



Agriculture-Related Conflicts in Numan Federation, Adamawa State, 1973 – 2018

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Abstract

This study examines agriculture-related conflicts in Numan Federation, 1973-2018. The area boasts of human and rich natural and mineral resources, which is complemented by its strategic position as a nodal area connecting different parts of the Northeast sub-region. The area had witnessed a number of conflicts, which by their forms of manifestation were erroneously regarded as mere rivalries among ethno-religious groups. This study therefore examined the factors responsible for the conflicts in the area. Its findings reveal, to a larger extent, that the conflicts were agriculture-related in which it identified population expansion, state (government) led developments such as the establishment of Savannah Sugar Company and construction of Kiri Dam coupled with climatic conditions among others, which had reduced the accessibility to arable and grazing land as the major causative factors. The concludes that conflicts had impaired the economic development of Numan Federation, intensified diametrical relations and polarised political relations along ethnic lines. Therefore, the paper recommends that critical assessment of root causes would enable pragmatic solutions to minimise recurrence while state led developments should take into account the indices of inevitable consequences. The research adopts historical methodology, which involves the utilisation of primary and secondary sources.

Keywords: Agriculture, resources, population, conflict

JEL Classification:

1.0 Introduction

One of the major causes of conflict in different parts of the world, especially in Nigeria, is agriculture-related factor, for instance, Billiri and Kaltungo, farmers and herders conflicts across Nigeria, and Numan Federation. Numan Federation is richly endowed with both natural resources such as fertile arable land and water; and mineral resources such as limestone, gypsum, kaolin, feldspar and bentonites (Adamawa State, 2024). Expectedly, the major economic preoccupation of the people was, and still is, agriculture: farming and animal husbandry, and related endeavours such as trade in agricultural products, fishing and hunting. The region had rich hydrological resources suitable for agricultural and agro-allied economic activities with a landscape that was well-watered by the Gongola and Benue rivers. In addition to providing water for agriculture, those rivers drained the environment and thus reduced the risk of floods and water-logging while providing a fertile valley for both rainy and dry seasons farming (Bashir, 2014). The rich alluvial and heavy loam and clay soils supported the production of grains – sorghum, maize, rice cotton, ground nuts, and soya beans among others.

The savannah grassland attracted both domestic and wild animals, however, due to ever increasing human population and other developments (construction of dam and Sugar Company), the grassland had been reduced drastically. The fertility of the area had attracted traders and farmers from different parts of northern Nigeria, notable among which were the



Hausa and Siyawa as well as Fulani pastoralists among others (Pongri, 2005). These endowments are expected to facilitate economic growth and development that would engender robust and meaningful social, political and economic interactions that would lead to development between and among the inhabitants of the area. However, it had since become a source of contestation, acrimonious relationship and conflicts. One of the major causes of conflict in different parts of the world, especially in Nigeria, is agriculture-related factor. Many of those conflicts were not systematically studied and the few that were investigated were regarded as ethno-religious by some scholars such as Kastfelt (2006), Andrew (2020) and Pongri (2005), among others, based on their assistive modes. This study therefore, focused on some agriculture-related conflicts in Numan Federation, 1973-2018 based on their assistive mode of manifestation. The study covers the period 1973-2018, because 1973 marked the first communal conflict in the area of study during the post-colonial period. It ended in 2018 when the cycle of retaliatory farmers and herders' conflicts had bequeathed a volatile conspiracy theory in the area of study.

The recurrences of conflicts in Numan Federation were as result of the economy's monotonous dependence on agriculture in the face of population and urban expansions and development. In fact, the area had not taken advantage of its potentiality due to its inability to adopt new innovations or mechanised the production processes. Consequently, population expansion has led to a greater demand for cultivable land as output becomes inadequate owing to the use of crude implements, which limit their capacity to expand and to adequately respond to the constantly changing environment being cause by climatic conditions. It is more of a paradox, on one hand, the farmers depends on crude implements, which limit to their ability to expand, on the other, few individuals who have adopted modern farming techniques have acquired huge tract of cultivable lands thereby increasing the scarcity of land for others. The paper adopts historical methodology, which involves the use of primary sources such as oral interview of eye witnesses and participants, reports as well as secondary data using qualitative analysis. This paper is structured as follows: conceptual clarification, background to the conflicts, analyses of the conflicts, impacts of the conflicts and conclusion with recommendation.

