

INSECURITY AND RETARDATION OF AGRICULTURAL PRODUCTION IN THE BENUE VALLEY: Implications for Nigerian Industrialization

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Abstract

The paper takes a historical look at the phenomena of crises and insecurity in the Benue Valley area of Nigeria. Using extant historical sources, it affirms the indispensable nexus between thriving agricultural production and successful industrialization. The evidence thrown up leads to the major conclusion that the persistent crisis and insecurity in the Benue valley area and the resultant massive disruption of agricultural activities poses a grave danger to Nigeria's quest for industrialization and sustainable development. Given the increasing prevalence of the crisis and insecurity situation in some other parts of Nigeria, the paper suggests, among others, greater attention to the problem by university scholars, stakeholders and policy makers in order to bring the country to the right course for inclusive growth and sustainable development.

Keywords: Insecurity; Retardation; Agricultural Production; Benue Valley; Implications; Nigerian Industrialisation

1.0 Introduction

Issues of development have, for quite some time, attracted the attention of the United Nations and its agencies. This, no doubt resulted from the serious danger posed by poverty to humanity generally and the more vulnerable sections of the world particularly. The poverty situation of the world, as presented by the World Bank (www.WorldBank.org) looks really gloomy. For instance, between 657-676 million of world population were estimated to live in extreme poverty in 2022, surviving on less than 1.90 dollars a day. More than half of the world's extreme poor live in Sub-Saharan Africa. Nigeria is among the five countries with the highest number of extreme poor, the others being India, Democratic Republic of Congo, Ethiopia and Bangladesh. More than 88 million, out of over 224 million (www.worldometers.info) estimated population of Nigeria are living in extreme poverty. It is against this kind of negative background that we attempt to examine the crisis situation in the Benue Valley, focusing specifically on its impact on Nigeria's quest for industrialization. To achieve this aim, the paper attempts a clarification of certain concepts to stimulate a profound understanding of the phenomena under consideration. It then discusses the geography of the Benue Benue Valley, complementary role of agriculture to industrialization, taxonomy of the crises in the Benue Valley, retardative effects of insecurity on agriculture, proposals on the way forward and the concluding thoughts.

2.0 Conceptual Clarifications

Concepts attracting clarifications here are industrialization, agriculture and insecurity. Industrialization on the one hand, is a process by which an economy moves from primarily agrarian production to a mass produced, technologically advanced goods and services. Industrialization is characterized by a shift from rural to urban labour and increased standard of living. Industrialization is believed to be the *sine-qua-non* for raising a country's standard of living. In historical terms industrialization involves the expansion of the secondary sector in an economy, hitherto dominated by the activities of the primary sector. To be more specific, industrialization is defined as:

The process of social and economic change that transforms a human group from a pre-industrial (or traditional) society into an industrial one. It is part of a wider modernization process, where social change and economic development are closely related with technological innovations, particularly with the development of large-scale energy.... It is the extensive organization of an economy for the purpose of manufacturing (Yio, 214:42).

In 1063 The United Nations Committee for Industrial Development also defined industrialization with a lot of premium also placed on manufacturing as a critical variable of the process. According to the committee:

Industrialization is the process of economic development in which the growing part of the natural resources is mobilized to develop a technically up-to-date, diversified economic structure characterized by a dynamic manufacturing sector having and producing means of production and consumer goods and capable of assuring a high rate of growth for the economy as a whole and of achieving economic and social progress. (Tyangunenko, 1966:7)

From the foregoing, industrialization is the process of growth of large scale machine production. It is also defined as the process of setting up such organizations, especially the introduction of manufacturing industries in countries, state or regions where people are engage mainly in agricultural activities (Clark, 1988:201). Once industrialization is achieved, it is expected that the per-capita income would rise and productivity levels would also increase with a corresponding increase in employment and drastic reduction in poverty as well as inequality. The process also includes movement from rural to urban areas and a shift from home to factory production (Yio, 2014:42). Increased mechanization in agriculture generally leads to increased agricultural productivity and enough food for large urban population. Agricultural productivity growth is therefore necessary for modern industrial growth (Yio, 2014: 42). Arising from the foregoing, some of the following features define an industrialization space:

- i. The transformation of natural resources into finished products.
- ii. The mechanization of the production process.
- iii. The diversification of the economy characterized by a dynamic manufacturing sector.
- iv. It is also characterized by high technological innovations.
- v. Expected increase in per capita income and rise in productivity levels.
- vi. Rural-urban movement and shift from home to factory production.
- vii. Increase in food production and enough food for the large urban population.
- viii. Increase in employment opportunities and drastic reduction in poverty (Ukase, 2016: 557-558).

