CONFLICTS AND SECURITY INTERVENTION IN ARMED CONFLICT IN BENUE STATE

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ABSTRACT
The armed conflict phenomenon in Benue State is widely recognized and constantly discussed in the local and international community as a major source of concern bedevilling national security and an existential threat to the indigenous population, even though the governments at all levels had adopted numerous measures considered as strategically important to bring the situation to an end. Among these efforts is the deployment of security agencies to coordinate themselves in a manner that could produce a joint force operation to end the conflict and restore peace and stability. Nevertheless, the outcome from the security intervention is coloured with mixed reports of success and many challenges that surpassed the success achieved. From the litany of extant literature reviewed, it is evident that the security agencies recorded commendable success in tackling the perpetrators of the armed conflict. Yet, much is left to be desired due to the fact that the armed conflict situation is progressively worsening even with the continued presence of the military and other security agencies in Benue State. The security agencies have been found to fail, according to studies. As a result, the future of restoration of peace and stability remains bleak and worrisome. The research recommend that Government should be more proactive in the implementation and provision of infrastructure designed for farmers and herders' resource use to avoid a situation where these incessant upheavals would affect agricultural production and food security of the nation. The research used secondary data. Frustration aggression and system theories were used.

Introduction

Armed conflict in Benue State has reached the status of an unprecedented, unnecessary and violent phenomenon in the middle-belt region of Nigeria. The two-decade-old armed conflict inevitably endangered human lives to an unbearable degree. The persistent occasional attacks on the communities constantly cause vicious destruction of human lives and their properties as well as disruption of social, economic, commercial, and agricultural activities of the inhabitants. The socioeconomic implications of this conflict is the experience of social and food insecurity in Benue state which has earned the tag of the food basket of the nation.

Benue State has a history of armed conflict that includes herder-farmer-clashes, military operations, militia and other violent incidents. The height of the armed conflict in Benue State is recognizably the Fulani herdsmen and farmers violent engagement. Historically, the dispute between the Fulani Herdsmen and indigenous farmers of Benue is said to have started in the early 1800s (Yaro & Tseer, 2019). The conflict has worsened over time, with peaks in 2014 and 2018. Invariably, the ceaseless incidents of episodic skirmishes caused the mass killings of the state inhabitants growing progressively worse all these years. There are 23 local government areas in Benue, and many of them have been taken over by the herdsmen. Concerted government efforts to control and bring to an end this conflict have been yielding no desired results. Legally, the Benue State government, in a bid to ensure an end to the herders-farmers violence, enacted the popular Anti-grazing laws captioned "A Law to Prohibit Open Rearing and Grazing of Livestock and Provide for the Establishment of Ranches and Livestock Administration, Regulation and Control and for Other Matters Connected Therewith" in 2017. These laws were passed and established for implementation to serve as a form of deterrent to herders who allow their herds to graze indiscriminately into farmlands. Unfortunately, its implementation has been grossly ineffective. Besides, and prior to the establishment of the anti-grazing law, every other approach the Benue State government and the Nigerian federal government adopted and put in place as interventions has failed at the moment, the Nigerian Army is in place in Benue State in greater strength, and the Inspector General of Police has been directed by the Nigeria's president to restore order to Benue. Yet, much is left to be desired. In fact, the lack of political will to systematically and genuinely implement effectively all plans and methods that have been adopted to bring this situation to an end is one of the major reasons why the farmers-herdsmen crisis in Nigeria still persists with regular reports of killings and destruction of properties. The crisis in Benue State is one that should be taken seriously by all the stakeholders in the security system in the country, as it has a negative impact on the socio-economic and political ecology of the state and the nation at large.

Existing literatures focused on food security, climate change and military operations. This study will attempt to fill this gap. Furthermore, various literatures in the Benue valley have no under pining solution to the armed conflict hence the gap. The existing literature on the Benue valley seems to be silent on the root cause of the armed conflict and its mitigating efforts. This study will attempt to fill this gap.

