

A GEOGRAPHICAL SURVEY OF THE HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE OF BALALA  
AREA, ADAMAWA REGION

Chubado Umaru  
Centre of Excellence(Research& Development),  
Federal University Gusau, Nigeria  
[chubadoumaru@gmail.com](mailto:chubadoumaru@gmail.com)  
+234 (0) 7031686161/+234 (0) 7055607575

Dr. Hamza Tukur Ribadu  
Department of History,  
University of Maiduguri, Nigeria  
[tukur@unimaid.edu.ng](mailto:tukur@unimaid.edu.ng)  
+234 (0) 8036560671

**Abstract**

*This paper examines the nature of geography of Balala area in the region of Adamawa. It explores the vital role of the geography in the realization of objectives of nature of the environment in different fields. It also gives background information on the Balala area in terms of the geographical location, physical features, climate and vegetation. The study relied on secondary data such as journals/ articles and books, etc. The study reveals that the nature of geography and impact of the land influences new settlements around the area vis-a-vis which foster more social developments/infrastructures to the communities that constituted Balala area both at local, state and federal government levels as well as interactional and non-governmental bodies.*

**Keywords:** Geographical location, physical features, climate, vegetation, land, Balala

**Introduction**

Geographically, Federal Republic of Nigeria located on the western coast of Africa, has diverse geography with climate ranging from arid to humid equatorial. The nation has abundant natural resources such as natural gas, petroleum, tin and iron ore, etc. The country is categorized into three (3) major geographical regions: coastal, forest and savanna regions. The savanna regions largely dominated with the highlands, marshlands and plains (Salihu, & Shabu, 2019). The study area which is part of Adamawa, fall on the region and nature of its land influence the variable agricultural and handicraft activities over the years. Balala area is one of the five (5) districts forming the Fufore Local Government Area of Adamawa, Nigeria. Adamawa state covers a land of about 39,972 kilometres. The state as it today was carved out the defunct Gongola state on 27<sup>th</sup> August, 1991. Gongola state was itself carved out of the then North-Eastern state in February, 1976 and Fufore LGA as well (Eleazu, 1988). Ribadu (Balala) town (1831-1839) was also the capital of Adamawa emirate later Njuboli in 1840, finally *Modibbo* Adamawa moved to Yola in 1841 and establish new emirate's capital (Alkasum, 2003). The town has also serves as the headquarters of Fufore LGA, inhabited with diverse group of people that are speaking different languages and customs ranging from Bata, Fualni, Hausa, Laka and Verre, etc. Traditionally, these people engaged in different socio-economic activities such as pastoralism/animal husbandry, farming, fishing, hunting, weaving, iron work, trade and commerce (Terfa, 2009).

The study area covers the present day Ribadu and Daware districts of Adamawa emirate in Adamawa State northeast, Nigeria (Adebayo and Tukur, 1999; Umaru, 2019; Umaru, 2012). The area of the study lies between latitudes 9°-30 N and longitudes 12°-50 E covering an area of approximately 549 square kilometres (Umaru, 2019). The study area is situated in the Upper Benue Valley, in fact the area located in the southern and northern bank of River Benue. It shares borders with Yola and Girei Districts to the west, by Malabu District to the north, on the east by the Republic of Cameroon and the south by Gurin District (See map I). The contributions made by geography and human skills in the development of Balala area are worthy of mentioning because they brought about an increase in population of the area over the years. The increase in population was due to collaborative efforts of the inhabitants of the area and those coming from neighbouring communities with their skills (Umaru, 2019). The economy of the area has in one way or the other led to the development of socio-political activities of the area and Adamawa as a whole (Alkasum, 2003). This was reflected in the existence of cordial relations among the people through trade/commerce, craft manufacturing as well as agricultural activities (Adebayo and Tukur, 1999). Fertile land and good drainage system for both wet and dry seasons farming have adequately contributed towards the integration of the communities despite their ethnic and religious differences (Kirk-Greene, 1969).

The area was first established as the fief of Ribadu by *Modibo* Adama on the bank of River Benue facing

Bagale hills from the southeast, during the outbreak of the jihad in c. 1809-1830 (Alkasum, 2003; Hamid & Alkasum, 2009; Mahmoud, 1979). Although the area was later divided into the garrisons of Ribadu and Daware by *Lamido* Sanda (1872-1890) in 1872, however, it was amalgamated into the combined district of Balala after the advent of colonial rule on 21<sup>st</sup> September, 1926 with Ribadu town as the first capital of the district before it was relocated to Fufore town in 1936 under the leadership of Mahmud Ribadu (Abba, 1988). Finally, it was separated into the districts of Ribadu and Daware in 1993 (Umaru, 2019). As mentioned earlier, the River Benue was used as the line of demarcation. The district was created in 1926 and served as the British colonial unit (Abba, 1988) and it was divided into twenty one (21) Ward units by the Native Authority. Balala is located in the eastern part of Yola, the capital of Adamawa Emirate (Oladapo, 1998).

