

## **Resource Based Conflicts and Political Instability in Africa: Major Trends, Challenges and Prospects**

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**Abstract:** *The paper critically examines the nature of conflicts in Africa which implicitly or explicitly have their basis from either natural or human resources. It tries to explain the political, economic and socio-cultural influence to the occurrence of such conflicts. By adopting the secondary methodology, findings show that, albeit Africa was regarded by the European explorers as a Dark Continent, but but even then, Africa had made them rich and affluent from her natural and human resources. This could be traced back to the trans-Atlantic slave trade, colonialism, and the concurrent neo-colonial economy. Africa (the virgin land) is rich in her natural resources such as petroleum, gas, gold, cocoa, cotton, rubber, groundnut, coffee, etc with a fertile land for agricultural and animal production, which also aid in boosting its industrial capacity, with a great number of labor force as human resources. The paper concludes that, incessant conflicts that are fueled and caused by resources may create vulnerability of national unity. It may antagonize others due to viewing them as resourceless, thereby causing resource based hostility, rivalry and antagonism. The paper recommends some socio-economic and militaristic strategies in dealing with cases of resource based conflicts in Africa, among other things.*

**Keywords:** *Africa; conflict; human; natural; political-instability; resources;*

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### **1. INTRODUCTION**

Africa is a continent which is vastly and naturally endowed with rich resources. These resources have been used to develop economies of the euro zone since hitherto the era of industrial revolution and the subsequent era of colonialism. Some of these resources have a great blessing for Africa, while some are seen as a curse. Why are such resources seen as a curse is that, they have not bring development to Africa, but depopulation, through violence, inter-ethnic, religious and communal conflicts. Millions have died as a result of conflicts in Africa, and many have been incapacitated.

The so called conflicts did not only occur among the Africans themselves, but even between Africans and the white colonialists. Starting from the days of slave trade when people were hunting for their fellow men (Africans) to be sold to the slave merchants, the whites aided this process by introducing guns and gun powder, which escalated the crisis. This trend was experienced in all areas of Africa. There were conflicts between Africans and the white colonialists in the process of land acquisition and ownership, which manifested itself in what can be called settler colonialism. This was experienced in Zimbabwe, South Africa, Mozambique, Angola, Namibia and some other parts of southern Africa.

Africans have been warring among themselves in the process of land ownership, resource control, rivers, lakes and even forests. Boundary disputes, oil wells and many more areas of resource advantage.

For Africa to develop with these potential resources, the paradox transpires within the continent, which involves political instability, underdevelopment and backwardness. It is based on this backdrop that the paper seeks to examine the causes of such conflicts, challenges and possible prospects.

## 2. MATERIAL AND METHOD

The methodology used in this research work is the secondary method of data collection, which involves the application of research materials like the text books, journals, periodicals, news papers, reports and others. This is also supported by a theoretical analogy. The theory adopted to explain resource based conflict is the conflict theory. The conflict theory as coined by Marx and later developed by Weber, was constructed on the premise that struggle for power and economic advantage opens a room for conflict in the society. They identified two classes of people, from which conflict may arise, which are the rich and the poor. But conflict theory has gone beyond this assertion in contemporary global conflict, as two tribes, ethnic groups, religions and many more groups of different interests are prone to conflict as they compete for political power, economic and social gains. [1]

## 3. CONCEPTUAL ANALOGY

### 3.1 The Concept of Conflict

Conflict is a concept that assumes a divergent definition. It is said to be a cultural behavior helping to explain disputes over seemingly similar substantive issues which can be handled so dissimilarly indifferent among citizens<sup>1</sup>. Conflict exists whenever incompatible activities occur and an action that is incompatible with another prevents obstruct interference or causes injuries to other groups.[2] These are conflicts that are directly or indirectly engendered as a result of the impediment of the necessity of sharing, acquiring, maintaining or preserving natural or human resources.[3] Resource based conflicts are interpreted by the bargaining school of conflict as a process of mirroring needs and values and effective resolution in the process of sharing the resources.[4] Failure to maintain an effective sharing formula of the resources, results into turbulent conflicts.