2.0 Conceptual Clarification

To aid understanding of some of the words used in this paper, key words beginning with agriculture, conflict and agriculture-related are clarified.

The term "Numan Federation" refers to the geographic area comprising of Demsa, Guyuk, Lamurde, Numan and Shelleng Local Government Areas of Adamawa State. It was established in 1951 in response to Donald Cameron's ethnic model of Native Authority introduced in 1936. A federation connotes the union of heterogeneous communities that bind together to recognise a central authority (Britannica). The ethnic communities that made up the Numan Federation are Bachama, Batta, Kanakuru, Longuda and Mbula (all former districts during the colonial period). Numan Federation as currently constituted does not recognise a central political head but are held together by common historical experience, territorial affinity as a former Colonial Division in Adamawa Province, and religion. It is used in this study as a convenient description and delineation of the study area.

Agriculture: Agriculture is the art, science, and business of cultivating crops and livestock for subsistence and economic purposes, which involve the domestication and farming of plant and animal species to produce food and fibre products (Raja & Lohitha 2023). It is a broad term encompassing all aspects of crop production, animal husbandry, fisheries, forestry, horticulture and arboriculture among others (Raja & Lohitha 2023). Agriculture has been a foundational and fundamental occupation for human civilisation, providing sustenance and economic gain

(Banerjee et al., 2023). It plays a vital role in economic development, providing food and wealth for the society and aims to enhance socio-economic well-being, increase productivity to meet the ever-rising global demands for food security. In most countries like Nigeria, agriculture was a significant contributor to economic development, employment and major source of foreign exchange earner before the oil boom of the 1970s (Okonjo-Iweala, 2014), with its performance impacting overall economic growth. The development of agriculture has been driven by the availability of land, water and active labour force in a given community (Benjamin, 2016), which depict prevailing conditions in Numan Federation.

Conflict: Conflict is an inevitable element of human inter-group relations. This is because of the differences in human interests in the pursuit of set goals and values in society. Competition over scarce resources engenders conflict between individuals or groups. Conflicts erupt in society due to imbalances, tensions or irreconcilable interests within the social system (Odey, 2007). Patzak defines conflict as an antagonistic state of opposition and disagreement among a number of groups (Patzak, 2012), which according to Conrad may arise as a result of the groups' pursuit of incompatible, inconsistent interests towards a certain objective (Conrad, 1991). Lewis Coser views conflict as the clash of values and interests in the development of human societies in its functional manifestation and or underdevelopment as its dysfunction (1956). This means that conflict is not necessarily evil. Conflicts are struggles over values and claims over scarce resources and power in which the aims of the opponents are to neutralise, injure or eliminate their rivals. According to Wilmont and Hocker conflict is a struggle between interdependent parties over the allocation of scarce resources, incompatible goals and the means or process of achieving such goals (2001). This best explains or describes the nature of conflicts witnessed in Numan Federation between 1973 and 2018. The mutual struggles by various ethnic groups to access farmlands and grazing areas had resulted into different forms of conflicts. Therefore, this study perceives conflict as the mutual struggles between and among interested groups over scarce resources that take the form of violent or non-violent confrontation, among the ethnic groups in Numan Federation of Adamawa State, Nigeria.

Agricultural-Related Conflict: It is a conflict that is driven by or associated with the processes of agricultural production and the mutual quest to acquire the primary means of production (land and water) and distribution by competing groups (Pongri, 2021). The scarcity of resources is the major cause of agriculture-related conflicts in Numan Federation (Andrew, 2020i).

