LAND PREDATION AND SOCIO-ECONOMIC DISLOCATION IN KUDA-KENGA COMMUNITIES OF PANDA DEVELOPMENT AREA, NASARAWA STATE, NIGERIA

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Abstract

This work explores how large-scale land appropriation for the establishment of multi-agribusiness companies engendered socio-economic dislocation among the rural population of Kuda-Kenga communities in Nasarawa state, Nigeria. Basically, it is a practical application of the axiomatic suppositions of Nozick's Entitlement Theory of Justice in explaining social tension and potential conflict situations in the study area in connection with the topic under investigation. To this effect, the study drew data from face-to-face key informants interviews (KIIs) and relevant documents (Land Use Act of 1978, official communiqués) which were analysed using Grounded Theory and Narrative methods of data analysis. It anchored its arguments on the aforementioned theory. The study found that between 2006 and 2022, over 3000 hectares of farmland in agrarian communities of Kuda-Kenga were appropriated in contravention of Nozickian principles of justice in acquisition of [land]holdings for the purpose of establishing multi-agribusinesses. To the host communitiess, this has triggered social tension: dissatisfaction, low level of trust, lack of optimism and protests for fear of losing their ancestral land upon which they depend. The study concludes that the presumed developmental rationale for appropriating and persistent control of the landholdings by external forces other than the natives has not, in real terms positively transformed the lives of the rural population. Thus, the main source of income and livelihood of the locals had been truncated and the rural communities are severely affected; a situation with the potential of degenerating into social uprising in the area.

Keywords: Land appropriation, landholdings, rural communities, social change

Introduction

Globally, there has been growing scrabble and demands of farmland for agricultural uses such as production of staple crops, domestic animals' and birds' feeds, agro-allied industries and the likes. This may not be unconnected to high increase in human population, insufficient agricultural land, climate change and other related factors. These issues manifest more and generate serious concern in many Asian, European and Gulf states where there is limited farmland, high pressure on natural resources, scarcity of water for large-scale farming. According to von Braun and Meinzen-Dick (2009, p. 1), 'these have pushed countries short in land and water to find alternative means of producing food.' Hence, the need to cushion the phenomena of land scarcity and food insecurity propelled government as well as profit-oriented organisations and individuals to inject huge capitals and skills in agriculture.

It has contributed to various land reforms, legislations on land appropriation, as well as rights over land ownership and use in developing countries, especially Africa with unpalatable impacts on rural populations. In Nigeria's colonial and post-independent periods for instance, litany of promulgations were enacted to govern rights over ownership, access to, and use of land. Many literature revealed that although these enacted legislations were aimed at inducing infrastructural and economic development in the country, they were not without negative effects on socio-cultural and economic rights of agrarian communities (Utuama, 2008; Odoemene, 2012; Bruce, 2013; Udoekanem, Adoga and Onwumere, 2014; Otubu, 2015; Kingston and Oke-Chinda, 2016; Osegbue, 2017). von Braun and Meinzen-Dick (2009) observed that land acquisitions have the potential to inject much-needed investment into agriculture and rural areas in poor developing countries, but that they also raise concerns about the impacts on poor local people, who risk losing access to, and control over land on which they depend. They further noted that the scale, the terms, and the speed of land acquisition have provoked opposition in some target countries, including Philippines, Mozambique, and Madagascar.

One notable fact about land grabbing in developing countries is its long-lasting negative impacts on rural communities. In Africa, particularly Nigeria that operates a dictatorially land tenure system coupled with weak governance and corruption, the system creates opportunities for wealthy influential individuals, local and foreign companies (investors) to acquire land at the expense of vulnerable rural

communities. This leads to displacement of communities, loss of traditional land-based livelihoods, environmental change or degradation, violation of human and private property rights (Peters, 2004; Lazarus, 2014; EYSTONE, n.d.). A condition that can best be described as predator-prey relationship. According to EYSTONE (n.d.), the practice has been widely criticised by civil society organisations and human rights advocates, who argue that lands should be managed in a way that is equitable, sustainable, and respects the rights of indigenous communities and marginalised groups.

With respect to the current study, large hectares of land belonging to many agrarian communities in Panda Development Area (Karu LGA) of Nasarawa state were appropriated by agric-related foreign investors (white 'Zimbabwean Farmers') since 2006 through the instrumentality of the State Government. The transaction was initiated and terms of the business entred into without the indigenous landowners; neither was the welfare of other local users (settler farmers) of the land given a realistic consideration. Put differently, the quest (predation) for large scale of good agricultural land by white Zimbabwean Farmers led to expropriation of ancestral land of the affected people which invariably dislocates the rural population socioeconomically. This, in no small measure prompted a lot of questions and reactions in the area which hinges on justice, rights, sustainable welfare and related issues such as dissatisfaction, distrust, protests in the area under investigation.

The perception of *the others'* violation of one's rights over what he claims as his *suum* (sphere) and the campaign to seek protection from unfair treatment, encroachment by the perceived *enemy* is often surrounded by social tension. Where this is not address promptly degenerate into conflict situations or violent uprising (Coser, 1956, 1965; Artemov, Aleinikov, Abgadzhava, Pinkevich & Abalian 2017). In other words, violent uprising and conflict often emanate from unaddressed social tension, discontent, infringement of rights, etc in the society. This probably explains why there is currently growing concerns and demands amongst scholars for clear and greater definition about who has which rights in the society, especially regarding whose rights are being overridden (Holt, 2021). Over the years, many political thinkers including Plato, Aristotle, Immanuel Kant, Karl Popper, Grotius, Pufendorf, John Locke, C.B. Macpherson, John Rawls, Robert Nozick and a host of others theorised on self-ownership, liberty, property rights and justice in their respective efforts to enthrone *good state*, peaceful life, and indeed happiness. Specifically, Robert Nozick (1974) in his

'Entitlement Theory of Justice' espoused that 'in a free society, diverse persons control different resources, and new holdings arise out of voluntary exchanges and [other] actions of persons…' It follows that the individuals involved may be entitled to those holdings (natural resources) or not. However, Nozick insists that rights or entitlement to a holding consists entirely in original acquisition, just transfer or rectification of unjustly held holdings which can only be guaranteed in a *Minimal State*. Anything beyond this will amount to violation and overriding of the individual's or people's rights. Relating this further, Nozick (1974, p. 151) posits that 'a distribution is just if everyone is entitled to the holdings they possess under the distribution' that is itself free from coercion, fraud, theft, criteria fixed by government or selected few.

However, it is important to note that even though avalanche of literature on land appropriation exists (Berry, 2002; Vallema *et al.*, 2011; Borras & Franco, 2012; Lazarus, 2014; Raza, 2023), there is no scholarly study focusing on how the incidence of land-grabbing and the process of redistribution of landholdings impacted on the socioeconomic life of rural dwellers in Kuda-Kenga communities of Panda Development Area (PDA), Nigeria. To fill this gap forms the primary remit of this study. In particular, the study is basically a practical application of Nozick's Entitlement Theory of Justice to explain social tension and potential conflict situations in some parts of Panda, Karu local government area of Nasarawa state.

