

AN ASSESSMENT OF CONFLICT AND PEACE-TIME EXPERIENCES ON ECONOMIC AND INFRASTRUCTURAL TRANSFORMATION OF WUKARI TOWN, 2013-2024

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ABSTRACT

One of the catalysts for economic and infrastructural transformation is security. An environment richly endowed with potential but devoid of effective security measures will inevitably experience stagnation. On the other hand, an environment not richly endowed but with effective security architecture, over time, develops potential that ultimately leads to economic and infrastructural development. Wukari, a historical town in southern Taraba, has undergone a period of violent crises and lack of social cohesion as well as peacetime experience, all of which, consequently, defined the social and economic landscape of the town. This study examines the transformation dynamics of Wukari town within the context of a serene and secure environment vis-à-vis a turbulent and insecure environment from 2013 to 2024. It attempts a comparative assessment of the transformation of the town during the period of conflict and the social disconnect, as against the steady and increasing economic and infrastructural development of the town after the conflict. The research relied on the use of oral interviews and critical assessment of written records – journals, books, monographs, and documentaries about Wukari's socio-economic development in its methods of data collection. The discourse analysis reveals with visible evidence the state of stagnation, retrogression, and disillusionment that engulfed the Wukari community during the conflict period. On the other hand, it portrays the steady economic and infrastructural development occasioned by the peace-time experience in Wukari.

KEYWORDS: Conflict, Development, Peace-time, Transformation, and Infrastructural development.

INTRODUCTION

Since time immemorial, every human society, at one time or another, has experienced peacetime and a conflict situation. Peace and conflict are both phenomena

in human society that have far-reaching effects and long-term impact on the environment, either positively or negatively. Conflict is unavoidably present even in the least micro-society if there is human interaction, thus accentuating the position that conflict seems endemic in human relations. Conflicts should be understood as the incompatibility of desire and interests.¹¹⁰ Albert observed that conflict is part of the process by which change occurs, and as such, we cannot say that social conflict is a bad thing in itself. Without it, there would not be a human society, and there would not be the possibility of options between regression and progress.¹¹¹ Meanwhile, the phenomenon of peace is associated with a tranquil situation that allows for development and remains a constant pursuit in response to a conflict situation. Ibeanu described peace as a process involving activities that are directly or indirectly linked to increasing development and reducing conflict, both within specific societies and in the wider international community.¹¹² Similarly, where the security of an entity is sustained, it equals peacetime that allows for steady growth and development in different sectors of administration. Oyesoji Aremu asserts:

Overall development (education, health, manpower, agriculture, energy, technology, sport, and the like) of a country in a sustainable pattern is a function of sustainable security. Sustainable security is continuous peace in which all indices of development are working optimally for the sustainable growth of the country.¹¹³

In a complex environment where society is multifarious, and the system or values held are multi-dimensional, the nature of the diversity poses a serious challenge, resulting in frequent crises and insecurity, while often, efforts at peace processes are either timely or delayed. This latter scenario fits into the Nigerian situation, where the spate of crises has presented a grim reality of insecurity, which has been the order of the day. Insecurity is the reality of a lack of protection or freedom from danger and violence, or being vulnerable or exposed to threats to one's survival and well-being. Insecurity in Nigeria has deeply manifested in the character of banditry, kidnappings, ethno-religious crises, arson, environmental degradation crises, land dispute crises, terrorism, farmers-pastoralists crises, etc. Whichever way, virtually all parts of the country at different times have witnessed one or multiple forms of violent crisis occasioned by any of the factors, which inevitably predisposed affected communities to a state of insecurity.

¹¹⁰ R. North, "Conflict – the Political Aspect" *Encyclopaedia of the Social Sciences*, Vol. 4-5. New York: Macmillan, 1963, 227.

¹¹¹ Isaac O. Albert, "Mapping the Discourse: History, Social Change and Conflict Management" in Albert, I.O. (ed.) *A History of Social Conflict and Conflict Management in Nigeria. A Festschrift for Professor Biodun Adediran*. Ibadan: John Archers Publishers Ltd., 2012, 6.

¹¹² Oke Ibeanu, "Conceptualising Peace" in Shedrack Gaya Best (ed.) *Introduction to Peace and Conflict Studies in West Africa: A Reader*. Ibadan: Spectrum Books Limited, 2006, 10.

¹¹³ Oyesoji Aremu, *Policing and Terrorism: Challenges and Issues in Intelligence*. Ibadan: Stirling-Horden Publishers Limited, 2014, 113.

