THE IMPACT OF CONFLICT ON THE ECONOMY: THE CASE OF PLATEAU STATE OF NIGERIA

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

This paper is not a research report but rather an exploratory exercise towards documenting the impact of conflict on the economy, especially the poor, with particular reference to the Plateau State of Nigeria. Plateau State of Nigeria has been in the news since the first major ethno-religious conflict of 7th September, 2001 in which over 2000 lives were lost and property worth millions of naira (Nigerian Currency) were destroyed in the Capital city of Jos and other Local Government Areas. The Conflicts kept recurring sporadically in different parts of the State especially the Southern Senatorial District of the State comprising of Langtang North, Langtang South, Shendam and Wase Local Government Areas among others. The latest serious conflict of May, 2004 led to the killing of hundreds of citizens, mainly Muslims, in Yelwan Shendam. Thousands fled their normal places of abode into “refugee” camps in the neighbouring states of Bauchi and Nassarawa States. Eventually the President of Nigeria Chief Olusegun Obasanjo had to declare a “State of Emergency” in Plateau State on 18th May, 2004. This was based on the powers conferred on him by the Constitution. The National Assembly by a near unanimous decision ratified the declaration of the President. This led to the suspension of the elected governor, the members of the State House of Assembly and the appointment of a Sole Administrator to run the affairs of the state for six months in the first instance.

This conflict has had enormous negative consequences on the economy, and especially on the poor, which is yet to be measured with a view to finding appropriate growth policies that will ameliorate the situation. The paper intends to discuss the impact of the conflict in the state on particularly agricultural production, livestock production, commerce, shelter and transportation. The casual observations on the trends in these areas demonstrate very negative consequences for the poor leading to further pauperization especially with the loss of means of livelihood in the forms of farmland, livestock, markets, houses and means of transportation.

The key concepts that need to be defined in the research proper shall be “IMPACT”, “CONFLICT” and “ECONOMY.” The operational definitions of these concepts in the context of Plateau State of Nigeria shall guide the conceptual framework for the research. The scope of the research shall be limited to the Plateau State, which is one of the 36 administrative divisions of the Federal Republic of Nigeria. The period of the study shall be restricted to 2001, the year of the occurrence of the major conflict in Jos City, and 2004, the year of the declaration of a state of emergency in the state.

Plateau State is located in the highlands of Central Nigeria. It has a lot of features, which attract a large population and support various economic activities. The discovery of tin and columbite on the Plateau by the British led to the conscription of labourers from all the provinces of Northern Nigeria to work in the tin mines. The availability of fertile agricultural land attracted farmers from distant places to engage in the production of various crops. The climatic situation of the Plateau, which is near temperate along with the abundant water and pasture led to the flocking of livestock rearers to the area. The absence of diseases which are detrimental to livestock rearing led to a heavy concentration of livestock usually reared by the Fulani on the Plateau. The temperate climate of the Jos Plateau coupled with its natural tourist resources attracted Nigerians and foreigners alike to the Plateau for vacation, permanent settlement or retirement. The location of Jos as a transport node served by an airport, rail link to the north and south of the country as well as road transport network to different parts of the country facilitate commerce. The agricultural and industrial goods produced on the Plateau and those imported from other parts of the country as well as abroad led to the development of a vibrant commercial sector in the Plateau State symbolized by the imposing Jos
Central Market also known as the “Terminus Market” because of its location near the railway terminus.

BACKGROUND

In order to put the conflict on the Plateau in a proper perspective it would be worthwhile to highlight the recent political history of Nigeria and to briefly illustrate the turmoil in the Central States of Nigeria otherwise called the “Middle Belt”, a geo-political term with a lot of ethno-religious connotations. At independence in 1960 Nigeria emerged as a Federal System with three regions. Not long after independence the country became a republic and the regions were increased to four. At that time Nigeria operated the Westminster parliamentary system copied from Britain. The economy was largely based on the agricultural resources of the country with each region excelling in an area of comparative advantage. This gave rise to rapid development in the areas of infrastructure, industry and social development. The majority of the citizens had a comfortable living standard compared to the current acute level of poverty. In a truly federal setting there was a Federal Constitution and each region had its own Constitution and diplomatic agents.

