

Incessant Conflict and the Economic Development of Wukari and Takum Local Government Areas of Taraba State

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Abstract

This research work examines the impacts of incessant conflict on the economic development of Wukari and Takum Local Government Areas of Southern Taraba State, Nigeria. Different aspects of conflict were examined. These include ethnic, religious, and communal tensions. Conflicts are generally associated with effects on essential economic indicators like infrastructure, investment, agriculture, and human capital. The study adopted a descriptive research design using a qualitative approach in data collection. Data was collected through in-depth interviews from 16 informants, with 8 informants each from Wukari and Takum. Data collected were analysed thematically after transcription. Pluralist and elite theories were used as a theoretical framework for analysis. A thorough review of existing literature was carried out to offer insights into the mechanisms by which conflict impedes developmental efforts in Wukari and Takum. The findings show that engaging government and the local stakeholders, deployment of Security personnel, and rotational chieftaincy approved by the State House of Assembly were among the strategies adopted to curb incessant conflicts in the study areas. The study also reveals that conflict in Wukari and Takum Local Government Areas has affected the economic development of the localities.

Keywords: Incessant Conflict, Economic Development, Wukari and Takum LGA

Introduction

Conflicts in the Wukari and Takum Local Government Areas (LGAs) of Taraba State, Nigeria, have persisted for decades, rooted in deep-seated ethnic, religious, and communal tensions. These conflicts, especially between various ethnic groups within the localities, have been characterised by cycles of violence, displacement, and destruction, often triggered by disputes over land ownership, political representation, and traditional leadership structures (Anifowose, 1982; Igbadoo & Gbenga, 2024).

The nature of these crises has not only eroded social cohesion but has also severely hindered economic development in the region. Despite the region's abundant natural resources and agricultural potential, such as fertile land for crops like maize, yams, and rice, and favourable conditions for livestock and fishing, economic activities have been repeatedly disrupted by violence (Pycine News, 2024). Infrastructure such as roads, markets, and schools has been destroyed or made inaccessible, while insecurity has deterred both local and foreign investment (Gani, 2025). The outcome is a cycle of poverty, food insecurity, and underdevelopment that disproportionately affects rural households and vulnerable populations.

The economic impact of these conflicts is substantial and far-reaching. Studies indicate that recurrent violence in Wukari and Takum has led to the abandonment of farmlands, loss of livelihoods, and a decline in agricultural productivity (Igbadoo & Gbenga, 2024). Furthermore, the displacement of populations has put additional pressure on social services and hindered human capital development, particularly in education and healthcare (Uche, 2023). This paper aims to illuminate the complex relationship between conflict and economic development in Wukari and Takum LGAs. By combining theoretical frameworks such as pluralist and elite theories with empirical data from field interviews and secondary sources, the study provides a detailed understanding of how conflict obstructs development. It also examines the strategies employed by local stakeholders and government actors to reduce violence and foster stability. Ultimately, the paper seeks to contribute to the broader discourse on post-conflict reconstruction and sustainable development in Nigeria's conflict-prone regions.

Literature Review

Incessant Conflict

When disagreements or problems go on for a long time without ceasing, we say that there is continual conflict. Interpersonal, corporate, national, and international conflicts may arise, and they often stem from long-standing, intractable problems. The inability of the parties to resolve an ongoing disagreement with a permanent solution is what defines it as persistent. Negative outcomes, such as protracted violence, economic hardship, social instability, and psychological stress, might result from this kind of conflict (Kriesberg, 2007). People frequently cite instances of perpetual conflicts, such as long-standing territorial disputes between states or protracted civil wars (Miall, Ramsbotham, & Woodhouse, 2011).

As Awudu (2025) observed, as Boko Haram escalated and garnered national and international focus, Taraba State not only suffered the spread of its attacks and became a haven for displaced people from Adamawa, Borno, and Yobe, but also endured severe internal conflicts that shattered communities and livelihoods. Between 2010 and 2015, areas such as Wukari, Ibi, Donga, Takum, and neighbouring localities experienced repeated violent outbreaks that wrought extensive destruction. These clashes obliterated means of subsistence and forced once-thriving communities to empty out, displacing their inhabitants.

