THE INTERNATIONAL COURT OF JUSTICE RULING ON THE BAKASSI PENINSULA DISPUTE: IMPLICATIONS FOR NIGERIA'S SOVEREIGNTY AND TERRITORIAL INTEGRITY

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Bakassi Peninsula; International Court of Justice; Nigeria and Cameroon; Greentree Agreement; the United Nations Organisation

Abstract

Research Problem: *This study interrogates the International Court of Justice (ICJ) ruling on the Bakassi Peninsula dispute and its implications for Nigeria's sovereignty and territorial integrity. It addresses the controversies surrounding the judgment, particularly the exclusion of the Bakassi peoplewho are directly affectedfrom the adjudicatory process, and Nigeria's decision not to appeal the ruling despite its far-reaching consequences.*

Methods/Theory: *The study adopted a historical research method. Data were sourced from both primary and secondary materials. Secondary sources included textbooks, scholarly journals, government publications, conference and seminar papers, and internet-based resources. Primary data were obtained through questionnaires, interviews, and official documents from government archives. Data were analyzed using content analysis.*

Results: *Findings reveal that the ICJ ruling failed to adequately consider the principle of effective occupation and the socio-political realities of the Bakassi people. The study also found that Nigeria's weak articulation and pursuit of a clearly defined national interest significantly undermined its bargaining position, leading to the cession of the territory to Cameroon with minimal resistance.*

Conclusion: *The judgment has had profound humanitarian and socio-economic consequences, notably the displacement of the Bakassi people into both Cameroon and Nigeria. This displacement has worsened their economic conditions, largely due to the Nigerian government's inadequate response to their welfare needs and loss of traditional sources of livelihood.*

Key Contribution to Knowledge: *The study contributes to the literature by linking international judicial outcomes to national interest formulation and human security, highlighting how deficiencies in strategic state*

behavior can exacerbate post-judgment humanitarian crises.
Recommendation: *The study recommends that Nigeria explore the possibility of seeking a judicial review of the judgment, clearly articulate and pursue a coherent national interest, and assume greater responsibility for protecting the lives, rights, and welfare of its citizens wherever they reside.*

Introduction

Conflicts have historically been intrinsic to human society owing to conflicting interests and the quest for dominance. Klare (2004) mentions territorial disputes, ideological and theological divergences, nationalism, and competition for natural resources as primary factors. Although certain variables have diminished, resource-based conflicts, particularly concerning oil and gas, continue to be significant. In Africa, these conflicts are sometimes exacerbated by corrupt administrations attempting to maintain power, often appearing as territorial disputes or factional clashes over resource-abundant regions.

Africa has encountered numerous and frequently intractable conflicts, prompting Baye F.M. (2010) to characterise the continent as possessing the greatest incidence of world conflicts. This encompasses civil wars, persistent border crises, and inter-state conflicts, like the Eritrea-Ethiopia war, Algeria-Morocco fight, Kenya-Somalia war, and the Nigeria-Cameroon dispute about the Bakassi Peninsula. Barkindo, B., Omolewa, M., & Babalola, G. (1994) and Babatola (2012) observe that numerous conflicts originate from colonial-era boundaries and have endured since the nations attained independence.

Numerous wars in African borderlands, including those in Burundi, Rwanda, Algeria, Benin, and others, originate from the continent's colonial legacy. Prior to colonisation, Africa was ruled by indigenous kingdoms and empires. The arbitrary division of the continent during the Berlin Conference of 1884/85, motivated by European colonial ambitions, overlooked ethnic, cultural, and geological reality. This resulted in coerced amalgamations and separations of indigenous communities, exacerbating enduring border conflicts, notably the Nigeria-Cameroon war regarding the Bakassi Peninsula.

The Nigeria-Cameroon dispute on the Bakassi Peninsula intensified considerably in 1971, almost resulting in warfare. Originally a component of the Calabar Kingdom, Bakassi was established as a British protectorate in 1884 and subsequently became the subject of boundary agreements between Britain and Germany in 1913. For decades, Nigeria and Cameroon shown minimal interest in the region. The discovery of oil, gas, and abundant fishing resources rekindled interest, inciting military confrontations and local discord. This resulted in Cameroon initiating a case against Nigeria at the International Court of Justice (ICJ) in 1994, officially asserting possession of the peninsula.