In 1966, the military seized power and interrupted the democratic system. The conflict among the military eventually led to a civil war which lasted from 1967-1970. The period after the civil war saw a vigorous exploitation of the petroleum resources of Nigeria which led to what came to be known as the “oil boom.” A lot of revenue accrued to the Nigerian State which consequently led to the neglect and decline of agricultural development.

Under the military, Nigeria saw a lot of political engineering. The four regions in the post independence period were overnight transformed into 12 States in 1967. With increased demands for self-determination by various parts of the country and subsequent military coups the States continued to be multiplied at intervals. At present Nigeria has a total of 36 States with a Federal Capital Territory and the States are broken into 776 Local Government Areas.

In 1979 a Constitution modeled on the American Presidential System was fashioned out by the military to return the country to democracy. On the basis of this a general election was held whereby a President, Governors as well as Local Government Chairmen were elected for the country. This was shortlived because the military struck again in 1983 to terminate democracy.

A long transition programme was developed by the military which saw the formulation of a new constitution in 1989 and another in 1999. In essence these did not depart fundamentally from the 1979 constitution. Another general election was held which led to a return to democracy with the election of the Executive and Legislative arms of government at the Federal, State and Local Government levels.

It is pertinent to point out the current central paradigm of Nigerian politics. In view of the enormous resources at the disposal of the state accruing from the sale of petroleum resources there is an intense competition for power leading to the widespread use of money and armed thugs in order to “win” elections. The state as the avenue for the control of decision-making, dispensation of political spoils and economic patronage raise the competition to the level of a vicious struggle.

In this contest for power the regional, ethnic and religious pluralism of Nigeria are exploited by various sections of the elite to serve their selfish interests. This can be demonstrated with the rise of the “Ethnic Militia,” which were hitherto unknown and the introduction of the Shari'ah Islamic Legal System in some Northern States. These developments have led to an increased polarization of the society and widespread use of violence both for political as well as criminal ends.
THE CONFLICTS IN CENTRAL NIGERIA

To situate the conflicts in Plateau State properly it is necessary to appreciate the ferment in the central states of Nigeria comprising of the states of Bauchi, Benue, Kaduna, Nassarawa, Plateau and Taraba. These states have some unique characteristics which differentiate them from the rest of the country. It would be worthwhile to briefly illustrate these elements which when manipulated negatively prepare the grounds for the conflicts in the zone. The socio-economic characteristics of the zone where summarized as follows in a Special Report by the National Orientation Agency, (NOA: 2002).

(i) Over 50% of the ethnic groups in Nigeria are found in the zone. It may be noted that no one ethnic group shares 100% of its culture and values with other ethnic groups.

(ii) Christianity, Islam and Traditional African Religion all command considerable influence on the lives of the people. In other words, there is deep-seated religious and cultural diversity.

(iii) Apart from rich mineral resources, the zones is also endowed with massive land and grazing activities. This explains the massive influx of people from other areas to this zone.

(iv) In terms of development, the zone is one of the least developed inspite of the location of the Federal Capital (close) to the zone.

(v) The zone has a very large pool of ex-servicemen. It is important to note that majority of these ex-servicemen were disengaged from service at very young ages and have not really been gainfully employed since their retirement.

(vi) The people of this zone are known to be hospitable, accommodating and peaceful. It is indeed worrisome that such a people could suddenly be engaged in frequent violent clashes. (NOA, 2002:2-3).

The same report also categorized the nature of the conflicts in the zone into two namely:

(a) Religious/Ethnic and (b) Land/Boundary. However it was observed that “it is important to note that the above categories sometimes have a tinge of politics.” (NOA, 2002:3).

In a survey of conflicts in Nigeria (JCPRCR,2003:17) with particular reference to the Middle Belt Zone it was asserted that:

“A major factor of communal conflicts in the zone is land or boundary disputes. This shows that land is becoming a very scarce factor of production either due to population pressure, land alienation or concentration of land in a few hands.” (Dunmoye, 2003:17).

