

# International Journal of Arts and Humanities (IJAH)

## Ethiopia

Vol. 8 (4), S/No 31, SEPTEMBER, 2019: 98-106  
ISSN: 2225-8590 (Print) ISSN 2227-5452 (Online)  
DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.4314/ijah.v8i4.9>

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### **The Environment, Peace and Conflict in Nigeria: A Theoretical Foundation of Linkage Analysis, 1956-2000**

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#### **Abstract**

Environment, peace and conflict are inseparable phenomena in Nigeria's historical development. Over the years, environmental problems have taken centre stage in Nigerian history. Sometimes, it leads to peace while at other times contributes to conflict outbreak in Nigeria. However, scholars and practitioners of environmental studies have always studied environment and conflict in isolation of peace thereby neglecting how environmental factors contribute to peace building. To this extent, this paper interrogates the link between environment, peace, and conflict in Nigeria. The argument of the paper is that most conflicts that have occurred in Nigeria occurred as a result of environmental negligence. This paper adopted linkage theory as a theoretical framework of analysis. The paper concluded that environmental negligence contributes to conflict outbreak and retards peaceful coexistence.

**Key Words:** Environment, Peace, Conflict, Nigeria, Linkage

#### **Introduction**

The debate on the relationship between Environment, peace and conflict is a complex one. This is because the question that is usually foremost in mind is whether there is a link between the environment, peace and conflict in Nigeria? However, scholars have focused on how the relationship between the environment-defined as the ecosystem-the pursuit of peace and various conflicts found not only in Nigeria but also on the globe constitute human security threats. To that extent, the study will according to Bakut (2007, p. 234) introduce the previous forces which constitute 'older forms' of threat to peace and security in the world and secondly, introduces the environment and how it constitutes a new form of threat to peace and security. Similarly, the focus of this study is to extrapolate the following objectives which invariably form the criteria for achieving lasting peace in Nigeria and Africa at large.

These objectives include:

- i. To examine the older forms of threat to peace and security in Nigeria as postulated by Bakut tswah Bakut.

- ii. To find out how the Environment constitute threat to peace and security in Nigeria.
- iii. To investigate the dangers of environmental degradation to humanity.
- iv. To ascertain how the politics of the environment leads to the pursuit of socio-economic interests in Nigeria.
- v. To evaluate the link between the environment and conflict in Nigeria.

**Peace;** to clearly understand this discussion, a conceptual definition of what constitute peace becomes imperative not necessarily because, it needs to be conceptualized but because it will guide our analysis on how environment (ecosystem) as a threat to peace leads to conflict in Nigeria. To this extent, peace assumes to be elastic and defiles every straitjacket definition or meaning. This is because as scholars with various orientations exist so as their perceptions to peace varied. By this, peace as a concept is primarily concerned with the creation and the maintenance of a just order in the society (Howard, 1987). Peace has been divided into six different meanings by Miall (2000) as including:

- i. The absence of war (absence of direct violence)
- ii. Just and development (absence of Structural violence)
- iii. Respect and tolerance between people
- iv. Gaia (harmony or balance in, and with, the ecosystem-ecosphere)
- v. Tranquillity or inner peace (spiritual peace) and
- vi. ‘Wholeness’ and ‘making whole’ (being complete) (Miall, 2000).

In fact, another relevant definition of peace is what the Norwegian peace theorist, John Galtung (1990 and 1996) classified as ‘negative’ and ‘positive’ aspect of peace. By negative peace, it means that the peace in existence includes only the absence of direct violence, war, fear and conflict at individual, national, regional and international levels. On the other hand, when peace is said to be “positive”, it means that the peace in existence relates to the above discussion which includes the absence of unjust structures, unequal relations, justice and inner peace at individual level. This is however, conceived to be a complete or the real peace since it includes the absence of war (direct violence) and absence of unjust structures (indirect violence). For Ibeanu (2007), peace can be viewed from the instrumentalist-functionalist, philosophical, sociological and political interpretations (p. 4). From the instrumentalist interpretation, peace is a means to an end. In this sense, the absence of war serves the end of social progress and development.

