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CLIMATE CHANGE AND RESOURCE-BASED CONFLICTS AS EMERGING THREATS TO NIGERIA'S NATIONAL SECURITY

Mubarak Sulaiman Jamiu[1]*, Hassan Seyid Ishola[2] and Adedoyin John Towoju[3]
[1,2,3]Department of Politics and Governance, Kwara State University, Malete, Nigeria
mubarak.jamiu@kwasu.edu.ng

Abstract
Climate change has emerged as a critical driver of resource scarcity and conflict, with serious implications for national security in Nigeria. This paper examines the interconnections between climate change, resource conflicts, and national security, focusing on how environmental stress exacerbates competition over land, water, and livelihoods across different regions of the country. Drawing on ecological theory and conflict resolution theory, the study explains how climate-induced environmental degradation translates into social tensions and violent conflicts, particularly between farmers and pastoralists, as well as within coastal and agrarian communities. The paper relies on qualitative analysis of secondary data, including policy documents, scholarly literature, and institutional reports, to assess both the drivers of climate-related conflicts and the effectiveness of existing policy responses. Findings indicate that while Nigeria has adopted several climate policy frameworks and intervention programmes, their impact has been limited by weak governance, inadequate funding, and an overreliance on militarised security responses. The paper argues that climate change acts as a threat multiplier, deepening insecurity and undermining social cohesion and economic stability. It concludes by recommending integrated strategies that combine climate adaptation, equitable resource management, and conflict resolution mechanisms to strengthen national security and promote sustainable development in Nigeria.

Keywords: Climate change, conflict, governance, national security, Nigeria

Introduction

Due to human activities like combustion of fossil fuels, deforestation and some agricultural practices since the Industrial Revolution, the concentration of greenhouse gasses and climatic changes in the atmosphere have risen leading to global warming. The effects of these processes have been seen in the rising of sea level, change in rainfall patterns, rising frequency and intensity of extreme weather systems like heat waves, floods, and storms, and sustained rising average temperatures. All these developments still have a cumulative effect on the natural and human systems throughout the world (Urry, 2011). Climate change has consequently become a major problem to world stability and has grave consequences to national security especially in Nigeria. The political and social stability of the country depends on the resource-related conflicts combined with climatic changes and their interactions pose a significant threat to the social cohesion.

Nigeria is also witnessing an increase in temperature, unreliable rainfall distribution, and flooding along the coast and all this has impacted the exploitation of arable land and freshwater sources. These environmental strains have escalated the already existing strains between communities, particularly between pastoralists and agricultural populations which have resulted in frequent violent disputes over the dwindling resources. These tensions destabilize livelihoods and lead to their further escalation into wider insecurity by displacing populations and increasing criminal acts. The effects of climate are also more likely to affect disadvantaged groups, increasing inequalities and exacerbation of social tensions. The poor performance of the state in successful management of these conflicts has also enhanced poor confidence by the people and the state. The given background

brings up the necessity of a better comprehension of how climate change influences the availability of resources and conflict processes in Nigeria and how all these processes in turn influence the national security.

The struggle between various groups over the dwindling natural resources has in the past caused conflict between the various groups in Nigeria especially the farmers and pastoralists. Pastoralist groups have been forced south of the geographical location by climate-based activities like desertification in the north where they seek pastoral lands, which raises the chances of violent conflict with the agricultural communities (Adelekan et al., 2020). These struggles are not novel; however, climate stress has aggravated this situation as it has led to declining agricultural production and increased pressure on land and water. Likewise, climate change effects like the rise of sea level and the change in temperature have also contributed to the loss of marine resources which have led to conflict situations among the fishing communities as some stocks of fish die or move. With the fisheries becoming increasingly contested, fishing rights become increasingly more contentious, which further increases the pressure on the security situation in Nigeria (Nwankwo et al., 2019).

