otite, et al, 1999; Imobighe, et al 2002; Adetula, 2004; Oji, 2015). People have been displaced from their ancestral homes. Their economic life has been nipped off as they can't go back to their farms. Either bandits steal their farms produce at the same time or they are destroyed. This problem is perennial and growing conflict at communal and inter-ethnic levels. Both need and greed can equally lead to the conflict, while scarcity and increases in land value can make matters worse.

At communal level, struggle over land boundaries between families and neighbours and the encroachment of domestic animals that destroy farmers produce are frequent and intense. In many local governments of Nigeria, local authorities have enacted laws against allowing domestic animals to infiltrate into farmlands. At national level, the herdsmen with their herds are causing and growing violence all over the country leading to confrontation and conflict (Otite, O & Albert, O. 1999). In Benue state and its neighbouring state of Nasarawa there is consistent conflict between herdsmen and farmers over destruction of agriculture and livestock (Usman Yusuf B. 2002). This confrontation and conflict have spread to Enugu, Ebonyi, Sokoto, Ekiti, Ondo, Oyo, and other parts of Nigerian states (Ubi, O.A. 2001; Eze, C.M 2010). It has led to deaths and displacement, as well as destruction of agricultural produce (Uka F, 2010).

Banditry on itself is a problem in Nigeria. It is a form of organized crime and outright displacement of people from their ancestral homes. Criminals typically involving the threat or use of violence commit it. They infiltrate into soft zones and unsuspecting communities to steal, kill and destroy. It is occurring on daily basis in many parts of Nigeria especially in Middle Belt region, North West and North East zones). Banditry and terrorism has led to a high increase in the number of displace persons. The number of Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) in Nigeria has increased in the last decade. A report on the internally displaced person in Nigeria in 2019 indicated that north-eastern states of Adamawa, Bauchi, Borno, Gombe, Taraba and Yobe are the most affected states. The report indicated that a nominal increase in numbers of internally displaced people (IDPs) was observed. In all, 2,018,513 individuals were recorded as being displaced in the affected states (Displacement Tracking Matrix DTM, 2019). Banditry is also happening in the East and South South of Nigeria. Many rural areas of Benue, Zamfara and Kaduna are under siege, invaded by the herdsmen. Banditry and terrorism have contributed to increasing displacement of people from their ancestral homes.

As a nation, Nigeria has had a fair share of insecurity arising mainly from terrorism and banditry, cattle rustlers and land grabbers. Clashes between herders and farmers have claimed hundreds of lives, including women and children, across the country. It is worse when the migrating herdsmen, allied particularly to one particular religion, encounters the host community allied to another religion. The killings and destruction of properties are scary and devastating. More repulsive and aggressive is the killing of innocent people who have nothing to do with farming or herding. While the crimes committed by bandits are spreading all over the country, the North East, Middle Belt and North West regions of Nigeria are hot heat, the South East and South-South political zones often are confronted with communal violent land disputes. The displaced persons from these conflict prone zones are being camped in various Internally Displaced People's camps. The number of these camps continues to grow every month. The governments are handicapped into taking decisive action to stem banditry in the land. Land encroachment has been a major cause of communal and inter-ethnic conflicts in Nigeria.

Concepts of Land Encroachment, Banditry and Terrorism as sources of conflicts in Nigeria

To encroach into another's land is an act of infringement. It is violation of the rights of the other over his or her property. Ani, *et al* (2019) argue that land is fundamental and represents a core value in African society. They emotionally attach selves to their land, which represents source of their identity. Africans oppose the encroachment, transfer or unwarranted acquisition of traditionally

family and communal lands by strangers. When this happens, conflict will ensue. Land is a vital natural resource that hosts and sustains living things (Ani, *et al* (2019). Man cannot just wish away his land to immigrants or strangers. An act of violation is violently resisted.

The Merrian-Webster dictionary defines a bandit as an outlaw who lives by plunder. He is a member of a band of marauders who kill and murder (https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/ bandit). We have urban bandits who terrorize, who kill and rob citizens. Bandits are terrorists. They coarse, kill, and destroy properties and people on their way. According to Odinkalu (2018), bandits have emerged as the new bogeyman for insecurity in Nigeria, joining a long (and still growing list) that includes Boko Haram, cultists, herdsmen, kidnappers and militants. In parts of the North-West, Birnin-Gwari in Kaduna State to Tsafe in Zamfara, bandits offered as a trope for an intolerable carnage, and the inexplicable haplessness of a Federal Government that does not appear to care less (Obasi, C. Nwokafor, L., and Olisa, A., 2020).