Land Tenureship in Rural Nigeria

The existing land tenureship in Nigeria as codified in the Land Use Act of 1978 contains the nature and rules which regulate land ownership rights, management or administration in the country. Scholars, public affairs analysts, jurists and stakeholders have commented on the nature and implications of the Act with respect to ownership, use, control of land and resources thereof. Thus, many studies noted that the Act is replete with so many contradictions and ambiguities which has been a source of concern for many citizens in the country (Ezejiofor, 1974; Uchendu, 1978; Agbosu, 1988; Utuama, 2008; Otubu, 2015; Osegbue, 2017). Otubu (2015) contents that the 'concept and domicile of ownership right under the Land Use Act is fluid (also see Honoré, 1961). It is enmeshed in vigorous academic and judicial divergent arguments and embellished by commentaries from different stakeholders' in which many believed that the Decree (Act) as promulgated in 1978 nationalised all lands within the country's jurisdiction in favour of the state (federal

government) via various Governors of the federation. This is exemplified in Sections 1 and 28(4) of the Act which stipulate that;

> Subject to the provision of this Decree, all land comprised in the territory of each State in the Federation are hereby vested in the Military Governor of that State and such land shall be held in trust and administered for the used and common benefit of all Nigerians in accordance with the provisions of this Decree (Section 1).
>
> The Military Governor shall revoke a right of occupancy in the event of the issue of a notice by or on behalf of the Head of the Federal Military Government if such notice declares such land to be required by the Government for public purposes (Section 28, sub-section 4).

Similarly, extant literature revealed that the stem of the philosophy or idea to nationalise all lands in modern Nigeria under a single managerial instrument is traceable to the recommendations of various committees such as Anti-inflation Task Force, Rent Panel, Constitution Drafting Committee and Land Use Act Panel set-up in 1975 and 1977 by the then Military Government of the federation (Otubu, 2015). The scholar further observed that one common outcome of these Committees was the recommendation for 'the promulgation of a decree that will have effect of vesting all land (in principle) in the state government [such that] all future transactions in land will require the approval of the respective State Governments and will be on leasehold basis.' Because for example, the Constitution Drafting Committee feels that 'it is revolting to one's sense of '*justice*' and '*equity*' that one person alone should own about ten or more plots of '*State*' lands… when others have none.' This was the justification and doctrinal philosophy underpinning the promulgation of the Land Use Decree of 1978, and indeed the land tenurial system in Nigeria. On the eve of the promulgation of the Decree for instance, Gen. Olusegun Obasanjo (Rtd) who was the then Military Head of State in a special national broadcast (March 28, 1978) stated as follows;

> All Nigerians are collectively owners of all land in the country and the rights of all Nigerians to use and enjoy the land of the country and natural fruits thereof in sufficient quantity to enable them provide for the sustenance of themselves and their families should be ensured, protected and preserved. Ownership of land *per se* is irrelevant. What is important is the use to which land is put and no Government should abdicate its responsibility in respect of a proper planning of land use within its territory (Otubu, 2015, p. 9).

No doubt, the statement above is plausible and might be instrumental to attain its stated [*face-value*] mission in any communist or socialist society

with centrally planning economic orientation. But on the contrary, a critical examination of that broadcast and the subsequent Land Use Decree (now Act) by the military dictator depict both exercises as the beginning of the contemporary land problems in Nigeria as it automatically abrogates real ownership rights of native landowners and seized their property (land) which was supposed to be protect by the state. Therefore, it is apt to argue that corruption, injustice, distrust, discontent, frustration, discord, social tension, agitation, dissention or rebellious and violent conflict situations abound where and when someone or a group of people (private or public) attempt to, or wield absolute power and control over holdings they do not originally own in the first place, just because they felt that they should 'manage' it *for the benefit of all*, even if it means to apply coercive instrument since they possessed such quality at their 'beck and call.'

In support of the above, some scholars maintained that provisions of the Act are 'inconsistent with democratic practices and the operation of a free market economy.' It invariably 'swept away all the allodial (unlimited) rights and interests Nigerians had in their lands.' This implies that Nigeria as a country now operates a centrally controlled contractual system of tenure, validated only by a certificate of occupancy that sets out terms of tenure such as access, use/rent, succession, duration, etc. issued by the Governor of each state; thereby, abolishing private (communal) ownership and entitlements of lands by private owners who, *ab initio* acquired same through the principle of initial person(s) to possess a settlement and inheritance (Uchendu, 1978, Nwabueze, 1984; Otubu, 2015).

Furthermore, studies showed that the 1978 Nigeria's Land Use Act is an offshoot of the 1962 Land Tenure Law of Northern Nigeria. For as observed in Otubu (2015), the current Land Use Act is more or less an *old wine in a new wineskin* which Ezejiofor (1974) lamented that;

> The Law and its predecessors (colonialists) took away from the natives of Nigeria proprietary rights to the lands which originally belonged to them and which they occupied and over which they exercised acts of *real* ownership according to their native laws and customs. In place of their ownership titles, they got mere customary rights of occupancy – the right to occupy and use the land which can be revoked by the *then* Minister or a local authority for *so-called* good cause and sometimes without payment of compensation for improvements on the land. *Moreover*, at no time was any compensation paid to the natives of Northern Nigeria for this act of expropriation.

Therefore, the exposition above strengthened the assumption that the Land Use Act in Nigeria nationalised all lands in favour of the state, and of course its managers. However, Akintunde Kabir Otubu made an impressive observation that 'the fact that most of the land in the country are in the rural non-urban areas and mostly held under a deemed grant of customary rights of occupancy with indeterminate tenure and free from all government restrictions, save the requirement of Governor's consent to alienation and revocation. One is thus tempted to affirm that holders of these rights enjoy rights akin to ownership over the land in their care. [Consequently], they pay no rents and have no business with the government in the management of the land. Even where the land is compulsorily acquired by the State for overriding public purposes and allotted by government thereafter, these communal landowners still find ways of coercing the developer to repurchase and/or pay additional compensation to them in respect of the land, before allowing any development on it.' Thus, the scholar notes the following grey areas of grave concern in the Nigeria's land tenure system;

> The Act is the genesis of most of the confusion and administrative anarchism in the country. There are issues on the proper position of the trusteeship concept under the Act. [Other issues of concern include] insecurity of title and tenure; urban and non-urban lands debacle; revocation and compensation imbroglio; State and Federal lands controversy; the consent argument; deemed and actual grants, as well as statutory and customary rights divides… These and many ambiguities certainly affect people's perception of the Act and also obstruct a purposeful interpretation of the provisions of the Act by concerned citizens, especially the courts and academia. It impacts negatively on private proper rights, rule of law and fundamental human rights of citizens as well as breeds socioeconomic injustice and adversely affects the business environments, especially of mortgage, land or estate management.