Experience has shown that for any environment to witness any meaningful development, it must be devoid of chaos or violent circumstances. The former Governor of Taraba State, Arc. Dickson Darius Ishaku, throughout his administration, when visiting communities in the local government areas, canvassed for a peaceful environment to enable him carry out his developmental agenda as dividends of democracy for the people of the state. He was popular with the slogan “give me peace, and I will give you development.” Peace, as simply put by David Francis, “is the absence of war, fear, conflict, anxiety, suffering, and violence and is about peaceful coexistence.” It is primarily concerned with creating and maintaining a just order in society and the resolution of conflict by non-violent means.”¹¹⁴

Without much ado to philosophical entanglements, it is understood that the concepts of *peace* and *security* are not mutually exclusive. Both align as catalysts enabling developmental strides to take place. Conversely, an environment ridden with instability because of a conflict situation will have its development retarded. In a conflict situation, people cannot strive for any socio-economic or political advancement but obey their instinct for survival. In other words, what preoccupies the minds of people in the face of danger is what to do or devise to stay safe. Apart from the insurgency of terrorists, which became prominent since 2009 with the emergence of the Boko Haram sect, and banditry that has ravaged most parts of Northern Nigeria, ethno-religious crises have been a long-standing recurring development in that political space since the 1980s. Taraba State in Northern Nigeria is one of the most multi-ethnic states in the country, bedevilled with challenges associated with ethnic profiling on the one hand and ethno-religious crises on the other.¹¹⁵

There have been cases of communal crisis or skirmishes in parts of Taraba State over time; the southern part, where Wukari is located, is not exempt. However, what appears to be a violent ethno-religious crisis erupted in Wukari in 2013. The effect of this crisis still resonates in the economic and infrastructural development of the town. This study attempted to discuss the nature of the ethnic communities, the economy, religion, and the socio-economic activities in Wukari town before, during, and after the crises of 2013 that engulfed the town. This discourse further presented a two-pronged approach of interrogating how economic considerations triggered some of the cases of violence witnessed in the study area and also assessed the impact of the crises on the economic and infrastructural development of the town up to 2024, when a landmark infrastructural achievement – the Federal University Wukari Teaching Hospital – became operational. This assessment is with a view to substantiating the notion that both economic activities and infrastructures in a conflict-prone and insecure environment experience stagnation/retrogression as opposed to a peaceful and

¹¹⁴ David J. Francis, “Peace and Conflict Studies: An African Overview of Basic Concepts” in Shedrack Gaya Best (ed.) *Introduction to Peace and Conflict Studies in West Africa: A Reader*. Ibadan: Spectrum Books Limited, 2006, 17.

¹¹⁵ M.A. Yuguda and I. Goni, “Ethno-religious Conflicts in Taraba State and its Implication on Socio-economic, Political and Educational Development of Youths,” *International Journal of Social Sciences and Humanities*. Vol. 4, No. 3, 149.

secure environment that experiences steady economic growth and improved infrastructural development that facilitates urbanisation.

ETHNIC COMMUNITIES, THE ECONOMY AND INFRASTRUCTURE IN WUKARI BEFORE THE CRISIS

This study focused on Wukari, the headquarters of Wukari Local Government Area, the political headquarters of Southern Taraba and the Kwararafa Confederacy, as well as the capital of the erstwhile Kwararafa (Jukun) kingdom. Wukari is home to the indigenous Jukun-Wapan, while other variants of the Jukun – Wanu, Ichen, Ekpan, Kuteb, and Jibu are closely knit, though they have their settlements scattered in Wukari Local Government Areas as well as neighbouring Local Government Areas such as Donga, Ibi, Takum, Kurunmi, Bali, and Gassol.¹¹⁶ The Hausa-Abakwariga and the Tiv people have long historical contact and cohabited in Wukari, and its environs (and Jukunland in general) in terms of their economic contributions, specifically the weaving industry and yam and other crop production, respectively undertaken by these two groups.¹¹⁷ However, Wukari, as an agricultural hub and nodal settlement, has since become cosmopolitan in nature, having accommodated people from different walks of life, including the Idoma, Igala, Igbirra, Etulo, Nupe, Goemai, etc., all of which, on one strand, claim affiliation to the Kwararafa kingdom. Other ethnic groups, including the Igbo and Yoruba, have a significant presence in the town.

From the foregoing, there is no doubt that Wukari has a complex configuration of an indigenous-settler and multi-religious society. What is peculiar about the crisis that imploded from February 2013 to September 2014 was that the feuding parties were those having a long-standing historical relationship. While it is understood that a conservative Jukun is a traditionalist who adheres to traditional Jukun institutions, which still hold sway, similarly, there are also adherents of both Christianity and Islam. The complexity of the crisis was that it bore the semblance of both intra-ethnic and inter-ethnic as well as religious outlooks. The intra-ethnic perspective was that the Jukun traditionalists and the Jukun-Christian adherents, on one hand, fought against the Jukun Muslims, while the latter had the support of the Hausa-Fulani and Abakwariga, who are offspring of intermarriage between the Hausa man and the Jukun woman who inevitably practised their father's faith. Thus, making the crisis also inter-ethnic in outlook.

Before the crises of 2013-2014, the economy of the town grew steadily as relative peace allowed for commercial activities to thrive. Farm produce from within and neighbouring communities found its way and was either distributed or sold at the major markets. The famous yam market received huge patronage from across different

¹¹⁶ Shishi Zhema, "Conceptualising Jukun People" in Zhema, S. and Agbu, A.D. (eds.) *Studies in the History of Jukun People of Nigeria Vol. 1*. Abuja: Dove Publishing House, 2018, 4-5.

