
IMPACT OF COMMUNAL CONFLICT ON WOMEN AND CHILDREN IN NIGER STATE: IMPLICATIONS FOR HUMAN SECURITY (2015- 2024)

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Abstract

Communal conflict poses serious threats to societal harmony, stability, progress and exploring the adverse effect it has on women and children most especially in Niger State from 2015-2024. The study examined communal conflict and human security and how it affects women and children in the study. The research objective is identifying the impact of communal conflict on majorly women and children and how it can be managed. The research adopted the hybrid method of data collection using quantitative and qualitative sources of data collection from 400 respondents, and also employed structural violence theory in analyzing the work. The study reveals that women and children are often affected during communal conflict exposing them to various forms of violence, disrupting access to essential services such as healthcare and education, forced displacement and refugee status, exacerbated by structural failures leading to deprivation, inequality, and economic hardship. The study concludes that issues surrounding communal conflict must be addressed urgently in order to reverse the ugly trend of child abuse during conflict and enhance sustainable development and national security. The study therefore recommends the importance of fostering intercultural dialogue, promoting inclusive education and addressing socio-economic disparities as crucial steps towards conflict prevention and strengthening community engagement, law enforcement and justice systems as essential components of conflict prevention efforts among others.

Key words: Communal Conflict, Women, Children, Human Security

Introduction

Communal conflict poses severe threat to human security and kill thousands of people each year (Sundberg, Eck, and Kreutz 2012) and this type of collective violence is often a trigger of civil war (Fearon and Laitin 2011). In some regions communal conflicts lead to only few deaths or are solved before they cause any fatalities. In others, however, these conflicts become very violent and dozens, hundreds, or even thousands of people are killed.

Conflict arises between two or more parties as a result of divergent opinion or believe over limited scarce resources available. Since humans cannot live in isolation, the need for interaction is eminent considering their divergent ideologies and strives to annex the scarce available resources. United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (1994) includes any conflict and form of violence between communities of different religious groups, different sects or tribes of some religious groups, ethnic origins or national origin as communal violence. It is clear to say that conflict between two or more communities that have divergent ideas, goals and target could become dangerous which leads to loss of lives and properties.

Communal conflicts in Niger State have resulted to many lives lost, houses, foodstuffs and valuables completely burnt down, some have been separated from their husbands and children, the challenge for shelter prompting them to seek succor in nearby villages and mal-nutrition because of the inability to feed themselves and their children.

In Niger State, the lack of access to health services and personal hygiene for some that sustained various degrees of injury during the course of the clash coupled with the psychological trauma attached is also a huge challenge.

Communal conflict has further impoverished more people and given them little or nothing to trade with. Poverty these days has been increased and this attributed to poor entrepreneurship among the populace (Popoola, 2018). Conflict hindered entrepreneurial activities and this causes negative impact in human and economic development (Hozelitz, 1960).

The event of communal conflict is typically lethal and furthermore lead to relocation of individuals, unfortunate body hurt, destruction of lives and properties. The aftermath of any conflict impacts negatively on women and children and puts them mostly at the receiving end as a result of their vulnerability (the state of being exposed to the possibility of being attacked or harmed as a result of their weakness and not as strong as the men), and are usually faced with the challenge of protection, access to shelter, food and other basic services such as health care services, nutrition, pipe borne-water, sanitation, hygiene and education. In addition to these consequences are related consequences such as geometric increase in the number of Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs), disruption of socio-economic activities and much more distrust between the different identity groups.

Communal conflict in Katcha, Lavun and Mokwa Local Government of Niger State shall be our yardstick to draw some of the challenges faced by women and children after communal conflict.

A land dispute between Anfani and Gaba communities claimed eight lives while several others were injured (The Sun, 2018). This conflict was caused as a result of land struggle between the two communities in which women and children were among the casualties in Katcha local government. According to This Day, three people died and several others seriously injured and several houses razed during a communal clash that broke out between the people of Boku and Doko communities in Lavun Local Government Area of Niger State (This Day, 2021). The conflict has its root cause on land struggle over many decades.

According to Vanguard also, two killed in Niger communal clash between Emigi and Kuchita communities in Katcha local government of Niger State (Vanguard, 2016). These two communities have struggle for both land and fishing rights which has had negative outcome over the years.

Communal conflicts in Niger State have resulted to many lives lost, houses, foodstuffs and valuables completely burnt down, some have been separated from their husbands and children, the challenge for shelter prompting them to seek succor in nearby villages and mal-nutrition because of the inability to feed themselves and their children.

In Niger State, the lack of access to health services and personal hygiene for some that sustained various degrees of injury during the course of the clash coupled with the psychological trauma attached is also a huge challenge. In some conflicting communities, children were separated from their parents and love ones and made orphans as a result of death during the clash. These children also lack shelter and food leaving them with the only option to beg and do menial jobs to cater for them and are easily available to social vices. The education of these children is halted and are forced to drop out from school leaving them with the option to walk around the street in nearby villages coupled with their own share of psychological trauma too.

Over the years, government at the Federal, State and local levels have not been able to handle the issues from the underlying driver and taking proactive steps in clamping down the occurrence of this vice in our society.

