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# Rural Development And Resource-Based Conflict In North-Central Nigeria: Escalation, Consequences And Management

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## Abstract

Rural development is crucial for the socio-economic growth of any nation, particularly in Nigeria, where the majority of the population resides in rural areas. However, rural development in North-Central Nigeria is hindered by resource-based conflicts, which have become a recurring decimal in the region. Therefore, this paper examined rural development and resource-based conflict in North-Central Nigeria. The specific objectives includes examining the incidences of resource-based conflicts in North-Central Nigeria, identifying the causes of resource-based conflict in North-Central Nigeria and bring to light the escalation, consequences and management of resource-based conflict in North-Central Nigeria. By adopting secondary sources of data collection, the paper used eco-violence theory to buttress the review. The paper revealed recent incidents of resource-based conflict in North Central Nigeria include clashes between herders and farmers in Benue state, escalating violence involving herders and farming communities in the Middle Belt region, conflict associated with open grazing in Benue and Plateau states, displacement of populations in Benue, Nasarawa, and Plateau states. It also revealed policies imposed without local participation, socio-economic changes, uncoordinated planning, inadequate or poor information sharing, migration and commercialization of common property resources among others as major causes of resource-based conflicts in the North-Central Nigeria. Vacation of ancestral home, destruction of properties, decline of commercial activities as well as agricultural practices, lost of lives, love and affections among others as major consequences of resources-based conflict in North-Central Nigeria. The also revealed effective communication, win-lose, lose-lose, and win-win approach among others as some of the conflict management strategies in North-Central Nigeria. The paper concluded that resource-based conflicts are a common occurrence in Nigeria's north-central area, and can have

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extremely damaging effects on both people and property. Most often, these disputes result from an incapacity to manage the community's limited resources and from giving in to the demands of some self-interested politicians who seek to gain or hold onto power at all costs. Therefore, it was recommended among others that there should be a regular dialogue sessions between farming and herding communities to address grievances and resolve conflicts, develop mutual understanding and trust, identify joint economic opportunities and collaborative projects that will provide employment opportunities for the youths in the region.

**Keywords:** Rural Development, Natural Resources, Resource-Based Conflict, Consequences, Escalation, Sources, North-Central Nigeria.

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## INTRODUCTION

Rural development is crucial for the socio-economic growth of any nation, particularly in Nigeria, where the majority of the population resides in rural areas. However, rural development in North-Central Nigeria is hindered by resource-based conflicts, which have become a recurring decimal in the region. The struggle for access to and control of natural resources such as land, water, and minerals has led to clashes between farmers, herders, and other stakeholders, resulting in loss of lives, destruction of properties, and displacement of communities.

Water and land are two resources that are used locally and may not have much of an influence elsewhere. Oil, minerals, and other resources like timber are also employed to generate income. Due to the contradiction that countries with enough natural resources frequently experience slower economic growth than those without natural resources, these revenue-producing resources are sometimes referred to as the "resource curse" and are the main source of issues. Dependence on a small number of revenue sources often discourages diversification, causes the economy to overheat, and raises price and revenue volatility. Additionally, the abundance frequently results in corrupt and poor government management [1].

In these and other ways, competition over natural resources, especially among rural dwellers, can lead to, intensify, or sustain violence. It should be noted here that conflict over natural resources is often part of, and exacerbates, a larger struggle over political, economic, cultural, or religious issues in society. Less dramatic and less well covered in the literature is the role natural resources can play in resolving and managing conflict and in preventing the re-occurrence of violence in the post-conflict environment. The persistent resource-based conflicts in North-Central Nigeria pose a significant threat to rural development, food security, and peaceful coexistence among rural dwellers. The conflicts have led to underutilization of agricultural potential, displacement of rural communities, loss of livelihoods, increased poverty and inequality and strained relationships among rural stakeholders. This paper therefore aims to explore the root causes of resource-based conflicts in North-Central Nigeria and their impact on rural development, with a view to identifying sustainable solutions to mitigate these conflicts and promote peaceful coexistence among rural dwellers.

## **OBJECTIVES OF THE PAPER**

The specific objectives of this paper are as follows:

- i. Examine the incidences of resource-based conflicts in North-Central Nigeria.
- ii. Identify the causes of resource-based conflict in North-Central Nigeria.
- iii. Escalation, consequences and management of resource-based conflict in North-Central Nigeria.

## **METHODS**

This paper employed a secondary analysis method, using materials such as books and online/offline journal articles among other internet documented sources that are relevant to the subject in focus.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

The review of related literature for this paper was thematically done in accordance with the aim and objectives of the paper under the following subheadings:

## **CONCEPTUAL REVIEW**

The key concepts in this discussion are rural development, natural resources, and resource-based conflict.

### **Rural Development**

There is also no universally accepted definition of rural development. As a result, different scholars and institutions define and conceptualize it in different ways. In supporting this, it is argued that the definition of rural development has advanced through time as a result of changes in the perceived mechanisms and goals of development [6]. According to [30], rural development was seen as purely an economic issue or raising the low levels of rural income through agricultural modernization. This definition is reflective of rural development as a subset of development in the 1970s. This is because, in the 1970s, development was also viewed merely from the economic dimension.

However, nowadays, development is broadly viewed as an overall improvement of the quality of life of a human being in terms of economic, social, economic, political, environmental, and administrative issues. To compare to some of the above-discussed definitions of rural development, [20], in his view, broadly defines rural development as an activity concerned with the improvement of the spatial and socio-economic environments of rural areas to enhance the ability of the individuals to cater to and sustain their well-being. In line with this definition, in very recent years, rural development has been conceived as the process of improving the opportunities and well-being of rural people. It is a process of

change in the characteristics of rural societies. Therefore, rural development encompasses health, education, and other social services. It also uses a multi-sector approach for promoting agriculture, extracting minerals, tourism, recreation, and niche manufacturing [17].

## **Conflict**

This refers to disharmony, antagonism, and hostility in relation, which could arise due to the incompatibility of the objectives pursued or the incongruity of the ways and means adopted in pursuing the preferred objectives (Mbachu, 2009). Conflict is inevitable as it can originate in individual or group reactions to situations of scarce resources, division of functions and roles, differentiation of power, as well as competition for limited supplies of resources, valued roles, and power (Mitchell, 1998). In the context of this paper, conflict is the struggle for the natural resource endowments by the government, diverse groups, and individuals in Nigeria. Conflict in all its forms and configurations has assumed a frightening dimension in Nigeria, as it has become a medium for self-determination, protest over material deprivation, and a desire to meet basic human needs.

