

# Women Farmers Preferred Communal Land Conflict Management and Resolution Strategies in Abia State, Nigeria

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## Abstract

Communal land conflicts affect have become common in Nigeria among different users of land especially farmers. This study examined women farmers' preferred land conflict management and resolution strategies in Abia State, Nigeria. The specific objectives were to identify the perceived causes of communal land conflicts; determine the preferred institutions for resolving land conflicts; examine the perceived effects of communal land conflicts; identify the respondents' preferred conflict resolution strategies used; and the reasons for preference of the strategies used. Data were collected using questionnaire and oral interview and analyzed with mean and standard deviation. Results showed that claim of ownership with mean (M) value of 2.70, indiscriminate grazing by animals (M=2.60), population pressure (M=2.54), contested boundary (M=2.51) were major causes of land conflicts. The institution preferred for conflict resolutions were amala (M=2.53), umuada (M=2.93), town unions/age grade (M=2.48) and agbara (dieties) (M=2.74). Conflict leads to low productivity (M=2.37), loss of lives and property (M=2.64). The women prefer mediation, reconciliation, compromise and accommodation for resolving conflicts and the reason being that problems are solved one at a time, leads to a win-win situation, lowers level of tension, creation of goodwill among others.

**Keyword:** Conflicts, Management, Resolution, land, Institutions, Women farmers, Nigeria.

## Introduction

According to [1], communal represent a shared social interaction which entails interpersonal contact, reciprocal response and an inner adjustment of behavior to the actions of others. Conflict is a form of social interaction in which the actors seek to obtain scarce reward by eliminating or weakening other contenders [1]. It degenerates into violent situations when excessive physical force and weapons are used. [2] observed that in rural Nigeria, conflicts may arise where there is difference of opinion, exploitation, and challenge to security between groups. In conflicts, security and livelihood activities are disrupted and high level of poverty, food and nutrition insecurities and communal living and individuals could be affected.

Worldwide, land remains an important natural capital for every nation and individuals, and because of this, it's not unusual that there is land conflict across the world, especially in developing nations where a huge population depends on agriculture for their livelihood [3, 4]. In most African countries, land conflict commonly arise at the countries' boarder level, district boarder, among ethnic groups, in the community over common land, between individuals over boundary [5]. Land conflict between individuals is the most common type of conflict in the rural community, and yet in many cases, conflict at this level lacked big attention from the authority.

In Nigeria today, we witness the occurrence of several conflicts. Most of these conflicts have their roots directly or indirectly in the type of land policy in use. For example, the crises in Taraba, Benue and Nasarawa States, Osun State (Modakeke/Ife), Anambra State (Umuleri-Aguleri), Delta State (Ijaw/Itsekir) among others can be linked to the land acquisition. In all these crises, it is the common man especially women that is the hardest hit [6]. This kind of situation has serious security implication for the country in terms of national food supply, community development and macro-economic performance in general. The most prominent of these conflicts arising out of resource utilization and management has been pastoralists-farmer and farmer – farmer conflicts [7].

While conflicts inflict suffering on everyone, women are particularly affected by its short- and long-term effects. They are sexually assaulted, exploited and victimized leading to isolation, alienation, prolonged emotional trauma, and unwanted pregnancies that often result in abandoned children [8]. As culturally designated caregivers, women struggle to support their families and keep their homes together, while the traditional breadwinners, the husbands, are caught up in the fighting and are thus unable to provide for their families.

There are studies on conflict management and resolution both in the workplace and among farmers in rural and urban Nigeria. None of these examined how conflicts affect women farmers and

women farmers' preference of conflict resolution strategies. Given that women suffer as victims first of conflict and then of sexual exploitation and abuse during conflict situation, it has become necessary to recognise the importance of conflict resolution and the institutions women farmers prefer in resolving conflicts and the reason for preference of such conflict management strategies.. It is therefore important to make this vulnerable population the focus of this important study since little attention has been paid to this area of research. The specific objectives were among others to identify the perceived causes of communal land conflicts; determine the preferred institutions for resolving land conflicts; examine the perceived effects of communal land conflicts; identify the respondents' preferred conflict resolution strategies used; and the reasons for preference of the strategies used.