¹¹⁷ Bello Z. Abubakar, *Economic History of Jukun People in the Benue and Chad Basins since C. 1500AD*. Makurdi: Aboki Publishers, 2021, 6-7.

parts of the country. Commercial ventures in household items, building materials, electrical and electronic gadgets, pharmaceuticals, motorcycle and automobile parts, and marts were dominated by the Igbo merchants, especially on a large scale. The Hausa are next in retailing these business ventures, including storage activities, while the Yoruba are more of artisans, especially in car maintenance, and other ethnic groups have followed suit in commercial ventures on a low scale. However, the indigenous Jukun were not keen about commercial ventures, but preferred farming activities, while there were very few artisans.

Commercial banks such as United Bank for Africa (UBA), Unity Bank, Zenith Bank, Keystone Bank, and Guarantee Trust Bank (GTB) were operating to provide banking services to the commercial and civil sectors, as well as others. The establishment of the Federal University, Wukari, in 2011, which became fully operational in 2012, provided a boost to the economy of the town as staff of the university from different parts of the country added to the economic fortune of the town and its people. The Federal University itself, as an institution, was an added piece of infrastructure to the town. In fact, people jokingly refer to it as the main industry of the town. The State General Hospital in the town was in a state of disrepair with decayed infrastructure and a lack of essential medical personnel. Although the town has a good road network, most of it is not in good condition.

CAUSES OF THE ETHNO-RELIGIOUS CRISIS IN WUKARI

The timeline of the violent crisis that engulfed Wukari is as follows:

- Episode 1: February 23, 2013 – deadly violence broke out when a Jukun boy was allegedly shot dead in a football field by a Hausa youth following a disagreement around Mecapacynth- Mayanka Area, which engulfed the town, especially Marmara, Mission Quarters, Wapan Nghaku, Old Market, Maijambe Kasuwan Katako, Akata, and Sabon Gari
- Episode 2: May 5, 2013 – deadly violent attacks around Dikko Street, because of the Muslims' refusal of passage during the traditional burial rites of the late second-in-command to the Aku Uka, late Manu Abe Ashumate, which spiraled to other areas of the town.
- Episode 3: April 15-16, 2014 –a dusk-to-dawn deadly violence in which areas around Wapan Nghaku, T-Junction, Ungwa Nani, Zenith bank community, and Pwadzu were worst hit.
- Episode 4: June 15, 2014 – a violent fight which broke out on Sunday morning when Christian worshippers were in Churches. The battlefields were areas around the hearts of the town – Marmara, Roger Road, Dikko Street, Abaka area, CRCN-Gu Wukari Area. It took a fighter jet from the Tactical Air Command, Makurdi, that was roving in emergency over the sky of the town before the cessation of the deadly violence.

- Episode 5: September 2, 2014 – this was when women came out *en masse* to protest half-naked against the recurring crises and alleged discriminatory killings of youths.¹¹⁸

The underlying factors that triggered the violent crisis were political and religious in outlook, but with economic undertones. As indicated, the vicarious ethno-religious conflicts witnessed in Wukari were inextricably linked to the continuous competition for resources; the ownership of economic resources – land ownership, sharing, and allocation in Wukari, as well as the determination of economic and political influence or authority linked to one's religious inclination, are the key driving forces that propelled the violence.¹¹⁹ According to Agege,¹²⁰ Since the colonial period, most of the natives, especially the Jukun, who were farmers, had their farmlands in either adjoining or far-flung areas of Wukari and would often spend a certain amount of time away from their homes. They would give out their additional apartments in their compounds either as rent or free of charge to the settlers, Hausa-Abakwariga, and while they came back, they sometimes sold some of their harvested crops to the latter, who on certain occasions would renege on or cheat the Jukun in payment. The Hausa-Abakwariga, who were often inclined to trade and commerce, married some of the Jukun girls and possessed some economic strength, often a sense of self-worth and assertiveness.

According to Dawudu Tsokwa¹²¹ Right from the olden days, Jukuns were mostly skilled in farming and hunting, and it was demeaning for them to leave farming for other commercial ventures. He observed that they are very accommodating to strangers and could easily give out their daughters to other people engaged in other commercial activities, including petty traders who would not contest their land with them. He continued by asserting that it was a mistaken belief that gave the settlers an edge in the political and economic circles. He further recalled that the act of giving their daughters out in marriage to the settlers was not reciprocated by the latter and that in the local politics, they often vote based on religious sentiment, while they also show nepotism in job creation or opportunities. Joel Yohanna observed that most Jukun families are into subsistence cultivation as they only farm crops for immediate consumption and reserve the rest for subsequent planting seasons, unlike some financially buoyant Hausa merchants who buy the produce, store and resell at higher prices.¹²²

¹¹⁸ The lead author compiled the timeline of the violent events in his notes as a living witness and was caught in the cross-fire of Episodes 1, 3 & 4.