2.1 Background to Agricultural Conflicts in Numan Federation

The economy of Numan Federation depended on natural resources such as rain, soil fertility, and the human resource to harness those resources. The people of the area of study depended totally on the physical environment for everything thereby depleting the environment through deforestation in their quest to acquire new farmlands and new settlements due to urban expansion for the growing population, firewood, constructions and other developments. These consequently affected soil fertility and led to decrease in the amount of rainfall. This is because traditional environmental conservation techniques obviously neither accommodated nor had provisions for future developments. The after-effects of such practices were the gradual desertification, which has confined agricultural production to the riverine areas along the River Benue and Gongola and the mutual struggle for the accessibility of farmlands and grazing areas among the inhabitants of the area (Andrew, 2020i).

Commerce was dominated by the Hausa and other non-indigenous traders with only few indigenous traders (Pongri, 2005). This was because the indigenous people hardly participated in trading activities, probably because they felt “self-sufficient” as they virtually produced same agricultural produce, which seemed to pre-empt any commercial initiative on their part



or not just enthusiastic about it. Furthermore, such attitude widened and strengthened the social distance caused by their seeming apathy toward commerce, with great implications for the diversification of the economy. The commercially active non-indigenous groups leverage on the opportunity to emerge as the middlemen between those communities and other regions. The indigenous elite became obsessed with political power while majority of the educated depended on government's employment with little regard for self-reliance through profitable commercial ventures (Andrew, 2020). This placed the economy in the hands of the non-indigenous groups. Consequently, the dominance of the economy by the non-indigenous groups had given birth to mutual struggle between them and the indigenous groups.

Population Growth: Numan Federation consisted of about 2,214 square miles (Kastfelt, 1994) with a population of about 609,108 (National Population Commission, 2006) (2010 projected population: 793,065) (National Bureau of Statistics, 2011). By 1982, about 432.915 square kilometres of land had been acquired by the Federal Government of Nigeria for the construction of Kiri Dam and the establishment of Savannah Sugar Company, which coupled with depletion of the environment; desertification and other climatic factors, increased the quest by ethnic groups to acquire land to accommodate the needs of their respective growing populations. This quest for land, especially for agricultural purposes, has resulted in a number of conflicts.

Table 1: Showing population of Numan Federation between 1952 and 2010

LGA	1952	1991	2006	2010
Numan Federation	121,404*			
Demsa	-	95,149	180,251	200,350
Guyuk	-	70,526	177,785	198,214
Numan	-	130,450	90,723	102,809
Shelleng	-	52,477	149,069	166,754
Lamurde	-	-	112,803	124,938
Total	121,404	348,602	609,108	793,065

Source: * Population Census of Northern Region of Nigeria 1952 and National Population Commission.

Population expansion had led to a greater demand for cultivable land as output becomes inadequate owing to the use of crude implements, which limited their capacity to expand and to adequately respond to the constantly changing environment being caused by climatic conditions.

Apart from an ever expanding population, “external” control of commerce, and mechanisation of the agricultural sector, there were three significant state instituted developments that could be regarded as the remote causes of agrarian conflicts in Numan Federation – the Local Government Reforms of 1976, establishment of Savannah Sugar Company and construction of Kiri Dam (Shalangw, Adebayo, Zemba and Bonifice, 2014) as discussed below.

Local Government Reforms of 1976: Local Government Reforms introduced in 1976 led to new delineation of boundaries in Numan Federation for the purposes of creating local government areas (LGAs). The area of study was parcelled into Numan and Guyuk LGAs. By 1991, additional three LGAs were created out of the old ones bringing them to five that comprised of Demsa, Guyuk, Lamurde, Numan and Shelleng Local Government Areas. One defining feature of these LGAs was that their boundaries almost corresponded with ethnic territories with few exceptions, which had become a source of contest, and at times conflicts over boundaries (Shalangw et al., 2014). The boundary disputes reached a climax during the late 1990s and early 2000s. For example, the inhabitants of Boshikiri, Fomle, Mamsirmi,

Tudun Wada and Mere voted to be included in Guyuk LGA with their kinsmen as they were treated as outsiders by the Bachama who were the pre-dominant group in Lamurde LGA, especially when it comes to the issues of farmlands, employment and other opportunities (Adamawa State Boundary Committee, 2000). The emphasis on indigeneship has limited the level of fusion between and among the Nigerian people in general and the Numan federated area in particular. Local and state governments have become champions of ethnic territories in Nigeria. This is as Johannes rightly stated that,

States all over the republic were given the right to favour their indigenes when it came to the use of agricultural land, or the distribution of jobs, educational opportunities and healthcare. In this respect, states and even Local Government Areas have functioned not just as administrative units but also as guardians of ethnic territories (Johannes Harnischfeger, 2004).

