

Factors Influencing Agricultural Land-Use Conflicts in Ohaji Area of Imo State, Nigeria

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Abstract: Agriculture and land are inseparable. Land is an important resource and a factor of production to the extent that without land, there can be no agricultural growth or development. Land conflicts have brought unprecedented problems and hardships to many inhabitants of Ohaji in Ohaji/Egbema Local Government Area and indeed Nigeria as a whole. This investigative research seeks to identify the factors leading to land use conflicts and effects of such conflicts on livelihood and agriculture. The sample size was made up of 140 household heads randomly selected from a list of 1400 households obtained from the village, heads. The major instrument for collection of data for the study was questionnaire. Oral discussions were held with opinion leaders and title holders in the area. The tools of analysis used were descriptive statistics. The study revealed that various land tenure systems exist in the area; purchase, inheritance, pledge, rent and allocation. The study also revealed the various factors influencing land use conflicts in the area such as trespass (failure to respect farm boundaries), reclaiming ownership, contested boundaries, and disrespect for culture. These results to violent clashes leading to loss of lives and property, thereby reducing investment in agriculture. It is recommended that government should established a Land Use Policy and Administration Commission to be charged with the responsibility of generating, managing, and updating information on land use and system of land tenure in Nigeria.

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Introduction

Nigeria, one of the countries in sub-Saharan Africa is the most populated country in the continent with an estimated population of over 140 million people and a total land area of over 900,000 square kilometres (Momale, 2003). As common in most African countries, majority of people derive their livelihood from primary economic activities, being mainly farming, livestock rearing, fishing and other related economic activities.

Agriculture and livestock production are among the most prominent economic activities of people in Nigeria, accounting for over 90% of the socio-economic activities of the rural population and therefore serving as their means of livelihood (Momale 2003). Land is central to agriculture and livestock production, as it is to all economic activities. The most essential land resources include soils, water (rain fall, rivers, and reservoirs), vegetation and other biological and aquatic resources associated with these resources

In the process of utilising these resources for the diverse, complex and competing socio-economic activities of the people, conflicts over access and management of these resources often arise. These conflicts significantly vary in dimension, process and the groups involved (Famoriyo, 1983). While some

conflicts arise between similar resource users such as between one farming community and another, others occur between different resource user such as between pastoralist and farmers or between foresters and farmers. Similarly, the conflicts take different dimension as some are non-volatile while others are volatile (Momale, 2003).

Barlowe (1978), stated that for centuries, most wars were fought for the possession of land and the average man everywhere lives in close association with the soils, fields, forests, fishing grounds that provided him with sustenance. These conflicts over land occur because ownership or control of land is a sign of economic power and social standing. The issue of control over agricultural land and even pastoral resources is a major concern and there have been armed clashes between groups resulting in loss of human lives (Maiga and Diallo, 1998; Famoriyo, 1984). Furthermore, land tenure systems are changing at different paces, more or less profoundly and probably not in a single direction. The transformation of tenure systems is not a smooth process but one of conflict and confrontation, and conflicts over land have received increasing political and scholarly attention over the past years. These conflicts have social, political and cultural dimensions as well as legal (Fabiyo, 1984; Famoriyo,

1987). This puts serious demand on the societies' capability to resolve or manage conflicts (Lund, 1997).

The causes and types of the conflicts vary from one period to another and from one area to another. In Nigeria today, we are witnessing several conflicts. Most of these conflicts have their roots either remotely or directly 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), etc. can be linked to the land questions. In all these crises, it is the common man that is the most hard hit. This sort of situation has serious security implication for the country in terms of national food supply and macro-economic performance in general. The most prominent of these conflicts arising out of resource utilisation and management, has been pastoralists-farmer conflicts. Farmer-farmer conflict, farmer conservationist-conflict, pastoralists conservationists conflicts and pastoralists-fishermen conflicts have been recorded as well. Conflict not only occurs within use but also in administration and management. Examples are conflicts between government agencies (such as states and federal institutions) and the traditional institutions (Momale, 2003; Gefu, 2003).

Thus, there is a need to create better socio-economic milieu, the need to ensure that the system of land acquisition and control, supports the development needs of the rural sector. This will help to reduce community conflicts, threats to farmer's security and encourage planned development which aims at revolutionizing agriculture through the introduction of different types of technological innovations in order to raise the levels of living for the subsistence farmers.

Land is the most important asset of Nigeria – the territorial entity which spans a total of 92.4 million hectares (Lowe, 1986) among the estimated over 130 million people. Despite the availability of 92.4 million hectares of land, land tenure issues have been a problem in many Nigerian communities as a result of changing socio-economic environment that has resulted in a decline in community control over the allocation of land. This is believed to have come in response to commercialization of agriculture, urbanization and globalization which has sometimes led to scramble for agricultural land among various competing land users, and conflicts between different land-users and socio-economic actors (Salau, 1978).

