NATURAL RESOURCES AND INTRA-STATE CONFLICTS IN WEST AFRICA AFTER THE COLD WAR

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ABSTRACT
Africa was a theatre of conflicts at the end of the Cold War and West Africa was the epicentre of destructive intra-state conflicts. The massive humanitarian catastrophe and the destabilising effect of civil wars necessitated inquiries on the causes of persistent civil wars in the developing world. Among the several studies of the phenomenon in Africa, the findings of Collier and Hoffler (2000) emerged as the most influential explanation. In their seminal study, Collier and Hoffler (2000) argued that it is greed for resources and not grievances that are the cause of conflicts in resource endowed countries in the developing world. In recent decades, the correlation between resource wealth and wars has held sway as the dominant perspective on the prevalence of conflicts in developing countries. Conflicts in Africa and the West Africa sub-region were explained through this paradigm. This paper is a contribution to the extant knowledge on the nexus between natural resources and conflicts in resource-rich countries in West Africa. Data was sourced from secondary materials: internet sources, textbooks, magazines and newspapers. The paper found that though natural resources were not the primary cause of conflicts in West Africa, these resources were however responsible for fueling and sustaining conflicts in the sub-region. Redesigning the security architecture of states to improve policing; addressing environmental and resource allocation grievances; address citizenship crisis of nomadic herders; implement unbiased policies in the settlement of herder-farmer tensions and the establishment of state-level institutional framework to facilitate peaceful settlement of herder-farmer disputes were recommended as solutions to conflicts in West Africa.

Introduction

Africa was ravaged by civil conflicts at the end of the Cold War. The West African sub-region emerged as the epicentre of intra-state conflicts in the decade after the Cold War. The deadly and destructive nature of these wars, the consequent humanitarian catastrophe and the threat the crisis presented to global peace and security helped raise questions on the causes of wars in Africa and indeed in the developing world. These necessitated series of inquiries to establish the factors that predispose African countries to conflict. Expectedly, these studies have thrown up different positions and explanations. While some have established a strong nexus between natural resources and conflicts in Africa, others have found no

relationship between the abundance of natural resources and conflicts in the continent.

The findings by Collier and Hoffler (2000) in the greed versus grievance thesis was widely acclaimed and accepted as possible reasons for the cause of conflicts in resource-rich countries in the developing world. Collier and Hoffler (2000) linked resource wealth to conflicts plaguing developing countries and argued that a strong correlation exists between resource endowments and the occurrence of civil wars in Africa and the developing world. These findings have been reinforced by Elbadawi and Sambanis (2001); Ross (2001); De Soysa (2002) and others. For these scholars, the quest to benefit from the exploitation of natural resources in resource-rich countries is the cause of conflicts in Africa and is the reason why resource-rich African countries are prone to conflicts. According to these scholars, explaining the motivation for conflicts from the standpoint of grievances is wrong as greed is the primary cause of conflicts in Africa. Even where resources are not directly responsible for the onset of conflict, studies have established correlation between natural resources and the duration of conflicts (Fearon, 2001). Drawing from resource wealth and conflict correlation thesis, it has been argued that West Africa is prone to conflict because of its natural resource endowments. Since the publication of the seminal study by Collier and Hoffler (2000), this position largely held sway as a reliable explanation of the occurrence of conflicts in developing countries.

However, the correlation between natural resources and intra-state conflicts has been challenged under intense scrutiny. In its place, the causes of conflict have been attributed to ethnicity, religion, corruption, the weakness of government and institutions of government to mediate in conflicts etc (Alao, 2011). Exponents of this position advance the argument that it is grievances and not greed that is at the root of conflicts in Africa. It is widely acknowledged though that natural resources are critical to the sustenance of post Cold War conflicts in Africa as conflicting depend on these resources for funding. The civil wars in Liberia, Sierra Leone and Cote d' Ivoire are often given as examples of conflicts that were sustained by resources. For instance, both sides in the civil war in Liberia depended on the exploitation of natural resources in prosecuting the war. The country's major exports - rubber and logging- became sources of funding for the Government of Samuel Doe in fighting the insurgents (Alao, 2011). On the other hand, Charles Taylor, the rebel leader, was also dependent on the exploitation of timber and diamonds for funding his insurgency (Stiftung, n.d). Similarly, both sides in the conflict in Cote d'Ivoire – the Government of Laurent Gbagbo and the rebels, Forces Nouvelles (FN) - resorted to trading in illicit diamonds to fund their operations (BICC, 2007).

