

AGRICULTURAL PRODUCTION CHALLENGES OF COMMUNITIES IN CONFLICT: EMPIRICAL EVIDENCE FROM ANAMBRA STATE, NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

Communal disputes among rural agrarian communities in Nigeria portend grave production and social consequences. The study is an empirical investigation of the challenges faced by farmers operating under communal conflict situations in Anambra State, Nigeria. Two communities that experienced communal conflict and another two that did not (control) were used for the study, while cluster random sampling was used to select 160 households for data collection. Data analysis revealed that dwindling social capital, farm size, income, and output were the significant challenges among farmers in communities in conflict. The study recommends stronger community alliances and more realistic conflict management and resolution strategies.

Key words: Communal, conflict, agrarian, agricultural production

INTRODUCTION

Agriculture is considered the largest sector in Nigeria's economy and it is the second largest source of national wealth after oil (National Planning Commission, 2004). In spite of the large fertile land in Nigeria, there is little or no indication of remarkable agricultural development. This scenario could be due to a number of factors, including communal and resource use conflicts between and within farming communities. According to Adisa and Adekunle (2010), conflicts in the utilization of natural resources such as land continue to perpetuate poverty among farmers and hinder agricultural development in Nigeria. Communal conflict in relation to agricultural development continues to be a retrogressive factor towards technical progress in nation building and food security. The percentage of land and labour put in agriculture in Nigerian communities have decreased over time due to land ownership and boundary conflicts, thereby diminishing the level of agricultural production.

Conflict, broadly defined by Coser (1998), is a struggle between opponents over values

and claims to scarce status, power and resources. Generally speaking, Wikipedia (2007) stated that levels and analyses of conflict include the following: intrapersonal, interpersonal, emotional, group, organizational, community, intra-state, international, environmental resources, inter-societal, intra-societal, ideological, diplomatic, economic, military, religious-based, and workplace conflicts. Most conflicts, including boundary and communal conflicts, could be appropriately situated in any of the above classifications. Smith (2005) also identified three types of conflict namely, task conflict, interpersonal conflict and procedural conflict. Task conflict is that which concerns the "substance" of an issue where group members or parties disagree about "facts". Interpersonal conflict is that which stems from the 'characteristics' of persons involved in the conflict. Procedural conflict exists when parties disagree about the procedures to be followed in accomplishing their goals. Communal conflicts could be flexibly fitted into any of these classifications.

Moore (2005) noted that conflict *per se*, is not bad: it is rather necessary in order for societies to evolve and develop over time. But when conflicts degenerate to violent, destructive clashes, they become not only unhealthy but also counter-productive and progress-threatening. For instance, Messer, Cohen and D'Costa (1998) posited that agricultural production drops by at least about 12% per annum in conflict areas.

Conflict and Agricultural Production

According to Zaur (2006), the link between agriculture and conflict has not received sufficient thoughtful analysis and discussion. True as it is that a disaggregation of the effects of conflict on agricultural production may be difficult, it is perhaps also indisputable that conflicts have far-reaching negative consequences on food production. Zaur (2006) identified three broad factors that determine the influence of conflict on agricultural production namely: economic, environmental and state capacity factors. Collier (2003) emphasized that the 'key root-cause of conflict is the failure of economic development'. A study by Deninger (2003) buttresses the view that under-development and economic shocks were important predictors of propensity for conflict. The import of this is, perhaps, that increasing economic prospects diminishes the possibility for violent internal conflict and vice versa (Miguel, Satyanth, and Sergenti, 2004). It is however not low per capita income *per se* that can predict conflict, but, according to Zaur (2006), also the incidence of decreasing prospects for economic growth. This view is supported by Stewart (2006) in his submission on the interplay of what he referred to as 'horizontal inequality' in provocation of conflict. Horizontal inequality is defined as inequality between groups in political participation, socioeconomic assets, employment and income (Stewart, 2006). Furthermore, Homer-Dixon's environmental scarcity model (1999) posits that increasing renewable resource scarcity, especially arable land can lead to violent conflict by

interacting with political and socioeconomic forces. It goes further to predict three types of conflict namely: (i). Simple-scarcity conflict (e.g. water and land resources conflict); (ii). Group identity conflict (segmentation of people into groups due to environmental scarcity); and (iii) Insurgencies (when the state loses its legitimacy to govern and its monopoly over the use of force). Communal conflicts fit the second categorization.

