

PATTERNS AND TRENDS OF COMMUNAL CONFLICTS IN BENUE AND NASARAWA STATES, NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

The study examined the patterns and recent trends of communal conflicts in North-central, Nigeria. The specific objectives were to identify the types of communal conflicts; determine the frequency of occurrence of communal conflicts in the study area; determine the seasonality of occurrence of communal conflicts; identify the category of people mostly affected by communal conflicts and examine the period of displacement from communities during communal conflicts. A four staged sampling procedure was used to obtain a sample size of 391 farmers. Data were elicited using questionnaires as interview schedule and were analysed using descriptive statistics such as frequencies, percentages and mean. The major findings showed that farmers/herder's conflict (75.70%) was a common occurrence with 47.05% of the conflicts occurred both in the dry and rainy seasons. The result revealed that both the young (58.82%) and adult (59.59%) population were affected by the occurrence of communal conflicts. The mean period of displacement from communities during communal conflicts in the study area was 11.74 months. In conclusion, the study identified communal conflicts involving herdsmen/farmers primarily affecting mostly youths, with a mean displacement period of 11.74 months. The study recommended that extension service providers, government and non-governmental organisations should facilitate farmers' access to productive resources to improve their well-being and productivity and aid in mitigating the effects of communal conflicts.

Keywords: Types of Communal Conflicts, Farmers/herders, Conflict occurrence

INTRODUCTION

Communal conflicts have become a recurring problem in Nigeria and have plagued the nation for decades (Daudu *et al.*, 2024). These conflicts, often rooted in ethnic or socioeconomic differences, have led to violence, displacement, and loss of lives. The patterns and trends of communal conflicts in Nigeria is a complex phenomenon with deep-seated historical, political, and economic causes (Anierobi, *et al.*, 2024). One of the key factors contributing to communal conflicts in Nigeria is the country's diverse population. With over 250 ethnic groups and a multitude of languages and cultures, the potential for misunderstandings and tensions is high. Competition for scarce resources such as land, water, and political power has exacerbated these tensions, leading to clashes between different groups (Olumba, 2022).

The impact of communal conflicts in Nigeria has been devastating, with thousands of lives lost and communities torn apart. The cycle of violence and retaliation has created a climate of fear and mistrust, hindering efforts at reconciliation and peacebuilding. The humanitarian consequences of these conflicts are also profound, with many people displaced from their homes and in need of urgent assistance (Ochogwu, 2024). Ultimately, the incidence of communal conflicts in Nigeria is a complex challenge that requires sustained commitment and cooperation from all stakeholders. By addressing the root causes of these conflicts and promoting dialogue and reconciliation, Nigeria can

move towards a more peaceful and inclusive society where all its citizens can coexist harmoniously (Orhero, 2020).

North Central Nigeria is situated within the critical hotbed of Nigeria's communal conflicts' axis. The region has, over the years, witnessed varying degrees and dimensions of ethno-communal incidents, often resulting in widespread violence and instability (Okoli and Ukwandu, 2021). Expectedly, there exists a gamut of literature on communal conflict in North Central Nigeria. Whilst the existing studies have variously emphasised some crucial aspects of communal conflict in Nasarawa State, especially its general causes and impacts, there has not been much attempt to systematically account for the socio-contextual dynamics of such conflicts, particularly their opportunistic dialectics in the contemporary period.

North-central Nigeria has experienced an array of ethno-communal incidents over the years, with many ending in widespread bloodshed and instability. Additionally, the prevalence of communal conflicts is a complicated issue that needs sustained dedication and collaboration from all parties. There is an urgent need to investigate the current patterns and trends of such conflicts in order to propose relevant solutions for curbing them. As a result, this study examines the prevalent narratives of communal conflicts in Benue and Nasarawa States to obtain insight into the current state of socio-contextual complications. Specifically, the study aims to:

- i. identify the types of communal conflicts in the study area;
- ii. determine the frequency of occurrence of communal conflicts in the study area;
- iii. determine the seasonality of occurrence of communal conflicts in the study area;
- iv. determine the category of people mostly affected by communal conflicts in the study area, and;
- v. determine the period of displacement from communities during communal conflicts in the study area.

METHODOLOGY

Benue and Nasarawa states, in North-Central Nigeria, were the study's locations. The total land mass of North Central Zone covers an area of 296,898 km² which represents approximately 32% of the land mass of the country. Its coordinates are 6° 30' to 11° 20' North by latitude and 2° 30' to 10° 30' East by longitude. More than 77% of the population in the region are largely involved in one type of agricultural activity or another (Adzenga, Umar and Onyekazi, 2024).