Cameroon initiated the case before the ICJ in 1994, but the Court did not provide a decision in its favour until October 2002, granting the Bakassi Peninsula to Cameroon in accordance with the 1913 Anglo-German Agreement. The ruling recognised the residents as Nigerians but determined that the region legally belonged to Cameroon. It also required the demarcation of the whole Nigeria-Cameroon border. Subsequent to the verdict, the UN established a Mixed Commission for execution, resulting in the Greentree Agreement. Nevertheless, the ICJ neglected to consider the nationality or welfare of the

Bakassi people, inciting identity conflicts and demands for autonomy. This thesis analyses the post-judgment ramifications, specifically concerning the displaced Bakassi inhabitants and Nigeria's prospective forfeiture of sovereignty, resources, and indigenous populace.

Statement of the Problem

The ICJ decision regarding the Bakassi Peninsula elicited intense nationalistic responses in both Nigeria and Cameroon, as geographical demarcations are fundamental to national identity and sovereignty. A multitude of Nigerians, encompassing legal professionals and individuals, articulated indignation, perceiving the ruling as a jeopardy to Nigeria's territorial integrity. Chief Richard Akinjide, a former Attorney-General, criticised the verdict as prejudiced and politically motivated, describing it as a fusion of erroneous international law and politics. The ruling incited demands for the Nigerian government to dismiss the verdict. Furthermore, Sagay (2012) contends that the ICJ's ruling was flawed, as it fails to uphold the principle of self-determination for peoples in accordance with international law. The main principle of international law is to enable individuals to vote and decide their preferred national affiliation (Sagay, 2012 in Punch, 23rd December 2012).

Subsequent to the ICJ ruling, numerous Bakassi residentspredominantly Efik and Ibibio, who had historically identified as Nigerianswere plunged into uncertainty and statelessness, compelled to either acquire Cameroonian citizenship or migrate to Nigeria as settlers. Despite Bakassi's constitutional recognition as part of Nigeria, the ICJ neglected to account for the historical connections, national identity, and human rights of its inhabitants. The absence of a referendum or plebiscite to ascertain their preferences resulted in extensive migration, psychological distress, and loss of livelihoods. Critics contend that the verdict disregarded the essential rights and living experiences of the indigenous population.

Numerous experts contend that the ICJ verdict regarding the Bakassi Peninsula contravened Article 13 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights by effectively rendering returning Nigerians as internally displaced individuals. Notwithstanding Nigeria's previous investments in regional infrastructure and services, the Court did not take into account the economic or political ramifications of relinquishing the territory. The Greentree Agreement insufficiently addressed the rights of returns, provided no explicit procedure for Cameroonian nationality, and shown a deficiency in transparency and oversight. The verdict also denied the locals access to Bakassi’s enormous oil deposits and fishing groundsresources that likely instigated the disagreement due to their significant economic and geopolitical importance.

Although many publications have examined the historical context of the dispute or the legal dimensions of the ICJ opinion, few have offered a thorough study of the judgment's socio-political, economic, and national security ramifications for Nigeria. Moreover, current work frequently neglects the interaction between international legal rulings and the local circumstances experienced by persons impacted by territorial alterations. This study addresses the deficiency by providing a comprehensive evaluation of the Bakassi judgment's implications for national sovereignty, the management of displaced populations, resource governance, and Nigeria's diplomatic stance, thereby enhancing the understanding of how international adjudication affects state sovereignty within the African context.

Objectives of the Study

Analyse the implications of the ICJ ruling for Nigeria and the people of Bakassi.

Discuss how the Greentree Agreement helped to implement the ICJ ruling and ensure peaceful settlement of the dispute between Nigeria and Cameroon over the Bakassi Peninsula.

Interogate whether Nigeria's acceptance of the ruling of the ICJ on the disputed Bakassi Peninsula justified her national interest.

Literature Review

An analysis of the development of contemporary African States and their international borders necessitates an examination of the prevalence of border disputes in Africa and the intensity of hostilities between the involved states, particularly regarding the repercussions of such hostilities on inter-state relations, regional collaboration, and the political and economic advancement of the continent. It is essential to analyse the causes, characteristics, and extent of such conflicts, as well as the available settlement procedures and their efficacy. Bonchuk (2014) contends that the imposition of colonial boundaries in Africa has precipitated significant challenges for postcolonial states, often resulting in boundary disputes that have triggered severe crises, occasionally culminating in violent border conflicts, thereby fostering antagonism among numerous African states. Some have evolved into enduring rivals of each other.

Bonchuk (2014) contends that these boundaries are arbitrary and do not constitute genuine boundaries, as they often divide the same or closely related ethnic groups. They disregarded natural features and partitioned the same population into two or more states, so forcing a novel concept of citizenship upon them. The Berlin Conference of 1884-85, aimed at partitioning Africa (often known as the Scramble for Africa), positioned the continent within the grasp of European expansionism. The European conquest of defiant African territories resulted in the establishment of new African states characterised by consolidated political and economic frameworks, comprising European merchants, colonial trading enterprises, and the spheres of influence of European powers over certain African regions designated as Protectorates, exclusive investment domains, or trading posts. The European powers permitted the African Native Authorities to function under the oversight and direction of representatives from foreign powers and colonies governed directly by Europe, regardless of the local populace's involvement.