### 3.2 Political Instability

This concept connotes a process under which political upheaval and cataclysm is the order of the day. Political instability, profound illiteracy, high cost of living, low standard of living, poverty and growth without development.[5] The process of unstable political environment is a gradual one, but perpetual military coups and coup d'état, a violent change of a regime not through democratic principles, but rather, a rebellious mutiny or revolution which obstruct the political plans.[6]

The desire of man to conquer, dominate and subjugate, paves a room for difficulty in the process of resource allocation and distribution. In a pluralist society, however, such domination might not be reckoned with. Even in homogenous societies, domination of man by man is always condemnable because no any socio-economic formation embraces or welcomes repression, oppression, or deliberate dehumanization. The dominated party may infuriate and revolt against the dominating party, which would automatically bring about conflict, violence and even turbulent bloodshed. The political system might collapse and there by summoning another leadership. The new leadership must not be entirely considered legitimate or acceptable to the entire members of the political environment. This, however, may produce another political upheaval and instability which would in the long run produce total backwardness in the society.

## 4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### 4.1 The Nature of Resource Based Conflicts and Political Instability in Africa

It is axiomatic to argue that African conflicts are resource – oriented. To have few resources at the disposal of a colossal number of people is to direct the emergence of poverty, just as Ghandi of India put it. “Poverty is the worst form of violence.[7] Such conflicts have brought sufferings to African sons and daughters as clearly argued by Qureysha:

*No single factor has contributed more to the present socioeconomic problem in the continent than the scourge of conflicts within and between our countries. They have*

*brought about death and human sufferings, engendered hate and divided nations and families.[8]*

It is estimated that resource based conflicts in Africa have claimed over three (3) million lives with 160 million Africans living in countries in the throes of civil wear.[9] An historical excursion to East Africa will provide an illuminating picture of such conflicts. During the era of Idi Amin in Uganda, conflict had spreaded all over major states in South Africa. Due to the nature of Amin's avarice, artifice and macabre frivolities of his sadism, he tried to control all aspects of the state of Uganda, including the Ugandan resources and non-Ugandan resources, Confiscated from foreign business men who stayed in Uganda. This totalitarian and dictatorial, if not despotic nature of the regime of Idi Amin, had attracted protest and rebellion. It reached to the extent that Tanzania intervened in the conflict until Museveni regime came in the hey days of conflict in Kenya and Uganda itself.[10]

The Central African Republic is not unconnected with the scourge of conflict which manifested itself from resourceful background. The conflict between Hutus and Tutsis of Rwanda was instigated by an attempt to maintain a permanent dominating power which would ease resource domination within their territories. It was estimated that almost one million Africans lost their lives.

In Southern Africa as observed by sheriff Ghali, the push and pull syndrome is prevalent; hostility has caused the death of innocent souls and homes destroyed, which engendered poverty, hunger and starvation. The conflict between ANC and Boers for many decades had then destroyed the economy of South Africa.[11] It is still on such resource based conflicts as experienced in Africa that Sheriff Ghali observed inter alia:

*The present issue of Mozambique, Swaziland and Zimbabwe, particularly between Mugabe's and the Ndebele in Bulawayo on one hand, and between Zimbabweans and the white population on the other hand is creating a new dimension in African politics.[12]*

The people of southern Rhodesia popularly known as Zimbabwe are fighting their white colonial settlers who settled in their territories and occupied their land for agricultural purpose.