More significantly in the Conclusion of the survey in the Middle Belt zone a link was established between the “conflicts,” “the economy” and “poverty” as follows:

“Communal conflicts in Nigeria has been exacerbated by the economic crisis and pauperization of citizens in recent times. Factors that account for these conflicts are numerous. These include ethnicism, religious differences and their manipulation, land hunger and burgeoning population, chieftaincy disputes and the native/settlers syndrome.” (Dunmoye, 2003:27)

A Strategic Conflict Assessment of Nigeria (IPCR,2003) with particular reference to the North-Central Zone concluded that conflicts in the North-Central focus largely around ethnic plurality, access to political and traditional positions of authority, land ownership and the clash of herder/cultivator interests. It was stressed that however;

“Underpinning these sources of antagonism and triggers are deeper systemic issues at the centre of which is the relationship between political power and
access to economic resources and opportunities. Poverty, unemployment and limited alternative routes to economic gain; governance that is not open or responsive to the needs of the people; and inadequate provision of security and to basic services also contribute to this central relationship. In the North Central region, this has brought about large numbers of casualties and displacement.” (IPCR, 2003:160).

IMPA CT OF THE CONFLICTS IN PLATEAU STATE ON THE ECONOMY

The essence of this research shall be to measure the impact of the conflicts in Plateau State on the economy. This should be in quantifiable terms with particular reference to the areas of agricultural production, livestock production, commerce, shelter and transportation. In general terms some allusions have been made to the negative impact of the conflicts on the economy. For instance President Obasanjo in justifying the declaration of the State of Emergency in Plateau State stated, among other things, that:

“Violence has reached unprecedented levels and hundreds have been killed with much more wounded or displaced from their homes on account of their ethnic or religious identification. Schooling for children has been disrupted and interrupted; businesses have lost billions of naira and property worth much more destroyed.” (Obasanjo:2004).

President Obasanjo went further to observe that visitors and investors have fled or are fleeing Plateau State and the neighbouring States have had their economies and social life disrupted and dislocated by the influx of internally displaced persons (Obasanjo:2004). To further stress this point the President said that the Federal Government and the neighbouring States to Plateau State are incurring huge expenses in managing the socio-political and economic consequences of the near collapse of State authority and the breakdown of law and order in some parts of Plateau State and elsewhere. (Obasanjo:2004).

Similarly in a Distinguished Annual Lecture presented to the National Institute, Kuru, in 2002 former President Ibrahim Babangida observed that the overall consequences of contemporary ethnic nationalism consist of the following among others:

* wastage of enormous human and material resources in ethnically inspired violent encounters, clashes and even battles;”
* threat to security of life and property and disinvestments of local and foreign components with continuous capital flight and loss of confidence in the economy.”
* “the heightening of fragility of the economy and political process.” (Babangida:2002)

In a research report presented by Participants of the Senior Executive Course No. 26 of the National Institute, the economic consequences of religious and communal conflicts were noted as follows:

“In addition to the irreplaceable loss of lives, losses in terms of property (goods, houses, business premises) have not yet been fully ascertained. Some survivors have permanently lost all they laboured for in their lives. As a result, one can safely argue that the aggregate of such instances negatively impact on the overall economy of these communities and by extension, the rest of the country. New armies of the unemployed, the destitute and highly aggrieved are added on the streets with its attendant consequences. Victims are also generally male and belonging to the economically active segments of the society.” (NIPSS:2004).
The case for a negative impact of the conflicts on the economy would have been established, at least in principle with the general observations above. To domesticate this axiom to the economy of Plateau State it is necessary to document, measure and quantify the extent of the negative impact of the conflicts on the economy within the period 2001 to 2004. Even from the above general observations a lot of research questions can arise. For instance how many lives have been lost? How many houses have been destroyed? How many shops and markets have been destroyed? How many people have been displaced? How many investors have fled the State? How have the conflicts affected the level of production in agriculture, livestock and industry? On the whole what have been the cumulative effects of all these on the economy, particularly on the poor people in the State? It would be worthwhile to look more closely at the various sectors of economic activities in Plateau State in order to appreciate the negative impact of the conflicts in Plateau State.

4.1 Agricultural Production.

The central location of Plateau State in Nigeria and its climatic conditions have blessed it to be conducive for the cultivation of a large variety of agricultural products. The availability of abundant land and low population density has made intensive agricultural production an important part of the rural economy. A casual survey of the crops produced in some of the Local Government Areas in the state shall illustrate the crucial place of agriculture in the economy of Plateau State.