Yerima, H.M. & Ranjit Singh, D.S. (2017) discuss the imposition of boundary demarcation by European powers in Africa. He contended that the primary motive was to undermine African kingdoms; consequently, they opted to exclude the kings by delineating arbitrary borders that bisected their territories. Despite the Shehu, king of the Borno Empire, alerting the Europeans to the potential ramifications of their decision, his perspective was disregarded on the basis that his information was deemed tardy.

Isola (2012) noted that prior to colonial authority, only a limited number of recognised interstate lines existed in Africa, however the traditional boundaries were influenced by several reasons including conflict, the emergence and decline of African nation-states, commercial expansion, and certain cultural influences. Boundary agreements between city-states and villages, access rights, land grants, and boundary delineation were accompanied by spiritual rites and the utilisation of natural elements like as trees, rivers, hills, mountains, and forests. The natural features used for boundary demarcation did not inhibit interstate cross-border relations, although these were shaped

and impacted by the power dynamics and expansionist ambitions of adjacent states. The characteristics of African customary boundaries were inferior to those established by colonisers, which were delineated through surveys and the production of maps. The European-imposed limits in Africa fragmented the indigenous populations, disregarding their traditional lifestyles, cultures, and pre-existing territorial divisions.

Omede (2006) asserts that the conflict and power struggle between British and German colonial powers during the Berlin Conference led to the establishment of artificial boundaries between Nigeria and Cameroon, notwithstanding the lack of cultural affiliation between the two nations. He further observes that the impetus for the European balkanization of African governments was the pursuit of power and the maintenance of a balance of power among the rival imperial powers. The European nations' incursion into Africa during the late nineteenth century, characterised by a fervent competition for land, inevitably resulted in a legacy of artificially imposed borders that now delineate the newly formed African States (Aghedo, I. 2011).

It is essential to recognise that many international accords established during the race for Africa subsequently became sources of conflict among the impacted African states. Numerous boundary conflicts have undoubtedly arisen among African republics due to the imposition of artificial borders during the colonial era.

Anene (1970), as cited in Aghedo, I. (2011), concurs that the border regions of Nigeria and its neighbours have historically been potential sources of conflict, particularly concerning the Bakassi Peninsula. Subsequent to the Berlin Conference, the regions of Nigeria and Cameroon were governed independently by the British and German colonial administrations, respectively, as components of their colonies.

Familugba and Ojo (2013) analysed the Nigeria-Cameroon border interactions, focussing on conflict and cooperation from 1970 to 2004. Their study conducted a conceptual evaluation of key concepts such as boundary, conflict, and collaboration, employing historical and descriptive methods for issue analysis. The research identified the origins of the border conflict in the colonial era and analysed the border circumstances before, during, and after independence. The study examined the variables responsible for the boundary disputes between the two countries and the challenges in achieving an equitable conclusion. A way to foster understanding and positive ties between the two countries was proposed; however, from a methodological standpoint, we have determined that the study's methodology is not applicable to the present research. The research indicated that territorial disputes between Nigeria and Cameroon were exacerbated by the existence of hydrocarbon reserves in the region, and that the International Court of Justice (ICJ) ruling determined that the Peninsula belonged to Cameroon. The judgement was to be upheld by both parties to facilitate the implementation of the Greentree Agreement, negotiated by the former UN Secretary-General. It also explicitly underscored that the alternatives of warfare or additional litigation could not be employed to resolve the impasse. Both governments could instead profit by reinterpreting their boundaries as linkages and sources of development rather than as impediments of conflict.

Gaps to be filled in the Literature

Notwithstanding the comprehensive examination of literature concerning war, international law, territorial disputes, and the function of the International Court of Justice

(ICJ), a notable deficiency persists in the contextual application of these principles to the Nigeria-Cameroon Bakassi Peninsula conflict. The current research generally addresses conflict management without specifically examining the ICJ's role in handling the Bakassi issue or how Nigeria's acceptance of the ICJ verdict corresponds with its national interests. Moreover, existing literature inadequately examines the causes of the war and the ramifications of the ICJ ruling—specifically the execution of the Greentree Agreement—on the displaced indigenous population of Bakassi. This gap requires an empirical examination, which this study fulfils by using primary data to offer context-specific insights into the resolution of the conflict and its wider socio-political and humanitarian consequences.