The Liberian conflict which lasted for decades has been seen as a great epitome of resource based conflict. The recent case study of Charles Taylor following the election of July 1997, where he intentionally chose to govern in the same manner which created turmoil between the Americo-Liberian "settler class" and the indigenous Liberian population.[13] He initiated the Tubman presidency and even created the ambiance of the office of the late President Tubman. Taylor's mission was to dominate the Mano River (resources) union countries (Guinea, Sierra-Leone and Liberia). The Mandingoes of Liberia declared war against Taylor, Guinea also waged war against Taylor. Sierra-Leone viewed Taylor as a threat,[14] by his attitude and mission to dominate the resources around Mano River union.

It is quite unequivocal that resource based conflicts sometimes begin as political, ethnic or religious conflict. But in Africa, political and ethnic conflicts are tantamount to resource based conflicts and this is primarily because those who wield political power also control the national resources. Fear of domination from a rival group or opposition parties may however, resort to conflicts. Ethnic rivalry and conflicts manifest themselves from a process of resource allocation and in the process of the struggle to have a sharing formula, of such resources. Some of the forgotten, but persistent African conflicts and their principal causes have been indicated in the table below:

**Table 1.1.** *Countries and principal causes for reverting to conflicts*

<b>Country</b>	<b>Cause for reverting to conflict</b>
Angola	Post-war poverty
Central African Republic	Post – war poverty
Eritrea	Food shortage
Great Lakes Region	Conflict, refugees
Guinea	Refugees

Liberia	Peace building deficit
Mauritania	Black population allegedly victims of genocide
Sierra Leone	Post war poverty
Somalia	State failure
Sudan	Ethnic and racial hatred
Uganda	Insurgency in the north
Zimbabwe	Economic collapse
Senegal	Insurgency in casamance
Ghana	Conflict in the north

Source: *The economists*, November 23<sup>rd</sup> – 28<sup>th</sup>, 2003 p. 46

Some of the obvious causes of resource based conflicts in Africa, especially in West Africa as identified by Kaye Whiteman may include chieftaincy disputes, land disputes, struggle over access to and distribution of resources such as gold, diamond and timber, political machinations and struggle for power, religious intolerance and poverty.[15]

In the area of casamance in Senegal, conflicts and hostility are manifested in the areas of resources. The area is about 25,350m<sup>2</sup> located in the southern part of Senegal, enclosed by the Gambia in the North, Guinea Conakry and Guinea Bissau in the South.[16] This area of Africa is blessed with agricultural resources both for subsistence and commercial purpose. It is in line with the above that Kaye Whiteman pointed out that:

*Its enormous agricultural wealth and forestry (rice, groundnut, millet, cotton, cashew, precious wood, palm oil, fruits) are some of the factors that have affected the politics of the region within Senegal, and on which a war economy developed and fuelled the conflict for more than twenty years.[17]*

Economic stagflation, social inequality and incongruity, non-payment of salary arrears for soldiers and public sector workers had resulted into a great conflict and political instability in the Central African Republic.[18] It was generally experienced in 1966 when the political terrain of the Central Africa Republic was touched by political crisis which jolted the country's national army by three successive mutinies. The first and second mutinies occurred in mid April and mid May 1996 respectively ending with a third army mutiny in November 1996.[19] But the most important aspect to note in our foregoing argument is that, these mutinies and conflicts are resource based. B.A. Adeyemi has confirmed that when he rightly argued:

*At the centered of this crisis was widespread public discontent over social and economic conditions of the country, which exacerbated by prolonged non-payment of salary arrears of soldiers and public sector workers.[20]*

Violence and conflict in Zimbabwe is not a racial expression per-say, but rather a sheer manifestation of resource based conflict. As reported by Mwesioka Baregs, the government of Zimbabwe maintained that the conflict was about land in at least three dimensions.[21]

The first dimension emphasizes the correction of historical injustices and the resulting imbalances, which reflects the restitution of land to its indigenous owners from whom it was forcefully confiscated and taken by Cecil Rhode's colonial invaders. The second dimension is a contingent and practical one based on generalized shortages of land and the rustling land hunger among the majority of Zimbabweans, who in the face of declining employment opportunities have, to resort to land to earn a livelihood. The third dimension is rooted in the experience of the period after independence under which the policy of willing seller willing buyer yielded no meaningful results.[22]