## **Resource-based conflict**

Resource conflict, otherwise known as "natural resource conflict," entails disagreements or disputes over access to, control over, and use of natural resources. This kind of conflict often emerges because of divergence in human needs for resources such as forest, water, pasture, and land or the desire to manage them in different ways (Mbachu, 2009).

One important characteristic of natural resources that makes them attractive to human interest is that they are valuable and scarcely exist in abundant quantity. Disagreement over natural resources also arises when the needs of the users are incompatible or when the priorities of the users are not considered in policies, programs, and projects. Resource conflict can also occur if there are contradictions between the local and introduced management systems, a lack of understanding and information about policies and program objectives, a lack of clarity in laws and entitlements, inequality in resource distribution, and the exclusion from or inclusion of a group in the management of natural resources that is not a stakeholder (FAO 2018). This exclusion and inclusion is the major cause of the Aguleri of Anambra and Odeke in Ibaji Local Government Area of Kogi State, which had just been brought to a halt following the declaration of Kogi State as an oil-producing state by President Muhammadu Buhari. The cause notwithstanding, resource conflict often involves many actors and divergent stakeholders. They range from local men and women to neighbouring countries mainly in the case of boundary disputes, community-based organizations, business organizations, government and non-governmental bodies, and so on [5].

A dispute over resources may also break out at different levels. At one level, the main issue could be access to or control over the resources that people depend on. At another point, the dispute could relate to more deeply rooted issues such as recognition, rights, identity, or the ability to participate. The

intensity of conflict also varies greatly, from confusion and frustration among members of a community about poorly communicated development policies to violent clashes among groups over resource ownership, rights, and responsibilities [5]. Community-based natural resource conflicts are often very complex. There are usually many causes and many interconnected issues, making it hard to identify the key issues in the conflict.

## **Natural Resources**

[32] defines "natural resources" as materials that occur in nature and are essential or useful to humans, such as water, air, land, forests, fish, wildlife, topsoil, and minerals. These resources can be classified as renewable or non-renewable. In most cases, renewable resources such as cropland, forests, and water can be replenished over time by natural processes and, if not overused, are indefinitely sustainable. Non-renewable resources such as diamonds, minerals, and oil are found in finite quantities, and their value increases as supplies dwindle. A nation's access to natural resources often determines its wealth and status in the world economic system. Moreover, natural resources are materials as well as substances such as minerals, forests, water, and land that occur in nature and are used for economic gain (Oxford Dictionaries, 2018). Natural resources are not limited to the material and non-material gifts of nature but also include people. Man's labour power is also a transforming resource that creates the material existence of man. Labour power comprises the physical, psychological, and intellectual capabilities of man, the worker [5]. It is the combination of the object of labour (resources), the instruments (tools), and the labour labour-power that constitute a society's factors of production or its productive forces [5]. A country like Nigeria, which is blessed with huge human and material resources, should be the driving force for economic development and growth in Africa and the world over. In the context of this paper, natural resources remain the main endowment in Nigeria, which include both solid minerals and oil as the mainstay of the economy.

## **Natural Resources and Rural Development in Nigeria**

Natural resources pave the way for sustainable development in the areas of its residences; hence, they are one of the causes of ethnic conflicts, especially in the North Central region of Nigeria.

The environment that sustains human populations is used by people in many ways. Farms and forests supply nations with a wide range of important raw materials: timber, wood, pulp, minerals, leather, and foodstuffs, which are further processed into manufactured goods such as lumber, paper, pharmaceuticals, footwear, and flour. These raw materials and finished products are important to the economic security of the country and the food security of its citizens. Water resources are essential for life and are harnessed as a critical input for economic growth, including agriculture and industry. Natural resources also provide rural people with food, medicines, game, honey, gums and resins, condiments, and other goods that are exchanged or used for secondary processing and contribute greatly to rural subsistence economies [11]. In addition, they contribute towards fiscal revenue, income, and

poverty reduction. Sectors related to natural resources are used to provide jobs and are often the basis of livelihoods in poor communities.

The wealth embodied in natural resources makes up a significant proportion of the wealth of most nations, often more than the wealth embodied in produced capital, therefore making natural resource management a key aspect of economic development [31]. Many countries have seen significant rises in revenues from natural resources due to the rise in commodity prices. Natural resources such as oil, gas, minerals, and timber are expected to continue to play a significant role in resource-abundant economies as demand from rapidly growing economies increases and as supplies of non-renewable resources decline and renewable resource harvests approach maximum sustained yield levels. In addition to providing revenues to resource-rich countries, natural resources can play a central role in poverty reduction efforts. The poor generally depend upon natural resources directly for their livelihoods, especially the rural poor. Consequently, policies that improve natural resource management can have immediate and meaningful poverty reduction impacts.

Natural resources generally form the backbone of rural economies in low- and middle-income countries and, if managed wisely through sound policies and institutions, can be used to generate growth that benefits the most vulnerable parts of the population (OECD, 2008). Indeed, studies show that non-farm income from natural resources plays an important role in sustaining rural livelihoods in transition countries. The growth of rural economies can be promoted by governmental policies aimed at supporting small and medium-sized enterprises, based in many cases on the use of local natural resources (Bright et al., 2000). Due to the fundamental importance of natural resources, they must be managed sustainably.