For centuries, the use purpose of land has influenced markedly the lives of millions of Nigerians. The use-purpose finds expression in the social, economic and political aspects of the life of the various ethnic communities that comprise

Nigeria. During the process of socialization in the use of land, especially in the study area, there emerged a whole set of complex, inter-relationships designed to secure, limit and regulate the individual's rights of access to land vis-à-vis those of the group.

Gradually with the passing of time, the relationships become even more complex as many more individuals are brought within the spectrum of controls and regulations. One of the manifestations of this complexity has been the emergence of friction and occasional violent confrontations among individuals, families and communities - on land matters. The above implies that decisions affecting land use can have more serious implications on Nigerian farmers since land as a factor of production is the farmers major input – that is, achieving self-sufficiency in food production will be difficult.

The general objective of this study was to provide a clear understanding of the factors influencing agricultural land use conflict, and their effects on agricultural production. The specific objectives were to:-

- i. identify ownership structure and tenure systems existing in the study area;
- ii. identify factors influencing agricultural land use conflict;
- iii. describe the effects of land use conflict on agricultural production.

Methodology

The study was conducted in six villages in Imo State. Imo State is in the South east zone of Nigeria. The State is made up of twenty-seven Local Government Areas out of which Ohaji/Egbema was chosen for the study. Ohaji was purposively chosen because it is an agricultural area in the State with high frequency of occurrence of land conflicts among villages. Ohaji/Egbema has a total population of about 209, 593 persons in 2011 projected from 2006 census figure (NPC, 2005; FGN, 2009).

Imo State occupies a landmass of about 5,530 square kilometers with a total population of about 4,500,987 million persons in 2011 projected from the 2006 census figure. The State shares boundaries in the North with Anambra State, South and West with Rivers State, while to the East, it shares boundary with Abia State.

The State has two dominant seasons – rainy and dry seasons. Rain falls between April and October while the dry season starts from November to early March, though early rain starts March. The Igbos are the exclusive ethnic group in the State; Christianity and traditional African religions are beliefs professed by people in the state. The State falls within the tropical rain forests zone with dense

forest in the south and rich savannah in the north (FGN, 2004).

Agriculture is the mainstay of the economy of the State. This is basically due to the rich arable land suitable for the growth of a wide range of tropical crops. Food crops grown in the state include yam, cassava, maize; oil palm and cocoa fall under the category of cash crops. The people also keep animals like goats, pigs and poultry (NARP, 1998).

Six villages were purposely selected from the study area. The selected villages include Umuilem, Umushike, Umuokeduru, Umuhaja, Umuokoroka and Umuotu. The reason for the selection of these villages was because they have been involved in land conflicts in the local government for many years which attracted the attention of the state government.

The estimated number of households from the village was 1,400 which was obtained from the National Programme on Immunisation in the area. A total of one hundred and forty (140) households from the six villages was randomly selected from the sample frame of households, using lottery method. This represented ten percent of the total household. The household head was used as the sampling unit. The household heads included widows who fend for themselves and family.

The study made use of both primary and secondary data. The primary data was collected by administering questionnaire to household heads. Oral interviews were also held with key informants - Chiefs, Development Association Leaders and other individuals, especially where the information so required did not fit into the questionnaire and also to collaborate the response of the household heads. Secondary data sources were utilised to provide background information and other necessary information to achieve some of the objectives of the study.

Basically, descriptive statistics were used to analyse most of the data. These involved the use of frequency counts and percentages presented in tabular forms.

Results and Discussions

Socio-economic characteristics of the sampled farmers

The result showed that 39.3% of the farmers are within the age bracket of 51-60 years. These farmers engage more in farming as they are not too old to farm. They are followed by 26.4% within 41-50 years. About 25.7% of the farmers are also above 60 years, while 8.6% of the farmers between ages 31 and 40 also farm. The low percentage is due to the fact that young people seek greener pastures in urban centres instead of helping in food production. Again,

45.7% of the farmers have a family size of 7-12 members. While 32.9% have a family size of about 1-6 members and 21.4% of the farmers have 13 and above members in their families. About 44.3% of the farmers attended primary school, while 42.9% attended secondary school. Only 12.9% received high education. Furthermore, 37.1% of the farmers have lived for 21-30 years in the study area, 22.9% have also lived for 41-50 years in the area, while 17.9% lived for 31-40 years, and 16.4% also lived for 51-60 years in the study area and 5.7% lived 61 years and above in the area. Again, 70.7% of the sampled farmers are married, while 7.1% of them are widowers, while 22.1% are widows. About 25.7% of the sampled farmers have 2-3 leadership titles, while about 14.3% have 1 title and 1.4% have more than four titles, and 51.6% have no title.