Research Questions

1. What are the underlying causes of armed conflicts in Benue state Nigeria?
2. What are the consequences of the armed conflict situation on the peace, security, growth, and development of Benue State?

Objectives of the Paper

The insight into the hydra-violent phenomenon of armed conflict in Benue State with its negative effect on the population and the nation and with the view to further research to assess the effectiveness of security agencies intervention to end the situation. The objectives are to

1. Review the perceived causes of the armed conflict situation that has been persisting in Benue State.
2. Elaborate further on the consequences of the armed conflict situation on the peace, security, growth, and development of Benue State,

Review of Literature

The Concept of Security

The term "security" has meant different things in different context and at different times (Rothschild, 1995). In its common interpretation from previous times, it relates to survival, to protection from threats to existence and being relatively free from harm inflicted by others. In academic usage, it generally relates to the protection of something that is valued, which may be physical life, democracy, identity, etc. According to Wolfers, (1952), security means some degree of protection of values previously acquired. The precise measurement for security is therefore impossible; clearly, a nation can have more security or less security. Perfect, complete security is unattainable.

The Macmillan Dictionary, (2017), defines the term security as "the protection or the safety of a country's citizens and its secrets", emphasizing the overall security of a nation. This indicates that the welfare/protection of people comes first above all other protections that a nation may be willing to guard. Security simply means safety of citizens

Armed Conflict

According to Nnoli (2003), armed conflict and its multi-dimensional consequences has been as obstacle to progress, political stability, economic prosperity and overall economic development of Nigeria. Violence provoked by conflicts, has often turned the people's intention from creative production to creative destruction.

Violence according to World Health Organization means the intentional use of physical force or power, threatened or actual, against oneself, another person, or against a group or community that either results in or has a high likelihood of resulting in injury, death, psychological harm, mal-development and deprivation (WHO, 2002). Armed violence in Nigeria has been a matter of great concern as the country is characterized by a lot of violent crimes and conflicts.

Muggah (2001) has observed that the nature of armed violence tends to vary according to situational variables such as normative and behavioural culture, gender and demographics.

Armed means any form of conflict involved use of any form of weapons that is capable of causing harm and dead of people.

The Impact of Small Arms on Armed conflict in Nigeria

The violence ridden country of Nigeria is a sad showcase of the insecurity, human rights and humanitarian costs of the uncontrolled proliferation of small arms. Quantities of arms have circulated the country despite the instruments, laws and prohibitions against their possession and use. This has given rise to the rampant misuse of such weapons by state and non-state actors alike. The widespread availability of small arms to abusive actors in Nigeria as elsewhere greatly contributes to armed violence coupled with further atrocities and also makes peace harder to achieve. The most direct impact of small arms and armed violence is the sheer number of deaths and injuries incurred by their misuse and application respectively in Nigeria state.

The deaths and injuries resulting from firearms have been simultaneously described by different researchers as a 'scourge', an 'epidemic', a 'disease' and a 'preventable global health problem' (Small Arms Survey, 2001:214). Armed conflicts in Nigeria have caused unprecedented deaths and injuries ranging from hundreds to thousands in number. Examples of such conflicts are the Aguleri-Umuleri, Ife-Modakeke, Tiv-Jukun, Ugep-Idomi, Oku Iboko-Ikot Offiong, Mangu-Bokkos and Igbo Ora conflicts. Others are the Kano and Kaduna religious riots, the Niger Delta, Zango Kataf, Tafawa Balewa and Jos crises, and most recently, the Boko Haram insurgency. On that same note, crime rates have been exacerbated by the increase in availability and proliferation of small arms throughout the country. Also, crime, especially armed robbery, is a primary concern of citizens in Nigeria.Furthermore, the right to life is guaranteed under the Nigerian constitution and also international law, both in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), Article III, and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), Article IV. The right to life is also guaranteed in International humanitarian law. Nigeria is bound under various international treaties and *jus cogens* of international human rights to protect these rights (Chuma-Okoro, 2001:293).