The reason for choosing Ribadu as a capital by *Modibbo* Adama was because the Adamawa jihadists realized that for the Bata of Tepe and those in and around the Faro valley region who retreated into the Bagale mountains as a result of their attacks to be checked, as well as for the jihadists to protect Muslim settlements of Malabu, Song and Girei a war camp closer to the Bagale hills was necessary. Thus, in 1831, the leaders of the Sokoto jihad of 1804 and 1809 in Adamawa (Upper Benue Valley) decided to move northeast and established a war camp and new administrative centre for the emirate and founded Ribadu just fifteen (15) kilometres away from Gurin the initial capital of the *Fombina* Emirate. Ribadu was unique among the various military bases or administrative centres established by the *Modibbo*, an indication to its strategic importance (Abba, 1988).

### Statement of the Problem

Many researchers and students of history have over the years developed interest and as such attempted to study the general history of Adamawa and Yola area in particular. Thus, several academic works have been carried out on the subjects of history, geography, politics and socio-economic activities of the inhabitants of Adamawa and their immediate neighbours from the pre-colonial, colonial and post-colonial periods. Unfortunately most of these studies have neglected the geography (or land) of Balala area with its significant to the development of Adamawa and Nigeria as a whole. Therefore, the study intends to bridge this gap by examining the geographical background of the study area.

### Significance of the Study

A study of the geography of Balala area, Adamawa shall provide us with explanation on the geographical background/history of the area under study. It is hopeful that the study shall shed more light on the nature of socio-economic and political transformations that shape lives of the citizens in politics and institutions around the area over the years. Also, it shall serve as guidance to individuals, improve their capacities and encourage the development of their communities. Eventually, the body of knowledge from this study shall establish opportunities for scholars, researchers, public services, traditional rulers and other bodies who want to undertake similar or related studies in future.

### Research Methodology

Sources used in the course of writing this article was broadly from secondary sources of information which include published and unpublished sources of data comprise of books, journals/articles, etc.

### Review of the Related Literature

For the purpose of this study different works were systematically reviewed in order to carefully accomplish what has been studied and how those works related to this study. Salihu, & Shabu, (2019) examined the flood strikes around the globe each year and it affected people and property damage because is a major problem and a risk to environmental component of the society. The river flooding is causing damage to social and economic activities, agricultural land and crops. By looking at the area of study, is inhabited along the bank of the River Benue and its tributaries are flood disaster prone because of their geographical location (i.e. land characteristics). Musa, & Tukur, (2009) observed the marshlands; highlands and plains were needed in each LGAs of Adamawa state, Nigeria. They also surveyed the LGAs with the highest percentage of marshlands are those which River Benue pass through its domain. Tukur, & Mahammed, (2014) examined the current political representations in Adamawa state since 1991 in the light of democratic principles of fairness, justice and equity among the citizens of the state. Another work discussed the geographical features of Adamawa state and insert interesting maps of climate, physical features, humidity and vegetations of the state. It also examined the impact of River Benue and its tributaries as well as the abundant lakes in the state that bust socio-economic activities of the inhabitants and their counterpart (Adebayo, & Tukur, 1999). Kirk-Greene, (1969) clearly showed the geographical boundaries of Adamawa Province, from the west with Plateau and Benue Provinces while to the south lies to the Bamenda Province of southern Cameroon. Sa'ad, (2008) briefly studied geography of the *Fombina* region in his work which extending from the Chad Basin up to northern Cameroon Republic. Alkasum (2003) described the geographical nature of Yola metropolis which contributes to development

of socio-economic and political activities of the people of Yola. Umaru (2019) also briefly surveyed the geographical features of Balala district that shape the social, economic and political development of Balala and Adamawa as a whole.

#### **Physical Features of Balala Area**

The common and essential geographical features of Balala area are the River Benue, its tributaries and numerous lakes. The River Benue divided the area into two (i.e. the north and south) both of which have equal access to the river (Adebayo, & Tukur, 1999; Oladapo, 1998). The Kilange River rises from the Mandara hills flowing south into the River Benue. Another river, (i.e. *Mayo Beti*) shares boundary with Gurin District from the south. The *Mayo Beti* rises from the Verre hills following north and terminate into the River Benue near Yola from the western border (Umaru, 2019). The latter river rises from the Bagale hills flowing southeast across the village of Bagale to the flood plains where it joined the River Benue (Umaru, 2012). The five largest lakes found in the district are *Wendu* Pariya, Ribadu, Hamdalla, Dasin and Dulo on the same bearing but only a kilometre distance from the Benue, most of the small streams originated in the surrounding mountains where vegetation covers are runs off system particularly during dry season (Umaru, 2019).