## Methodology

Abia State is in Southeast Nigeria. Abia was selected because of the occurrence of land-related conflicts in various parts of the state. The state occupies about 6,320 square kilometers and is bounded on the north and northeast by the states of Anambra, Enugu, and Ebonyi. To the west of Abia is Imo State, to the east and southeast are Cross River State and Akwa Ibom State respectively and to the south is Rivers State [9]. The southern part of the State lies within the riverine part of Nigeria, it is a low-lying tropical rainforest with some oil-palm brush. The southern portion gets heavy rainfall of about 2,400 millimetres (94 in) per year and is especially intense between the months of April through October. The rest of the State is moderately high plain and wooded savanna [10]. Multi-stage sampling technique was used in sample selection. The first stage involved the purposive selection of two local government areas where land-related conflicts were recorded namely Umunneochi and Ugwunagbo. The second stage involved the purposive selection of the communities in the LGA where conflicts have occurred namely Isuochi and Lokpanta communities were chosen from Umunneochi Area, while Uturu was selected from Ugwunagbo Area. The third stage involved the proportionate selection of 82 women farmers from Isuochi, 74 women farmers from Lokpanta and 94 women farmers from Uturu making a total of 250 women farmers affected by land-related conflicts in Abia state. Questionnaire and oral interview schedule were used in collecting primary data from the respondents. The data analysis was done using mean score and standard deviation. Objective one which identified the perceived causes of communal land conflicts was measured on a 3-point Likert type scale of major cause, minor cause and not a cause. Objective two which determined the preferred institutions for resolving land conflicts achieved on 3-point Likert type scale of most preferred, preferred, and not preferred, while objective three which examined the perceived effects of communal land conflicts was measured on a 3-point Likert type scale of strongly agree, agree and disagree. The discriminating index was set at 2.0 mean score to accept or reject the scaling items. Again mean was also computed on a 4-point Likert type scale of strongly agree, agree, disagree and strongly disagree to achieve objective four which identified the respondent's preferred conflict resolution strategies used. Objective five looks at the reason for preference of the strategies used. This was achieved on a 4-point Likert type scale of strongly agree, agree, disagree and strongly disagree. The discriminating index was set at 25.0 mean score to accept or reject the scaling items.

## Results and Discussion

### Perceived Causes of Communal Land Conflicts in the Study Area

Table 1 showed that several factors caused communal land conflicts in the study area. These are discussed below.

#### Claim of Ownership:

The respondents agreed that claim of ownership with mean response of 2.70 causes land conflicts in the study area. When individuals, lay claim to a parcel of land in use by other individuals, who also claim that the same land belongs to them, conflicts over such parcel usually occurs. This can also happen when individual also question the rights of others to use of a particular land, it is common for the other party to question the right of the others in questioning them.

**Contested Land Allocation/Gift**, this has a mean response of 2.57. Land is owned by allocation and gift and the allottees here have right to use of the said portion allocated to them or given them as gift. This practice was done in ancient times and olden days. Today, individual who did not know what transferred begins to contest the right of the allottees to use of such parcel. This gives rise to communal conflicts

#### Denial of Land Right:

Denial of land right (M=2.34) causes communal land conflicts. Individuals, families and even communities have several rights to land ranging from use, transfer, and control among others. When attempt is made at denying others these rights, communal conflicts are bound to occur.

#### Illegal Sale of Land:

Illegal sale of land (M=2.43) leads to communal conflicts in the study area. When individuals or groups sell land without the consent of the elders, family or community, the buyers of such land may be prevented access to or use of it since the procedures for selling and transferring land was not followed. Most times, we see young people/youth sell land, this is abominable and sacrilegious which elders will not support or condone. This causes conflict.

#### Land Grabbing from Females/Communities:

Forceful taking of land in the study area is common and it is met with stiff opposition from the side who claims ownership. This has a mean of 2.40. Most powerful/influential people in the community may attempt to grab land by force from the poor and vulnerable in the community. This caused clashes when attempt is made to resist such moves.

#### Trespass without The Consent of the Owners:

All lands are owned by people and anyone who want to use land is expected to seek the permission of the owners before entering into such land for any economic purpose. Trespass without the consent of the owners (M=2.37) has caused clashes between various land uses in the area due to failure of land use to recognize the authority already on ground.

#### Contested Boundary:

This is a major cause of communal land conflict in the study area. Individuals, communities and even groups contest the boundary of land. This happen when the boundary marker was displaced, removed or hidden from peoples' sight and guesses will be made

regarding the original boundary. When the other party refuses to adjust the boundary, conflicts occurs. This has a mean of 2.51.

### Climate Change Orchestration:

Too much rainfall affects land use, low rainfall does same too. Very hot weather and very cold weather, affects land use also. Farmers and other land users tend to respond to these situations for survival as they move to more vegetative areas of the forest which may have been left fallow for several years. The same applies to herdsmen who search for green grasses, in their search for better grasses and water, herdsmen have clashed with crop farmers over use and ownership of land. This has on many occasions triggered communal conflicts. This has a mean score of 2.31.