As such, each ethnic group made use of the machinery of LGA to protect, preserve and projects their respective interests.

Savannah Sugar Company: Savannah Sugar Company Limited Numan was established to serve as a stimulus to fast-track industrial development in Numan Federation in particular and the North-East sub-region in general (Ishaku, 2022). According to the relevant sections of 1978 Land Use Act is that, private or community land may be acquired by the government in the public interest subject to the payment of adequate compensation to the affected individual owner or the host community of such land (Land Use Act, 1978). Public interest here include, among others, mining, construction of public facilities such as hospitals, schools, residential quarters, etc. factories and industries.

Based on the provisions of the post-colonial land use act, an expanse of land measuring about 29,891.5 hectares (Idama, 2024) (298.915 km²) was acquired by the government for the establishment of the company, which was not adequately evaluated and compensated for by the government but was “simply” confiscated (Todd, 1999). The host communities were forcefully ejected from their farmlands, hunting reserves, and areas of cultural festivals. The affected communities are still clamouring for compensation (Guyuk & Shelleng, 2021). The establishment of the company had reduced the availability of cultivable land leading to fierce competition among the effected communities with each striving to acquire as much land as possible for itself (Andrew, 2021).

Construction of Kiri Dam: Similarly, the construction of Kiri Dam in the early 1980s covered about one hundred and thirty-four square kilometres (134km²), resulting in the displacement of thousands of people that settled along it coastline (Salau). The affected communities included Banjiram, Purakayo, Lakumna, Kwadaddai, Gugu, Talum, Pondiwe, Mada, Bodeno, Dapri and Kiri (Ishaku, 2022). All these communities were resettled in or on other peoples’ farmlands and hunting grounds, which further intensified the mutual struggle or competition to acquire arable and grazing lands for survival.

The urban expansion necessitated by population growth coupled with developments such as construction of Kiri Dam and establishment of Savannah Sugar Company Limited had increased the pressure on the availability of land. The implementation of the Local Government Reforms intensified ethnic claims over territories as the areas created almost corresponded with the ethnic districts of the colonial period. Those developments reduced the accessibility to cultivable and grazing areas and smothered grazing routes in the process. The above factors among others combined to form the remote causes of agriculture-related conflicts in Numan Federation.



2.2 Analyses of the Agriculture-Related Conflicts in Numan Federation

Numan Federation had witnessed a number of conflicts, many of which were caused by the mutual quest by ethnic groups to access and control the means and processes involve in agricultural production since 1973. This study examines selected conflicts based on the parties involved: communal, indigenes/settlers and farmers/herders' conflicts and their impacts on the society.

2.2.1 Communal Conflict of 1973

The communal conflict here refers to conflict involving ethnic groups that are indigenous to Numan Federation. Such conflicts included Longuda and Kanakuru in Kola and Kiri settlements, Waja and Longuda, Bachama and Batta, and many among others. For purpose of this study, Kola-Kiri conflicts had been selected being the first in the post-colonial period.

The Kiri-Kola conflicts of 1973, and 1987 were caused by assertion of rights over farmlands between the Kanakuru of Kiri, Shelleng Local Government and Longuda of Kola, Guyuk Local Government (Aliyuda, 2024). The two communities had been laying claims and counter-claims over the fertile plain separating them since the colonial period when administrative boundaries were drawn for the purposes of, among other things, tax assessment and collection (Adamawa State Boundary Committee, 2000). The contest became violent for the first time in 1973 (Guyuk & Shelleng, 2021i). Kola community claimed that the people from Kiri community were progressively encroaching on their territory and taking over their farmlands and hunting grounds (Puri, 2024). This claim was refuted by Kiri people arguing that it was the Longuda people that trespassed and in the process attacked Tallum, a Kanakuru village on the West Bank of the Gongola (Guyuk & Shelleng, 2021i). The Longuda based their claim on the map drawn by the British colonialists in 1951 that recognised Kiri as the only Kanakuru territory on the West Bank of the Gongola River (National Archives Kaduna, NAK, 1951). The Kanakuru on the hand were re-asserting the pre-1850 settlements before they were forced across the Gongola by the Longuda (Windibiziri, 2005).