The Conflict between Aguleri and Umuleri Communities

Chinwuba (1981) observed that a class of warlords emerged and became consolidated in most parts of pre-colonial Igbo land due to absence of clearly demarcated boundaries between pre-colonial communities. The colonial state exacerbated the contradictions already existing in their societies by supporting some communities over and against others. Records show that the district officer of the area in 1930s partly engineered the problem by encouraging the Umuleri to make claims to the whole of the Otuocha land and promised to support them in the war (Chinwuba, 1981). The Otuocha land disputes between the Aguleri and Umuleri communities clearly illustrate the role of Europeans in creating and intensifying land disputes. This is the case of grant and counter grant, sale and counter sale of land to Europeans for trading, residential and missionary purposes of land that had, historically, been used by the two communities in common without problem. Ibeanu and Matthew (1995) concluded that the disputes of Aguleri and Umuleri are difficult to resolve because they tend to become a vehicle for the expression of communal sentiments.

The two communities, historically traced to the same parents, had since resorted to peace through dialogue after several years of violent conflicts that involved loss of thousands of lives and properties worth billions of naira (Okoli, 2005). However, the impact of the conflicts continues to be felt among the people and their livelihoods.

This research is an empirical analysis of the changing dynamics of land disputes between Aguleri and Umuleri communities in Anambra State, Nigeria and its effects on agricultural production. The specific objectives of this study are, therefore, to determine the socio-economic characteristics of the respondents, analyze the causes of communal conflicts, investigate the farmers' conflicts management/resolution approaches, and to examine the effects of communal conflicts on agricultural production.

Finally, the study tested the hypotheses that there is no significant difference in the farm income, size, total output, yield, farming experience, and educational attainment of respondents from communities that experienced communal conflicts and those that did not.

METHODOLOGY

The study was conducted in Anambra East Local Government Area (LGA) of Anambra State, Nigeria. The LGA has nine autonomous communities namely Eziagulu-Otu, Nando, Aguleri, Enugu-Otu, Igbariam, Umuleri, Otuocho, Nsugbe and Umuoba-Anam. It is made up of mainly Igbo speaking inhabitants with a population of 152,149 and an area of approximately 264km² (National Population Commission, 2006). Situated at the confluence of River Niger and Anambra River, agriculture is the dominant occupation of the people, with major crops being maize, yam, rice, cassava, sweet potato, groundnut, and palm fruits. The Anambra and Ezu River and rivulet breed plenty of fish and other aquatic lives like crayfish.

The study essentially adopted the 'lens' or keyhole comparative analysis methodology which is useful for illuminating, critiquing, or challenging the stability of a thing that, before the analysis, seemed perfectly understood. Going by this methodology, using socioeconomic and agricultural production variables in low-conflict areas as a framework for understanding high-conflict areas could give better chances of

appreciating the peculiarities of farming activities in conflict-prone areas.

Four communities were purposively selected for the study. Two of the communities (Aguleri and Umuleri) had been engaged in long-standing mutual communal conflict, while the other two (Igbariam and Nsugbe) enjoy unfettered peace. In each of the communities, cluster random sampling technique was used to select 40 farmers, thus giving a total of 160 respondents. This was achieved by dividing selected villages into clusters, after which respondents were randomly selected from a sample frame designed by the authors on the basis of the derived clusters. A structured questionnaire was consequently administered to elicit relevant data from respondents. Trained enumerators were used to collect data under supervision. Test-retest method ($r=0.86$) was used to ensure the reliability of the data collection instrument.

The variables measured were sex, age (yrs), educational background, years of formal education (yrs), farming experience (yrs), occupation, household size, farm size (Ha), farm income (N), source of farmland, membership of social organization, yield and total farm output (ton). These variables were measured separately for the two sets of communities (i.e. conflict and non-conflict communities), thus making it possible to carry out a comparative analysis. Other variables measured include effects of communal conflicts on agricultural production, causes of communal conflicts and conflict management/resolution approaches.