Other factors were increasing land values/scarcity (M=2.64), population pressure (M=2.54) and lack of knowledge of existing laws on land (M=2.39). Due to increase in human population, land is becoming scarce for general economic uses. Land is not found easily, thereby being scarce and not available/affordable when one needs it. The high population of any area can makes land use and acquisition very costly and difficult. Most land user do not know the existence of certain laws on land and jump unto business with strangers. This causes land conflict also. Supporting the findings, [11] said in Mali, disputes and conflicts arise mainly from claims to ownership of grazing lands and related areas (corridors through which transhumance takes place, stopovers, right of procedures), cultivated areas (areas used for growing rain-fed crops in both flood and flood retreat areas). They also arise from a diverse array of arrangements such as share-cropping, sale of lands, loans and right of inheritances. Land tenure disputes could be activity related or actor-related. Activity-related are concerned with demarcation, ownership and inheritance. They are sometimes caused by disappearance of boundary markets, loans of lands and the vagueness of customary rules of inheritance.

**Table 1: Perceived Causes of Communal Land Conflicts in the Study Area**

Causes	Mean	SD
Claim of Ownership	2.70	0.64
Contested land allocation/gift	2.57	0.69
Denial of land right	2.34	0.54
Illegal land sale	2.48	0.48
Land grabbing from family/community	2.40	0.61
Trespass without consent of owners	2.37	0.87
Contested boundary	2.51	1.10
Climate change orchestration	2.31	0.56
Animal grazing	2.70	1.01
Increasing land value/scarcity	2.64	0.78
Population pressure	2.54	0.94
Lack of knowledge of existing land laws	2.39	0.83

**Mean 2.0 accepted as major cause**

### Preferred Institution for Resolving/Managing Communal Conflicts in the Area

Several institution play vital roles in resolving and managing conflicts in the study area. Table 2 showed that about eleven institutions play veritable roles in communal land conflicts management. These institutions included **the Amala with a mean response of 2.53**. The Amala means the council of elders in the area who comes together as respected men to look into conflicts matters with a view to resolving them. The Amala is one of the most preferred institution by the women farmers to handle violent communal land conflict in the area.

Another preferred institution is the **Umuada (M=2.93)**. The Umuada is made of females born in a town but married out. This group has powerful influence to the extent that they mediate into matter arising from their birth place. It is assumed they know the history of issue especially land having been born and brought up in the town. Umuada have such powers that they can sanction both men and families of erring individuals in the community as they collaborate with other institution to enforce their rules and regulations.

**The town union/age grade with mean of 2.48** is preferred by the respondents for resolving/managing conflicts. The town union or age-grade is made up of respected and accomplished men of the town who were born the same year who come together to form a force for peace making, sanctions and social control etc. it is also one of the most preferred, institution for conflicts resolution/management in the area.

**The shrines and dieties for oath taking (Agbara) (M=2.74)** is another most preferred institution for resolving and managing land **conflicts** in the study area. The Agbara which means the local deities or oracles in the land located at shrines with chief priest in-charge. This is the most feared institution by the people as those who tell lies before the oracle will die instantly or after a short time. Individuals who die here

are not given a befitting or decent burial and their property deposited at the shrine for the use of the chief priest. Most times, this has become very useful and effective in resolving land tenure conflicts in the area.

The use of these customary avenues/platforms remains important instrument with many advantages for managing, resolving and settling land conflicts. It is easy and economical to access, and settlements can be achieved quickly. The way settlement is reached is suited to the social, historical and cultural realities of the areas and involves they participation of the whole community in finding a solution.

**Table 2: Preferred Institution for resolving conflict in the study area**

Institutions	Mean	SD
The family	1.80	0.65
Amala	2.53	0.78
Okpara system	1.56	0.59
Umunna	1.62	0.71
Umuada	2.93	0.45
Town Union/Age grade	2.48	0.58
Religious organization	1.20	0.54
Ohanaeze	1.46	0.74
Law Courts	1.31	0.38
Shrines and dieties (Agbara)	2.74	0.67
Police	1.05	0.43

**Mean 2.0 and above accepted as preferred institution**

### Perceived Effects of Communal Land Conflicts on Respondents

Communal Land conflicts affect the overall life of the people socially, economically, emotionally and mentality. Table 3 revealed that economically, conflicts leads to low productivity in their livelihood activities, this has a mean response of 2.37. Since agriculture is the major source of livelihood, the land being the major productive asset is left idea for years and even abandoned. The crops already in the farm are also abandoned resulting into low yield since weeding and fertilizer application will not be done leading to low yield.