Besides their misuse in the violation of people's right to life, armed conflict have been used for other nefarious purposes. Frey (2004:380) has noted that: arms facilitate an entire range of human rights violations, including rape, enforced disappearance, torture, forced displacement, and forced recruitment of child soldiers. Communities that suffer from an

atmosphere of armed criminal or political violence may suffer a wide range of violations to their international rights to education, healthcare, development and their right to participate in government - to name a few. Clearly, the above is prevalent in Nigeria as it has already been observed by Anyim (2012), using the Jos experience. The gender perspective of the impact of small arms and armed violence on Nigeria is quite expository. Small Arms Survey (2001) noted that: Consideration of gender is particularly relevant in the discussion of direct effects since a disproportionately large percentage of both aggressors and victims (during conflict or peace) are men and yet women are explicit targets of certain types of armed violence - simply because they are women. Some forms of violence like - domestic abuse, sexual assault, and rape are uniquely conditioned for gender-based relations, which means that understanding their dynamics is critical for effective intervention.

Interestingly, Anyim (2012) noted again that during the Benue crises, the fear of sexual harassment forced women into forming alliances with soldiers and militia as a means of safety and escape. Consequently, there was increase in unwanted pregnancies and sexually transmitted diseases. He however pointed out that women and children were not only victims in the crises but that they also participated in the killings in Benue. The socio-economic impact is also enormous. Small Arms Survey (2001) noted that: violence creates an atmosphere of anxiety, with negative multiplier effects that erodes the human, economic, and social capital of communities. Widespread armed violence inflicts various social and economic costs on individuals and states, including medical treatment and rehabilitation; destruction of physical infrastructure; internal displacements of persons; refugee flows; losses in productivity and foreign investment; general disruption of economic, social, civic and political activities. At the macroeconomic level, small arms proliferation and armed violence discourage foreign investment, as well as domestic savings, as people lose confidence in a country's prospects for growth.

Armed conflict, crime and domestic violence also damage prospects for economic development, affecting school enrolment rates and overall productivity. Furthermore, armed conflict and crime impose significant constraints on the ability of affected countries to implement national development programmes. On the one hand, national resources are diverted away from social welfare for purchase of arms to protect the security of civilians. On the other hand, vital infrastructure needed for development initiatives is put in jeopardy by arms-related anxieties (Small Arms Survey, 2001). In the 2012 of the Nigerian Federal Government, N 921 billion (USD 5.5 billion - almost 20 percent of the country's whole budget) was allocated to security spending (Owen, 2012). This might seem necessary but the fact still remains that there is a clear accent on procurement rather than on human resources development or structural or procedural changes that might make security institutions more effective.

Benue State has, for the past two decades walloped in violent aggression due to the herders-farmers confrontation. The unpleasant experience from this unpredictable no-end-insight of this conflict phenomenon cannot be overemphasize. Sadly, it is a reality that in all violent confrontation between groups where sophisticated arms are illegally sourced and used for the aggression, much is always lost such as killing of people and destruction of properties (Okoli & Atelhe, 2014). Ikpanor and Aondoaver (2021) in their study report, posited that over 5,000 people, including children and pregnant women, were killed, and tens of thousands were forced to leave their ancestral homes. The armed conflict dominated by the herders-farmer violent engagements which has been occurring unabated over the past decades is major existential threat security and peaceful coexistence of the people.

By any reason whatsoever, and the source of the conflict, the fact remains that the armed conflict situation particularly the Fulani herdsmen and farmers of various ethnic groups in Benue, has induced poverty, hunger and deliberate subjection of the people to homelessness in their land. This is because armed conflict has forced the expulsion of the inhabitants of the communities in many of the local government areas in the Benue State where the violent groups have occupied (Yaro & Tseer, 2019, Mohammed et al., 2021). The unwanted displacement of people has induced the loss of agricultural, socioeconomic or commercial, educational activities as well as impinging development. Furthermore, this has made criminal acts, such as banditry and armed robbery, easier. It also accounts for the numerous ethno-religious clashes that has become a basic characteristic of Nigeria's weakness (Faror2021). These attacks are by armed groups which sometimes, happened at night or even during the daytime, depending on the attackers' calculations.

