



The Political and Economic Perspectives of the Tiv-Jukun Conflicts, 1976-2005

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Abstract

This paper gives a dispassionate analysis of the Tiv-Jukun conflicts in the Middle Benue Basin from 1976-2005. This is situated against a historical background of a peaceful coexistence between the two ethnic groups from pre-colonial times, that of hostilities in the colonial and even the contemporary period. Colonialism imposed artificial borders that took no cognizance of the people living on the land, sowing the seeds of conflicts and ushering in the politics of divide and rule. This placed some ethnic groups at a vantage position over others. It is against this background that the paper analyses the causes of the various conflicts that have flared up between the two ethnic groups since the creation of Benue and Gongola States in 1976. These conflicts, which have political and economic undertones, hinge on the struggle for political appointments and control of cherished economic resources in the area such as farmland. In order to achieve lasting peace in the area, the paper proposes reconciliatory efforts on the part of the belligerents. On the other hand, good governance, and the provision of democratic dividends, would restore inter-ethnic harmony and promote democratic consolidation.

Introduction

Conflicts between ethnic groups in Nigeria has become a common phenomenon. Nigerians are no longer surprised at the outbreak of violence which is in most cases caused by ethnic chauvinism. These conflicts normally attract widespread attention and sometimes government intervention. On a number of occasions, some conflicts went beyond imaginable proportions, and prompted the government to send the military or the police to intervene in such situations. The political economy of most Nigerian conflicts revolve round the struggle for the acquisition of scarce economic resources like land, the struggle over the holding of political appointments and the creation of local governments areas. The Tiv-Jukun conflicts in Central Nigeria happen to be one of such conflicts with political and economic underpinnings.

The Tiv speaking people are the largest single ethnic group in the Middle Benue Basin of Central Nigeria. They are the majority ethnic group in the present Benue

State.¹ The rest are found in considerable numbers in Southern Taraba State, parts of Nassarawa, Plateau and Cross River States. The Jukun are found mainly in Taraba State, with others are in Benue, Plateau and Nassarawa States. The Tiv were said to have migrated into the Benue valley in the eighteenth century and met the Kwararafa kingdom identified with the Jukun. The Kwararafa kingdom had politically dominated the region for centuries.²

The Tiv, after their arrival in the Benue valley, were said to have lived peacefully with the Jukuns with no boundary problems between them. The two groups had in fact united and fought side by side against invading groups like the famous slave raider, Dankaro.³ Though the Tiv and the Jukun lived peacefully, there were exceptional cases when the Jukun invaded Tiv areas for slaves which were in turn supplied to the Fulani Emir of Muri Mohammed Nya who had imposed such on the Jukun. Based on this cordial relationship that existed between the two groups, the Tiv copied their chieftaincy institution *Tor Agbande* from the Jukuns.⁴ The pertinent observation for this peaceful co-existence is borne out of certain considerations. Firstly, the use of land at that time was geared primarily towards subsistence rather than for profit making ventures, hence the absence of clashes. Secondly, the absence of the office of a paramount chief for the Tiv and the controversies associated with it meant the absence of conflicts. Since this was in the pre-colonial period, the policy of divide and rule fostered by colonialism did not exist.

The situation that existed before colonialism changed with the coming of the British who ushered in politics of divide and rule thus fostering ethnicity and consequently conflicts. While early British contacts with the Tiv had created the impression that they were warlike and recalcitrant, the British admired the ritualistic Jukun Empire which had welcomed them as friends against the Tiv who resisted them and branded them as foes. The British then proceeded to support the Jukun territorial claims that considered those who infringed on Jukun lands as “settlers” or “guests.”⁵ The British administration of Nigeria, particularly in Tiv and Jukun areas, is an important antecedent in the Tiv-Jukun conflicts. Despite colonial rule, the Tiv and the Jukun still lived relatively peacefully until the demise of colonialism. The main crux of this paper is to analyze the conflicts that took place since the creation of Benue and Taraba States in 1976. The creation of these two states brought the Tiv-Jukun conflicts to an unprecedented level. These conflicts which have political and economic aspects shall be analyzed. The paper is sub-divided into five sections. After the introduction is the

theoretical framework followed by a general survey before 1976 and the main conflicts that took place thereafter. The role of militia groups that took part in the conflicts are also discussed before the conclusion. It is the contention of this paper that the government should adopt a proactive approach towards the management of conflicts. This strategy will encourage Nigerians to be more interested in Nigeria's corporate entity rather than ethnic chauvinism.