The research therefore proffers solutions on how to understand communal conflict and how it can be managed and reduced drastically.

The following research questions guide the study:

- I. What is the relationship between Communal Conflict and Human Security?
- II. What are the impacts of Communal Conflict on Women and Children in Niger State?

- III. What strategies can be adopted to contain communal crisis and further improve the livelihood of Women and Children affected by Communal clashes in Niger State and Nigeria in general?

The general objective of this study is to interrogate the impact of communal clashes on women and children in Niger State. The specific objectives of the study are:

- I. To what extent has communal conflict affected human security?
- II. To examine the impact of Communal Conflict on Women and Children in Niger State?
- III. To identify the strategies adopted to assist Women and Children affected by Communal Clashes in Niger State?

The research work is guided by the following assumptions that:

- I. Communal Conflicts has exacerbated the challenges of human security in Niger state and Nigeria in general.
- II. Women and children were the most vulnerable during communal conflict in Niger state.
- III. Communal conflict has strived as a result of structural failure from the government.

Communal Conflict

Communal conflict is defined in this study as a conflict between non-state groups that are organized along a shared communal identity. This definition deserves some further clarification. Conflict refers to the fact that the parties want to gain control over some disputed and perceived indivisible resource, such as a piece of land or local political power. The groups involved are non-state groups. This means that neither actor controls the state, although the state might be involved as an important supporting actor in a communal conflict.

Communal conflict can be seen as low intensity conflict that occurs between or among groups of people who are bound by communal ties. It thrives in primordial societies where groups are differentiated along the parochial lines of clan, religion, ethnicity, and caste (Okoli and Nnabuihe 2019). This study employs a socio-contextual approach whose point of departure is that conflict occurrence and dynamics are determined by the forces of its socio-organic context (UNDP 2016). The socio-contextual conflict analysis approach combines elements of liberal political ecology and a contemporary conflict analysis paradigm in an attempt to proffer a holistic analysis of a conflict laying emphasis on both proximate and structural factors underlying the occurrence of a conflict. A UNDP Report maintains that this approach entails ‘a macro-micro analyses of conflict. The Report elucidates:

Common to inter-group conflicts in many ill-defined federal states with plural identity groups is the skewed distribution of socio-economic and political resources, which breeds inequalities amongst culturally and sometimes religiously different groups. Such practices constitute the structure within which certain groups perceive injustice and marginalization, leading to the construction of enemy images of the government and other groups who appear to be favored by it. Without recognition of such structures, which differ from place to place, responding to conflicts will only be like addressing the symptoms while neglecting the causes. This is why the structural analysis of the cause of conflict must cover the social, economic and political spheres, intending to identify the grievances that might make taking to violence inevitable for groups that feel maligned. This helps to understand how socioeconomic and political needs intersect with ethnic or and religious identities providing a shared narrative of exclusion and marginalization that might provide self-justifying rationalization for violence. (UNDP 2015:52).

Alongside the underlying structures and contexts of conflict is the factor of subjective agency, which mobilizes social energies around existing grievances and fault-lines in a manner that complicates or escalates conflicts. Conflict occurrence is thus a complex social process whose dynamics are often opportunistic and dialectical (Okoli and Nnabuihe 2019). This has been the character of major communal conflicts in Nigeria and more importantly, in North Central Nigeria. According to the International Crisis Group (2006), intercommunal herder-farmer violence centered on Nigeria's Middle Belt killed 1,200 people in the first six months of 2018, roughly six times the number of civilians killed by Boko Haram in the same period while displacing 300,000. Series of intra and inter communal clashes stem between the stronger communities and the weaker ones over competing for natural resources (Adigwe, 1974).

Conflicts involving communal groups are referred to as communal conflicts. Additionally, communal groupings are those where members' primary identities take precedence over other identities. Violent conflict between non-state organizations that are organized around a common communal identity is communal conflict. This definition requires some additional explanation. The use of lethal force by the parties to seize control of a contested and perceived indivisible resource, such as a plot of land or local political power, is referred to as a violent conflict. This is in accordance with a widely used conceptualization of armed conflict (Galtung, 1965). The parties involved are non-state actors, and neither has influence over the government or armed forces (although state actors may be involved as an important supporting actor in a communal conflict).

Additionally, the groups are organized along a shared communal identity. Some would equate the concept of communal identity with ethnic or religious identity, but as conceived here the definition is purposefully left more open because group identity is considered to be socially constructed rather than a static phenomenon. Communal identity is conceptualized as subjective group identification based on, for instance, a common history, culture, or core value (Gurr 2000). Focusing solely on ethnic or religious identity would make the term less flexible and unable to capture other forms of relevant identity. For instance, in some local conflicts the dividing line is between the “original” inhabitants of an area and more recent “settlers”. In this study, this is seen as a form of communal conflict because people strongly identify themselves (and the “other” group) along these lines.

In other areas the main identification might be based on one’s livelihood, and conflicts sometimes arise, for example, between groups such as pastoralists and agriculturalists. Livelihood conflicts often parallel ethnic lines because, for instance, pastoralists living together often are from the same ethnic community. This is not always the case, however. For instance, farmers in a village might identify as inhabitants of a particular village no matter if the village is ethnically homogenous or heterogeneous. The bottom line is that what constitutes the basis for a communal identity can differ across time and space. Hence, leaving the definition of this term more open allows for an examination of conflicts in a broader range of contexts.