There is substantial body of knowledge on the role of natural resources as critical elements in the sustenance of conflicts in West Africa after the Cold War. The impact of natural resources in conflicts is also broadly acknowledged in almost all conflict situations in the sub-region. Conflicting parties have almost always focused on controlling areas that produce important natural resources which are exploited to fund the war efforts. This is noticeable across conflict scenes in the sub-region. For instance, in Liberia, the struggle to control diamond producing areas of Western Liberia and the timber producing parts of south-east region of the country became the primary objective of all parties in the civil conflict. The control of these areas by factions in the conflict provided the needed resources for groups and the motivation to continue fighting (Atkinson, 1997).

Where control over resources to aid conflicts is not the primary cause of conflicts, grievances over the exploitation of natural resources have often formed the basis of rebellion and conflicts. A noticeable case is Sierra Leone where the looting of the country's resources by the elite was a grouse in the insurgency by the Revolutionary United Front (RUF) (Ross, 2001). Resource-inspired or sustained conflicts have emerged as an issue of grave concern for the peace and stability of the sub-region, Africa and the security of the global community. This paper seeks to expand the frontiers of existing body of knowledge on the relationship between resource wealth in West Africa and the incidence of conflicts. The paper is divided into seven sections. Section one is the introduction which is followed by the framework of analysis. Section three deals with herder-farmer conflict while section four is on oil conflicts. Sections five, six and seven are on illicit mining, gemstones and conflict and the presentation of findings/ recommendations and conclusion respectively.

Framework of Analysis

This paper adopts the analytical framework offered by Paul Collier and Anke Hoeffler (2000) in *"greed versus grievance in civil wars in developing countries"*. The contention by Paul Collier and Anke Hoeffler that natural resources are at the root of conflicts in resource-rich countries in the developing world is considered appropriate framework because the paper is aimed at examining the relationship between natural resources and conflicts in West Africa. Economic causes of conflict and associated theories that explain conflicts in society are not new in socio-political and historical thought. In his writings, Karl Marx (1818-1883), more than any other philosopher, dealt extensively on the relationship between the economic lives of individuals and conflict in society. In the *Das Kapital,* the *Communist Manifesto* and several of his celebrated philosophical contributions on capitalism as the cause of conflict in society, Karl Marx contended that capitalism creates economic classes with conflicting interests that are not reconcilable (Rashid, 2017). This formed the foundation of his socio-economic and political theories on the intricate and conflicting economic interests and relationships in capitalism as a mode of production. Karl Marx predicted that conflicting class interests of the bourgeoisie, the class that owns the means of production, and the working class (proletariats) makes conflict a permanent feature of capitalism and that these can only be resolved through proletariat revolution that will end capitalism and establish a classless society (Rosen, n.d).

The philosophical thoughts of Karl Marx have global impact and have continued to inspire further inquiries on man's economic relationships and conflict in society. The challenges of conflict in Africa after the Cold War and the attempts to provide scientific explanations to the crisis have again brought to the fore the relationship between economic factors and prevalence of conflicts in the continent. This was the focus of research in the decade after the Cold War. Amongst the several contributions on the causes of conflict in Africa, the contribution by Paul Collier and Anke Hoeffler (2000) on the relationship between natural resources and civil wars in developing countries has continued to be a point of reference. After an extensive study of civil wars, Collier and Hoeffler (2000) produced a report entitled "*greed or grievance in civil wars in developing countries"* in which they argued that resource dependent countries are more prone to civil wars. Collier and Hoeffler further contended that natural resources provide a unique opportunity of funding for nascent rebel organizations to begin a civil war as these resources are location specific, produce rents and can be looted for a long period.

Corroborating the findings of Collier and Hoeffler, Ross (2001) contended that natural resources are a factor in the initiation, intensification and prolongation of civil wars in resource–rich developing nations. The greed thesis also resonates with De Soysa (2002) who posited that primary resources dependence have a strong effect on the incidence of civil wars in resource endowed nations. Natural resource availability contributes to conflict because it provides incentives for the formation of rebel groups and the needed resources for their operations. For De Soysa, the greed for resources is therefore a primary driver of conflict in resource wealthy developing nations. De Soysa cited the conflicts in Angola, Sierra Leone, Liberia and the Democratic Republic of Congo as wars motivated primarily by greed for natural resources.