Economic Development

No single definition incorporates all of the different strands of economic development. Typically, economic development can be described in terms of objectives. These are most commonly described as the creation of jobs and wealth, and the improvement of quality of life. Economic development can also be described as a process that influences the growth and restructuring of an economy to enhance the economic well-being of a community. In the broadest sense, economic development encompasses three major areas:

- i. Policies that the government undertakes to meet broad economic objectives, including inflation control, high employment, and sustainable growth.
- ii. Policies and programs to provide services, including building highways, managing parks, and providing medical access to the disadvantaged.
- iii. Policies and programs explicitly directed at improving the business climate through specific efforts, business finance, marketing, neighbourhood development, business

retention and expansion, technology transfer, real estate development and others (Economic Development Reference Guide: www.iedconline.org).

Dudley (1969) specifically advanced work on development, where he raised questions in an attempt to define development. He therefore said that the question to ask about a country's development would be: What has been happening to poverty? What has been happening to unemployment? What has been happening to inequality? If all three of these have declined from a high level, then beyond doubt, this has been a period of development for the country concerned. If one or two of these central problems have been growing worse, especially if all three have, it would be strange to call "development", even if per capita income doubled. This applies, of course, to the future too. A "plan" which conveys no targets for reducing poverty, unemployment and inequality can hardly be considered a development.

The literature on conflict and economic development stresses the complex link between poverty and violence, drawing attention to the ways in which disputes may impede investment, social cohesiveness, and economic activity. Devastating physical infrastructure, disrupted markets, and displaced people all contribute to a drop in productivity and income levels, which in turn perpetuates the poverty cycle (Collier and Hoeffler, 2004). The displacement, relocation, and interruption of healthcare and education systems in conflict-affected regions also lead to a loss of human capital (Stewart, 2008). The decline in living standards and the dampening of long-term development possibilities are both caused by these issues.

Past research in the Wukari and Takum area has shown that the agricultural sector—the backbone of the local economy— is negatively impacted by ethnic tensions and farmer-herder disputes (Omotola, 2017). Rural populations rely on farming for their livelihoods, and when farmlands, livestock, and agricultural infrastructure are destroyed, it not only threatens food security but also decreases those livelihoods. Conflicts also make it harder to attract development initiatives and foreign assistance, and they discourage private investment (Obi, 2013). Because of this, the region's socioeconomic marginalization and cycles of poverty and underdevelopment are worsened.

Theoretical Framework

There are three major theories often used by political scientists and of recent Conflict Managers to explain conflict in any socio-political setting. These are: social class theory (Marxian), pluralist theory and elite theory. For this research work, the Pluralist and the Elite theories were used. These theories were developed in response to Marxian theory, which viewed conflict as the basic source of social evolution. Pluralist Conceptions of Political Power is a popular theory on how political power is distributed in the United States. From this perspective, there is no single ruling elite. The state is a neutral entity that solves conflicts between groups; no particular group controls the state (Lindblom 1982). According to pluralism, public opinion is the result of a combination of interests (Polsby 1960).

The actions of elected officials and state managers are reflective of public opinion and negotiations between numerous competing groups. All individuals can become politically organized and achieve their political interests (Polsby 1960). Individuals and groups cannot be involved in every issue. As a result, there are numerous different political groups with competing interests in the political process. This creates a low potential for unity among elites (Dahl 1958). Since political effectiveness requires a high potential for both control and unity, elites do not

have the power to dominate the political process (Dahl 1958). Pluralism studies political power by examining the individuals involved in the decision-making process. Pluralist scholars research specific political issues to determine who prevails in community decision-making (Polsby 1960).