Security Agencies Intervention in the Armed Conflict in Benue State

The escalation of violence in Northeast and Middle Belt Nigeria necessitated the deployment of a heightened security presence across the region. Through the initiation and development policies and strategies to arrest the armed conflict situation in Benue State, during leadership of the then President Goodluck Jonathan (2010-2015). Due to the absence of a Comprehensive National Security Policy and Strategy document for the country (Nigeria Stability and Reconciliation Programme (NSRP), (2015), launched a framework for a holistic and more coordinated approach and response to security concerns in the country called the National Security Strategy (NSS) Jatau (2017). The NSS identified major security issues and assigned roles and responsibilities to the government, civil society, private agencies and individuals in addressing these issues, including counterterrorism and cyber-security strategies.

Considering the birth of the National security strategy document as a stimulus to coordinated approach and response to addressing the issues of rising armed conflict in Nigeria, it is imperative to discuss the security intervention with a supporting theory. This is to ensure that quest to examine the impact of security agencies intervention in the armed conflict situation in Benue State comprehensively explained and understood. Doing so therefore, Galula (1964) Counter-insurgency theory is found to be suitable to align the aim of the paper. The theory propounded by French war veteran, David Galula, rest on belief that, success in fighting armed conflict there will be need for combination of military and social actions under strong control of a single authority (Counter-Insurgency, 2018). Galula further emphasized that the development and success of counter-insurgency campaign should be hinged on the heart of the "political machine" and effectively coordinated efforts to achieve the intended outcome. This coordination can be massively achieved through committees and integrated military-civilian hierarchies (Itumo &Nwobashi, 2015,). According to Galula, a victory in a counterinsurgency is not the destruction in a given area of the insurgent's forces and his political organization. But it is the permanent isolation of the insurgent from the population

The invention of this security strategy document led to the evolvement of Joint security operation which is a collaboration among the military, police, and department of state security services, Nigeria security and civil defense for purpose coordinating intervention to curb the progressive and worsening violence in all the Nigeria States including Benue. These joint operations were meant to enhance coordination and resource sharing, leading to more effective control efforts. Invariably, in response to this idea, the Federal Government in February 2018 established its first joint security taskforce codenamed Operation Ayem Akpatuma with the mandate to tackle the rising wave of armed herdsmen attacks, farmers-herders clashes, cattle rustling, kidnapping and armed banditry by local militia (Ogunleye,2018).

The joint force operation claimed to have recorded some successes in the few security operations it undertook within the first three months of its lifespan. In May 2018, the taskforce was disbanded, and in its place, another sister security taskforce named Operation Whirl Stroke (OPWS) was established with the same mandate (Olowolagba, 2019). Worthy of note also is that these two security task forces comprised personnel of the Nigerian military (Army, Air force, and Navy), the Nigeria Police Force, DSS, and NSCDC), with a military general as its commander/head. From the 32 security offensive operations it undertook within the first year (2018) of it's existence, Olowolagba (2022) reported that Operation Whirl Stroke (OPWS) has so far launched successful attacks in over 130 security parades against armed herdsmen, militia gangs, suspected bandits, and kidnappers in parts of Benue State as at December 2021.

In addition to the regular Nigeria Police Force, the DSS, State Government\s Livestock Guards, and the various local community vigilante groups that are charged with the mandate of maintaining internal security across Benue State, there are, of course, a plethora of ancillary security outfits charged with such similar mandate whose presence are visible in the state. These ancillary security agencies that are expected to play complementary role to that played by the Nigerian police and DSS, among others include the following: the Nigeria Correctional Service (NCS),the Federal Road Safety Commission (FRSC), National Drug Law Enforcement Agency (NDLEA), the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC), Vehicle Inspection Office (VIO), Independent Corrupt Practices and other related Offences Commission (ICPC), Nigeria Customs Service (NCS), Nigerian Immigration Service (NIS), the Code of Conduct Bureau (CCB), the National Agency for the Prohibition of Trafficking in Persons (NAPTIP), and the Nigeria Security and Civil Defense Corp (NSCDC), among others.