Land Tenure System in the Study area

Table 2 showed that a farmer may hold several units of farm under different types of tenure as indicated by the multiple response Land can be acquired by purchase, inheritance, rent, pledge, and allocation. About 47% of the sample farmers acquired 200 hectares of land by purchase alone. This was followed by 38.6% who acquired 139.4 hectares by inheritance. The table also shows that 60% acquired 76 hectares by rent, while 26.4% acquired 79.5 hectares by pledge. All the surveyed farmers got a total of 56.2 hectares by allocation. This was due to the fact that by birth, all the farmers have a stake in land and by marriage in the case of widows of deceased. It then means that more farm land was acquired by purchase. Even those who inherited land sold part of their land for one problem or the other. The table also review that in the study area, farmers still find it easier to gain access to land through the customary land tenure arrangement rather than the land allocation advisory committee. This is as a result of the strong traditional attachment to land which farmers and rural inhabitants still hold to land.

Factors influencing agricultural land use conflicts

The second objective of this work was to identify factors influencing agricultural land use conflicts in the study area. The surveyed farmers gave multiple factors or reasons which caused the land use conflicts in the area. These factors are discussed thus:

Trespassing (failure to respect farm boundary)

This is the major factor influencing conflict in the study area Trespassing accounted for 54.3% of the responses. Farmers manifest this by ignoring the agreed boundary and attempting use of other farmers'

resources. When boundaries are not respected conflicts occur. Trespassing accounted for 30% of land use conflicts in the study area.

Challenging inheritance

Conflicts arise when indigenous inheritors contest the amount of land left to them by their parents, asks incomers to hand back part of the areas allocated them, or to buy back the land. Conflicts also arise when beneficiaries come of age or return from migration and claim that their land is being used by others. When the other party refuses to return all or part of the land, conflicts arise. This accounted for 35.7% of the responses. The conflicts between Umuokoroka, Umuotu, Umuokeduru, were as a result of this. Challenging inheritance accounted for 25.7% of the total land use conflicts in the area.

Illegal sale of land

Conflicts arise between individuals, families, lineage groups or villages when an indigenous land owner sells land to people or at times sells same land twice, rent or pledges land which does not belong to him or without the consent of his family, lineage group, village and even community. In the study area, 7.1% said it was a source of conflicts and it accounted for 2.8% of the total conflicts.

Tenure system

The tenure system defines the ways in which individuals gain access to, and acquire rights of use over land, either temporarily or permanently. This implies that certain privileges, opportunities and claims are conferred on the individual user of land. These various ways are – purchase, inheritance, pledge, gift, lease, allocation and even rent. The way in which an individual acquired landed property is capable of causing conflict in a locality. Since all are not of the same economic standing, certain privileges enjoyed by some might incite those who do not enjoy those rights to protest leading to conflicts. A tenure system that allows inheritance and purchase may later witness conflicts over the legitimacy right of users. In the study area, it accounted for 10.7% of the total responses. This also accounted 7.1% of the total conflict.

Scarcity of land

Land scarcity refers to lack of supply of available land suitable for agricultural and developmental purpose in relation to demand for such land. A community with this problem will resist with their last drop of blood attempt to take their land away, especially in the study area where land is in

short supply. Scarcity accounted for 9.3% of the total responses. It was cited as a source of conflict between Umuotu and Umuokoroka and also accounted for 5.7% of the conflicts.

Population pressure

Increase in population resulting from immigration, birth and other sources can influence conflict. This results in intensification on resource exploitation and degradation. Increase in population on land can lead to allocation of small farms to farmers, especially will it result to conflict when non-indigenes occupy land. It accounted for 7.1% of the responses. This caused 4.2% of the total conflict.

Contested boundary

When boundaries disappear, or are not well defined conflict could occur. Some times farmers who attempt use of others' farms will remove the marker resulting to disagreement over boundary. This has 21.4% of the total responses. It also caused about 20% of the total conflicts.

Disrespect for culture

When farmers abandoned previously accepted and socially recognised rules of access to and use of land and other natural resources, conflicts occur. This accounted for 35.7% of the total responses. Traditionally, the warring neighbour would bring wine and kolanut at the beginning of every farming season to show their loyalty to the other village, permitting them to farm on the land. It was failure to observe this rule that contributed to the conflicts in three of the villages. It accounted for 25.7% of the total land use conflicts in the study area.

Refusal to obey court ruling

When a land owning group refuses to obey the decision of the court, conflict could occur. The farmers in Umushike said that their conflicts with Umuhaja occurred because they refused to stay clear from the land they won in court. This accounted for 2.1% of the responses.