In another study, Udoekanem *et al.* (2014, p. 182-188) attempt a study on landownership in Nigeria, in which they x-rayed 'the historical development, current issues and future expectations' pertaining to land, the people and the nation. According to them, land is very essential for every human activity on earth as it is the source of almost all material wealth; and as such, different nation-states of the world have instituted different land systems and laws in order to regulate acquisition, use and ownership, its development or control of resources thereof. On the peripheral outlook, those regulations were aimed at balancing the interests of the government, its citizens who own land and of those who

probably do not have. The scholars were able to show that landownership structure and practice in Nigeria had variously evolved over the years until 1978 when a single land policy document (1978 Land Use Act), was established to harmonize and regulate landownership rights for the entire country. These rights consist of absolute and derivative interests. The absolute interests are rights in land which bestow on holders absolute ownership rights or unconditional interests in perpetuity; while, as the name implies, derivative interests (leaseholds, life interests, kola tenancy, mortgage, borrowed interests, pledges, etc.) are derived from the larger estates which is absolute. According to them, land ownership structure upon which Nigeria operates is based on both absolute and derivative interests that evolved through three major epochs, viz: precolonial, colonial, and postcolonial periods, respectively.

According to existing literature, the predominant land tenure system during precolonial era in communities which now constitute Nigeria was the customary land tenancy in which lands were owned and controlled by members of the community according to their respective customs. At this period, legal estate under customary land tenancy is vested in the community or family whose many members are dead, few are living and countless others are not yet born. This implies that heredity is one of the key mediums people derive various entitlements over landholdings. It was noted that absolute interests in land was vested in the community as a whole or family as a unit as the case may be; whereas interests or rights of individuals in such land were derivative. Meanwhile, the community land comprised lands which the entire community has an individual or proprietary interest; family land on the other hand consists of all lands that were vested in the members of the family; and parcel of land can be partitioned to members of the family mostly in accordance with patriarchal practice. It was also pointed out that customary land tenure in southern region during pre-colonialism was held and recognized as (a) communal lands (b) chieftaincy or stool lands (c) family lands, and (d) individual or separate property. However, it is informative to note that during this era, lands held under customary tenure in most cases are not sold or alienated. In fact, such act was generally perceived as ‘capable of depriving the future generations of the opportunity to acquire land’ (Aniyom, 1983; Bardi, 1998; Udoekanem *et al.,* 2014).

Unfortunately, the advent of colonialism in Nigeria as elsewhere do not only tempered with the precolonial land tenure system, but also truncated indigenous sociocultural, economic and political life of host communities to favour the imperialistic motives of the colonizers.

Udoekanem *et al.* observed that European conquest and occupation of West Africa, particularly British colonial rule in Nigeria were based on two main motives: economic and governance. According to them,

> As a major factor of production, land was inevitably required by the colonial authorities to achieve their economic, social and political objectives. The British merchants who came to the country purely on economic motive required land to establish their merchandise [such as the Royal Niger Company]… Also, the colonial Governors required land for public purposes. Because land ownership in pre-colonial era was communal, the colonial authorities initiated laws and regulations governing land ownership, land use and development among others to enable them acquire and convey titles to land for the purposes of commerce and governance.

Historically, scholars reported that the first and principal among these laws was the *Treaty of Cession* which was enacted in 1861 when the colonial leaders and indigenous traditional chiefs signed it and passed same unto the British Crown. Amongst other land legislations are: *Land Proclamation Ordinance* (1900), *Land and Native Rights Act* (1916), *Niger Lands Transfer Act* (1916), *Public Lands Acquisition Act* (1917), *Native Land Acquisition Act* (1917), *State Land Act* (1918) and the *1947 Town and Country Planning Act* (Dike, 1960; Onwubiko, 1976; Udoekanem *et al.,* 2014). Worthy of note is the fact that the Europeans' dealings or treaties with most (if not all) African natives were not without various forms of tricks, coercions and imposition (where there is opposition), lack of clear or deeper understanding of obnoxious impact of those laws to the natives. Moreover, the colonial laws and regulations were initiated and enforced for two broad reasons: (i) to enable the British authority have total control over her colony and protectorates, and (ii) to check/suppress both internal (local) and European (foreign) competitors or opposition that may arise against her foreign policy pursuit. Therefore, it is obvious that the colonial land legislations disregarded the principles which guide native norms and customs on landownership and use. It rather provided that title to land can only be acquired through the High Commissioner and/or the colonial Governor. The colonialists achieved their subtle imperialistic tendency under the veil of their "mandate" to civilise and develop the so-called "*dark*" societies of Africa.

At independence, the postcolonial (indigenous) government according to extant literature consciously or unconsciously maintained the status quo in terms of colonial land laws and administration of the country (Francis, 1984; Agbosu, 1988; Udoekanem *et al.,* 2014; Kingston & Oke-

Chinda, 2016; Osegbue, 2017). This implies that both the colonialists and indigenous leaders instituted different land laws, maintained or reformed these laws in order to enabled them eliminate precolonial land tenureship and empowered themselves with rights to expropriate the land of the natives.

Theretical Framework

The study is anchored on the basic assumptions of Robert Nozick's (1974) Entitlement Theory of Justice also known as Distributive Justice. It is an absolute libertarian property rights-based theory which advocates ownership rights of private property as against John Rawls' (1972) '*pie-cutting*' thought of Justice. Nozick derived his ideas from the works of Grotius, Pufendorf and John Locke who respectively theorised on liberty and origin of private property rights. Their major philosophical assumptions are encapsulated as thus (Olivecrona, 1974; Mukherjee and Ramaswamy, 2007):

- the earth and its fruits belonged to God, and that God had given them to human beings in common to enjoy;
- the fundamental precept of the law of nature which is the will and commands of God was to accord to everybody what belongs to them; and if somebody had justly appropriate an object (part of the earth or its fruits), it is an injury to deprive him of it;
- but that the power (right) of a person over his holdings could be transferred to another through voluntary exchange;
- that liberty implies equality. Everyone has equal rights to life, protection and own property; hence, everybody was sovereign within his own *suum*, but he must not encroach upon that of others and if otherwise, such action constitutes an injury, injustice on the victim;
- it was for the preservation of man's entitlement rights that political community was formed;
- that no government or its agent, 'powerful' individual or group should deprive someone of his material possessions without the latter's consent;
- that by committing an injury, the offended person could now use violence against the offender to avert the attack to recover what he had lost or to extract compensation, in which the reaction need not be proportionate to the damage caused or threat of attack, such that it can lead to the killing of the assailant;

- justice consists entirely in abstaining from forcefully taking that which belongs to others.

