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Full Length Research Paper**The Socio-economic Impact of Land resource Conflict in Taraba State: A Case Study of Kona – Minda crisis in Northern Taraba.****E. D. Oruonye***Department of Geography, Taraba State University, P.M.B. 1167, Jalingo, Taraba State, Nigeria.***ABSTRACT**

One of the greatest problems of development in Taraba State is the communal conflict between the various ethnic groups. This conflict has tended to be centred around competition for land and economic resources. This paper examines the causes and socio-economic impacts of the Kona - Minda communal conflict in northern Taraba state. The survey design method was adopted in this study and questionnaires were used to generate data. Descriptive statistics was used to analyzed the data. The study findings shows that the communal conflict resulted in the loss of lives and properties worth over twenty three million naira (N23,000000). Ten persons loss their lives while 552 houses were destroyed and 4,764 persons were internally displaced. This study recommends the need to improve governance and security at the grassroot level to forestall individuals taking laws into their hands at the slightest provocation.

*Keywords: Communal, Conflict, Impact, Land resources and Socio-economic***INTRODUCTION**

Land means different things to different people depending upon their outlook and their interest in the land (Balowe, 1978). Land is the sum total of the natural and man-made resources over which the possession of the earth surface gives control (Adebayo, 2009). Land is the platform of all human activities - economic, social, spiritual or recreation. Land is no doubt the most important and most coveted natural resource at the disposal of man (Oruonye, 2009). Its ownership has been pursued with unrivalled tenacity all through the ages because it dictates whether or not there would be production. Its possession has been guarded with astonishing ferocity for the same reason. Many a borderline conflicts or boundary disputes have occurred because of the quality of the associated land. Man has been at pains to regulate the access to and control of land to evolve suitable land tenure (Olofin, 1994).

One feature of the colonial land law which is entrenched in the 1978 Land Use Act is the element of compulsory land acquisition with some compensation for private property or economic trees on the land, but without compensation for the land. The State has relied on this feature to accumulate land for itself and for some of its functionaries at the expense of the peasants (Labaran, 1987). Land is seen as a centrally important resource needed to provide for sustainable and diverse livelihoods throughout the world. Ownership patterns have tended to be highly skewed with a very small number of people holding enormous estate. Ever since, there has been countless litigation in courts both on hitherto customary ownership and the new methods of land acquisition that have set individuals, communities and the state against one another. The pains of land disputes and conflicts remain gruesome and indelible in the memories of the victims and the collective consciousness of the country.

The main fault of the Land Use Act of 1978 was that it transferred title and ownership of land from individuals and communities to the governors who hold the land in trust but many of whom have been known to have abused the power and privileges conferred on them by the Act. It also made acquisition of land by individuals and corporate bodies for commercial and economic development purposes extremely difficult.

Recently, there was an ethnic conflict that broke up between the Kona and Minda communities. The conflict which breaks out around 12:30pm on Friday, 10th July 2011 in the rural settlements of Minda and Kaudat in Lau LGA extended to five other local government areas in northern Taraba and resulted in the loss of lives and properties and displacement of thousands of peoples. This study briefly examines the causes and socio-economic impacts of the communal crisis on the affected people, communities and recommends measures of curtailing future occurrence.

DESCRIPTION OF STUDY AREA

Taraba State is the second largest state in Nigeria in terms of landmass and the most culturally diverse state in the Federation, accommodating the largest number of ethnic groups in Nigeria. This different ethnic groups and cultural diversity are suppose to be an asset to the state but unfortunately it has turned out to be a source of friction and conflict in the state, resulting often times to loss of lives and property (Oruonye and Abbas, 2011). Since its creation in 1991, there has been a lot of ethnic and communal conflict between the various ethnic groups and communities. Thus, one of the greatest problems of development in the state is the communal conflicts between the various ethnic groups in the area. This includes that between the Tivs and the Jukuns. This conflict between the Tivs and Jukuns has tended to

