



SOCIAL IDENTITY CONFLICTS, SOCIOECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AND BIOCULTURAL IMPLICATIONS IN WUKARI LOCAL GOVERNMENT AREA OF TARABA STATE NIGERIA



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Abstract

Social identity conflict in Wukari Local Government Area of Taraba State Nigeria significantly undermine socioeconomic development and consequently enhances bio-cultural implications that further negates development within and around the study area. This study critically examines the relationship between social identity conflicts, socioeconomic development outcomes and physiological stress responses basically through secondary sources and relied on the use of Social Identity Theory and Stress Diathesis Model to clearly establish cause and effects of social identity conflict particular in Wukari Local Government Area of Southern Senatorial District of Taraba State. The Study's theoretical positioning revealed that social identity conflicts are responsible for the poor state of development within Wukari and that it also accounts for heightened cases of stress among indigents and settlers within the study Area. Secondary findings from the study in consonance with the claim above, showed that, social conflict disrupts markets, schools, and health centers. Thus, creating a "development boundary" that prevents investment and service delivery, that there is a nexus between biology, culture, and environment. In Wukari cultural practices around marriage, diet, traditional medicine, and burial intersect with health outcomes and that, conflict-induced displacement and environmental stress alter diets, increase disease exposure, and erode indigenous knowledge systems etc. The paper therefore recommends among many that: Government and non-governmental organizations should design targeted youth empowerment schemes to reduce unemployment, idleness, and susceptibility to violent mobilization. That, Policy documents should be reviewed to ensure fairness in the allocation of political offices, educational opportunities and access to farmland, so as to reduce perceptions of marginalization. That Traditional rulers and faith base leaders and clerics should be empowered through capacity building to play stronger roles in early conflict detection, dialogue and peace education and That Stress management and mental health support should be integrated in conflict resolution.

Keywords: Social Identity, Conflicts, Socioeconomic Development, Bio-cultural Implications

Introduction

Social identity dichotomy is seemingly a significant barrier to socioeconomic advancement in many ethnically diverse and developing regions of the World and this apparently poses Bio-cultural implications for humans in societies around the World. This variance apparently

accounts for issues relating to racism, ethnocentrism, religiosity and sectionalism amidst chronic stress, anxiety and depression. According to Roberts (2021), as a result of variance in colour, black people are treated as fugitives and are denied basic social amenities amidst heightened cases of discrimination and subjugation. In Australia, the social identity conundrum grossly undermined the rights and privileges of indigenous people as records revealed that, indigenous Australians were dispossessed of their land, despised for their culture, marginalized, abused and murdered; all because of their physiological and cultural identity (Ejikeme, 2016). however, Sen (2006) argued that, social identity conflict is not static but a dynamic fluid concept that is constantly shaped by varying factors like education, cultural exchange and socioeconomic conditions.

Reminiscing on the continent of Africa, Achiume, Tidball-Binz and Morales (2022) averred that, the xenophobic attacks in South Africa which is currently making a caricature of other blacks as attempting to be “more blacks than South Africans” thereby creating a separatist ideology from Pan-Africanism, seemingly promotes the “we versus them” syndrome thus separating South African indigenes from other Africans who are settlers in South African soil. According to Nates (2021), the Rwandan genocide accruing from the violent conflict between the Tutsi’s and Hutu’s majority-minority feud created a class warfare as humans began to identify themselves on the basis of tribe and ethnicity devoid of equality of rights as enshrined under the United Nations Charter on Human Rights. Although Collier (2003) depicted that social identity conflicts are not the primary cause of socioeconomic underdevelopment but a deeper structural issue such as historical injustice, Hooks (1992), affirmed that social identity conflict is can serve as source of strength and resilience in the face of adversity and marginalization.

In Nigeria, Northeast Nigeria, Southern Senatorial District of Taraba State and Wukari Local Government Area to be precise, social identity conflicts, have grossly undermined the socioeconomic development thereby infringing on the Bio-Cultural diversity of the region and country at large (Agbu, 2020). These conflicts often arise from competition over resources, political representation and cultural dominance, leading to violent clashes, killings, displacement, and destruction of properties. Apparently, the persistent clashes between the Jukun, Tiv, Hausa, and other minority groups have disrupted economic activities, education, healthcare, and social cohesion, apparently stagnating development within the region.