However, the Entitlement Theory of Justice propounded by Nozick is predicated on the following:

i) Original acquisition of holdings: *The principle of justice in initial acquisition*,
ii) Transfer of holdings: *The principle of justice in transfer*, and
iii) Rectification of unjust holdings: *The principle of rectification of injustice*.

Furthermore, Nozick observed that the human history is not one of always just acquisition or transfers, but also of slavery, conquest, theft, fraud and patterned distribution principles skewed by, and for the interest of a few which require remedy to correct it and enthrone equitable, peaceful society. In his words, 'if the world were wholly just, the following inductive definition would exhaustively cover the subject of justice in holdings' (Nozick, 1974: p. 151):

a) A person who acquires a holding in accordance with the principle of justice in [initial] acquisition is entitled to that holding;
b) A person who acquires a holding in accordance with the principle of justice in transfer, from someone else entitled to the holding, is entitled to the holding; and
c) No one is entitled to a holding except by applications of principles (a) and (b) above. Anything short of this necessitates the application of the principle of rectification of injustice.

In Nozick's conception, justice in acquisition of holdings is that 'for current distributions to be just, they must have been brought about via *just steps* from a *situation* which was itself just.' Further, just steps denote those transactions or exchanges which include gifts that are fully voluntary on the part of all the transacting agents free from coercion, frauds, deceit and reference to particular conventional details fixed upon by a group of people, government or any authority other than natural rights and processes like inheritance (Farreley, 2004). Similarly, just situation upon which just steps depend revolves around the question of how *unheld* things may come to be held by someone. Describing this further, Nozick identifies Locke's '*Proviso*' – theory of appropriation as one of the just processes of acquiring an *unheld* holding. Nozick believes that respect for persons as self-owners, and indeed their holdings requires people or the society to conceive Distributive Justice as one that adopts a historical entitlement conception of justice in holdings, but not as a pie-cutting or current-slice exercise advanced in Rawls' theory of justice

which is patterned and ahistorical. Nozick succinctly demonstrates what just entitlement of holdings meant as thus:

> The answer to the question, "Is it just for me to have X, Y and Z?" is not answered by considering whether I need X, Y or Z, or if I deserve X, Y and Z; but it is properly answered when one asks, "Am I entitled to X, Y and Z? Did I acquire them in a just manner from a just situation?" If, for example, I stole them or bought them from someone who stole them, then I am not entitled to them. But if I acquired them through a fully voluntary transfer from a just situation, then I am entitled to them. For example, if they were payment for services rendered or a gift (Farreley, 2004, p.39).

Therefore, the whole gamut of entitlement theory of justice according to Nozick is that 'whatever arises from a just situation or just steps is itself just.' Hoffman and Graham (2009) further explained that just transfer is dependent upon just acquisition because one cannot justly transfer what he has not justly acquired. If he does that, he only successfully entrenched injustice. Thus, if a landholding was acquired and/or transferred through deceit, theft, force, patterned-principle, etc. then, there is need to rectify the situation. Furthermore, rectification in Nozick's entitlement theory requires that victims of injustice in holdings be raised to a level of wellbeing, at least as high as they would have been at, had the injustice never occurred. It follows that the perpetrators should be obligated to restore and compensate the victims accordingly. He insisted that if there had been a single injustice in the history of the state, no matter how far back, the state would not be able to achieve a just distribution of resources in the present without rectification of that injustice (Farreley, 2004). In other words, a distribution is just if everyone is entitled to the holdings they possess under a particular distribution in which such holdings were acquired. Hence, anyone in possession of holdings not entitled to him is in truth an injustice.

This theory is appropriate to this study because it enables us uncover various injustices associated with land-grabbing and appropriation in Nigeria, particularly in Panda Development Area (PDA) and why most victims act or react the way they do. Nigeria as a country is a conglomeration of hitherto autonomous communities and chiefdoms with people of diverse ethnic, religious and cultural compositions that were more or less forced into one country through colonialism. Unfortunately, the colonial masters ruled their colonies, including Nigeria by fiat. They often enact laws or promulgations on landholdings which were alien and unfavorable to the natives. Worse still, most of the

colonial legislations and reforms on landholdings were carried over to the post-independence Nigeria (Udoekanem *et al*., 2014). Nevertheless, most native Nigerians still hold firm to their respective ancestral ties and customs which every generation seeks to consolidate. This implies that various reforms with colonial footprint did not completely remove pre-existed customs, especially at the local level. As such, any attempt to tamper with their customary practices or traditional landholdings tenure was perceived as an attack on their very existence. This may be due to the fact that more than 70% of the population depends on agriculture whereas farmland as a whole is relatively scarce and highly demanded for agricultural purposes. Hence, people readily mobilise around land issues (Bruce, 2013; Osegbue, 2017).

Apropos of the above is the fact that colonial authorities in Nigeria created a system that suit and serve their imperialistic interest. For example, it was noted in Peters (2004, p. 272) that:

> The multiple types of authority and sets of claims over land and its products were glossed by the label 'communal tenure', which became incorporated into the developing body of 'customary law'… The formation of customary law and communal tenure served to promote both state and private European interests in African colonies…and so, the terminology of customary and communal land was enunciated by colonialists and [subsequently] furthered by Africans themselves which continued into postcolonial times.

In other words, colonial administrations systematically displaced tribal customs governing land tenure system while succeeding indigenous political leaders (military and civilian) maintained the colonial structures in order to stay in power and to privilege a few elites under the guise that native land systems did not provide the necessary security to ensure agricultural and productive use of land. To them, the so-called "lack of security" was thought to lie in the absence of clearly defined and enforceable property rights while the purported appropriate policy direction was assumed to lie in the State. This was seen in various land policy reforms and laws (Peters, 2004). For example, the Military Government of Nigeria, through a Decree (No. 6) in 1978 nationalised all lands in the country and vested same in various state Governors. The Decree (now Act) is a contradiction of all landed rights which had hitherto been dependent on the allodia ownership of various native landowners in Nigeria based on their respective diverse customs and practices (Agbosu, 1988).

Therefore, various forms of transfer of landholdings (lease, concession, rentals, sales, etc) have often led to collusion between powerful individuals and traditional rulers, privileged elites and government (political leaders) that often end up in conflict with rural dwellers who uphold ancestral ownership rights or entitlement. In fact, such appropriation in Nigeria has led to unnecessary speculation and displacement of landowners and settler-farmers who were supposed to acquire increased security from the state. It facilitates practices of bribing, fraudulent titling and expropriation of land for selfish interests that sooner or later trigger discords and patterns of inequitable access to land based on ethnicity, class or influence which in turn almost always resulted to social tension and various forms of protests, litigations and conflicts.