Climate change in Nigeria has a far-reaching national security implication. The displacement is caused by the environment, which interferes with livelihoods and increases social tensions in vulnerable populations (Omojola & Adebayo, 2021). Migrants who move to big cities or more economically secure areas of Maylands are also likely to face opposition by the host communities that are also experiencing economic strains. Most government reactions have been based on domestic security operations and this strategy has often led to infringement of human rights and also made matters worse in the security context (Ukiwo & Adebayo, 2020). It should be noted though that attempts to mitigate the effects of climate change by successive governments in Nigeria have been made. Among them is the revision of the Nationally Determined Contribution of Nigeria under the UNFCCC Paris Agreement of 2021, committing to reducing greenhouse gas emissions by 20 percent, the National Council on Climate Change in 2021 to organize climate policy and support a green economy, the National Adaptation Plan (2020), which specifies the goal of the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions and sets priorities in the form of actions, and the Nigeria Energy Transition Plan, according to which it is planned to become carbon-neutral by 206

Nigeria is one of the worst hit countries in regards to climate change despite these efforts. Nigeria ranked 17th among 63 countries in the 2024 Climate Change Performance Index index, which evaluates the countries by indicators by the greenhouse gas emissions, renewable energy, energy consumption, and climate policy. Although it has a fairly high score on greenhouse gas emissions and energy consumption, it had a low rating on climate policy and renewable energy adoption (CCPI, 2024). Insufficient funding is one of the greatest limitations to the efficacy of climate adaptation in Nigeria. Though both the national and subnational levels have adaptation initiatives, they are mostly funded with the help of the outside world. Similar to most of the Sub-Saharan African countries, Nigeria relies on foreign grants, loans, and aid to finance over half of the climate mitigation and adaptation efforts. A significant portion of these expenses is still carried by multilateral financial institutions like the IMF, USAID and the World Bank, and to a smaller extent the African Development Bank (Adelekan, Simpson, Totin, & Trisos, 2022).

Understanding Climate Change and Resource Conflict through Ecological Theory

The Ecological theory focuses on the interdependence of the ecosystem and the human society and tends to pay attention to the manner in which environmental change can cause dysfunction in social systems and lead to competition over limited resources. It provides a powerful base on which the connections between climate change, resource struggles and security in Nigeria can be analysed especially in situations where livelihoods rely directly on natural resources.

In this context, resource conflicts are perceived to be results of increased desperation of the communities affected that tried to protect their survival means in the ever-growing hostile ecological environment. The inability to produce the same amount of land and water due to climate change processes like drought, irregular rainfall and desertification makes resource-dependent groups vulnerable and competitive to access resources (Okoli & Atelhe, 2014). It is common that this competition has occurred through violent encounters particularly among the farmers and the pastoralists who rely on the same ecological spaces to sustain their livelihoods. These pressures are further intensified by population increase and continuous environmental degradation which intensifies the cycles of conflicts threatening national security in a serious manner (Abubakar, 2012; Abugu et al., 2020).

The ecological theory also emphasizes the fact that the lack of resources caused by climate is disproportionate to marginalized groups. Women and young people are particularly vulnerable because of a lack of access to education, land, and economic opportunities, which expose them to disruptions caused by climate and competition based on the available resources (International Alert, 2020). These socio-economic weaknesses enhance the prevailing inequalities and make them prone to instability, further strengthening the security implications of environmental change.

In its turn, the conflict resolution theory offers analytical means of understanding the conflicts caused by climate stress and the lack of resources, as well as addressing them. Conflict resolution concept is a wide discipline that incorporates various methods of resolving conflicts at various levels within society (Ann & Di, 2007). Ramsbotham (2000), Woodhouse (2000), and Richmond (2002) differentiate between conflict resolution and conflict management, where the latter is, in many cases, associated with the attempt to contain the conflicts, whereas the former is related to the processes of identifying the roots of conflicts and achieving more lasting results (Matijevic & Coric, 2015). The main theme of the conflict resolution theory is a study of the psychological mechanisms of avoiding the escalation of the conflict and alleviating its adverse effects, as well as the possibility of positive outcomes.