It should be noted here that, the construction of Kiri Dam and Savannah Sugar Company Limited caused resettlement of many affected communities among which was Tallum. Tallum was resettled further inland in the areas cultivated by Longuda farmers. The two state-owned projects also limited the access to farmlands and hunting grounds of the affected ethnic groups, and coupled with population expansion led to competition over land and boundary crisis.

The attack resulted in the loss of one life and the destruction of properties. It also momentarily halted the construction of Upper Benue Staff Quarters at Talum (Guyuk & Shelleng, 2021i). The area designated for the quarters was contested also by both parties. The paramount rulers of the feuding ethnic groups intervened with the help of the Divisional Police Officer after some arrests were made but released as part of the peace process (Aliyuda, 2024).

2.2.2 The Kola-Kiri Conflict of 1987

Violent clash erupted between the communities of Kola and Kiri around March or April of 1987. The conflict was caused by the Kola community's attempt to construct a Development Area Office and a postal agency on a disputed area. People of Kiri resisted the move claiming that Kola was encroaching on their territorial area. During the stand-off, as it was gathered, hunters from Kola covertly attacked Kanakuru people working on Kiri Hills leading to the death of about thirteen people (Aliyuda, 2024). This drew the attention of the Chairman, Guyuk Local Government Area of Gongola State, Hon. Harold Mirchaulum, paramount rulers of Longuda and Kanakuru and some military dispatch to mediate and restore orderliness.

However, some of the utterances made and action taken by the Chairman during the mediation was considered biased by the Kiri community. They claimed in a letter written to the Military Administrator of Gongola State that

... Chairman of Guyuk LGA, Mr Harold Mirchaulum, being a Longuda, selfishly warned the people of Kiri that they should be careful with the people of Kola... the Chairman egocentrically ordered the stoppage of the construction of the Development Area Office being built in the heart of Kiri town, along with that of Kola; forgetting that the one being constructed at Kiri was not on a disputed land (Guyuk & Shelleng, 2021i).

According to Hon. Harold the warning was necessitated by the danger posed by the Kola hunters and the damage they can cause. He claimed that Kanakuru people have always resented him for his role in the creation of Guyuk LGA in 1976, which reversed the pre-1951 colonial administrative structural arrangements. Hence, his actions were always considered biased by the Kanakuru, a reality compounded by the asymmetrical relations between the Longuda and the former (2024).

2.3 Tingno Conflict: An Indigene versus “Settler” Clashes

Tingno is one of the areas that is richly endowed with fertile plains and natural ponds in Numan Federation of Adamawa State. The area’s fertile arable land is traversed by a number of streams that empty themselves in the neighbouring River Benue. It is dotted by hills and mountains. These endowed it with abundant fish, livestock and wild animals, and a fertile land for agriculture, especially rice production. Hence, Tingno has become the principal commercial centre of, and for all adjoining villages and districts in and around Numan Federation. In fact, it has attracted a number of commercial farmers and merchants from far and near, especially from Silame in present day Sokoto State. Silame migrants settled and established themselves in the economic dynamics of the area. According to Johnson Haniel Pongri, for instance,

A combination of all these transformed Tingno from an unknown village to a major trading centre. Meanwhile, more Hausa communities, attracted by this goldmine came in large numbers to settle in the area. Gradually, they acquired rights to live as “indigenes.” At the end, almost all available fertile land in Tingno and Waduku was taken over by the Hausa (Pongri, 2005).