Currently Plateau State has 17 Local Government Areas namely Barkin Ladi, Bassa, Bokkos, Jos East, Jos North, Jos South, Kanam, Kanke, Langtang North, Langtang South, Mangu, Mikang, Pankshin, Qu’an-Pan, Riyom, Shendam and Wase. Each of these local governments apart from those that are predominantly urban produce a variety of crops by way of some comparative advantage. A few examples shall suffice.

Kanam Local Government Area’s economy is mainly based on agriculture. The main crops grown include: maize, cotton, groundnuts, beans and millet. Kanam is credited to be the highest producer of quality cotton in the State (Shu’aibu, 1999). Similarly the economy of Kanke Local Government Area is agrarian with such food crops as guinea corn, groundnuts, acha, maize, millet, beans, cassava, rice, cocoyam, cotton and sweet potatoes. (Shu’aibu, 1999). The Langtang North Local Government Area is rich in the production of crops such as groundnuts, yams, guinea-corn, maize, and cotton (Mana, 1994).

The large scale agricultural production of the State has made some Local Governments to develop very significant grain markets. For instance Mangu Local Government Area’s economy is mainly agricultural with cash crops such as Irish potatoes, maize, beans, millet, wheat, rice, sorghum, and guinea corn being grown in commercial quantities and marketed both within and outside the State as well as to neighbouring countries. (Shu’aibu, 1999). The popular Mangu Friday grains market attracts traders from near and far. The Qu’an Pan Local Government also produces mainly yams, rice, maize, guinea corn, melon and groundnuts.

Riyom Local Government Area specializes in the production of a wide variety of vegetable products namely, Cabbage, Lettuce, Carrots, Green Beans, Cucumbers, Peas, Green Peppers, and a host of horticultural products. These are produced through both rain fed agriculture and irrigation farming. Other crops that are produced in the Local Government Area include acha, rice, sweet and Irish potatoes, maize and millet.

A searchlight on the Southern Senatorial district of the State which has been the most recent theatre of intense, bloody and destructive conflicts would show that it is an area of vibrant agricultural activity. For instance among the agricultural produce of Shendam Local Government Area are yam, rice, sorghum, beniseed, beans and potatoes. In the same manner Wase Local Government Area produces crops such as maize, sorghum, rice, groundnut, cotton and beans.
The import of the illustrations above with respect to the agricultural abundance in the Local Government Areas of the State is that there is sum level of food sufficiency and relative prosperity among the communities. With the outbreak of conflict agricultural activities are abandoned, crops are destroyed and communities that made substantial income from the sales of agricultural produce now have to depend on relief supplies. Certainly a lot of research questions can be formulated by undertaking a comparative study of agricultural production in the pre and post conflicts periods. For instance what was the extent of acreage under production? What was the tonnage of production for the various crops? What was the level of annual income derived by the members of the community from the sales of agricultural produce? There are a number of ancillary trades that depended on the agricultural economy such as farm labourers, traders, processing of farm produce, etc, which also suffer whenever there are conflicts.

4.2 Livestock Production.

Livestock plays a very important role in the national economy as demonstrated by Fetuga, (2003). He stated that historically, it has consistently contributed 5-6% of the national GDP and 15-20% of the total agricultural GDP over the years. More significantly it provides a source of employment and income for a large proportion of the rural population as well as an important source of protein in the local diet.

The current estimated livestock population comprises about 15.6 million cattle, 28.69 million sheep, 45.26 million goats, 5.25 million pigs, 118.59 million horses, camels and donkeys. (Fetuga, 2003). The livestock sub-sector is dominated by traditional systems of production, processing and marketing. Eighty percent of cattle, sheep and goats are reared by transhumant pastoralists. (Fetuga, 2003) This is also the root cause of many conflicts between herders and farmers over land use.

The availability of pasture as a result of the favourable rainfall, abundance of sources of water supply and the temperate climate of Plateau State makes it conducive for livestock rearing. The practice of transhumance also makes Plateau State a favourable destination for flocks of livestock from the North West and North East zones of the country. The following livestock are reared on the Plateau: Cattle, Sheep, Goats, Pigs, Poultry and Rabbits.

