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Research Paper

Rural farm-households perception of land-related conflicts as an impediment to rural livelihoods in Imo State, Nigeria

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ABSTRACT

The aim of this was to establish whether or not land-related conflicts could be detrimental to the lives and survival of rural people in Imo State. The specific objectives were to identify livelihood strategies of the respondents, examine perceived causes of conflicts in the area; ascertain effects of conflicts on rural economy/livelihood of the respondents and determine measures to reduce conflicts in the study area. Purposive random sampling technique was used to select 300 respondents from conflicts affected areas in Imo State. Data were collected with structured questionnaire and oral discussion with the respondents. Data were analyzed using percentages and mean to achieve the objectives of the study. The results showed that 100% of the respondents engaged in farming for survival. The major causes of the conflicts were human population pressure (M=3.43), encroachment without permission (M= 3.30), land tenure system (M=3.45), among others. The major effects of conflicts on rural economy and livelihood were farmland abandonment (M = 3.37), decrease income (M=3.12), reduction in yield (M=3.31), loss of lives (M=3.60), insecurity (M=3.00), increased hunger and starvation (M=3.47) among others. To curb conflicts, security be provided to the communities, settlement of dispute be done quickly, and educating all actors would be necessary.

Key words: Conflict, economy, rural, livelihood, farm, households.

INTRODUCTION

Conflict over natural resources, such as land, water and forests is universal. People everywhere have competed for the land they need in order to ensure their livelihoods (Buckles, 2000). Therefore, conflicts are generally accepted to be inevitable phenomenon in the lives of men. It cannot be completely separated from the inter-relationships that exist among individuals and communities. Conflict is therefore a natural occurrence among human beings. Whenever people gather together in the family or other social and political groups, there are bound to be conflicts which according to Alagoa, could lead to "struggle of various level of intensity, extending to violent combat which could lead to the destruction of the group" (Alagoa, 2001).

It is often argued that because human beings are by nature competitive and aggressive, there will always be conflicts amongst them. Land conflict can be defined as a social conflict in which at least two parties are involved, the root of which are different interests and perceptions regarding the access right to land, the right to use and manage the land, to generate income from it, to exclude others, to transfer the land and the right to compensate for it (Wehrmann, 2008). According to Mohamed and Ventura (2000), conflict on land and other natural resources can be a result of disputes within one or among several communities, such as boundary dispute between the community and outsiders, boundary dispute between members of the community, resource use dispute between community and outsiders, resource use dispute between community members, land use dispute between

community and outsiders, as well as land use dispute between community members. This means that conflicts in land uses and other natural resources are typically associated with opposing interests over the type of land use, limited access and use rights, unclear ownership and property rights, and the delineation of boundaries.

Land is an important resource for any country's socio-economic development because it supports the livelihood of nearly everyone. The importance of land to a country's development is emphasized by the fact that most of the population derives their livelihood from land through activities, such as farming, livestock production, industry, construction and other activities (Lange, 2008). To smallholder producers, land is an asset of enormous importance for billions of rural dwellers in the developing world (Cotula et al., 2006). The eradication of hunger and poverty, socio-economic stability, and the sustainable use of the resources depend largely on how people, communities and others gain access to land. The livelihoods of many, particularly the rural poor, are based on secure and equitable access to and control over these resources. To them, land is the source of food and shelter, the basis for social, cultural and religious practices; and a central factor in economic growth (FAO, 2012).

In Africa, and Nigeria, land is vital for poverty reduction whereby about 80% of most rural households rely on it for the survival of present and future generations (ECA, 2009) through agriculture, which provides the means of livelihood and economic sustenance for the majority of the populations. Farmers and pastoralists who are the main agricultural practitioners, make significant contributions in meeting the nutritional needs of the country and thus contributing to food security (Obioha, 2005). They are almost wholly dependent on crop production to sustain their vocations. In recent times, access to water and grazing land has become more competitive and has led both the farmers and pastoralists into arguments on a regular basis. This is a worrisome trend because both have coexisted inter-dependently for centuries, sharing the same fields for farming and grazing with a manageable level of tolerance and accommodation (Oyetade, 2007). In recent years, Nigeria has witnessed series of violent communal clashes arising from the activities of competing users (the nomads, and others) who move about on a daily basis with their cattle in search of water and green pastures. They are on the streets in most of the cities and could also be found operating in the remotest villages in various states of the country (Okoli and Atelhe, 2014). Nweze (2005) noted that many farmers and herders have lost their lives and herds, while others have experienced declining productivity in their herds. The socio- economic effects of the intrusions include reduction in crop yield and income of farmers/nomads, displacement of farmers, loss of lives and properties and loss of products in storage (De Haan, 2002).