Theoretical Framework

A discussion on the political and economic perspectives of the Tiv-Jukun conflicts necessitates a theoretical framework. The pertinent terms that need clarification here are conflict, as well as political and economic conflicts within that category.

Conflict is a serious disagreement or contention or state of antagonism between two or more parties or groups. Conflicts evolve from variations in interests, values, ideas, ideologies, orientations, perceptions and tendencies and are part and parcel of social existence and progress.⁶ Conflicts are end results of contradictions that exist in the human society. It is a state of discord caused by the actual or perceived opposition of needs, values and interests between people. It can result in stress or tension and negative feelings between disputants, and it is not only disruptive and destructive but also constructive.⁷ It is therefore, not only the destructive nature of conflicts that count, but whether groups involved in conflicts can maintain a healthy relationship after the conflicts. Conflict thus serves as a medium for creating integration between groups. It can lead to group cohesion and social understandings if well managed. A conflict can range from a disagreement, or clash to a fight, which may consist of harsh words or may involve the use of force, armed conflict or war.⁸ Conflict is said to exist when two or more parties with perceived incompatible goals seek to undermine each other's goal seeking capability. Conflicts may take place between individuals, groups; between individuals and organizations or groups; or between an organization and one or more of its components.⁹ Conflict is said to emerge whenever two or more persons or groups seek to possess the same object, occupy the same space of an exclusive portion, play incompatible goals and undertake mutually incompatible means for achieving their purpose.¹⁰ Conflict can be expressed violently or passively, and all systems, political, social or economical have the inherent capacity for conflict.

Political Conflicts

Political conflicts are usually struggles arising from disagreements or contestations over the sharing and holding of political appointments, the creation of administrative areas and the creation of local government areas and their purported headquarters. There is also the struggle for chieftaincy or kingship positions, the issue of superiority and the extent to which any of these groups could exercise their sphere of influence. This problem could be traced to the colonial period, when traditional institutions were firmly under the control of the colonial administration. The colonial authorities elevated some traditional institutions to the detriment of others. In Tivland, the British colonial administration placed a part of the area under Jukun leadership, a situation the Tiv resisted. The British used the Tiv to sustain their administration in Wukari native authority. The Tiv provided food and money needed to sustain the Wukari native authority. The Tiv were to stay as “indigenous foreigners” or settler groups without any political rights. According to C.C.Jacobs:

The British consistently supported Jukun territorial claims and considered those who entered what they supposed were Jukun lands as ‘settlers’ or ‘guests.’¹¹

Experience has shown that the clamour for new administrative areas does not solve the problems or give a sense of belonging to the groups in their new areas, if created. When new states or local government areas are created, new majority or minority groups emerge with attendant problems.

Economic Conflicts

Economic conflicts can be located in the struggle over the acquisition of land and other scarce resources. Land is an important economic possession and it is often used for agricultural purposes in Nigeria. This has continually heightened the pressure on land as the main economic resource for agricultural production. In Tivland, the practice of shifting cultivation calls for the continuous acquisition of new lands which often leads to conflicts. In addition, the increasing need for cash crops such as rice, yams, groundnuts, etc. has often led to tension and pressure on land. The lack of availability of this resource and the quest for new acquisitions has often led groups migrating to other areas, and these movements are usually resisted by the indigenous groups.