According to Zhema (2012), socioeconomic development encompasses improvement in living standards, education, employment and infrastructure, and is highly dependent on sustainable peace and social stability. It is pertinent to note that, in Wukari Local Government Area, recurring identity-based conflicts have eroded trust among communities, discouraged investment, and weakened government interventions. Studies depicts those areas plagued by communal violence experience slower economic growth, higher poverty rates and reduced human capital development, not exempting the likelihood of poor health living conditions. Differential health outcomes have also been observed between groups experiencing conflict and discrimination versus dominant groups which is seemingly about the biological impact of living in a state of perpetual stress and not just about access to health care. Despite government and civil society efforts to mediate these conflicts, sustainable peace remains elusive, further exacerbating underdevelopment in the region.

Agbu (2020), opined that, despite the rich cultural diversity and agricultural potential inherent in Wukari Local Government Area, recurring clashes between the Jukun, Tiv, Hausa, and other ethnic groups have led to loss of lives, displacement of people, destruction of property, and disruption of economic activities. The nature of these conflicts has created an unstable environment that discourages investment, limits access to education and healthcare, as well as

weakens infrastructural development (Akwara, Udaw, Akwara & Onimawo 2013). Social Identity conflict according to Agbor and Ngene (2017), disrupts critical sectors including health leading to chronic stress which undermines development.

Although, existing research has explored identity conflicts in Nigeria broadly, few studies have specifically examined its impact on socioeconomic development and its Bio-cultural implication particularly in Wukari Local Government Area (Best & Idyorough, 2003). The lack of in-depth analysis on how these conflicts hinder development interventions, such as agricultural programs, educational policies, and healthcare services, leaves a critical gap in understanding sustainable solutions. This paper Therefore, seeks to examine the relationship between social identity conflict, socioeconomic development and its Bio-cultural implications in Wukari Local Government Area of Southern Senatorial District of Taraba State. The objectives of the study are to; examine the relationship between social identity conflict and socioeconomic development, investigate the the Bio-cultural implications of social identity conflict and identify sustainable solutions to addressing the impact of social identity conflict on socioeconomic development and Bio-cultural diversity in Wukari Local Government area of southern Senatorial District of Taraba state.

Comparative Overview of the Causes of Social Identity Conflicts in Wukari

Social identity conflicts are primarily fueled by deeply entrenched differences in ethnicity, religion, culture, language, and historical narratives that define group membership and belonging (Tajfel & Turner, 1986; Horowitz, 2001). In the context of Nigeria, and specifically Wukari Local Government Area of Taraba State in Northeast Nigeria, these differences are often politicized and weaponized, resulting in violent confrontations (Agbu, 2020; International Crisis Group, 2022). Scholar's present competing but complementary explanations for the causes of identity crises in Wukari. The indigeneship-settler thesis remains central. Best and Idyorough (2003) argue that conflict in Wukari is rooted in the struggle for recognition and power between the Jukun, who are recognized as indigenes, and the Tiv, who despite generations of settlement are categorized as non-indigenes. This aligns with Yusuf and Fwatshak (2018), who found that preferential treatment in employment, land ownership, education, and political representation for indigenes consistently generates resentment and feelings of exclusion among ethnic minorities. However, Otite (2020) offers a counter-point, contending that the indigene-settler dichotomy alone is insufficient and must be understood alongside resource competition to explain the persistence of violence in North Central Nigeria Vis-a-vis Northeast Nigeria, Particularly Wukari Local Government Area in Southern Taraba.

Historically, there are areas of convergence and divergence in relative scholarly positions on Social Identity Conflicts. According to Ojiego-Okoro and Ezeonwuka (2024), colonial policies of indirect rule and ethnic classification solidified divisions by empowering certain groups over others, creating a lasting hierarchy of power. This view is supported by Akinola (2021), who depicts those colonial administrative boundaries in Taraba fused incompatible ethnic groups. However, Mustapha (2019) on the contrary argues that, while colonialism laid the foundation, post-independence elite politics has been more instrumental in activating and sustaining social identity Conflicts for political gain.