The general expectations were that these security agencies would collaborate or work in synergistic cooperation among themselves both

as autonomous bodies and in their joint security operations against threats to public safety and internal security in in Benue state and Nigeria as whole (Gbanite 2010; Odoma, 2012; Alemika, 2003; Omogui, 2006; Marizu, 2007). This view was that, in a situation whereby the various security agencies in Nigeria play their roles well, especially in mutual collaboration, cooperation or synergy with one another and amongst themselves as widely envisaged by society and the constitution, the increasing wave of violent crimes and other threats to internal security would have been drastically eliminated. The approach to intervention in the armed conflict revolves around two major strategies and these include the kinetic and non-kinetic methods.

Basically, the joint force operation involving the military and other force organizations have the expertise use variety of tools that they can use to win a war, using both kinetic and non-kinetic. Defining these terms is not always straight forward, particularly non-kinetic, as it sometimes seems to be the category for "everything else". Kinetic can be briefly defined as those capabilities focused on "physical force and systems that immediately support the use of physical force", and non-kinetic as those capabilities "relevant to irregular warfare" (Hurley et al., 2009). Besides, the federal government and State apart from the releasing the force organization act appropriately to control the armed conflict, employed many approaches that focused on dialogue to complement the forces efforts.

Nature/Outcome of the Security Agencies Intervention

According to Amnesty International (2018) report, the Nigerian Federal Government, State Governments, the Nigeria Police Force and the Nigerian Army are the secondary actors of the conflict. Actually, at some level of the security intervention success was acclaimed to have been recorded by joint force operations. These successes saw the arrest and neutralizing of perpetrators or members of the various armed groups (Gabri, 2024). In a series of recently conducted operations, troops of the Nigerian Army have successfully quelled the nefarious activities of notorious kidnappers and rescued their hostages in Benue State. Acting on actionable intelligence, troops raided a notorious kidnap syndicate hideout in Sankara, Ukum Local Government Area, resulting in the neutralization of three terrorists and the rescue of two hostages. The operation also led to the recovery of one AK-47 rifle, one locally fabricated gun, assorted mobile phones, a camouflage uniform, and one motorbike (Gabri, 2024).

Apparently, these operations have improved coordination among security agencies, leading to more successful raids and operations. Yet, occasional inter-agency rivalry and lack of unified command can reduce overall effectiveness. The security forces deployed to these areas have a mandate to maintain peace, their officers have been implicated in widespread human rights abuses against civilians consequently eroding public confidence in the security sector and alienating security forces from the citizens they are charged to protect, thus thwarting the effectiveness of their mandate (Impactometrics International, 2022). This has culminated into the failure of executing their expected coordinating responsibility to achieve the desires outcome. In the light of this, the effectiveness of security agencies in Benue State has been mixed, with reported successes and challenges.

The security agencies failure led to many unusual and unfortunate incidence. For example, not long ago, on 30th May, 2024 Lieutenant Bot Elisha and 10 other passengers who were kidnapped traveling on board a Peace Mass Transit Bus from Abuja to Port Harcourt by armed, though they were later rescued. This was aptly captured in an interview with military personnel in Makurdi. Many joint force members were killed at different organized surprised attacks by these gunmen. The security forces were found unable to prevent the clashes most of the times. Some evidence and witness testimonies show that some officers are corrupt, and they cooperate with the attackers. Instead of being a trustworthy organ of the state and protect their citizens, the security forces in Nigeria disrupt the current situation. In a related development, troops on a search and rescue operation have successfully extricated from Kidnappers' den, Warrant Officer Ogbonna Charles, a serving soldier of the Nigerian Army, who was abducted in the Goh Area of Gwer West Local Government Area of Benue state. The soldier, who was abducted on 25 May 2024, in Naka, is currently undergoing medical checks following his rescue.

