


'David found Ziklag burned with fire': Assessing ecoterrorism in a multireligious Nigeria

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This article examines the phenomenon of ecoterrorism in Nigeria and the roles of faith-based communities in curbing ecoterrorism. In Nigeria, there have been numerous cases of ecoterrorism, committed by Fulani herdsmen against the indigenous populations. Literature has laid emphasis on ecoterrorism, with its implications for faith-based organisations (FBOs) sidelined. The phenomenon of ecoterrorism started in the Old Testament, when David and his men burned Ziklag with fire, destroying the houses, farmlands, and other properties there. From the documentary analysis, findings reveal that there are divergent reasons given for the prevalence of ecoterrorism in Nigeria. Firstly, it is believed that the Fulani herdsmen have the ambition of taking over the lands of non-Fulani people. Secondly, it is alleged, especially by Christians, that the ecoterrorism that is being carried out by Fulani herdsmen is an attempt to enforce Islam on the entire populace. Thirdly, a lack of education on pastoralism has sustained ecoterrorism in Nigeria. Also, the results indicate that ecoterrorism affects women, children, and property more than any terrorist attack. Recommendations are discussed.

Contribution: Ecoterrorism is one of the leading factors of poverty, famine, and abuse in Nigeria, and it also affects farmers, especially those in rural areas. Practical theology was implicated in this study.

Keywords: ecoterrorism; Ziklag; David; FBO; Jihad; Fulani herdsmen; Christians; terrorism.

Introduction

In Nigeria, ecoterrorism is intended to damage a supposed enemy's natural environment for the purpose of becoming the owner. Ecoterrorism is a legitimate threat to Nigeria's security, notwithstanding the mild approach to it by the Nigerian government. Take for instance the burning down of a farm of yams in Benue state by invading Fulani herdsmen (Duru 2015); or how herders in Oji-Agu in Akpugo community, Nkanu East Local Government Area of Enugu State, invaded and destroyed a rice farm worth over N17 million (Adonu 2020).

At this juncture, it is important to understand the concept of ecoterrorism. It can be seen as the use or threat of use, of violence by an individual or group, whether acting for or in opposition to established authority, when such action is designed to create extreme anxiety and/or fear-inducing effects in a target group larger than the immediate victims with the purpose of coercing that group into acceding to the political demands of the perpetrators' (Wardlaw 1989:16). Also, Schwartz (1998) asserts that ecoterrorism was listed as one of the most serious domestic threats. It can be when: (1) the act or threat breaches national and/or international laws governing the environment during peacetime or wartime and (2) the act or threat exhibits the characteristics of terrorism (i.e. the act or threat of violence has specific objectives, and targets a symbolic target). An act of environmental destruction can be termed 'environmental terrorism' only when the two latter criteria are met, and when the environment is used as an authentic symbol that instils fear in the larger population over the ecological consequences of the act. These aforementioned indicators indicate that ecoterrorism is intended to damage an enemy's natural environment (Merriam-Webster 2022).

Nigeria is made up of two critical religions: Christianity and Islam. Christianity thrives in southern Nigeria, while Islam thrives in northern Nigeria. In the context of this article, religion is a faith-based reward that satisfies an individual's mode of worship, freedom of association and room for interaction with others, thereby satisfying some of the human needs (Yesufu 2016:3). However, Christians and Christianity are an integral part of the fabric of northern Nigerian society (Ehrhardt & Ibrahim 2020). The southern part of Nigeria is made up of vegetation and grassland

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because of the adequate rainfall, while the northern part is strongly affected by desertification because of the absence of adequate rainfall. The herdsmen from the north tend to move southward or to the north central region with the notion that they are looking for vegetation for their animals. Unfortunately, what is observed is the destruction of farmlands, the burning of their houses and crops by the invading Fulani herdsmen who terrorise the people. Generally, the decrease in basic resources such as water has already been identified as a driver of violent conflicts, which have given way to the strengthening of terrorist organisations that use the environment as a tool of coercion (Spadaro 2020). This is the practice of terrorists in southern Nigeria, who masquerade under the cover of being herders to cause destruction to the environment.