Apart from land, economic conflicts can come into being when valuable natural resources such as oil are found. Natural resources are seldom found uniformly distributed over an entire country, but are usually concentrated in a particular part of it. The bone of

contention then arises as to who owns the resources, the whole nation or the lucky community on whose locality the resources are found. The inhabitants of the lucky community may have an obvious interest in seceding from the rest of the country with the intention of keeping the wealth to themselves or causing problems for different purposes. This has been the case with the conflicts in the Niger Delta, where the groups feel that they do not have a fair share of the wealth found in their area.

The Benue Valley: A Historical Background of Tiv-Jukun Migrations

Sa'ad Abubakar maintains that the Jukun were politically and spiritually one the most dominant groups in the Middle Belt.¹² This is because a number of other ethnic groups in the region preserve traditions of Jukun socio-cultural influences. However, Jukun remarkable cultural influence on its neighbours seem to have been occasioned not necessarily by military conquests but mainly through mutual contacts and spiritual assistance which eventually resulted in the adoption of Jukun institutions.¹³

It is to be noted too that, during the pre-colonial period, there were occasions when the Tiv and the Jukun were almost seen as one people with only some few discernible social differences. This, no doubt, was because of the close inter-group relations that existed between the two groups.¹⁴ Oral claims from both communities trace their presence in Wukari to many centuries before the advent of colonialism in the area. Most early works on this subject point to the fact that Tiv-Jukun contact in the area took place in the first half of the nineteenth century. Tseror for instance maintains that Tiv-Jukun contact occurred after the nineteenth century Great Tiv Dispersal.¹⁵ Hassan on the other hand argues that it may be possible to see early Tiv-Jukun contact as an eighteenth century phenomenon.¹⁶ Earlier on, Meek stated that modern Wukari was founded in the 1840s by the Jukun who crossed from Chinkai.¹⁷ Though the number of the Tiv at this time was not known, Freemantle maintained that in the 1870s Aku Uka Awudu Manu Abiten (1871-1903) was already at war with the growing Tiv factor in his domain.¹⁸ The plausibility of the view by Meek that "Modern Wukari" was founded in the 1840s by the Jukuns compels us to conclude that before the coming of the Jukun, the area was already inhabited. It also implies that the arrival of the Jukun might have only changed the nomenclature of the area due to the domineering force the Jukun brought to bear on pre-existing societies. The Tiv could also claim to be one of such pre-existing societies.¹⁹

The claims over the foundation of Wukari raises some important historical points. First and foremost, it implies that some ethnic groups in the area are of remote

origin. It also implies that Tiv-Jukun contact and interaction is not a recent phenomenon. It is argued that it was in the course of this early contact that the Jukun referred to the Tiv as *Mbichi* or *Bichi*.²⁰ While some Jukun presently attached a derogatory meaning to the term *Bichi*, the original Jukun meaning for the term implied “stranger settlers” or directly interpreted means “come and settle.” These postulations could imply that if the Jukun had already held sway over Wukari as their land, in defiance of whether other groups, the *Bichi* concept of “come and settle,”²¹ could signify later Tiv influx into the area as a result of the warm invitation by the Jukun. Whether or not these assumptions are tenable, what is very certain is that early Tiv-Jukun contact and interaction in Wukari, particularly between 1850 to the dawn of the twentieth century, was very peaceful. The questions that come to mind, for this period, therefore bear significantly on the areas of co-operation and conflict between the two groups.

Underlying Factors to the Conflicts

Land is an important factor when considering conflicts involving the Tiv and the Jukun. The Tiv people are subsistence farmers who practise shifting cultivation. The quest for more fertile lands must have led the Tiv into the Benue valley where they clashed with the Jukun.²² The increasing use of land for food and cash crop production during the colonial period, without any corresponding improvement in techniques and land regeneration, led to greater struggle for the control of land and thus a shift from communal ownership in the pre-colonial period towards individual ownership, so encouraging conflict.²³ It is therefore not surprising that clashes between the Tiv and the Jukun hinge on the land factor which the two sides consider important for their existence.