On the other hand, in the functionalist interpretation, peace is seen from the angle as playing a social function of other social structures and institutions. In other words, peace can be conceptualized as having social functions of integration and order. In the philosophical view point, peace is seen as natural, original, God-given state of human existence. In this way, peace is the pre-corruption state of man in society that remains as God established it. In fact, peace from this philosophical standpoint, is a state of perfection, an earthly expression of God’s kingdom that is yet uncorrupted. As a sociological concept, peace refers to a condition of harmony in which there is no social antagonism. In other words, peace is a condition in which there is no social conflict and individuals and groups are able to meet their needs and expectations. While politically, peace is a condition that makes justice possible. It entails political order that is, the institutionalization of political structures. In this sense, institutionalization means that political structures acquire values and stability. Therefore, to

create peace means that politics must be mediated by stable structures and secular culture. Its implication means that the latter ensures that citizens become more participant and political values like tolerance, bargaining and negotiation are made the norm. By this, it further reveals that citizens also become rational and evaluative when dealing with political issues since as a political order, peace entails that government minimally employs the coercive apparatuses of the state such as the armed forces and police, in dealing with the citizens usually because there is no threat to the interests of the ruling class by the underprivileged classes.

Generally, a common consensus among scholars is that peace is godly and in that it relates to tranquillity and openness to tolerate wrong deed hence, Bakut (2007, p. 236) opined that every society in Africa has the concept of peace and also, promotes a culture of peace. In this, it is expected that plural societies like Nigeria, whether Islam, Christianity or traditional religion is endowed to pursue religious programmes that will promote peace in the country. This will dramatically reduce the religious conflicts between or among religious worshippers in order to pave way to harness socio-economic development needed to make Nigeria one of the leading economies in the world. By this, religious programmes and as well other actions that threaten peace are considered factors to conflict hence conflict is often conceived as an opposite of peace.

**Conflict;** as already stated above, a common trend among scholars and students is to conceive conflict as an opposite of peace. However, conflict exists side by side with peace (meaning that peace still exists even when there is conflict). Meanwhile, conflict is said to be intrinsic and pervasive in nature. This shows that conflict exists in all spheres of human endeavour. In Africa, conflict has become a reoccurring phenomenon arising from weak state institutions and political will to foster strong economic development. By this, Rice and Patrick (2008, p. 5) maintains that weak states are those countries that lack the capacity and/or will to foster an environment conducive to sustainable economic growth; to establish and maintain legitimate, transparent and accountable political institutions; to secure their populations from violent conflict and to control their territory; to meet the basic human needs of their population. It is against this background that the Niger Delta environmental crisis became explicable. For Tor and Egbe (2018, p. 247), there are three major parties involved in the environmental imbroglio in the Niger Delta-the Nigerian state, Multinational Oil Companies (MNCs) and the oil-bearing communities in the Niger Delta. Each party has a position on the crisis and in that Tor and Egbe (2018, p. 247) further stressed that the Nigerian state has over the years held that the crisis in the region is a security crisis. The above is an example of weak state as demonstrated by Rice and Patrick.

In conceptualizing Conflict, Burton (1993) maintained that the term is used usually for the range of arguments, tensions and violent conflicts that occur both within and between states. In other words, it is therefore defined as the pursuit of incompatible interests or goals by different individuals, parties or groups. This definition is by all implications reveal the intrinsic and inevitable nature of conflict in human social life and existence. That is to say, there is a whole range of incompatible interests possess by humans or groups of humans that predispose them into fighting one another. Therefore, while conflict is often held to threaten peace, it is arguable that not all threats are threat to any or the six types of peace enunciated above. It is the negative action taken to resolve the conflict that represents the threat to any of the six types of peace in our definition. To this extent, Bakut (2007, p. 236) further contended that the word 'negative' here connotes action that entails injuring other people or destroying their property in an attempt to resolve conflict: for example, the use of arms (armed conflict) to resolve the conflict in one's favour which may result in mass killings, murder or even genocide of innocent and unarmed civilians. This undoubtedly implies that the application of arms in resolving human conflict constitutes a threat to the six types of peace early mentioned above hence we can deduce that