From the above and happenings in recent times as discussed earlier – population increase among other factors, explained the reasons for the apprehension and animosity being expressed by the indigenous ethnic group – Bachama against the Hausa, Siyawa and others ethnic groups believed by the former to be outsiders and settlers usurping their ancestral lands. Under these circumstances of deeply seated resentments, trouble is inevitable. The Bachamas were faced with the need of land to cultivate for their immediate survival and to keep for their offspring and the generations yet unborn to inherit (Pongri, 2005).

Consequently, a number of nocturnal meetings began, all in an effort to mobilise the Bachama in Tingno and other neighbouring villages to join forces together to retrieve their traditional lands. According to Bashir Bello Akko (1988), the 1983 meetings birthed the process to wrest land from “settlers” included following strategies highlighted below:

The first step was the introduction of tax. All “settlers” were mandated to pay tax on all produce. This mandate was complied with by all “settlers.” The tax was paid in both cash and kind to the traditional ruler.



The second step was a purported strategy to confiscate land from the “settlers” with the simple reason that late Chief Mbi wrongfully distributed lands belonging to the Bachama to others without knowing the implications. Consequently, by 1986, about six hundred and fifty (650) confiscated land cases were reported in Tingno. The affected communities took their cases to Hama Bachama for redress but to no avail (Pongri, 2005). The Local Government Authority could not help either, this is because local government areas exist as custodians of ethnic territories in Nigeria where indigeneship is a factor in accessing any dividends from the state (Andrew, 2021). Sam Moyo identified land custody as the dominant factor responsible for conflicts in Africa. He posits that:

The land problem in Africa has escalated in the wider context of struggles over the land rights “embedded” in extensive mineral and other natural resources of exchange value to global tourism, forestry and bio-technology markets which are rapidly being concessioned into external control. Civil wars, inter-country conflicts in the region, migration and involuntary displacements are all symptomatic of increasing land conflicts involving direct confrontation over access to key natural resources by both domestic and external forces (Moyo, 2003).

The third step was the introduction of an inclusive and mandatory attendance of all fishermen in the traditional rites of sacrificing to the gods to declaring a new fishing year despite their Christian beliefs. The offerings to the water gods were carried out by the “king of the Waters.” This practice was introduced as a direct affront to Muslims who were the dominant fishermen (Pongri, 2005). And as expected, they resisted leading to a number of violent conflicts that characterised the history of the defunct Numan Federation during the period of study. Such conflicts include but not limited to Tingno conflict of 19th August, 1987 caused by labour fee bargain on the farm of Dan Silame a Hausa man, leading to the death of the Village Head Mr Kotauhula and his younger brother, Mr. Lasko Miwa, who went to mediate but got killed by their tribesmen for betrayal alongside six Hausa (Pongri, 2005). It is worth noting here that, this particular conflict was caused by the Bachama’s drive to confiscate lands from “settlers” irrespective of ethnic or religious affiliations. For instance, the majority of Siyawa communities in Tingno and Waduku are Christian Lutherans as the Bachama but their farms were seized by the latter in 1996 for ridiculous reasons consequently leading to violent conflict between the two ethnic groups (Andrew, 2020). As discussed earlier, the Savannah Sugar Company Limited and geometric rise of population had increased the pressure to the accessibility of land for farming and grazing. The non-indigenous groups were seen as threats by the indigenous groups as far as land-resource was concerned.

2.4 Weapons and Strategy in the Prosecution of Conflicts, 1973-1987

Violent conflicts in Numan Federation were prosecuted using crude weapons such as bows and arrows, machetes, cutlasses, swords, sticks, and batons. The period before the Tingno Conflict of 1987, the conflicts were largely fought over boundaries delineation between and among the indigenous ethnic groups.

The strategy used by both parties was to outdo the opponent by staging the theatre of hostilities at a boundary point where they desired to reclaim. That ensured that the theatres of hostilities were at the affected boundaries away from their respective settlements. This meant that houses and other domestic properties were hardly affected, but lives were lost.