Although research has been made on various forms of ecoterrorism, most of the approaches have sidelined the impacts of ecoterrorism on the church as well as the roles that faith-based organisations (FBOs) could play in the fight against ecoterrorism. Faith-based organisations often have a good understanding of the local context, speak out for the disenfranchised, deliver higher quality services, mobilise energy and resources, contribute to consensus-building and connect local communities with higher authorities (Banda et al. 2006). Available statistics reveal that those who are mostly affected are the Christians in the southern and northern central parts of Nigeria. Literature has laid emphasis on ecoterrorism (Gallagher 2023; Penders & Thomas 2002; Spadaro 2020). This study first assesses religion in Nigeria, then discusses ecoterrorism in Nigeria and finally analyses the cases and impacts of ecoterrorism in Nigeria. Finally, it explores what faith-based organisations could do for both the victims and the aggressors. This study adopted documentary analysis through a phenomenological approach.

Religion in Nigeria

Religion is a determinant factor in the political and social sectors in Nigeria. This is why even the efforts of elder statesmen to make people believe that religion is not a problem in Nigeria have failed because of the various negative social and political impacts of religion in Nigeria. Nigeria is strongly divided between Christianity and Islam in southern and northern Nigeria, respectively. Christians in Nigeria are divided along denominational fault lines such as Roman Catholicism, Orthodox Churches, and Pentecostal movements. Islam is divided among the Hausa and Fulani Christians. The two major religions form two important organisations. They are the Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN) and the Jama'atu Nasril Islam (JNI). These two associations have over the years wielded powers to protect and defend their members and reduce divisions within various groups (Yesufu 2016).

Religion in Nigeria is a double-edged sword. It has the positive side and also the negative side. In Nigeria, religion is

meant to be a platform for peace, stability, progress, development, and unity but has apparently been used by many to disrupt the well-being of individuals and society (Adefarasin 2004:293). The negative side of religion is what is being used, especially by politicians, for their personal aims and objectives. Religion is manipulated by populists to continue to push the citizens at loggerheads, while the politicians continue to wax stronger in their political journey. Most religious conflicts escalate into crises, and during each crisis, a large number of people are killed and properties worth millions of naira are destroyed. Aluko (2017) lamented:

If, however, such a country continues to lose her citizens on the basis of religious crises that ensued from intolerance and the non-understanding of religious faiths, how can such a country develop or continue to exist? (p. 305)

Available statistics indicate that northern and southern Nigeria were amalgamated by the British in 1914. It was in 1960, precisely on 01 October, that the British decided to grant Nigeria independence. Nigeria adopted the republican constitution in 1963, giving her a federal status among the committee of nations. Since Nigeria's independence, it has been ruled mostly by a civilian regime. It was in 1999 that Nigeria returned to democracy, but there have been several interventions, with military style leadership adopted by some of the civilian leaders since 1999. Although Christians dominate southern Nigeria and Muslims northern Nigeria, the north central region, otherwise known as the 'middle belt', has nearly equal populations of Christians and Muslims. Kukah (1993) indicated that the Middle Belt, with its clusters of Christians and traditional religious worshippers, remains central to the geopolitical calculations of the ruling classes in the North and the South, each laying claim on a different basis: the North on the basis of geographical contiguity and the South on the basis of religious brotherhood.

Ecoterrorism in the Old Testament (I Samuel 30)

Before the advent of contemporary ecoterrorism, the Old Testament also had narratives of ecoterrorists and their activities. However, Nilson and Burke (2002) see ecoterrorism as any direct or indirect use of force, wilful damage, or violence against persons, groups, or property that is used to terminate, prevent, or minimise human alteration to any part of the natural environment or its animal species. One of the narratives in the Old Testament that projects ecoterrorism is I Samuel 30.

