Communal Violence and Food Security in Africa

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Abstract: *This paper is an overview of the impact of communal violence on food security in Africa. The paper adopted the Marxist theory which stresses group interest and competition for resources as main causes on communal violence in the society. The paper argues that communal violence affects food security through limiting people's access to food, destruction of infrastructure for food production, cutting access to food supplies, physical destruction and plundering of crops, livestock and food reserves. Other impacts include displacement of labour and use of food as weapon of war. The paper concludes that communal violence directly and indirectly leads to food insecurity in Africa countries. The paper therefore recommends for research to know the causes of violence in order to effectively reduce it and policies that promote equity, justice and poverty and punishment for perpetrators of violence.*

I. Introduction

Communal conflicts (which also known as armed conflicts) have become common phenomena in Africa today. These conflicts mostly ethnic in nature have posed a great concern to all spheres of human endeavour. Communal violence has the propensity to directly and indirectly influence the socio-economic activities among communities in the warring camps. Osinubi and Osinubi (2006) assert that in countries of traditional stability, communal conflict is becoming an increasing factor. In Kenya, communal tensions related to multiparty elections resulting to 1,500 deaths between late 1991 and late 1993. Additional deaths had occurred in connection with the elections in 1997 including the post election recriminations against non-government voting areas in early January 1998. South Africa lost 14,000 people due to racial and communal violence which was part of the transition to majority rune between 1990 and 1994. Several other conflicts which have affected Africans are prominent. In Sudan civil conflict stretching back to four decades has pitted the Arab-Muslim North against the non-Arab Christian and animist south. The most current phase which began in 1993 resulted in the deaths of about one million people either directly or indirectly due to the war or starvation caused by the violence. Often in such conflict food deprivation is used as an instrument of the war. Because of the government control of the media and drawn out nature of the conflict, it is mostly forgotten by western society. More dramatic events occurred in Rwanda where Hutus staged a slaughter of Tutsis culminating to an estimated 300,000 deaths in the first half of 1994 and an additional 20,000 in the refugee camps of neighbouring countries where a total of 1.7 million people fled.

In Africa, which has most of its population residing in rural areas, communal violence or conflicts has serious implication of access and availability of food, since agriculture is the main preoccupation of rural population. The production of crops and rearing of livestock is the main economic activity of the people. Therefore communal conflicts have serious implication on food system. Often, warring communities or parties tactically resort to manipulation over access to food and livestock. Thus, food insecurity has become an effect of communal conflict (Messer, Cohen, 2004).

Communal conflict is correlated to food security and under most circumstances depresses production and income from cash crops and livestock. This reduction in production and income has serious implication on food security with the capacity to reduce coping capacity of those depending on food resources for their livelihood. According to the Food and Agricultural Organization (2004) communal violence costs Africa over $120 billion worth of agricultural production during the last third of the 20th century, given the importance of agricultural livelihood to overall economic wellbeing, especially in conflict prone areas of Africa. Not only has communal conflicts limit production of food, it has the propensity to deny people access to food and availability of food supply. According to the Food Research Policy Institute (2004) most conflicts and post conflict zones in sub-Saharan Africa are home to substantial numbers of food insecure people. In most cases, population in need of food only account, for small percentage of the total food insecure people. Hence, African countries are zones of high chronic food insecurity.

Communal conflicts involve groups with permanent or semi-permanent armed militias but do not involve the government. However, it can escalate to include government forces. Hendrix and Salehyan (2010)

insist that communal conflicts are common in the Sahel, the zone of transition between the Saharan desert and Savanna.

The thrust of this paper is to analyze the extent to which communal violence conflicts have affected food security in Africa, through drawing of analogy from other parts of some of the African countries.

II. Conceptual And Theoritical Framework

The Concept of Communal Violence:

Communal violence as a concept has been defined and conceptualized by plethora of scholars and researchers. According to Horowitz (2000) communal violence refers to the situation where violence is perpetrated across ethnic lines and victims are based on ethnic group's membership. This typically takes form of mutual aggression in which members of all involved ethnic groups perpetrate violence and also serve as its victims. To Horowitz communal violence may also be called ethnic violence. To Tadjoeddin (2002) communal violence may be defined as a violence that occurs between different communal groups. Groupings in the community based on religion, tribes, sect race and others. In this broad meaning, Varshney (2002) argue all communal violence are based on ascription (birth based) group identities including race, language, religion, tribe or caste therefore can be called ethnic conflict. According to this understanding, communal violence ranges from Muslim-Christian conflict in Northern Nigeria, Black and White conflict in United State and apartheid South-Africa, Anti-Chinese riots in Indonesia, Tiv-Jukun crisis in Nigeria and Shia-Sunni troubles in Pakistan.