Agriculture on the other hand, is the art and science of growing plants and other crops and raising animals for food, other human needs or economic gains (<https://www.cropsreview.com>). Agriculture is synonymous to farming and its practice is based on a body of knowledge (Science) and requires skills (Arts). Agriculture usually refers to the activities, though, it is also observed in certain species of ant, termites and *ambrosia* beetle (Ulrich, 2002:12, Ityonzughul, 2019:50). To practice agriculture means to use the natural resources to 'produce commodities which maintain life including food, fibre, forest products, horticultural crops and their related services' (Chantrell, 2002:50). Related to the above definition, agriculture is conceived as the the production of food, fibre, feed and other goods by the systematic growing and harvesting of plants and animals (Akinboyo, 2008:36). It is the science of making use of land to raise plants and animals. It is the simplification of nature's foog webs and rechanneling of energy for human and plant (Akinboyo, 2008:36, Ityonzughul, 2019:50). Agriculture, embraces all the processes that are pulled together using the factors of production such as land, labour and capital in order to produce the food requirement of man. According to Ojo (2009) in its widest sense, the agricultural sector consists of agricultural crops, livestock, and fishery and forestry sub-sectors. Agriculture, here, involves the production of crops on land, the keeping of livestock of various kinds, fishery production and the establishment and maintenance of forests. It, therefore, does not go beyond the production and maintenance of the above products.

Insecurity can only be better understood in contradistinction to security. Security is understood to mean a state of feeling happy and safe from danger or worry. This applies to individuals, communities and nation states. Insecurity on the other hand, therefore, smacks of vulnerability to harm and loss of life, property or livelihood. While security implies the feeling and sense of safety, being safeguarded and protected, insecurity implies exposure to danger and harm which leads to anxiety, fearfulness and misery.

3.0 The Benue Valley Scenario

Benue Valley refers to the Benue River basin of about 800km long and 130-159km wide (Najime and Gundu 2011). The area is made up of undulating plains situated within the savannah vegetation zone. Its climate is characterized by adequate rainfall and well-marked dry and wet seasons. The area is dominated by deep loamy soils with dark colours, high humus and nitrogen content and is very high in fertility. The fertile soils and the transitory nature of the vegetation allowed for production of both root crops and grains. (Yams, potatoes, cassava, millet, guinea corn, maize, etc.) (Varvar, 2008). Agriculture has always been and still remains the major occupation of the people. Here, the percentage of the population involved in agriculture is higher than the 70 percent estimated for the country. Agriculture in the Benue Valley is almost wholly practiced through peasant production in the rural areas.

The Benue Valley area has been a melting pot for ethnic groups from the earliest times. Numerous ethnic groups lay claim to this area as their ancestral homes. These include the Jukun, Kuteb, Chamba, Tiv, Idoma, Arago and Gommai, among many others. In recent times, the central Nigeria area, the lower Benue inclusive, has become a found destination for migrant populations from areas affected by increasing desertification from the far north of the country (Onoja, 2016). These recent migrations have a lot to do with the pervasive conflicts that have engulfed the Benue Valley area.

4.0 Complementary Role of Agriculture to Industrialization

Industrialization plays a vital role in the development of a country's economy. Industrialization has the capacity for guaranteeing wealth and providing mass employment. It is essentially through industrialization that Nigeria can achieve that kind of sustained development as envisaged by the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals.

Table 1 : United Nations Sustainable Development Goals: Agenda 2030	
GOAL 1: No Poverty	GOAL 10: Reduced Inequality
GOAL 2: Zero Hunger	GOAL 11: Sustainable Cities and Communities
GOAL 3: Good Health and Well-being	GOAL 12: Responsible Consumption and Production
GOAL 4: Quality Education	GOAL 13: Climate Action
GOAL 5: Gender Equality	GOAL 14: Life Below Water
GOAL 6: Clean Water and Sanitation	GOAL 15: Life on Land
GOAL 7: Affordable and Clean Energy	GOAL 16: Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions
GOAL 8: Decent Work and Economic Growth	GOAL 17: Partnerships for the Goals
GOAL 9: Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure	
Source: <i>United Nations Transforming Our World: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development</i> A/RES/70/1; sustainabledevelopment.un.org	