Banditry in Nigeria wears the cap of terrorism. Terrorism has become notorious in this passing decade. Terrorism reared its ugly head during the Obasanjo civilian regime of the fourth republic, which witnessed religious riots in Plateau state in Northern Nigeria. In recent times terrorism has assumed a political undertone and is been spearheaded by a faceless Islamic insurgents based in the Northern region of Nigeria called Boko Haram (Obasi, C. Nwokafor, L., and Olisa, A., 2020). Its effects has devastated the country since 2009 and has impacted in the economy and social lives of the people. Through bombing of public places, including Christian Churches, and through suicide bombings, many lives have been lost in their hands.

Another dimension was added to this terrorism in 2015. The herdsmen bandits became prominent in their act of terrorism. They have traversed every part of Nigeria with their herds. It was not so before this time in question. The herdsmen before 2015 migrate south during the dry season in Nigeria, when the North has less vegetation to feed their herds. They go back to their base in the North with the arrival of rain. In those days, they lead their flock with their stick and water containers. Today they go with sophisticated weapons.

According to Ewelina (2018), the problem of cattle herders is a very long historical problem. Before now, cattle herders were known to carry sticks and machetes but these ones are carrying AK-47s. The atrocities perpetrated by the Fulani herdsmen include the destruction of houses and churches, as well as the seizure of land and properties belonging to Christian owners. Indeed, the conflict is extremely complex. There is insecurity in the land.

Observers from Nigerian and foreign have linked insecurity in Nigeria to a number of factors, which include, political conflicts, unbalanced development that involves horizontal inequalities religious/ethnic distrust, poor governance linked to leadership failure, and high-level corruption (Kufour, 2012; Oluwarotimi, 2012). The rate of insecurity in Nigeria has heightened recently. No highway in Nigeria is safe. Nwanegbo and Odigbo (2013) noted that security avails the opportunity for development of nation. Ewetan and Urhie (2014) noted that insecurity hinders business activities and discourages foreign and local investors. Adegbami (2013) in his study opined that insecurity is detrimental to general well-being of the people, and has led to destruction of business and properties, and relocation of industries. Udeh and Ihezie (2013) also noted that insecurity challenges Nigeria's effort towards national economic development and consequently its vision 2020, and scares the attraction of foreign investment and their contributions to economic development in Nigeria. Insecurity affects industries like airlines, tourism, manufacturing companies, and export sector, which can reduce gross domestic product and growth (Enders & Sandler, 2006).

Causes of land Encroachment and Banditry in Nigeria

There are two dimensions to land encroachment; one is communal and the second is inter-ethnic. The communal conflict happens within same community or between two communities. There are many reason for the conflict. According to Doudreaux, K, Vhuge, D, and Walter, N (2017)

communal land conflicts and land conflicts in general results from historical injustices, ill-advised policies, conflict of interest, corrupt leadership or more generally from competition over land and resources. The conflict can be latent or dormant. It can escalate due to new land development or commercial project. The reason for the inter-ethnic conflict is semilar to the community reasons for conflict. Boundary issues, competitions marginalization and land infiltrations could to heighten ethnic conflict. The table below explains further causes of communal and inter-ethnic land conflicts

Table 1:

No	Causes of Communal land Conflicts	Causes of Inter-ethnic Land Conflicts
1.	**Leadership Dispute:** In many communities in some parts of Nigeria, land disputes are caused by the struggle of family leadership. It is either the sons of the family against the rest of leadership of the community against all other members of the community. The dispute could also arise when members are sidetracked from sharing of land or during negotiations over commercial project or development.	**Boundary:** Land boundaries have been one major source of inter-ethnic land conflicts in Africa and Nigeria in particular. Rivers and Seas are also sources of conflict even when they are supposed to be natural boundaries of nationalities.
2.	**Generational history**: Written and unwritten history of land possession and the sense of belonging can lead to conflict should there be encroachment from outside. Young people will not accept their ancestral land to be dispossessed from them.	**Herdsmen Infiltration:** Issues of land conflict have arisen between herdsmen in Nigeria, Cameroon, Ghana and farmers over grazing land. In Nigeria for instance, there have been conflicts between the Fulani herdsmen and farmers in Benue, Enugu, Nazarawa and Kaduna States who are mainly Christians and Non-Fulani ethnic group.
3.	**Boundary Disputes**: In communities, disputes over land boundary are rampart. It is either between families, neighbours or between two or more communities. Natural boundaries like rivers are also in dispute sometimes.	**Migration**: While it is a right to migrate for a better life enhancement, it often comes with conflict. In Igbo land and other places in Nigeria, the first occupiers of land claims ownership. Later immigrants to the place are discriminated against for land space.
4.	**Land Grabbing:** The wealthy and moneybags in many communities go all out to grab lands from the weak members of the community. The use the connection and money to take over the land belonging to poor people and widows. It is a serious issue in Igbo land and many regions of Nigeria.	**Multinational Companies**: They cause land conflict by grabbing people's lands through conniving with the wealth and some traditional rulers. It happens both in communities and between nationalities in Nigeria.