David and his men had just spent 3 days walking about 60 miles from Gath to their homes in Ziklag. When they get to this burned out city there, according to verse three, they find 'their wives and sons and daughters [were] taken captive' (Shawver 2021). They had overcome Ziklag and burned it with fire and taken captive the women and all who were in it, both small and great. They killed no one, but carried them off and went their way (Knapp 2020). The Amalekites raid this unprotected city and carry off anyone who could be of value

to them. There were doubtless some older folks still remaining in Ziklag who could not be sold as slaves or used as slaves. But everyone of any economic value to the Amalekites, namely wives, sons and daughters, had been hauled away as spoils of war (Shawver 2021).

It could be seen that the features of ecoterrorism obtainable in the Old Testament are similar to what is happening in Nigeria. Firstly, it is observable that during ecoterrorism, lives and properties are lost. Secondly, it involves attack by a religious group against another for personal or group purposes. Thirdly, women and children are usually the most affected during times of ecoterrorism as seen in the David's ordeal in the hands of the Amalekites. The narrative in I Samuel 30 sheds light on the challenge of ecoterrorism in Nigeria, which is analysed in the next section.

Ecoterrorism in Nigeria

Ecoterrorism is a phenomenon that has been in existence during most of the Jihad and Crusades of Muslims and Christians throughout the world. Ecoterrorism is a form of terrorism with the environment as the major target. Elliott (2013) explains ecoterrorism could be seen as the destruction, or threat of destruction, of the environment by groups, or individuals in order to intimidate or coerce governments or civilians. The model of ecoterrorism in Nigeria is peculiar because of its nature and formation. Eagan (1996) mentions that nearly all of the groups share three elements: they argue that because of environmental necessity, an uncompromising position is needed; they spend their time and money on direct action to achieve this goal, rather than on lobbying government and industry; and they are typically grassroots organisations with little or no pay, no perks, and little hierarchical structure.

Fulani herdsmen from northern Nigeria migrate with their cattle to southern Nigeria. However, it is important to state that the:

[O]rigin of the Fulani people is shrouded in mystery. Theories about their relationships with other people are numerous and wide-ranging. They are generally described as 'Hamites' of [N] ilotic origin, which would explain the possession of longhorn cattle. (Lambrech 1976:26)

During the rainy season, they are known to be carried by large trucks, with their cattle down southern Nigeria. Loftsdóttir (2004) corroborated that 'they [the pastoralist Fulani] base their ethnic identity strongly on livestock holdings and the mobility intrinsic to their economy'.

When in southern Nigeria, they most often prefer to stay in secluded places. As an eyewitness, Bello (2021) observed that on 04 August, suspected Fulani herdsmen in their hundreds were intercepted at Erinle, a border town in Oyun Local Government Area of Kwara, and these herdsmen and their cows were on their way to Ajase Ipo, a town in Kwara with a large concentration of Fulani. Bello

further revealed that the suspected herdsmen were later led to Ajase-Ipo by the security men on the ground, where further background checks and profiling were carried out by the appropriate security operatives. In some cases where these herdsmen are allowed to inhabit with their cattle, instead of adopting ranching for their animals, they prefer to do open grazing, taking their cows from one point to the other.

During the process of moving about with their cows, they enter people's farms. Agriculture in Nigeria is somehow tedious because of the government's neglect. Most farmers have to borrow money from the bank to fund their farming activities. These investments of the farmers are destroyed by the herdsmen. The federal and state governments appear unconcerned about these tragic developments. The local government chairman, who would have done something, seemed unable to do so because of the lack of autonomy over their jurisdiction. In the lamentation of Enyedike and Orji (2005):

... the Local Government councils are the seat of 'power' at the grassroots for the socio-economic transformation of the environment of the ordinary man for meaningful development. Suffice it to say that lack of performance has hindered to a great extent the much desired, and the much anticipated socio-economic dividends to the populace. The pronounced banner of lack of autonomy is one of such impediments militating against the realisation of set goals by local government administrations in Nigeria. This impediment implies the constitutional provision that has placed the third tier arm of government exclusively under the whims and caprices of the state government of the federation. (p. 49)