Oral discussions also revealed that the system of buying land and leaving it uncultivated with the hope of selling it later to make an unusual profit through changes in its market values can lead to conflicts. It was observed that land was sold out and during farming seasons, the villagers will acquire the same land on rent from the buyer. Youths from the area protested this development and conflict between them and the owner erupted. Lack of recognition of the role of the local leaders in land allocation also influence conflicts. Discussions with informants revealed that at times, their people do not obey or take instructions from them and as a result

flagrantly violet their orders. Because of commercialization of landed property most people do not comply with rules set up for mutual and peaceful existence among people from other communities. In his own opinion.

Effects of land use conflicts on agricultural crop production

The third objective of the study was to describe the effect of the conflict on crop production and on lives and property. From the data collected, the effects of land use conflicts are endless and legion. The study showed that the farmers abandoned their farms for their dear lives as revealed by 100% response. Increase hunger and starvation (71.4%), loss of lives of productive or farming populations (71.4%) resulted. Farmers also experienced low productivity from crops grown since they no longer employ all the necessary practices for fear of being caught by the enemy side. Low farm investment is

another effect of the land use conflict as shown by 42.8%, stealing of farm produce, rancour, enmity, fear and suspicious are all effects of land use conflicts. In one village, 1.8 million naira was spent in both treatment of injuries and hiring of a Senior Advocate of Nigeria that represented them in the Supreme Court.

Discussions with key informants, showed that sometimes late cropping was done which led in most cases to low yield or even completes crop failure. This in effect has further decreased productivity and production of agricultural commodity, and potential expansion of farm size has been difficult. The study shows that production decreased to less than half of the usual production capacity due to the land conflict. This is because farmers now cultivate less than half of their usual farm size and yields are equally low.

Table 1: Socio-economic characteristics of respondents

Age	Frequency	Percentage
31-40	12	8.6
41-50	37	26.4
51-60	55	39.3
61 and above	36	25.7
Family size		
1-6	46	32.9
7-12	64	45.7
13 and above	30	21.4
Educational level		
Adult Education	-	-
Primary School	62	44.3
Secondary school	60	42.9
Tertiary	18	12.9
Years of stay		
21-30	52	37.1
31-40	25	17.9
41-50	32	22.9
51-60	23	16.4
61 and above	8	5.7
Marital status		
Married	99	70.7
Widower	10	7.1
Widow	31	22.1
Number of title		
None	82	51.6
One	20	14.3
Two-three	36	25.7
Four and above	2	1.4
Total	140	100

Table 2: Land tenure systems in study area

Method	Frequency (N=140)	Percentage	Hectare
Purchase	66	47.1	200
Inheritance	54	38.6	139.4
Rent	84	60.0	76
Pledge	37	26.4	79.5
Allocation	140	100	56.2

Table 3: Factors influencing agricultural land use conflicts

Factors	Frequency (N=140)	Percentage	Percentage conflicts
Tenure system	15	10.7	7.1
Population pressure	10	7.1	4.2
Scarcity of land	13	9.3	5.7
Trespassing	76	54.3	30
Contested boundary	30	21.4	20
Illegal sale of land	10	7.1	2.8
Disrespect for culture	50	35.7	25.7
challenging inheritance	50	35.7	25.7
Refusal to carry out court ruling	3	2.1	1.4

Table 4: Effects of conflicts

Items	*Frequency	Percentage
Abandonment of farms	140	100
Destruction of farm property/bulbing	80	57.1
Low yield/Productivity	90	64.3
Low farm investment	60	42.8
Loss of lives	100	71.4
Stealing of farm produce	70	50.0
Fear and suspicion	45	32.7
Rancour and Enmity	50	35.7
Increase hunger and starvation	100	71.4

* Multiple Response:

Conclusion

It is obvious from the foregoing discussion that although, traditionally, farmers have acquired rights to land by being the first to clear it or through inheritance, and or allocation, land has now become a transferable commodity. Purchase, rental and pledge have become institutionalized in the villages. Farms are often sold or pledged to solve some financial problems.

It has also been observed that conflicts in land often occur because of illegal sales, trespassing (failure to respect farm boundary), reclaiming ownership/challenge of inheritance rights. The system of tenure is also another factor influencing agricultural and use conflicts in the study area. To be taken seriously is the lack of respect for laid down

cultural rules and regulations, which farmers manifest by not fulfilling the required cultural right. Not to be forgotten is the refusal to obey court rulings in land matters as well as population pressure, and scarcity of land.

Land conflicts have resulted in insecurity and fear. It has forced many able-bodied men to emigrate to other places, thereby severely affecting agricultural production, farm income and food security. To say the least it has led to death of promising individuals.

There is need to evolve urgent and efficient methods of conflict management and resolution to overcome the problem of land use conflicts and communal clashes in Nigeria. This will involve setting up of special commissions with people of high

integrity that will dialogue with aggrieved parties. Resolution should always be quickly done to prevent escalation.

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