¹¹⁹ Jaja Nwanegbo, J. Odigbo and O. Ngara, "Citizenship, Indigeneship and Settlership Crisis in Nigeria: Understanding the Dynamics of Wukari Crisis" *Journal of Research in Peace, Gender and Development* 4 (1), 2014.

¹²⁰ Oral Interview with Mr. Philemon Agege, 50. Civil Servant, Mission Quarters, Wukari, 30/05/2025.

¹²¹ Oral Interview with Reverend Dawudu D. Tsokwa, 68, Aku Palace, Wukari, 22/01/2015.

¹²² Oral Interview with Mr. Joel Yohanna, 51, Teacher, Opposite Abite Lodge, East, Wukari. 01/02/2015.

Similarly, it was alleged that most of the revenue-generating economic activities were handled by the settlers who had gained the upper hand in that sector. An average Jukun youth was allegedly lackadaisical about other economic ventures apart from farming; they were hardly skilful in entrepreneurship. According to oral information, even the attempt by the Jukun youths to be part of the motor park workers was initially resisted by the Hausa.¹²³ Given this disposition, the indigenous people seem to believe that their hospitality has been taken for granted, and they seem to have lost many economic opportunities.

Al-Isa Yusuf¹²⁴ recounted that the crisis at the beginning did not bear any religious undertone, but was basically socio-cultural and political, because the indigenous people felt marginalised by outsiders. He described the outsiders as *yan cirani* – a Hausa word for immigrants, especially those from core Northern States who came for seasonal work as labourers, artisans, and semi-skilled workers who either decide to stay permanently, or some go back to their states of origin during the off-peak period of economic activities in Wukari. He further categorised the indigenous Jukun into two: the conservative Jukun, who are traditionalists on one hand, and the non-conservative Jukun, called Tswenkan (those that are not adherents of the Jukun traditional and religious institutions and have embraced either Christianity or Islam). The Abakwariga were also not left out as members of the community.

In effect, the division of these communities embroiled in various socio-cultural and religious sentiments and suppressed grievances heightened the volatility of the area. Thus, by the time of the implosion, the religious factor became the dividing line. It was a coalition of the Jukun Muslims, Abakwariga, *Yan Cirani*, Hausa-Fulani versus the Jukun Christians and Traditionalists. In all of these, there was a general feeling of insecurity on account of underlying grievances as a result of perceived past marginalisation in economic resources, lack of reciprocity in social relations, political disadvantage, and cultural disdain, which were key issues that created the potency for the ethno-religious violence that broke out in the town.

For the long-standing historical relationship between the Jukun and the Tiv, who over the years have been locked in intractable conflicts, it is expedient to note that virtually all literature and oral information gathered has attributed it to access to land resources. But at the beginning, it was alleged that they enjoyed peaceful coexistence. According to Targema, the Tiv and Jukun have, since the 18th century, lived harmoniously as neighbours and both enjoyed the goodwill of each other in what could be regarded as a beneficial, reciprocal relationship.¹²⁵ C.C. Jacobs observed that, sequel to the collapse of the Kwararafa Empire, there was rampant rivalry among the various ethnic groups and that it could have been such an incursion that the Tiv came to the defence of the Jukun. More so, he also asserted that the Tiv had great admiration

¹²³ Dante T. Angyu, 70, Former Chairman, Jukun Youth Development Association, Ajiduku Area, Wukari. 24/01/2015.

¹²⁴ Al-Isa Yusuf, Civil Servant, Dikko Street, Wukari, 28/01/2015.

¹²⁵ Joseph Bem Targema, *The Tiv-Jukun Relationship: The Model of a Jukun Bishop and a Tiv Priest*. Makurdi: Obama Publishers, 2018, 38.

for the Jukun's magical and religious powers, which were associated with their kingship institution; thus, the Tiv, particularly the Ukum and Shitile segments, who were close to the Jukun, sent eminent individuals among them to Wukari or Katsina-Ala to understudy and gain this power while they played the role of drum chiefs (Tor Gbande).¹²⁶ As a matter of symbiotic relationship, the Jukun, who were fishermen and good swimmers, had assisted the Tiv to cross the River Katsina-Ala to the eastern bank for their safety.¹²⁷ In response to a request by missionaries around the River Benue axis to know the boundaries between the Jukun and Tiv, a Jukun allegedly intertwined his ten fingers to indicate that both communities (Jukun and Tiv) lived as one without a clear-cut boundary.¹²⁸

As recalled, the relationship between the Tiv and Jukun became frosty over land resources. It has even been alleged that the issue of land acquisition had been a source of contention between both communities right from the beginning of their intergroup relations, since the colonial period.¹²⁹ Adamu indicated that to forestall any future land squabble between the Tiv and Jukun, the Tiv that were submissive to the authority of the Aku were offered symbolic 'Deeds of Title' to land they acquired, but which were reversionary, as the Tiv understandably were mere tenants.¹³⁰ Migration, as we know, is a common phenomenon in the historical discourse of the pattern of early human settlement, which impacts the nature of intergroup relations; however, as Targema rightly noted, where an agrarian group inadvertently migrated to the territory of another agrarian community, it more often than not brought apprehension, which typifies the nature of the Tiv-Jukun relationship.¹³¹ According to Tsokwa,¹³² the Tiv who migrated from Benue into Taraba were also farmers like the Jukun people, and