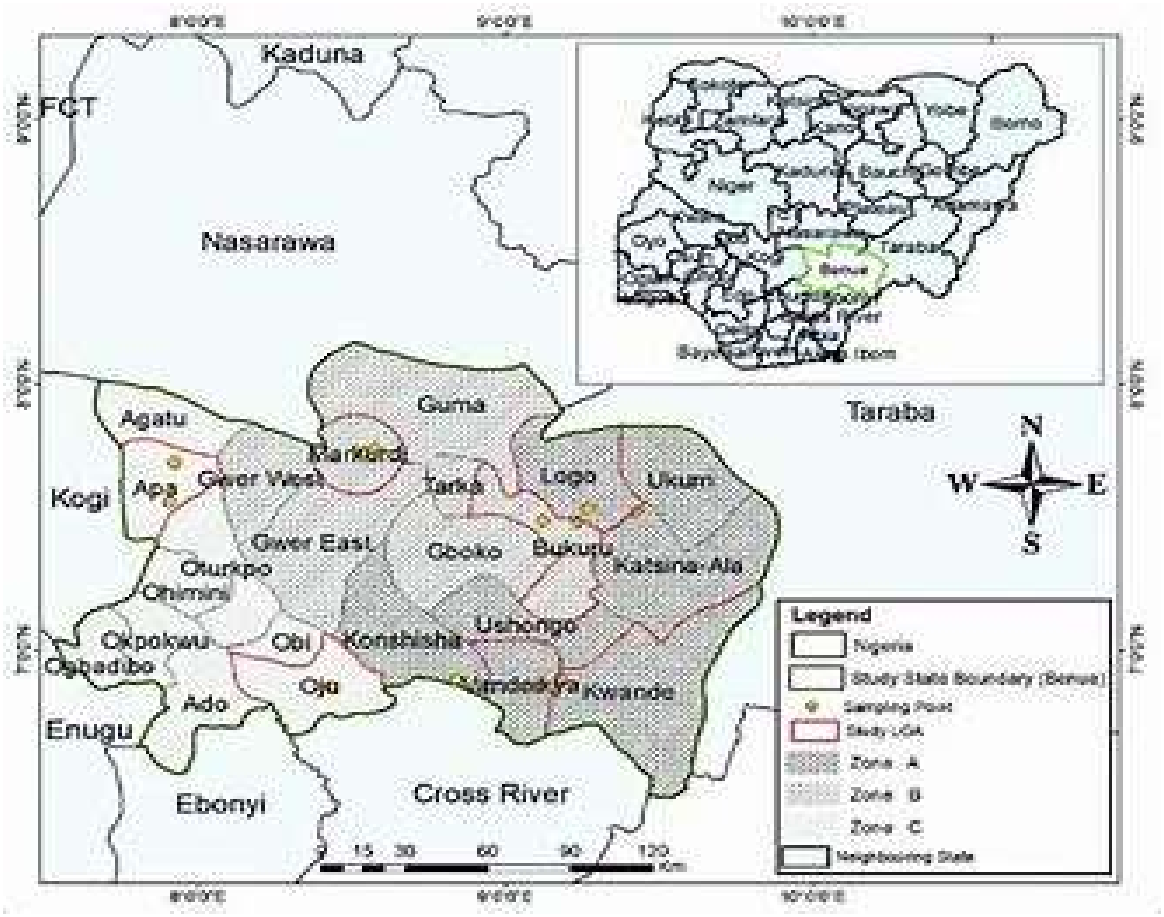


Figure 1: The Study Area showing zones of armed conflict
Source: Ministry of Land and Survey, Makurdi

Data Collection

The data primarily used to achieve the objective of the paper were obtained from secondary sources. Secondary sources data are published work of researchers who took their time to do painstaking research on the situation of armed conflict in Benue State found in text-books and journal articles, newspapers, magazines and official documents found online found online and in libraries.

