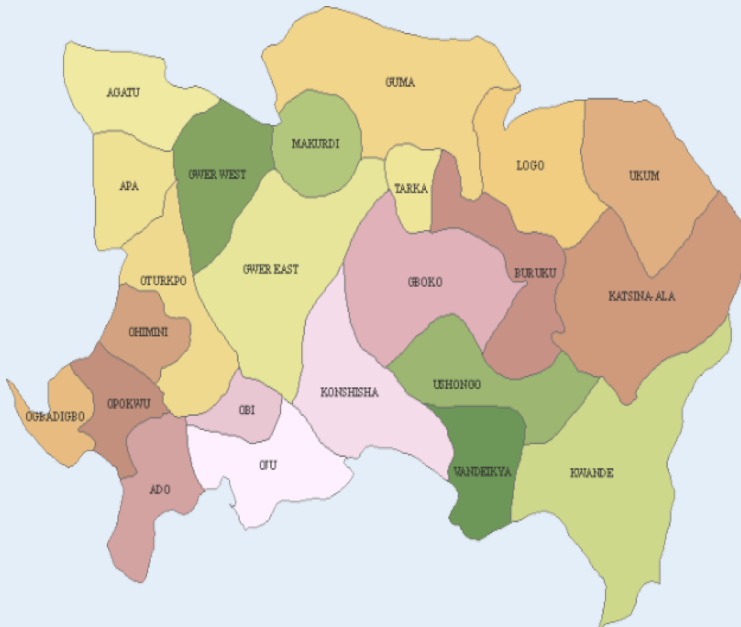


INTERCOMMUNAL CLASH: 25 PEOPLE KILLED IN AGATU LGA OF BENUE STATE, NIGERIA, (June 30, 2019)

BACKGROUND



Pic 1.1 : Map of Benue State, Nigeria²

- Benue State is located in the North-Central Region of Nigeria and has a total population of 5,741,815 (2016 estimate.)¹.
- The State shares borders with Nassarawa, Taraba, Cross River, Enugu and Kogi States as well as with the Republic of Cameroun. There are 23 Local Government Areas (LGAs) in the State with 10 ethnic groups.
- Benue State is referred to as the 'Food Basket of the Nation' due to the vast agricultural potential of the State. About 80% of the State population are involved in agriculture with focus on farming and fishing around the River Benue. **Agatu Local Government Area (LGA)** is particularly noted for its rich diverse agricultural produce and fish production in the State, thus making the LGA prone to violence.
- Benue State has been a major hotspot of varied dimension of communal conflicts, farmer-herders clashes and gang-related violence that have resulted in the loss of lives and properties as well as strained peaceful and social relationships/structures in the State.

INCIDENT PROFILE

On Sunday, June 30 2019, 25 people were allegedly killed³ (including 1 female and 2 children) with several others injured in Agbaduma-Okololo village, Agatu LGA of Benue State in an attack carried out by suspected armed youths from neighbouring Abugbe community. The attackers also reportedly burnt down several houses in the incident⁴.

Prior to the armed attack, the conflicting communities (Agbaduma and Abugbe) had signed a peace accord on June 29, 2019 to resolve the existing skirmishes over the ownership of a piece of land and fishponds in the area. This is in addition to the series of visitations conducted in the communities by the Benue State Deputy Governor, Benson Abounu⁵, as part of the efforts to resolve the lingering disputes in the LGA.

While the proximate cause of the attack on Agbaduma-Okololo village could not be ascertained, investigations have commenced to ascertain the motive behind the latest violence.



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RISK ANALYSIS

The recurring incidence of communal clashes in Agatu LGA of Benue State has become worrisome considering the huge humanitarian consequences of human deaths, displacement and destruction of the sources of social/economic livelihoods. The remote cause of the intermittent skirmishes, triggered by unresolved disagreements over ownership of land and fishing ponds has lingered for several years. This continues to strain the hitherto peaceful relations and social ties existing between the communities. Given that majority of the population in the communities in the LGA are subsistent farmers who depend on crop farming, pastoralism and fishing, the conflict has the potential to affect food security, household consumption and income. This is evident in the fear and distrust among the affected communities, which is hampering local farming and fishing activities at the disputed sites.

The displacement of communities from their means of livelihood further threatens the economic welfare of the urban dwellers that rely on the rural communities for food supply. Data generated by WANEP Nigeria from monitoring trends of insecurity in the LGA in previous months (April 2019) revealed a fatality rate of over 20 people with 100 houses destroyed in Aila community of Agatu LGA⁶ following similar disputes over a fishing pond site in the community. As such, the current conflict has the potential to cause internal displacement among affected population in the communities, especially women and children who constitute significant proportion of the population. This could further expose the risk to sexual and gender-based violence against such vulnerable populations in the communities.

Additionally, continual use of small arms and light weapons in the inter-community conflict also has the potential to create a demand that could fuel proliferation and availability of firearms in the communities. This could further compound the risk of violence escalation and increase fatalities, injuries, destruction of properties and internal displacement of population.

Moreover, the lack of justice following years of inter and intra communal violence in Agatu LGA for victims and their families is likely to accentuate the cycle of violence and reprisal killings in the affected communities. Though security interventions have become necessary in creating space for dialogue, mediation and peace agreements, the protracted conflict continues to undermine such efforts. This has further heightened tensions and fear among the populations in the feuding communities.

MECHANISMS FOR INTERVENTIONS:

- Site assessment of the affected community has been carried out by the State Deputy Governor to ascertain the extent of damage with the view to provide relief for affected victims. Also as part of measures to curb reprisal attacks and maintain peace and security, the Benue State Government has imposed curfew within Obagaji, Egba, Okokolo and Abugbe axis of the LGA⁷.
- Security Operatives have been deployed to the affected communities to enhance peace and security, while further investigations have commenced to unravel the potential causes of the current violence and in trail of perpetrators of the crime.



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RECOMMENDATIONS

- The State and Local Governments should initiate dialogue and mediation through existing local peacebuilding structures to engage traditional authorities, religious groups, women and youth groups of the feuding communities to resolve the conflict and foster social cohesion. The dialogue and mediation processes should necessarily create a space for CSOs participation to enhance synergy and sustainability.
- The State and Local Governments, in collaboration with Traditional/Religious leaders, women and youth groups, Civil Society Organisations and the media should embark on community engagement through peace sensitization activities aimed at preventing further escalation of violence.
- The State and Local Governments should increase support for the presence of security agencies in the communities to enhance peace and security. This should necessarily provide a platform to enhance community policing strategies to include identification and strengthening of existing conflict early warning mechanisms to aid the prevention and mitigation of threats to security in the affected communities.

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