Source: Adapted by the authors from Doudreaux, K, Vhuge, D, and Walter, N (2017)

Analysis of the issues

One of the primary sources of conflict in the communities and inter-ethnic regions in Nigeria as elsewhere is landownership. It is perennial in many farming communities. Recently, the struggle to control large portions of land for gracing and other commercial purposes has increased the rate of conflict in country Nigeria.

Odinkalu (2018) said that mismanagement of natural resources, exploitation in both the North and the South energized the transition from urban to rural banditry. Mismanagement of the economy did the rest. Southern Kaduna, for instance, had always been rich in gemstones, including diamond, sapphire, quartz, ruby, temaline, and aquamarine. In the early-to-mid 1980s, this set of a mad rush of artisanal gemstone rustlers would invade communities in Jema'a. The rustlers came from as far as Mali, Senegal and Sudan in search of shiny gemstones that the locals called "devil stones". Good governance could have stemmed the rush for our scarce commodities.

People have adduced that one of the reasons that herdsmen clash with farmers is the problem of overpopulation. As people increase in numbers, the small space available diminishes, and the

vegetable land became scarce and thus, the struggle and competition. As the number of people increases, the number of cows, rams, goat increase also. This gives reason for migration.

Desertification is another factor, which contributes to the spread of banditry and violence. The North of Nigeria is not growing greener in spite of all the efforts the different administrations have made towards that. Desertification has become a problem in Nigeria. This is one of the reasons for the herdsmen's migration towards South. Migration is part of life. It is natural and at times, economically enhancing. Herdsmen migration is economical but experience in the past few years has turned out not to be so. Their migration has turned out to involve destruction of farmers produce, destruction of their houses and farms and the killing and kidnapping of innocent people. This banditry and or terrorism have become the goal of herdsmen migration. The terror acts beg many questions. What are the herdsmen looking for? Do they want to acquire other people's land by force? Why kill the people and destroy their properties? What is the reason for the acts of terror? According to Babatunde, Olatunji, Moshood, Lawal, (2015) the intergroup relations between the Fulani herders and the Native Farmers is increasingly becoming an issue of concern. The prevalent conflicts that occur between these two opposing groups in places where the two co-habit is of great concern to the Government. Inter-group conflict constitute obstacle to the peaceful socio-political co-existence of people.

Olatunji, (2011) stated that the population of a society has a very important role to play in the general ways the social structure of the country would be. Unchecked population could bring about a situation whereby scarcity of resources will result into serious environmental destruction, chaos, conflict, hunger, poverty and under development. the increase in population of both the farmers and herders will automatically reduce the marginal available land resources that will be used for farming and grazing. Due to the importance of farm crops to the natives and the relevance of cattle to the livelihood of the herders, inter-group conflict is imminent between the two groups. The rapid growth in population has caused the farmers to struggle for farmland. With this development, grazing areas that were hitherto abundant are being taken over by scattered small farms, making grazing in these areas extremely difficult. This provides fertile grounds for the intergroup hostility between Fulani herders and the farmers in the region (Ayih, 2003)

The affected people may migrate. Migrating groups often trigger ethnic conflicts when they move to new areas. Okpi, (2010) opined that the fundamental factor accounting for the mass movement of the Fulani herders to the North Central and Southern parts of the country is climate change, which caused desert encroachment in the North Western and North Eastern Nigeria. Desert encroachment has created scarcity of grazing lands and water in the North-Western and North-Eastern Nigeria. Due to climate change, pasture portions already allocated to herdsmen dried up which led to cattle invasion of farmland, destroying crops and streams. This encourages the orgy of intergroup conflicts between the Fulani herders and native farmers in the country.
According to Ayorinde, (2011) physical attachments to land have placed land in a sensitive and unique position. Conflict interests among communities to secure territories, conserve socio-economic resources and carry out physical development activities and practice customs and traditions on land have given birth to untold crises over the ages. Conflicts have implications on livelihoods, productivity, agriculture, peace and security.