Methodology

The study titled "The International Court of Justice Ruling on the Bakassi Peninsula Dispute: Implications for Nigeria's Sovereignty and Territorial Integrity" employed a combination of quantitative and qualitative methodologies, indicating that it is a survey-based research. This study is exploratory in nature. The research will utilise both primary and secondary data collection techniques. Primary data will be collected via fieldwork use questionnaires and interviews with key stakeholders and respondents in the Bakassi Peninsula and other pertinent regions of Nigeria. The research will employ broad secondary sources to enhance the analysis, ensuring a thorough and high-quality examination.

Population of the Targeted States

Table 1:

Location	Population	Percentage of Total Population (%)
Abuja	3,464,123	79
Calabar	604,546	14
Bakassi	300,000	7
Total	4,368,669	100

Source: StatisticsTimes.com (2021 Population Size for Abuja and Calabar)

Odinkalu, C. (2012). Population Size of Bakassi for 2007

From the table 1 above the total population is approximately 4,368,669 (Four million, three hundred and sixty-eight thousand, six hundred and sixty nine).

Sample Population Size

The study sought to ensure that the selected population sample met the criteria of diversity, representativeness, accessibility, and subject-matter knowledge. To achieve this, the Taro Yamane formula was employed to determine the appropriate sample size. This method is particularly suitable when the only known characteristic of the target population is its size, making it an ideal choice for the study's sampling needs. The Yamane sample size formula states that:

$n = N / 1 + N(e)2$

Where:

n= the Yamane (desired) sample size,

N = the population size

1= is a constant

e = margin of error (MoE), the level of confidence a research is seeking from the study. If research wants to be 95% sure about result of the study, then **e = 0.05**

Therefore:

n = N/1+N (e)2

n = 4,368,669/1+4,368,669 (0.05)2

n = 4,368,669/1+4,368,669 (0.0025)

n = 4,368,669/1+10,921.67

n = 4,368,669/10,922.67

n = 399.96, or approximately 400.

Consequently, utilising the Taro Yamane formula, the sample size for this study is determined to be 400. A purposeful sample method was utilised to effectively distribute both the questionnaire and the interview. The sampled respondents include legislators, security officials, diplomats, scholars/historians, traditional leaders and chiefs, private citizens, and victims of nationality conflicts.
The analysis of the data gathered from the sample size will employ both primary and secondary data gathering methods. This would provide a balanced appraisal of the information necessary for identifying solutions to the observed situation. For the major data source, 25 individuals from the total population of 400 were to be interviewed using purposive sampling procedures; however, only 9 respondents were interviewed. The remaining 375 individuals of the population were administered a questionnaire due to its potential for extensive coverage.

Method of Data Analysis and Presentation

The study report would be historic, analytical, explanatory,statistical and descriptive. The questionnaires retrieved from the field were analysed statistically using simple percentage. The formula for simple percentage is presented below:

Observed Frequency x 100

Total Frequency 1

Data Presentation and Analysis

Presentation of the Biodata of Respondents

This subsection deals with personal information of the respondents in a tabular presentation. The biodata of the respondents includes the data generated from individuals who responded by filling and returning the questionnaire and the data generated from those who responded to the personal interview requests. The total number of respondents who filled the questionnaire were 204, and personal interviewees were held with 9 individuals.

Table 2: Gender Distribution of Respondents

Gender	Frequency	Percentage
Male	182	85%
Female	31	15%
Total	213	100%

Source: Field Survey, April 2025

In this Table, 182 or 85% of the 213 respondents are males while 31 or 15% are females. This implies that the majority of those readily available to respond to the subject matter were male. That can be explained by the fact that the targeted respondents are largely males.

Table 3: Responses according to Age

Age	Frequency	Percentage
18 to 30 years	43	20%
31 to 59 years	131	62%
60 years and above	39	18%
Total	213	100%

Source: Field Survey, April 2025

Tableshows that 43 or 20% of the 213 respondents were within the age range of 18 to 30years; 131 or 62% were within the age range of 31 to 59years; and 39 or 18% were 60years and above. This shows that in the total population, the number of the people between 31 to 59 years constituted most of the respondents of the questionnaire.

Table 4: Educational Qualification of Respondents

Level of Education	Frequency	Percentage
Primary	24	11%
Secondary	75	35%
Higher Institution	93	44%
Informal Education	21	10%
Total	213	100%

Source: Field Survey, April 2025

Table reveals that a significant portion of the 213 respondents are well-educated, with 44% having attended higher institutions, 35% holding secondary school certificates, 11% with primary education, and 10% with other forms of schooling. This high level of education among respondents enhances the reliability and credibility of the data collected, as it reflects informed opinions from individuals capable of understanding and engaging with the research topic.