¹²⁶ C.C. Jacobs, *British Administrative Policies in Tiv-Jukun Relations between 1900-1945*. 326. Cited in Terna H. Ahom, "The Social and Economic Military Invasion of Zaki-Biam 2001" in Wuam, Terhemba & Ikpanor, Elijah Terdoo (eds.), *The Military Invasion of Zaki-Biam*. Makurdi: Aboki Publishers, 2013, 151.

¹²⁷ T. Makar, *The History of Political Change among the Tiv in the 19th and 20th Centuries*. Enugu: Fourth Dimension Publishers, 1994. 45-46. Quoted from Terna H. Ahom, "The Social and Economic Military Invasion of Zaki-Biam 2001" in Wuam, Terhemba & Ikpanor, Elijah Terdoo (eds.) *The Military Invasion of Zaki-Biam*.

¹²⁸ O. Alubo, "Ethnic Conflicts and Citizenship Crises in the Central Region" *Programme on Ethnic and Federal Studies (PEFS)*, Ibadan, 2006. 96. Cited in Terna H. Ahom. "The Social and Economic Military Invasion of Zaki-Biam, 152.

¹²⁹ Tanko Adihikon, "The Foundation, Growth and Development of Jukun Settlement: A Case of Chonku in Wukari" in Zhema, S. and Agbu, A.D. (eds.) *Studies in the History of Jukun People of Nigeria Vol 1*. Abuja: Dove Publishing House, 2018, 35.

¹³⁰ Adamu Danjuma, *Issues in Tiv-Jukun Conflicts*. Jos: Target Publishers, 2002. 2. Cited in Tanko Adihikon A, "The Foundation, Growth and Development of Jukun Settlement: A Case of Chonku in Wukari" in Zhema, S. and Agbu, A.D. (eds.) *Studies in the History of Jukun People of Nigeria Vol 1*, 35.

¹³¹ Joseph Bem Targema. *The Tiv-Jukun Relationship: The Model of a Jukun Bishop and a Tiv Priest*...40.

¹³² Oral Interview with Reverend Dawudu D. Tsokwa.

this often resulted in apprehension, particularly in a situation where land was parcelled to the Tiv, and at the end of the tenancy, the latter refused to leave, thereby possessing the place by planting economic trees, and had their dead buried there. He further observed that in the course of time, they have populated the area with a high birth rate or by accommodating many of their kith and kin, and in so doing, sometimes outnumber the hosts and lay claim to the territory. This situation, as observed, gives them a political advantage, and the idea of the Tiv allegedly demanding a third-class stool in Wukari Local Government is part of the politics that engendered the crisis.

Nenshi Terer reflected on the socio-political life of the Tiv in the past as one of the intricacies of the Tiv-Jukun crisis. He noted that had the Tiv not been acephalous before 1946, but had a semblance of a centralised political administration under a sovereign ruler, like the position of the Aku Uka, perhaps some of the crises between the Tiv and Jukun would not have been as intractable as they seem.¹³³ In other words, as expected, the idea of the eldest in a clan being a rallying point where there are many clans may not carry weight or provide a united front like that of a paramount chief when a third party is to give recognition or pay homage and have a high-profile deal with the community.

The timeline of the Tiv-Jukun crisis within the period under review in Wukari may not be as vividly captured as that of the religious crisis within the town. This is because the clashes occurred intermittently, mostly at the outskirts or adjoining areas of Wukari, especially before and during the planting season, but without any significant impact on the infrastructure of the town, except that they usually resulted in the disruption of economic activities. Again, in most cases, the clashes were in the form of guerrilla attacks and non-conventional warfare.

CONFLICT PERIODS AND IMPACTS ON THE ECONOMY AND INFRASTRUCTURE OF WUKARI

As earlier posited, an environment that is insecure or prone to crisis and unstable will always experience retarded growth/stagnation and retrogression in virtually all facets of human development, be it economic, political, social, educational, etc. Even when endowed with economic resources, no meaningful advancement in civilisation will be achieved in such a crisis-ridden or insecure polity. The violent crises in Wukari from 2013 up to the recent period have had dire consequences on the lives of both the indigenous population and the settlers, especially as they affect the economy and infrastructure of the community.

