

NAME: OYEBANJI OLAJUMOKE ABIGAIL

MATRIC NO: 19/LAW01/233

COLLEGE: LAW

QUESTION: Write an essay on violent conflict on your geographical zone not less than two pages.

I am from the North Central of the part of the country, Kwara State to be precise. The states in the North Central zone of Nigeria are Benue, Nasarawa, Niger, Kogi, Kwara, Plateau states and the Federal Capital Territory. The area has a high socio-political and religious plurality and a large percentage of ethnic minorities in Nigeria which makes it a melting pot of identities and fault lines.

Indeed, the ripeness of the North-Central for a study of this nature cannot be ignored with a sleight of hand as this zone comes next to the terrorised spaces of North-Eastern Nigeria in the number of internally-displaced persons. While some findings, especially causes of the conflicts, could be described as generic in the zone comprising the six states of the North-Central zone, responses to conflicts, attendant tension and humanitarian crises generated by some of these conflicts are peculiar.

The farmers-herders conflict has remained a dominant feature in all the states in the North-Central. Land remains a scarce resource in the zone, worsened by increasing demand resulting in frequent clashes between herders and host communities; most of whom are farmers. Rural-banditry and cattle-rustling are rife in the zone, characterised by armed assaults, rape, kidnapping, organised attacks and reprisals on villages and communities. Protracted disputes over supremacy and rights to chieftaincy stools are also rife in the geo-political zone; often degenerating into indigene-settler conflicts. Urban gangsterism and frequent clashes between these gangs over territories and illegal tolling were found in all the capital cities of the six states. In Abuja, resistance of the motor cycle riders popularly called 'okada riders' against attempts to enforce laws restricting and proscribing them from certain areas often degenerate into violence.

With the exception of Kwara and Nasarawa states, all other states including Abuja, the FCT, suffered attacks by the Boko Haram terrorist organisation – akin to a spillover of the conflict between the sect and the government from the North-East.

The mismanagement of civil-military relations and inter-faith relations worsened the already fragile relations between the Gbagyi and the Herders and the Muslims and Christians in different places in Niger state; generating clashes that claimed lives and belongings. Militaristic and humanitarian responses were found to be common in all the states, including Judicial Commissions of Inquiry (JCIs) – some of which went further to recommend the initiation of peace and reconciliation processes, such as the one chaired by Justice Sikirulai Oyinloye, in the aftermath of the Erin-Ile and Offa clash in 2013.

Towards improving inter-group relations and establishing sustainable peace, it is recommended that state governments should take cognisance of the inevitability of differences and struggles that could easily degenerate into violence and put in place pro-active structures that are firm, sincere and transparent to build confidence and trust of parties in conflict. Therefore, respective state governments should institutionalise conflict management and peacebuilding structures that will proactively, civilly and effectively collate and respond to early-warning signs of potential and impending conflicts, in line with extant laws, while enacting new ones where none exists. This should not preclude the need to identify and isolate “spoilers and conflict entrepreneurs” in each conflict setting and relating with them as the issues and settings dictate. Equally important is the need to identify the “peace constituency” in each conflict setting as well, towards enhancing and mobilising their capacities for peace. This reinforces the need for closer working relationships between state governments, security agencies, the socio-political and economic notables, the civil society and the IPCR – the latter being the appropriate agency of government; towards providing informed analysis and pragmatic suggestions.

The North Central zone given its plurality has numerous conflicts that have become intractable. The conflicts have been mainly resource based and identity in nature. It has been characterised by religious violence, ethnoreligious conflicts, ‘indigeneity’ and ‘settlement,’ as well as access to land and livelihoods. The latest being the herders- farmers conflicts and cattle-rustling defined as an economically based form of criminality driven by informal networks (Kwaja, 2013).

Conflict Landscape of Kwara State

As covered by previous SCA reports up till 2012, Kwara state is not immune from conflicts although most of these have been in the context of inter-group with hard to come by instances of insurgencies, that is, groups violently engaging the state. Inter-group conflicts in the state has been in the context of communal clashes arising from boundary disputes, political violence, industrial disputes, chieftaincy conflicts, herders and farmers confrontations.

Other than the Tiv riots of 1960 and 1964, the Northern Region was largely peaceful. The crisis actually began to brew in 1959 during the build up to elections. The United Middle Belt Congress (UMBC) had actively mobilised popular support in the length and breadth of Tivland. As a result of this popular support from the people, the opposition UMBC won 85 percent of Tiv votes cast while the Northern People’s Congress (NPC) won only 10 percent. Unfortunately for the UMBC, their votes could not push forth their aspirations as they had no influence upon the nature of the government that prevailed at the local level.