### **North Central Nigeria: An Overview**

North-central Nigeria, known as the Middle Belt, is home to the country's capital city Abuja and six other states: Benue, Plateau, Kogi, Nasarawa, Niger, and Kwara. It is the fourth-largest geopolitical zone in Nigeria. It is home to 14.5% of the country's population, which consists predominantly of Christians but also has a sizeable Muslim population. The north-central region is a convergence of several minority ethnic groups who are mostly farmers. It is the third poorest zone in Nigeria, with an average poverty headcount rate of 42.7% [24]. The area consists of heterogeneity and diversity of people and cultures. Central Nigeria is home to a complex plurality of ethnic minorities considered indigenous, while other groups such as the Fulani, Hausa, and Kanuri are considered migrant settlers. Prominent minority groups in the area include Tiv, Idoma, Eggon, Nupe, Birom, Jukun, Chamba, Pym, Goemai, Kofyar, Igala, Gwari, Bassa, etc. The middle belt is unique as a zone having the largest concentration of minority ethnic groups in the country. The region is volatile and highly susceptible to militia attacks and sectarian crises (Genyi, 2014). There are also frequent clashes between pastoralists and sedentary farmers in the region, with the reasons being far from resource-based misunderstandings.

North Central Nigeria is also characterized by religious diversity: Christianity, Islam, and African traditional religions. The numerical proportion may be indeterminate, but Christianity appears to be predominant, followed by the considerable presence of Muslims among the Fulani and Hausa migrants. Central Nigeria displays this diversity, which is a mirror of Nigeria's complex plurality. The region also covers parts of Kaduna and Bauchi states, known as Southern Kaduna and Bauchi, respectively (James, 2000).

As noted by [24], the North Central geopolitical zone in Nigeria represents a transition from the savannas of northern Nigeria to the southern forest region. It, therefore, contains geographical elements from both climatic zones. The area is heavily suited for a sedentary life, and, hence, agriculture is the dominant occupation. Root crops like potatoes, yams, and cassava are widely cultivated across the region. Cereals like rice, Guinea corn, millet, maize, linseed, and soybeans are also widely cultivated and constitute the primary commodities for cash incomes. The cultivation of these crops requires wide plains to guarantee sustained cultivation and high yields. Sedentary agricultural practice is supported by seven months of rainfall (April–October) and five months of the dry season (November–March), which are suitable for the harvest of a wide variety of cereals and tuber crops. The region is supplied with natural water through river courses that crosscut the region and empty into the River Benue and Niger, the two largest rivers in Nigeria. Major tributaries in the region include the Galma, Kaduna, Gurara, and Katsina-Ala rivers (James, 2000). These water sources and their availability are crucial for agricultural use as well as domestic and pastoral purposes.

### **Incidences of Resource-Based Conflicts in North Central Nigeria**

Recent incidents of resource-based conflict in North Central Nigeria include clashes between herders and farmers in Benue state, escalating violence involving herders and farming communities in the Middle Belt region, conflict associated with open grazing in Benue and Plateau states, displacement of populations in Benue, Nasarawa, and Plateau states. These conflicts are often driven by competition for resources such as land, water, and minerals, and are exacerbated by factors like poverty, unemployment, and weak governance.

For instance, on 28 February 2023, a clash between herders and farmers was reported in the community of Tse Akyegh in Ikyaghev ward of Gwer West LGA in Benue state. The conflict affected 122 individuals and displaced 115 individuals to the community High level in Ikyaghev ward of Gwer West LGA. As a result of the clash, 7 fatalities and 13 injuries were reported by International Organizations for Migration (2023). In the manner, on 03 and 04 March, 2023, clashes between herders and farmers were reported in the communities Ityulugh and Ityuluv in Mbaikyor ward of Kwande LGA in Benue state. The clashes affected 2,251 individuals and displaced 636 individuals to the community Jato-Aka in Yaav ward and 1,590 individuals to the community Ikyogen in Liev II ward of Kwande LGA. As a result of the clashes, 25 fatalities and 65 injuries were also reported by International Organizations for Migration (2023).

Incidences of resource-based conflicts abound in recent times, especially within the zone of north-central Nigeria. For instance, between February 8 and 10, 2011, Tiv farmers along the coast of the Benue River, in the Gwer west local government area of Benue, were attacked by hordes of herdsmen who killed 19 farmers and burned down 33 villages. The armed attackers returned on March 4, 2011, to kill 46 people, including women and children, and ransack an entire district [9].

The ferocity of these attacks and the sophistication of the weapons involved are reflected in the rise in casualties and the level of destruction. Between December 2010 and June 2011, more than 15 attacks were recorded, resulting in the loss of over 100 lives and over 300 homesteads destroyed, all in the Gwer-Wfavourocal government area. The government responded with the deployment of soldiers and mobile police to the affected areas, as well as the continued exploration of peace initiatives, including establishing a crisis committee co-chaired by the Sultan of Sokoto and the paramount ruler of the Tiv, the Tor Tiv IV. This initiative is still ongoing [9].

Hostilities between the groups entered a lull in 2012 due to sustained peace initiatives and military surveillance but returned with renewed intensity and expansion in area coverage in 2013, affecting Gwer-West, Guma, Agatu, Makurdi Guma, and Logo local government areas of Nasarawa State. On separate occasions, Rukubi and Medagba villages in Doma were attacked by the Fulani, who were armed with AK-47 rifles, leaving over 60 people dead and 80 houses burned [2]. Again, on July 5, 2013, armed pastoralist, Fulani attacked Tiv farmers at Nzorov in Guma, killing over 20 residents and burning down the entire settlement. These settlements are those in local council areas that are found along the coasts of the rivers Benue and Katsina-Ala. The contestation for pasture and water becomes intense and could easily devolve into armed confrontation [2].

**Table 1: Selected Incidences of Resource-based Conflicts in North-Central Nigeria (2013-2022)**

| <b>Date of occurrence</b> | <b>Place of the Incident</b>  | <b>Estimated Death</b> |
|---------------------------|---|------------------------|
| 1/1/2013                  | Jukun/ Fulani clash in Taraba State   | 5                      |
| 15/1/2013                 | farmers/Fulani clash in Nasarawa State  | 10                     |
| 24/1/2013                 | Fulani/farmers clash in Plateau State   | 9                      |
| 3/4/2013                  | Fulani/farmers clash in Guma, Benue State   | 3                      |
| 23/4/2013                 | Fulani/Egbe farmers clash in Kogi State   | 5                      |
| 29/6/2015                 | Agatu/Fulani clash in Kogi State  | 0                      |
| 23/8/2014                 | Aguleri of Anambra and Echeno/Odeke in Ibaji local government area of Kogi State. | 7                      |
| 11/06/2022                | Ebira Mozum and Bassa-Komo-speaking people of Kogi State.                         | 19                     |
| 4/4/2019                  | Tiv-Jukun Clash in Taraba State   | 16                     |
| 22/9/2022                 | Iharev and cooperatively-Sho Village in Makurdi                                   | 2                      |



**Source: Authors' Pilot Study, 2022.**

## **Causes of Resource-Based Conflict in North-Central Nigeria**

Natural resources are increasingly subject to intense competition. In most cases, several factors are responsible for this, including demographic change (e.g., population growth, migration, and urbanization); market pressures (e.g., increased commercialization, intensification, and privatization of local economies; growing integration of national and global economies; economic reforms); and environmental changes that force people to alter their livelihood strategies, e.g., floods, recurrent droughts, altered river flows, and changes in wildlife migration [12].