The attitude of the British colonial administration towards the two ethnic groups encouraged hostilities. The British in their early contact with the Tiv got the impression that the Tiv were warlike and recalcitrant, but on the other hand admired the Jukun who had welcomed them as “friends” against the Tiv who resisted them and branded them as “foes”.²⁴ The British also admired Jukun culture which they associated with the ancient Kwararafa empire, supporting Jukun territorial claims over the Tiv and considered those who “encroached” on what they considered as Jukun land, as “settlers” or “immigrants.”²⁵ The British were convinced that the Tiv, also referred to as the Munshi by the British, were committed to grabbing other people’s lands and it was their desire to put a stop to this “Munshi menace.” Governor Palmer made it clear that:

the Munshi as a people have been favourably treated by the government. The policy we have to pursue is for Nigeria to absorb the 'Munshi' and not for the Munshi to absorb Nigeria.²⁶

The British administration did everything possible to create ethnic homelands or the building of a "Munshi wall" to separate the Tiv from the Jukun. Further colonial legislation, particularly the Ring Fence Policy of 1918, was a practical expression of the series of measures adopted by the colonial administration to place the Tiv and the Jukun apart. Among other considerations, the Ring Fence Policy was a measure adopted by the colonial administration to halt Tiv advancement into the Aku Uka's domain, and to completely evict the Tiv, even the long established clans, from Wukari Division. This was as a result of the fear by the Jukun leadership over the unprecedented increase in Tiv encroachment on Wukari and Takum Districts.²⁷ According to Dewar's intelligence report:

In consequence, in 1918 the Tiv were evicted wholesale from their homes and farms on the north side of the Wukari – Akwana road, which was accepted as a rough boundary.²⁸

The expulsion of the Tiv created fresh problems because the Jukun were unable to fill the vacuum created by the departure of the Tiv, in addition to the fact that the Tiv were not prepared to leave these areas which they considered to be their ancestral homelands. It is important to note that this policy adopted to separate the Jukun from the Tiv could not achieve positive results. Apart from its failure to check further Tiv advancement into the area of Wukari, it severely affected the revenue base of Wukari District. This is because the Tiv, being the most populous group, produced more taxpayers than any other ethnic group.²⁹ A compromise position was consequently reached which allowed the Tiv to return to Wukari under certain conditions. On their return, they were to be regarded as "settlers" and were also to accept the political authority of the Aku Uka of Wukari.³⁰ The colonial Ring Fence Policy sowed seeds for contemporary Tiv-Jukun conflicts because the Jukun have sought over the years to exclude the Tiv from the economic and political benefits in Taraba State and the Tiv yearning for more recognition had always created conflicts.

The introduction of party politics in the pre-independence and post independence periods in Nigeria became a bona fide means of gaining political and economic power. At the attainment of independence, Nigerian politicians sought to take over the reins of power by fostering ethnic unity and consequently causing clashes between ethnic groups. This is important in explaining the genesis of the Tiv-Jukun conflicts. The Jukun have always felt that Taraba State belongs to them while Benue State is for the Tiv. They believe that if the Tiv are subsequently not checked, they will outnumber the Jukun, thus uprooting them politically from their ancestral homelands. The question of who votes or is qualified to be voted for becomes imperative here.

With the coming of party politics, certain political appointments are also the exclusive rights of certain ethnic groups because they are the majority, while the minority groups are relegated to the background or are given the position of deputies to win the votes of such groups. The minority groups are prone to resist and this usually breed conflict. This has been the bedrock of Tiv-Jukun hostilities to date. A pointer to this is a look at the pre and post independence political disturbances in Tivland. This extended to Wukari Division where the Tiv, like their brothers in Benue Province, supported the Tarka led United Middle Belt Congress (UMBC), arguing that it was their party, while the Jukun on the other hand followed the Nigeria People's Congress (NPC), enjoying the support of the Northern Regional Government. In the 1959 elections, Charles Tangur Gaza won the elections on the platform of the UMBC defeating the NPC candidate and this raised much tension and minor clashes in Wukari.³¹