This analytical framework focuses on natural resources as the root cause of conflict in resource-rich countries. Consequently, in West Africa the abundance of resources is considered as the cause of conflicts in the sub-region. This framework is considered appropriate in highlighting the impact of natural resources on conflicts in West Africa. It seeks to establish the fact that natural resources fuel and sustain conflicts in West Africa sub-region.

a. Herder-Farmer Conflict

Resource-use conflicts are a source of perennial problem in West Africa. The protagonists in these conflicts are herders and farmers. Conflict between farmers and herders in West Africa has a long history (Institute of Security Studies, 2009). Competition for land, water and other natural resources are the underlying factors in these conflicts. Natural resource use by sedentary crop farmers and nomadic cattle farmers is a major source of intra-state conflict in the sub-region. This is because both herders and crop farmers need the same dwindling resources – land and water – for sustenance. As a result, interaction between farmers and herders in the course of promoting their livelihoods is unavoidable. It is these interactions that have often bred uneasy

relationships between the two agricultural groups.

Nomadic Fulani cattle rearing has been a significant part of the history of most countries in West Africa. Long before the independence of Ghana in 1957, Fulani pastoralists have been rearing cattle in that country (Alhassan & Asante, 2022; Adomako, 2019). However, in the 1980s there were increased tensions and incidents of conflict between farmers and herders in the country (Alhassan & Asante, 2022). The response of the Government of Ghana to the frequent farmer-herder conflict was the formation of Operation Cow Leg in 1988 to deal with the problem (Alhassan & Asante, 2022; Adomako, 2019). The objective of the security operation was to "flush out alien Fulani herdsmen from Ghana's territory as a prerequisite for maintaining peace and security, and to promote the livelihood of the country's subsistence farmers" (Tonah, 2002 as cited in Alhassan & Asante 2022:6**).** Obviously, this is based on government's perception of herders as foreigners. In fact, Alhassan and Asante (2022) noted that the Government of President Jerry Rawlings saw Fulanis as foreign invaders from Niger, Burkina Faso and Mali. This informed the mass deportation of Fulanis between 1988, 1989 and 1999. Pastoral Fulanis were also targets of eviction from areas prone to farmer-herder conflict as they were rounded up by operatives of Operation Cow Leg in collaboration with local and district authorities (Alhassan & Asante, 2022). Since 2000, Alhassan & Asante (2022) observed that there have been frequent expulsions of Fulanis from parts of the country that are prone to farmer-herder conflict or where conflicts have been reported. Interestingly, Fulanis pasturing cattle for Ghanaians are considered indigenous pastoralists and exempted from eviction or expulsion (Alhassan & Asante, 2022).

Discrimination against Fulanis in the distribution of social amenities; the denial of citizenship to Fulanis; stereotyping of pastoralists as jihadists, criminals and rapists; lack of land allocated to herders for grazing; the refusal of herders to pay compensation for devastation of farms caused by grazing and the contest for land and water are identified social triggers of the crisis in northern Ghana (Ahmed, 2022). Climate change is considered as an exacerbating factor. Apart from the impact of climate change, Ahmed (2022) noted population growth, urbanization and acquisition of large expanse of land for commercial farming as other factors contributing to herder-farmer crisis in Ghana.

It has been observed that over the decades, climate change has resulted in desert encroachment in northern Nigeria (Onyekuru & Marchant, 2014). Between 1976 and 1995, 425% of arable land was encroached by the surging desert, resulting in the loss of several hectres (Onyekuru & Marchant, 2014). The intensification of the process of desertification has necessitated southward push by pastoralists to seek pastures for their herds. Consequently, there is competition for resources between farmers and herders (Scoons, 1995 as cited in Onyekuru & Marchant, 2014). The stiff competition for land and water and the resulting claims of encroachment by both parties has often led to tensions and clashes. The ensuing conflicts have taken a huge toll on human lives and an unprecedented destruction of properties in the north central zone – the epicentre of the crisis - and across most parts of Nigeria.