The study's population consisted of all farm families in Nigeria's Benue and Nasarawa states, selected through a multistage sampling procedure. Initially, all Local Government Areas (LGAs) where communal conflicts occur often in the two states were selected using the purposive sampling procedure due to the severity of occurrence of the conflicts in the selected Local Government Areas. Overall, seven (7) LGAs with a high incidence of communal conflict over the years were selected: four (4) out of 23 LGAs in Benue state and three (3) out of 13 in Nasarawa state. In the second stage, eleven (11) extension blocks were chosen from the specified LGAs using a purposive sampling technique based on the high prevalence of communal conflicts in the area. That is, eight (8) extension blocks from LGAs in Benue state and three (3) extension blocks from LGAs in Nasarawa state (the significant number of extension blocks affected in Benue state reflects the severity of

conflicts in the State. In the third stage, twenty-four (24) extension cells that have suffered repeated communal conflicts were randomly selected (15 extension cells from Benue state and nine (9) extension cells from Nasarawa state) using a simple random sampling method. Finally, 391 farmers (277 from Benue and 114 from Nasarawa) were selected from a list of registered farm families in each cell using the Taro Yamane formula for sample size determination. Primary data were obtained using a structured questionnaire and interview schedule to elicit information from farmers and analysed using descriptive statistics such as percentages, mean scores, and ranking.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Types of communal conflicts in the study area

The results in Table 1 indicated that the prominent type of conflicts in the study area was farmers/herders' conflict with 85.1% and 71.8% for Nasarawa and Benue states respectively. Land use conflicts (49.8%) and conflicts over demarcation of administrative boundaries (28.5%) were the other prominent types of conflicts in Benue state while for Nasarawa state, ethnic conflicts (76.3%), conflicts over chieftaincy stools and community leadership tussle (62.3%) and land use conflicts (54.4%) were the other prominent types of conflicts that were prevalent in the area.

The pooled results showed that farmers/herder's conflict (75.7%) was of common occurrence in the study area. The result suggests that resource-based conflicts involving farmers and herders over struggle to control land resources was the commonest type of communal conflicts in the study area. Other conflicts prevalent included land use conflicts (51.2%), conflicts over demarcation of administrative boundaries (30.2%) and ethnic conflicts (27.9%). This result agrees with the findings of Soomiyol and Fadairo (2020), that violent conflicts between nomadic herders from northern Nigeria and settled farming communities in North-Central Nigeria have become common. These clashes have increased over the years and are now spreading southward. The violence threatens Nigeria's security and stability.

Table 1. Types of communal conflicts in Benue and Nasarawa States

| Types of Conflict | Benue | | Nasarawa | | Pooled | |
|--------------------------|-------|------|----------|------|--------|------|
| | f | % | f | % | f | % |
| Ethnicity | 22 | 7.9 | 87 | 76.3 | 109 | 27.9 |
| Farmer/herders | 199 | 71.8 | 97 | 85.1 | 296 | 75.7 |
| Boundary demarcation | 79 | 28.5 | 39 | 34.2 | 118 | 30.2 |
| Land use | 138 | 49.8 | 62 | 54.4 | 200 | 51.2 |
| Communal fishing Streams | 16 | 5.8 | 20 | 17.5 | 36 | 9.2 |
| Chieftaincy tussle | 26 | 9.4 | 71 | 62.3 | 102 | 26.1 |

Source: Field survey, 2019 *Multiple response

Frequency of occurrence of communal conflicts in the study area

As shown in Table 2, the mean frequency of occurrence of conflicts between farmers/herdsmen in the last two years in Benue state was 17.8 times as against 16.8 times in Nasarawa state. This is an indication that the occurrence of land and boundary conflicts is slightly higher in Benue state than in Nasarawa state. The pooled result revealed that the mean frequency of occurrence of farmers/herdsmen conflicts in the study area in the last two years was 17.5 times. This suggest that extension services

which provide complimentary services to farming which is the predominant occupation of communities in areas prone to communal conflicts is being disrupted by these conflicts. This makes livelihood difficult at both the immediate locality as well as the larger societies that are dependent on the produce from these communities. This result conforms to findings of Animasawun (2023) who observed that out of a total of 677 hundred incidents of communal conflicts in 2020 across several States in Nigeria, about 207 came from clashes between farmers and herders (resource use conflicts).

Table 2. Frequency of occurrence of communal conflicts

| Types of Conflict | Benue | | Nasarawa | | Pooled | |
|-----------------------------|-------------|------------|------------|-------------|-------------|------------|
| | f | % | f | % | f | % |
| Ethnicity | 97 | 35.0 | 35 | 30.7 | 132 | 33.8 |
| Farmer/herders | 159 | 57.4 | 75 | 65.8 | 234 | 59.8 |
| Land use/Boundary | 15 | 5.4 | 03 | 2.6 | 18 | 4.6 |
| Fishing/ Chieftaincy Tussle | 06 | 2.2 | 01 | 0.9 | 07 | 1.8 |
| Total | 277 | 100 | 114 | 100 | 391 | 100 |
| Mean | 17.8 | | | 16.8 | 17.5 | |

Source: Field survey, 2019

Seasonality of occurrence of communal conflicts

The result in Table 3 revealed that 41.9% of the respondents in conflict prone areas of Benue State indicated that farmers/herders’ conflicts mostly occur during the rainy season. This result suggests that farmers in areas prone to communal conflicts in Benue State experience communal conflicts mostly during the farming season probably due to interference in their major source of livelihoods. This result is congruent with that of Olaiya, Ogungbaro and Olujide (2022), who observed that the majority of resource-based conflicts between farming communities in Nigeria occur during the farming season. Table 3 shows that majority (86.0%) of the respondents from Nasarawa State indicated farmer/herdsmen conflicts occur both in rainy and dry seasons. This result implies that resource use conflicts in conflict prone areas of

Nasarawa State do not follow a particular pattern of the season as there was no specific season of occurrence of the conflicts.