Table 5: Occupation of Respondents

Occupation	Frequency	Percentage
Public/Civil Service	106	50%
Academia/Postgraduates	38	18%
Private Individuals	69	32%
Total	213	100%

Source: Field Survey, April 2025

Tableindicates the frequency of the total number of respondents that make up the various occupational strata. As shown on the table, the academia/postgraduate group that makes up 38, or approximately (18%) of the 213 respondents are the lowest group of the respondents that filled the questionnaires in the occupational strata. The public/civil servants' rates 106 or 50% constituted the highest percentage of the total respondents; and the respondents that belong to the private individuals are 69 or 32% of the respondents.

Data Analysis

Sub-section presents the analysis of data collected through questionnaires. Out of 375 distributed, 204 were returned. The questionnaire data is treated separately because it is quantitative and measurable, unlike the qualitative data from interviews, which cannot be quantified.

Table 6: Respondents' Opinion on if the International Court of Justice (ICJ)'s ruling has an implication on Nigeria and the people of Bakassi

Respondents	Number	Percentage
Yes	195	96%
No	0	0%
No Response	9	4%
Total	204	100%

Source: Field Survey, April 2025

From **Table 6.195 or (96%)** of the **204** respondents agreed that the International Court of Justice (ICJ) ruling has implication on Nigeria and the people of Bakassi, while 4% (9) did not respond to whether the International Court of Justice (ICJ) ruling has implication on Nigeria and the people of Bakassi. Those who agreed that the International Court of Justice (ICJ) ruling has implication on Nigeria and the people of Bakassioutweigh other respondents.

According to Charles (oral interview, 2025): The indigenes of Bakassi are the vanquished because they are losing everything. They are losing homelands, territories and those who have returned to Nigeria are becoming Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) in their own country. They are most disadvantaged

because where they are now, is not their ancestral home. What you now see as a sign saying: 'Welcome to Bakassi' is not in the Bakassi proper but is rather a piece of land under the Akpabuyo local government in Cross River State of Nigeria. The sign is just to give hope to the IDPs that one day, they would return to their own territory, when Nigeria gets Bakassi back. It was out of this exigency that they had to say (let us say), this is Bakassi. And when you go further before you get to ICAN, by your left, you will see the resettlement centre where the new Bakassi local government indigenes reside. All those things were carved out of the original Akpabuyo local government area.

Ojong (oral interview, 2025), a native of Abana, the original headquarters of Bakassi, expresses discontent about the cession of the territory to Cameroon without a referendum, deeming it a betrayal based on a spurious deal. He condemns the Nigeria–Cameroon Mixed Commission for neglecting to safeguard the rights and welfare of Bakassi inhabitants, since several individuals today endure severe living conditions under Cameroonian authority. Fishermen are prohibited from their customary occupations, endure excessive taxation, and experience human rights violations, including homicides, perpetrated by Cameroonian authorities.

The interview with Bassey (oral interview, 2025) reveals profound irritation and animosity from a Bakassi native regarding the transfer of the Bakassi Peninsula to Cameroon without adequate resettlement provisions for the impacted population. In contrast to the Lake Chad region, where ceded populations maintained rights and benefits, the Bakassi people were rendered dispossessed, impoverished, and devoid of governmental assistance. The speaker mourns the forfeiture of their ancestral territory, means of subsistence, and identity, condemning the Nigerian government's failure to consult and fulfil its commitments. Notwithstanding assertions on the disbursement of cash, they see a lack of proof for resettlement initiatives and experience feelings of abandonment, betrayal, and disconnection from the nation.

The interview with Bitrus (oral interview, 2025) indicates that militancy and youth unrest have escalated in Bakassi due to the ongoing displacement problem resulting from its transfer to Cameroon. Non-governmental organisations and the National Commission for Refugees offer fundamental assistance; nonetheless, resettlement is ineffectively administered, characterised by overcrowded and insufficient housing, along with the absence of an accurate census of displaced individuals. A significant number of Bakassi individuals experience statelessness, coerced assimilation in Cameroon, and marginalisation in Nigeria, resulting in escalating insecurity, militancy, and identity erosion.

Uzoma (2011) emphasises that the Bakassi people perceived themselves as a subdued and traumatised community, emotionally shattered by the involuntary relinquishment of their territory. Their history, culture, and assets were transferred to Cameroon without their consent, resulting in profound sorrow and anguish. The Nigerian authorities coerced them into choose between Cameroonian and Nigerian citizenship, a choice made under coercion and desperation.