Communal Conflicts in Niger State and Nigeria

Communal conflicts have been a recurring social phenomenon in Nigeria. According to Abada (2004:234), ‘in spite of the level of social, political and economic development of Nigeria, cases of intra-communal or intra-ethnic feuds have been recurring’. Abada (2004:24) adds that:

Since the end of the Nigerian Civil War, many communities have fought each other either over a piece of land, the site of a market, protest against sitting of local government headquarters or police station, or inclusion in a state or local government area they do not like. In some cases, as well, communities have fought each other because of mere hatred ... especially in some semi-cosmopolitan societies.

Communal conflict in Nigeria has been precipitated by struggles for competitive advantage by contiguous communities. The objects of these struggles have varied from cultural, economic, political, to socio-ecological factors (Alimba 2014). These factors have been variously implicated in different instances of communal conflict in Nigeria by scholars. In a relevant study, Ikurekong,

Udo and Essin (2012:98) attribute the cause of communal conflict to ‘aggressive resource competition’ in the context of ethno-identity struggles. This implies that communal conflict is often informed by intercommunal struggles for competitive advantage in relation to ownership, control or access to an economic or political resource. A land dispute between Anfani and Gaba communities claimed eight lives while several others were injured (The Sun, 2018). This conflict was caused as a result of land struggle between the two communities in which women and children were among the casualties in Katcha local government.

One of the veritable material sources of communal conflicts in Nigeria is the factor of land. In a study on ‘Causes and Effects of Communal and Ethnic Conflicts in Tiv-land’, Oravee (2015:10) identifies struggle for farmlands as a principal and critical conflict determinant. The significance of land as a crucial factor in communal conflict in Nigeria must be understood beyond economic consideration. Apart from being a veritable economic resource, land is seen as an important socio-political and cultural asset (Egwu 2015). According to This Day, three people died and several others seriously injured and several houses razed during a communal clash that broke out between the people of Boku and Doko communities in Lavun Local Government Area of Niger State (This Day, 2021). The conflict has its root cause on land struggle over many decades.

Claim over the ownership of lands in Niger State is one of the major factors responsible for communal violence in the state. For instance, the findings of the major causes of the conflict between Doko and Boku communities are the issue of ownership and control of the land. The root cause of the conflict was a land dispute which was exacerbated by the decision of some communities to take ownership of the land.

Conflict over land ownership has been a major source of violence in Niger State. It is a common phenomenon and can happen at any time and in any place. Land conflicts occur in the form of boundary conflicts between neighbors’, inheritance conflicts between siblings and disputes over the use of a given piece of land. These conflicts are comparably easy to solve. Those that include several parties though - such as group invasions or evictions of entire settlements are more difficult to deal with (Wehrmann, 2008). In Nigeria, the Land Use Decree No 6 of 1978 stipulates that all powers over lands comprising the territory of each state in the Federation are vested in the Governor of the State. This, therefore, means that the burden of solving the land problems lies squarely on the government.

Two complaints are frequently made about the Reports and White Papers. One is that they usually are not published, so people do not know in any detail what findings and recommendations the Commissions or Committees have made, or which recommendations made have been formally accepted, merely noted, or rejected by the government. From many submissions made, it was felt that the lack of making public the findings of various Committees/Commissions set up to consider religious crisis had tended to encourage rather than discourage such uprisings. (Interview with Anonymous, 2019).

The second complaint is that the government does not implement even the recommendations it accepts. If previous recommendations were implemented, the rate at which communal/religious and or political crises are happening would have reduced to the minimum level.

Furthermore, the non-implementation of the recommendations of judicial commissions of inquiry or committees of investigations had encouraged people to take the law into their own hands. In some cases, government decisions on the reports of judicial commissions of inquiry or committees of the investigation were not made known to members of the public. Also, the government does not implement even the recommendations it accepts. If previous recommendations were implemented, the rate at which communal/religious and or political crises are happening would have reduced to the minimum level.

More often than not, communal conflicts in Nigeria have been caused by an articulation of identity-based, livelihood-related and political (partisan) considerations. In this regard, Uzuegbunam and Nwobia (2014:1404) argue that communal conflict could be a consequence of an admixture of cultural differences, struggles for access for resources or livelihood opportunities, as well as issues relating to political participation or representation. In most instances of communal conflict in Nigeria, these factors have often reinforced one another in bringing about critical outcomes.

According to Vanguard also, two killed in Niger communal clash between Emigi and Kuchita communities in Katcha local government of Niger State (Vanguard, 2016). These two communities have struggle for both land and fishing rights which has had negative outcome over the years. There are instances where ethno-cultural differences and prejudices have informed communal conflict in Nigeria. A case in point is the Sagamu crisis between the Yoruba and the settler-Hausa communities in late 1990s. In this respect, Olobomehin (2011) notes that the conflict was rooted in cultural intolerance, groomed and matured in a context of competitive inter-group

socio-economic relations. Cultural differences or prejudices have also featured prominently in some instances of communal conflict where indigene/ settler contestations are at issue (Asiyanbola 2007:10). A case in point is the Ife-Modakeke crisis, where ethno-cultural prejudices played a prominent role in aggravating inter-communal animosities.