These forces can push people to exceed the sustainable harvesting limits of renewable natural resources (forests, water bodies, grazing areas, marine resources, wildlife, and agricultural land). In areas where the number of people is increasing, resources often need to be shared among more users with different interests. According to [8], these users range from farmers seeking access to agricultural land to pastoralists requiring pasture resources for livestock and city dwellers requiring more meat, fish, and cereals. Securing access to resources can become people's greatest concern when those resources are scarce. Water scarcity in arid or semi-arid regions is a key example. As freshwater is necessary for life but cannot be made or grown, access to water may serve as a focus of dispute. However, increased competition is not always the only cause of conflict. Four important conditions influence how access to resources could become contested. These are the scarcity of a natural resource; the extent to which the supply is shared by two or more groups; the relative power of those groups; the degree of dependence on this particular resource; or the ease of access to an alternative embodiment [8].

Increased demand for resources can, however, result in responses other than conflict. For example, it can lead to agricultural intensification (using fertilizer, terracing, irrigation, multiple cropping, stall-feeding livestock, tree planting, etc.), increased reliance on non-farm/off-farm income, or increased commercialization of production. Ross (2014) argued that these new adaptations may in turn generate conflicts as resource use patterns are altered. One of the primary causes of some of the conflicts is the trespassing of cattle on farmland samples, it can lead to agricultural intensification (using fertilizer, terracing, irrigation, multiple cropping, stall-feeding livestock, tree planting, etc.), increased reliance on non-farm/off-farm income, or increased commercialization of production.

Ross (2014) further argued that these new adaptations may in turn generate conflicts as resource use patterns are altered. One of the primary causes of some of the conflicts is the trespassing of cattle on farmlands. This involves two things: the cramping of the soil, which makes cultivation using traditional means of tilling (a hoe) extremely difficult, and the destruction of the crops and farm products. The intensification of the conflict during the cropping season prevented farmers from cultivating or clearing the area and allowing for unrestricted grazing (Ross, 2014).

Crops such as yams, cassava, and maize are widely consumed by cattle as forage or pasture. Once the Fulani have forced their way to settle and occupy space, they can successfully secure grazing, especially with the use of arms. They can then reduce farming activities and take over cultivated land. Those interviewed were unanimous regarding this trespassing on farmlands as an immediate cause of the sustained conflict between the groups. Nyiga Gogo in Merkyen village (Gwer west LGA), Terseer Tyondon in Uvir village (Guma LGA), and Emmanuel Nyambo in Mbadwen village (Guma LGA) lamented the loss of their farms to incessant cattle trampling and grazing. Attempts by farmers to resist this was repelled, forcing them to flee and subsequently relocate to temporary camps at Daudu, St. Mary's Church, North Bank, and Community Secondary Schools, Makurdi [24].

However, the following are the fundamental sources of resource-based conflict in Nigeria:

### **1. Structural causes of conflict:**

Established organizations and patterns govern how the law works, how education and health services are provided, and how women and men, old and young people live as families and communities. These could be described as how society is organized or structured. Natural resource conflicts are often underpinned by this structure [12].

A conflict may involve one issue—, for example, a boundary dispute between two villages. This could be addressed by local people using customary law. But if someone wants to use state law, the conflict becomes more complicated. [19] posited that structural conflict may arise because customary law and state law are organized differently, one being local and the other being national. State law is usually stronger, and the conflict may then move from a boundary dispute to one about people's rights and identities. Deeper, structural issues such as this often have roots in long-standing conditions, such as how wealth or power is produced, distributed, or controlled in society. Broader social, political, economic, or legal frameworks within a society may be perceived as unjust, ineffective, or exclusionary. This makes it harder to solve the problem. Structural conflicts often lie dormant until awakened by other factors.

As [12] posited, conflicts between official/statutory and customary tenure systems cause major concern. Even if the great majority of rural people obtain their rights to land through customary means, local land tenure arrangements often have an uncertain or insecure position within national policy frameworks. Customary land rights often remain unclear, even when they are acknowledged legally, so state law may continue to come into conflict with custom. Different authorities using different rules can then make contradictory decisions—one in customary law and another in statute law. Wider inequalities (real or perceived) may also lead to conflicts over the use or control of natural resources. For example, marginalized groups may compete for the chance to gain or secure rights, while privileged groups may feel the need to defend their existing rights. Sometimes, minority groups may compete to seek more influence. Then, struggling for resource access becomes linked with a search for recognition of identity, status, and political rights [12].

## **2. Socio-economic change fuels conflict:**

When society and the economy change, it is not surprising that the interests and needs of users of natural resources also change. Economic development often increases pressures on natural resources, and this can trigger conflict or make existing conflicts worse. The following are some examples: The introduction of new technologies can have positive and negative effects on the sustainability of resource use. Managed well, technologies such as synthetic fertilizers, agricultural mechanization, or permanent irrigation can improve people's lives. Poorly managed resources, however, can reduce the capacity of renewable natural resources to regenerate, increase resource scarcity, and threaten the livelihoods of resource-dependent users in the longer term [12].

## **3. Commercialization of common property resources:**

Many poor people depend on common property resources for their livelihoods. These are resources that are shared and jointly managed by several groups. The value of some resources (wildlife, land, forests, fish, etc.) is increasing. The increase in benefits can encourage powerful groups to monopolize benefits through "private" property rights, often excluding others from using the resources, and thereby resorting to misunderstanding [12].