The violent crises and instability in Wukari brought the economy of the town to its lowest point. They led to the incapacitation of agricultural productivity. Many of the indigenous people in an agrarian society lost their means of livelihood. The Tiv and Jukun people around Wukari and its suburbs could not go to farms because of the restiveness and cases of isolated killings on farmlands. Every sector of the economy

¹³³ Oral Interview with Nenshi Terer, 54, Jandekura, Wukari Local Government Area. 30/05/2025.

was seriously affected. For instance, farmers lost greatly because many were unable to cultivate at the appropriate time, those able to cultivate were unable to grow their crops, and many crops could not be harvested and were left to rot or were plundered. There were cases of post-harvest losses, too. The influx of traders with commodities from many communities in far-flung and other local government areas into Wukari, hoping to get supplies from Wukari, was hampered. In other words, goods and services that hitherto were beneficial to the town ceased or were restricted. The loss of internally generated revenue, which is normally derived largely from sales and distribution of farm produce, stagnated the community. For instance, the yam market, which is a major distribution centre for yams and other tubers to many parts of the country, no longer thrives, and the revenue generation, which was a major and regular source of income for the local government coffers, was affected. The Hausa and other ethnic groups that purchased farm produce in Wukari, either in bulk or in small quantities to store and resell, were unable to do so.

Large-scale looting and arson were committed during the crisis, which further made the economic viability extremely low because several wholesale and retail outlets in the town were plundered and set ablaze, especially those located in areas outlined in the timeline. The cultural institution was also not spared, like the burning of the Atoshi royal compound with its shrine and other paraphernalia of office on Atoshi Street. The house of Kunvyi (chairman of the kingmakers), close to CRCN-Gu Wukari, and the traditional festival sites of Ando and Kenda were also burnt down.¹³⁴ Religious and worship centres – Mosques and churches were set ablaze during the crisis.

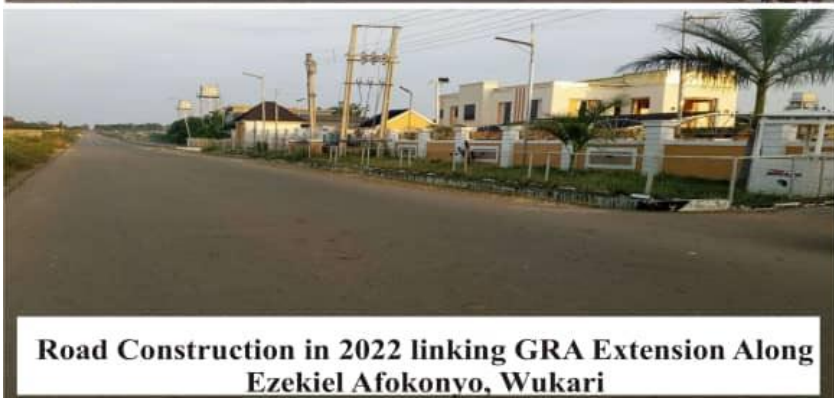
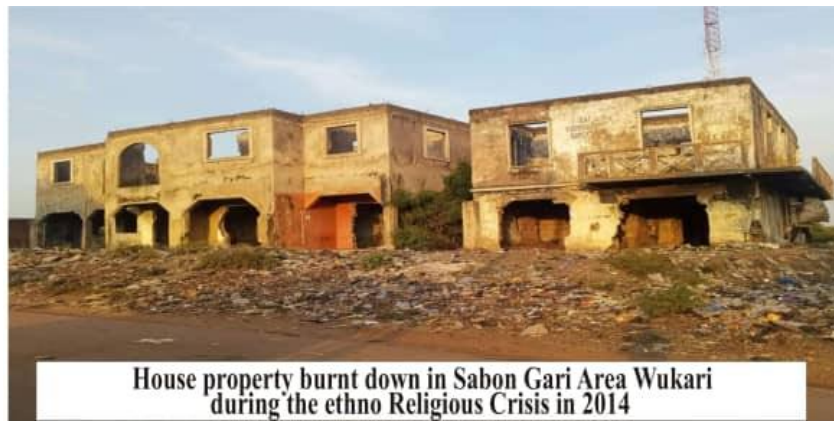
Incidentally, the General Hospital, which hitherto was in disrepair, was completely overwhelmed because of the number of casualties and victims of the crisis, being the major hospital offering medical services during the crisis. The commercial banks that used to operate in the town were also affected. In fact, all the banks in the town halted their activities for a while, and in the course of time, Keystone Bank got liquidated because of low patronage. The management of the GTB Branch in Wukari ceased to operate, citing the restiveness that engulfed the town. Although UBA was alleged to have been razed by some criminal elements prior to the crisis, the skeletal services it was rendering were equally affected.

Population displacement and demographic changes abruptly affected the economy of the town. According to S.O. Adamu,¹³⁵ the rate of growth of the population is obviously one of the most important demographic measures and is determined by the dynamics of fertility, mortality, and migration. Many of the youths and able-bodied men who were in their prime and considered the productive force died during the crisis. Apart from children that were conceived before the war, childbearing

¹³⁴ Oral Interview with Mr. Philemon Agege.