In addition, Political manipulation and elite mobilization appears to be contributory factors to these violent conflicts. In buttressing this point, Ibeanu (2019) and Bello (2023) averred that political elites in Taraba and Benue exploit ethnic differences to galvanize support during elections, thereby transforming peaceful coexistence into rivalry. Similarly, Kwaja (2017) links weak governance and the failure of state institutions to deliver justice with the rise of ethnic militias and vigilante groups in Wukari. Yet, Egwu (2022) on the contrary posits that, state weakness is not just about capacity, but also about the perception of partiality in conflict

resolution, as it correspondingly deepens mistrust between groups thereby instilling identity grievances that often results in violent outburst.

Reflecting on Economic factors, though the dispositions of scholars differ on primacy, Ibrahim (2015) and UNDP (2021) identify youth unemployment and economic deprivation as key drivers, noting that idle youths become easy recruits when they perceive their group identity as under threat. This is consistent with findings by Human Rights Watch (2020) on farmer-herder and indigene-settler clashes across the Middle Belt and extension the study area in question. On the other hand, Abbas (2023) argues that while poverty is a trigger, it is the perception of inequitable resource distribution along ethnic lines that is the major cause of hostility over scarce resources like fertile farmland and political appointments.

In essence, while there is broad consensus that historical injustices, structural inequality, political manipulation, and socioeconomic exclusion drive social identity conflict in Wukari (Agbu, 2020; Yusuf & Fwatshak, 2018), scholars differ on which factor is most decisive. This paper therefore seeks to contribute to this debate by examining how these intersecting dynamics specifically affect the reintegration of marginalized persons within Wukari Local Government Area of Southern Senatorial District of Taraba State, Nigeria.

Effects of Social Identity Conflicts on Socioeconomic Development and its Bio-Cultural Implications

The economy of any defined society is not only a measure of production and exchange, but a social determinant that conditions lifestyle, political will, and cultural viability. As such, economic structure is a primary axis through which social stability or instability is produced and reproduced. In contexts of scarcity, competition for resources becomes ethnicized, and social identity emerges as the primary vehicle for claiming access, rights, and supremacy (Bates, 2001; Aishatu & Mohammed, 2014).

Drawing inference from a biocultural perspective, social identity conflict is understood as the biological embodiment of social inequality. Igbafe (2021), In line with Park's Race Relations Theory, it had been argued that competition among ethnic groups for resource control and political power produces discrimination and marginalization. These cultural processes do not remain external. They are internalized as chronic stress, insecurity, and trauma, with measurable biological consequences. In Wukari and other parts of Southern Taraba, the persistent targeting of specific ethnic groups to monopolize economic, cultural, and political power has produced what can be described as a syndemic: the clustering of violence, poverty, and disease that mutually reinforce one another (Singer, 2009). The biological costs of social identity conflicts are direct and intergenerational. The destruction of schools, markets, roads, and health facilities (Adeoye, 2018) and the atmosphere of fear that results in the abandonment of farms (Yusuf & Okoli, 2020) create conditions of chronic stress. Prolonged activation of the stress response elevates cortisol, suppresses immune function, and increases vulnerability to cardiovascular and infectious diseases (Collier, 2019). Yusuf and Okoli (2020) further documented the psychological burden: anxiety, depression, and other mental disorders arising from displacement. Critically, these effects may be biologically embedded across generations through epigenetic pathways, meaning that the trauma of conflict is not only social but corporeal and inherited.

These biological outcomes in turn loop back into the cultural and economic sphere. Obasi and Onuoha (2019) stated that displacement and insecurity prevent school attendance and access to healthcare, eroding human capital. Tanko and Ibrahim (2021) show how conflict weakens traditional authority and governance, blocking dialogue and development. The result is a hostile economic environment that discourages both public and private investment, deepens

poverty, and reproduces the very conditions that fuel further identity-based mobilization. Berry's (2005) acculturation framework and Verkuyten and Yamin's (2019) work on perceived threat help explain variation in outcomes. Where integration is possible and the dominant group is receptive, social cohesion can buffer against biological harm and support development. Where separation or marginalization is enforced, stress is amplified and development becomes a mirage.