## **4. Migration:**

Migration changes how rural society and resource use are organized. When people move into towns and cities, the available labour for sustainable resource management is reduced. This may be another grievance line in resource quality and value [29]. Migration into rural areas increases the demand for resource use and may challenge the customary rules of distributing access. Whenever strangers who are not part of the local customary systems of resource ownership, use, and management invade the community, conflicts will ensue.

## **5. Perverse incentives:**

People respond predictably when they are given economic encouragement to act. A subsidy or guaranteed price for coffee makes more people grow coffee. High taxes on one crop make people grow when they do not, they are called "perverse" (wrong-headed or unreasonable) incentives. Some perverse incentives can lead to corruption, rent-seeking, and other sources of conflict [25], for example between rural communities and officials.

## **6. Natural resource management policies, programs, and projects as sources of conflict:**

New policies of decentralization, devolution, and collaborative management increase the decision-making power and influence of local communities, households, and individuals. Such policies encourage communities to become more involved in decisions affecting their livelihoods and the resources on which those livelihoods are based. Although such policies are helpful for sustainable livelihoods, the

successful introduction of greater power sharing among different groups is often challenging. Policies, programs, and projects themselves can serve as sources or arenas of conflict, even though they intend to reduce conflict or improve livelihoods. Reasons include the following as highlighted by FAO (2000):

**Policies imposed without local participation:** Natural resource policies and interventions are often made without the active participation of communities and local resource users. For example, some governments rely on centralized management strategies controlled by administrative units and technical experts. These often fail to take into account local natural resource rights and practices [25].

**Densification and consultation:** Stakeholders are people or groups who possess an interest in or influence over a resource. Examples of stakeholders are the local government and the community. However, such groups are often highly varied and contain many subgroups. So counting the community as one stakeholder group may be meaningless; some people may have very different interests from others, according to gender, status, age, wealth, ethnicity, etc. Conflicts can occur because planners and managers identify stakeholders inadequately or fail to acknowledge a group's interest in a resource [19].

**Uncoordinated planning:** Many governments and other agencies still rely on sectoral approaches with limited cross-sectoral planning and coordination. For example, the agricultural service may promote cash crop expansion in forests to raise incomes without recognizing the adverse effects of this on other resource users. Overlapping and competing goals among agencies may lead to confusion when those agencies are unable to reconcile other stakeholders' needs and priorities (FAO, 2000).

**Inadequate or poor information sharing:** Effective sharing of information on policies, laws, procedures, and objectives can improve the success of programs and reduce the likelihood of conflicts. In contrast, a lack of information on the planning agencies' intentions may lead to suspicion and mistrust [2].

**Limited institutional capacity:** Conflicts arise when government and other organizations cannot engage in sustaining neighbouring resource management. Not only do organizations face financial constraints for staff and equipment, but they also often lack the expertise to anticipate conflicts or to handle conflicts that arise in the course of their actions and affect

**Inadequate monitoring and evaluation of programs:** Programs and priorities are often designed without clearly defined monitoring and evaluation components, especially regarding natural resource conflicts. When there is no systematic monitoring and evaluation of natural resource management activities, it is more difficult to identify or address conflict (FAO, 2000).

**Lack of effective mechanisms for conflict management:** for natural resource management programs to be effective, mechanisms for participatory conflict management need to be incorporated into their design and implementation. These should ensure that open or latent conflicts are constructively dealt with to reduce the chances of conflict escalation (FAO, 2000).

## **Escalation of Resource-Based Conflict in North-Central Nigeria**

Escalation involves an increase in the intensity of a conflict and in the severity of the tactics used in pursuing it. Once a conflict is in the escalation phase, identities, grievances, goals, and methods often change in ways that perpetuate the conflict in an increasingly destructive fashion [16]. Thus, each side's collective identity is shaped as the opposite of the enemy's identity. Group loyalty is also often demonstrated by antagonism toward the enemy. Additionally, good qualities are increasingly attributed to one's group, while bad qualities are increasingly attributed to the enemy, sometimes going so far as to dehumanize the enemy.

The fighting itself generates new grievances among members of each side as the adversaries inflict injuries on each other. In addition, old dissatisfactions and injustices are aroused, and responsibility for them is ascribed to the current in the enemy. Of course, many agents -- political leaders, intellectuals, and religious leaders play crucial roles in formulating grievances and identifying the injustices suffered and those responsible for them [16].

Goals tend to become firmer as a conflict escalates, since making concessions seems more difficult after sacrificing so much in waging the struggle. (This is commonly called "entrapment" (Brockner, 1985). Goals also sometimes expand to include harming the adversary for the sake of retribution. Furthermore, unresolved old issues are often revived, further increasing the matter under contention.

As conflicts escalate further, the methods of fighting may lose their practical connection with the goals of each side. The desire for revenge results in atrocities that further inflame the fight. One example is the breakdown in Israeli-Palestinian peace negotiations and the second Intifada that erupted in September 2000 [16].

As posited by this author, once a conflict begins to escalate, many processes contribute to its institutionalization and self-perpetuation. As a conflict persists, members of one group teasingly view members of the other side as enemies with bad qualities, and perhaps as cruel and untrustworthy. Such socialization contributes to a conflict's further intractability. Mutual fear increases and people on each side are concerned about their vulnerability if they yield. One group may hear another group's call for justice as a cry for revenge.

As the fight persists, some people on each side develop vested interests in continuing the struggle. Some gain prestige, income, and power by participating as warriors in the fight, and they may lack alternative careers promising equal gains. Others may profit by engaging in a variety of illegal activities associated with the struggle. The nature of their identities, their grievances, and their goals are changed in ways that make a mutual accommodation more difficult to reach. The customary methods of struggle may seem suitable for achieving new goals, and the fight with the enemy is tenaciously pursued in the same old manner [16].