Agriculture has the potential for providing food and raw materials needed by the industrial sector. Without food and raw materials, industrializations cannot progress. The larger population of Nigerians engaged in agriculture is a ready market for industrial goods. Production linkages develop from the interdependence between agriculture and industry through the use of inputs. While industry provides tools, vehicles, fertilizers, etc, agriculture provides raw materials. For the industrialization process to fully mature in Nigeria, it necessarily needs the full compliments of agriculture, just as agriculture also needs the complements of industry to fully flourish. The experience of the first industrial nation, Britain and others that followed, clearly attests to the indispensable role of agriculture in industrialization.

In Nigeria, this imperative is even more emphasized as over 70% of Nigeria's population is involved in agriculture, monopolizing the prospects for the supply of the capital necessary for industrialization. Due to the dominance of peasant production in Nigerian agriculture (Varvar, 2008), a determined focus on the improvement of rural agriculture will translate into rural development with tremendous impact on the industrialization process.

5.0 Crises in the Benue Valley: Taxonomy

The Benue Valley with its abundant natural endowments accommodated large numbers of ethnic groups who utilized the land, water and other resources with minimal conflicts in the pre-colonial period. With the advent of colonialism and the introduction of the colonial economy, there resulted

pressure on land resources. This generated tensions and even crisis leading to internal migrations (Varvar, 2008). The British colonialists themselves; in their “Indirect Rule” policy, adopted "strategy of inducing ethnic disparity and conflict as an effective tool of domination and resource exploitation" (Gatawa 2017).

Since the colonial period and with the increasing population, conflicts and the crisis they generate has been on the increase. At present crisis has become a permanent feature of the Benue Valley area to the point that it would not be very useful to attempt a census of the various crises that occurred in the area over the historic period. What would be more rewarding would be an attempt at typological presentation of the various crises as below:

First and foremost is inter-ethnic crisis; the numerous ethnic groups in the Benue Valley have had a long history of clashes among themselves. The major conflicts have been the ones between the Tiv and the Jukun in 1990-1993 and 2001-2002. Outside these major confrontations, the Tiv-Jukun crisis has remained protracted and continues to occur in isolated incidents even during peace periods. There has also been lesser skirmishes between the Kuteb and Jukun/Chamba in 1998 (Gaya, 2006; Nyitse, 2018) and between Odugbo and the Mbakpa in 1964-1965 (Obeya, 2018).

Land disputes; contests for land in the Benue Valley has had a history of degenerating into crises situations between ethnic groups, communities and families (Ahom, 2018). Land should not be seen as a narrow resources needed for farming by farmers, grazing by grazers, or building by those who wants to erect structures. These are important uses to which land is utilized. Besides, land owner is a statement about which group was the first to arrive and permanently settle in a place, and therefore, an “indigene” or native; and who arrived later and is as such a “settler”. For instance, the bulk of the conflicts involving the Tiv in Wukari and other parts of Taraba State, as well as southern Nasarawa State and Southern Plateau State are over the ownership of land with a wilder implication, that of territoriality and jurisdictionality. The owners of the territory, based on the local assumptions, are expected to exercise control over the political resources and administration of the land (Best, 2006). In the course of contestations and conflict over land agricultural produce are destroyed thereby affecting industrial activities in the study area and Nigeria on a broader perspective.

Relatedly, Chieftaincy disputes are found to have generated a lot of crises among the Tiv (Nyitse, 2013, Ahom, 2018) and the Idoma (Okpeh, 2005, Adole, 2018). The “indigene” normally resists any attempts to grant independent chieftaincy institution to “non-indigenes”, or sometimes to even include them in the existing ones. The politics of traditional administration manifests in the form of chieftdom, paramount chiefs, creation of new districts, district headships, village headship, inclusion in existing traditional councils, creation of new ones, etc. The persons or communities, who presumably own a territory, a land, or a place, are the assumed traditional rulers to such place and become custodians of the culture of the place and its people. The traditions, customs and rites flow from land ownership. Thus, the Emir of Kano is Hausa/ Fulani because his people own the land. The Ooni of Ife is Yoruba because the Yoruba own the land. The Obi of Onitsha is Igbo because the Igbo people own the land there. This principle institutionalizes the exclusion of groups who have lived in a place long enough to be part of these traditional systems, but cannot be, simply because they do not “own” the land. The case of the Tiv in Nasarawa, Taraba, and Plateau States is an illustration of this argument. In all cases, they have large populations and seek inclusion in the traditional system for

different reasons. However, they meet resistance from the existing structures.