As Ann and Di (2007) note, the conflict resolution theory stresses those methods of resolution that foster fair and non-violent resolutions, and aims at satisfying the needs of all the parties instead of dominating one. The theory can be applied to a diverse spectrum of situations, starting with the realm of interpersonal conflicts and continuing with international conflicts, and especially in the context where the tension related to the resource and climate endangers social stability and national security. Conflict resolution theory helps in propagating peaceful coexistence and long-term stability by providing means of dialogue, negotiation and cooperation.

The conflict resolution theory comes in particularly handy in this study because it offers viable solutions to the understanding of disputes and development of friendly solutions to conflicts that may arise due to climate change and scarcity of resources. It is based on various models and promotes the achievement of harmony in the situations where there is an increased level of competition and violence due to

environmental stress. According to the Thomas-Kilmann model, people tend to avoid conflict, compete, accommodate, compromise, collaborate or specifically resolve conflicts through Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) (Thomas & Kilmann, 1974). These tactics have been found to be effective in addressing and resolving conflicts that occur as a result of competition over resources and the pressures related to climate, which have remained significant threats to the national security of Nigeria.

Causes of Resource Conflicts in Nigeria

Continuing the above theoretical arguments especially the ecological elucidation of how the ecological stress is converted to social competition, the available literature demonstrates that natural resources form significant sources of wealth, power, and political influence within the states. These resources are deposits located on the crust and below the surface of the earth including oil and gas or the solid minerals like gold and diamonds. This process of ownership, access and control of these sources of wealth has seen legal tussles, armed conflicts, loss of livelihoods, poverty, and deaths which can be seen clearly in the Nigerian context (Viko, Epu, & Mbumbeurem, 2021).

The situation in Nigeria also demonstrates the role of climate vulnerability in adding to these tension. Coming in the top ten most climate-vulnerable nations in the world, Nigeria offers an excellent example of how climate change makes competition over natural resources even more intense and contributes to conflict (Onuoha, 2023). Population, high rates of urbanisation and continuous environmental degradation has also placed a lot of stress on the limited resources which include land, water and fisheries. With processes like coastal erosion, flooding and a decrease in agricultural productivity increasing at a faster rate due to global warming, competition of these resources has increased especially in coastal and agrarian societies where lives largely rely on stability of the environment.

In the face of increased resource-related conflicts, the Nigerian state has identified militarised reactionary policies to deal with the security threats as they continue to emerge. The armed forces and paramilitary agencies such as the Army, Navy, Air Force, Police, Customs Service, and Immigration Service have been employed by successive governments to deal with internal security issues associated with resource competition and instability caused by climatic factors (Onuoha, 2023). Though the objectives of these interventions are to contain violence, it also indicates the degree to which resource wrangles have gotten entrenched in the wider national security issue.

Academic discussions also shed some light on the cause of these conflicts. Resource scarcity, rather than abundance, is a more common trigger of violence, Homer-Dixon (1999) cites that Osawe and Uwa (2023) argue. Although an apparently abundant situation might be the case even in the contexts that deal with the extraction and distribution, unequal access and social-economic imbalances that surround the extraction and distribution processes create conflict. In this light, instability is spawned when access to resources is questionable or exclusionary, which strengthens the probability of the occurrence of violent conflict. Drought, population growth, and rising industrialisation have been among the climate-related stressors in Nigeria that have aggravated competition among groups concerning scarce resources, furthering the existing fault lines (Osawe & Uwa, 2023).

The other researches highlight the importance of governance and policy failures in increasing the conflicts over resources. Akujobi, Ebitari and Amuzie (2016) assume that the growing number of competitors on the land and the grazing resources is explained by the deficits in the policy, especially the inadequate development of the grazing routes and land-use planning

systems. These issues have been augmented by the increase in the production activities to satisfy the demands of an ever-growing population. The authors observe that land patterns and land ownership have had both direct and indirect influences on the parameters of most land agricultural conflicts in Nigeria and they are turning out to be many and increasingly brutal.