Research Methodology

The study employed survey and documentary methods of data collection. Thus, data were drawn from 16 Key Informants (KIs), relevant internet and print materials such as Nigeria's Land Use Act of 1978, official communiqués, etc. Similarly, judgmental and snowball sampling techniques as described by Black and Champion (1976), Naderifar, Goli and Ghaljaie (2017) were employed according to which KIs were carefully selected and interviewed as explained in Kumar (1986), Performance Monitoring and Evaluation TIPS (1996, p. 1-4). The instrument (semi-structured) used to elicit data from the field was validated by experts from the Department of Political Science, University of Nigeria, Nsukka with which face-to-face interviews were conducted and recorded using audio recording gadget with the permission of Respondents. And after meticulous transcription and systematic organisation of the recorded voice notes, data were objectively analysed using Grounded Theory and Narrative methods of analysis as explained in Nie (2017, p. 53-70).

Results and Discussion

Land-grabbing and distribution of landholdings in Kuda-Kenga communities

Investigation shows that in 2006, Nasarawa State Government expropriated over 3000 hectares of land located in Panda Development Area (PDA) of the State and transferred it to a set of foreign agro-investors who occupied and have taken charge of it since then. The

investors established agric related industry known as Pandagric Novum Ltd. in the area. It was revealed that the land in question belongs to specific natives of Kuda-Yeskwa, Ochā, Okōh, Kogintaru-Yeskwa, Anvuba, Kenga communities. The appropriation and occupation of the people's ancestral land has been a serious concern in the area, especially to the native landowners and local land-users (settler farmers). Specifically, the process through which the land was acquired raised the question of credibility and issues bothering on economic status and rights of the locals. In fact, the appropriation of the land contravened Nozick's principles of justice according to which no one is entitled to a holding, except by just applications of the principles of justice in initial acquisition and transfer of holdings. However, the following interview excerpts highlight the despicable processes through which the current distribution of landholdings was carried out in PDA.

Beginning with the State House of Assembly, the Director Legal Services, responded to interview questions at the instance of the Clerk of the House as saying,

> …to the best of my knowledge, there was no bill from the Executive arm to the State House of Assembly on appropriation of land for any investor…But because it is not legislation that guarantees such transaction as regards land-use and ownership in the State, it may not necessarily come to the Legislative arm for consideration. The Government is empowered to exercise its own duties by policy. So whatever action the Executive will take, and because they have right and power over land, she is at liberty to now get or transact with such investors; highlighting its activities or operations and interest.

He further stated that he hailed from the study area and was aware of the occupation of large portion of farmland by foreign agro-investors in the area. He however admitted he was not privileged to have any document related to the transaction between the investors and the State Government; stressing that if there is any agreement involving the State Government and any investor, it is the State Ministry of Justice that handles it. The respondent was also convinced that whatever the arrangement, it must have been done with the knowledge of some prominent persons from that area and that the Paramount ruler too, being a senior lawyer must have been privy to whatever transpired.

At the State Ministry of Justice, the Permanent Secretary on behalf of Commissioner for Justice referred us to Section 1 of Decree No. 6 of 1978 (Nigeria's Land Use Act). The Section states that,

> Subject to the provisions of this Decree, all land comprised in the territory of each State in the Federation are hereby vested in the Military [now Executive] Governor of that State and such land shall be held in trust and administered for the use and common benefit of all Nigerians in accordance with the provisions of this Decree (see Land Use Act, 1978).

The Perm-Sec. further explained that going by the Land Use Act, all lands in the country belong to Nigerians and that the one in Nasarawa State belongs to its citizens but must be held in trust by the State Governor in accordance with the Act. For this reason, one must get or give necessary documents – whether the person buys a land or it was allocated to him by government's grant or by gift. The gift could be by a person's father, grandfather, or relation. That is, through customary process of bequeath one can acquire land either before or after the death of relative or forebear. However, he remarked that the government can acquire such and other lands on the basis of overriding public interest such as establishment of hospital, Motor Park, schools, industries, etc. The Perm-Sec. also noted that when the government acquires land for the reason above, it would usually compensate the indigenous tribe(s) there mostly in kind. For instance, if it is a market that the government built, it might allocate some shops at a subsidised rate for those (indigenes) who may be interested. If it is urban renewal, building of industries or so, the indigenous people might be given about 30% employment before considering others, provided that they have requisite knowledge or qualification for such jobs. In the event that the government wished to give it out in form of lease or so, there's what is called Corporate Social Responsibility. Some of them build schools, hospitals, sports or recreational facilities, road, boreholes, etc for the people. The respondent however admitted that sometimes, certain community members may be at forefront of the negotiations but may not inform their own local people adequately. Such persons who may be a member of National Assembly, minister, commissioner, etc. may enter into agreement with the government and collect money for one project or the other but may in turn not execute the project or give a dime to their people who may not be aware that necessary payment had been made for their land. In such instance, when the government, contractor or company wants to work on the land, it elicits stiff resistance.

The Perm-Sec. concluded that '…just like many other establishments and companies such as Dangote Sugar Refinery Plc., Golden Sugar

Company Ltd. in Awe and Toto LGAs of the State, the government and Ministry of Justice were aware of the coming of the 'Zimbabwean Farmers' and their activities in Panda Development Area; so the appropriation and allocation of lands by the State Government was in line with the provisions of the 1978 Land Use Act.' However, it is important to observe that the Land Use Act in use, vested in the Governor so much power over land such that nobody or legal institution, including the Supreme Court of Nigeria has the *locus standi* to question the actions of the Governor on land matters (see Sections 1, 5(1-2), 21, 22, 28(1), 47 of the Act). A critical evaluation of the Act shows that it has a lot of authoritarian and antidemocratic provisions skewed in contradistinction of native land tenure and contravention of Nozick's Entitlement Theory. It would appear that the un-libertarian qualities of the Act are not unconnected to the nature and character of its proponents. It will be recalled that the Act was actually a derivative of a military decree, which was itself and adaptation of the 1962 Land Tenure Law of Northern Nigeria that was itself heavily criticised for its colonial character (Ezejiofor, 1974; Udoekanem *et al*., 2014; Otubu, 2015).

With particular reference to Section 47 of the Act, Udoekanem *et al*. (2014, p. 187) decried the fact that 'the courts and even the Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria are excluded from inquiring into any question pertaining to the granting of land rights by the Governor and payment of compensation in cases of compulsory land acquisition in any part of the country.' This further implies that appropriation and transfers of landholdings by various State Governors in the Federation contradict the doctrines of private property rights espoused by Grotius, Pufendorf and Locke (Olivecrona, 1974). Thus, it suffices that the process which brought the land in question under the control of foreign investors undermines the rights of the native landowners. This position is validated in various responses of respondents.