Table 7. Respondents' Reaction to whether they knew about the Greentree Agreement

Respondents	Number	Percentage
Yes	159	78%
No	18	9%
No Response	27	13%
Total	204	100%

Source: Field Survey, April 2025

From Table 7, 159 or (78%) of the 204 respondents agreed that they knew about the Greentree Agreement, while 18 or (9%) said they did not know about the Greentree Agreement. 27 or (13%) did not respond to whether they know about the Greentree Agreement or not. Those who agreed that they know about the Greentree Agreement outweigh other respondents.

Table 8. Respondents' Opinion on if the Greentree Agreement has been operationalized

Respondents	Number	Percentage (%)
Yes	0	0%
No	153	75%
No Response	51	25%
Total	204	100%

Source: Field Survey, April 2025

From Table 8, 153 or 75% of the entire 204 respondents did not agree that the Greentree Agreement has been operationalized; while 51 or 25% did not respond to whether the Greentree Agreement has been operationalized or not. Those who did not agree that the Greentree Agreement has been fully implemented (or operationalized) outweigh the respondents who agreed to the proposition.

Tereke (oral interview, 2025) argues that the Greentree Agreement neglected the cultural and welfare needs of the Bakassi people, excluding them from justice and decision-making. The agreement failed to resolve the conflict meaningfully, leaving the people in poverty and under threat. Though many chose to remain Nigerians, they faced harassment from Cameroonian authorities and lost access to their ancestral lands.

According to Charles (oral interview, 2025):

The Greentree Agreement (GTA) was meant to be the final seal as far as the issue of the implementation of the ICJ decision. The problem, or source of concern was how that has impacted on the lives of the people of that region. By right, under the agreement, there were supposed to be adequate provisions that would have been put in place before one could know that the agreement was for the benefit of those who lived in those territories before. The affected people are suffering. They are still leaving as displaced persons in Nigeria. They are not being properly taken care of. If you get to that area, you will see where their quarters

were supposed to be. The original prototype of the area suggested that there were supposed to be markets, schools, and hospitals, but if you go there, you just see houses scattered here and there. As far as I am concern, the agreement has not solved any problem other than to service the interest of the person who conceded.

Neji (oral interview, 2025) stated that the Greentree Agreement, intended for peacebuilding, has largely been violated, particularly Article 3, which guaranteed unhindered cultural and economic rights for original Bakassi dwellers. Instead, residents faced harassment, including a massacre of 97 Nigerians over an imposed discriminatory tax. Ojong (oral interview, 2025) added that the Cameroon-Nigeria Mixed Commission has failed in its duty to properly resettle returnees, leaving them neglected.

Table 9. Respondents' Opinion on whether Nigeria's reaction to the ICJ ruling over Bakassi, was in line with her national interest

Respondents	Number	Percentage
Yes	23	11%
No	173	85%
No Response	8	4%
Total	204	100%

Source: Field Survey, April 2025

From Table 9, 23 or 11% of the entire 204 respondents agreed that Nigeria's reaction to the ICJ ruling over Bakassi is in line with her national interest. 173 or 85% did not agree that Nigeria's reaction to the ICJ ruling over Bakassi, is in line with her national interest, while 8 or 4% did not respond to whether Nigeria's reaction to the ICJ ruling over Bakassi is in line with her national interest. Those who do not agree that Nigeria's reaction to the ICJ ruling over Bakassi is in line with her national interest outweigh other respondents.

According to Tereke (oral interview, 2025), the ICJ ruling did not favor Nigeria's national interest, as key landmarks and oil-rich areas were ceded to Cameroon. He argued that Nigeria was short-changed and failed to consider the culture and traditions of the Bakassi people in implementing the Greentree Agreement. As a result, both Nigerian and Cameroonian governments have abandoned the people, leaving them without support or a clear national identity.

According to Charles (oral interview, 2025):

Definitely not! The background I gave, pointed to the direction that our national interest was not projected because somebody somewhere wanted to earn some cheap popularity. That is why we find ourselves in that kind of situation. Obasanjo was the Head of State at that time. He had the opportunity of saying no let us appeal this judgement, because the historian will give you several instances where judgement was given in favour of a country over boundary, but the other country will refuse to give out the territory, and nothing happened. So why were we in a hurry to cede off our territory? You can be right to say that personal interest was reflected as national interest in the ceding of Bakassi.

Alluding to Adam's assertion on obeying the ICJ rulings, Professor Akin Oyebode had said, as captured by Fanora (2012), that if Nigeria had reneged or failed to apply the judgement of the court, it would not have been the first time in the history of the world.