The effects of communal conflicts were measured on a three-point Likert-type scale (agree, undecided, disagree) that contained positively presented possible effects of communal conflict designed by the researchers from reconnaissance survey and eclectic literature review. Their perceptions of causes of communal conflict and its management and resolution practices were similarly measured.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Socioeconomic characteristics of respondents

The summary of the results of an investigation of the socioeconomic characteristics of the two groups of respondents is presented in Table 1. The preponderance of male participation in farming was more reflected in the conflict-free communities (CfC) than the communities experiencing communal conflict (CiC), suggesting that communities in communal conflict might be having more female-headed farming households. Table 1 further revealed a fair similarity in the age structures of the two data sets but a generally higher literacy level in favour of the conflict-free communities. This is corroborative of the view that long-standing conflict might hinder educational development of areas in or affected by conflicts (Dolan and Perry, 2007).

More respondents (63.8%) in the conflict-free communities were members of farmers'

unions than respondents in the communities engaged in communal conflicts (38.8%). This indicates that farmers in conflict-free environments might find it easier to participate in social and occupational organizations than their counterparts in conflict-prone areas. Furthermore, while majority (66.3%) of respondents in the communities in conflict relied on inherited lands for farming activities, about 29% of their counterparts in conflict-free communities claimed to use inherited farmlands. It is thus not improbable that heavy reliance on inherited land might be a 'driver' of conflicts between Aguleri and Umuleri people.

About 65% of respondents in the conflict-free communities claimed that farming was their primary occupation, compared to 51% in the conflicting communities. This finding is in agreement with Zaur (2006) on the far-reaching negative consequences of conflict on agricultural production.

Table 1: Socioeconomic characteristics of sampled farmers in Anambra East LGA, Anambra State, Nigeria, 2010

Category	*CfC (n=80)		**CiC (n=80)	
	Frequency	%	Frequency	%
Sex				
Male	53	66.3	45	56.2
Female	27	33.7	35	43.8
Age (Years)				
20-30	19	23.8	26	32.5
31-40	22	27.5	21	26.3
41-50	26	33.1	22	27.5
>50	13	15.6	11	13.7
Years of Education				
0	19	23.7	28	35.0
1-6	34	42.5	33	41.3
7-12	10	12.5	9	11.2
>12	17	21.3	10	12.5
Membership of farmers' Union(s)				
Yes	51	63.8	31	38.8
No	29	36.2	49	62.2
Source of Land				
Leasehold	28	35.0	11	13.7
Purchase	19	23.8	9	11.2
Inheritance	23	28.8	53	66.3
Rent	10	12.4	7	8.8

Category	*CfC (n=80)		**CiC (n=80)	
	Frequency	%	Frequency	%
Major Occupation				
Farming	52	65.0	41	51.3
Non-Farming	28	35.0	39	48.7
Marital Status				
Married	46	57.6	38	47.5
Single	15	18.7	14	17.5
Widowed	9	11.3	17	21.3
Divorced	10	12.4	11	13.7
Household Size				
1-5	24	30.0	44	55.5
6-10	36	45.0	21	26.3
>10	20	25.0	15	18.2

Source: Field data, 2010

Table 1 shows further that the modal household size range for 55.5% of respondents in communities engaged in communal conflict was 1-5 persons, compared to 6-10 persons being the modal household size in 45% of the conflict-free communities. Similarly, 25% of respondents in the conflict-free communities were heads of household consisting of more than 10 persons, compared to 18% for communities in conflict. These indicate that communities that experienced communal conflict tend to have smaller households than those that did not, probably due to emigration of household members occasioned by the conflict situation.

Perception of causes of communal conflict

Table 2 reveals that based on the perceptions of respondents, communal conflicts are caused mainly by poverty among the farmers and struggle for the ownership and control of fertile land. This finding is in agreement with Paul and Hoeffler(1999) that poverty could cause conflict and that those who are economically stagnant and not benefitting from the trend of overall economic development demonstrate a greater incidence of conflict. Also, respondents generally opined that issues of claims and counter-claims over land were responsible for driving communal conflicts in the study area.