Moreover, the governments of Nigeria have had difficulty to devise and carry out ensuing policies to take a consistent approach in resource management and conflict management. Corruption, poor institutional capacity, lack of infrastructures and unhealthy competition among security and law enforcement agencies has been eroding efforts to deal with the structural factors behind conflicts in this regard. These governance issues not only restrict the performance of conflict prevention strategies, but also strengthen the circumstances in which the resource conflicts are threatening national stability.

Nigeria's institutional climate response mechanisms and project-based adaptation initiatives

After the policy and governance issues of Nigeria in controlling the resource conflicts caused by climate change, the most current and detailed attempt to solve the climate change issue in the country is the Nationally Determined Contribution (NDC) Implementation Framework (2023-2030). The framework was launched on May 23, 2024 and it is aimed to inform the climate action commitments of Nigeria and also foster environmental sustainability and long-term resilience. At its opening, the Director-General of the National Council on Climate Change (NCCC) Dr. Salisu Dahiru emphasized on the use of multiple stakeholders as a way of implementing the change in an effective way. In the same manner, the Secretary to the Government of the Federation, George Akume, requested the concerted efforts of all the levels of government and society, with the involvement of the international community, the participation of the private sector, and the long-term advocacy of civil society organisations (ICEED, 2023).

The NDC Implementation Framework identifies over 150 outputs and over 300 key performance indicators that are in line with sectoral action plan per critical area like agriculture, energy and waste management. The framework also aims at increasing the level of coordination, mobilization of resources, and accountability in climate governance due to taking a multi-stakeholder approach whereby the government institutions, civil society actors, and the partners in the private sector are brought together. Theoretically, these actions are supposed to make the climate less vulnerable and consequently alleviate the strain on resources that tend to generate conflict. Nevertheless, the success of this framework merely relies on the implementation capacity, the availability of funds, and the institutional coherence, which still serves as the challenging issues of the climate response in Nigeria.

Other than policy frameworks, Nigeria has also sought project based interventions so as to target certain environmental antecedents of resource strife. The Nigeria Erosion and Watershed Management Project (NEWMAP) is one such project that was formed by the Federal Ministry of Environment in partnership with the world Bank. According to Adelekan, Simpson, Totin and Trisos (2022), NEWMAP was to help solve serious cases of gully erosion in southeastern Nigeria and the general challenges of soil degradation in the north of the country. When it launched the project in 2012, the World Bank pledged around USD 500 million towards the project.

NEWMAP is established in nineteen states and it is based on three main components; Gully Rapid Action and Slope Stabilisation (GRASS), integrated watershed management and adaptive livelihood

support. The mission of these components is not only to lessen the environmental degradation but also safeguard livelihoods and as much as possible reduce displacement which are major aspects in avoiding conflicts related to the resource. By targeting the erosion, land degradation and the livelihood vulnerability, NEWMAP is an attempt at transforming the goals of climate policy into practical interventions, which can minimize competition in land and water resources. However, the inability to cover the full range and sustainability of such projects still cast the shadow of the future extent of their influence on the prevention of conflicts and on the national security.

Climate Change and Resource Conflicts: Implications to National Security

Although there are policy frameworks and specific interventions, the relationship between climate change, resource conflicts, and national security is among the most urgent issues in Nigeria. This connection is more pronounced in the unending disputes between the pastoralists and agricultural societies that have been fuelled by change in environmental conditions. With the escalation of the climate change, the rate and intensity of violent clashes have grown and it is a major danger to the stability of any state and social cohesion. These underlying environmental and socio-economic drivers have frequently led to repetitive periods of violence, which in turn has weakened economic growth and ruined the domestic and international reputation of Nigeria because of the failure of the state to effectively tackle them.