The statement above proved the failure of ICJ to ensure the implementation of its various rulings on border disputes. If we go back the memory lane, we find that the ICJ had ruled on several cases that had not been respected and implemented up till date and the heavens had not fallen. Good examples are the cases involving Israel and the Palestinians over East Jerusalem and Gaza. There has been many rulings in favour of the Palestine, but which Israel has blatantly refused to implement. The judgement on the case between USA and Cuba over Guantanamo Bay is another example. The Britain and Argentina over Falkland Island and the Eritrea and Ethiopia cases are yet others. Professor Oyebode had frowned at the action of the UN system that theoretically sought equity but could not come with clean hands! (Tar and Ukhami, 2018). Nigerians had complained that Nigeria had no business responding to the ICJ summons in the first place. Nigeria had committed herself and consequently played to the gallery (Tar and Ukhami, 2018).

According to James (oral interview, 2025):

I grew up to know that Bakassi is an aspect and part of Nigeria and displacing the people there for whatever reason cannot be said to be for their own good or interest. But it depends on the legal technicalities and treaties entered by the international communities or organisations. More so, it was given to Cameroon maybe to avoid war.

According to Bitrus (oral interview, 2025):

Was that a political or a social manipulation? In 2008, August precisely, there was a final ceding of Bakassi to Cameroon after the ICJ judgement in 2002. They tried to manage it diplomatically, until Obasanjo (according to him) looked for political solution to it. That was the first Court judgement that was enforced in Africa. All previous ICJ judgements were never enforced. It was only the judgement in respect of Bakassi. The question is, what was the interest of France, America, Germany, China, and UK in the Bakassi territory? From the day the matter was taken to the Court and dispensed out of the Court, the people of Bakassi were not part and parcel of the proceedings. You want to take my land and deliberation is going on in the Court and I did not attend the proceedings for one day. Yet a judgement was given we are supposed to take it. Where is fairness there? There was no attempt to find out anything from us as to where we want to belong to. Where is justice there?

Bitrus (oral interview, 2025) argued that ceding Bakassi was against Nigeria's national interest, as it compromised the country's security and control over vital oil reserves. He viewed the decision as driven by selfish political motives rather than genuine national benefit.

As if to underscore in advance the last point made by Bitrus on the non-involvement of the Bakassi people to participate in the ICJ proceeding, Sagay had earlier said, as captured in Punch 23rd December, that:

The judgement of the ICJ was a faulty one because most international law respect the self-government right of the people it may concern. By applying the international law, the most superior factor is to allow the people to vote and determine where (which country) they want to belong to.

The argument above shows that the people occupying the Bakassi Peninsula were never given any fair hearing as regards where they would have chosen to lay claim to as citizens. That is something contrary to natural justice because as the late Chief M.K.O Abiola was

quoted to have said, "you cannot shave a man's head in his absence" (National Mirror, 2012).

Akin (oral interview, 2025) explained that Obasanjo's administration ceded Bakassi to Cameroon partly to restore Nigeria's international image and improve relations with global powers. Despite Bakassi's oil reserves, Nigeria had not fully benefited from the area before ceding it. Therefore, some view the ceding as a strategic move aligned with Nigeria's national interest to gain international favor.

Table 10: Respondents' Opinion on whether there are prospects for peace and the full implementation of the Greentree Agreements between Nigeria and Cameroon

Respondents	Number	Percentage
Yes	148	73%
No	39	19%
No Response	17	8%
Total	204	100%

Source: Field Survey, April 2025

From Table 10, 148 or 73% of the 204 respondents agreed that there were prospect for peace on 39 or 19% said there was no prospects for peace and the full implementation of the Greentree Agreements between Nigeria and Cameroon. 17 or 8% did not respond to whether there are prospects for peace and implementation of the Greentree Agreements between Nigeria and Cameroon. Those who agreed that there are prospects for peace and implementation of the Greentree Agreements between Nigeria and Cameroon outweigh other respondents.

According to Neji (oral interview, 2025), "since this was a pronouncement of the ICJ, the government should ensure that the international agreement reached by the GTA is completely executed. Unfortunately, it has been allowed to degenerate as you now have Cameroonian Gendarmes invading Nigeria and killing scores of people not only within the Bakassi Area, but also down to Ekbom and other parts. There is also the need to effectively resettle the Bakassi people."

According to Jerry (oral interview, 2025):

We can have a rethink about what happened in the Bakassi. We can rationally revisit what has taken place there overtime and if we do, we can have a decision either to reverse it or further consolidate on the previous decisions in which we have taken.