Farmer-herder conflict in Nigeria and across West Africa are exacerbated by the intensification of drought in the West African Sahel (Nyong, n,d). Sustained periods of drought in the northern parts are also a push factor for nomadic pastoralists to migrate southward to the tropical zones in search of pastures. This migratory trend over the years has facilitated pastoralist conflict with sedentary farmers south of the Sahara. In a broad study of the literature on the causes of farmer – herder conflict in Africa, Nasssef, et al (2023) found that climate change related conflicts in Africa contributed the largest proportion (56%) of farmer – herder conflict. The complex interaction of socio-political and economic factors which worsens climate related conflicts in West Africa is reinforced by increased population and the pressure it exerts on agriculture (Nyong, n.d). Population increase has altered traditional land use systems as a result of pressure on land. Reduction in available land for cultivation is contributing to farmers' encroachment on traditionally reserved grazing areas and routes thereby bringing them into collision with herders (Nyong, n.d).

The effect of climate change as a causative factor in farmer-herder conflict is generally acknowledged. However, Shettima and Tar (2008) implicated socio-political relations between the two groups as the underlying reasons for the frequent conflict. They argued that simply attributing the cause of the perennial

conflict to environmental changes and its associated scarcity and the consequent competition for resources as the primary cause of conflict will miss the point as it does not properly situate the problem within the socio-political context in which these conflicts occur. They therefore concluded that the sources of conflict between herders and farmers are multidimensional with roots in socio-cultural and political experiences of the two groups. The fact that nomads are regarded as a group of landless people who uses land and other natural resources they do not own while sedentary farmers are treated as the land owners by governments only breeds mistrust and poisons their mutual relationship (Shettima & Tar, 2008). Most governments across West Africa are quick to blame herders for any misunderstanding with sedentary farmers (Shettima & Tar, 2008). This helps to reinforce the perception amongst herders that the state is in alliance with sedentary farmers.

Davidheiser and Luna (2008) introduced historical perspective to the understanding of herder-farmer conflict. They situated the root of the conflict in colonialism. According to Davidheiser and Luna (2008) in pre-colonial times the relations between pastoralists and farmers were symbiotic as the production systems depended on each other. The interdependence coupled with effective traditional dispute resolution systems at the local level promoted amicable relations between the two groups. Davidheiser and Luna (2008) contended that colonialism and the introduction of capitalism greatly disrupted these relations. Davidheiser and Luna (2008) further stated that pressure on land and its degradation, colonialism and the intensification of capitalism combined to enforce artificial scarcity and therefore competition for natural resources by both groups. This, according to the authors introduced elements of conflict in the hitherto mutual relations between the two production systems.

Davidheiser and Luna (2008) further noted that colonial laws and practices which were biased against pastoralists were inherited and implemented by succeeding post-colonial administrations in West Africa. The introduction of modern technology and techniques of farming which enabled the irrigation of arid parts of the Sahel that were used exclusively by pastoralists for their herds further contributed to the crisis (Davidheiser & Luna, 2008). According to Davidheiser and Luna (2008) this impacted farmer-herder relations in two major ways: it increased farming activities in the arid regions which were considered unfavourable for farming thereby encouraging a northward expansion of farmers into pastoral territories and it also encouraged sedentary practice by nomad pastoralists in areas where water sources were located. Davidheiser and Luna (2008) attributed the southward movement of pastoralists to pressure on land due to demographic rise and desertification. This resource-induced migration increased herders' interaction with farmers with whom they have no shared history of integration and traditional institutions and mechanisms of dispute resolution. According to Davidheiser and Luna (2008) this is the root cause of increased land-use conflicts in West Africa. In order to resolve recurring farmer-herder conflict in the sub-region, Davidheiser and Luna (2008) recommended local control of land, adoption of traditional methods of dispute resolution as against the present Western style of adjudication and review of legislations that are biased against either nomad pastoralists or sedentary farmers.

It is the contention of Kendrick and Sanders (2024) that the farmer-herder conflict ravaging the West African sub-region is both a consequence and reflection of the socio-economic and political exclusion and injustices suffered by Fulbe (Fulani) pastoralists across West Africa. Kendrick and Sanders (2024) presented a catalogue of deprivations of the Fulbe across almost all countries in West Africa. According to Kendrick and Sanders (2024), there is general misconception about Fulbe people in West Africa. They are stereotyped as criminals, violent jihadists and aliens in most countries in West Africa. As a result, Fulbe people suffer injustices from governments and other ethnic groups and communities. Kendrick and Sanders (2024) noted that in Ghana and Benin Republic, nomad pasturing is viewed as old fashioned and prone to conflict; this argument is fast gaining currency in Nigeria as well. Consequently, there is general advocacy for ranching in place of traditional methods of herding. Kendrick and Sanders (2024) further noted that in Ghana and Benin Republic, Fulbe ethnic group is denied citizenship and deprived of basic political rights which deprive them of representation in governance and therefore participation in the formulation and implementation of policies that affect them. The absence of Fulbe representation also means that their communities are deprived of social amenities. The Fulbe people also suffer injustices in the