The livestock sub-sector generates revenue for Plateau State through its many diverse upstream and downstream enterprises e.g. Livestock trade tax, slaughter fees paid in government – owned abattoirs, Hides and Skins Buyers License fees and clinical treatment fees for livestock at government veterinary clinics. A large scale national trade network in livestock exists and Plateau State serves as one of the supply centres of this intricate trade. The location of the National Veterinary Research Institute, Vom in Plateau State was not an accident.

With the on-set of the conflicts in Plateau State in 2001 a number of Fulani community leaders and herders were killed. A large number of livestock were burnt or killed. Cattle rustling has been a major cause of the most recent conflict in the Southern part of the State. As a result a large number of the cattle herders along with their animals fled from the State to the neighbouring States of Bauchi, Nassarawa, Kaduna and the Federal Capital Territory. This triggered a phenomenal increase in the cost of livestock products especially beef and milk as a result of the conflict in Jos and environs.

The research questions that could arise with respect to the impact of the conflicts on the livestock sub-sector could be: How many heads of livestock were lost? How much revenue was lost by the State from the livestock sub-sector? By what percent did the cost of livestock products rise as a result of the conflict? What effect did the conflict have on the livestock population in the State? Adequate responses to these research questions would assist in measuring the negative impact of the conflict on the economy of Plateau State with particular reference to the livestock sub-sector.
4.3 **Commerce**

The location of Plateau State in the Kano-Kaduna-Jos industrial triangle and its strategic communication network as well as agricultural products has made the State into a commercial nerve center for the North-Central. The products of the industries in Jos and the proximity of Kano and Kaduna which are equally important centers of the manufacturing industry make the goods and services produced easily available thanks to the effective road network. The rail link to the South and North, as well as the airport linking Jos to Lagos make the availability of goods and services from these areas available in the State. As such an intricate wholesale and retail trade has developed in the North Central zone with its center based in Jos. For example the NASCO Group of Companies based in Jos produces a wide range of products which include carpets, biscuits, cornflakes, detergents, packaging materials and a variety of beauty care products. The Grand Cereals Oil Mill which is located in Zawan, Jos South Local Government Area produces numerous products in the three components of the industry involving flour products, cooking oil and livestock feeds. A long line of trailers off-loading raw materials is a familiar sight at the gates of the factory. The UAC Nigeria Ltd. Has a substantial share holding in the company. The Jos International Breweries also produces a number of alcoholic and non-alcoholic products which are widely distributed all over the country. There are numerous smaller industries including bottling companies, leatherworks, catering and hotel businesses which add to the sustenance of the vibrant commercial centre’s viability.

The most significant symbol of the commercial importance of the city is the Jos Central Market. This monumental edifice was built at a cost of ₦20million in the late 70s and commissioned in 1985. It has a capacity of 4,290 stalls of various sizes. It has the Parking Space that can accommodate comfortably, over 300 cars, 60 trailers and over 200 buses at a time. (Anonymous, n.d.). This ultra modern market was gutted by fire on 12th February, 2002, a few months after the 7th September, 2001 major ethnic/religious conflict in the city of Jos. Several billions of naira worth of wares were razed down in the inferno. No report of any enquiry on the fire incident has been published. Up to the present moment the market has neither been rebuilt nor the displaced traders rehabilitated. The market has virtually relocated to all the major roads of the commercial business area of the city.

Here also a large number of research questions can be asked concerning the negative impact of the fire especially on petty traders, artisans and the loss revenue to the government. Newspaper reports indicated that before the fire incident the State government realized a monthly revenue of about ₦40million. After the fire hardly could the State government realize ₦4million as revenue from the market. This has also contributed to the strained industrial relations between the State government and the its labour force because of its failure to pay workers’ salaries as an when due.

4.4 **Shelter**

One of the major casualties of the conflicts in Plateau State apart from human lives and livestock has been residential accommodation. The large scale destruction of houses, places of worship and shops forced a large number of people to be displaced. Many opted to relocate outside their normal places of abode or even outside the state for their safety.