This conflict has had enormous negative consequences on the economy, and especially on the poor, which is yet to be measured with a view to finding appropriate growth policies that will ameliorate the situation. The present study intends to discuss the impact of land-related conflicts in the state on particularly agricultural production, commerce, shelter and transportation. The casual observations on the trends in these areas demonstrate very negative consequences for the poor leading to further pauperization especially with the loss of means of livelihood in the forms of farmland, livestock, markets, houses and means of transportation. The specific objectives were to 1). identify the livelihood strategies of the respondents; 2). Examine perceived causes of land-related conflicts in the area; 3). Determine perceived effects of conflicts on rural economy and livelihood of the respondents; and 4). Ascertain perceived measure/strategies for reduction of conflict in the study area.

METHODOLOGY

The study was conducted in Imo State which lies within latitudes 4°45'N and 7°15'N, and longitude 6°50'E and 7°25'E with an area of around 5,100 sq km. It is bordered by Abia State on the East, by the River Niger and Delta State on the west, by Anambra State to the north and Rivers State to the south (Imo State Government (IMSG), 2010). Imo state has a total population of 5,408,756 million persons in 2017 projected from 2006 national census figure (NBS, 2016). Rainy season begins in April and lasts until October with annual rainfall varying from 1,500 to 2,200 mm (60 to 80 inches). An average annual temperature above 20ºC (68.0 °F) creates an annual relative humidity of 75% with humidity reaching 90% in the rainy season (IMSG, 2010). Multi-stage (3-stage) sampling technique was adopted in the process of sample selection. The first stage was the purposive selection of the Local Government Areas of the state where cases of land-related conflicts have occurred and were reported. Here Ohaji/Egbema, Owerri West, and Okigwe Local Government Areas were chosen. The second stage involved the purposive selection of the communities in the Local Government Areas, where conflicts have occurred. We selected Awarra (Ohaji/Egbema), Irete (Owerri West) and Ihube (Okigwe) communities. The third stage involved the proportionate selection of 105 farmers from a total of 1050 affected farmers in Ihube, 69 farmers from a total of 695 farmers in Irete and a selection of 126 affected farmers from a total of 1260 affected farmers in Awarra. This gave a total sample size of 300 crop farmers selected from the household lists of 3,005 farmers affected by the conflicts obtained from the community heads. The household heads were used as the sampling unit. The household heads included widows who fend for themselves and family. Both primary and secondary data sources were used. The primary data were collected through questionnaire (survey), observation, and

Table 1: Livelihood activities of respondents.

Livelihood activities	Frequency	Percentage
Crop Production	300	100
Poultry Farming	231	77.0
Fish Farming	87	32.3
Agro-Processing	240	80.0
Snail Production	61	20.3
Charcoal Production/making	190	63.3
Day Labour Provision	184	61.3
Plantain Chips making	124	41,3
Firewood Sales/Collection	210	70.6
Hunting	141	47.6
Sales/Collection of Mushroom	251	83.6
Dye Making	84	28.0
Petty Trading	187	62.3
Hair plaiting	94	31.3
Plucking/ sales of Fruits	215	71.6

Source: Field survey 2016.