Contemporary trajectories of communal conflicts in Nigeria have borne out elements of politicization and elite manipulation (Okoli and Uhembe 2014:13). Hence, communal conflicts have often resulted from the contradictions of elite's politicking and competition (Egwu 2006:406). Hence:

The political class (elites), in collaboration with their religious counterparts has exploited ethnicity and religion as symbols of mobilization and instruments or negotiation for patronages and sharing of national resource. (Adeyote and Omilusi 2015:51)

The implication of the above is that the political elites have often provoked communal conflict by their desperate opportunistic penchant for political power. This was the case with respect to the Ombatse crisis in Nasarawa State (Alozieuwa 2016).

The phenomenon of communal conflict in Nigeria can be explained with reference to its 'sources', 'fault-lines', and allied 'catalysts' (Okoli and Nnabuihe 2019:123). The 'sources' are the root-causes of communal conflict, such as land, boundary, and chieftaincy disputes. These factors have persistently played the role of primary precipitators in most instances of communal conflict in Nigeria (Alimba 2014). 'Fault-lines' in this context refer to the opportunistic socio-cultural and political variables that have often given communal conflict its virulent character. These variables include ethnicity, religion, identity politics and cultural prejudices. It is under the influence of these primordial factors that communal conflict often assumes its critical salience (Egwu 2006). The rest of the factors are designated allied 'catalysts' or 'enablers'; they include sundry socio-ecological, demographic, socio-economic, and governance issues that complicate communal conflict. Examples include climate change (Blench and Dendo 2005), urbanization and population explosion (Asiyanbola 2007:61), and governance-related issues such as insecurity and socio-economic crises (Okoli and Ayokhai 2016). The significance of 'fault-lines' in relation to communal conflict in Nigeria has been succinctly captured thus:

Violent communal conflicts have been a recurrent phenomenon during the last two decades of Nigeria's history. In Africa's most populous country, the fault-lines along which conflicts can

arise are manifold: ethnicity, religion, politics, distribution of riches, and modes of economic production (Schuab 2014:49).

Communal Conflict and Human Security

Each year, communal disputes kill thousands of people (Sundberg et al., 2012) and pose a serious threat to human security, and frequently serve as the catalyst for civil wars (Fearon and Laitin 2011). Over the past 20 years, violent inter communal clashes have repeatedly occurred in Nigeria. The main causes of violence in the most populous nation in Africa are: ethnicity, religion, politics, wealth distribution, and economic production methods. Nigeria is home to 200–400 ethno linguistic groups, which can be easily distinguished as friends from enemies (Sklar, 2004). Conflicts involving inter communal relations are on the rise in Nigeria, and one characteristic of these conflicts is their confrontational, violent, and destructive nature, which has an impact on the security of the populace. Nevertheless, it is crucial to recognize that "there is a radical shift from the idea of security that is state-based to that of security that is focused on the welfare of the people, hence, human security" (Adedoyin, 2013:455). This means that "security" now includes defending citizens against threats such as those posed by diseases, hunger, unemployment, drug abuse and trafficking, psychological disorders, violations of human rights, problems with eviction and housing, conflicts, political repression, and environmental degradation in addition to threats posed by external aggression.

Human security is an approach to international security that focuses on the security of individuals and communities, rather than traditional national security which focuses on the security of states and borders. The key areas of focus for human security include food security, economic security, health security, environmental security, personal security, community security, and political security. It examines a wide range of threats from hunger to natural disasters to political repression that endanger human safety and wellbeing. The human security approach argues that insecurity arises not just from armed violence and conflict, but also from chronic threats like hunger, disease, repression, etc. It requires broader, integrated policies to address the root causes of these threats. Implementing a human security approach involves fostering multi-sectorial partnerships between humanitarian, development, human rights, and peacebuilding organizations.

However, instances of confrontation or violence within a community will decrease when people feel secure there. Human growth and security are two separate yet related concepts. Human insecurities are caused by development barriers; consequently, advancements in human

development will increase human security. Hence, human development is challenging to attain when the fundamental elements of human security are absent (Jolly and Basu, 2006).

However, communal conflict impacts human security in ways which are as follows:

1. **Physical safety and personal security:** communal conflicts often result in violence and displacement, putting individuals at risk of injury or death. The breakdown of law and order can lead to increased crime rates, making it challenging for people to feel secure in their homes and communities.
2. **Health and healthcare security:** Health infrastructure and services are also disrupted by conflicts. Access to medical assistance can be lost, endangering conflict-affected populations to preventable illness and death. Pandemics become harder to control. Limited healthcare access during crises endangers women's sexual, reproductive and maternal health. Unintended pregnancies, unsafe abortions, pregnancy complications, etc. become more common. Children's healthcare is disrupted by conflict and access to vaccines, medicines, clinics decline. Malnutrition and stunting increase with food insecurity. These impact physical and cognitive growth. Exposure to violence, loss of family, displacement from home take huge psychological tolls, severely damaging mental health and development of children. Post-traumatic stress disorder and depression becomes common.
3. **Access to basic services:** communal conflict can disrupt essential services such as healthcare, education, clean water and sanitation thereby impacting people's well-being. Displacement and destruction of infrastructure may limit access to clean water, food, and medical care, increasing the risk of disease and malnutrition. This has a direct impact on the well-being of individuals and communities.
4. **Livelihoods and income:** Violence damages infrastructure, disrupts market access and mobility, and diverts productive resources into conflict efforts. This severely impacts jobs, income levels, and poverty for conflict-afflicted populations. Communal conflict can disrupt agriculture and food distribution systems, leading to food shortages and famine. This poses a direct threat to the nutritional security of populations.
5. **Political stability and governance:** communal conflicts can weaken state institutions, making it challenging for government to provide security and basic services. Political instability may exacerbate existing tensions and contribute to a cycle of violence, further compromising human security. Upholding human rights, democratic governance, and the rule of law contribute to

political security. Corruption, political repression, and abuse of power undermine human security

6. Human rights violations: communal conflicts often lead to human rights abuses including displacement, discrimination and persecution. Vulnerable groups such as minorities and marginalized communities may face heightened risks during communal conflicts. Protecting human rights is a fundamental aspect of ensuring human security.

Most of the communal conflicts emanate as a result of groups' perception that their value expectations and capabilities are denied. As such, groups resort to political action by citing grievances of their people who feel deprived of what they perceive as values to which they are entitled. It is important to note that even if the state is divided into two, as long as these issues (Land disputes, mutual suspicion among ethno-religious groups, religious intolerance and traditional leadership crisis) are not resolved, inter-communal conflicts will continue to emanate in Niger state.

To resolve the problem of communal violence and have a lasting peace in Niger State, the study recommends that government should implement the recommendations of various reports of the commission of inquiries accepted by the government, most especially the ones that are related to land disputes, mutual suspicion among ethno-religious groups, religious intolerance and traditional leadership crisis. The government should also create an agency that will continue to orient people on the advantages of living with one another in peace.

In Niger state, government gained support from organizations like Search for Common Ground (SFCG), which is implementing Enhancing Collaboration for Peace and Security (ECPS) and to address communal conflicts through collaborative discussions and the establishment of State Peace Architecture (SPA) aiming for a safer future for communities. The peacebuilding initiatives has not really been effective as conflicts still prevalent.

Structural Violence Theory

The term structural violence was coined by Johan Galtung in his 1969 article, "Violence, Peace, and Peace Research." Galtung argued that structural violence explained the negative power of social institutions and systems of social organization among marginalized communities. He further framed the term "structural violence" to mean any constraint that are placed on human potential which are caused by economic and political structures (Galtung, 1969). This results in socioeconomic underdevelopment that reinforces the human needs theorist's arguments, which

states that the inability of people to access basic needs drives people to other means of securing them; which sometimes includes the use of violence (Christie, 2009).

Structural violence is the unequal distribution of power and wealth within and between societies, and it has insidious effects on the health, intellectual development, education, and general welfare of millions of children. The cruelties of structural violence on children are often subtle, unspoken, unrecognized, and even normalized, regarded by many people as natural or just the way things are. Unfortunately, even those who fall victim to forms of structural violence often do not see the systematic ways in which their plight is choreographed, orchestrated and managed by unequal and unfair distribution of society's resources. Such is the insidiousness of structural violence (Winter & Leighton, 2001). Structural violence focuses attention on the social machinery of exploitation and oppression; "the ways in which poverty and inequality, with their deep histories, become embodied and experienced as violence" (Farmer, 2010).

Structures can be defined as the settings within which people may do large amounts of harm to other human beings without the intention to do so, just performing their regular duties as a job defined in the structure; Structural violence is seen as unintended harm done to human beings, as a process, working slowly in the way misery in general, and hunger in particular, erode and finally kill human beings (Weigert, 2008). Structural violence has killed ten times more people as compared to suicide, homicide and warfare combined (Høivik, 1977), which affects women and children more often too.

Throughout the world, children suffer from structural violence. About twelve million children under five years old die each year in developing countries, most often from preventable causes. The deaths of over six million children, or 55 percent, are caused by malnutrition, not because there is a shortage of food in the world but because food is unequally distributed. Gandhi's terse comment is relevant here: "There is enough in the world for man's need but not for his greed" (Ostergaard, 1990). Other preventable causes of malnutrition include poor health services, unsafe water, inadequate sanitation, harmful child-rearing practices, and a lack of maternal support. More than 2.2 million children under the age of five die each year from infectious diseases, including childhood diarrhea. We know these diseases are primarily caused by unsafe drinking water and inadequate sanitation and are thus preventable (UNICEF, 1998).

Besides the twelve million children who die from preventable diseases each year, even more disturbing is the fact that each year 160 million children survive the dire conditions of crushing

poverty, but end up chronically malnourished and suffer from severe developmental disabilities both physically and mentally. Given the poor health status of so many children, it is not surprising that over 100 million children of school age fail to attend school (UNDP, 1997), and most of them are girls (Kagiticbasi, 1998). These children pay a great price because education is the most certain way to increase human potential, as measured by intelligence tests, and to raise human capital, measured by lifetime earnings. In countries where studies have been conducted, the more schooling children receive, the higher their IQ and earnings (Brody, 1997).