The most important reason for identifying these waters is that, it provides a means of water transportation and communication, source of employments (such as fishing, farming and other agricultural activities as well as handicraft industries) and source of drinking water for humans and animals. The availability of rivers, lakes and streams flowing in all directions of the area provide good grazing grasses for livestock, and the *Fulani* (both settled and nomadic groups) enjoy the area both during the rainy and dry seasons. It is believed by the *Fulani* that the grasses in the area more nutrients and is healthier to cattle and other livestock for fattening and reproduction (Philip and Murray, 1994).

Hills are the other striking geographical features of the district. They are found mostly in the northern part of River Benue. In this area, they are situated in all directions (See map II). Those found particularly in the northeast are known as Furo hills, while those in the south west are Bagale hills, both occupying an area of about thirty nine (39) square kilometres (Oladapo, 1998). Other smaller hills are found in the area about four (4) square kilometres south of the River Benue in Dasin, these hills spread about nine (9) square kilometres from west to east (i.e. from Dasin to Wafago, a small settlement near Ribadu town) Umaru (2019). The hills are responsible for the flood plains in the areas down below. In addition, the caves in the mountains serve as homes for wild/bush animals. And hunters or refugee camps which provide buffer defences. The remaining area of the district, apart from the hills is an open plains/land for cultivation and grazing (Oladapo, 1998; Umaru, 2019)

#### **Climate of Balala Area**

The geography of Balala area is diverse with climate ranging from high levels of temperature, humidity, sunshine and meager rainfall. Maximum temperature in the study area can reach up to 40°C particularly in the month of April while the minimum temperature can be as low as 18°C between the months of December and January; this higher temperature would be possible with respect to the area of Benue trough. The reason for this high temperature is the high humidity caused by River Benue and its tributaries. The coolest nights of the year are observed in the months of December to March; and during such period, the air is often dry (i.e. the period of Harmattan). During this period the wind borne dust of dry northeast from the Sahara is thick enough to spread a number of minor diseases (Umaru, 2019). The temperature change during the succeeding months of April and June in which both day and night are hot and the inhabitants prefer to sleep outside at night (Umaru, 2019). When the rains start however, the temperature still changes between the months of June and September due to the effect of cloud. The period from January to April has harsh monthly sunshine of 220 hours. There is a decline in sunshine hours between the months of May and September due to increase of cloudiness in the district. The harsh monthly sunshine during this period is about 207 hours. The harsh sunshine increases again to 255 hours (Adebayo, & Tukur, 1999) for the period between the months of October to December.

#### **Rainfall of Balala Area**

Rainy season is the most significant season in the area. In general, the rains begin around the month of May and end in September every year. In some years however, rains are recorded from early April and last up to October. The total average of rainfall in the area is 42 inches, while sometimes the area's rainfall is less than 40 inches (Kirk-Greene, 1969). The months of August and September recorded the heaviest rains and the highest number of rainy-days. The rainfall is characterized by short sharp showers and continuous falls of rains lasting two to three hours (Adebayo and Tukur, 1999). Notwithstanding, August and September are the wettest months and incidence of flood and erosion are experience in the area during this period (Umaru, 2012; Umaru, 2019). The significant level of rainfall is that, like the other geographical conditions, it determines the nature of vegetation and general ecology of the area, the rainy season is used for the cultivation of crops, plants and other purposes. There is hardly any rainfall

between the months of November and February and during this period; the whole of Adamawa is under the influence of dry (and harmattan) Adebayo & Tukur (1999).

#### Vegetation of Balala Area

The major vegetation covers in Adamawa region are the Southern Guinea Savannah, Northern Guinea Savannah and Sudan Savannah, particularly Northern Guinea Savannah that stretches across the Adamawa from West to East (Adebayo and Tukur, 1999). In terms of vegetation, Balala area falls within the Sudan Savannah region. As discussed earlier, most parts of the study area are open (Umaru, 2019). For this reason, it is covered by short green grasses, especially stubble. Other vegetations of the area are trees widely found which are small in sizes. In this manner, the area support economic viable trees like shea tree, tamarind, gum-Arabic (Adebayo & Tukur, 1999) and many more. **There are trees, grasses and leaves that are edible in which the leaves are cooked and eaten or some are used for medicinal purposes (Umaru, 2019).**

These trees, grasses and plants are very important as sources of income, cooking, building houses, carving canoes, mortars and pestles, charcoals, materials for livestock fencing, other tools like hoe, knife, axe handles among others. The nature of the land permits Agricultural activities such as farming, herding, fishing, hunting and handicraft activities. These are assisted by the green grasses of the rainy season and crop litter of the dry season. The land is also free from tsetse flies. These advantages favour comfortable human and animal habitation in the area (Adebayo and Tukur, 1999).