interview schedule. Descriptive statistical tools, such as percentages presented in frequency distribution tables, mean and standard deviation were used to achieve objectives 1, 2, 3 and 4. Mean was computed on 21 statements, 4-point Likert type rating scale of strongly agree, agree, disagree and strongly disagree assigned weight of 4,3,2,1 to capture the perceived causes of the conflicts (objective 2). The values were added and divided by 4 to get the discriminating mean value of 2.5. Any mean value equal to or above 2.5 was regarded as a major factor causing conflict, while values less than 2.5 were regarded as minor factors. Mean was also computed on 28 statements, 4-point Likert type rating scale of strongly agree, agree, disagree and strongly disagree assigned weight of 4,3,2,1 to capture the perceived effects of the conflicts on rural economy and livelihood of the respondents (objective 3). The values were added and divided by 4 to get the discriminating mean value of 2.5. Any mean value equal to or above 2.5 was regarded as a major effects of conflict, while values less than 2.5 were regarded as minor effects. Again, mean was also computed for objective 4**,** which looked at strategies for reducing conflicts using a list of 11 item statements on a 3 point Likert type rating scale of very effective measure, effective and not effective assigned values of 3,2,1. The values were added and divided by 3 to obtain a discriminating mean value of 2.0. Any value with mean equal to or greater than 2.0 was considered very effective measure and vice versa

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Livelihood strategies of respondents

Livelihood comprises the capabilities (social and material resources) and activities required for a means of living. Table 1 shows the economic activities the respondents engage in for survival in the study. Entries in the table shows that all (100%) the respondents engaged in crop production, 77% engaged in poultry keeping, 80% in agro-processing of product, 70% are into firewood collection/sales, 83.6% in collection and sales of mushroom, 71.6% are into collection and sales of fruits , 47% are into hunting of animals, 63.3 and 61.3% are into charcoal production and day labour provisioning, respectively 41.3% make plantain chips, 62.3% are into petty trading, 32.3% are into fish farming, 20.3% produce/rear snail, 28% are into dye-making, and 31.3% plait/make hair.

These agree with the reports of Singh and Sharma (2011) who stated that livelihood development in agriculture and allied agricultural include activities, such as cultivating to organic vegetables, flowers, oil seeds and seed production, besides taking up mushroom growing and bee – keeping. Some more areas can be dehydration of fruits and vegetables, canning or bottling of pickles, chutneys, jams, squashes, dairy and other products that are ready to eat. Livestock management activities, such as diary farming, poultry farm, livestock feed production and production of vermi composting using the animal waste can be an important area in which women can utilize both her technical skills and raw materials from the farm and livestock to earn substantial income and small scale agro-processing units of household based operations, such as knitting, stitching, weaving, embroidery, bakery and flour milling, petty shops, food preparation and preservation.

Perceived causes of land-related conflict in the study area

The causes of conflict in the study area varied and numerous, depending on the type of conflict witnessed. Table 2 shows that the common causes of conflicts

Table 2: Perceived causes of conflicts in the area.

Causes of land-related conflicts	Mean	SD
Human population pressure	3.43	0.67
Decrease in land size	3.56	0.50
Poverty incidence	3.06	0.76
Environmental degradation	3.30	0.71
Over-exploitation of natural resources	3.28	0.68
Intensification of farming/agriculture	3.10	0.87
Charcoal burning	3.02	0.74
Vegetation clearing	3.07	0.77
Overgrazing By Animals	2.89	0.86
Encroachment Without Permission	3.30	0.85
Poaching/over-fishing	2.78	1.15
Uncontrolled grazing	3.45	0.69
Land tenure system	3.50	0.66
Land fragmentation	2.89	1.02
Crop damage /destruction by nomads	2.89	0.75
Disregard for traditional authority	3.50	0.57
Contested boundary	3.71	0.67
Challenge of inheritance	2.89	0.95
Water pollution/contamination	2.80	0.79
Indiscriminate tree felling by farmers	2.67	0.65
Unwarranted attack on rural residents	2.78	0.94
Local fights during festivals	2.67	0.56

Source: Field survey data, 2016.

included human population pressure with a high mean (M) response of 3.43, decrease in land size (M=3.56), poverty incidence (M=3.06), environmental degradation (M=3.30), intensification of farming/agriculture (M=3.10), over-exploitation of natural resources (M=3.28), disregard for traditional authority (M=3.50), and local fights during festivals (M=2.58). These could give rise to communal conflicts