Empirical research studies of climate-induced conflict dynamics throughout Nigeria have all indicated an increasing insecurity that is associated with environmental stress. In coastal areas, communities have been displaced by the heightened sea levels, recurrent floods, and dwindling sea resources which have heightened competition at fishing areas and arable land. It has resulted in bloody conflicts as communities find ways to adjust to the loss of resources thus adding to insecurity in already vulnerable regions (Onuoha, 2020). Similar to Moses-Ojo, Joseph, and Aliyu (2023), the climate change has increased the severity of conflicts in the states of Niger Delta like Bayelsa, Delta, and Cross River where flooding, rise in sea level, and loss of marine resources contributed to displacement and competition within the fishing communities.

In the North Central part such as the Benue, Nasarawa, Kaduna and Plateau states, desertification and agricultural productivity has lowered climatic conditions, and this has worsened conflicts between Fulani herders and agricultural communities. The limited access to arable land and water has increased competition which has led to violent challenges in most cases. Nigeria is also faced by acute conditions in the security situation due to the lack of resources in the form of Northern states, including Adamawa, Borno, Katsina, Kebbi, Niger, Taraba, Yobe, and Zamfara, related to climate change. In a work cited by Abugu, Bello, Olatan and Macaulay (2021), Haider (2019) reports clear evidence of the climatic changes in Nigeria, such as increased temperatures, varying rainfalls, rise in sea level, flooding, drought, desertification, land degradation, freshwater stress, and loss of biodiversity.

The changes in the environment have increased competition among the users of the resource especially between the farmers and pastoralists since the herders move southwards in search of water and pasture. These kinds of movements have often led to violent alterations with the host populations which have been direct threats to national security. In addition to physical violence, climate change and resource wars have also upset agricultural production, which has contributed to food insecurity to a great extent. The increasing food prices and deteriorating livelihoods, in their turn, led to

social unrest and mass protests. The October 2020 protests of the #EndSARS and August 2024 protests of the #EndBadGovernance are indicative of deeper frustrations associated with economic distress, deficiencies in governance, and insecurity which are indirectly propagated by climate-based disturbances. Collectively, these dynamics demonstrate that the issue of climate change and resource conflicts is not confined to issues related to the environment, but also defines the nature of the national security environment in Nigeria.

Panacea for Climate and Resource Conflict in Nigeria: Policy Perspective

Expanding on the examination of the exacerbation of resource conflicts and impaired national security in Nigeria through climate change, current policy responses demonstrate a clear awareness of the situation and ongoing gaps in the implementation process. The existence of such tools as the National Policy on Climate Change and Response Strategy (NPCCRS) and the National Adaptation Strategy and Plan of Action on Climate Change to Nigeria (NASPA-CCN) testify to the fact that the government is aware of the multidimensionality of climate threats. Nevertheless, they have been limited by lack of proper funding, institutional capacity, lack of awareness by the people and low inter-agency coordination. In addition to that, the prolonged use of militarised reactions towards the control of climate-related foughts has frequently overlooked the environmental and socio-economic causes of insecurity. The urgent need to solve these problems in a way that is related therefore necessitates a change towards a more holistic approach to policy, ensuring that climate adaptation, sustainable development, and conflict prevention are incorporated into the traditional security means.

This strategy includes increased climate action and investment as one of its key elements. Nigeria needs to better utilise its vast solar and wind energy potential to cut down on its reliance on fossil fuel, cut down on the emission of greenhouse gases and enhance energy security. Increasing renewable energy projects such as the solar mini-grid programmes of the Rural Electrification Agency can be used to fund the creation of jobs and economic inclusion at the same time. In agricultural sector, more investment in climate resilient activities like drought resistant varieties of crops and efficient systems to deliver irrigation needs to be given priority in order to protect food security and build resilience of farmers. These priorities must be incorporated in the Agricultural Promotion Policy entirely, and the special attention should be given to smallholder farmers. Besides this, the conservation and recovery of important ecosystems, such as forests and wetlands, are also critical in mitigation and adaptation. The programs like the Great Green Wall are supposed to be increased and incorporated more in the national strategies of dealing with climate changes like desertification and land degradation.