This dimension of politics is a key source of conflict in the Benue valley. The experience of the Tiv who are demanding for traditional political rights and inclusion in Nasarawa, Taraba and Plateau States is a graphic illustration. The Tiv in Wukari have asked to be included in the Wukari Traditional Council because they are residents of the area, they pay tax, they need security, etc. (Best et. al., 1990). The rejection of these demands by the 'indigenes' only deepens the grievances of the Tiv. Sometimes, the 'settlers' resort to affirmative action to announce their presence, to the irritation of the 'indigenes'. A case in point was the chief-like 'triumphant procession' staged by Manu Uva Vaase into Wukari in 1954. This event created deep perceptions of threat in the Jukun who believed that the stool of the Aku Uka was being eyed by the Tiv in Wukari (Best et. al., 1999). Agricultural activities in these areas are also truncated and industrial activities are deeply affected because of lack of raw materials to feed the industries.

The Taroh have the same problem in Wase, where their demands for inclusion in the Wase Traditional Council have been rebuffed by the emirate authorities on account of their being immigrants from their traditional centre of Language. They have resorted to demanding for a Taroh independent chiefdom in Wase LGA. This is also the experience of the Jukun people of Wase, who are demanding for a separate Jukum chiefdom, a demand that even though the emirate authorities are not excited about, are more tolerant of than the Taroh demand. These demands, all emanating from history and the land question, have been key causes of conflict in the area.

Political and citizenship crisis; some of the crises in the Benue Valley are found to have been politically motivated. Some were generated to achieve political goals. The Tiv-Jukun crises of 1990-1993 and 2001-2002 were linked to a deliberate aim of displacing populations for political gains (Avav & Myegba, 1992, Hagher, 2002). The settler phenomenon in the Benue Valley has generated a lot of crises. The crisis involving the Tiv in Taraba and Nasarawa states has been interpreted as struggles for citizenship and indigenship rights in the respective areas (Avav & Myegba, 1992, Hagher, 2002, Varvar, 2008, Alubo, 2008).

Farmers/herders crisis, banditry, kidnapping and military rivalries; these have become very notorious in the recent past, leading to loss of thousands of lives, destruction of property worth hundreds of millions of naira and displacement of large scale populations (Varvar, 2017, Audu and Dangusau, 2018). The activities of armed bandits and local militia who engage in wanton kidnapping, looting and willful destruction of properties has created a terrible situation of insecurity in the Benue Valley area. These phenomena are still on going on a very large scale and evidence for it currently abounds on electronic, print and social media.

6.0 Retardative Effects of Insecurity on Agriculture

In looking at the effects of insecurity on agriculture in the Benue Valley, we should start from the premise that colonialism bequeathed a structural dependent economy on Nigeria without industrialization. We should also note that the imperative for agriculture in the journey to industrialization and economic development was long realized and governments, since the first republic, have always put forward successive agricultural programmes which were largely characterized by failure due to factors that can't be discussed here. The present phenomenon of

insecurity in the Benue Valley and elsewhere has brought about a new dimension to the problem with the following negative effects:

Loss of farming populations; due to the diverse nature and the fact that the crises are still ongoing, the exact number of people killed cannot be established but it runs in hundreds of thousands (Wegh, 2017). These hands are a loss to agricultural production.

Table 2: Statistics of Killings, displacement and valued property lost in 2014

S/No	LGA	Numbers of Persons Killed	Number of persons displaced	Value of property
1.	Guma	142	6544	128,246, 220.00
2.	Gwer-East	15	253	53,226,541.00
3.	Gwer-West	168	4543	592,043,493.00
4.	Katsina-Ala	20	1679	4,066,003,560.00
5.	Kwande	+	3199	132,523,130.00
6.	Logo	54	4088	9,631,291,525.00
7.	Makurdi	484	3018	16,884, 800.00
	Total	883	23324	31,488,134,469.00

Source: Mzough U Tiv (MUT), May 2016.