By tracing the concrete decision-making process, pluralists examine the extent to which a power structure exists. On the other hand, Elite theory depicts that power flows not from the ownership of property but from political and bureaucratic organizations. The central argument of the theory lies in the affirmation that power configuration is basically the configuration of competing interest organized into groups. Major proponents of the theory are Mosca, Marvin and Pareto, among others. Mosca (1945) in differentiating between political systems, argued that many societies depend largely on two strata, those that rule and those that are prepared to be followers. To him, it is possible for families to be in an elite position for several generations, thereby controlling the affairs of things in the society. Marvin (1971) further pointed out that in any society, oligarchy exists as a few small sets of people dominating the many. He maintained that the elite group constitutes a very tiny percentage of the total population, but because of the political and economic powers, they control many members of the society.

Pareto (1937), for instance, in his work on elite divided society into two distinct groups: the elite and the masses. He asserts that the governing elite are dominated by the instinct for combinations, while the masses are dominated by the persistence of aggregates. This provides a stable situation since the masses are not likely to have enough initiative to challenge the rule of the elite. Any revolution which pretended to abolish the elite would end up simply replacing one set of elite with another.

Elites are necessary and inevitable in society. The high level of socio-political organization of the elites makes them highly necessary and needed for any large organisation to function. Elites are endowed with certain abilities or qualities, which enable them to exploit certain situations to their advantage. Of course, not all abilities lead to economic wealth or political power. But those who have most of the abilities which societies reward become the political elites. In specific terms, elites may exploit ethnic or sub-ethnic cleavages in cornering scarce, desirable socio-political and economic resources through the manipulation of the mostly uninformed masses.

However, the use of Elite theory has not been able to give a watertight explanation of the relationship that exists between the community and other communities. Critiques of the theory, like Seymour Lipset, Dye Thomas, Elmer Eric, etc., criticize the theory for not giving room for normative consideration due to the presumption of limited and peaceful competition among members of the elite, while citizens are only allowed with passive role in the society. It was also criticised for being scientific and mechanistic in its analysis of residential power. They also criticise the theory of overemphasis on controls by a few groups over the many. The critics also criticise the theory for undermining the role of the media and other institutions in creating awareness among the masses on trends of events globally that could reduce the elite's influence over the masses. The theory could operate in an oligarchical or monarchical community where the rights of the masses are undermined during leadership selection. It is on this note that the theory is used to explain how elites use their status to ignite a crisis in these localities, using the masses.

Methodology

This article is a qualitative research which administered some descriptive studies to seek the opinions of the informants on the phenomenon so as to generate adequate information for a viable theoretical framework (Sekeran and Bougie, 2013). The in-depth interview was duly conducted with 16 informants, with 8 informants each from Wukari and Takum. The researcher analyses the data thematically after transcribing it. This research tends to describe the state of each strategy for curbing the crisis in both Wukari and Takum. The researcher applied in-depth interviews to the local dwellers in Wukari and Takum and some academics at the Federal University, Wukari.

This was because of their experiences of such happenstance and intellectual prowess in crisis. The researcher interviewed the informants in Takum between June 2nd to June 5th, 2025, and Wukari informants were also interviewed from June 9th to June 12th, 2025. Creswell (1998) connote that, between five to twenty-five (5-25) informants should be interviewed in a qualitative research study. Baker and Edwards (2012) opined that the informants to be interviewed should be from twelve to twenty (12-20). This will enable the researcher to reach the saturation point in all the questions raised. And so, this study is within the above range (16 informants).

Thematic Data Presentation and Analysis

The research questions, along with the responses from the informants, are highlighted in this section; the discussion of the findings will follow later. The researchers asked the questions below and obtained the results as outlined.

1. **The strategies for curbing the crisis in Wukari and Takum:** In responding, the informants unilaterally respond that the government and the stakeholders are both trying to see how to minimize the crisis in Wukari and Takum, be it herders, chieftaincy, communal, land, etc. The Wukari informants agreed that with the deployment of Security personnel in Wukari, the crisis has been reduced to the barest minimum with the coming of the Governor Agbu Kefas administration. (Informants from the locality of Wukari and Members of academia via interview).