During these invasions, people's farms, barns, crops, and houses are burned down. This is usually the resultant effect of putting up any resistance against the terrorist Fulani herdsmen. Also, when they invade a land, women and children are killed, and they are burned in their farms. A large farm with crops ready for harvest is burned down. The farmers, for fear, run away from their farms, abandon their houses, and become refugees in another land. These invading Fulani herdsmen are known to usually take over the land of these farmers, placing their flags and bringing in their wives and children. The invaded community automatically becomes their own, with the government doing nothing about this. For instance, Police Commissioner, Paul Yakadi said over 5000 cows accompanied by armed Fulani herdsmen were occupying part of Agatu local government area of the state of Benue State, where about 300 lives were allegedly lost last week and 7000 persons were displaced (Ujah, Agande & Duru 2016); and Olayemi (2023) narrated that the King of Idjerhe, a kingdom in Ethiopia West Local Government Area of Delta State, raised the alarm that Fulani herdsmen were gradually taking over the kingdom as they had laid siege to the farmland of his people. Also, in Iwollo community in the Ezeagu local government area of Enugu State, there was an invasion of farmlands in the community by suspected herdsmen. According to one of the lamentations:

They want to create hunger for us. They enter our cassava farms, uproot them and feed their cattle while the animals destroy the remaining crops. You need to visit the community to see for yourself what we are suffering from. The blossoming akidi and cassava on the farms were being eaten by the cattle as the herders allowed. They were just roaming the farms as if the crops were not owned by humans. Our people are now afraid to go to the farms, just to avoid a clash with them. (Sahara Reporters 2022a:1)

Fulani herdsmen have also learned to graze their cattle at night. It is during this period that people's crops and farmland are destroyed with little resistance. Most times, when farmers come to their farms in the morning, they find everything burned down.

Causes and cases of ecoterrorism in Nigeria

There are divergent reasons given for the prevalence of ecoterrorism in Nigeria. Firstly, it is believed that the Fulani herdsmen have the ambition of taking over the lands of non-Fulani people. Pwanagba (2021) mentioned that:

[T]he agenda of the militia is to take over lands that belong to the natives, and that is our major concern, and we appreciate the state government for coming up with a bill that seeks to prevent land grabbing in the state, and unless we have an enforcement agency that will enforce these laws, our efforts as government are useless. (p. 1)

Most of the environmental terrorism carried out is for the purpose of taking over the lands of the indigenous population. Unfortunately, these herdsmen meet little or no resistance during their invasions of people's farms and lands. Secondly, it is alleged, especially by Christians, that the ecoterrorism that is being carried out by Fulani herdsmen is an attempt to enforce Islam on the entire populace. Christianity and Islam have always been in suspicion of each other. They are always fighting for superiority. This is seen in the political, social, economic, and educational arenas. This is the reason underdevelopment and poverty have become the order of the day. People are voted into political office based on their religious affiliation rather than on their competency and character. Thirdly, the lack of education on pastoralism. Ejiofor (2022:364) observed that connected to pastoralists' general lack of education and access to the most basic necessities is the problem of the precarious future of nomadic pastoralism, a century-old occupation and lifestyle that caters to the basic needs of pastoralists. For Fulani pastoralists – and this observation applies to many African pastoralists – cattle serve 'as the medium of transformation, in a total economy of signs and practices, between a material economy of things and a moral economy of persons' (Comaroff 1990:196).

There are several cases of ecoterrorism in Nigeria. Some of them are mentioned in Table 1.

TABLE 1: Selected Cases of ecoterrorism in Nigeria.