For example, based on his involvement in the land deal, the Paramount ruler of Panda chiefdom in an interview narrates why and how the land was acquired. Taking a long historical view of the problem he explained that what actually led to the coming of the investors was that during the regime of former President Olusegun Obasanjo, he (Obasanjo) invited all former Heads of State and serving Governors to brainstorm on how to improve the agricultural practices in Nigeria, in order to boost food production and availability for the local population and possibly for export as well. During the deliberations according to the respondent, it was agreed that they replicate the reform in the education sector which

saw the gradual replacement of expatriate teachers with Nigerians when the latter had duly understudied the former. They reasoned that it would be useful to introduce mechanised agriculture, first by bringing expatriate farmers who will come with both expertise and machinery and do mechanised farming in Nigeria so that Nigerians could understudy them and overtime, as happened in the education sector and take charge of mechanised farming in the country. He explained that this was the motivation of the Obasanjo administration for bringing in White large-scale farmers from Zimbabwe but who were national of various countries including Austria, UK, etc.

The Paramount ruler also informed that Nasarawa state was not originally included among the pilot states for the project but that the then Governor of the state, Alhaji Abdulahi Adamu lobbied then President Obasanjo to include the state, which he obliged him. The State government then drew up with a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) which permitted the white Zimbabwean farmers to come and establish multi-agribusiness industry in the area; and that as the Paramount ruler (*Odyong Nyankpa*) of Panda Chiefdom, he was invited by the Governor to discuss modalities of procuring farmland for the investors in the area. They subsequently entered into an agreement that the White farmers should pay rents to the landlords either at the beginning or end of the year. When they first came, about 21 farms were carved out with their sizes ranging from 700 to 1700 hectares. But consequent on change in government and inconsistent policies which affected many of them, only two functional farms remaining which are being run by Mr. Bruce Spain & family though formally known as *Pandagric Novum Ltd*.

However, it was obvious from the discussion that the Paramount ruler was actually aware and played a significant role in the process leading to the coming of the investors and taking over control of the land from many communities within his domain. But it was also deciphered that he solely acted on behalf of his subjects (landowners) in the negotiation process without direct consultation nor involvement of the native landowners. This clearly undermined Nozickian principle of justice in transfer of holdings as earlier noted in the theory that not everyone follows just principles of acquisition of holdings in the society, since some people acquire particular set of holdings through force, fraud, or other unjust means (Nozick, 1974). That goes to say that one's ownership of land or control over it is only just if he is entitled to them through the principle of justice in acquisition or transfer.

Meanwhile, the centrality of justice here is that something that was not held before should or can be acquired through just steps or process called original acquisition of holdings. But if they are already held holdings which were initially acquired from a just situation, then somebody else can acquire them by '*freely entered exchange* or *gift*' on one hand; and on the other, through fraud, force or by 'reference to particular conventional details fixed upon in a given society.' Thus, holdings (natural resources) can either be acquired or transfer justly or unjustly, and if they are acquired by unjust means or situations, Nozick called for application of the principle of rectification to justly correct the 'evils' meted by others in the process of such exchange. Going by this position, no powerful individual including the State should be immune from following the just means of appropriating landholdings. Moreover, the State according to Nozick's '*Minimal State*' is primarily responsible for protecting against violation of rights of people's private property and providing conducive environment within its jurisdiction (Nozick, 1974; Farrelly, 2004).

In another interview with the Chief Executive Officer (CEO), Pandagric Novum Ltd, it was explained that as international investors, they first of all considered international best practices and got necessary permits from the government; then entered into formal long-term lease agreement for use of the land which involved payment of lease fees on annual basis. Recounting some of the challenges they encountered, he said they discovered that the people were largely not quite educated and so for them to understand what really lease agreement is and to adequately consider the options on what they can gain was quite a difficult one. He lamented that 'only about one-third of the population was educated. Also, we came to realise that several promises had been made to people for decades by governments, companies, politicians, etc without fulfilling them. And so, words mean very little to the people. They (locals) want to see action, they want to see result and see things working. So, it's a process of turning back trust. Based on our promises, there was mutual and willingness from the host community.' He observed further that a lot of lands did not have Certificate of Occupancy (CO). He however noted that the courts recognise customary law. But again, 'respect for boundaries is a problem here in Nigeria as there was very little respect for boundary lines', he said.

Arguing from the prism of Nozick's Entitlement Theory of Justice, the opinion of the investors that '*we legally secured agreement with appropriate authorities*' and that '*we go through the right channel*' do

not necessarily mean that the land was justly acquired. In the first place, the process of original acquisition of holdings had been altered by the 1978 Land Use Decree which unjustly confiscated, nationalised and centralised the allodial rights over land[holdings] of native Nigerians and vested same in various State Governors of the Federation. This explains why some scholars opined that 'The Law and its predecessors took away from the natives… proprietary rights to the lands which originally belonged to them and which they occupied and over which they exercised acts of ownership according to their native laws and customs…' (Ezejiofor, 1974; Otubu, 2015). This, by implication contradicts the principle of justice in original acquisition of holdings and so affects whatever transaction on such landholdings that may arise thereof since the actors that initiated and negotiated the initial transaction (agreement) sidelined the native landowners. Thus, those challenges the investors encountered and various antagonistic actions by the landowners which compelled the investors to enter into another negotiation, MoU or memorandum of action (MoA) to enable them secure conducive environment for their business obviously depicts the nature of land management and contradictions inherent in the Land Use Act (see Sections 1, 5, 28, 36, 48) as was also observed in many literature (Agbosu, 1988; Omuojine, 1999; Udoekanem *et al*., 2014; Obutu, 2015; Kingston and Oke-Chinda, 2016; Osegbue, 2017).

Again, considering the nature of Nigeria's Land Use Act and the manner of appropriation of the land in question, Robert Nozick was quite correct when he argued that the fact that:

> …a situation could have arisen via *justice-preserving* means, does not suffice to show its justice. The fact that a thief's victims voluntarily could have presented him with gifts does not entitle the thief to his ill-gotten *property or* gains *thereof*. *Because*, justice in holdings is historical; it depends upon what actually has happened *in the past*.

Therefore, it is safe to assert that the appropriation of over 3000 hectares of people's ancestral land implicated in prevalent social tension in PDA which has significant potentiality of violent outburst. This instigates us into in-depth examination of the prevalence of social tension arising from the unjust appropriation of lands in the study area.