Raleigh and Kniveton (2010) also conceptualized communal violence as a form of organized violence conducted between informal ethnic militias. Such conflicts are primarily over local issues and occur between traditional hostile parties. It exhibits spatial and temporal trends which is rooted ethnic competition, resource access and wealth acquisition. This violence overall can take various forms including pitched battles and attacks on civilians. In the conception of Kahl (2006) communal violence could be seen as a violence that involves groups with permanent or semi permanent armed militias that does not involve the government. However, communal violence can often escalate to include government forces when it is perceived that government is supporting tacitly or otherwise one of the communal groups at the expense of the other.

The above definitions and conceptualizations point to the fact that communal violence is a form of violence that is rooted in ethnic background of individuals and groups. It is based on indicators such as tribe, race, religion, sect, language etc. It also involves more or less permanent ethnic militias and sophisticated and local weapon in the destruction of life and property and revolves around competition for socio-economic space, political power, land, natural or mineral resources etc.

The concept of Food Security

The concept of food security has been seriously contended within the academic domain and that of the specialists within international organizations. According to World Food Forum (2001) food security refers to the people's right to define their own policies and strategies for sustainable production, distribution and consumption of food that guarantees the right to food for the entire population, on the basis of small and medium-sized production, respecting their own cultures and diversity of peasants, fishing and indigenous forms of agricultural production, marketing and management of rural areas in which women play a fundamental role.

In the conception of Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO) in 1996, food security is the situation when all people at all times have physical or economic access to sufficient safe and nutritious food to meet their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life. FAO states that food security depends more on socio-economic condition than on agro-climatic factors and on access to food rather than production or physical availability of food. This entails that food security is not all about the deficiencies in production techniques but access to food resources. This conceptualization is the basis of the opinion of FAO (2007) which states that:

> *FAO vision of world without hunger is the one in which most people are able by themselves*
> *to obtain the food they need for an active and healthy life and social safety nets ensure that*
> *those who have resources still get enough to eat.*

To Johnson (2009) food security is the situation which exists when all people at all time have affordable access to sufficient safe and nutritious food to meet their dietary needs and food preference for an active and healthy life. Mc Harry, Scott and Green (2002) have pointed that equitable access to food refers to both access to supply (availability) of food, and to the entitlement of food (i.e the resources financial and natural and human ability to obtain food). Food insecurity occurs when there is either unavailability and/or where there is lack of entitlement to food. Two basis forms of food security Mc Harry et al are:

(a) Transitory food insecurity: This refers to extreme cases of famine caused by war, flooding, drought, crop failure, pest and purchasing power of farming communities and market failures through high prices. Such problems can trigger production and subsistence food crises threatening a population's access to food.

(b)   Chronic food insecurity: Long term and deep noted insecurity is largely driven by endemic poverty. People are subjected to continual problem of poor diet through an inability to acquire their basic food requirement either because they are unable to buy it or produce it for themselves.

Food security is linked more to issues like poverty, low income, poor infrastructure, inequitable access to land, water, credit and rather than failure in the production techniques. It also includes conflict and violence that displaces rural and farming communities.

The Marxists Perspective

The Marxist theory has its roots from the works of Karl Mark and his friend Frederick Engels. The starting point for the analysis of the society is determined mainly by social production. That is what is produced, how it is produced and how the product is shared. The theory therefore insists that society is composed of contradictions and conflicts over scarce resources by the various competing groups. These contradictions are as a result of the competition and struggle for power and economic resources. This competition and struggle over resources have made conflict inevitable in the society. Marxist theory emphasizes interest rather than norms and values as been central in the discussion of conflict in society. This conflict is seen as normal aspect of society life rather man abnormal occurrence. Competition over resources is often the source of conflict. Three levels of theory are (a) society is composed of different groups that compete for resource (b) There is continual power struggle between social groups and they pursue their own interest. (c) Social groups will use their resources to their own advantage in pursuit of their goals.

The perspective therefore sees communal conflicts as resulting from the contradictions inherent in the course of material production. To understand communal conflicts, Magubane (1996) stressed the role of social structure and urges for special consideration to:

The material basis of the society, the nature of the social system, the political organization, the structure of social consciousness, the ideological and socio-psychological orientation of the members of the society, views of the ruling class and various social groups, and rivalry between various groupings within the ruling circles.

It is in the contention of the Marxists approach that communal conflicts should be examined and analyzed using historical materialism. To the Marxists ethnic formation is a historical entity which encompasses and penetrates all social formation including class structures.

It is therefore misleading to assume that communal conflicts operate independently. They operate alongside economic, political, religious variables.

Keen (1997) asserts that economic motives are primary factor behind warfare and violence. To him, economic goals are central and conflict may be highly effective way to pursue them. Drawing from above communal conflict is as the result of economic competition between ethnically or socially differentiated segments of working class or ethnically differentiated traders, customers or farmers. Horowitz (1998) asserts that elite competition and action of ethnic or group entrepreneur drive communal conflict. Elites manipulate ethnic identities in their quest for power through construction of ethnic conflict.