## 4.2 Factors that Influence Resource Based Conflicts in Africa

### Colonialism

This is an expansionist policy of foreign states to acquire territories outside their lands and introduce political, economic and socio-cultural domination. The colonialists through their policy

of divide and rule have partitioned and exploited Africa of her natural resources. It is in line with the above that Walter Rodney argues:

*Throughout the period that Africa has participated in the capitalist economy, two factors have brought about underdevelopment: in the first place, the wealth created by African labour and from African resources was grabbed by the capitalist countries of Europe; and in the second place restrictions were placed upon African capacity to make the maximum use of its economic potential which is what development is all about.[23]*

### **4.3 Slave Trade**

The trans-Atlantic slave trade of 17<sup>th</sup>, 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries have granted people of Africa origin to resort to any means for preventing the obnoxious trade of human beings. The slave trade seems to have prospered in Angola for the same reasons that it prospered throughout West Africa in the 16<sup>th</sup>, 17<sup>th</sup>, 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries.[24] Europeans offered goods which African leaders needed and for the most important of these goods firearms. No one knew how many slaves were transported from Africa to North and South America and Caribbean plantations – a rough approximation is 50,000,000 in three centuries.[25] What is known is the colossal amount of profits made by the Europeans which created the necessary investment capital for the industrial revolution.[26] Today, the ex-slaves in Europe and America are facing racial conflict, segregation and deprivation of human rights.

### **4.4 The Cold War**

In 1940's, there emerged another era in the history of global economic and political formations, where economic resources served as the impetus as well as the yardstick to vein a conflict which was basically ideological between the Western and Eastern blocks. Such conflict has gravitated African countries as well as other countries in Asia, Latin America and the Caribbean to develop a new ideology of non-alignment, which represented non-support to either of the blocks. Though, misleading, the movement was neither supporting capitalism nor socialism. With the collapse of the Soviet Union between Late 1980s and early 1990s, however, unipolar world emerged, with United States having the lead in political, economic, military and ideological capacity. Today, capitalist ideology has caused inequality in our African societies, the gap between rich and poor, the conflict between leaders and the led etc. It is in line with this that Mwalimu Julius K. Nyerere asserts:

*When governments themselves are weak or corrupt or both, who can intervene on behalf of the poor in our societies? When the political system gives the vote to the many and the economic system gives the bread to few, civil strife is almost inevitable; peace is a product of justice. They work for peace, who works for justice?[27]*

The issue of cultural – pluralism and resource allocation/control; conflict and political instability are more rampant in societies with cultural pluralism, which is heterogeneity or the existence of cleavages in terms of ethnicity, culture, language and even religion. Some of the African conflicts in areas like Cameroon, Nigeria, Libya Niger and Uganda are based on resources naturally endowed across the borders. But the difficulty becomes who to share and who objects the possession of a larger share or even the whole of the resources. In Nigeria, for example, resource allocation and control is the responsibility of the federal government acting centrally for the survival of the federalist structure. The conflict arises from the typology of the formula to be used (derivation, population or proportional formula?). The Niger Delta is claiming a special proportion to be given to them due to their oil richness. And Nigerian leadership which has always emanated from the North had refused that, albeit, a special amount is being paid to them for ecological damage. The conflict today has exacerbated, causing hijacking, kidnapping and killing of oil companies workers and Nigerian security officials. It is due to the above that Bisi Olaniyi captured the situation in the Niger Delta when she wrote:

*No one has so far been able to provide a concrete answer to why hostage taking is rampant and very successful in the Niger Delta in spite of the heavy presence of military personnel and the police. The worst scenario is when a soldier is disarmed and taken hostage.[28]*

