

CHAPTER 11 INTER-GROUP RELATIONS

Objectives

At the end of this chapter, students should be able to:

- describe the nature of commercial relations between Nigerian diverse groups;
- assess the impact of economic activity on inter-group relations;
- explain the role of migrations in promoting inter-group relations;
- describe the effects of war on inter-group relations;
- explain the impact of politics on inter-group relations.

Introduction

As we have studied in the previous chapter; Nigeria is made up of diverse groups which in the pre-colonial period existed as independent states. However, no Nigerian group or community at that time existed in isolation of others. Environmental differences found between groups which affected production made inter-group relations unavoidable.

In this chapter, we shall consider the major economic, political, military and cultural activities through which various Nigerian groups related before the colonial period.

11.1 Economic Activities and Intergroup Relations

Nature of commercial relations

The different groups in Nigeria maintained commercial relations with one another in the pre-colonial period. Since no group was self-sufficient, a group had to establish and sustain trade relations with others to obtain what it could not produce in order to meet its needs. This also required such a group to be at peace with their trading partners.

Environmental differences determined what could be produced and exchanged by any group. For example, groups that lived in the North have a savannah environment and produced mainly grain crops like millet beans and sorghum. In addition, they kept cattle because of the grassland environment. However, the South with its forest vegetation which did not favour grain cultivation and animal rearing, produced mainly root crops like kolanut, yams, cassava and oil palm. Inter-regional exchange therefore took place between the North and the South.

Intra-regional commercial relations also took place between groups in the same region. For example, exchange occurred between coastal communities and hinterland communities.

Among some groups trade was a royal monopoly. This means that it was firmly controlled by the rulers. For example, in Benin, the Obas and Palace chiefs dominated the trade between the empire and other groups.

Another characteristic of commercial relations was the emergence of professional traders who acted as middlemen between producers in the production centres and the petty traders in the markets. Items of trade were mainly primary goods and manufactures.

Exchange of commodities

Inter-group relations in Nigeria occurred mainly through the exchange of commodities. Primary products such as yam, kolanuts and oil palm fresh produced in the South were moved to the Northern markets where they were in high demand. Other products like millet, beans and sorghum were brought to the South from the North. The lucrative trade between the North and the South encouraged peaceful intergroup relations among the groups involved.

Exchange also took place in manufactured hide and skins which were abundant in the North. These were used to produce leather goods such as leather bags, leather clothes and leather shoes. Some of the surplus of these leather products were exported to the Southern markets.

Pottery products (cups, pots, bowls) were produced by communities that had supply of clay such as Afikpo, Iwo Eleru, Ile-Ife and Gwani. These pottery items were sold to communities that did not have the right clay and technology to produce pots. pottery items, being fragile or easily breakable, were not traded very far.

Manufactured goods from Europe were also exchanged between diverse groups in Nigeria. European goods came into Nigeria from two sources, namely; through the Trans Saharan route in the North; and through the Trans Atlantic route. It was relevant inter-group relation because goods imported from Europe were traded among diverse groups in Nigeria.

Commercial relations linked different groups together. Locally-produced foods and import were exchanged between diverse groups and this encouraged profitable inter-group relations.

(c) Impact of trade on inter-group relations

Groups were not self-sufficient and therefore depended on others for the supply of very essential goods. For example, high quality clothes made by the Ijebu were exported to Benin. Salt was produced in certain parts of Nigeria, such as Nembe Uburi, Borno and Jukun. From these production points salt, which was consistently in high demand, was made available in other parts of Nigeria. So trade made it possible to move goods from areas of surplus production to areas of scarcity. In this way, it encouraged inter-group relations.

Trade was not only important to the traders, governments also derived substantial revenue from it through the taxes paid by producers and traders. It was also for this reason that groups worked hard to maintain peaceful relations with others as a way of encouraging trade.