## **Consequences of resource-based conflict on rural development**

The resource-based conflict has devastating consequences, especially in rural areas. Being more sparsely populated and more difficult to police, rural spaces offer relatively safe havens for violent groups to gain ground and base their operations, terrorizing rural communities in the process. In the north-central part of Nigeria, conflicts that had happened so far had led to the following:

### **1. Death of people**

In most conflicts in North Central Nigeria that involved the use of firearms, many were wounded, and maimed, while some others died [34]. The conflict in Ibaji and Bassa local government areas had left many dead. What is most painful is that several of the victims of these attacks are youths who usually volunteer themselves for these battles because of the confidence they have in their mystical fortification, which most times leaves them disappointed with irredeemably disastrous and calamitous losses. Some of them who engage in battle die, and again, others who are innocent but happen to be victims of circumstances also die. As the surviving opponents seek measures to weaken or rubbish their power, and this is how the "merry will go round" until tall get eliminated, fulfilling the scripture that says, "He who lives by the sword will die by the sword" (Luke 9:23). Once upon a time, the city of Anyigba lived in fear of many dreadful thugs, who have all since died. Their lifespans don't always go beyond the government or party in power that they served.

### **2. Destruction of properties**

Conflicts that involved ethnicities had always led to the destruction of buildings, cars, and public installations in areas where these conflicts erupted [28]. In places like Ebiroko, Ogba, Sheria, and Oguma in the Bassa local government area, so many buildings had been brought down; some had been burned while others that were left standing had had their roofs removed. Similar results are obtained in warring communities in Ibaji local government and also in Agbenema and Bagana in Omala local government areas, where several affected victims are homeless [28].

### **3. The decline of commercial activities as well as agricultural practices**

Whenever there were reported cases of conflict in Anyigba, Sheria, and Bagana, to mention a few, commercial activities got paralyzed and frustrated. People will avoid going to the market in these affected towns at least for some market days until peace or normalcy is seen to be restored. The consequence of this is a decline in per capita income and, ultimately, the national income of the country and a fall in the standard of living of people should the crisis persist [23].

### **4. Vacation of an ancestral home or land**

Many people had evacuated their families from communities that experienced frequent conflicts. Today, many communities had been evacuated in the Bassa Nkomo District of Bassa local government due to frequent and protracted conflicts for which the solution seemed elusive. The people live in perpetual fear of sudden attacks because the two warring tribes are not ready to sheathe their swords. Neighbouring towns such as Dekina, Anyigba, and Lokoja are flooded with refugees from the Bassa local government, particularly people of other tribes that are not directly involved in the conflict. This sudden relocation will undoubtedly affect the economy and means of livelihood of these people, as well as the centration of their children and their social, physical, and emotional health. At one point, a whole community in Ibaji's local government was driven from their ancestral homes. It took the intervention of the government for the stronger community to permit the return of their brethren they had driven away from the land [7] .

### **5. Love lost**

Breaches of trust and love may no longer be built between the warring communities and families. In conflicts, many harms and wrongs are done, such that when the coasts get cleared, confidence and trust in one another will be very difficult to come by. For instance, if during the conflict one recognizes the person who pulled down one's house or killed one's spouse, parents, or children, how will one reconcile with such a person for a normal relationship to resume? It is difficult, if not impossible. It can only take a regenerated mind not to engage in vendetta [23].

Conflict and violence force people out of their communities, leaving them without resources or means to start afresh. They stall the lives of millions of people, depriving adults of their dignity and children of their childhood. According to the most recent UNHCR data available, 65.3 million people were forcibly displaced in 2015, and that figure has been growing at a rate of 34,000 people per day. Of these, 21.3 million are refugees, and half of them are under the age of 18. The pressure on receiving countries, where this sudden population increase puts their host countries at risk of food shortages and competition for limited employment opportunities.

In rural areas, the conflict has devastating consequences. Being more sparsely populated and more difficult to police, rural spaces offer relatively safe havens for violent groups to gain ground and base their operations, terrorizing rural communities in the process. Decreased investment, trade, and productivity, along with human and physical capital destruction (including forced displacement and devastating effects on education and health care), are some of the key channels through which conflict impedes economic growth [28].

This is one way that conflict and rural development are related. The relationship between the two is complex and tightly intertwined. In addition to brutally affecting rural communities, conflict often stems from competition for land and natural resources, such as water. Poverty, a lack of employment, and opportunities for a better future fuel resentment and offer extremists fertile recruiting grounds. When conflict erupts, rural development becomes difficult, if not impossible. Conversely, prosperous rural

areas are more resilient to conflict. Investing in rural areas to strengthen rural communities in food production, business creation, productive activities, basic infrastructure, and conflict mitigation helps prevent conflict escalation, promotes stability, and reduces food insecurity that results from the massive displacement of farmers [23].

The International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) has considerable experience in preventing conflict and buffering its impact through investments in inclusive, sustainable rural transformation in Africa, the Middle East, and Latin America. By investing in rural development, we can give rural people the option to stay and the strength to resist the onset of violence. By focusing on agriculture production and rural business development, countries become more resilient to food shortages and the degradation of natural resources. This is particularly important in countries that heavily depend on food imports and have little or no autonomy in food production. On the other hand, rural business development offers alternatives to farmers and producers to diversify their activities and invest in their territories, making them more likely to survive a bad harvest as well as natural or man-made disasters.

Development is a complex process, a social, cultural, religious, political, economic, and technological puzzle in which the pieces constantly change shapes. Investment in inclusive rural transformation strengthens the fabric of the society that will build the puzzle and hold the pieces together for years to come. In conflict zones, the coordinated work and investment of the international community are crucial and should be geared toward providing the tools and knowledge for rural organizations and local institutions to take ownership of their community's development. It should support local and national authorities, as they represent the people, to create policies that favour sustainable and peaceful growth and to gain the skills and tools to negotiate, enforce, and maintain peace and security. While contributing to the achievement of Agenda 2030 for sustainable development is also a moral obligation [23].

### **Management of Resource-Based Conflicts in North-Central Nigeria**

It is true that to avoid further damage to nature, life, and property and ensure socio-economic growth and political stability, stakeholders in organizational or societal conflict must be placated. The parties to the conflict should be made to settle their differences. The process of doing this is known as "conflict resolution." Conflict resolution, in its simplest term, is therefore the method and processes that have to do with facilitating the peaceful ending of a conflict and retribution. The concept of conflict resolution is open to many interpretations. On one hand, it can be regarded as any process that revolves around or ends conflict via methods that can include violence or warfare. Alternatively, it can be viewed as a non-violent process that manages conflict through compromise or with the assistance of a third party who either facilitates or imposes a settlement or resolution on the parties [22].