Frustration and Aggression Theory

Dollard, Doob, Miller, Mowrer and Sears (1939). According to them, the central thesis of Frustration and aggression theory is that aggression is always a function of frustration and the occurrences of aggressive behavior always presuppose the existence of frustration. They further defined aggression as any behavior which is intended to injure, cause harm, pain to the individual to whom it is directed. According to Zillmann (1979), the major tenets of the theory are;

a. frustration instigates behavior that may or may not be hostile or aggressive;

b. And any hostile or aggressive behavior that occurs is caused by frustration.

The theoretical significance of this theory is its ability to concisely explain the reasons for violent conflict between the farmers and herdsmen. Environmental conflict from the perspective of this theory is a product of the frustration of herdsmen as a result of severe ecological changes and Boko Haram incessant attacks in their home state with the resultant effects such as the death of many cattle which are their most treasured possession, cattle rustling and migration to the south. All of which makes the herdsmen put on aggressive behavior which is a derivative of the previous frustration

they have encountered as a result of grazing in the face of adverse weather condition, scarcity of environmental resources and security threats from Boko Haram attacks. Therefore, the destruction of farm crops, properties, houses and massive death toll that perpetually fill up the front-page of the national dailies are the product of aggression that evolves from frustration and sense of deep loss on the side of the herdsmen.

Frustration Aggression Theory is adopted as the major theory because it explains the reason for conflict. When individual expectation is not met, it can easily be frustrated and once he is frustrated, he will exhibit hostile behavior which will lead to aggression hence result to conflict which is the situation between farmers and herders in different communities in Benue State.

Conclusion

The issues of armed violence have been a source of great security concern in Nigeria. This paper has therefore provided an analysis of the causes, impact attempt at curbing and challenges of insecurity in Benue state Nigeria, thereby linking it with its attendant armed violence that is characterised in violent conflicts and criminality. The paper has also explored the dynamics of armed violence in Nigeria and showed that armed groups, criminal gangs and even some bad elements within security operatives are highly involved in the perpetuation of violence on even innocent citizens.

It is however pertinent to note that inasmuch as there is a link between small arms availability or proliferation and armed violence, small arms or their proliferation is not the cause of violent conflicts in Nigeria. Moreso, it is not also the cause of armed robbery and other crimes. Socio-economic factors like poverty, underdevelopment, unemployment, corruption, bad leadership and also the structural or root causes of violence need to be addressed.

There is therefore no doubt that small arms availability and proliferation in Nigeria has helped to increase the intensity of violent conflicts, crime and security operatives' brutality. The government has a prime responsibility to nib the issues of small arms and armed violence in the bud. It should tackle socio-economic factors that give rise to violence and also ensure that there is effective and well-enforced legislation and policy that guide firearms use; improved border controls; training of security personnel; cooperation between armed forces and security forces; cooperation with neighbouring countries; and increase its focus on human security. Until these are done, small arms and light weapons will continue to be a challenge for Nigerians for many years to come.

Recommendations

i. The Federal Government should formulate and effectively implement policies and programmes capable of addressing the root causes of armed conflict in Nigeria such as poverty, unemployment, environmental degradation, the dearth of infrastructural facilities, uneven development, among others.

ii. The Government should be more proactive in the implementation and provision of infrastructure designed for farmers and herders' resource use to avoid a situation where these incessant upheavals would affect agricultural production and food security of the nation.

iii. The Federal Government should re-organize the country's intelligence system and build a capable and more proactive security apparatus in country, so as to checkmate the incessant bombings, robbery, kidnapping and violent crimes/crises by hoodlums all over the country.

iv. There is the need for collective security arrangement by Federal, State and Local Governments in Nigeria. This arrangement should produce a committee at village, community, local, state and federal level with the responsibility of providing sensitive security information for security agencies on areas of operation, for easy identification of criminals, their sponsors and hideouts in Nigeria.

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