In addition to goods produced by Nigerian groups, trade made it possible to distribute European – manufactured goods among different groups. Such goods like salt, firearms, alcoholic drinks which were imported from Europe and traded among Nigerian groups. However, some of these

items had negative impact on inter-group relations. For example, imported fire arms increased inter-group conflicts and wars.

The trade system depended on a network of river and land routes which linked several Nigerian groups. Also, footpaths or roads connected Igboland with the Igala in the Niger Benue confluence. Footpaths also linked Yorubaland with Nupe and Borgu. Land routes were constructed and maintained by communities through which they passed. In this way, trade helped to promote intergroup relations.

Trade encouraged inter-group cooperation by promoting inter-group marriages. Traders deliberately married from the communities located along their trade routes. Such traders, by reason of marriage, saw themselves as members of the communities and felt secure from harm or molestation in such routes.

Trade promoted bilingualism between Nigerian groups. Traders developed in learning the language of their trade partners. For example, many Aro, who were dominant in the trade between the Niger Delta and Igbo hinterland, learnt to speak the Ibibio and Efik languages in addition to their own Igbo language. This made them to be more effective as middlemen in the inter-group trade. Among all the Nigerian groups trade promoted language learning. Generally, bilingualism helped to ensure peaceful inter-group relations.

Trade made cultural borrowings and exchange of ideas possible. Through trade certain types of food, clothing and dressing styles spread among different groups. In the South-East, traders easily embraced membership of Ekpe and Okonko societies because of the protection they offered in the course of their trading activities among the Ibibio peoples.

Specialisation in crafts and industries

Craft and industrial production was widely practised in Nigeria before the colonial period. Nigerians of diverse groups were involved in craft production, such as; pottery, metal work, leather work, cloth-making, salt production and soap production. Industrial production was determined by availability of the required raw materials, availability of markets and knowledge of the necessary technology.

Some communities developed specialist skills in certain crafts. For example, Akwete in Igboland Ijebu in Yorubaland and Kano in Hausaland became famous for their expertise in cloth-making. In salt production, Uburu Awe Nembe and Ijo became important salt-producing centres. Akwa Benin, Oyo and Kano were important centres for iron and bronze works.

Diversity of craft production encouraged intergroup exchange in manufactured goods. For example, groups that produced metal items sold their surplus to groups that did not produce any.

Movement of people from cities of specialization of crafts

Manufactured goods were sold within and outside their centres of production. Usually goods were moved to areas where they were in demand by traders. Another practise was for specialist craft men to travel to other communities or groups to sell their products and carry on their craft. In South-East

Nigeria, the Akwa Nkwere and Abiriba who became specialists in iron works travelled extensively in relays among the Igbo and their neighbours. The Akwa carried on their craft in Northern and Western Igbo land and among the Igala and Idoma people of the confluence region. The Nkwere practised their craft in Southern Igboland and among the non-Igbo communities of Ijo and Ogoni. These travelling craftsmen were able to establish economic and social relationships that cut across ethnic lines.

Trading associations and groups

Certain trading is associated with groups whose activities cut across lineages and territories emerged. For example, the Hausa travelled far and near in the course of their trading activities. In the kolanut trade, they travelled to Yorubaland and as far as Gonja to buy kolanut. The Aro were also involved in long distance trade that cut across lineages and territories. Unlike the Akwa, the Aro were purely professional traders and did not combine their trading activities with Smithing. These trading groups, through their widespread trading activities, encouraged peaceful inter-group cooperation.

11.2 Political Activities

Nature of political activities

Different groups in Nigeria were politically organized even before the coming of the Europeans. For example, Oyo had a centralized monarchical system of government. There were different systems of government and officials of groups responsible for maintenance of law and order and the regulation of inter-personal and inter-group relations. Political activities therefore had impact on intergroup relations.

Impact of political activities on inter-group relations

Governments by their actions determined the nature of inter-group relations. In the pre-colonial period rulers controlled armies which they used for defence and to fight wars of expansion. During such wars of expansion, defeated groups were absorbed into the victorious kingdom. It was through this process that small groups like Edo and Oyo transformed into large groups.