Other causes of conflict included charcoal burning (M=3.02) which could take place in another person's plot of land without his permission. Vegetation clearing (M=3.07), overgrazing by animals (M=2.59) mostly done by the Fulani nomads, encroachment without permission (M=3.30), uncontrolled grazing (M=3.45), crop damage/ destruction (M=3.40) by the nomads, and water pollution/ contamination (M=2.80) were identified by the respondents as perceived causes of conflict in the area. It was also revealed that land tenure system with a mean response of 3.50, contested boundary (M=3.71), indiscriminate tree felling by farmers (M=2.67), unwanted attacks on rural residence (M=2.78), land fragmentation (M=2.8), and challenges of inheritance (M=2.89) are all causes of conflict in the study area.

What the above indicate is that land is at the heart civil disturbances witnessed in Nigeria and other places. Land ownership influences the socio-economic and political positions of different groups of people. The land in sub-Saharan Africa has been a subject for conflicts, conquest and exploitation, resulting in many types of inequalities and discrepancies. There are many land conflicts in the catchment and the past inequalities have persisted as they remain unresolved (Okech, 2010). In most sub-Saharan countries, land dispossession and contestation has resulted in a skewed distribution of land resources (Kok et al., 2009). Land issues are related to poverty, inequality and land reformation processes. Contestations over land are most noticeable among the poor, who lack alternative means of supporting their livelihoods (UNDP, 2006). Land provides security in cases where formal employment opportunities and access to resources is lacking. Land has major cultural, spiritual and historical significance as it is a symbol of unity and gives a sense of belonging to household members. Accessibility and availability of land resources are paramount in ensuring improvement of long lasting socio-economic and political well-being of societies, especially the marginalized groups. The amount of land available determines the stability and food security of a local community, yet in Africa, land is becoming scarce in many parts of the continent (Odgaard, 2006).

Effects of conflicts on rural economy and livelihood in the area

Table 3 revealed that violent conflict disrupts and distorts the functioning of an economy, to the detriment of economic development and decent livelihood of people. Conflict leads to decrease/ reduction in income of residents as indicated by a mean (M) response of 3.17, leads to farm land abandonment (M=3.37), leads to social insecurity (M=3.27), leads to reduction in yield/ farm production (M=3.50), reduced ration/feeding for family

Table 3: Perceived effects of conflicts on rural economy and livelihoods.

Effects on rural economy and livelihood	Mean	SD
Decrease/reduction in income of residents	3.17	0.72
Farmland abandonment	3.37	0.88
Leads to social insecurity	3.27	0.81
Reduction in yield /farm produce	3.50	0.73
Inability to pay back loans /advances	2.50	0.87
Reduced ration/feeding for family members	2.65	0.66
Withdrawal of children from schools	3.33	0.82
Displacement of farmer/households	3.48	0.81
Loss of financial assets	3.50	0.73
Loss/destruction of possessions/property	2.91	0.90
Destruction of homesteads/farm buildings	3.09	0.62
Drops in farm investment	3.70	0.63
Loss of business opportunity	3.09	0.62
Interruption of markets for sales	3.00	0.03
Increased costs of produce	3.16	0.64
Unavailability of farm inputs	3.40	0.73
Reduction in credit and grants opportunity	3.27	0.81
Dependency on relief supplies/packages	3.20	1.04
Difficulty in movement/transportation of goods	3.45	0.63
Leads to loss/death of farm people	3.50	0.73
Increased hunger and starvation	3.03	0.57
Forced migration of agricultural labour	2.98	1.02
Reduction of life expectancies rate	2.68	0.86
Increases undernourishment of rural dwellers	3.41	0.83
Increase rate of diseases/sicknesses	3.50	0.78
Leads to unemployment/joblessness	3.67	0.60
Results in change of household composition	3.49	0.81
Disruption in service provision	3.72	0.63

Source: Field survey 2016

members (M=2.65), loss of financial assets (M=3.50), displacement of farmers/households (M= 3 48) withdrawal of children from school (M= 3. 33) and leads to inability of farmers to pay back coins/adounces (M=2.50).