In addition to this are the primordial sentiments of the elites or bourgeoisie of the contending parties who fuel the conflicts. These are quick to use ethnic sentiments to further their economic interest. The Tiv-Jukun conflicts of 1991/92 and 2001/2002 were manipulated directly or indirectly by ethnic elites for diverse reasons. The fact is that conflicts generally will not thrive if they do not have sponsors. It is also important to note that most sponsors of conflicts do not do so openly. They sometimes hide under the guise of peacemakers and are not easy to be identified. The Tiv accused General T.Y. Danjuma, a respected retired Chief of Army Staff and later Minister of Defence, as always enlisting the soldiers to fight on the side of his Jukun ethnic group. Another Jukun man, Group Captain Ibrahim Kephas, a retired Air Force Officer and former Military Administrator of Cross River State, was also accused. The Jukun similarly accused the

serving Benue Governor, George Akume, and other military brass like General Malu, General Inienger and General Atom Kpera of sponsoring and abetting the crisis.³²

States Creation: Blessing or Curse?

Before the creation of Benue State in 1976, the Tiv and the Jukun had a fairly cordial relationship. That is not to say that before this period there were no clashes between the Tiv and the Jukun. The post-independence political upheavals in Nigeria had engulfed Tivland, which was then part of the Northern Region, and swept through the Middle Benue area. The Tiv and the Jukun belonging to different political parties with varying opinions had differences but this did not lead to full-scale bloody conflicts on a magnitude that is being witnessed in the period under discussion. The Tiv and the Jukun had initially lived peacefully under Benue Plateau State created in 1967.

The first signs of trouble started in 1976 when Benue and Gongola States were created. The two ethnic groups felt these states had been created for them. Consequently, it was alleged the Jukun ethnic group led by the then sole administrator of Wukari Division, Mallam Ibrahim Sangari, and the present Aku Uka, Masaibi II, led a band of arsonists to attack and burn down Tiv villages.³³ They argued that since Benue was created for the Tiv, while Taraba was created for the Jukun, hence the Tiv were to relocate to Benue State.³⁴ After this the two groups lived together in mutual suspicion and hostilities, a sort of cold war that needed an action to explode.

Another incident occurred in 1987 during the Babangida endless transition programme. The Babangida administration had organized local government elections in 1987 that were not based on the formation of political parties. Since the Tiv and the Jukuns are mainly Christians, they resolved to work together. The Tiv people after consultations conceded the position of Chairman and went for that of Deputy Chairman. Three candidates presented themselves for the position of Chairman for Wukari Local Government. Out of these, two were Jukuns and the other a Fulani. The Jukuns were Andrew Sulla Tsokwa and Samuel Tsoviai Adda while the third was a Fulani Alhaji Danladi Shehu, who eventually won because he accepted a Tiv man as his deputy and subsequently had all Tiv votes. The Jukun did not take kindly to this act, accusing the Tiv of taking sides with the Fulani against them. The Jukun maintained that the Tiv had “overstayed,” “biting” the fingers that fed them. The Tiv were then been suspected and were to be made to return to their so-called home state.³⁵ This situation led to the outbreak of open conflict in the 1990s. Tiv-Jukun conflicts prior to the 1990s were more

of political rather than any other factor, economic or religious. This is because they were centered on the struggle for the acquisition of political appointments. This situation changed in the 1990s when the conflicts assumed economic dimensions.

The Conflict of 1990 - 1993

As part of the long-standing skirmishes and suspicions, the situation exploded in 1990. This conflict, which was long and bloody, had both the Jukuns and the Tivs explaining it from different points of view. One account maintains that the conflicts erupted as a result of a dispute over the ownership of a piece of land between the Aku Uka and a Tiv man. The account states:

It all started on September 21st, 1990 when the Jukun stormed the disputed piece of land claimed by the Aku Uka at Uban Igyaba village in three pick up vans. They were armed to the teeth. Their mission was to cultivate the disputed land for the Aku. On this same day, one Mveen died at the Village and was buried on September 25th, 1990. While the Tiv were at the burial ceremony some armed Jukun attacked and killed two brothers. A Jukun was also killed while the rest escaped to Wukari. This was all the Jukun needed in order to declare war on the Tiv.³⁶