Communal land conflicts leads to poverty (M=2.41), relocation of households to safer places (M=2.83) and displacement from native land (M=2.91). Due to conflict situation, farm households economic activities ceases to flourish, their standard of living and income/ savings will be affected negatively leading to poverty. Farm families will no longer meet their nutritional/food security needs, resulting to disease, hunger and even death. During communal conflicts, women and others flee their homes and agricultural lands to safer areas where they will start life afresh either as farmers or even beggars – individuals who depend on humanitarian/government aid/ration to survive. Those who leave native land will rent land for farming or engage in share-cropping to survive.

Other effects were rural-urban drift (M=2.63), dysfunctional economic/social amenities (M=2.51), unemployment/restiveness (M=2.70), food insecurity (M=2.64), and poor living standard (M=2.37). When communal conflicts occur, residents especially young women engage in legal and illegal activities of survival to the detriment of rural economic development. Economic/social amenities also cease to function as many of these infrastructural facilities may have been destroyed or stopped to be serviced or maintained by the engineers mandated to keep them going. Unemployment rate and restiveness becomes very high. The ones displaced from farming will be jobless and civil disturbances will be the order of the day as these individual are not meaningfully engaged an idle mind, they say is the devils work shop. Land tenure conflicts lead to food insecurity which exists when households have no access to nutritious meal anytime they want it and at the right quantity and quality.

Food becomes scarce due to drop in supply owing to insecurity. Households will not access, use, buy and prepare the types of foods they want. They may not eat all the time as ratios will be missed or foregone most of the periods. The missing/skipping of meals becomes a survival strategy though the negative way. The standard of living becomes very poor-owing to lack of good water, food, clothing, clean clothes to wear and the rest.

Loss of lives and property (M=2.67), suspicion/insecurity/fear/mistrust (M=2.41) and disruption of peace and harmonious living (M=2.34) all remains effects of violent communal land tenure conflicts. Households will suspect neighbors, strangers and others even when they do not have anything bad in their minds. The feeling insecurity/fear and mistrust will envelop households making them to be on the defensive at all times. Peaceful/harmonious co-existence will disappear and people keep to themselves and informal practices.

**Table 3: Perceived Effects of Communal Land Conflicts on Respondents**

Effects	Mean	SD
Low productivity in livelihood activities	2.37	0.53
Leads to rural poverty	2.41	1.47
Relocation of households to safer places	2.83	0.67
Displacement from native land	2.91	0.73
Rural-urban drift	2.63	0.81
Dysfunctional economic/social amenities	2.51	0.66
Unemployment and restiveness	2.70	0.77
Food insecurity	2.54	0.65
Poor living standard	2.37	0.53
Loss of lives and property	2.67	0.45
Insecurity/fear/mistrust/suspicion	2.41	0.54
Disruption of peace/harmony	2.34	0.60

Mean 2.0 and above accepted as effects

### Preferred Communal Land Conflicts Resolution/Management Styles

Several styles are used in performing conflict resolution/management for peaceful and harm-nious co-existence. Table 4 showed the most preferred styles/methods by the respondents. They are discussed one after another.

**Mediation:** This strategy has a mean response of 3.25. Mediation involves non-coercive intervention of the mediators called third party who brings conflict to peaceful settlement [12, 13]. Elders are respected as trustworthy mediators with accumulated wealth of wisdom and experiences. Their roles include- pressuring, making recommendations, giving assessments, conveying suggestions on behalf of the parties, emphasizing relevant norms and rules, envisaging the situation. If agreement is not reached, or repeating of the agreement already attained [14].

**Reconciliation:** This strategy with mean score of 3.51 is the most significant of conflict management and resolution. After the disputants have been persuaded to end the dispute, peace is restored. This restoration of peace and harmony is anchored on the principles of give a little and get a little. This idea buttresses the idea of the disputing parties to give concessions. A feast would be organized to confirm the readiness of the conflicting parties towards reaching points of compromise [15]. Again, reconciliation function is performed by an authority figure who mediate between conflicting parties and is empowered to make binding judgments. That is why the institution mentioned in table 2 earlier were effective in handling communal land conflict issues.

**Negotiation:** Negotiations has a mean score of 3.17 making it a preferred method of restoring peace and harmony in the community. In traditional societies like the Igbos, peace is negotiated. Apology for wrongs done to individuals and the entire community is a feature of negotiation. Such apology can be channeled through the Amala (Council of elders), Umuada (females born in the town but married outside), town union/age a grades and other strong institutions.