center around competition for land, as well as control over economic resources and political power. There have been disputes over the citing of the boundary between Benue and Taraba States, leading to disregard for boundary demarcations and unstable political control of the border towns and villages. The Jukun claimed to be the original inhabitants of Taraba State, or "indigenes," and consider the Tiv as settlers. The Tiv rejected this view, on the basis that they too have been living in the area for several generations and therefore have equal rights. The Tiv complained of being marginalized in Taraba State. Likewise, the Jukun minority in Benue State also complained of marginalization, lack of employment opportunities, and insecurity. There has been periodic fighting between these groups since the late 1950s, with sporadic outbreaks in 1964, 1976, and again in 1990-1992. In 1991/92 there was serious conflict between Tiv and Jukun. Militia groups set up checkpoints along the road, stopping vehicles and killing along ethnic lines (IPCR, 2006). Both Tiv and Jukun communities were attacked and houses destroyed causing people to flee. There were further clashes in October 2001 and January 2002.

There was also the Mambilla/Fulani ethnic conflict in 1997/8, in which the Fulanis brought in mercenaries from Niger and Chad republics to assist them in fighting against indigenous groups, causing displacement of the indigenous groups within and outside the state. The dispute over grazing land between local farming communities and Fulanis in Tonga Maina village on the Mambilla plateau in January, 2002, displaced hundreds of people. Many Fulani herdsmen fled across the border into Cameroon for fear of reprisal attacks (IPCR, 2006). According to the United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR), an estimated 17,000 Nigerians fled to the Republic of Cameroon in the wake of the conflict.

The Jukun-Chamba/Kuteb conflict in Takun LGA has been going on for years, although there has been no large scale fighting since 1999. These conflict results from two factors; the killing of the paramount chief (Kuteb) which prompted retaliation from the Kuteb and dispute over the boundary of a new LGA (Ussa) created in the state. The original LGA was Takum, where the Jukun-Chamba had the political majority (previously Kuteb). The new LGA created, Ussa, comprises mainly Kuteb communities. However, there are significant numbers of Kuteb in three communities about 5km from Takum, who have been told to join the Ussa LGA. These communities have refused to join the Ussa LGA as they consider Takum LGA to be much closer.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The survey design method was used to examine the socio-economic impact of the communal conflict. Data were generated through the use of questionnaires, Participatory Rural Appraisal method and field observation. Sixty five (65) questionnaires were administered in each of the three settlement communities and forty two (42) at Lankaviri refugee camp. In all, 239 questionnaires were administered in the study areas. The Participatory Rural Appraisal method was used at each of the affected settlement communities. It was conducted separately for the adult members of the host

community and the resettled people. Questionnaires were also randomly administered to ensure that every adult had equal chance of being selected. Secondary materials were also used to highlight some of the problems associated with ethnic conflicts in the state. Descriptive statistic was used to analyze the data collected. This includes the frequency distribution, average and percentages.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Causes of the Conflict

Most of the ethnic/communal clashes in Nigeria emanated from land dispute. There is a lot of problem over who owns the land, land use right and transferability. In the case of the Kona-Minda conflict, the source of the conflict was land ownership dispute between individuals in the two neighbouring communities of Minda and Kaudad. The Kona people claimed that the farmland in question was their ancestral land which they lease out to a Mumuye settler. The Mumuye settler (Minda) has used the land for decades and after his death, his children wanted to transfer the right over the land to another person (third party) by selling it. The Kona people insisted otherwise, claiming that the land was not sold but giving to their father on lease and as such they only have a usufruct right over the land and cannot transfer or sell it. The children of the Mumuye settler (Minda community) insisted that their father had used the land for decades before they now inherited it and as such they have the right to do whatever they wanted to do with the land including selling it. It is this dispute that escalated into a communal conflict between the Kona and Minda communities (Jalingo LGA) and Kaudad (Lau LGA) settlements. The conflict spread to neighbouring settlements such as Kona Garu, Sambe and Yelwa Abare (both Kona and Mumuye) in Ardo Kola LGA and Lankaviri in Yorro LGA with each group launching attack and counter attack on each other, selectively killing along ethnic line. Other settlements affected include Yaukani (Kona), Jauro Shambai (both Kona and Mumuye), Marbai (Kona), Kashab (Kona) and Jauro Awe. Many Kona people living among the Mumuyes in other settlements fled their homes for safety as each group attack and burn the houses of known members of these two groups even in Jalingo town.