It is also important to enhance institutional capacity and governance. The climate action requires well-resource-endowed institutions that have clear mandate and technical know-how to perform. The agencies like the National Council on Climate Change need to be established with permanent financing, enhanced data management and better coordination of efforts in order to make policy commitments work. It will require integrating climate considerations in both planning and decision-making on all governance levels, including federal and local, to develop a resilient society. Simultaneously, effective environmental management and law enforcement through clear and transparent regulatory frameworks and responsible resource management is crucial to ecosystem protection and minimization of resource-based conflicts.

Nigeria should also have community-based solutions and social resilience at the base of its response to the climate-related conflicts. The adaptive capacity can be increased and tensions can be minimised by recognising and incorporating the traditional knowledge systems and empowering the local community to take part in the decision making as well as governance of the resources. Conflict analysis and stakeholder engagement must be integrated systematically in the development programmes to predict and address the disputes caused by climatic changes. Along with this, social safety nets of vulnerable groups hit by climate shocks and violence are required to alleviate poverty, restrict displacement and social stability.

Last but not least is international cooperation, which is essential. Nigeria should also be proactive in discussing with the international and regional allies to get climate finance, technology transfer and technical support required to promote adaptation and mitigation at a large scale. The issue of transboundary climate and security can be solved by strengthening regional cooperation systems including platforms like the Lake Chad Basin Commission. Peacebuilding efforts and long-term dialogue between the parties to the conflict is also crucial to deal with the underlying causes of resource crises and restore confidence. By embracing this composite policy framework, Nigeria is able to strive towards a more sustainable, safe and tougher future amid the ever-increasing climate threats.

Conclusion and Recommendation

In conclusion, climate change is the origin of the resource shortage in Nigeria and this increases the intensity of competition in the land, water, and fisheries and consequently leads to violent conflicts, especially between the farming and pastoralist communities. Such resource-based conflicts disrupt livelihoods, drive food insecurity and strains social cohesion that directly affects the stability and security of the countries. Although the initiatives of the NDC Implementation Framework and the New MAP project include evidence that Nigeria is eager to act in order to mitigate the impact of the climate change process, the absence of effective conflict prevention and adaptation was caused by the constant inability of the country to tackle the problem as the result of the complex of the weak governance, corruption, the lack of institutional capacity, and the poor enforcement of the policy. The necessity of addressing the problem of national security in Nigeria is therefore, by integrating the efforts which will imply the implementation of efficient climate adjustment programs, equitable distribution of the resources, and efficient system of conflict management in order to reduce vulnerability, violence, and provide sustainable social and economic stability.

To end the inseparable challenges of climate change, resources wars and national security in Nigeria, institutional capacity and governance structures should be increased by the government. This will entail improving the execution of the policy, being open in the resource distribution, and investing in the climate adaptation programs that target the most vulnerable sections. The targeted actions could include the extension of irrigation and water management systems, the rehabilitation of degraded land, and the encouragement of sustainable agricultural activities to decrease the level of competition in limited resources. It should also be reinforced with the civil society, local communities and the private sector so as to have inclusive planning and proper monitoring of the climate and resource management plans.

Simultaneously, Nigeria should implement proactive conflict resolution and prevention systems to control conflicts confronting the nation due to lack of resources. In order to avert the escalation of conflicts, training and arming of local

security agencies to be involved in mediation, dialogue, and community-based peace-building can be used. To avoid problems in the timely interventions, implementing climate risk analysis in the national security planning and early warning measures of environmental risks and possible resource conflicts will be beneficial. The cooperation of international agencies should also be used to assist in climate adjustment, sustainable livelihood and conflict prevention programs so that national security can be revitalized by environmental vulnerability as well as by social stability.

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