The conflict theory has been adopted for this study because of its recognition struggle by the various groups in society for political, economic and religious control. It is the competition and the struggle that breeds conflicts and violence.

THE EFFECTS OF COMMUNAL VIOLENCE OF FOOD SECURITY

Communal violence can have significant effect on food prices which limits people's access to food. Food And Organization-National Programme For Food Security (2009) assert that since 2000, rising food prices have contributed to increasing number of food prices have contributed to increasing number of food insecure people from 857 million to 102 billion in 2009. The organization argued that the rise in prices of food may not be unconnected to the persistent communal conflict and violence in developing countries especially Africa in general and Nigeria in particular.

Dreze and Sen (1989), O' Grada (2007) and United Nation (1993) confirm that communal conflict have been the dominant cause of famine in sub-Saharan African countries hit by crises such as Nigeria, Somalia, Ethiopia and Mozambique. UN (1993) argues that the ability to produce, trade and access food is often directly and indirectly affected as a result of violence. Messer Cohen and Marchione (2002) also affirmed that communal conflict crowds out normal economic activities such as food production and destroys the necessary infrastructure and cut off access to food supplies thereby subjecting people in such zones to high risk of food insecurity.

World Food Program (2004) has further identified the effect of communal conflict on food security. To WFP, communal conflict destroys land, water and social resources for food production and that thirty million people in more than 60 countries were displaced or had their livelihood destroyed by conflict every year. Food

and Agricultural Organization (2002) estimated losses of almost $52 billion in agricultural output through conflict in sub-Saharan Africa between 1970-1997, a figure equivalent of 75% of all official development resistance received by conflict affected countries. Estimated losses for all developing countries averaged $4.3 billion per year enough to have raised food intake of 330 million undernourished people to minimum required levels.

Displacement of people is one of the most direct effects of communal conflict on food security. According to FAO (2002), in 2001 there were more than 12 million refugees, 25million internally displaced people and an unknown number of people trapped in combat zones. Most of these people needed temporary food assistance until they can return to their homes or find new livelihoods. Contributing to meeting the food needs of refugees places an additional burden in recipient community where food security is already marginal often leading to acute food shortages. Messer et al (1998) have found that refugees fleeing fighting in northern Chad upset market in western Darfur during drought years (1983-1985) transforming that food shortage into famine.

The use of hunger as a weapon (food war) is also a consequence of communal conflict on food security it includes selective food distribution in favour population in pro-government areas, especially when government is tacitly or openly involved. This is implicated in the farmers of 1980's and 1990's in Africa and chronic under population and food insecurity in post conflict economies in Africa, Asia and Latin America. Stewart (1998) have argued that hunger is an important weapon used in conflict (communal inclusive) and has constituted 7% of one camp dying each week in Sudan from 1983-1984.

In sum, communal conflicts are enemies of food security. There is a well established correlation between the exposure of countries to communal conflicts and the deterioration and long term stagnation of their food security. The conflict disrupts food production through physical destruction and plundering of crops and livestock, harvest and food reserves. Communal conflicts also prevent and discourage farming and also interrupt the lives of transportation through which food exchanges and even humanitarians relief takes place. It destroys, farm capital, conscript young and able bodied males and females, taking them away from the farm work and suppresses income earnings occupation. The impact of communal violence on food security often last long after the violence has subsided because assets have been destroyed, people killed and maimed and populations displaced, still lovesome are landmines which later agricultural land, kill and cripple people and deter them from farming for years over decades after all violence has ceased.

III. Conclusion

This paper has analyzed that communal violence has both direct and indirect consequences on food security. It has been found to limit people's access to food through destruction of infrastructure necessary for food production, cutting off access to food supplies and ultimately leading to famine. Communal violence also leads to physical destruction and plundering of crops, and livestock, harvest and food reserves. Apart from this, it drives young people away from farming activities. Further, displacement of people creates acute food shortages in the receiving areas where they seek refuge. Lastly the use of food hunger as a weapon of war against anti-government population is also a source of food insecurity in conflict tone areas.

IV. Recommendation

- African government and world organizations should carryout compressive research to in order to unearth possible causes of conflict peculiar to each area so as to device best methods of solving them in order to improve food security in the region.
- There should be introduction of effective unemployment reduction cum job creation policies and laws that would engage the youth, boost food production, good affordable housing, equity, justice and fairness in all spheres of human endeavor.
- Government and international organizations should take meaningful actions to bring perpetrators of communal or ethnic violence to book. This will serve as deterrence to others who may potentially want to use ethnic or communal identities to achieve the socio-economic goals.
- The International Criminal Court has to be more aggressive in bring culprits who have engineered communal conflicts to book to serve as deterrence for potential perpetrators, not considering countries or world leaders that back them.

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