local traditional mechanisms of dispute resolution as these institutions always favour sedentary farmers in disputes with herders. Other causal factors identified are traditional land tenure system that disadvantages Fulbe pastoralists; the increasing presence of oil multinationals across West Africa and the huge expanses of land required to host them; commercialization of farming which shrinks available pasture and attempts by various governments across the sub-region to modernize pastoral farming through sedentary cattle rearing.

b. Oil Generated Conflicts

Environmental degradation in oil producing communities and revenue distribution are common causes of resource-based conflict in the Niger Delta of Nigeria. The despoliation of the environment of oil producing communities by the activities of oil multinationals, systematic alienation of oil producing areas from participation in the oil industry and unfair distribution of oil-based revenue are some reasons for the intractable conflict in the Niger Delta region (Ibaba, 2008). The struggle for the benefits of oil and the oil economy itself continues to be a source of conflict (Ikelegbe, 2005). It is the cause of inter and intra-communal conflicts as well as the conflict between the oil-bearing communities on the one hand and the Federal Government and the multinational oil companies on the other (Ikelegbe, 2005). The contest for benefits from the oil industry has resulted in the emergence of various ethnic-based associations and ethnic militias that have violently attacked both the state and oil companies operating in the region (Ikelegbe, 2005; Ibaba, 2008). Therefore, the crisis in the Niger Delta is the result of decades of oil production without commensurate benefits to the host communities, marginalisation of the oil communities, pollution and environmental degradation of oil-bearing areas. According to Ikelegbe (2005) these are the objective factors that formed the basis of the conflict in the region.

Similarly, Imobighe (n.d) observed the lack of adequate concern for the interests of oil-producing communities in the distribution of oil benefits; lack of protection of the interests of oil-bearing communities in the oil industry; environmental pollution and degradation caused by the oil industry and unfair distribution of oil revenues as the sources of frustration. These discontents have fuelled agitations and the resort to violence and conflict in the oil producing areas (Imobighe, n.d).

Ibeanu (2000) emphasized on the harmful environmental impact of four decades of oil production in the Niger Delta and the exclusion of the area from benefits of the oil industry as the primary reasons in the conflict involving the oil-bearing communities, the oil companies and government. In Sierra Leone, the lack of benefits for resource producing areas provided the springboard for Late Fodah Sankoh to launch his rebellion from the South East province where the bulk of diamonds were produced (Alao, 2011). The broad consensus in the literature on the conflict in the Niger Delta is that environmental degradation resulting from exploration and exploitation activities of the oil industry in the area and distribution of benefits of the oil wealth are fundamental to the crisis.

c. Gemstones, illicit mining and conflict

Theoretical and empirical findings have established a correlation between resource wealth and conflict in Africa (Ross, 2001; Berman, 2017 et al). Artisanal and small-scale gold mining (ASGM) has been particularly implicated in recent conflicts in West Africa. ASGM plays a critical role in the initiation, intensity and prolongation of armed conflicts (Ross, 2001). It provides a source of funding and a motivation for armed groups to continue to prosecute a conflict. This is due to the ability of armed groups to extract revenues from mining sites even when not being directly involved in mining operations. Taxation of miners, offering protection for mining activities and serving as guards in mining sites and engaging in mining through proxies are some activities of armed groups that make their adventure lucrative and provides the incentive for armed conflict (Berman, 2017 et al).

There are festering conflicts in various parts of sub-region that are attributed to the activities of illicit mining of gold and other precious stones. Illicit extraction of gemstones, gold and other valuable minerals are often the root cause of conflicts in mining sites and the surrounding environment. Ogbonnaya (2020) noted that illegal gold mining is a factor that promotes conflict in Zamfara state of Nigeria. Quoting a local source, Ogbonnaya (2020) stated that the sponsors of gold mining in Zamfara state are the same people that sponsor cattle rustling and rural banditry. Their objective is to create an environment of insecurity which is conducive for

the activities of illegal miners. Part of the proceeds realised are ploughed back in procuring arms and ammunition for the intensification and sustenance of the climate of insecurity in the area of operation and beyond (Ogbonnaya, 2020). In another vein, the struggle amongst illegal miners for control of mining fields also causes conflict among miners which impacts the security of the state and the region.