'threat to peace' represents any violent method used in resolving conflicts. Thus, we can establish the inherent nature of conflict in humans and emphasize that conflict is by all indications pervasive and it is the pervasive nature of conflict that makes it inevitable hence a common trend both to students and scholars of social conflict is to see conflict bad because of its destructive tendencies. There are conflicts that are constructive that lead to societal development. Therefore, conflict in itself is not bad but, it is the violence linked to the conflict that makes it a threat to peace.

### **The Linkage Theory**

Linkage theory emphasizes the way one negotiation influences or determines the process or outcome of another. It effectively explains the relationship between one variable with another particularly its relevant environment. Crump (2009) held that the outcome of a single negotiation can have multiple explanations depending on the variable selected for analysis. Therefore, our concern here is to critically look at the link between environmental negligence or activities can result to conflict and how serene environment and lack of conflict promotes peace in our society. To that extent, Adelusi citing Frankel (1972) maintained that linkage theory evolves from system analysis. According to Frankel (1972) linkage theory has its starting point from the system analysis. Linkage theory denotes any recurrent sequence of behaviour that originates in one system and is reacted to another (Rosenau 1969, p. 5).

In this context, this theory establishes how environmental pollution arising from the activities of the Multinational Companies such as oil spillage or gas flaring, poverty, unemployment and government negligence on the one hand contributed to environmental crisis in Nigeria while on the other hand the environmental crisis led to the pursuit of peace. By this, linkage theory explores the whole range of interconnection between the phenomena hence, the theory is succulently suit and captured our analysis about the subject matter.

### **Older Forms of Threat to Global Peace and Security**

Environmental crisis arising from the degradation of the ecosystem as a new threat to peace and security has dominated academic discourse recently. However, scholars maintain that the older forms of threat to peace and security came from the period of slavery, serfdom, war and colonialism when human beings used coal and firewood as sources of energy. Within this period, the population estimation of the world by 1900 was at about 1.6 billion and the greatest threat to humanity was the activities from slavery, serfdom, war and colonialism that continued till era of Industrial Revolution. In fact, the Industrial Revolution could not have taken place without the steam engine powered by coal. However, the Industrial Revolution did not only lead to progress in technology, science, medicine and modernity but it also brought about the degradation of the environment and its associated dangers to humanity. Bakut (2007, p. 137) opined that the use of coal as source of energy for the steam engine saw the emission of smoke, smog, soot, and ash into the ecosystem, thereby fouling the air and introducing new forms of cardiac related diseases, illnesses. These diseases, illnesses and discomfort provoked the rich and adventurous Europeans to explore Africa and other parts of the world in order to find solution to the problems. By this, the Europeans who were responsible for the Industrial Revolution and the negative impact that such advancement, development and modernity brought, never saw it as endangering the world. Instead, they considered and treated these problems as if they were restricted to the local environment only.

To that extent, it would be imperative to not that while the Europeans were responsible for the environmental related diseases of the Industrial Revolution, they were not concerned about the changing nature of the environment. Instead, their concern was the protracted territorial wars

particularly over their sovereignty and spheres of influences in other parts of the world among themselves. Secondly, they were worried about the resistance of African peoples against slavery and guerrilla attack on their interests. Thirdly, the great World War (WW1) Fought between Britain and her allies against Germany from 1914-18 over Bosnia-Herzegovina to which African and Asian soldiers were drafted to defend colonial government was another source of worry to the Europeans. With the end of the WW1, the whole world was thrown into another great war again between Great Britain and Hitler of Germany from 1935-45. The war was over the policy of Hitler's trying to dominate Europe and it was dubbed WW11 despite the fact that the war was concentrated in Europe and did not represent a threat to humanity.