Wars were also fought by groups for area with ownership of resources such as farmland or fishing rights, etc.

Also, rulers promoted peaceful inter-group relations by forming alliances to carry out projects of mutual interest. The result of such peaceful relations would be meaningful economic and social development among the group.

Government by their actions could encourage inter-group trade. They could make laws regulating such trade and the movement of traders and goods.

11.3 Military Activities

Reasons for inter-group wars

Wars were fought by states to acquire new territories. Defeated groups were incorporated into the new states. For example, Oyo started as a very small kingdom but it soon expanded into an empire with diverse groups under its control. The Jukun, at one time, developed an efficient army and expanded from small autonomous communities into a powerful state. This, at the height of its power in the 17th century, had Hausa states of Zaria, Kano and Kastina as tributary states.

In Hausaland, the need to control trade routes was a frequent cause of wars among the Hausa city states. For instance, Fulani Jihad of the early 19th century was caused by the desire to revive Islam and to enthroned a new leadership.

Wars were fought for the reasons discussed above. However, in such wars diverse groups were brought into contact with each other which in a way promoted intergroup relations.

The impact of wars on inter-group relations

Wars led to the establishment of new states or the expansion of already existing ones. Oyo, Edo and Jukun all expanded into empires through wars of expansion.

Wars produced a large scale movement of people into new territories either as refugees or as war captives. These affected inter-group relations as different groups were drawn together.

War captives were often sold into slavery and taken to foreign lands where they would naturally experience a new culture. Such war captives could also transfer their own culture to the new territories they found themselves.

Wars encouraged hostile instead of friendly inter-group relations. They conquered and colonized groups usually treated as inferior. This could create persistent conflicts between the colonizers and the colonized.

11.4 Socio-Cultural Relations/Interactions

Certain social and cultural institutions brought different groups together. Such institutions as age grades, oracles, secret societies and marriage relationships were used to facilitate inter-group cooperation.

An age grade is a set of people that belongs to a certain age bracket or category. In the past, members of an age grade performed police and military functions.

Age grade organization was a common feature in the socio-political life of many Nigerian communities. The Ibibio of Cross River had a well organized age grade system with members of each age grade drawn from different villages which allowed members to interact closely.

It is believed that the age grade system of the Ibibio was adopted by North Eastern and Cross River Igbo through cultural contact.

Secret societies such as Akang, Okonko and Ekpe diffused into Southern Igbo of Ngawa and Ohuhu from their lower Cross River neighbours, the Efik and Ibibio. Memberships of these societies cut across different ethnic groups and villages and help to foster inter-group cooperation.

Oracles, their agents and patrons emerged in many places and became important factors of inter-group interaction. In Igboland, famous oracles were the long juju of Arochukwu, Agbala of Akwa, Agbara of Ozuzu and Igwe-ka-ala of Umuemeoha. The fame of these oracles spread far and near. People from within and outside Igboland came to consult them.

11.5 Migration

Causes of migration

Migration is an important factor in intergroup relations in Nigeria. Certain factors compelled people to move to new settlements.

The outbreak of wars might force defeated groups to migrate to other areas. For example, due to Fulani incursions into Old Oyo some Yoruba communities were forced to move Southward to the forest zone.

Also, Balala menace in Kanem compelled Mai Ibn Idris to move to Borno where he founded Kanem Borno.

During wars, people were displaced and forced to move as refugees into new settlements. Some were captured as war captives and sold into slavery to live in new territories. These are forms of migration which in the past contributed to inter-group contacts.

The need to have access to markets and engage in trading activities also made groups to move into new territories. In Igbo land, the Aro established many trading colonies, the toast of which was Azondizogu where many of them settled permanently. In Yoruba towns, Hausa traders involved in the kolanut and cattle trade settled to carry on their trade.

Natural disasters in forms of flood, drought, famine and outbreak of diseases compelled people to leave old settlements for new territories.

