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## CONFLICTS OVER FARMLAND AND ITS SOCIOECONOMIC EFFECTS ON RURAL RESIDENTS OF SOUTHWESTERN NIGERIA

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### ABSTRACT

Land is increasingly becoming a source of conflicts in Nigeria and Africa at large where land access had traditionally been characterised as relatively unrestricted. This paper examined conflicts over farmland and its socio economic effects on the rural residents of southwestern Nigeria. Multi-stage sampling technique was used to select 160 respondents for the study. Data were collected through a structured questionnaire and analysed using descriptive statistics. Findings revealed that the major causes of conflict over farmland in the area were failure to respect boundary ( $\bar{x} 1.66 \pm 0.58$ ), contesting for the inheritance of land boundary ( $\bar{x} 1.65 \pm 0.65$ ) and abandonment of the previously accepted rules of access to and use of land ( $\bar{x} 1.09 \pm 0.63$ ). Farmland conflicts terminates the social interaction and peaceful co-existence of people ( $\bar{x} 1.65 \pm 0.48$ ), causing mistrust among members ( $\bar{x} 1.61 \pm 0.49$ ), destruction of goods and property ( $\bar{x} 1.57 \pm 0.50$ ) and loss of life ( $\bar{x} 1.55 \pm 0.57$ ). It was concluded based on the findings that conflict over farmland had negative effects on the socio-economic activities of the rural residents. Consequently, the study recommends that individual and community farm boundaries must be respected. There must be an effective system of land administration of management to reduce frequent challenges of land ownership. Inheritors should be loyal to the agreement made with their progenitors on the use of land and public education/enlightenment programmes must be strengthening to reduce the adverse effect of conflicts over farmland.

**Keywords:** Farmers, Farm land, Conflict, Socio-economic, Agricultural productivity.

### INTRODUCTION

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. Agriculture contributes more than 30% to the annual gross domestic product (GDP) and employs about 65% of the labour force (Emeka, 2007).

Land is central to agriculture and livestock production, as it is to all economic activities. Land resources include soil, water, vegetation and other aquatic resources. Land can be defined as a vital natural resources that hosts and sustains all living things namely: plants, animal and man. It is a fixed socio economic asset, that aids production of goods and services and virtually all activities that take place on earth (Deogratias, 2013).

Land ownership is a sign of economic power and social standing. In the process of utilising land resources for the diverse complex and competing social-economic activities of the people, conflicts over access and management of these resources often arise. Conflict is defined by sociologists as a social fact in which at least two parties are involved and whose origins differs either in interests or in the social position of the partners.

Conflict is an intrinsic part of human existence. Nkoro (2005) explained that conflicts are inevitable in human society as long as there is existence. Francis (2007) stresses that it is the resort use of force and armed violence in pursuit of incompatible and particular interests and goals. Conflict is not a new phenomenon but rather a problem that grows with time. Batubo (2010) considered conflict as a relationship between two

or more parties who believe they have incompatible goals or interests. It could be as a result of misunderstanding that involves negotiable interests which could be religious, social, political or economic interest.

A land conflict therefore, can be understood as a mis-use, restriction or dispute over property rights to land (Wehrmann, 2005). These conflicts significantly vary in dimension, process and the groups involved. Some conflicts arise between similar resources users such as between one farming community and another while others occur between different resources users such as between pastoralist and farmers or between foresters and farmers (Abegunde, 2010). Similarly, some are volatile while some are non-volatile resulting into armed clashes between groups and usually resulted into loss of life.

Land is increasingly becoming a source of conflicts in Nigeria and Africa at large where land access had traditionally been characterised as relatively unrestricted. During conflicts, activities of rural residents are usually affected but to which extent does it affects the farmers socially and economically. This study therefore examined conflicts over farmland and its socio economic effects on rural residents of southwestern Nigeria.

The specific objectives of this study is to identify the socio economic characteristics of the farmers, examine the causes of conflicts over farmland in the area and investigate the effects of farm land conflicts on socio economic activities of the rural residents.

## METHODOLOGY

The study was carried out in southwestern Nigeria. The zone comprises six states of the federation namely Lagos, Osun, Oyo, Ogun, Ondo and Ekiti States. The area lies between latitudes  $6^{\circ}$  and  $9^{\circ}$  N and longitudes  $2^{\circ} 30'$  E and  $6^{\circ}$  E of the Greenwich meridian. It is bounded in the south by the Atlantic ocean in the east by Edo and Delta states, in the west by the Republic of Benin and in the north by Kwara and Kogi States. The area covers about 114,271 km<sup>2</sup>, which is approximately 12% of Nigerians total land area and agricultural sector forms the base of the overall development thrust of the zone.