#### Conclusion

In conclusion, based on the findings of this research paper geographical nature of the Balala District Adamawa as a whole motivated and has significantly influenced potentialities of the inhabitants. Thus, it provided background knowledge of geography of the district whereby it examined the physical features such as climate and vegetation of the society of Balala. Geographically, Balala District was divided into two (2) main sections: northern and southern parts of River Benue which marked as the demarcation between the two segments. It also shows impact of land to the development of agriculture and handicraft activities as well as industrial production on the bank of River Benue, its tributaries and the various lakes around the area which boosts political and socio-economic development among the people of the area. Finally it also reveals the inter-group relations between the inhabitants and their neighbours. This study delimited to the geographical features of Balala area by studying the impacts of its land to the development of the socio-economic and political activities of the inhabitants of Balala area and their immediate neighbours. However, it is recommended that future studies should examine and focus on the people and their economic and political development of the communities that constituted Balala area by haven its background knowledge.

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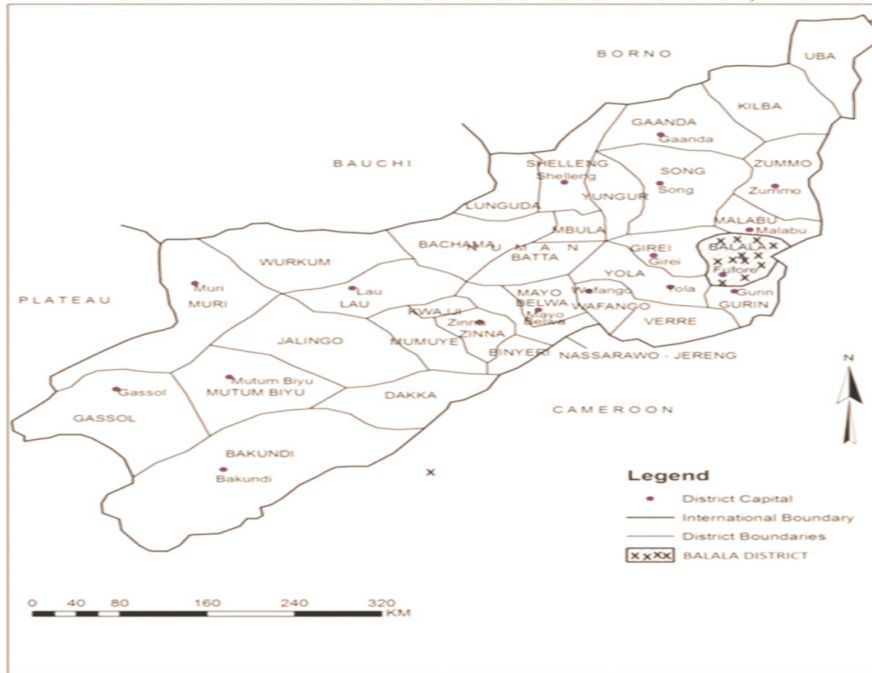
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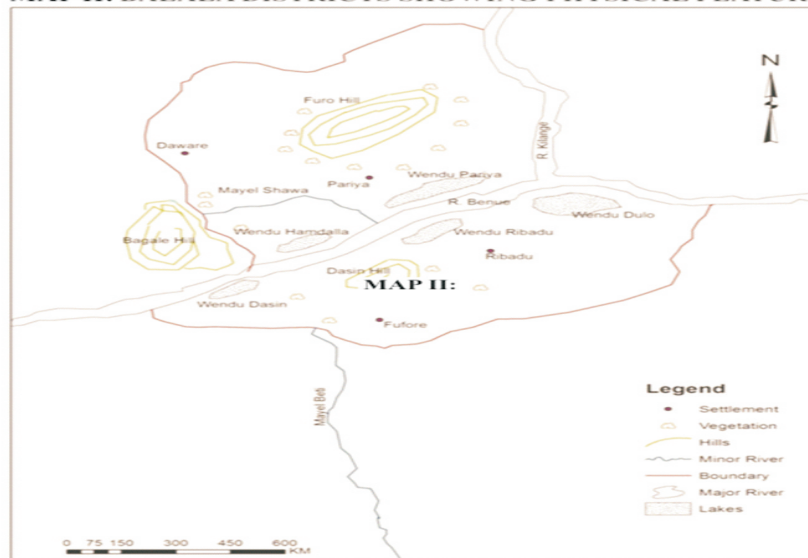
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MAP I: ADAMAWA PROVINCE SHOWING BALALA DISTRICT, 1926-1965



SOURCE: LA Abba, Mahmud Ribadu: A Statesman and Nigeria's First Minister of Defence. Arewa House, Kaduna, Nigeria, 1988.

MAP II: BALALA DISTRICTS SHOWING PHYSICAL FEATURES



SOURCE: NAK Yola Prof ACC. 77: Balala 1935-1956.