While the informants from Takum attest to the fact that the strategies for curbing crisis in that area, despite its shortcomings, include amongst other things the rotational chieftaincy approved by the State House of Assembly, tarring the road from Takum to Abako and the security apparatus in Takum and along the Takum-Wukari road. (Informants 1-8 from Members of the local dwellers in Takum via interview).

2. **The effectiveness of the strategies for curbing crisis in Wukari and Takum:** In this respect, five informants from Wukari attested that the security institutions were effective in discharging their duties despite the challenges that border them, like funding in terms of allowances. But they are still effective in dealing with the crisis (Informants 1-5, representing local dwellers, were interviewed). While the other three informants from the academics contravene the above and contend that the institutions are not effective in curbing the crisis due to the challenges of funds and lack of professional skills, among others (Informants 6-8 representing Members of Academics via Interview).

While in Takum, the absence of efficiency and fairness by the leaders appointed was based on nepotism, loyalty to the state, thereby triggering the crisis in that area. (Informants 1- 8: Members of locals via Interview).

3. **The challenges that hinder the strategies for curbing crisis:** In response to the question, the informants duly pointed out that the challenges or restraints that perverted the crisis in Wukari and Takum are a lack of adequate funding, political interference and judicial bottleneck. Paucity of funds has affected the security agents in discharging their basic duties, such as logistics. Though the main obstacles to these institutions are political interference and weak judicial response, and lack of a special court, as lamented by the informants (Informant, 1-16 from Locals of both Wukari/Takum and Members of Academics Interview).

Impact of Conflict on Economic Development

The influence of conflict on the economic development of Wukari and Takum is multifaceted, impacting several sectors and aspects of the local economy.

- i. **Infrastructure:** The persistent violence has adversely affected infrastructure development, as roads, bridges, schools, and healthcare facilities are frequently targeted or made inaccessible due to security issues. Insufficient basic infrastructure obstructs transportation networks, restricts access to essential services, and hampers trade and commerce, thereby limiting economic growth and integration with larger markets.
- ii. **Investment:** Since investors see Wukari and Takum as high risk and unstable, the current insecurity discourages both local and international investment in the area. A non-conducive business environment inhibits entrepreneurship and industrialization, resulting in a lack of essential capital, technology, and expertise necessary for sustainable development in the local economy.
- iii. **Displacement of Populations:** Economic growth in Wukari and Takum LGAs is significantly hampered by relocation brought on by conflict. Forced migration of communities disrupts social cohesion and results in the loss of livelihoods, especially among agrarian populations. Displaced individuals frequently encounter difficulties in obtaining essential services and employment opportunities, which intensifies poverty and inequality. Ojo (2018) indicates that extended displacement leads to the degradation of human capital and hinders progress toward sustainable development.
- iv. **Agriculture:** Agriculture serves as the main livelihood source for most of the population and is significantly affected by disruptions caused by conflict. Conflicts between farmers and herders, land disputes, and the destruction of crops and livestock diminish agricultural productivity and intensify food insecurity and poverty in rural households. The failure to utilize the agricultural potential of the region sustains reliance on subsistence farming and restricts income-generating opportunities for rural communities. Inter-ethnic conflicts, land disputes, and insecurity have hindered agricultural activities, resulting in reduced productivity and increased food insecurity (Adams, 2018). The displacement of farming communities and the destruction of farmlands have led to a loss of income and heightened reliance on external aid (Okafor, 2019). Additionally, Yakubu et al. (2019) emphasized the necessity for interventions that focus on agricultural rehabilitation and support services to rejuvenate the rural economy and improve food security in areas affected by conflict.