In the 1987 conflict, the Kola community deployed tactic of the element of surprise using the horse riders (cavalry) to attack the Kiri fighters stationed on the Kiri Hills to defend the town

(Aliyuda, 2024). The latter lowered their guard when the paramount chiefs of the respective ethnic groups and government agents were meeting on the disputed boundary to broker peace (Kiri District CDA, 1998). It took the efforts of military dispatch to intervene in the conflict and restore order (Aliyuda, 2024).

The Tingno conflict of 1987 between the indigenous Bachama ethnic group and “settler” Hausa community over the Tingno market, fishing ponds and farmlands was prosecuted using firearms by Bachama ex-service men.

2.4.1 Farmers and Herders’ Clash 2017/2018

The inhabitants of Dong, Shelewol, Bille, Lawaru, Shaforon and Kikon among other villages in Demsa and Numan Local Government Areas of Adamawa State were embroiled in a wave of conflicts with herders between November, 2017 and February, 2018. The conflict began in November, 2017 when two farmers were killed by the herders on their farms in Kikon village. The farmers retaliated leading to the displacement of the herders out of the Kikon (UPR Working Group, 2018). However, on the 4th December, 2017, the herders, remobilised and attacked, ransacking the villages listed above with so many deaths, houses burnt down alongside grains and other farm produce. The carnage increased when the Nigerian Air Force (NAF) deployed an Alpha Jet and EC 135 attack helicopter resulting in the death of about thirty five persons (35) from the Jet’s rocket fire, 51 hospitalised and destroyed three thousand (3000) houses across seven villages (Amnesty International, 2018). By the end of the conflict in February, 2018, about 135 persons died, many more displaced, houses and properties destroyed. The intention of the NAF Alpha Jet has been misconstrued by the affected communities, as they claimed that the fighter jet was not neutral in executing its offensive as it dropped bombs on farmers while the herders were not affected. The NAF on its part refuted such claims asserting that the Jet was only responding to requests by the Nigerian Army (NA) and other security forces (NTA, 2018).

The remote cause of farmers and herders’ conflict in Numan Federation has always been about the decline of pasture and grazing areas as high-lighted in the background to conflicts above coupled with continuous southwards migrations of herdsmen from the Sahel regions of Nigeria and beyond (Courtright, 2023).

In addition to weapons earlier mentioned, the farmers and herders conflict witnessed an increased use of sophisticated firearms such as AK47 rifles, hand guns, improvised explosive devices among other projectiles; consequently, the death tolls were recorded in scores and sometimes in hundreds. For instance, Brigadier General Muhammad Bello claimed that Fulani herders intending to attack Bachama villages were well armed that ‘troops had to use rocket-propelled grenades to disperse them (This Day, 2017).

In contrast to pre-1987 conflicts, the prosecution of post-1987 conflicts in Numan Federation involved razing down of houses and other properties. This was because the theatres of conflicts were within residential areas between “indigenous ethnic groups and “settlers.” Burning down of houses featured prominently in Tingno and Lafiya/Mamsirme conflicts of May and June 2020 respectively among others. The result was the displacement of thousands of residents who had to take temporary shelters in government schools and makeshift internally displaced peoples (IDPs) camps.

The use of firearms such as AK-47, PKM, G3 rifles and other assault rifles and improvised explosive devices (IEDs) suggest the involvement of organised armed ethnic militias and or vigilantes with rich patrons that supplied them these sophisticated weapons (Leadership, 2018).



Militias were involved in the farmers and herders’ conflicts of Numan and Demsa LGAs between November 2017 and the first half of 2018, and Longuda and Waja conflicts of 2020 and 2022. The governors of Adamawa and Gombe States had to ban the ethnic vigilante groups or militias to mitigate the escalation and destructive impact of the conflicts (Nigerian Governors’ Forum, 2021).

The post-1987 period witnessed the reintroduction of the scorched-earth invasion that kill scores, raze villages, destroyed sources of livelihoods of people with the intention to annihilate as seen in Shaforon, Kikem, and Dong attacks. The militias emboldened by their sophisticated weapons engaged security agents deployed to stop violence and kill police and troops. For instance, General Bello reported that militias in Adamawa had killed seven policemen and two soldiers in farmers and herders’ conflicts in Numan and Demsa LGAs (This Day, 2018).