¹³⁵ S.O. Adamu, "Population and Planning in Nigeria" in Tamuno, N. Tekena & Atanda, J.A. (eds.) *Nigeria since Independence: The First 25 Years, Vol IV – Government and Public Policy. Panel on Nigeria since Independence History Project*. Heinemann Educational Books (Nigeria) Ltd., 1989, 209.

was a major factor in most homes due to the harsh economy of that period. Most families that were affected had to travel or relocate to other parts of the state, such as Jalingo, Takum, Mutum Biyu, etc., and some to neighbouring Benue State. Most of the people from the southern parts of the country returned to their state of origin. To some extent, some artisans with expertise in certain vocational and skill acquisitions emigrated from the town. In fact, many university staff who initially planned to settle down and invest in the economy of Wukari (which now has a new federal educational institution) became disillusioned with a cosmopolitan society.



In all of these, it was clear that the spate of crises had made the environment insecure for people, goods, and services to thrive, despite its economic potential. The stagnant nature of the economy and the destruction of some of the infrastructure resulted in retrogression, as the town wore the look of a shattered environment, with ruins as a common sight. An average resident of the town, from whichever side of the divide, has now come to believe that war does no good.

PEACE-TIME DEVELOPMENT OF ECONOMY AND INFRASTRUCTURE IN WUKARI

Although the conflicts that bedevilled Wukari within the scope of the study were in two streams – the religious crisis between the Christians and Muslims and the ethnic rivalry between the Tiv and Jukun, spanning April 2019-November 2021 and 2017-2023, respectively – the latter were intermittently on the outskirts, and their effect was felt on the economy of Wukari. As a result, the period of this discourse is emphatically from September 2, 2014, the date of the last episode of the crisis, is September 2014 to December 2024, and the reason is that the religious crisis was right inside the town and it affected both the economy and the infrastructure.

The sustained peace that was achieved because of many conflict resolutions and peace meetings that took place both inside and outside of the town has led to many of the giant strides recorded in Wukari in its economic and infrastructural development. First, the health care sector, it was alleged that some of the private hospitals' infrastructure in Wukari, such as Waritoma, Bethel, Biyama, Gongola, Kwararafa, among others, could not sufficiently cater to the teeming population and victims of the crisis. The immediate past Aku Uka, late Dr. Shekarau Angyu Masa-Ibi, Kuvyon II, relentlessly prevailed on the state government to see the need to improve the services of the General Hospital. At the behest of the late monarch's request, the acting Governor, Alhaji Danladi Abubakar, ensured the transfer of many medical personnel and nurses who helped improve the medical services at the time of dire need. It was during the administration of Governor Darius Ishaku that a remodelling of the General Hospital took place. The hospital structures were greatly renovated, and sophisticated medical equipment, a laboratory, a pharmacy, medical kits, a good running water system, standard generators, and other state-of-the-art facilities were put in place.¹³⁶

In 2023, by virtue of the presence of the Federal University, Wukari (FUW), and the policy of the Federal Ministry of Health, which stipulates that a teaching hospital could only be established at a site not more than 50 kilometres from a federal university, and whereas the management of the FUW had taken an earlier initiative to have established the College of Medicine, an agreement was reached between the Taraba State Government and the Federal Government to upgrade the General Hospital to a teaching hospital, an agreement which came to fruition in 2024. This deal became a reality in view of the security and peace enjoyed in the town and the influx

¹³⁶ Oral Interview with Philemon Agege.

of people from all walks of life, facilitated by some other federal institutions like the FUW.

The Federal University was the first federal institution that was established in 2011, bringing respite to those who have been yearning to attend a federal university in this zone. Surprisingly, anyone yearning to attend any federal university would, before now, have to travel to the seemingly nearest conventional federal university, which is the University of Jos, Plateau State – a journey of not less than a 6-hour drive by car. This university is indeed reassuring and has helped improve the educational condition of all residents of Wukari and beyond. The FUW later birthed the teaching hospital; apart from serving the medical needs of the community, it's the training ground for the clinicals.

The Kwara University, which was established in 2005 as a community.¹³⁷ University, under the former name – Jubilee University – is one of the major developmental projects within this scope of study. It relocated to the permanent site in 2022 and has helped provide hope for those who did not have the financial capacity and have received community support in the form of a scholarship. It is worthy to note that Wukari town could boast of two universities. The spate of ongoing infrastructural development at the permanent site is a testament to the security of the town. The National Open University Study Centre in Wukari (2014), which helps, among other programmes, with a distance learning facility, is equally remarkable.

In the aspect of electricity supply, Wukari has benefited over the years, being the earliest in Taraba State to be linked to the national grid through Yandev in Benue State, the latter took its source from Oji River, Enugu State. Apart from Zing in Taraba State, which was also linked to the national grid, other communities in the state were under the rural electrification project. Wukari had suffered incessant power outages because of the undersupply or frequent collapse of the national grid. However, with the disconnection from Yandev and reconnection of Wukari to the Kashimbila Dam in Takum Local Government Area of Southern Taraba, Wukari witnessed a new dispensation of improved power supply as of 2022.¹³⁸

In road transportation, Wukari had, during this peacetime under former Governor Darius Ishaku, seen some road reconstruction and construction of new roads, all of which enhanced the economy of the town. Apart from the existing 4 major entry roads, Wukari–Ibi Road (1927), Wukari–Katsina-Ala Road (1950), Wukari–Kente Road (1962), and Wukari–Yola Road (1950), all of which serve a special purpose, the peacetime additional road was the construction of the Wukari – Tsokundi Road (2019) to open up and ease rice cultivation and production and regular supply from those popular rice production area communities found along the Donga River towards Gindin Doruwa such as Tsokundi, Ando Shani, Gamye, Tsekwu, Nwunko, and Tunari.¹³⁹ The construction of this road project was peculiar because it

¹³⁷ Oral Interview with Mr. Philemon Agege.