Illicit mining of gold, diamonds and other natural resources are known to be responsible for conflicts (Ross, 2001). Ojakorotu (2022) established that the attraction of huge profits from gold mining was a primary reason bandits transformed from robbery and involvement in other criminal activities into gold mining in Zamfara state of Nigeria. Ojakorotu (2022) further noted that conflicts arise from clashes between bandits engaged in exploitation of natural resources and state security agencies. Since 2019, the contest over control of gold mines and mining sites by criminal gangs has been the cause of conflict, general insecurity and the resulting mass displacement of people in Zamfara state (Salati, Adeyemo & Adeyemo, 2022).

The trade in illicit diamonds as a source of funding for rebel groups and other non-state actors in the violence and conflict in Sierra Leone and Liberia is a reference point in the war economies of both countries (Tana high-level forum on security in Africa, 2017). In an empirical study, Salati, Adeyemo and Adeyemo (2022) established that mining sites are notorious for attracting criminal gangs who turn such areas to conflict zones. The point is that armed non state actors and other criminal elements consider the lucrative trade in gold-mining communities of Zamfara state attractive as a source of funding for arms and ammunition that drive criminality and conflict in the state and the entire northwestern zone of Nigeria (Salati, Adeyemo and Adeyemo, 2022). This partly explains the persistence of conflict and insecurity especially in Zamfara and the neighbouring states of Katsina and Kaduna (Salati, Adeyemo and Adeyemo, 2022). Zamfara and the whole of the northwest also suffer from frequent farmer-herder conflict over competition for land and water resources which is common in other parts of the country and the West Africa sub-region (Salati, Adeyemo and Adeyemo, 2022).

d. Conflict diamonds

Conflict diamonds from Sierra Leone presents a classic case of the greed and grievance argument. In their explanation of the prevalence of wars in the Third World, Collier and Hoeffler (2000) dismissed the case of grievance as the cause of wars in resource-rich nations and concluded that the primary motivation for wars is greed over mineral resources. Therefore, for Collier and Hoeffler (2000) it is greed that is at the root of conflicts in resource-rich Third World countries. According to this school of thought, war affords the opportunity for people to loot resources and that is the primary reason for the initiation of conflict. In the past two decades, this school of thought has gained wide acceptance as the dominant explanation for the prevalence of civil wars in Africa.

The nexus between illicit trade in diamonds and civil wars in West Africa was brought to the fore in the civil wars in Liberia, Sierra Leone and later Cote d' Ivoire (Ross, 2001; Stiftung, n.d; BICC focus, 2008). The Revolutionary United Front (RUF) of Foday Sankoh launched its attack on Sierra Leone from Liberia in March 1991, with active backing from Charles Taylor and the National Patriotic Front of Liberia (NPFL) (Ross, 2001). The rich diamond resources of Sierra Leone provided the primary motivation for Charles Taylor's support for the RUF (Stiftung, n.d). This partly explains the concentration of RUF attacks on the diamond-rich region and the mining operations in Sierra Leone. Though the Revolutionary United Front (RUF) needed the diamonds to finance its rebellion, there was no doubt that Charles Taylor also wanted the diamonds from Sierra Leone to fund his own insurgency in Liberia, which was the primary reason for the support (Vines & Vanesan, n.d). Indeed the NPFL and the RUF heavily depended on trading in illicit diamonds from Sierra Leone in funding the rebellion in both countries. Similarly, in Cote d' Ivoire, the massive exploitation of diamonds along with cocoa, timber, gold, cotton and oil was to play a significant role in financing the conflict at the onset of the crisis between the military under Laurent Gbagbo and the Forces Nouvelles (FN) in 2002 **(**BICC focus, 2008)**.**

Apart from being a source of financing for the rebels and government, diamonds and other lootable natural resources were critical in staving off eminent defeat particularly of government forces in Sierra Leone. In 1995, the Executive Outcomes, a South African mercenary firm was

engaged to repel the eminent rebel attack on Freetown (Ross, 2001). The agreement with Executive Outcomes was paid for in diamonds and other resources (Ross, 2001). The success of this military intervention saved the government from eminent defeat by the RUF (Ross, 2001).