3.0 Impact of Agriculture Related Conflicts on Numan Federation

Periodic occurrences of agriculture-related conflicts had impacted the social, economic and political spheres of Numan Federation. Economically, the conflicts among others have resulted in the death of many people, displacement of many communities. Forced migration to neighbouring communities, further increased the pressure on arable land to sustain the consequential demographic change. Increase in population meant the reduction in the size of farms to enable the new members have where they could cultivate. Consequently, the output of farm products reduced considerably thereby laying the foundation for food crisis (FGD, 2024). See the table below for statistical presentation of humanitarian toll of the selected agriculture-related conflicts in Numan Federation.

Statistical presentation of Selected Agriculture-Related Conflicts in Numan Federation, 1973 – 2022

S/No.	Conflict	Year	Deaths	Houses Destroyed
1.	Kola/Kiri Communal Clash	1973	1	Nil
2.	Kola/Kiri Communal Clash	1987	13	Nil
3.	Tingno Indigenes/Settlers’ Clash	1987	8	Nil
4.	Tingno Indigenes/Settlers’ Clash	1988	15	Nil
5.	Farmers/Herders Clashes	2017/2018	135	500

Source: Compiled from various sources by the researcher

The social and political impact of the conflicts entrenched the indigene and settler dichotomy in Numan Federation. There is a sharp divide between the parties to the extent that, in Numan town for instance, a member of community finds himself in imminent danger once in a ward dominated by the other. Furthermore, the conflicts widened and strengthened the social distance caused by mutual struggle over resource control, particularly, land.

The farmers and herders conflicts have led to the emergence and solidification of a vicious conspiracy theory in Numan Federation. Indigenous groups in the Federation strongly believed that, the Fulani are waging a jihad, not primarily to Islamise but to usurp their ancestral lands. According to a report produced by Bwatiye Group (Bachama and Batta) claimed that:

The pogrom to annihilate and subjugate the Bwatiye Nation is being executed systematically with the Fulani terrorists under the garb of herdsmen who have been invading Bwatiye settlements across the length and breadth of Adamawa State with the tacit support and backing of some powerful groups both inside and outside Adamawa State with the collusion of both Adamawa State Government and the Federal Government (Courtright, 2023).

This theory had entrenched mistrust and adversarial relations between indigenous groups of Numan Federation and the Muslim Fulani and Hausa “settlers.” It has to an extent, united the so-called indigenous groups politically and socially, a development that now determines who they support in General Elections. It has also undermined trust in the government even further and poisoned relations between the two communities. When the state government tried to set land aside for herders as a part of a plan to formalize the livestock sector, the indigenous groups protested, fearing the ranches would be used as training grounds and arms depots for Fulbe militants (Courtright, 2023).

4.0 Conclusion

This study revealed that economic factors or resources are responsible for the several violent conflicts witnessed in Numan Federation. Ostensibly, those violent conflicts often manifest in a form of ethnic or religious conflicts and sometimes as a combination of both. However, in whatever form a conflict chose to manifests itself, its resultant effect is devastating in terms of the loss of lives and properties, not less the intensification of asymmetrical relations between and among groups. Furthermore, the manifestation of the conflicts always misleads authorities into reducing conflicts to simply religious and ethnic rivalries or both. Such misleading perception or diagnosis pre-empts the holistic solutions and results in cosmetic treatment of the conflicts, hence their periodical reoccurrence.

The study identified the expansion of population, which increases the demand for land, confiscation of farmlands by the Upper River Basin Development Authority for the construction of Kiri Dam and establishment of model farms; and the Savannah Sugar Company for its sugarcane plantations as the major cause of resource conflict in Numan Federation. Also, the poor resettlement of communities affected by the confiscation of farmlands worsens the already flammable situation. These causes were not helped either by the perceived control of the economy and economic forces of production by the “settlers.” Therefore, the paper recommends that critical assessment of root causes of conflicts instead of assistive mode of manifestation would enable pragmatic solutions to minimise recurrence while state led developments should take into account the indices of inevitable consequences or its ripple effects.

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