This implies that the instrument of conflict resolution depends on the nature and parties involved in a conflict. Conflict resolution processes are many and varied and can be seen on a continuum ranging from collaborative, participatory, informal, non-binding processes (such as mediation, conciliation, and



third-party negotiation) to adversarial, fact-oriented, legally binding, and imposed decisions that arise from institutions such as the courts and tribunals Boulle cites in [3]. Typically, mediation, conciliation, or negotiation are activities that facilitate communication between participants who are seeking to resolve their differences cooperatively. This approach could be better for conflict resolutions since the majority of scholarly arguments on conflict management suggest a belief in the approach, as the key to the resolution of conflict is to focus on the interests of the contending parties rather than their positions, where notices situation where one party seeks to impose on another.

It was argued by [22] that a conflict can only be considered resolved if the following conditions are met:

The solution jointly satisfies the interests and needs of the parties via a joint agreement. The solution does not compromise the value of either party. The parties do not accept the solution, even if they have the power to do so. The solution is fair and just and becomes self-supporting and enforcing.

This form of conflict resolution seems ideal because it aims to achieve an enduring outcome, but not always practicable in situations where the relationship between the two parties is severely strained or when there is no ongoing relationship to maintain [18]. This suggests that the resolution of conflict through a non-adversarial approach can be effective during the early stages of conflict resolution. How conflict is handled determines whether it will result in a constructive or destructive outcome [13].

Regardless of the level of conflict, there are different approaches to dealing with incompatibilities. Conflict can result in destructive or creative others depending on the approach that is taken. If creatively managed, it could lead to new solutions that are mutually satisfactory to both parties. Given its interdependence, Fisher (2000) identified three general strategies parties to a conflict could take in dealing with their incompatibility: win-lose, lose-lose, and win-win. The win-lose approach is the most common approach to conflict resolution. The assumption here is that what one party gains, the other loses. The strategy is thus to force the other party to capitulate. Sometimes this is done through socially acceptable mechanisms such as a majority vote, the authority of the leader, or the determination of a judge. Sometimes it involves secret strategies such as threats and promises of rewards. This approach is noted to always result in a victorious and vanquished party between the two conflicting groups and could not provide a lasting solution to the conflict. A lose-lose approach occurs when neither party gains what they compete for. The parties may decide these on their own or be forced by an external force to do so [22].

Another approach is the win-win approach, which emphasizes a strategy to conflict resolution in which each party secures some of its interests from contending issues. This may come as a result of a dialogue between the disputing parties, with external forces playing a mediating role. Similarly, conflict resolution, according to [22], can take two different forms: the use of force, that is, forcing parties to fall into a compromise line, or the naked demonstration of power by one group over another. However, this

approach has been proven inadequate in resolving conflict; it leads to bottled-up anger that will erupt at the slightest opportunity.

On the other hand, a resolution that comes about through common consent is more lasting because the parties involved believe they are parties to the resolution process and are therefore willing to make it work. This approach emphasizes the power of round table negotiation in the process of conflict resolution. However, effective communication has also been shown by research and experience to be at the centre of effective crisis management. [26] states that the best antidotes, in the end, are consistent and persistent communication—day in and day out, year in and year out. With consistent communication and thoughtful planning, companies are prepared to encounter crises with a measure of calm and emerge with a measure of success [22].

Conflict management that follows the principles of sustainable livelihoods seeks to facilitate a balanced negotiation of competing resource claims among different stakeholders. Successful conflict management enhances awareness of, knowledge of, and skills to identify and overcome constraints in the development process (human capital); strengthens relationships and builds trust within and among groups (social capital); increases the capacity of communities, organizations, and institutions to solve problems; contributes to strengthening the institutional arrangements that regulate access to and use of resources (policies, institutions, and processes); and fosters the increased flow of income and benefits through improved access to and management of natural resources [10].

Over the years, the government has taken several measures to try and deal with the various conflicts. The most pronounced has been the deployment of the army to improve the security situation. But this has not managed to stem the various sources of conflict. There is some evidence that the conduct of soldiers tends to worsen the security situation. This in turn strains civil-military relations. For instance, in 2001, the military killed over 200 people in Benue State

(<https://www.hrw.org/reports/2002/nigeria/Nigeria0402-02.htm>). They were supposed to be on a peace restoration mission in the state.

It has become clear that effective collaborative resource management involves attention to conflict management issues. Disagreement over access rights, lack of consensus on management objectives, and misinformation or misunderstandings emerge in most settings. Managing differences of opinion is critical to nurturing an atmosphere in which constructive solutions can be identified and taken forward.

### **The Roles of Government and International Organizations in Supporting Local Efforts in the Management of Resource-Based Conflicts**

Governments and international organizations play crucial roles in supporting local efforts to manage resource-based conflicts. Their involvement can provide necessary resources, expertise, and legitimacy

to grassroots initiatives. However, the effectiveness of these interventions depends on how well they complement and empower local efforts rather than supplanting them.

### **1. Policy Framework and Legal Support:**

Governments are instrumental in creating enabling policy environments for local conflict management. Lind et al. (2020) argue that national policies should recognize and support customary institutions and local governance structures in managing natural resources. This approach can help bridge the gap between formal state systems and traditional conflict resolution mechanisms.

International organizations often assist in developing these policy frameworks. For instance, the UN Environment Programme (UNEP) has been working with governments to integrate environmental and natural resource management into peacebuilding programmes (UNEP, 2022).

### **2. Capacity Building and Technical Support:**

Both governments and international organizations provide crucial capacity-building support to local actors. This includes training in conflict resolution, natural resource management, and climate change adaptation. The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) has been particularly active in this area, implementing projects that strengthen local capacities for peace and development in conflict-prone areas (UNDP, 2023).

### **3. Funding and Resource Allocation:**

Financial support from governments and international donors is often critical for sustaining local conflict management initiatives. However, Ide et al. (2021) caution that funding mechanisms need to be designed carefully to avoid creating dependency or exacerbating local power imbalances.

### **4. Coordination and Multi-stakeholder Engagement:**

Governments and international organizations can play a vital role in coordinating efforts across different levels and sectors. [14] has been promoting integrated approaches that bring together various stakeholders, including local communities, government agencies, and civil society organizations (FAO, 2021).