Another source of worry to the European of that time was the use of Weapon of Mass Destruction such as the nuclear and chemical weapons. While these weapons pose serious threat to humanity, it was observed that the USA and USSR who manufactured and controlled these weapons never used them physically except as a means of threatening each other and to exert influence in the world. To that extent, it could be noted that these problems posed as challenges to peace as well as sources of conflict that threatens humanity.

### **The Environment as a Threat to Global Peace and Security**

Environmental threats to peace and security have become increasingly alarming, with about 95% of the world population experiencing environmental disasters arising from the mismanagement of the ecosystem. Mindful of its implication, the international community became committed to its solution thus, they called for 'The Earth Summit' or 'Conference' held in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil in June 1992 with almost every country of the world in attendance. The conference was prompted by two main factors:

1. Was the belief that the world faced a common crisis-global warming, and
2. The belief that it is in the interest of everyone to join hands to combat that crisis in particular and other forms of environmental decline in general.

### **Global warming**

The rising temperature of the planet represents a common crisis to humanity, hence a threat to security and peace. While it is natural for variations (change between one season and another-hot and cold temperatures), in the temperatures of planet to exist, the range of variations is increasing. This implies that a long protracted hot weather has the tendency to remain hotter all through the season with adverse effects on local climates especially on the vegetation and animal life. This invariably constitutes a threat to the survival of humanity as well as affecting agricultural production and other aquatic lives.

There are many causes and consequences of global warming. They are caused as a result of huge increase in the emission of carbon dioxide (CO<sub>2</sub>) through industrial and commercial processes. Many scholars have brazenly identified the uses of oil, coal and wood extracted by plants from the atmosphere as the main source of global warming. This is considered to be injurious to human existence hence, Singh, Singh and Gupta (2006, p. 12) stated that among most obvious consequences of global warming is the change in altitudinal and latitudinal distribution of organisms and their assemblages. These organisms may occur as a result of toxicant substance from hazardous wastes, industrial chemical, heavy metals, pesticides and fertilizers on the organisms, population, community or ecosystems including human beings. In this context, Bakut reiterated that while vegetation continues to withdraw CO<sub>2</sub> from the atmosphere, the rate at which it does this however, is slower than the rate at which it is released again by combustion (Bakut, 2007, p. 239). Therefore, the impact of environment to global

warming has constituted a threat to humanity. Toxic plants and deforestation of trees are the major sources of global warming. In this way, it has been argued that as the forests of the world are depleted (by cutting of trees for firewood, making of furniture and roofing building), the rate at which CO<sub>2</sub> is withdrawn is further reduced. To this extent therefore, the causes of global warming cannot be completely diverged from industrialization, which precipitates a large-scale change in the composition of the atmosphere.

Indeed, it is belief that CO<sub>2</sub> is a “greenhouse” gas whose presence in the atmosphere has an effect similar to that of the glass in a “greenhouse”. The implication is that, as the glass in a “greenhouse” allows the warmth of the sun into the house, so as it retards its escape, thereby causing the area below to warm up. This shows that the more the CO<sub>2</sub> the greater the retardation; and so also the temperature on earth rises thereby causing an environmental disaster amounting to division and diverse ethnic crises and so on. Therefore, global warming has remained a common threat to all countries of the world. Its adverse consequences entail collective measures are to be adopted in order to promptly deal with it.

However, apart from the above problem, there is an indication that human activities provide another explanation to the dangers of environmental pollution resulting to global warming. Part of that problem is that as the world is warming up as a result of human emission of CO<sub>2</sub>, the effect will result to climate changes and substantial rise in sea levels, leading to serious consequences on food production, housing, food and communication. For conflict practitioners, environment has remained largely a constant background factor in conflicts rather than issues in its own right.