Land Encroachment as a factor that fuels inter-ethnic conflict in Nigeria
Land is a mark of identity and a gift of God. It is a strategic socio-economic asset. Patience M. S, (2011) argues that competition over its acquisition is often vigorous almost everywhere. It is because wealth and survival are measured by ownership of land. It is also a resource of limited quantity and one of the most basic aspects of subsistence for the people, rules regulating ownership of it are a focal point of attention as well as the basis for conflict both community and inter-ethnic levels (Sakah, 2009).

Brueggemann, (1978) explains that land is normally a place, with historical meaning and provides continuity and identity across generations, 'where important words have been spoken, which have

established identity, defined vocation and envisioned destiny. Obasi, (2007) argues that the basic needs of human experience include the need tomorrow to belong, to be secure and to be powerful. These entirely have in some degree are realizable by the pursuit and possession of land. Land has much to do in human affairs, and whatever humans do in the land affects the land negatively or positively: to bear fruit, produce rich food, grow different types of trees and crops, provide mineral resources, and abode for its inhabitants and may offer security. In Nigeria as well as in many African countries, land is a symbol of identity for the individual and the group as a whole. In owning a land, each African can find his origin and an identity. Land is the first step in creating stability in families, communities and groups, and it is the first remedy for the problem of marginalization.

Towards Peace Approach

Settlement of land issues is a process and it takes time. Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) stands for any form of peaceful conflict resolution apart from other forms of settlements, such arbitration. Non-violent, rather unemotional micro and meso social conflicts such as boundary conflicts, illegal subdivisions, and the illegal use of land that violates building regulations might be solved this way. If strong emotions (as is generally the case with inheritance conflicts) or violence is involved, an active third party normally becomes necessary, as here the parties have to be conciliated. The ADR has components through which you obtain the desired peace. The components include mediation, negotiation, arbitration, conciliation and reconciliation. Mediation is a process of resolving conflict by the intervention of a third party. He assists the conflicting parties in dialogue to resolve their conflict (Bear, J. E. and Parkard, C. C. 2012). The mediator brings the conflicting parties together for discussion and moderates it. In African tradition, elders or heads of organization or Chief priests who are neutral to the issue at stake can act as mediator. In land cases, neutral elders or Kings are best at the act of mediation. Mediation comes after negotiation fails. *Umuada* Igbo in the case of Igbo nation or Town Union Presidents can facilitate, conciliate or mediate in land matters in Igboland. Professionals who are trained on land matters like land Extension officers can do mediation

Ani, A. O. *et al* (2015) acknowledged the role of land Extension Officers in resolving land conflicts when they said they can organize producer association or advice mangers of shared resources to be inclusive and transparent in order to avoid exacerbating conflict. And by reducing land related conflicts, they enhance agricultural productivity and thus alleviate the material need that can drive conflict. They have a role in resolving conflicts between herders and farmers, etc.

In negotiation, the conflicting parties try to sort out the difference but where they cannot resolve their differences, the mediator involvement becomes necessary. At local level every group of the society is involved in peace process. The youth, women societies, elders, traditional rulers, Masquerade society age grade, market women, etc get involve in conflict resolution. In land cases, it is the elders, traditional rulers and religious leaders are often at the center to resolve the cases.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Policy makers and community elites should cooperate in policy formulations that ensure communal harmony, and builds good relationship among ethnic nationalities in the country.
2. Peace-building is a long-term process that occurs before, during and after conflict has slowed down or abated (Karbo, 2008). What this implies is for everyone, elders, town unions, traditional rulers and governments at any level to examine once more the African humanity, expunge any contradictions that create unwarranted tension for the people, no matter how marginal (Obasi, 2018; Obasi, Nwakafor and Olisa. 2020).
3. There is need for education on the dignity of man that should be respected. Both farmers and herdsmen should be given this education on human rights, respect for life and the benefits inherent in living in peace. Government of Nigeria should encourage peace building as Karbo (2008) writes that the ultimate goal of peace building in Nigeria or Africa is the rebuilding of relationships and asserting communal responsibility and solidarity.
4. Environmental factors that are driving herders' migration to the south should be addressed. This will require stepping up implementation of programs under the Great Green Wall Initiative for the

Sahara and the Sahel, a trans-African project designed to restore drought-and-desert degraded environments and livelihoods including in Nigeria's far northern belt. The government is to develop strategies for mitigating climate change impact in northern states.

5. Cross-border movement of non-Nigerian should be addressed to regulate movements, especially of cattle, armed bandits and terrorist (Obasi, Nwakafor and Olisa. 2020).

6. Inter-communal cooperation is often impeded by entrenched acrimony and suspicion. Elites of various communities should make effort to build trust among themselves while ensuring dialogue as potential pathway to increase inter-ethnic trust (Svensson and Brouneus, 2013).

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