Table 3: Statistics of Killings, Displacement and Valued Property lost in 2015 and 2016

S/No	LGA	Numbers of Persons Killed	Number of persons displaced	Value of property
1.	Buruku	28	6650	8,335,664,000.00
2.	Logo	58	+	+
3.	Tarka	15	+	+
4.	Ukum	+	+	+
	Total	101+	6650+	8,335,664,000.00

Source: Mzough U Tiv (MUT), May 2016.

Table 2 and 3 above shows that within the period of three years (2014-2017) the Tiv have lost over 1,000 persons killed by herdsmen, over 294,974 persons were internally displaced (excluding figures for Logo, Tarka and Ukum LGA that were unavailable), and N39,823, 789,469 = (again excluding estimated losses from Logo, Tarka and Ukum LGA not yet available). Some districts in these LGAs were occupied by the marauding herdsmen. The local crop farmers have been displaced from their farm land and are helpless.⁴⁷ Food crop production in some of these areas has stopped and the local communities made dependent.

Disruption of Agricultural Activities; hundreds of thousands of agricultural populations were displaced. Even for those not displaced, agriculture becomes a very risky enterprise as succinctly put by Yawe (2018): "Farming activities, the major occupation of these rural folks has become a highly risky endeavor. If you are caught on the farm, it could be the end of your life".

Destruction and Looting of Farm Products; agricultural output form a very important target during the crises situations. Ahom (2018), with respect to Nyiev-Uyoo intra-ethnic conflicts says: “All yam, cassava, rice fields and plantation crops like citrus were all uprooted”. This high level of destruction, looting and loss of agricultural products has always been characteristic of the crises situations.

Impoverishment of the Farmers; the general insecurity in the Benue Valley and its attendant effects has led to serious impoverishment of farmers in the area. This has come about not only through the destruction and looting of farm products as revealed above, but also through the killing of rural markets by activities of bandits and kidnappers.

Agriculture-Industry Link Disrupted; with the high level of insecurity in the Benue Valley, the expected raw materials and food for industries and urban populations respectively are no longer available in the required quantities. Taken at the level of the country, Nigeria loses about USD 14 billion per annum to the herder-farmer crisis alone (Babatunde Afolabi, 2019). With loses from other crises situations, the total magnitude of loses can only be imagined.

7.0 Proposing the Way forward

The most important question to ask in view of the above glaring evidence is, can Nigeria achieve the goal of industrialization with the monumental crisis in the agricultural sector? The answer, obviously, is no. This calls for useful suggestions of strategies that can take the country out of this near abysmal situation. These are offered in the recommendations below. The recommendations are targeted at these two main directions: universities and scholars as well as governments. It is expected that with the right attitude and correct policies by these bodies, the problem can be ameliorated if not eliminated. There is need for Universities and Scholars to direct attention to sponsorship and conduct of studies that focus on the rural areas generally and the crisis situation in particular. A scholarly attention on the phenomenon will be important in many ways. Firstly, such studies have the capacity for clearly indentifying the various causes of the crises in the respective areas. This would be an important first step towards the management and eventual resolution of the problem. Secondly, the negative effects of the crises on the affected areas and particularly on the country's development efforts would be clearly revealed. Such knowledge is extremely necessary in the attempt at fashioning strategies for the reduction of and possible eradication of the problem.

Thirdly, such scholarly attention to the problem would consequently attract the attention of governments, stakeholders and development partners to the findings of the studies and their possible implementation with effective results.

The evidence presented indicates absence of governance in the rural areas, leaving the field for almost total domination by war lords, bandits, kidnappers, etc. Governments at all levels, federal, state and local should live up to their own responsibilities. The presence of governments must be felt in the affected areas in all ramifications. Governments should take seriously findings from scholarly studies of the crisis situations and study the recommendations carefully with a view to implementing them.

8.0 Conclusion

The piece centred on the disruptive impact of crisis on the agricultural sector and its implications on the quest for Nigeria's industrialization. This study attempted a conceptualization of agriculture, industrialization and insecurity. Besides, it examined the complementary role of agriculture and industrialization. It discussed taxonomy of the crises in the Benue Valley. The retardative effects of insecurity on agriculture in the study area have been brought under consideration. The major conclusion is that Nigeria cannot industrialize in the midst of ongoing massive dislocation in the agricultural sector. It suggests greater involvement of universities and scholars in studying the spate of crises in the rural areas and calls on governments at all levels to live up to their responsibilities.

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