### **5. Research and Knowledge Sharing:**

International organizations often contribute to the evidence base for effective conflict management strategies. For example, the International Crisis Group regularly publishes analyses of conflict dynamics and recommendations for policymakers and practitioners (International Crisis Group, 2023).

### **6. Monitoring and Evaluation:**

Governments and international organizations can provide oversight and evaluation of local conflict management initiatives. This can help in identifying best practices and areas for improvement. The World Bank's involvement in monitoring and evaluating community-driven development projects in conflict-affected areas is a notable example (World Bank, 2022).

### **7. Addressing Transboundary Issues:**

In cases where resource conflicts have cross-border dimensions, international organizations play a crucial role in facilitating dialogue and cooperation between countries. The Lake Chad Basin Commission, supported by various UN agencies, exemplifies this approach in managing shared water resources in a conflict-prone region (Okpara et al., 2020).

While these contributions are significant, it's important to note that external interventions can sometimes have unintended negative consequences. Autesserre (2021) argues that top-down approaches by international actors can sometimes undermine local initiatives and exacerbate conflicts. Therefore, the most effective interventions are those that prioritize local ownership and adapt to specific contexts.

In essence, governments and international organizations have important roles in supporting local efforts to manage resource-based conflicts. However, their interventions should be carefully designed to complement and strengthen local capacities rather than replacing them.

### **Theoretical Framework: The Eco-Violence Theory**

This paper adopted eco-violence thinking as its theoretical underpinning. The theory was propagated by Homer-Dixon and Blitt. Dixon and Blitt (1998) noted that human existence is contingent on the scarcity of resources and that a scarcity of resource endowment bidding to conflicts.

The underlying assumption of the eco-violence thesis goes to explain the fact that when resources are scarce (land, water, and mineral resources, among others), and because of excessive demands by several competing interests and social groups, there is bound to be conflict. Conversely, the increased demand or unequal distribution oft brought about by environmental hazards could result in violence against the population, as the case may be. The scarcity of resources can be exacerbated by factors such as climate change, an increase in population, and many other environmental challenges [15]. This is what has happened in the recent past in most African countries, especially with the shrinking of the Lake Chad region.

The Food and Agricultural Organization has been quoted as saying that, of the 30 million people living in the Lake Chad region, competition for water resources is worrisome. Again, the drying and depreciation of the Lake Chad Basin is a major driver of conflict. To be sure, it has been alleged that fish production alone has declined by 60 percent in terms of production level, while pastoralist activities

have been downgraded, giving rise to an increasing shortage of animal feeds, general bio-diversity, and a lack of food for livestock [15].

According to the United Nations Secretary General, Amina Mohammed, over 2.3 million inhabitants in Africa have been displaced; over 5 million persons cannot access food, while a colossal amount of individuals and seven vulnerable groups (especially women, children, and the elderly) currently suffer from acute malnutrition. The recent trend in Nigeria of kidnapping individuals in busloads [4], [21] as well as the attack on 26 March at the Kaduna International Airport [27], the bombing of trains and the kidnapping of hundreds of train passengers over two consecutive days and the incessant clashes over resources in the North-Central Nigeria exemplify the emerging trends of eco-violence theory [15].

However, the eco-violence theory has been heavily criticized for its simplistic approach to the explanation of the subject matter of group or inter-group relations and violence. For most of the conflicts experienced, not only in Nigeria but in Africa generally, the issue of scarcity of resources has been a highly insignificant contributing factor to conflicts. Instead, what has been the bane of conflict is the way and manner in which some of those resources have been misappropriated through the instrumentality of self-aggrandizement, indolence, banality, greed, and avarice by the elite and/or opportunistic class. The tendency to continue to accumulate resources has basically side-lined the general interests of the already impoverished masses, who in turn are being manipulated by the same politicians to cause mayhem all in the name of tribal or religious conflicts. Nonetheless, the theory has also become relevant because it gives a bigger picture of the reality of a lack of focus and direction on how Africans, and indeed, Third World countries, have continuously failed to sufficiently tap their own resources to be able to manage and sustain their teeming populations ever since the advent of democratic institutions and shortly after the military interregnum in the early 1960s and beyond.

## **CONCLUSIONS**

This paper has attempted to x-ray the relationship between rural development and resource-based conflict in north-central Nigeria. Resource-based conflicts are a common occurrence in Nigeria's north-central area, and can have extremely damaging effects on both people and property. A result of the fighting, some villages were left desolate, and some people who survived were lamenting the loss of their loved ones. Most often, these disputes result from an incapacity to manage the community's limited resources and from giving in to the demands of some self-interested politicians who seek to gain or hold onto power at all costs. The most beloved Kogi, Benue, and Nassarawa towns, among others in the North Central States, that were previously tranquil and had welcomed visitors and outsiders, have now turned into awful and nightmare places to live as a result of these wars.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

Based on the revelations from the above reviews, the authors made the following recommendations:

1. There should be an independent commission to oversee the management of natural resources, such as land, water, and minerals. This commission should conduct resource mapping and auditing, develop and enforce resource usage policies, resolve disputes and conflicts related to resource access.
2. There should be a promotion and Implementation of initiatives to modernize livestock management, such as ranching and feedlot development, livestock breeding and improvement programs and training for herders on sustainable grazing practices.
3. Foster Inter-Community Dialogue and Cooperation: There should be a regular dialogue sessions between farming and herding communities to address grievances and resolve conflicts, develop mutual understanding and trust, identify joint economic opportunities and collaborative projects that will provide employment opportunities for the youths in the region. There should also be local peace committees by forming diverse groups representing all stakeholders to mediate disputes and promote dialogue between farmers, herders, and other resource users can help.
4. There should be alternative livelihoods to support diversification of income sources to reduce dependency on scarce natural resources and mitigate competition. Revitalize and adapt customary practices for dispute resolution, integrating them with formal systems.
5. Facilitate intercommunity exchanges: Organize forums for different groups to share experiences, build trust, and develop joint solutions by training community members to identify and report potential conflict triggers, enabling rapid response and prevention.

These recommendations require a collaborative effort from government agencies, local communities, traditional leaders, and civil society organizations to effectively manage resource-based conflicts in North Central Nigeria.

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