Table 2: Farmers' perceptions of causes of communal conflicts in Aguleri/Umuleri LGAs of Anambra State, Nigeria, 2010 (n=80).

Sources of communal conflict	Mean	Ranking
Neighboring farmer	2.37	6
Struggle for fertile land	2.65	2
Land boundary	1.56	7
Government policies	2.58	4
Poverty	2.85	1
Claim over land	2.59	3
Colonial legacy	1.32	8
Social organization (cooperative society)	1.26	9
Speculative motive	2.57	5
Religious beliefs	1.21	10

Source: Field survey, 2010

Table 2 further shows that religious beliefs, roles of social organizations, and perceptions of past colonial legacies were considered as least responsible for communal conflicts among respondents in their communities. Convincingly, these findings show that ethno-cultural factors are not always significantly responsible for communal and resource use conflicts and are consistent with findings from several studies including Haggblade, Hazel, Kirsten, and Mkandawire (2005) and Adisa (2008) who observed in their respective studies that resource use and control are usually at the roots of the conflicts. Even though the conflict is believed to have been exacerbated by the colonial arrangement and still featured in

1999, according to Ekeh (1999), respondents generally opined that colonial legacies contributed insignificantly to the contemporary conflict scenario in the study area. It is also instructive to note from Table 2 that most respondents considered reduced access to extension services and aggravation of poverty among farmers as effects of communal conflicts.

Effects of communal conflict on agricultural production

Data contained in Table 3 summarizes the findings on the perceptions of the effects of communal conflicts on agricultural production among respondents from communities in conflict.

Table 3: Ranking of Farmers' Perceptions of the Effects of Communal Conflicts on Agricultural Production in Aguleri/Umuleri LGAs, Anambra State, Nigeria, 2010. (n=80)

Effects of communal conflicts	Mean	Ranking
Farm land destruction	2.83	2
Inflation of price of farm produce	2.55	7
Reduction in farm labour supply	1.96	10
Loss of crops and livestock	2.75	3
Low returns to agricultural investment	1.85	13
Food insecurity	2.65	5
Health crisis	1.95	11
Poor quality/quantity of family food intake	1.55	15
Loss of life and property	2.35	9
Rise in youth unemployment	1.86	12
Hindrance of mechanized farming	1.05	16
Decrease in farm yield	2.88	1
Low farm income earnings	2.69	4
Increase in poverty among farmers	2.55	7
Decrease in exports of produce	1.59	14
Reduced access to extension agents	2.64	6

Source: Field Survey, 2010.

Table 3 shows that based on the perceptions of respondents, communal conflicts negatively affected farm yields, farm income earnings, and led to destruction of farmlands, loss of livestock and crops, as well as reduced food insecurity. Furthermore, it brought about inflation of price of agricultural produce, increase in poverty and loss of lives and properties of farmers. All these imply that communal conflicts could

lead to poor agricultural development as observed by Henri (2009), that conflict have direct effect on people's food insecurity. These findings also confirm those of Adetunla and Dung (2006) who observed that Zangon Kataf riots of 1992 and the communal conflicts in Ghana in 1994 led to loss of many lives and properties, thereby causing considerable destruction of the agricultural landscape.

Communal conflict management/ resolution perspectives

The challenge of managing and resolving communal conflicts in rural agrarian communities cannot be successfully accomplished without incorporating the perspectives of conflict actors into the

mainstream of a sustainable management paradigm. Data presented in Table 4 summarizes the findings in respect of respondents' perspectives of management and resolution of their mutual conflicts. Expectation of a leading role by traditional leaders and government clearly stood out as the most preferred strategies by respondents.

Table 4: Conflict Management/Resolution Approaches favoured by farmers in Aguleri and Umuleri LGAs of Anambra State, Nigeria, 2010, (n=80).