S/N	Narrative	Date	Source
1.	Fulani herdsmen destroyed farmlands in Kwi and Jol communities in Riyom Local Government Area of Plateau State.	06 July 2021	Pwanagba (2021)
2.	Fulanic herders stormed the Tse Udeghe community, Mbakpa Council Ward and Ahumen community in Gwer West Local Government Area of Benue State about 17:30 opened fire on the residents and razed their homes. The people ran for their lives, but those who they caught up with were killed and several others sustained injuries.	17 February 2022	Duru (2022)
3.	Three herders allegedly burnt down a groundnut farm worth 1.5 m in Kebbi state.	22 November 2022	Aliyu (2022)
4.	In plateau state, the unwarranted entrance and influx of Fulani herdsmen was noticed, they have destroyed and damaged several dry season farms crops ranging from cabbage, tomatoes, pepper, Irish potatoes, sweet potatoes, cassava, green beans, peas, as well as looted water pump machines and other farming implements in many villages, amounted to over hundred million.	09 July 2021	Bere (2022)
5.	Herders invade farms, destroy crops reportedly worth millions of naira	12 September 2022	Sahara Reporters (2022)
6.	It is most painful to also disclose that some of the pilot farm projects, academic, research demonstration farms and recently established plantations on which we pinned our hope of future revenue enhancement have been destroyed one after the other by the Fulani cattle rearers.	14 March 2016	Ojomoyela (2016)
7.	Cattle rearers have taken over our farm in Egbe land in Kogi state.	24 November 2020	Obahopo (2020)
8.	Herders invaded five hectares of rice farm at the Oyan farm settlement, Ibaro Rice Village, Ibaro in Abeokuta North Local Government, Abeokuta, Ogun State.	28 January 2021	Mojeeed (2021)
9.	Fulani herdsmen destroyed crops worth millions of naira in two communities in Obokun Local Government Area of Osun State.	29 January 2018	Jonathan (2018)
10.	Scores of farmers in Umuepe kindred, Obosa-Assa community in the Ohaji/Egbema Local Government Area of Imo State have lamented the alleged invasion and destruction of their farmlands by Fulani herdsmen.	16 November 2021	Okeoma (2018)

Note: Please see the full reference list of the article, Uroko, F.C., 2023, "David found Ziklag burned with fire": Assessing ecoterrorism in a multireligious Nigeria', *Theologia Viatorum* 47(1), a192. <https://doi.org/10.4102/tv.v47i1.192>, for more information.

S/N, serial number.

The church and ecoterrorism in Nigeria

The church has been greatly impacted because of the increasing pace of ecoterrorism in Nigeria. To begin, most members of churches are poor, and especially in rural areas of Nigeria, most of the church members are farmers. They make their living from farming. The activities of Fulani herdsmen have led to increased poverty among church members. Farmers now find it difficult to feed themselves. They also find it difficult to pay their children's school fees. It was on this basis that Okuneye et al. (2004) mentioned that poverty in Nigeria is concentrated in rural areas and that the incidence of poverty is highest among households in which the head is engaged in agriculture as the main source of income.

Also, there is growing malnutrition among farmers and their family members in Nigeria. Some of the farmers, their children, and their wives are in the internally displaced people's camp. They are in need of food, water, and healthcare. Unfortunately, some of the food and health needs provided by some faith-based organisations and government

and non-governmental organisations are cornered into private hands, and sometimes they are shared by officials managing the camp, and even sold in the public market. As corruption continues to mar the relief programme, the displaced persons are at the receiving end and they have continued to complain about this method of feeding, saying the quantity of foodstuff and condiments given to them for 1 month hardly lasts for a week (Abubakar 2017). Providing an elaborate insight, *This Day* (2022) reported:

Apart from massive food shortages, the victims are imperiled by several risk factors. Dislodgement of populations and resettlement in makeshift locations create atmosphere of environmental degradation, poverty, lack of safe water, poor sanitation, and waste management, all which promote communicable diseases and make life unbearable for the displaced. There are also reports of the startling abuses to which women and girls are subjected in the camps. It is unacceptable and criminal for security personnel and aid workers, whose primary task is to guard and provide support for the displaced persons, to turn around and be demanding sexual gratifications from women and girls in exchange for food, money, and other favours. Some of the people in the IDP camps also suffer from post-traumatic stress disorders and increased rates of infectious diseases. Many children born in the camps do not have access to education, placing their future at a risk. (p. 1)

There are also other challenges that farmers are experiencing, including their inability to return home.