**Accommodating:** Accommodation has a mean of 2.89. In accommodation, there is the sacrificing of one's own concerns for the sake of another's. People using this style are not assertive but cooperative. Relationships are maintained by the users and an effective idea that builds up is used to accommodate the other parties [16]. Conflicts are resolved in short time and relationship is maintained.

**Compromising:** It has mean of 3.30. This involves a give and take situation in which both parties will give up something after negotiation in order to reach an agreement. It will create lose-lose and win-win sections make people have sufficient reasons to do so or simply avoid continued confrontation [17]. Conflicts are resolved in short time and relationship is maintained.

**Collaboration:** This strategy is commonly named problem-solving style. People who resolve the conflict attend to the issue openly, frankly and neutrally by communicating with the other party [18]. Collaborating attempts to find a solution that satisfies both parties concerns. All parties are happy with the final decision reached.

Adopting a collaborating, compromising style rather than a competitive one can be of great advantage in conflict resolution. Greater collaboration produces more constructive outcomes for the disputing parties, and compromising behaviors help ensure harmonious, lasting relationships. The focus of all the preferred approaches is on building amicable, long term relationships, meaning that conflict management be an important variable in settling a dispute. Therefore women farmers collaborative, compromising and mediation approaches may be

more productive and efficient than competing allowance and adjudication-hard tactics usually used by men in conflict management and resolution.

**Table 4: Respondents' Preferred Communal Conflict Resolution/ Management Style**

Resolution/management Style	Mean	SD
Mediation	3.25	1.04
Adjudication	2.30	0.62
Reconciliation	3.51	0.81
Arbitration	2.01	0.71
Negotiation	3.17	0.74
Competing	2.15	1.04
Accommodation	2.89	0.97
Avoiding	2.08	0.48
Collaboration	3.45	0.68
Compromising	3.30	0.86

**Mean 2.50 and above**

**Reasons for Preference of Communal Land Conflict Resolution/Management Strategies**

Table 5 revealed that there are several reasons for women farmers' preference of mediation, negotiation, collaborating, compromising, reconciliation and accommodating. The former strategies leads to solving the actual problem with a mean of 3.09, leads to a win-win outcome (M=2.96) meaning that both parties will be satisfied with the outcome. Fosters mutual trust and respect (M=2.77), temporary solution is quickly reached (M=2.56), shared responsibility (M=2.62), faster issues resolution (M=2.86), lowers level of tension and stress (M=3.12), creation of good will (M=2.50), building relations/merging ideas (M=3.01) and makes for effective listening (M=2.62).

Oral interview with respondents showed that foregoing ones' own concerns in favour of satisfying the concerns of other actors make for peace. Compromise can help resolve disputes quickly, which is important when a protracted disagreement potentially derail a time-sensitive project or when there is the need to keep a simmering conflict from escalating. When each side in a dispute realizes that the other is required to make a sacrifice, the partner are often more willing to reach an agreement and move forward. Collaborating conflict management makes all parties involved in the dispute feel valued and understood.

Again while men do most of the violent fighting, women agitate for peace. To bring about peace, women within households apply a variety of mechanisms. They engage household members in time consuming activities, making them busy so that they have no time to go out to fight [19]. They teach their families the importance of peace, forgiveness and respect for human life. Household heads deny their household members access to weapons and restrict the herders to specific places where chances of getting into conflict with others are low.

**Table 5: Reasons for Preference of Conflict Resolution/Management Strategies**

Reason for preference	Mean	SD
Leads to solving the actual problem	3.09	0.45
Leads to a win-win outcome	2.96	0.58
Fosters mutual trust and respect	2.74	0.98
Temporary solutions is quickly reached	2.56	0.76
All actors share responsibility of the outcome	2.62	0.68
Faster issue resolution	2.36	0.43
Lowers the level of tension/stress	3.12	0.82
Creation of goodwill	2.50	0.57
Building relations/merging ideas	3.01	0.64
Makes for effective listening	2.62	0.53

**Mean 2.50 and above accepted**

## Conclusion

Conflicts have grave consequences such as rural poverty, displacement of people, and low productivity among others. The causes of communal land conflicts in the study area are many which includes claim of ownership of land, illegal land sales, overgrazing, population pressure among others. The institutions for resolving and managing conflicts include the amala, umuada and the deities (agbara) and the town unions/age grades. Women farmers prefer mediation, reconciliation, negotiation, accommodation, collaboration and compromising in conflict management and resolution. They prefer these strategies because the actual problem will be solved, mutual trust and respect are brought about, level of tension is reduced, goodwill is created and all actors share responsibility in the conflict management.

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