Socio-economic Impacts of the Ethnic Conflict

The socio-economic cost of the conflict was much. Several houses of the Kona and Mumuye communities were burnt down in the process of attack and counter attack. Farmlands were equally burnt and destroyed. Most people fled their houses for safety in the nearby LGAs such as Lau, Ardo Kola, Jalingo and Yorro. There were about 7 refugee camps at Lau, Ardo Kola, Yorro and Jalingo LGAs where the people that were displaced by the conflicts were camped. This includes the Government Junior Secondary School Lankaviri (Mumuye)(Yorro LGA), Government Day Junior Secondary School Kofai (Kona) (Ardo Kola LGA), Government Secondary School Nukkai (Jalingo LGA), College of Education Staff School Jalingo (Kona), Jolly Nyame Stadium (Mumuye) and old Airport Jalingo (Mumuye), all in Jalingo LGA. Women and children were the most affected as they constituted about 99 percent of the people in the refugee camp. The people suffered seriously

from starvation, thirst and poor sanitary conditions of the camp in the first 10 days after the crisis before the intervention of the government. There were cases of death as a result of this poor condition. Many were rendered homeless, while others lost their source of livelihood. Result

of the findings of this study shows that 10 people lost their lives in the Kona – Minda communal conflict. About 552 houses were burnt down. The breakdown is presented in Table I below;

Table 1. Properties lost in the Kona and Minda ethnic conflict

S/No.	Community	No. of Households affected	No. of houses affected (round huts)	Brick walls affected
1	Yelwa Abbare (Jalingo LGA)	41	113	3 bedroom flat
2	Tuddiri village (Ardo Kola LGA)	5	18	2 bedroom flat
3	Jauro Jangai village (Ardo Kola LGA)	23	80	
4	Murbai village (Ardo Kola LGA)	1	-	-
5	Kaudad (Lau LGA)	36	71	Non
	Minda (Lau LGA)	69	270	Non
	Total	166	552	

Source: SEMA (2011).

The study findings also show that 15 persons were injured in the conflict, while 4,764 persons were internally displaced by the conflict. The destructions resulting from the conflict was estimated at about twenty two million, one hundred and forty thousand six hundred naira only (N22,140,600) by the

state government assessment committee. The breakdown is presented in Table 2 below;

Table 2. Cost of destruction of the Mumuye – Kona ethnic conflict

S/No.	LGA	Community	Cost of Destruction
1	Ardo Kola	Jauro Jangai	N4,856,600
		Tuddiri village	N492,500
		Murbai Village	N355,000
2	Jalingo	Kona and Abbare	N7,389,000
3	Lau	Minda village	N5,007,600
		Kaudad	N4,049,000
	Grand Total		N22,149,600

Source: SEMA (2011).

The state government donated relief materials worth three million naira (N3,000,000) and the state is still expecting additional assistance from the National Emergency Management Agency, Abuja. Individual philanthropist, non - governmental organization (NGOs) and civil society organization (CSOs) also donated relief materials to the affected people.

Since the creation of the state, the various ethnic groups that make up about half of Taraba State have found it extremely difficult to sustain peace. The frequent war has devastated the people of the state particularly, southern Taraba. It has scared investors and impeded government efforts in addressing the economic and cultural challenges of the conflicts. The crises rendered many people destitute. Markets were burnt, residential buildings, schools, financial and health institutions, as well as farmlands were destroyed.

CONCLUSION

This study has examined the socio-economic impact of land resource conflict between Kona and Minda communities in northern Taraba State. The study findings revealed that the conflict was as a result of dispute over farmland. The socio-economic impact of the conflict was enormous as it resulted in loss of lives and properties and displacement of people. This study recommends the need to improve governance and security at the grassroots level to forestall individuals taking laws into their hands in event of dispute. The village and ward heads of the various communities should also be sensitized to mobilize their people on the need for them to be law abiding and to shun all forms of violence in any situation.

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