In a nutshell, social identity crises in Wukari Local Government Area are fundamentally biocultural. Cultural tussles over indigeneity, resources, and power become biologically embedded through stress, poor health, and intergenerational trauma. Simultaneously, deteriorating biological and mental health undermines economic productivity and social institutions, completing a feedback loop of underdevelopment. This analysis suggests that addressing reintegration and development in Wukari requires interventions that target not only political and economic structures, but also the biological consequences of prolonged social exclusion.

Theoretical Framework

In examining the interplay between social identity conflict, socioeconomic development and Bio-cultural implication in Wukari Local Government Area, this study focused on Social Identity Theory, while drawing supportive insights from Stress Diathesis Model to establish its position.

Social Identity Theory (SIT)

Social Identity Theory (SIT), propounded by Henri Tajfel and John Turner in 1979, states that humans derive self-esteem and belonging from group membership, such as ethnicity, religion, or nationality. This affiliation or social affinity leads to in-group favoritism and out-group discrimination, thereby influencing intergroup relations and conflict. In Wukari, Social Identity Theory explains how ethnic identities fuel competition over resources, power, and recognition, often leading to exclusion and grievances. SIT in relation to this paper therefore, provides a lens through which the root causes of recurring inter-group conflicts in Wukari Local Government Area, can be understood. This theory also helps explain why such conflicts are persistent and emotionally charged, as they touch on individuals' core identities.

By implication, this theory is of the view that, when one ethnic group perceives political exclusion, land encroachment, or unequal access to resources, the issue is interpreted not simply as an economic matter but as a threat to the group's collective dignity and survival. For example, land disputes between Jukun and Tiv often escalate beyond property disagreements into violent clashes framed as "us versus them." Similarly, it holds that, when Leaders and elites mobilize ethnic identities to consolidate support, it reinforces in-group solidarity but simultaneously deepens mistrust towards out-groups. This however, undermines social cohesion and fosters cycles of retaliation. In addition, persistent intergroup violence destabilizes local economies. Markets are disrupted, infrastructure are destroyed and investment opportunities are discouraged. Moreover, thereby drawing young people who ordinarily should be contributing to productive economy into cycles of conflict, either as victims or perpetrators. The resulting insecurity weakens education, healthcare, and agricultural production, leaving the community perpetually underdevelopment. In a nutshell, SIT explains how identity-based conflicts in Wukari perpetuate a vicious cycle of violent conflicts that undermines socioeconomic progress and sustainable development in Wukari Local Government Area.

However, SIT has limitations. It overemphasizes group dynamics, downplaying individual agency and other factors like economic inequality and leadership. The theory also assumes

identities are fixed, ignoring fluidity and multiple affiliations. Furthermore, SIT's deterministic approach implies conflict is inevitable when identities clash, neglecting cooperation and peaceful coexistence. These limitations are evident in Wukari, where intergroup relations are shaped by historical, economic, and political factors beyond SIT's scope.

Although the Realistic Conflict Theory argues competitively that conflict arises from competition over tangible resources, not just identity and Intersectionality Theory highlights how overlapping identities shape experiences of oppression, the SIT in relation to this paper, provides valuable insights into understanding Wukari's identity conflicts irrespective of its limitations.

Stress Diathesis Model

This theory was popularizing by Tirril H. and Philip S. Holzman in the 1980s. The model explains how vulnerability and environmental factors interact to influence the wellbeing of humans. The framework of this model posits that, the onset of a disorder or outcome results from the interaction between an individual's predisposition (diathesis) and environmental stressors. In the case of Wukari's identity conflicts, the model sought to explain how pre-existing vulnerabilities such as ethnic tensions and economic inequality interact with external stressors like climate change and political disputes to produce conflict.

The strength of this model, lies in its recognition of the interplay between internal and external factors, highlighting that conflict is not solely the result of one or the other, but rather the combination of both. For instance, Wukari's history of ethnic tensions (diathesis) can be exacerbated by drought and competition for resources (stressor), leading to violent conflict. This framework encourages policymakers to address both the underlying vulnerabilities and the triggering stressors. Put differently, the exclusive ownership policy exhibited by indigenous Wapan people creates a false feeling of accomplishment, whereas in reality they lack the required resources to address their basic needs (Diathesis), however when this disposition comes in contact with the reality that an external person (settler) who has been labouring diligently is more resourceful than the indigenous Wapan person, envy sets in and eventually results in aggression and violent conflict (stressor). In other words violent conflict according to this model erupts from the weak struggling to overpower the strong and vice versa. This analysis clearly explains the recurring conflicts between herders and Farmers, Tiv and Jukun, Muslim and Christians within Wukari enclave.