The consequences of this widespread destruction of houses rendered many homeless and the government has never resettled such displaced citizens throughout the conflicts from 2001 to 2004. Some people had to abandon their houses while others sold what was left of them. There are indications in the estate market that many Nigerians who decided to build luxury homes for holidays in Jos and environs are putting up the houses for sale.
A worthwhile research project could assist in documenting the extent and magnitude of the loss of shelter by victims of the conflicts especially the poor. The most difficult damage to be repaired in this situation is the breach of trust in the community as people now prefer to live in segregated communities where they feel that their lives and property could be safe.

4.5 **Transportation:**

The wide expanse of the State with 17 Local Government Areas makes road transport the most strategic link for the movement of people, goods and services in the State. The existence of “Motor Parks” to cater for travellers to all parts of the State and the country at large makes mobility fairly feasible. The activities of the National Union of Road Transport Workers of Nigeria and the National Association of Road Transport Owners assist in organizing the transport sector efficiently. The State government, other State governments and the Federal Government also contribute through their transport companies and loan assistance to the sustainability of the sector.

The negative impact of the conflict in the State affected the transport sector in various ways. A large number of passenger vehicles and goods trailers were destroyed during the numerous conflicts in the State. The prevalence of conflicts in some parts of the State sometimes make certain roads impassable. This means long detours have to be made to reach nearby destinations. The vehicle fares and the cost of moving goods and services escalate in such circumstances. The majority of those who bear the brunt are most likely the poor.

An impact assessment of the conflicts in the State on the transport sector in Plateau State would reveal the number of passenger and good vehicles that have been lost. The consequences of this on passengers fares in the pre and post conflict periods should be measured in quantifiable terms. The implications of this for the availability and cost of goods and services in the State could also be assessed to see their impact especially on the poor. The crucial nature of transportation in linking the various production sectors in the State makes it imperative to carry out such a study because of its ripple effects on the lives of the majority of the poor citizens of the State.

5.0 **CONCLUSION**

The foregoing casual observations of the negative impact of conflicts on the economy of Plateau State needs to be documented and measured especially in the ways the poor are affected. In order to fashion out policies that will rehabilitate the victims of these conflicts and promote pro-growth policies, the actual situation must be researched into so as to generate basic data for planning and development. If a decisive intervention by the State, Donors and NGO’s is not taken to halt the phenomenon of conflict and its negative economic impact we may be engulfed in a vicious cycle of poverty leading to conflict and conflict leading to poverty. For instance General Babangida made the following profound assertion:

“The most fundamental underlying forces which propel ethnic nationalism in Nigeria are those of pervasive poverty, mass unemployment, underdevelopment of productive forces and non-absorbance of the economy. The absence of developed productive forces constrains the transformation of the structures of the economy and society. Mass poverty and unemployment create alienation and insecurity, which in turn encourage Nigerians to experience and prefer accommodation within the social insurance system of ethnic nationalities. In this regard, people are easily excited about injustice- of other groups against their own groups. Poverty also creates frustration and divisiveness.” (Babangida, 2002:34)

Chief Emeka Anyaoku has also opined that as is clear from some of the political trends in the country, Nigeria, like many other pluralistic States in the world faces the growing challenge of constructive management of diversity (Anyaoku, 2000:16). He further admonished that:
“Nigeria’s political stability and economic and social progress in the coming decades will rest on our response to such a challenge.” (Anyaoku, 2000:16).

In the particular case of Plateau State, the declaration of a State of Emergency on the State is a constitutional but drastic measure of returning the seeming uncontrollable situation to normal. The policies that the Sole Administrator will pursue shall determine the possibilities of rehabilitating the poor victims and preparing the grounds for prosperous growth among these innocent victims. Some short term measures have become necessary.

The decision by the Sole Administrator to embark on (i) A policy of disarming the citizens through the recovery of illegal weapons, (ii) Conducting a census of the internally displaced persons and (iii) Providing relief supplies to the victims in “refugee” Camps as well as resettling them are good preliminary measures. There is a need for a long term policy of development that should create employment on a large scale, through the development of agro-allied industries, small and medium enterprises, and development of infrastructure as well as social amenities. In this respect research has a crucial role to play.

REFERENCES