- v. **Human Capital:** The violence in Wukari and Takum hurts the development of human capital by impeding social cohesiveness, healthcare access, and educational achievement. Displacement, trauma, and the fragmentation of social networks hinder access to quality education and healthcare services, thereby compromising the well-being and productivity of the population. Ethno-religious tensions contribute to an environment characterized by fear and mistrust, which obstructs social cohesion and community resilience. Displacement, fatalities, and communal distrust have eroded community cohesion and obstructed collaborative economic advancement efforts (Okoli, 2018). Insecurity frequently hinders children's access to education, thereby sustaining a cycle of poverty and underdevelopment (Eze, 2020). Adebayo (2017) emphasizes the significance of investing in education, healthcare, and skills development initiatives to alleviate the negative impacts of conflict on human capital formation.
- vi. **Infrastructure Damage and Disruption of Business Activities:** Conflict prevalence has adversely affected infrastructure development and commercial activities in the region. Insecurity has resulted in damage to roads, bridges, markets, and other essential facilities, thereby obstructing the movement of goods and services (Idoko, 2020). This has discouraged potential investors and hindered local entrepreneurship, worsening poverty and unemployment rates (Ahmed, 2017).

The possible ways towards improving the strategies for Conflict Resolution and Economic Development in Wukari and Takum

Addressing the root causes of conflict and promoting peacebuilding initiatives are essential for realizing the economic potential of Wukari and Takum. Enhancing governance structures, improving security measures, and promoting inter-ethnic dialogue are essential for creating a favorable environment for investment and development (Ojo, 2021). Furthermore, investment in education, healthcare, and infrastructure rehabilitation can facilitate the reconstruction of social capital and promote economic growth (Ibrahim, 2019).

However, to build a Peace process, six phases as posited by the United States Institute of Peace in Umar and Gimba (2019) are to be considered. These phases are:

- i. **Security:** After a conflict, a state needs to ensure its citizens' safety from internal and external threats. There must be a level of security sufficient to allow the recovery of the economy and society. The state must re-establish the rule of law, provide an effective police force, protect its borders, carry out disarmament, safeguard the infrastructure, dismantle repressive government institutions, respond to emergencies, and suppress internal conflicts and armed rogue groups.
- ii. **Humanitarian Relief:** A state needs to provide its citizens with the basics needed for survival. Immediately after a conflict, thousands of people may be injured, become refugees, or otherwise unable to provide themselves and their families with food, water, medical treatment, shelter, and other living requirements. Also, the destruction of the infrastructure means that even people who are healthy and have remained in their homes may no longer have water, electricity, etc. Therefore, international relief organizations must be allowed to assist in resolving humanitarian and refugee crises until the government can re-establish basic services to its people.

- iii. **Good Governance:** A democratic system of governance must be created to provide security and provide responsive and responsible governance in an atmosphere of transparency and accountability.
- iv. **Infrastructural Provision:** Armed conflict destroys or disrupts the elements of a modern society, such as transportation systems (roads, bridges, railroads, airports, etc.), power supplies, water and wastewater treatment, telecommunications, and basic sanitation.
- v. **Economic Revival:** Economic reconstruction is necessary to ensure that people have jobs and can provide for their families, and the government must address the consequences of illegal or underground economic activities (black markets) as it re-establishes banks and other financial institutions.
- vi. **Social and Cultural Revival:** Schools, arts, medical, and religious organizations need to be re-established after a conflict. The social groups most affected by the conflict need help to re-establish their social and cultural institutions, and the means of bringing about reconciliation among competing groups will be important to achieving a lasting peace (www.usip.org in Umar & Gimba, 2019).
- vii. **Reintegration and Regeneration:** The state and other conflict management and prevention agencies must institute sustainable mechanisms that will bring about overall regional reintegration to a common national project. The American experience was quite demanding, though, but has also remained highly rewarding. Reintegration must radiate and generate confidence for all Nigerians to have a sense of belonging in every national project with a spirit of statesmanship (Nwachukwu, 2009 in Umar, & Gimba, 2019)

Conclusion

The economic growth of Taraba State, especially Wukari and Takum LGAs, has been negatively impacted by the crisis, and this effect cannot be overstated. Conflict leads to population displacement, infrastructure destruction, and loss of human capital, thereby undermining sustainable growth and prosperity in affected areas. Concerted efforts from government authorities, civil society organizations, and international partners can mitigate the adverse effects of conflict and facilitate inclusive and resilient economic development in Wukari and Takum Local Government Areas.

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