Another account maintains that the Jukun were infuriated by the continuous Tiv reference to the Kwararafa in derogatory terms and consequently went in the night and destroyed the Tiv villages along Ibi- Wukari road.³⁷

The conflicts of 1990-1993 were bloody and devastating with widespread destruction. The belligerents went from village to village killing, raping and looting. This went on for weeks without government intervention. The government finally responded by deploying firstly a mobile police force to the area and then soldiers to bring peace. The soldiers and police were accused by each of the sides of supporting the opposite group. The crisis led to the influx of Jukun refugees into Wukari and the Tiv fleeing in large numbers to Benue State.

The Conflict of 2001/2002

Throughout the history of modern Nigeria, there have always been violent conflicts between pastoralists and agriculturalists. While the Fulani pastoralists take their cattle from one place to the other looking for wetlands and green grass where their cattle can graze, especially during the dry season, the farmers are out to preserve their crops against this Fulani menace. The immediate cause of the 2001/2002 conflicts was an encounter between a Fulani herdsman and a Tiv farmer. This conflict could easily have been waived

aside, taking it as one of those usual clashes between the pastoralists and agriculturalists. However, this was not the case because of the Jukun involvement in the matter. One fact which the Fulani and Tiv both agree to in the conflict is an incident which took place at Che Ikyambe's village:

On that fateful day, a seemingly unarmed Fulani herdsman trespassed into the farm of Mr. Iortimin Umande, a Tiv farmer. When challenged by the farmer, the Fulani herdsman drew his dagger and stabbed the Tiv farmer to death. This led to reprisals by the Tiv, and subsequently the Jukun took over.³⁸

The Tiv were blamed for starting this violence. That the Tiv should not have carried out reprisals against the Fulanis thus provoking violence instead of allowing the law to take its due course. The Tiv accused the Jukun of using the Fulanis as a cover up to attack them. The crisis now took a different dimension with the Jukun and the Fulani on one side and the Tiv on the other.³⁹

The conflicts were marked by much killing, looting and plunder. An accurate account of the number of casualties cannot be given. Both sides maintain that hundreds of people were killed on their side by the opposing party. As the conflicts continued, soldiers were deployed to the area for peacekeeping operations. The soldiers were said to be partisan since they were sent on the orders of the then Minister of Defence, General Danjuma.. The soldiers were said to be on operation in Vaase when they were captured, brought to Zaki Biam and killed. The killing of the soldiers received much press coverage. There were ugly pictures of disembowelment and beheadings that were freely circulated in Zaki Biam. After the abduction and killing of the soldiers, the Benue State Governor George Akume apologized for the act. The Federal Government issued an ultimatum to the Benue State Government to identify the killers and bring them to justice but nothing was done. The dead soldiers were subsequently buried in Abuja with full military honors. President Obasanjo promised that the killers would be found and be punished.

Following this development, the Federal Government deployed soldiers from 82 Division Enugu and from Wukari who came and carried out reprisal attacks on several Tiv villages. Human Rights Watch reported the Tiv as saying that they believed the soldiers came as peacemakers only to go from one village to the other killing and plundering. On one occasion, it was reported that they went to a market where they

separated the men from the children and women only to open fire on the men .⁴⁰ The attacks went on for sometime before President Obasanjo ordered that they be halted. As usual, this conflict, like the previous conflict, led to a large scale refugee problem. The Jukuns in their thousands fled to Wukari where they were catered for in refugee camps while the Tiv refugees fled in thousands to Makurdi and environs where they were catered for in refugee camps set up in Makurdi and the surrounding villages.