However, the pooled result in Table 3 showed that 47.0% of the respondents in areas prone to communal conflicts in the study area reported that farmers/herders’ conflicts occur both in the dry and rainy seasons. The inference to be drawn from this is that communal conflicts do not follow any cycle as recent occurrences indicated that resource-based conflicts do not necessarily involve seasonal movements but some of them may result from reprisal attacks. This result is consistent with the findings of Onuoha *et al.* (2023), who reported that resource-based conflicts do not end with the rainy season, and the violent nature of the conflicts was not limited to specific times of year, but occurred throughout the year.

Table 3. Seasonality of Occurrence of Communal Conflicts

| Type | Season | f | % |
|-----------------------|---------------|------------|--------------|
| Ethnicity/Chieftaincy | Rainy | 127 | 32.5 |
| Land/Boundary/Fishing | Dry | 80 | 20.5 |
| Farmers herders | Rainy and Dry | 184 | 47.0 |
| Total | | 391 | 100.0 |

Source: Field survey, 2019

Category of people mostly affected by communal conflicts

As shown in Table 4, the category of people mostly affected by farmers/herders’ conflicts in Nasarawa State were the adults (73.7%) while for Benue State, category of people mostly affected were youths (65.3 %). The pooled result revealed that both the young category of persons (58.8%) and

adults (59.6%) almost in equal proportion were mostly affected by occurrence of communal conflicts. This result suggests that all classes of community members are affected by crises especially the youths who serve as the active labour force in the communities as well as major beneficiaries of extension services. Occurrence of communal conflicts may result in their displacement

and subsequent migration to urban centres in search of less risky jobs, thereby affecting the labour supply within the communities. In a related study, Okpa *et al.* (2023) stressed that armed conflict can have a serious and protracted effect on children, young

people, and their families and it can result in increased violent behaviour, poverty, high school dropout rates, and long-lasting psychological trauma.

Table 4. Category of people mostly affected by communal conflicts

| Category | Benue | | Nasarawa | | Pooled | |
|----------|-------|------|----------|------|--------|------|
| | f | % | f | % | f | % |
| Young | 146 | 52.7 | 84 | 73.7 | 230 | 58.8 |
| Adults | 181 | 65.3 | 52 | 36.1 | 233 | 59.6 |
| Elderly | 118 | 42.6 | 37 | 32.5 | 155 | 39.6 |

Source: Field survey, 2019 *Multiple responses

Period of displacement from communities during communal conflicts

Table 5 showed that the mean period that the respondents were displaced in Benue State was 13 months, while the mean period of displacement in Nasarawa State was 11 months. This suggests that farmers in Benue State had a longer period of displacement from their communities than their counterparts in Nasarawa State probably due to the intensity of the conflicts in Benue State. The pooled result revealed that the mean period of displacement from communities in the study area was 11.7

months. The desertion of several communities and consequent interruption of farming and extension activities in communities affected by communal conflicts will likely affect the income generating activities of the people. This result corroborates the findings of Anierobi *et al.* (2024) who reported in their study that many of the displaced persons were yet to spend up to 1 year in the IDP camps because they were new arrivals at the camps due to recent incidents in their communities while others have spent between one to three years in the camps.

Table 5. Period of displacement from communities during communal conflicts

| Duration (Months) | Benue n=277 | | Nasarawa n=114 | | Pooled n=391 | |
|-------------------|-------------|------|----------------|------|--------------|------|
| | f | % | f | % | f | % |
| 1-11 | 162 | 58.4 | 63 | 55.3 | 225 | 57.5 |
| 12-23 | 78 | 28.2 | 19 | 16.7 | 97 | 24.8 |
| 24-35 | 28 | 10.1 | 26 | 22.8 | 54 | 13.8 |
| 36-47 | 03 | 1.1 | 03 | 2.6 | 06 | 1.5 |
| 48-59 | 03 | 1.1 | 03 | 2.6 | 06 | 1.5 |
| ≥ 60 | 03 | 1.1 | 00 | 0.0 | 03 | 0.9 |
| Total | 277 | 100 | 114 | 100 | 391 | 100 |
| Mean | 13.3 | | 11.1 | | 11.7 | |

Source: Field survey, 2019

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The findings revealed that the prevalent seasonal communal conflict was herdsmen/farmers conflicts, occurring in about 18 times within two years; affecting mostly the youths in the study area. The conflicts have displaced them for almost a year. Therefore, it is recommended that extension service providers, other government organisations and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) such as the National Emergency Management Authority (NEMA), Red Cross, and others should help displaced community members lessen the impact of communal conflicts with productive resources.

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