The Stress-Diathesis Model like most model is not without limitations. It has been criticized as to be oversimplifying complex conflicts by reducing them to a straightforward diathesis-stressor interaction, neglecting the role of leadership, power dynamics, and historical context. In addition, possessing a deterministic view, suggesting that certain groups are predisposed to conflict, a position that can be stigmatizing. Despite its limitations, the Stress-Diathesis Model provides a useful framework for understanding Wukari's conflict

The Significance of the Application of both Theories

The Social Identity Theory (SIT) and Stress-Diathesis Model (SDM) are two frameworks that are significant to understanding of the complex dynamics of identity conflicts in particularly in Wukari Local Government Area. While both theories offer insights, they differ in their focus and applicability to the theme of this paper. Whereas, SIT explains how group identities shape intergroup relations and conflict, highlighting the psychological processes underlying identity-based tensions. IHence, illuminating how ethnic identities fuel competition and exclusion, leading to grievances and mobilization. The theory's strength lies in its ability to explain the role of identity in conflict, making it highly relevant to this paper. On the hand, The SDM, focuses on the interaction between pre-existing vulnerabilities (diathesis) and external stressors,

providing a framework for understanding how conflicts escalate. In Wukari, the SDM can explain how ethnic tensions (diathesis) interact with environmental stressors (e.g., drought, economic shocks) to produce violent conflict.

However, the SDM has limitations in the context of this paper, because its focus on individual-level vulnerabilities and stressors may overlook the broader social and historical context shaping identity conflicts. SIT, therefore by contrast, explicitly addresses group dynamics and identity, making it more relevant for understanding Wukari's state of recurring conflicts. Significantly, both theories share complementary perspectives. SIT on one hand explains why identity-based conflicts emerge, while SDM on the other, explains how they escalate. For instance, SIT can explain how ethnic identities become salient in Wukari, while SDM can explain how these identities interact with environmental stressors to produce violence. In this regard, to develop effective strategies for peacebuilding, policymakers should prioritize understanding the social and historical context of identity conflicts, as highlighted by SIT, and address the structural vulnerabilities and stressors as emphasized by SDM. In a nutshell, while both theories offer insights, SIT's focus on identity dynamics makes it more relevant to this paper while SDM serves as a complementary theory.

Methodology

This study adopted a desk review approach using secondary data as its primary source of information. The reliance on secondary data was deliberate because the theme interrogates long-standing social processes, historical identity conflicts, and development trajectories in Wukari Local Government Area. These phenomena cannot be fully captured in a single cross-sectional field survey. Secondary sources consulted included: government gazettes, National Population Commission reports, academic journals, NGO reports, community histories, newspaper archives, and health policy documents from Taraba State. The use of secondary data allowed the study to situate current realities within a broader historical and structural context.

To communicate its theoretical positioning, the study employed a narrative technique. Which was considered appropriate herein because social identity conflicts and biocultural change are not just statistics; they are stories of people, places, and power. The narrative approach enabled the synthesis of fragmented data into a coherent story that links identity → conflict → development → health and culture. Theoretically, the study is positioned within Social Identity Theory and Stress Diathesis model. The narrative technique was used to show how these theories manifest in lived experiences in Wukari, rather than testing them in isolation. This makes the discussion richer and more policy driven.

Study Setting

The empirical focus of the study is the ten geopolitical wards of Wukari Local Government Area: Avyi, Chinkai, Hospital, Ikyaior, Jibu, Kente, Puje, Rafin-Kada, Tsukundi, and Wukari. Wukari is the headquarters of the Southern Taraba Senatorial District and serves as a major commercial, political, and cultural hub in Northeast Nigeria. Wukari is a biocultural convergence zone. It is ethnically diverse, with the Jukun, Tiv, Hausa, Kuteb, and other ethnic enclaves. It is also ecologically transitional between the Guinea Savannah and Sudan Savannah making livelihoods dependent on farming, fishing, and trade. This diversity makes Wukari a microcosm for studying how social identity intersects with resource access and development.