Appropriation of ancestral lands and prevalent social tension in Kuda-Kenga communities

In a national broadcast on the eve of the promulgation of the 1978 Land Use Act, the then Military Head of State, Gen. Olusegun Obasanjo

(retired) declared that 'All Nigerians are collectively owners of all land in the country and the rights of all Nigerians to use and enjoy the land of the country and natural fruits thereof in sufficient quantity to enable them provide for the sustenance of themselves and their families should be ensured, protected and preserved…' (Otubu, 2015, p. 9). This study, however, insists as noted in Farrelly (2004, p. 46) that even 'in a situation of common ownership, individuals have a say over how their resources is used.' On the contrary, the people in question (native landowners) were not consulted; neither was their rights over the land protected or preserved as noted in the proclamation above and as enshrined in Sections 33-45 of the 1999 Constitution (CFRN, 1999). This naturally elicits resentment and hostility from the native landowners towards the beneficiaries of the unjust allocation of their lands. This is highlighted in our interviews with KIs. In one of the interviews, a Village head noted that,

> …the arrival of the investors triggered the minds of the people – the native landowners and settler farmers were troubled. So, we protest against the sudden taking over of our ancestral land. We had to take 'our destiny by our hands' in order to protect our legitimate 'birth rights' and source of livelihood. This is because we were not in the know of the coming of the investors, how their coming will benefit or endanger us. In fact, we saw it as threat to our existence.

Similarly, a concerned citizen disclosed that:

> …about 80-97% of the people depend on crop farming which is their major occupation and source of income. Also, more than two-third of this population rely on the appropriated land. So with anxiety over the seizure of the land, the people demonstrate against the White mechanise farmers when they came to start work in the area. They vehemently opposed the taking over of their land. Example, *Anvuba* people sternly barred the investors from further occupation/use of their piece of land. The authorities that had dealings or tended to protect the interest of the investors were spared. They insisted that they will not allow the investors use their land without knowing how they will be compensated. In fact, a Village head was dethroned more than once by Odyong Nyankpa for challenging his authority over the matter.

Relating to why and how human beings are naturally prone to react against others who intend to seize their cherished belongings, early thinkers like Grotius illustrates that,

> When a child has picked some strawberries, they are said to be "his/hers." If they are taken from the child by a naughty boy, this is acutely felt, not only because of the loss of the strawberries, [but also] the act is experienced by the child as an attack on itself; that is, on its personality. In this way, we feel, all of us, with regard to objects that "belong" to us. They are supposed to be joined to ourselves. We have the feeling of our personality being in some inexplicable way extended to encompass the objects we own. Therefore, if anything is [forcefully] taken from us or damaged, we have the experience of an attack on ourselves. The feeling differs… In the case of land, it can rise to a high degree of intensity… If a farmer is deprived of the soil which he and his forefathers have cultivated for generations, he will feel it as a severe amputation (Oblivecrona, 1974, p. 215).

From this submission, it could be deduced that the fact that such attack or violation as in the current study exposes the *offender* to the reaction of the *offended party* is based on perceived or practical feeling of negative dynamics associated with the appropriation of their landholdings. This argument corroborates that of Ivanov, Nazarov and Kublitskaya (2017) to the effect that the feeling of a negative dynamics prevails, at least with respect to: (a) economic welfare (b) lack or poor observance of the principle of equality before the law, justice and rights…They further assert that the determination of protest activity is of a multifactorial character and social tension is determined by both long- and short-term situational circumstances. Furthermore, Kapoguzov, Chupin, Kharlamova and Pligunova (2020, p. 518) explained that transformation processes (unfavourable changes), which are accompanied by political and economic instability, worsening living standards and other negative consequences, inevitably affect the mood of the population. They lead to a change in social relations and give rise to contradictions that take place in all spheres of society which may result to violent attitudes toward any perceived forces responsible for their problems.

Hence, there is no gainsaying that psychologically, emotionally and morally speaking, no sane or even mentally unstable person will be 100 percent happy or comfortable when he/she is abruptly and forcefully deprived of that which they cherished, even if such act may perhaps be

for their 'benefit.' People, whether strong or weak, rich or poor, etc are likely to exhibit various attitudes in attempts to display their disapproval over whatever thing is done against their welfare, livelihood or existence. Consequently, the person who is unfairly dislocated (dispossessed) of what he cherished or relied on, will naturally make effort to seek justice – restoration, compensation, etc. To this end, Grotius and Pufendorf argued that 'by committing an injury (infringement), the offended person could now use violence against him (antagonist) *to avert* the attack, to *recover* what he had lost, or to *extract compensation*. The reaction need not be proportionate to the damage caused or threatened by the attack. If it was necessary to prevent an injury even of the most trifling kind, the assailant might be killed…' (Oblivecrona, 1974, p. 212).

In the current study for instance, a key informant narrates a scenario in which he was invited in 2006 to a meeting wherein he was for the first time informed of the appropriation of their land. According to him;

> …they gave me money for "Farm 11" – the land which belongs to us, for me to share to my people. But I openly told them that I was not going to collect it because I and my people were not aware of any arrangement or transaction related to our land… As such the Governor, Odyong Nyankpa and other dignitaries were very angry by my action. Sincerely speaking, I started protesting right before the Governor. It became more serious... when my people agitate against it as they felt that their ancestral land has been snatched away from them. We complained bitterly to our *Hakimi* (District head) and the *Odyong Nyankpa*(Paramount ruler) and when nothing good seems coming, out of frustration, I asked the people to go and do whatever thing they wish to do on their land. Along the line, I was suspended from my position as *Daikachi* (local Chief) for months by Odyong Nyankpa for challenging his authority and the government. But I refused to be intimidated. I insisted that if the people's rights continued to be trampled upon by the investors or whoever, the people will have no option than revolt.

From the foregoing therefore, it is not out of point to submit that unjust denial of people's rights to freely access and use their holdings (natural resources) in whatever guise is one of the foremost factors responsible for social tension and various forms of protest activities or conflicts in many parts of the country. Because in most cases, the aggrieved persons

perceived such acts as injustice meted upon their personality and right for mutual existence.

Impact of large-scale land appropriation on the rural population of Kuda-Kenga communities

During interviews, some KIs acknowledged that the entrance of the foreign investors and their large-scale agribusiness establishment brought about modern agricultural practices in the area. Odyong Nyankpa, the paramount ruler estimated that the investor had invested over $50 million in the Company, which created massive employment opportunity for the agrarian population of Panda Development Area and its environs. Another KI also stressed this fact that huge investment in the appropriated land actually attracts different categories of people from far and near into working in the Company. He argued that by being gainfully employed, they are discouraged from engaging in vices and antisocial behaviours. Another interviewee observed that the Company built boreholes and pit latrines for each host community even though some of them were no longer functional.