People were also forced to migrate due to over-population when available resources in a place could no longer take care of their needs.

This movement of people to new settlement for any of the reasons outlined above increased inter-group contacts.

Impact of migration on inter-group relations

Migration led to the establishment of new settlement or the settlement of the immigrants in already established communities.

Inter-marriages among immigrant and original settlers often took place thereby producing hybrid or heterogenous societies. This was the case in Northern Nigeria between the Hausa and the Fulani.

Migration often led to cultural exchange between the new comers and those already living in the area.

In some places, a new class of rulers emerged, especially when the old leadership could not take care of new challenges brought about by the sudden population increase.

In pre-colonial Nigeria, a number of actors made inter-group interaction unavoidable. In the first place no group was self-sufficient. Each group depended on another for the satisfaction of one basic need or the other.

Groups therefore became involved in various political, social, economic and cultural activities that influenced inter-group relations.

Summary

- Nigerian groups did not live in isolation but related through their economic, military, political and social activities.
- Differences in goods and services produced among diverse groups in Nigeria promoted trade and inter-group cooperation.
- Traders had significant roles in marketing and distributing local and foreign goods across Nigeria.
- A network of river and land routes were established and maintained to ensure free flow of trade among different groups.
- Governments of states worked together through alliance and official visits to maintain peaceful interstate relations.
- Military activities leading to territorial expansion, acquisition of slaves, control of markets and trade routes increased interstate contacts.
- Socio-cultural institutions, such as age and secret societies with membership that cut across ethnic lines, promoted inter group relation.
- Oracles, their agents and patrons that came from different groups increased intergroup relations.
- Intergroup marriages were used by rulers and traders to establish a network of relationships with neighbouring states and communities.
- Migrations, often resulting from natural disaster and wars, led to the movement of people into new areas where they inter-married with the original settlers living heterogeneous societies.

Revision Questions

Objectives

1. States in Nigeria in the pre-colonial period were _____.
 - A. self sufficient
 - B. dependent on others for some of their needs
 - C. inaccessible to one another
 - D. not involved in production
2. Varieties of goods produced in pre-colonial Nigeria reflected the _____.

- A. ecological and vegetational diversity
 - B. use of modern technology in production
 - C. abundant supply of rainfall
 - D. diligence of indigenous traders
3. The major items of trade in Yoruba – Hausa trade relations were _____.
A. electronic goods
B. leather goods
C. cloths and yam
D. kolanuts and cattle
4. Professional traders that helped to connect Igboland and other Nigerian groups were the _____.
A. Aro, Awka and Nike
B. Nkwerre, Owerri and Ohafia
C. Aro, Awka and Umuahia
D. Awka, Nile and Asaba
5. One of the reasons for wars in the pre-colonial period was to _____.
A. acquire new territories
B. reduce the human population
C. promote the production of weapon
D. increase production of goods
6. In the past, inter-group marriages were encouraged through _____.
A. inter-group wars
B. intergroup cooperation
C. succession disputes
D. territorial conflicts
7. One of the following was not an important factor of intergroup contact _____.
A. age grade
B. oracles
C. secret societies
D. Osu caste system
8. One of the major causes of migration in the pre-colonial era was _____.
A. natural disasters
B. fertile land
C. availability of resources
D. effective leadership
9. One impact of migration was the creation of _____.
A. heterogenous societies
B. powerful states

- C. agricultural communities
 - D. dedicated leadership
10. The age grade system of the Niger Delta states was adopted by parts of _____.
- A. Hausa land
 - B. Benin Empire
 - C. Igbo land
 - D. Yorubaland

Essay Questions

1. Examine the contribution of economic activities in inter-group relations.
2. What roles did military activities play in inter-group relations?
3. Explain the reasons for the migration of groups in pre-colonial Nigeria.
4. Discuss the effects of political activities and socio-cultural institution in inter-group relations.
5. Explain five ways trade promoted inter-group relations in Nigeria.