#### **Challenges of Environmental Degradation to Human Existence in Nigeria**

Environmental pollution has remained a common threat to the corporate existence of Nigeria. Scholars and policy makers have reaffirmed that human activities arising from exploration of the environment have formed sources of environmental pollution resulting to global warming. Its impact could lead to conflict or agitation for environmental cleanse and compensation. Only few of these scholars opine that apart from the exploration of environment, there are other activities that could constitute threat to peace in Nigeria. In Nigeria, the constant engagement of the Multinational Companies in exploiting and exploring the environment has resulted to the number of crises witnessed in the area of Niger Delta. Akiri (2008, p. 90) maintains that as a result of the oil and gas operations of the multinationals, the land and environment have been grievously degraded. Pollution from frequent oil spillages has a high capacity for rapid spread along the coastline and within the creeks, with its attendant destruction of the ecosystem and ground water contamination. These have led to the destruction of quiet a bit of the flora and fauna, thus depriving the people of their resources.

More so, the gas flaring has led not only to the emission of sulphur, ammonia and other toxic agents, culminating in acid rains with their attendant effects on homes and vessels. There is off course, the continuous light and heat at night and during the day that leads to various stressful conditions for flora and fauna, including humans. Explanation to these accounted for the drastic reduction in the living standards of the Niger Delta States, who now face reduced yields in their erstwhile sources of livelihood (fishing and farming). In a relative development, Aghalino (2008, p. 132) further opined that for well over four decades that the oil majors have been prospecting for oil in the Niger Delta, they have not only radically disrupted the ecological balance of the area, but have also through negligence and cynical indifference orchestrated a various ecological war. Environmental pollution caused mainly by oil spillages and indiscriminate disposal of oil industry waste and cuttings are common place in the region and a demand for a compensation has resulted to collateral damage of oil pipe lines, wells and

kidnapping of oil expatriates and the demand for ransom. This has continued unchecked for a period of time until when Nigerian Government in an attempt to protect oil companies and their workers launched military action against the aborigines. The result of this action further exacerbated the crisis leading to the militarization of the region with its consequent rise on militant group.

In fact, militancy in the Niger Delta owes its history to the government lacklustre to come to the rescue of people affected by oil spillage and gas flaring. While the people have carried to government to protect their lives and properties, the latter in has totally neglected the region and signed several Memoranda of Understanding with the oil companies to protect and safeguard their exploration and installations. By this, lives the region became quite unbearable with people forced to live within the coastline and creeks. The result of this was an attack on oil installation leading to pipeline vandalizing and kidnapping of expatriates. Rather than finding solution to this impasse, the Federal Government of Nigeria went ahead and declared the militant 'terrorist' thus, stoking the protracted crisis characterized the political economy of the region.

### **Environmental Degradation as a Threat to Humanity**

The dangers of environmental degradation have become sources of worry to humanity. This is because, the impact of global warming has caused pollution which is linked to the industrialisation and development that have led to the emergence of new cardiac related diseases and the rising of sea levels. This has resulted into floods, washing away coastal cities or more specifically countries (Island countries), destroying lives and rendering the inhabitants refugees. The effect of global warming especially with the rise of sea levels contributes to hotter climate which also contribute to drought, desertification and soil erosion that appeared to be common in Africa. However, desertification, erosion and floods are common dangers that have led to the intermittent fighting and conflicts in Africa because of the scarcity of land for grazing and farming. Indeed, it is important to note that Africans were not responsible for the cause of global warming however, its impact has been enormous thus, leading to serious damages in the continent.

Apart from the impact of global warming, African continent has been free from environmental and natural disasters such as earthquakes, tsunami and floods. The only threats to environment that challenges Africans are the activities of MNCs and drought. Until recently, Africa continent is relatively peaceful before being challenged by the rise of insurgent and terrorism in East and North Africa. The activities of these sect and terrorists have called for a special attention to Africa as the continent appears to be a haven and base for terrorism, kidnapping, robbery and other vices.