The study was targeted at the rural residents who had conflicts over farmland. Multi-stage sampling technique was used to select respondents for the study. The first stage involved a random selection of two-third of the states in southwestern Nigeria. At this stage, Osun, Oyo, Ekiti and Ondo States were selected. The second stage involved purposive selection of one local government area [LGA] from each state where inter communal conflicts over land were very prominent. Four LGAs were selected. The third stage involved random selection of two communities from each LGA resulting into eight communities (Ife and Modakeke, Irawo Ile and Irawo Owode, Emure and Ise, Iju and Itaogbolu). The fourth stage involved random selection of twenty affected farmers from each community resulting into 160 respondents.

Data were collected through structured questionnaire and analysed using frequency counts, percentages and means. Causes of conflicts over farmland were measured with three-point scale of larger extent, little extent and not at all and were scored as 2, 1, 0 respectively. Ofuoku and Isife (2009) used a 5-point Likert type scale to identify the main causes of conflict. They measure the causes by calculating the mean of each variable and they identified a variable as a major cause if its cut off score is  $\geq 2.50$  and minor cause if its mean is  $\leq 2.50$ . As a result, this study adapts the same calculation to identify the major causes of farmland conflict using a 3 point scale. Causes of conflicts were later categorised into two major cause  $\geq 1$  and minor cause  $\leq 1$  using the total score  $2+1+0 = 3$  divided by total no of scale items which is 3 to obtain 1 which is the cut-off point.

The severity of socioeconomic effects was also measured with 3-point scale of severe, mild and not severe, scored as 2, 1, 0 respectively. The level of severity was later categorized into two severe  $\geq 1$  and not severe  $\leq 1$  using the total score  $2+1+0 = 3$  divided by total no of scale items which is 3 to obtain 1 which is the cut-off point.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

### Socioeconomic characteristics of the respondents

As shown in Table 1, 38.8% of the respondents age were below 50 years while about two third (61.2%) of the respondents were above 50 years. The mean age of the farmers in the study area was  $54.4 \pm 10.5$  years. The modal age of the respondents was 51 to 60 years. This shows that majority of the youths have migrated from rural areas to urban areas in search of greener pastures leaving older people to do farming. This result is similar to the findings of Adeogun, Fapojuwo, Oyeyinka, Adamu and Abina (2013) that the average age of farmers in cocoa producing areas of Nigeria was 54.4 years.

Larger proportion (77.5%) of the respondents were male while 22.5 % were female. Majority (91.6%) of the respondents had one form of education or the other and only 9.4% had no formal education. The modal response category was primary education (34.4%). The findings indicates a high level of literacy among the respondents which is expected to translate to better understanding of management and solving land conflicts issues.

Inheritance system of land tenure system is the major source of land for farming activities in the area (76.2%) followed by leasehold (11.9%) and individual ownership (9.4%). The source of acquisition of land for farming activities do affect the types of crop cultivated, scale of farming enterprises and mechanization of farming activities. Larger proportion (90.0%) of the respondents' farm size was between one to three hectares and only 10.0% of the respondents had above three hectares. The average farm size of the respondents was  $2.11 \pm 0.92$  ha. This is an indication that majority of the farmers in the study area were peasant farmers practicing subsistence agriculture.

The mean years of farming experience of the respondents was  $22.7 \pm 9.89$  years. About 50.7% had more than 20 years of farming experience, which means that they were very experienced in farming business and would have been familiar with the socio economic effects of conflicts over farmland.

**Table 1: Socio economic characteristics of the respondents (n=160)**

Variable	Freq	%	Parameters
<b>Age in years</b>			
31 - 40	19	11.9	
41 - 50	43	26.9	Mean 54.4
51 - 60	57	35.6	Std. dev 10.5
61 and above	41	25.6	
<b>Sex</b>			
Male	124	77.5	
Female	36	22.5	
<b>Marital status</b>			
Single	4	2.5	
Married	136	85.0	
Divorced	8	5.0	
Widow	12	7.5	
<b>Religion</b>			
Christian	53	33.1	
Muslim	65	40.6	
Traditionalist	42	26.3	
<b>Educational level</b>			
No formal education	15	9.4	
Adult literacy	24	15.0	
Primary	55	34.4	
Did not finish secondary	16	10.0	
Secondary	38	23.8	
Post secondary	12	7.5	
<b>Farm size in hectare(s)</b>			
0.1 - 1	41	25.6	
1.01 - 2	53	33.1	
2.01 - 3	50	31.2	Mean 2.11
3.01 - 4	16	10.0	Std. dev 0.92
<b>Farming experience in years</b>			
0.1 - 10	21	13.1	
11 - 20	58	36.2	Mean 22.7
21 - 30	47	29.4	Std. dev 9.89
31 - 40	25	15.6	
41 and above	9	5.6	
<b>Sources of land ownership</b>			
Inheritance	122	76.2	
Leasehold	19	11.9	
Individual	15	9.4	
Gift	4	2.5	