In 1997 President Tejan Kabbah was overthrown in a military putsch and Sierra Leone was constrained to solicit for the services of another military firm, this time Sandline International, to assist in his reinstatement. The cost of $10 million for the intervention was again borne through the concession of mineral rights to the company (Ross, 2001). Essentially, the role of natural resources in the civil wars in Liberia and Sierra Leone largely supports the findings of Collier on the causes of wars in resource-rich countries. Charles Taylor used the proceeds from the sale of diamonds and timber to prosecute the civil war in Liberia and also fund the insurgency in Sierra Leone and Cote d' Ivoire (Vines & Vanesan, n.d).

In order to stop the conflicts funded from natural resources there is the need to cut off the source of funding as suggested by Collier and Hoeffler (2000). This explains why the United Nations imposed an embargo on diamond sales by the government of Charles Taylor and also banned the sale of timber from Liberia in 2001 (Vines & Vanesan, n.d).

Findings and Recommendations

a. Herder-farmer conflict

Government policies are critical in the deterioration in herder-farmer relations. In countries where governments consistently portray the Fulani as not indigenous to local communities and therefore not citizens are fundamental to the crisis. More often than not, the basis of this claim and persisting perception is the itinerant nature of their occupation which involves herding cattle from one location to the other and across national borders. Consequently, most countries do not consider herders as indigenous to their communities and society. They are often called settlers, aliens and non-indigenes while sedentary farmers are considered as indigenous people. The nomadic nature of their occupation further ensures that they are not adequately represented in government where policies affecting them are formulated and implemented. On the other hand, their competitors for resources are considered as locals and owners of the land. This perception effectively places herders in a precarious situation which can be seen through policies formulated and implemented in conflict situations. Therefore, herders are marginalized both in the communities they identify with and the government they consider to be their own. The result is that their interests are not always protected when they conflict with those of the farmers.

The literature on herder-farmer conflict in Ghana illustrates the dilemma of herders in that country. The formation of Operation Cow Leg in Ghana in 1988 was aimed at flushing out Fulani cattle farmers who were considered aliens by the government. The name 'Operation Cow Leg' alone is suggestive of the target of the policy. The formulation and implementation of the policy is indicative of the fact that herders were not represented. Again, the policy was a clear indication of the fact that the Government of Ghana was on the side of the farmers who were considered as indigenes and the herders often assigned the ignominious tag of migrants or settlers. The denial of citizenship and their exclusion from the enjoyment of the basic benefits of citizenship is sensitive and could be the basis of grouse that fuels farmer-herder conflicts. The grievances arising from this marginalization are exacerbated when government openly takes sides with sedentary farmers. The mere existence of a general perception of government bias will not promote the desired peace as herders will continuously view any government intervention with suspicion.

The competition for common resources will persist and intensify due to demographic pressures and dwindling resources as the impact of climate change takes its toll on resource availability. Therefore, tensions are expected to spike in farmer-herder relations in the years to come. This establishes the critical role of government as a mediator. The success of this all-important role will depend on the perception of government as an unbiased, fair and just arbiter. Developing a data base through proper documentation of herders, showing nationalities and their local communities is vital for the peace process. It will establish the proper identity and nationalities of transnational herders and assist in the resolution of the problem of tagging all herders as aliens or settlers. Governments of the sub-region should go a step further by providing social amenities that will serve the interests of nomadic cattle farmers.

Regular meetings between herders and farmers in order to resolve areas of disagreement in the use of resources should be encouraged and vigorously pursued. Decentralised institutional frameworks to facilitate the resolution of conflicts and encourage peaceful co-existence between the parties should be established in each country. The regular meetings recommended should be facilitated by these state institutions. Areas of disagreement and any build up of tension should be promptly reported to the coordinating body at the state/regional level while serious cases are referred to the central body for resolution. The resort to formal court system for resolution of disputes should be avoided. Any threat to peace has to be reported early to security agencies which should be equipped to intervene in situations promptly before it gets out of hand.

b. Oil conflicts

In several ways, the crisis that disrupted oil production in the Niger Delta illustrates the failure of successive governments in the management of oil resources in Nigeria. First, it demonstrates the incapacity or lack of will on the part of government to take decisive measures to protect the Niger Delta environment. The Niger Delta is heavily polluted and is one of the most polluted environments in the world. Oil pollution is the primary source of environmental degradation that has complicated lives and livelihoods. Fishing and farming are the primary occupations of the people of the delta and destruction of the environment has tremendously impacted on the ability of the people to earn descent sustenance. Livelihoods have been destroyed and the people are exposed to the harmful effects of chemical emissions from the oil industry. All of these are sources of annoyance and frustration for the people and reasons for the uneasy relations between the communities and the oil companies.