While it has long been recognized that the education of men is important, it is becoming increasingly clear that when women are deprived of education, everyone pays an enormous price. Recent research has linked well-being of children to well-being of women (Buvinic & Yodelman, 1989; UNDP, 1997). In comparison to men, women have a more profound and direct impact on children's survival, health, and quality of life (El-Mouelhy, 1992). Despite the important link between women and children, there is no society in the world where women enjoy the same opportunities as men, whether measured by enrollment in school, literacy, preparation for careers, political participation, earned income, or any other measure that reflects quality of life (UNDP, 1995).

Structural violence does not involve acts of physical violence that cause physical harm rather it refers to acts of systemic oppression, limitations, barriers and opposition towards the ability of a person(s) to live a life of quality which results in increasing levels of poverty, inequality and inability of access of essential social services such as health and housing. Structural violence thus causes physical harm through these above-mentioned effects when people die from starvation and poor health. Other results are, psychological harm, maldevelopment or deprivation through violent socioeconomic or political structures which form inequality within society which creates barriers to access of social securities (Rowson 2012). Structural violence is a kind of violence that results in harm on a person both physically and emotionally but is not caused by an actor that can be clearly identified (Vorobej, 2008).

Galtung says that violence tramples the basic human needs, rights, and fundamental freedoms (Galtung, 2007). Structural violence causes direct violence and direct violence reinforces structural violence which is interdependent of one another.

Structural violence also highlights the roots of inequality. Inequality is a self-sustaining form of violence, as marginalized and violent communities have fewer opportunities for growth and

improvement (Lee, 2019). Inequality caused by social structures is postulated to be the core culprit for “violence” all around the world (Miliband, 2005). Inequality also takes multiple forms which increases the means to which structural violence is experienced such as inequality through gender, race, ethnicity, immigrant status, sexual orientation, class and other forms of inequality that is faced by individuals and society as a whole (Lewis, 2019). Structural violence produces suffering and death as often as direct violence does, though the damage is slower, subtler, more common, and more difficult to repair. Unequal access to resources, political power, education, health care and to legal standing, are forms of structural violence (Winter & Leighton, 2001) which are some of the realities faced by residents.

All over the world, infrastructural development seems to have been preferred over short-term material benefits accruing from social programmes of government. The simple reason is that infrastructure can empower people (Ayeni, 2017). It is quite unfortunate that many state governments under the control of state governments in Nigeria have preferred stomach infrastructure that gives temporary satisfaction to beneficiaries, while they are later left on their own to continue in their previous stage of poverty. The state government under the control of state governors are responsible for a high level of poverty. Failure of any society to prioritize the maintenance of road infrastructure that disempowers people from effectively participating in viable economic activities that enhance the ability to create wealth especially for women who are industrious. The problem affecting active job creation in Nigeria is the pitiable state of infrastructure; hence job creation has continued to be a daydream (Ayeni, Sani, Andeshi, Ibrahim & Adamu 2021).

The act of corruption by state governors in Nigeria is so rampant that it has denied many people the opportunity to benefit directly and indirectly from infrastructural projects. Non-implementation of projects due to corruption has sent many into poverty lines and caused them to suffer harm they are not supposed to have suffered. This is why Ayeni and Sani (2021) posited that corruption poses a challenge to the well-being and sustainable peace of Nigerians.

Weak institutions do not entail that there are no guiding principles or that there are no rules that guide people in the society, but what it does entail is that the guiding principles are not being strictly adhered to by everyone in society, especially the ruling elite. Strong institution provides equal opportunities for everybody to succeed, while weak institutions

do not provide equal opportunities for everybody to succeed. Strong institutions usher in a better local government that can develop the right intervention, reduce poverty, and promote education, health, and sustainable development (Ezeani, 2014). On the other hand, the weak institution ensures that the existence of local government does not serve as a tool for development.

Methodology of the Study

The study employed a mixed-methods research design, combining quantitative and qualitative approaches to explore communal conflict and human security in Niger State and its effect on women and children. This methodology was chosen for its ability to provide both measurable data and in-depth insights. Therefore, those afflicted by intergroup violence in the Lavun, Mokwa, and Katcha Local Government Areas, as well as academics, community leaders, and government officials, will make up the population of this study.

A sample of 400 respondents was selected using the Taro Yamane formula, with questionnaires providing quantitative data.

According to the National Population Commission of Nigeria, the 2022 projected population under study is 983,800.

Population of Local Government Areas in Niger State, Nigeria.

S/No.	Local Government Areas in Niger State	Population Projection 2022
1	Katcha	207,400
2	Lavun	359,800
3	Mokwa	416,800
TOTAL		983,800

Source: National Population Commission of Nigeria (2022).

In determining the sample size, the Taro Yamane's formula of sampling was utilized. A sample of three hundred and eighty (380) questionnaire respondents was drawn. Furthermore, five percent (5%) margin of error was used to address the issue of some of the questionnaires that may likely not be retrieved or properly filled. Twenty (20) respondents were also drawn for the interview.