In spite of these few positive ratings, however, it is noteworthy that despite the huge investment and its developmental potentials in the area, majority of the respondents indicated that most members of the rural population were yet to experience genuine positive economic transformation. A respondent aptly captured the situation in the following piece:

> Before our ancestral land was taken over, we used to farm and make much income from the crops we cultivate. Also, those local farmers whom we settled in our community and cultivate crops on our land usually give us *Ofur-alum* (royalty) from their harvest. So we used to gather more crops every year from which we eat, sell and make a lot of money to cover our needs and leisure. But with the coming of this company, the difference between seizing the land and the rent we are collecting is just small. Because the rent was been paid to us is not appealing. For example, my people are very many and about 85% of our fertile land was taken over. From the rent we receive yearly no adult male takes home more than ₦20,000. So is it ₦20,000 that will serve a family man from January to December? Of course, NO! That is why we see nothing good in the coming of the investors. Although the investor we are still customary owners of the land but the question is, where is the ownership rights of something

> we don't have access to, cannot use or control the way we want? You see, the rent is paid not based on what is generated from the land or number of people who were benefiting from it previously, but according to total size (hectares) accruing to native landowners only. Settler farmers who have become part of the community were completely deprived of using the land without providing another place for them. Truly, our living condition has dwindled drastically. No doubt, there is dissatisfaction and anxiety among the people over the continuous control of the land by the investors. So, we hope for that opportunity to correct these issues before it escalates into a situation that might be difficult to manage. Besides…there was no openness and sincerity in the initial transaction; because what we are collecting today was what they, on arrival negotiated with our parents who did *not have clear understanding* the deal.

Another KII explained that:

> …when something new is projected to you for the first time, you will gladly accept it even without clearly understanding it; but when you have full grasp of it through practical experience, you don't need anybody to explain it for you anymore. That was what happened between my people and the investors. The investors met stiff opposition when they came and in order to pacify the people, they promised that everybody in the community will enjoy if only the people will allow them establish an agric-related company and invest in it. That they will provide job for the people; that we don't have to go into farming by ourselves again; that they brought modern farming and development for our people… They promised to transform our communities into beautiful place like where they came from. These persuasive and sweet promises made our people yield to their plea. But before now, we used to farm as much as we could, and our annual harvest has never disappoints our social and economic needs. Sadly, the reality before us is almost a complete opposite of our expectations. Truly, 'experience they say is the best teacher.'

Similarly, different KIs reported that most members of the affected communities have been waiting for any opportunity to reclaim, at least some parts of their farmland to enable them return to their usual farming activities so as to ameliorate their current economic downturn. According

to some of them, the presence of the Company has not really change positively the lives of most people but a privileged few because they do no longer have farmland for farming, nor receive substantial wages from the Company. Others recount their predicaments in terms of their relationship with the Company as noted below:

> The Company cultivates maize and other crops which are used as raw materials to feed their agric-industry that produces commercial animal feeds and so forth. Usually after harvesting maize, the people often wish to gather the leftover scattered on the farm which could have been of help to them but the Company prohibits everybody from accessing it and that is how the maize is being wasted there… They have been so insensitive to our plights. Also they easily dismiss labourers at any slightest offence even without critical investigation. Worse still, the government that brought them never cares how the people fare now.

Similarly, another respondent described their current situation as modern day slavery. He said their condition is so terrible that some people now resort to unusual alternatives for survive, including stealing food crops from the Company's farms despites tight security around the farm. He wondered how much longer the people would have to survive under their current condition.

Apropos this, scholars explained that the feeling of injustice rises from disagreement with actions of the authorities, which in turn, can be associated with various forms of imbalance, violation of significant moral principles, and the appearance of threats to the existing conditions of people's life endeavours (Artemov *et al*., 2017; Ivanov *et al*., 2017). It is important to that the people, especially settler farmers were displaced from their main source of livelihood without providing something that, at least is equivalent to their previous income. According to interviewees, the appropriation of the land left the people with two main options: (i) to rely on rent which is exclusively for customary landowners (ii) to 'work in the Whiteman's farm or industry for meagre wages.' Moreover, many respondents noted that the wages of locals working in the Company are not commensurate with their labour compare to what they generated in farming before they were dispossessed of the land. The prevailing situation has resulted to discontent amongst the host community, other social problems such as increase rate of criminalities and unhealthy contestations in the area. These vices are products of perceived injustice, unmet satisfaction of needs and unfavourable dynamics of economic expectations or deteriorating living condition.

Conclusion and Recommendations

This study shows how large-scale land appropriation in Kuda-Kenga communities dislocates the rural dwellers of their socioeconomic condition. Empirically, key informants disclosed that over 3000 hectares of land belonging to the natives was appropriated. This action was not in conformity to Robert Nozick's Entitlement Theory of Justice which holds that a particular distribution of [land]holdings is only just if it has been brought about via just steps from a situation which was itself just. However, the forceful displacement of both indigenous and settler farmers from the farmlands and their subsequent commodification as labour-bearers led to a deterioration in their socioeconomic conditions and triggered the palpable social tension that is prevalent in the area, which if left unchecked could spill into violent uprising. Furthermore, we observed that there were various ambiguities and contradictions inherent in the 1978 Land Use Act and 1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria (as amended) which also contributed to problems associated with the landholdings in question, and indeed the phenomena of resource control in Nigeria. Sequel to our findings, we recommend that there is need for just rectification of unjustly held landholdings in order to avoid possible outburst of social tension into riot situation against the investors in the area. Such rectification should include conscious efforts and actions by relevant actors, including the representative of the people in the National Assembly towards the amendment of the Land Use Act to bestow allodial rights on, and allow original landowners in the area, and indeed native Nigerians have full control over land and resources within their respective domains while they contribute certain collectively agreed percentages to the central government as is the case in classical federalism.

For the time being, both the government and investors (Pandagric Novum Ltd.) should reciprocate their control over the people's land by providing them with adequate social amenities, good jobs, scholarship and other socioeconomic programmes that can indisputably better their lives. Civil society organisations should undertake to deliberately educate the citizenry on certain obnoxious provisions of the 1978 Land Used Act and also lobby key players in the legislature towards amending some relevant sections of the Act.

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APPENDIX: Study area and particulars of interview

Study Area	Respondents (Face-to-Face Interview)			
	Interviewees	**Date and Time(local)**		**Total**
A collection of 6 Communities (Kuda-Yeskwa, Kogintaru-Yeskwa, Ochá, Oköh, Anvuba, Kenga)Panda DevelopmentArea	Clerk & Director Legal Services(Nasarawa State House of Assembly)	09/02/2022	11.23am	**16 Key Informants**
			11.41am	
	Permanent Secretary (Nasarawa State Ministry of Justice)	09/02/2022	12.16pm	
	CEO, PandagricNovum Ltd.	15/02/2022	09.32am	
	Traditional Rulers	10/02/2022	10.31am	
		11/02/2022	09.39am	
		14/02/2022	03.43pm	
		15/02/2022	07.58am	
	Typical/Concerned Citizens	10/02/2022	08.16am	
		11/02/2022	08.47am	
		12/02/2022	03.12pm	
		13/02/2022	08.51am	
		13/02/2022	01.29pm	
		13/02/2022	04.09pm	
		14/02/2022	12.43pm	
		14/02/2022	06.03pm	

Source: Authors (2022)