Such resource based conflict has spreaded militancy cuts across all the nine states of the Niger Delta, but is more pronounced in Delta, Bayelsa and Rivers state.[29] Soldiers, police men, oil workers, expatriates and others are taken as hostages, while flow stations are seized and oil installations vandalized. Army and naval personnel, who are usually engaged by the multinational oil companies to guard their facilities, are regularly targeted by the militants.[30]

#### **4.5 The Challenges and prospect of Managing Resource based Conflicts in Africa**

The first challenge is the restitution or deployment of competent, honest and responsive leaders who are devoid of violence, of any kind and peace loving. To fail this challenge, however, is to exacerbate political rivalry and vendetta, which may culminate into genocide and massacre due to political instability.

Incessant conflicts that are fueled and caused by resources may create vulnerability of national unity. It may antagonize others due to viewing them as resourceless, thereby causing resource based hostility, rivalry and antagonism. The challenge, however, is to do away with such fragility of the national unity and ensure peace process and revolutionary measures and formulas in curbing such conflicts.

Ecological damages of Africa which are incurred due to resource exploration, especially in the Niger Delta of Nigeria. This is an environmental challenge to deal with the issues of sustainability and development. A polluted environment due to oil spillage, refuse dumping, contaminated water, solid waste etc. cannot produce a healthy environment, but rather, creates a drastic conflict between the natural environment and the human beings which may result into diseases, global warming, lack of good drinking water etc.

Perpetual conflicts within the continent may result into persistent destruction of the resources endowed by nature on the continent. The culminating result is shortages in the supply of that resource, which may also results into poverty and economic dislocation. The end of it is the emergence of imperialist nations offering foreign aid, debt to the victim nation, which may attract a titanic amount of interest for serving such debt.

Both the formal and informal institutions such as the executive, legislature, judiciary, the mass media, political parties, and the family, religious institutions must be deployed to curtail the degree of ethnic and religious intolerance. The spirit of ethnicity and tribalism induces an individual to fight in getting resources only for himself and those within his ethnic affiliation. The challenge, however, is to curtail ethnic, tribal and religious tendencies, because it can never be eradicated.

#### **5. CONCLUSION**

It is axiomatic to conclude that all African conflicts are directly or indirectly attached to resources. Consider the fear of poverty and economic collapse in Angola, Central African Republic, Eritrea, the Great Lakes Region, Guinea, Liberia, Mauritania, Sierra-Leone, Somalia, Sudan, Uganda, Zimbabwe, Senegal, Ghana, Niger, Nigeria, Congo etc. all these conflicts have a symbiotic relationship with resources. And failure to avail such conflicts, may lead to depopulation, hunger, perpetual hunger and poverty within the region, illiteracy and social voices.

#### **6. RECOMMENDATION**

In order to deal with the issue of resource based conflicts, the following strategies as recommended are essential:

One, Political Strategy: Politics as generally known is all about conflict resolution, reconciliation of differences and disputes. The political process may begin with the legislative political arm to have a clear picture of the conflict; be neutral and objective; then pass a sincere law or policy

which could resolve such conflict. The executive should implement the law, and institutions of the judiciary should adjudicate the law.

Two, Social and Economic Strategy: This strategy is the type that envisages justice and equal allocation of resources among all conflicting parties so as to avoid the claims of marginalization. The government should coordinate this process of peace with proper monitoring and evaluation

Three, Militaristic Strategy and Security enforcement: All conflicts are relative to time, space and the participants, so also the process of resolving the conflict is relative, depending on its magnitude. It may therefore require different methods of resolution. If such conflict has reached to the apex or to the extent of killing and turbulent breakdown of law and order, the security forces should be deployed to bring back law and order.

Four, Mediation and Dialogue: External bodies who are accepted by the conflicting parties can mediate in the process of peace to calm the situation.

Five, education and creation of awareness: awareness should be created about the impact of conflict on the society, and the gospel of peace be taught in schools and colleges, so as to enable the younger generation imbibe with the culture of peace.

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