The Yamane's formula calculation that made us arrive at 400 is given below:

Yamane's Formula:

$$n = \frac{N}{1 + N(e)^2}$$

Where; n = the sample size

N = the size of population

e = level of significance.

N = 983,800

e = 0.05

Hence;

$$n = \frac{983,800}{(1+983,800(0.05)^2)}$$

$$n = \frac{983,800}{(1+983,800(0.0025))}$$

$$n = \frac{983,800}{1+2459.5}$$

$$n = \frac{983,800}{2460.5}$$

n = 399.83

n = 400

The demographic representation of the respondents is shown below

Variables	Frequency	Percentage
Age	Frequency	Percentage
18-22	95	26.2
23-29	139	38.4
30-39	67	18.5
40-49	29	08.0
50-59	17	04.7
60 and above	15	04.2
Total	362	100
Gender	Frequency	Percentage
Male	102	28.2
Female	260	71.8
Total	362	100

Qualification	Frequency	Percentage
Primary	17	04.7
Secondary	144	39.8
Diploma/NCE	75	20.7
HND/First Degree	67	18.5
Postgraduate Degree	25	06.9
Professional	21	05.8
Others	13	03.6
Total	362	100
Occupation	Frequency	Percentage
Local Government Functionary/ Public Servant	63	17.4
Politician	39	10.8
Traditional Ruler	04	01.1
Religious Leader	10	02.8
Retired Security Personnel	15	04.1
Member of a youth Organization	25	06.9
Youth Leader	05	01.4
Unemployed	49	13.5
Security Personnel	18	05.0
Farmer	25	06.9
Civil Servant	27	07.4
Police Personnel	10	02.8
Community Security Personnel	17	04.7
Business	34	09.4
Private Employee	10	02.8
Others	11	03.0
Total	362	100

Validity and Reliability of the Instrument

Validity explains how well the collected data covers the actual area of investigation. The validity of this study is further underpinned by the level of attention paid to ethical issues in the research design and the researcher’s conscious attempts to eliminate researcher bias throughout the entire research process. A pilot study technique will be used to establish a validity test, whereby a pilot study is one of the important stages in a research project and it is conducted to identify potential problem areas and deficiencies in the research instruments and protocol prior to implementation during the full study.

Reliability concerns the extent to which a measurement of a phenomenon provides stable and consist result. The concept of reliability refers to the accuracy and precision of the measurement and absence of differences in the results if the research was repeated.

Data Presentation and Analysis

Descriptive analysis was employed to analyze the data that was collated through questionnaire; using statistical tools such as frequency distribution table and percentage. The Likert scale method of survey system that allows respondents to express a range of opinions with five response options from strongly agree, agree, strongly disagree, disagree and undecided. On the other hand, thematic analysis was also used to analyze the data that was collated through key informant interviews (KIIs). Based on the research objectives, three tables were used

Table 1: Review of respondents on if communal conflict poses severe threat to human security leading to loss of lives and destruction of properties.

Responses	Frequency	Percentages%
Strongly agree	182	50.3
Agree	152	42.0
Undecided	13	3.6
Disagree	8	2.2
Strongly disagree	7	1.9
Total	362	100

Source: Field Survey, 2024

Table 1 examines that communal conflict poses sever threat to human security and majority of respondents 182(50.3%) strongly agreed, while 152(42%) respondents also agreed, 13(3.6%) respondents chose undecided, 8(2.2%) respondents disagreed to the notion and 7(1.9%) respondents strongly disagreed. From the responses, we can accept that communal conflict poses severe threat to human security.

This view was further supported by majority of the interviewee from the structured interview, a respondent in view of this stated that:

There is a link between communal conflict and human security as conflict undermines what human security stands to achieve. Human security stands to protect individuals majorly from conflict, starvation, personal, economic security and fundamental human freedom (Interview, Academician 05/05/2023).

The above view was further supported by another respondent, she added thus:

Communal conflict results into human insecurity which has ripple effects on the wellbeing of the individuals, daily activities, economic, health, political affairs. Food insecurity also arise and reduction of productivity of those communities (Interview, Police Personnel, 29/05/2023).

Table 2: Analysis of respondents on whether exposure to violence and displacement can pose significant psychological trauma on women and children.

Responses	Frequency	Percentages%
Strongly agree	105	29.0
Agree	91	25.1
Undecided	32	8.8
Disagree	71	19.6
Strongly disagree	63	17.5
Total	362	100

Source: Field Survey, 2024

Table 2 moreover shows the respondents views on how exposure to violence and displacement can pose significant psychological trauma for women and children. 105(29%) respondents strongly agreed, 91(25.1%) respondents agreed, 32(8.8%) respondents chose undecided, 71(19.6%) respondents disagreed and 63(17.5%) of the respondents strongly disagreed. We can

deduce that however exposure to violence and displacement pose significant psychological trauma on women and children.

During an interview with a respondent, he maintained the same view as above and further added that:

Communal conflict gives bad stigma to a growing child which can affect the child for life and women that are victims of war/conflict are sometimes sexually abused. This causes psychological trauma for those affected. (Interview, Youth leader 01/06/2023).

