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ASSIGNMENT

Write an essay on violent conflict on the geographical zone you are from. Not less than 2 pages. Submit on or before December 1st, 2020.

ANSWERS

Land disputes are the key causes of armed violence in Ebonyi State, with no end to the headline-dominating issue in sight. Clan differences, socio-political inequality and agrarian economic interests – the root causes of these disputes and their resultant inter-communal conflicts – have been difficult to control by governmental authorities. With a paucity of resources and a lack of infrastructure, combined with long-standing communal malice, even issues that may seem minor can escalate to the point of serious violence with major implications across the state and for years to come.

The Ezza-Ezillo crisis is one example. According to Afikpo Today magazine, the dispute between these two rival eastern-Ebonyi communities was inflamed by a 2008 disagreement over ownership of a piece of land on which a phone booth was erected. By the end of December, 2011, the disagreement had escalated, with gunmen attacking Ezillo and killing over 70 men, women and children – including the local police chief. Besides the killings, Ezillo market and other properties were burned to the ground and indigenous communi- ties’ animals slaughtered. The ramifications of this are still ongoing. In the summer of 2013, a bomb was found at a building site on the disputed territory, and as recently as October, 2013, politicians claimed that the withholding of infrastructural improvement money was tied to political and social differences related to the Ezza-Ezillo dispute.

Other drivers of armed violence in Ebonyi State in- clude the University-based confraternity gangs known as “cults” that are much reported at Ebonyi State University in Abakaliki, as well as the so-called “do or die” nature of Nigerian politics. Renewed violence in 2012 and 2013 between University cults has resulted in gun battles, kidnappings, and murder, including the killing of a police corporal in 2012 and multiple deaths in 2013. Ebonyi has, in addition, the federal university in Abakaliki and a federal polytechnic in Uwana, meaning that the potentials of armed violence through University cult activities is, in these areas, rife.

Meanwhile, the commonplace practice of politicians arming gangs for political purposes is not only a driver of violence in and of itself, but results in semi-organised gangs of youths being armed and purposeless after election time. In 2012, two commissioners and an advisor to Ebonyi State’s governor barely escaped an assassination attempt when they were attacked at a petrol station by gunmen; a bystander was not so lucky and was killed in the gunfire. Even with the headline-grabbing issues of cultists, political thugs and communal conflict, it is unemployment and underemployment that most in Ebonyi see as the most important drivers of crime and armed violence.

Finally, the fact that Ebonyi state has boundaries with the non-Igbo state of Cross River must be acknowledged. Cross River itself provides a major regional source of income through sand dredging and river transport, but the part of Cross River that sits at the boundaries records a very high incidence of communal violence. This violence has led to the loss of a huge number of lives, for instance in the Ezillo/Izza clashes. And many people impacted by the Ezza/Ezillo conflict were just travelers passing through that and not linked to the grievances of the clashes per se.

The perpetrators of armed violence in Ebonyi tend to be young and poor, even when carrying out the will of wealthy and powerful political and cultural figures. A lack of opportunities for any kind of socio-economic advancement in this agrarian society, combined with the very real inequality that these same “have-nots” encounter amongst their leaders, has left a huge part of the young population frustrated. Ebonyi has mineral and other potential industrial resources, but they remain largely untapped. Meanwhile, the traditionally communal form of agriculture leaves extremely limited potential crops beyond subsistence farming. Until something changes within the region’s resource exploitation, there is little chance of socio-economic advancement for most. Income generated within the state amounts to less than a quarter of the state’s statutory revenue from the federal government, making Ebonyi the least developed state in Nigeria’s southeast, fully dependent on outside aid (according to CLEEN Foundation research).

Communal, political and gang violence, as well as less unique factors such as everyday crime and domestic violence, all disproportionately affect women and children in Ebonyi State (as they do throughout much of Nigeria). However, no class or demographic of people in the state is safe from violence, whether it be the communal violence that hits poor families and small businesses, the threat of kidnapping against the wealthy, or attempted assassinations and attacks against the politically powerful. The result is that the population of Ebonyi suffers, across the board, from a sense of insecurity and, ultimately, from fear.

In conclusion, Media and NGO sources, including newspapers and magazines such as the Advocate and Afikpo Today and the research organization CLEEN Foundation, are attempting to do the basic background work necessary for any change to come in Ebonyi’s armed- violence situation. First and foremost it is necessary that the government and outside agencies understand the broad nature and effects of violence, particularly communal violence, in Ebonyi, which begins with this reportage and baseline data. With frustration, poverty and inequality as major drivers of violence, changes to Ebonyi’s economic situation – and, in particular, its inability to generate revenue beyond subsistence – is of grave importance. To this end, the government has launched a program called Vision 20-20-20 that aims to improve internal revenue generation by 70% before 2020, when, according to the national Nigeria Vision 2020 concept, Nigeria could have one of the world’s 20 largest economies. Though the strategies and viability of both the Ebonyi and national 2020 plans are often considered opaque or unrealistic, it at least places revenue advancement on the state’s agenda. Research by the CLEEN Foundation found that governmental incompetence and corruption was seen as an essential aspect of disillusionment amongst the people of Ebonyi – a huge challenge in successful governance. The current state government has placed an emphasis on reforming this corrupt governmental “attitude” as well as on utilizing the natural resources in the state to promote Ebonyi’s internal revenue.