¹³⁸ Mr. Ibrahim Adekka Agbu, 56, Civil Servant, Ibi Local Government Council, 28/05/2025.

¹³⁹ Mr. Ibrahim Adekka Agbu.

also linked the metropolis up to the palace of the Aku Uka. There was also improved road construction of some kilometres along the Wukari–Kente Road, where the Teaching Hospital is located.¹⁴⁰ It is expected that more still needs to be done both within and outside Wukari town.

Some other infrastructural development that further impacts the economy was the modernisation of the yam market into an international yam market. Initially, the market was owned by the community, but later ownership was transferred to the Taraba State Government in 2021 after due compensation by the latter. The local government under the administration of Hon. Adi Daniel (Adigrace) played a crucial role in this regard, and the chairman of the Yam market after the modernisation was Mr. Yakubu Angyu Byepyi. This reorganisation of the market gave it a facelift, resulting in increased revenue generation and improved economic interaction between marketers within and outside Wukari. In the same vein, the modernisation of the rice mill was undertaken in the same year, 2021, with a new site provided at Hyuku village, a suburb of Wukari, while efforts are currently ongoing to relocate the rice milling community to the new site.

It is also imperative to note that it was in the aftermath of the ethno-religious crisis and restoration of sustained peace and security that Wukari could boast of state-of-the-art lodges and hotels, although Elim-Top Suites and Gardens and Rohi Suites had reputably befitting infrastructures. However, the confidence to invest in these structures gained more traction from about 2015, when the town began to see exquisite lodges and hotels, including Binary Hotel, La Palms, and King Royal; the moderate ones were Sonyama, AdiGrace Motel, etc. Some of the existing ones that continue to receive patronage are Jankada, Godiya Lodge, Abite Lodge, Emmokene, etc.

¹⁴⁰ Mr. Dangana Agbu, 54, Civil Servant, Wukari Local Government Council, 28/05/2025.



Road Construction from Aku-Uka Palace through Rice Mill Area, Wukari linking Tsokundi Road. Constructed in 2020



Binary Hotel, along Old Bantaje Road, Wukari.
Constructed in 2020



Wukari Old Market Since Gongola state. Once deserted during the 2014 crisis.

The housing estate in Wukari grew rapidly after the crisis due to the security of the town. The initial demographic pattern, which tended to see an exodus of people from Wukari, was abruptly reversed with an influx of people, including returnees and newcomers. The expansion of FUW was partly responsible as staff strength increased and improved infrastructure. The new site along Takum Road became populated with non-indigenes from different parts of the country, especially staff of the FUW and other workers. In other areas of the town, non-indigenes added to the dense population both in the heart of the town and in the various wards. A significant number of sprawling buildings were constructed, with some storey buildings and plaza/shopping complexes. As expected, there was an increase in rent in view of the prevailing harsh economic realities. However, there still exists a pattern of seclusion in settlements along religious lines in some parts of the town.

CONCLUSION

The desire for peaceful coexistence cannot be overemphasised because a tranquil environment is a necessary platform for progressive development, but in virtually all human affairs, it is not uncommon for conflict to erupt because of incompatible interests and social realities. However, there should be deliberate engagements on conflict resolution for peace time, and when that is achieved, it brings about meaningful growth and transformation in both economic and infrastructural development. The experience and picture from the Wukari case clearly underscore this belief. In other words, the case of Wukari has depicted that sustained peace is pivotal for massive transformation. Like the Rwandan experience, a genuine peace accord must be seen to be achieved and sustained.

The centrifugal forces that inhibit a sense of humanity and peaceful and beneficial intra-group and intergroup relations, but promote hatred, nepotism, unnecessary competition, or struggles over unlawful resources that seem to have been overcome, should be sustained. Like Rwanda, which today is the African tourism destination, Wukari could be the same; all efforts should be made so that, from the remaining visible ruins, an edifice of hope can be built. However, according to the Yoruba school of thought or adage, *'Ile Oba to jo ewa lo bu kun'* (literally meaning *the king's palace that got burnt will inadvertently add beauty to it*). The adage in its proper context affirms that when a palace is engulfed in an inferno, the rebuilt palace will be an edifice or more sophisticated than the previous one. In other words, the drawback from the crisis that engulfed Wukari town in 2013 has been reversed by the sustained peace that is being experienced, marking a rejuvenation of the town to give it a better look in the long run.

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