Table 3: Summary of respondents on if the creation of a conducive environment for communities to dialogue and settle their differences can help curtail the rise in communal conflict and human insecurity.

Responses	Frequency	Percentages%
Strongly agree	110	30.4
Agree	87	24.0
Undecided	15	04.2
Disagree	74	20.4
Strongly disagree	76	21.0
Total	362	100

Source: Field Survey, 2024

Table 3 examines if the creation of a conducive environment for communities to dialogue and settle their differences can reduce the rise in communal conflicts and 110(30.4%) respondents strongly agreed, 87(24%) of the respondents agreed, 15(4.2%) responses were undecided, 74(20.4%) respondents disagreed and 76(21%) respondents however strongly disagreed. From the analysis then we can agree that creation of conducive environment for communities to dialogue and settle their differences reduces further communal conflicts.

According to one of the responses of one of the interviewees, he said:

Resource persons (Professionals) to sensitize conflicting communities through organizing seminars and workshops and how communal conflict can bring backwardness, underdevelopment and retrogression (Interview, Religious Cleric, 11/05/2023).

Another respondent of the interview had an opposing view:

The government has failed in their duties because when communities are struggling over resources, they ought to come into the situation to bring a lasting solution. The real owners of such resources should be known through history and the court should pass the right judgment on the issue. Strict penalties should be melted out on those who engage in the act of violence amongst communities (Interview, Religious Cleric, 27/05/2023).

Summary of Research Findings

In the course of the study, the following were recorded as findings:

1. The conflict led to loss of lives and destruction of properties and human security creates political, economic, social, cultural, and environmental conditions in which people live knowing that their vital rights and freedoms are secured. There is a considerable link between communal conflict and human security, according to the findings of the study. Which implies that Communal conflict and human security are inextricably linked? Women and children are often the most affected when conflict occurs. Children are the future of any nation, and as such require proper care and training; as a child is the function of his/her environment and upbringing. Conflict gives a negative impression on how people interact and the experience can have lasting impacts on the children and women alike.
2. According to the majority of the respondents polled for this study, communal conflict poses severe threat to human security leading to loss of lives and destruction of properties and that women and children are often times the most vulnerable during conflict situations causing physical harm. The education of children is also been disrupted with the occurrence of communal conflict as they seek refuge in other places. Communal conflict has negative impact on human security because no nation can fully achieve a state of security if the children, who are the future leaders and managers of the nation's social, economic, and political development, are killed, injured or made to pass through experiences that is not healthy for their development and growth.

This suggests that children are the nation's future, and as such, they require adequate nurture and protection. However, a child's experience can leave a lasting scar on their minds.

However, other respondents were of the view that children are not really the target during a communal clash.

3. The study also disclosed that, communal conflict causes families to flee their homes for safety and separation affects mostly women and children. Also, exposure to violence and displacement poses significant psychological trauma for women and children increasing the economic impacts faced by women and children and also overcrowding in Internally Displaced People's (IDPs) camps promoting the spread of infections especially among women and children in Niger state. The government has not responded to the issues of communal conflict decisively to bring a halt to the occurrence. Government's reaction to this social phenomenon will help to curtail communities from engaging in such.
4. The study also revealed that food security is threatened during conflict, and increased the number of children affected by acute malnutrition during conflict and that communal conflict produces strained relationship between the communities which can result to more conflict.

Conclusion

The work showed communal conflict and human security in Nigeria with emphasis on Niger state. The scope of the study is from 2015-2024, which is aimed at examining communal conflict, its forms, and implication for Nigeria's national security. The study reveals that communal conflict is a long-standing problem. Conflict in this form is predominant as communities try to secure more land for new farming season which results into tussle for the ownership of such land as the case might be. There are other factors like Fishing right (water) and Chieftaincy title that also causes communal conflict.

Full out conflict between communities has negative impact as some actors lose their lives, houses burnt and destroyed; preserved grains and livestock are also destroyed. Women and children are also caught up in this quagmire as some are affected by such conflict and they desert their place of settlement to seek refuge in nearby communities or bushes and are faced with various forms of challenges ranging from economic, physical harm, health issues, post-traumatic stress disorder, disruption of the education and social activities of children that will help them grow and develop amongst others. We acknowledge the impact of communal conflict on national security, and we

recognize that addressing communal conflict in Niger State and the country as a societal issue requires a coordinated effort.

Recommendations

From the findings of the study on communal conflict and human security in Nigeria, with Niger State as a reference point, the study came up with the following recommendations:

1. The study recommends that communal conflict should be discouraged by community leaders and government because of its destructive nature having impacts on women and children in other for the concept of human security to be achieved which is security for all.
2. Government should implement gender-sensitive peacebuilding initiatives where women take leadership roles in addressing communal conflict.
3. The establishment of trauma counseling centers and vocational training for displaced women and children to enable them fend for themselves.
4. As a way of finding lasting solution to communal conflict, strengthening alternative dispute resolution mechanisms through dialogue, negotiations, reconciliation and justice becomes sacrosanct to protect women and children.

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