Conflict Management/Resolution Approaches	Mean	Ranking
Use of mediation to reach mutual agreement	2.65	3
Use of committee to arbitrate between yourselves	2.15	6
Use of court of law to settle differences (litigation)	1.56	8
Intervention by traditional leaders	2.81	1
Intervention by government agencies	2.80	2
Use of compromise	1.12	10
Use of conciliation by dialogue among	2.57	4
Use of negotiation by direct bargaining	1.89	7
Use of facilitation	1.43	9
Intervention of religious leaders	2.55	5
Intervention by foreign NGOs	1.09	11

Source: Field survey, 2010

Table 4 shows that based on ranking in order of most-preferred conflict management and resolution approaches, respondents in the communities under investigation mostly agreed that to manage and resolve communal conflicts, intervention of traditional leaders, government agents including the use of mediation, conciliation, and arbitration are imperative. This implies that respondents believed that participatory and combined approaches could bring about conflict management/resolution, thus corroborating Raphael's (1999) position that conflict stakeholders have emphasized the use of these approaches to check community disputes.

It is however worrisome that most respondents rated the 'use of compromise' very lowly. This means that majority of the farmers might not be favourably disposed to yielding to the opposing side on their bone of contention land, portending serious implications for conflict resolution and management between the warring communities.

Test of Hypothesis

Table 5 presents the results of Student t-test used to test five stated hypotheses to compare the means of the two groups i.e. conflict and non-conflict communities on the bases of farm income, farm size, farm output, yield, educational background and farming experience.

Table 5: Results of t-tests comparing the means of some variables between communal conflict and non-conflict communities in Anambra State, Nigeria, 2010.

Groups	Mean	t-value	Probability	Remark
Farm income (N'000)				
Conflict communities	75,235	2.11	0.003	Significant
Non-conflict communities	127,344			
Farm size (Ha)				
Conflict communities	1.49	2.37**	0.001	Significant
Non-conflict communities	3.47			
Yam farm output (ton)				
Conflict communities	18.03	2.26**	0.006	Significant
Non-conflict communities	43.19			
Productivity (ton/ha of yams)				
Conflict communities	7.84	0.36	0.63	Not significant
Non-conflict communities	8.47			
Farming experience (years)				
Conflict communities	13.4	0.24	0.91	Not significant
Non-conflict communities	11.5			
Years of formal education				
Conflict communities	11.6	0.43	0.33	Not significant
Non-conflict communities	13.8			

Source: Data analysis, 2010

The results indicate that three of the null hypotheses were valid and should be upheld, while the other three are rejected. The two groups exhibited significant differences in the mean values of their farm income, farm size, and farm output. This means that farmers in the conflict-free communities had significantly higher farm incomes, larger farms, and greater farm output than their counterparts in the communities engaged in communal conflicts. This finding is consistent with Messer, Cohen and Da' Costa (1998) that agricultural production in areas that experienced conflict often suffer significant setbacks.

It is also worthy of note that there was no significant difference between the two groups on the basis of yield of yams. This might be due to the fact that the two groups shared similar farming techniques and perhaps used similar farm inputs. However, this finding confirms that increasing farm output in most sub-Saharan African countries, including Nigeria, is not attributable to yield but area under cultivation (Meridian Institute, 2009). The

lack of significant differences between the two groups on the bases of farming experience and educational backgrounds reflect the importance of education and farming in the communities.

CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS OFFINDINGS

Based on the findings of the research, it is concluded that apart from the challenges of peaceful coexistence and conflict resolution, farmers in the communities faced with communal conflicts grapple with other challenges that include low farm income, loss of livestock, inflation of price of commodities and loss of lives and properties which reduces number of farm labour. Farm income, farm size and farm output of conflict communities are less than those of non-conflict communities. The issues of poverty, traditional leader policies, land boundary and quest for fertile land often cause communal conflicts.

The intervention of traditional leaders and government agents (participatory approach),

the use of mediation, conciliation, litigation and arbitration are useful and successful approaches to communal conflicts management/resolution.

Based on the observations made by the research, the researchers propose the following recommendations which could prevent the incidence of conflicts and management of communal conflicts in agrarian communities to increase agricultural production.

- Community associations and other traditional institutions should promote peace by furthering stronger communal alliances and dialogue
- Peace programmes should be encouraged in the communities to create enabling environment for agricultural production.
- Governments need to make policy to facilitate structure to be created and owned by the communities for anticipating and managing subsequent conflicts.
- Extension agents need to educate farmers on the effects of communal conflicts.

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