Robust institutional and legal provisions to protect the environment and the people are not lacking but corruption, negligence and lack of will on the part of government has rendered interventions ineffective. The problem of revenue allocation and the distribution of resources have contributed in no small measure to the crisis in the Niger Delta. The fact that decades of oil production in the area has only left the region impoverished and underdeveloped is an indication that fundamental injustices have been committed against the people of the Niger Delta. It is the rebellion against these injustices that manifest as tension, confrontation and conflicts in the region.

Remediation and protection of the Niger Delta environment is recommended and gas flaring by the oil companies should be stopped. A review of the revenue allocated to oil producing areas is also necessary as the 13% derivation fund for oil producing areas is the minimum prescribed by constitution. The vigorous pursuit of infrastructural development in the oil-producing areas is also advocated.

c. Illicit mining, gemstones and conflict

Conflicts induced by artisanal and small-scale mining of gold, gemstones and other precious minerals within the borders of independent nations is an indication of lack of capacity of governments to effectively police and secure their territories. This incapacity is a potent threat to states and the stability of the sub-region. Weaknesses in the security architecture of states have exposed countries across West Africa to destabilization by insurgents. This situation is worse in countries that are rich in mineral resources. Illicit mining is a lucrative enterprise that fuels tensions and conflicts. There is the urgent need for governments across the sub-continent to review the security architecture in their respective countries, particularly around mining areas as illicit mining is a lucrative enterprise that attracts conflict entrepreneurs. If illegal and small-scale mining activities are unchecked, the resources flowing from these enterprises will continue to constitute a threat to peace in the sub-region. Regional countries should invest more in policing and in rebranding their security architecture to ensure efficiency and effectiveness.

d. Conflict diamonds

Illicit mining and trading in diamonds are major sources of insurgency financing and the sustenance of conflicts as was noted in the civil wars in Liberia, Sierra Leone and Cote d' Ivoire. More than any other mineral resource, diamonds are a major source of attraction for conflict entrepreneurs. Like the illicit mining of other minerals, artisanal mining of diamonds indicates the porosity of the security architecture of states with diamond endowments. This weakness can be exploited to initiate and sustain crisis and conflicts in various countries. Review of the internal security of countries particularly in diamond producing

areas is recommended. International collaboration against trading in illicit diamonds as was the case in Liberia, Sierra Leone and later in Cote d' Ivoire is also necessary.

Conclusion

Natural resources are of critical importance to conflicts in West Africa. In the past two decades, natural resources inspired conflicts have wreaked catastrophe and taken a heavy toll on human lives in West Africa. These conflicts have been attributed to greed by some scholars while others are of the view that it is caused by ethnicity, religious differences, corruption and weak governments all of which are endemic in West Africa.

Herder-farmer conflict is a security threat in many countries in West Africa. The competition for dwindling natural resources by herders and farmers is the root cause of these conflicts. The increasing spate of these conflicts and the associated humanitarian crisis has thrust these conflicts to the fore of security discourse in the sub-region. Climate change and its increasing impact on both parties will increase the occurrence of these conflicts.

The exploitation of crude oil and the allocation of its benefits have created discontentment and conflicts particularly in the Niger Delta region of Nigeria. Exploitation of oil has generated local grievances that have snowballed into conflicts between oil producing communities and the federal government. The destruction of the Niger Delta environment and dissatisfaction with the allocation of oil revenue is the primary cause of the conflict in the Niger Delta of Nigeria.

Illicit mining activities have been known to contribute to conflict in the sub-region. Artisanal and small-scale gold mining in Zamfara is the primary source of the ongoing conflict in Zamfara state and the entire northwestern zone of Nigeria. The infamous blood diamonds from Sierra Leone and Cote d' Ivoire provided funding for the sustenance of the civil wars in Sierra Leone, Liberia and Cote d' Ivoire. Therefore, in diverse ways, illicit mining activities contribute to conflict in West Africa.

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