### **The Link between Environment and Conflict in Nigeria**

Until recently, Nigeria has been and is still confronted with how to solve ethno-religious conflicts, the search for peace and political stability. The ethno-religious crises were primarily a subject of systemic failure. However, power politics and tribal considerations that divided the country along religious cleavages later dovetailed into high-tech violence and electoral irregularities. To that extent, state actors began to manipulate the lapses into political gains to the detriment of the entire nation as people at community and state levels started advancing claims over their resources thus marking the beginning of environment-based conflict in Nigeria. For example, herders who took their cows to graze outside their environs would face attack from the people. This has manifest in the current state of violence between farmers and

herdsmen in Nigeria. While the formers are complaining of their crops being destroyed by the cows, the latter invoked the principle of free movement of persons to take the flocks to graze.

Therefore, the link between environment and conflict is self-evident, due to the negative impact of environmental degradation experienced by Nigerian people. It is important to note here that global warming, depletion of the ozone layer, pollution and deforestation that constitute problems, desertification, soil erosion and water shortage and the degradation emanating from the activities of Multinational Companies by exploiting and exploring the environment for oil as exemplified in Niger Delta are linked to the conflicts in Niger Delta. Desertification in this context relates with the process in which land degradation in arid, semi-arid and dry sub-humid areas form parts of the various factors such as climatic variations and human activities that threaten human existence. This contributes to other environmental crises, such as the loss of biodiversity and global warming. In fact, in the Northern Nigeria, about 15% of the landmass is deserted and has played part in armed conflicts such as Fulani herdsmen and Boko Haram.

More so, the region becomes notorious for other criminalities such as kidnapping, robbery and for training Islamic zealots that propagated different Islamic ideologies in the country. In 2010, many school children were kidnapped by Boko Haram sect at Chibok in Borno State. The incidence grounded school activities with this its effect making many parents to withdraw their children from school. Apart from its effect on school activities, National Youth Service Corps programme was also affected as posting of prospectus corps members to Borno State were no longer considered. Markets, schools, churches and mosques were not left out with movement and gathering of public places prohibited.

In South West and South Eastern of Nigeria, the activities of Fulani herdsmen have constituted threats to farmers who have demanded the evacuation of the cows. In Benue and Taraba States, there are constant crises between the herders and farmers that resulted to death of several people. This conflict has remained unchecked as government appears to take side in handling the crisis. While the farmers are poised to protect to their crops and demand restriction on the constant transportation of cows to their land, the herders are very much determined to move their cows around to graze without precaution. Therefore, this impasse has been explained in a number of literatures as landownership crisis.

### **Conclusion**

The study on environment, conflict and peace in Nigeria has revealed that the three variables are closely linked with one another. Meaning that the environmental challenges could lead to conflict in the society while peace can be ensured when there is no threat to environment with an absent of conflict. However, issues bordering on global warming occurring from environmental pollution on biodiversity together with the activities of Fulani herdsmen were discussed to ascertain the interconnection between the three concepts. To that extent, this found that conflicts and threats in Nigeria have direct links to these lands and their resources. This is because the claim of landownership is central to Nigerian self-definition. In Nigeria, land is seen to be very valuable and belong to the vast family members in which many are dead, few living and the countless number still unborn (Davidson, 1969). This places much importance on Nigerian identities which is based on the location of their ancestral spirits. By this, Nigerians tend to link their ownership of the land to the 'dead', the living and the many generations yet to be born. They land becomes both the basis of their claim to a particular identity as well as the source of the resources they claim as their own (Mbiti, 1971). This example the value attached to land and why Nigerian people often fight war whenever their portion is temper. Therefore, land, peace and environment resources are very important in Nigeria and any threat on them always leads to conflict.

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