According to Bitrus (oral interview, 2025):

As a way forward, let us go back to the original agreement. They said they will build a modern territory, a new area that will be supervised by the United Nations itself. That they will build good houses and they will build facilities. The place will be secured. There will be Churches built for Christians and Mosque built for Moslems as well as hospitals and schools. That is why they came and acquired this land but before you know what happened, everything was twisted.

Discussion of Findings

Consequently, the research will adopt the following stance based on the findings. The ICJ verdict on Bakassi resulted in significant economic, political, and humanitarian repercussions for Nigeria and uprooted the Bakassi population, who endure

trauma, statelessness, and prejudice. Although Cameroon has recently endeavoured to politically integrate Bakassi indigenous, those relocated to Nigeria endure marginalisation, political disenfranchisement, and social adversities. Notwithstanding the symbolic acknowledgement of Bakassi Local Government, its populace continues to be marginalised and deprived of fundamental rights and services. Secondly, although the ICJ verdict and the Greentree Agreement (GTA), some essential terms remain unexecuted, exacerbating tensions and heightening the possibility of future violence among Nigeria, Cameroon, and the Bakassi people. Nigerians in Bakassi endure coerced integration and prejudice, while those sent to Nigeria contend with neglect and adversity. The effective execution of the GTA is essential for maintaining peace and stability in the region.

Thirdly, several respondents perceived Nigeria's relinquishment of Bakassi as a tactical decision to preserve peace and enhance its global reputation, considering the substantial expenses associated with warfare and diplomatic pressures. Nonetheless, many contended that Nigeria lacked a definitive national interest, positing that the cession was driven more by political machinations and the personal agendas of leaders than by authentic national aspirations. Consequently, the endorsement of the ICJ verdict may not entirely represent Nigeria's genuine national interest.

Major Contributions to Knowledge

This research demonstrated that although the Nigerian-Cameroonian conflict and the ICJ verdict facilitated the transfer of Bakassi to Cameroon, fieldwork yielded more profound and nuanced insights than secondary sources could provide alone. Direct interaction with impacted parties illuminated the tangible consequences of the dispute and its resolution, showcasing the lived experiences of those engaged and providing a critical viewpoint on whether the decision benefitted Nigeria and Bakassi.

The research indicated that resolving border disputes via the ICJ is protracted and beset with difficulties, particularly in enforcing judgements and executing agreements such as the Greentree Agreement (GTA). Notwithstanding the legal transfer of Bakassi, lingering concerns remain, including the Nigerian government's hesitance to completely assimilate territorial modifications and sufficiently assist displaced Bakassi natives. The investigation revealed deficiencies in the UN, ICJ, and both governments in providing equitable rulings and guaranteeing justice and fair treatment for people directly impacted by the issue.

Conclusion

A considerable number of Nigerians perceived the ICJ's ruling regarding the Bakassi Peninsula, awarded to Cameroon, as partial and unsatisfactory, contending that it overlooked the profound historical and cultural connections of the Bakassi populace to Nigeria, along with their entitlement to self-determination. The analysis indicates that the ICJ verdict and the Greentree Agreement (GTA) inadequately addressed the human rights, socio-political, and economic concerns of the Bakassi residents, predominantly Nigerians. The Nigerian government's prompt acquiescence to the verdict, although considerable domestic dissent, indicated an absence of a clearly articulated national interest. A multitude of respondents in the study regarded the conclusion as shaped by both internal and external conspiracies as well as self-serving political agendas. Moreover, there has been evident disregard in executing the ICJ ruling and the GTA, with essential provisions either overlooked or unmet, resulting in the affected individuals being

deprived of the justice and equity that the procedure was intended to ensure.

Recommendation

1. The United Nations should prevail on both the Nigerian and the Cameroonian Governments to honour and fully implement all the provisions contained in the Greentree Agreement signed by the two parties, especially the portion that guarantees that the culture of the Efik nationality should not be tampered with by the Cameroonian authorities, and the aspect of the agreement that guarantees the fundamental human rights of the inhabitants of the territory, as stipulated in article 3 of the GTA. In addition to that, there is the need for the international community to caution the Cameroonian authorities to ensure that the Cameroonian gendarmes stop the dehumanizing treatment allegedly being meted out to the Bakassi natives.

2. There is the need for the Nigerian government to begin to take the responsibility of protecting the lives of her citizens with very high level of seriousness and ingenuity, wherever such citizens are. The diplomatic progress made so far on the Bakassi border issue should be sustained, and in addition, both the Nigerian and the Cameroonian governments, in partnership with the United Nations, should address the issue of resettlement and reintegration of the people both on the mainland Bakassi and those who have become IDPs in isolated settlements in some parts of Cross River State of Nigeria.

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