Other effects of conflicts on rural livelihood are loss/destruction of possessions/property (M=2.91), destruction of home steads/ farm buildings (M=3.09), drops/reductions in farm investments (M=3.70), and loss of business opportunities (M=3.09) as seen in peoples withdrawal /closure of businesses in the affected area. Additionally, interruption of markets for sales (M=3.0), increase costs of produce (M=3.16), unavailability of farm inputs (M=3.40) owing to drop in supply for fear of the unknown, reduction in credit/grants opportunity (M=3.27), dependency on relief supplies (M=3.20), difficulty in movement/transportation of goods/products (M=3.45), leads to loss/death of farm people (M=3.50), increase hunger and starvation(M=3.03), and forced migration of agricultural labour (M=2.98) were effects of conflict on rural economics and livelihood identified by the respondents.

Furthermore, conflicts could affect rural economics and livelihood of rural people by the reduction of life experiences rate of people (M=2.68), increase undernourishment of rural dwellers (M=3.41), increase rate of disease/sickness (M=3.50), leads to unemployment/joblessness (M=3.67), results in change of household composition (M=3.49) and disruption in service provision (M=3.72) for improving rural life.

The above indicates that the effects of conflicts range from physical harm to humans and the natural resource base to productivity and economic development. There is a direct relationship between livelihoods and Natural Resource-Based Conflicts. The environmental conflicts affect livelihoods and health, exacerbate poverty and inequality. People exert control over the natural environment with negative consequences on themselves and on the bio-physical environment (Cowan and Neut, 2007; Rajan and Subramanian, 2005). Conflict generally affects the price and availability of inputs required in the production process. Physical capital is destroyed and the investment rates remain low during conflict. Wars and

Table 4: Perceived measures for reducing conflicts in study area.

Measures to reduce conflicts	Mean	SD
Provision of security to community	2.79	0.54
Mapping of areas for farming and grazing	2.47	0.80
Mapping of routes for cattle movement	2.54	0.75
Review of traditional governance system	2.40	0.74
Removal of conflicts actors from conflict areas	2.90	0.59
Settlement of disputes immediately	2.30	0.68
Educating all conflict actors on need for peace	2.55	0.67
Giving balance and sound advice	2.27	0.78
Land reform/agrarian programme	2.45	0.74
Compensation of victims	2.33	0.79
Effective communication and good governance	2.50	0.76

Source: Field survey 2016.

confrontations kill and displace people. Skilled workers often leave the country and part of the labor force becomes part of government and rebels armies. Financial capital often also leaves the country, reducing the availability of credit to finance working capital and large operations.

Collier (1999) distinguishes four different economic effects of civil war: diversion of public resources from productive activities to violence, time horizons shortened leading to opportunistic behavior, lost of human and financial capital, and a shift away from vulnerable economic activities towards those that are less vulnerable. Rohner (2006) shows that conflict can lead to under-exploitation of renewable natural resources and over-exploitation of resources with negative future externalities.

Measure aimed at reducing conflict in rural areas

To curb/reduce conflicts in rural areas, Table 4 recommends the following measures- provision of security to community (M=2.70), mapping of area for farming and grazing (M=2.47), mapping of routes for cattle movement (M=2.54) in the case of crop farmers/pastoralists conflicts, review of traditional governance system (M=2.40), removal of conflict actors from conflict areas (M=2.90) since their presence would ignite the situation, immediate settlement of disputes (M=2.30), educating all conflict actors on the need for peace (M=2.55), land reform/agrarian programme (M=2.45), compensation of victims (M=2.33), effective communication and good governance (M=2.50) and giving balance and sound Advice (M=2.27).

Conclusion

Several insights have been gained from the study. For example, the study has shown that farming and other agriculture-related activities provide an important contribution to household food and income. All the farmers continue to draw their income from farming related activities. However, the conflicts in the study area significantly affected productivity, well-being, incomes and food production. Since the conflicts started, farmers' average food production, yield, and income have substantially reduced. This resulted in their inability to pay children school fees, reduce ration intake, farm abandonment, migration, social insecurity and fear, dependency on relief materials among many other poor conditions. Developing economically and environmentally sound policies enabling secure access to tenure rights and ownership of land will reduce land-related conflicts in the area.

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