The Role of Local Militia Groups and Implications of the Conflicts

Militias in some societies may be privately funded, organized and may act as a regular army. Some of these groups could be well organized under a particular leadership, and in some cases supported by government, like the Odua People's Congress (OPC), Bakassi Boys, Hisbah Guards, or Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND). On the other hand, these could be recruited to perform specific functions and disappear soon after. The militia groups that operated in the Tiv-Jukun conflicts of the 1990s and 2000 had some resemblance to the militia groups like the Sardauna Brigades of the N.P.C. and Tarka Young Pioneers of the UMBC that operated in Tivland during the political upheavals of the First Republic.⁴¹ Like the militia groups of the First Republic, these were well coordinated, trained and sponsored, but did not have specific names attached to them. However, the militia groups during the Tiv-Jukun conflicts were sophisticatedly armed and in some cases wore army uniforms before carrying out their dreaded acts.

The militia groups that operated on the two sides had a character of spontaneity in moments of conflicts. They appeared and after their dreaded acts disappeared without trace. Their members hardly knew themselves except for the fact that they belonged to the same ethnic groups. The calibre of militia groups that were used in these conflicts were made up of the cream of retired military and police personnel from both sides. These were joined by criminal and unemployed youths who were quick to take advantage of the chaos to exploit the situation to their maximum benefits. Apart from the fact that these militia groups went from one village to the other causing mayhem, many of them put up illegal road blocks where they stopped oncoming vehicles to take out their enemies to slaughter in nearby bushes.

This violence was perpetuated by gangs of marauding youth militia on both sides. Accusing fingers were pointed at Group Captain Ibrahim Cephas, a retired Air Force Officer and former military Administrator of Cross River State for arming and

training the Jukun militia in bushes near Wukari. General Theophilus Danjuma (retired) was accused of being aware of the existence of such a militia group and he gave them the necessary funds and weaponry for their operations. George Akume, the then Governor of Benue State was equally accused of collaborating with retired military personnel to form militia groups to prosecute the conflicts.⁴² The Tiv-Jukun conflicts were thus carried out by sponsored militia groups on both sides by influential elites of the two ethnic groups. They were not fighting for the true cause of their respective ethnic groups.

The Tiv-Jukun conflicts had devastating consequences on the warring factions. The warring communities seemed to be caught in a conflict trap, where the key issues had the potential of producing more conflicts in the near future. Both sides suffered untold hardships, loss of lives and general destruction during the war. The conflicts were marked by the destruction of towns, villages, foodstuffs and cattle belonging to both the Tiv and the Jukun. In addition, ethnic groups that were not directly involved in the conflicts also suffered. Villages such as Akwana, Arufu, Tsokoundi, Kente, Vaase, Gbeji, Ikaior, Zaki Biam and others were completely destroyed and devastated. The official government documentation in Taraba State put the number of people killed at the beginning of conflicts at 22, while 2,226 huts were burnt and 49,265 animals killed. In Akwana, 45 Muslims worshipping in a mosque were said to have been killed.⁴³ The Tiv spoke of the killing of thousands of people and the destruction of several villages such as Jootar, Iorza, Gbeji and Vaase. In the process, farmlands were destroyed in the economic activities of the areas brought to a halt. Generally, what was destroyed during these conflicts could not easily be recovered even after many years.

Conclusion

The Tiv-Jukun conflicts among numerous ethnic conflicts in Nigeria revolve round the contestations over the acquisition of scarce economic resources such as land and the struggle for political relevance. They also revolve round the problem of identity and a sense of belonging especially among the minority ethnic groups in Nigeria. The minority ethnic groups feel that they have the right to possess the economic resources found in their areas and to have a greater participation in the decision making process in the country. With the creation of Benue and Taraba States in 1976, the two ethnic groups felt that states were created for them to exercise their political and economic influence, the former for Tiv while the latter was for the Jukun. This was the bedrock of the conflicts. It is the contention of this paper that good governance, especially accountability,

transparency, equity, and the provision of adequate security would restore confidence and inter-ethnic harmony . This will make Nigerians see themselves as Nigerians, pledging their loyalty towards the country and her corporate existence, rather than their ethnic groups. In so doing the spate of ethnic conflicts in Nigeria will be reduced to the barest minimum.

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