The state and federal governments are making little or no efforts to ensure that the farmers whose farms and homes have been burned are repatriated. Instead, the people whose houses and farms are burned down are abandoned to survive on their own. They sometimes stay outside their homes for years as refugees in their own country. Many of these humanitarian groups are in the habit of bribing international displaced people (IDP) to remain in camps operated by the government, despite the return of peace to their original homes attacked by Boko Haram insurgents at different points (Sahara Reporters 2019). Also, there is speculation that the government works with the ecoterrorists to take away the lands of Christians and give them to the Jihadists.

The role of faith-based organisations in ecoterrorism in Nigeria

Faith-based organisations also known as FBOs are religious groups using spirituality to take care of the social needs of a people. A faith-based organisation may be defined as a group of individuals united on the basis of religious or spiritual beliefs (Carver & Reinert 2019). The FBOs can be identified with all religious or ethnic groups in Nigeria. During periods of crisis, people turn to FBOs for strength. There are the Christian faith-based organisations and Muslim faith-based organisations. They are formed not for profit-making but inspired by religious beliefs to contribute meaningfully to the growth and development of humanity and society (Ishaku, Aksit & Maza 2021). The following are the roles faith-based organisations could play to solve the issue of ecoterrorism in Nigeria to introduce the bullet points.

- Christian and Muslim faith-based leaders should condemn ecoterrorism regardless of which religion is the aggressor or victim. When a scenario of ecoterrorism affects Christians, Muslim leaders should condemn it, and if it affects Muslims, Christian leaders should condemn it.
- There is a need for the government to partner with faith-based leaders. With this partnership, government involving them in security meetings will help to create that relationship, and faith-based leaders will be able to give the government vital information needed to curb ecoterrorism in Nigeria. Christian and Muslim faith-based leaders are closer to the people and exert much influence on them. When the government works with the faith-based leaders, the results would be evenly felt. Faith-based leaders will, through their sermons, tell their members about need for them to be peaceful in their relation with the adherents of other religions.
- There is a need for the government to come out unscathed in matters of ecoterrorism. There have been accusations and counter-accusations that the government is sponsoring some of the ecoterrorists. The government should be able to condemn any action that threatens the land and other properties of any Nigerian, notwithstanding the religion or ethnic divide.
- Also, the federal government should arrest and prosecute any faith-based leader caught in the art of violent hate speeches. This would help to deter faith-based leaders from engaging in religious hate speeches.
- Faith-based organisations should also begin the deradicalisation of youths and adolescents, who were negatively indoctrinated by peers or faith-based leaders.

Conclusion

The challenge of ecoterrorism started from the Old Testament when the town of Ziklag was burnt by the Amalekites. Ecoterrorism impedes the fundamental human rights of any Nigerian, be the person a Christian or a Muslim. The people mostly affected by ecoterrorism are the farmers, especially those in rural areas. There is the suspicion that Fulani terrorists are trying to take over lands belonging to Christians in northern and southern Nigeria. Unfortunately, the government's ineptitude and a lack of political will have been singled out as part of the conspiracy for the survival of ecoterrorism in Nigeria. Furthermore, the neglect of faith-based communities has not gone down well in the fight against ecoterrorism in Nigeria. There is a need to carry FBOs in matters of this nature because all ecoterrorists belong to one faith-based group or another. This is because faith communities are motivated by spiritual values and driven by an ethical responsibility and they wield enormous social and political influence when it comes to promoting action to restore ecosystems (Abumoghli 2021).

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F.C.U., is the sole author of this article.

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