Cases of farmers-herders’ conflicts have been widespread in Nigeria in recent times. According to Fasona et al (2016), conflicts resulting from cattle grazing actually accounted for 35 percent of all reported cases between 1991 and 2005. More recently, Amaza (2016) reports that out of reported 389 incidents of herdsman and farmers conflicts from 1997 to 2015, 371 occurred in the Middle Belt

otherwise known as the North- Central. The North-Central states of Benue, the Federal Capital Territory, Kogi, Nasarawa, Niger, Kwara and Plateau, are the most affected areas in the country. There is no clear consensus on whether the farmers or the herdsman are worse hit. However, the effect on arable crops, which constitutes the substantial part of Nigeria's agricultural production, has been a source of serious research and academic debate and a source of concern for the Federal Government of Nigeria (FGN). The security implications have escalated to unprecedented proportions with the recent classification of some Herders herdsman as Boko Haram collaborators or the next security challenge by foreign and local observers (Amaza, 2016).

The production potentials of grassland and livestock in the arid and semi-arid region is constrained by low and variable rainfall (Ifatimehin, 2008). In the early 20th century, cattle herders in Northern Nigeria had access to vast areas of grassland. Over time, and with the introduction of irrigated farming in the savannah belt, less pasture was available to herders (Olayoku, 2014). This necessitated southwards movement of the herdsman to the coastal zone where the rainy season is longer, in search of pasture and water.

Climate change, southern migration, the expansion of farming on pastures and invasion of farmlands by cattle has been identified as some of the causes of conflicts. Others are assaults and allegations of rape of non-herders women by herders, blockage of water points leading to freshwater scarcity, burning of rangelands, cattle theft, inadequate animal health care and disease control.

Over-grazing of fallow lands, defecation on roads and streams by cattle, extensive sedentarisation and ethnic stereotyping (Olayoku, 2014). All of these can be situated into the context of access to and control of land as a scarce resource and economic survival of the pastoralists and farmers.

The North-Central states emerged from the old Northern Region, which was an autonomous center of power within Nigeria, distinctly different from the southern part of the country. It had independent customs, foreign relations and security structures were slightly different from the south. On 27 May, 1967 the regions were dissolved and 12 states created instead. Benue-Plateau state and Kwara state were created along with North-Western state, North-Eastern state, Kano state, North-Central state. In 1976, North Western state was divided into Sokoto and Niger, while Abuja (FCT) was carved out of Niger, Kwara and Plateau states. North Eastern state was divided into Borno, Gongola and Bauchi. Benue-Plateau was separated into Benue and Plateau. In 1987 Katsina was carved out of Kaduna. Kogi was carved out of Kwara in 1991 and Nasarawa was created from Plateau state in 1996.

Other than the Tiv riots of 1960 and 1964, the Northern Region was largely peaceful. The crisis actually began to brew in 1959 during the build up to elections. The United Middle Belt Congress (UMBC) had actively mobilised popular support in the length and breadth of Tivland. As a result of this popular support from the people, the opposition UMBC won 85 percent of Tiv votes cast while the Northern People's Congress (NPC) won only 10 percent. Unfortunately for the UMBC, their votes could not push forth their aspirations as they had no influence upon the nature of the government that prevailed at the local level.

As new states emerged, new fault-lines also appeared on the horizon to create violent conflicts in each of the states that constitute the North-Central states. Cognisant of the centrality of peace in the context of state-society and inter-group relations for democratic consolidation, security and development on one hand and the inevitability of conflicts on the other hand, the Institute of Peace and Conflict Resolution (IPCR) with the support of the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) in Nigeria and other development partners, has been embarking on regular assessment of conflicts across the country towards providing a holistic and evidence-based suggestions to the government and other critical stakeholders to the peace, security and cohesion of the country.

As a sequel to previous editions, the SCA 2016 aimed to develop “an overview of the conflict context and trends of violent conflicts, analyse the key stakeholders, and map out conflict related risks and peace-building opportunities, with a view to outlining a number of options . . .”, covering from 2013 to 2016. Dating back to 2002 when the first Strategic Conflict Assessment (SCA) of the country was undertaken. The IPCR continues to improve on every edition of the exercise utilising innovative methodologies towards keeping pace with the trajectories and dimensions of conflicts in all contexts across the country.

RECOMMENDATIONS

There is a need to take stock of all interventions so far by all stakeholders in order to know where the gaps are and how to plug them. This is because, sometimes, actors act inadvertently at cross-purposes; thereby reducing the gains that would have accrued from their collective efforts.

The citizenship question must be addressed socially and politically.

There is need for increased and firmer presence of security personnel across the states with special emphasis with communities that more prone to attacks and raids.

There is a need to consciously embark on the deconstruction of hate narratives mutually held against each other by groups in the state.

REFERENCE: undp.org