However, Wukari has also been a flashpoint for recurrent identity-based conflicts, particularly between farmers and herders, and between indigenous and migrant groups over land, power, and political representation. These conflicts have direct implications for socioeconomic development and for health outcomes, including displacement, food insecurity, trauma, and disruption of health services. The choice of all ten wards ensures that the analysis is not limited

to the urban center. It captures rural-urban differences in infrastructure, access to services, and exposure to conflict. This ward-level spread is critical because development and conflict impacts are not uniform across the Local Government Area.

Discussion of Findings

The theme, *Beyond Boundaries: Rethinking Social Identity Conflicts, Socioeconomic Development and Biocultural implications in Wukari Local Government Area*, is framed to move the discourse beyond simplistic ethnic explanations of conflict to addressing the structural drivers of conflict and its cascading effects on societal development. Though traditionally, conflicts in Wukari were mostly linked to ethnic clashes, this study argues that identity is only one layer. Using narrative synthesis of past reports, it was revealed that identity becomes politicized when tied to competition over land, political offices, and economic opportunities. Thus, identity conflict is a boundary problem over land ownership, resource control, and Supremacy. The discussion reframes conflict not as inevitable, but as a product of governance gaps and unequal development. Although data from secondary sources shows that Wukari Local Government Area has potential in agriculture, trade, and education as a result of raw material availability and the presence of Governmental institutions, its development indicators remain low. This is so because, narratives from budget performance reports and NGO assessments revealed that conflict disrupts markets, schools, and health centers. Thus, creating a "development boundary" that prevents investment and service delivery, even where policies exist.

Bio-culturally. The narrative technique draws this out by showing how, for example, the destruction of farmlands in Bantaje or Akwana wards does not just cause hunger, but also leads to loss of culturally significant crops and changes in nutritional status. By using the phrase *Beyond Boundaries*, the study argues that solutions must also go beyond boundaries: beyond ethnic lines, beyond sectoral silos of health, education, security, and beyond short-term relief to long-term structural transformation.

In essence, the use of secondary data and narrative technique is significant for three reasons: 1. **Historical Depth:** It connects current events in Wukari to decades of migration, settlement, and policy decisions. 2. **Policy Relevance:** It translates academic theory into a story that policymakers and community leaders can engage with and 3. **Interdisciplinary Insight:** It bridges sociology, public health, development studies, and environmental science. In a nutshell, the study positions Wukari Local Government Area as not just a site of conflict, but as a site of possibility. By focusing on the ten wards and using narrative to communicate theory, the paper seeks to rethink the methodology of understanding identity, development, and health in a plural society like Wukari.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Based on secondary reports, the study concluded that social identity conflicts in the study area was primarily driven by competition over scarce resources and political marginalization, with ethnicity and religion serving as rallying points rather than root causes. It also revealed that the outcome of these conflicts had devastating effects on the socioeconomic development of the area as it accounts for large scale displacement of people, disrupted agricultural productivity, discouraging investment opportunities, weakened existing social institutions adverse health outcomes.

The study also showed that conflict and development are closely linked: that the more frequent the conflicts, the greater the socioeconomic disruptions. This underlines the fact that without sustainable peace and inclusive governance, efforts towards poverty reduction and

infrastructural development will remain largely utopian and the Local Government Area would continue to suffer socioeconomic retrogression.

On a general note, there is need to constantly initiate and engage residents in community dialogue and reconciliation to ensure strategic peace building initiatives. Specifically:

1. Government and non-governmental organizations should design targeted youth empowerment schemes to reduce unemployment, idleness, and susceptibility to violent mobilization.
2. Policy documents should be reviewed to ensure fairness in the allocation of political offices, educational opportunities and access to farmland, so as to reduce perceptions of marginalization.
3. Traditional rulers and faith-based leaders and clerics should be empowered through capacity building to play stronger roles in early conflict detection, dialogue and peace education.
4. The government should increase the presence of security agencies, to ensure the effective surveillance, crime investigation, prosecution of perpetrators of violent conflicts in order to reinforce confidence in law enforcement institutions.
5. Sustainable conflict resolution should combine economic interventions with grassroots-level peace building initiatives, moving beyond short-term relief to long-term reconciliation and development.
6. Stress management and mental health support should be integrated in conflict resolution

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