Source: Field Survey 2016

**Causes of land conflict in the study area**

Table 2 reveals that the major causes of land conflict in the area were failure to respect farm boundaries ( $\bar{x}=1.66\pm0.58$ ), contesting the inheritance of the land ( $\bar{x}=1.65\pm0.65$ ), and abandonment of previously accepted rules of access to and use of land ( $\bar{x}=1.09\pm0.63$ ). Other minor causes of land conflicts include improper sharing of joint resources ( $\bar{x}=0.94\pm0.79$ ), Illegal sale of land by family lineage or community ( $\bar{x}=0.74\pm0.87$ ) and destruction of farm crops by grazing animals ( $\bar{x}=0.39\pm0.65$ ).

The findings on failure to respect farm boundary is in agreement with Yamano and Deininger (2005) and Dunmoye (2003) who reported that boundary

dispute is a major factor of communal crisis in Nigeria and in Kenya about half of land conflicts are over boundaries issues between neighbours or relatives. The second one is contesting the inheritance of land due to its increase in value. This shows that land is becoming a very scarce factor of production, either due to population pressure, urbanization, land alienation or concentration of land in a few hands. Illegal sale of land by family lineage or community deprived the family members their rights to own lands and this provokes action to defend their interest (Bogale, Taeb and Endo, 2006).

Furthermore, the findings on abandonment of previously accepted rules of access to and use of

land is similar with Asiyanbola (2010) who reported that the first major economic crisis between Ife and Modakeke was land tribute (Isakole) which Ife collected from Modakeke until late 1970's. The promulgation of land use decree of 1978 abolished land tributes while Ife saw it as infringement of their own right, the other group saw the decree as an opportunity for free tenancy

and refused to pay land tributes to their landlords culminating into conflicts, which degenerated into killing, arson and mayhem of unprecedented proportions. Zwain (2011) found out that many African countries are experiencing violent conflict because of the competition for access, control and use of land resources.

**Table 2: Distribution of respondents by causes of land conflicts in the area n =160**

Causes of land conflict	Larger Extent	Lesser Extent	Not at all	Mean	S.D	Remark
Failure to respect boundary/ Trespassing	71.9	22.5	5.6	1.66	0.58	Major cause
Challenging inheritance of land	75.6	14.4	10.0	1.65	0.65	Major cause
Abandonment of previously accepted rules of access to and use of land	25.0	59.4	15.6	1.09	0.63	Major cause
Improper sharing of joint resources	28.1	38.1	33.8	0.94	0.79	Minor cause
Illegal sale of land by the family lineage or community	28.1	17.5	54.4	0.74	0.87	Minor cause
Destruction of farm crops by grazing animals	9.4	20.0	70.6	0.39	0.65	Minor cause

Source: Field survey 2016

**Socioeconomic effects of conflicts over farmland on rural residents**

Table 3 reveals that the major socio-economic effects of conflicts over farm land on rural residents were termination of social interaction ( $\bar{x}=1.65\pm0.48$ ), mistrust among members ( $\bar{x}=1.61\pm0.49$ ), destruction of goods and valuable property ( $\bar{x}=1.57\pm0.50$ ) and loss of life ( $\bar{x}=1.55\pm0.57$ ). The findings is in alignment with that of Ofuoku and Isife (2009) that farm land conflicts lead to loss of lives, arms running, loss of houses and properties and farm products in storage. Others include leading to court cases and litigations ( $\bar{x}=1.53\pm0.69$ ), abandonment of farm/migration to other areas that are peaceful ( $\bar{x}=1.49\pm0.63$ ), low agricultural production ( $\bar{x}=1.48\pm0.61$ ), and low income ( $\bar{x}=1.47\pm0.62$ ). The table further revealed that land conflicts leads to increase in hunger and starvation ( $\bar{x}=1.39\pm0.70$ ), high cost of rehabilitation ( $\bar{x}=1.30\pm0.67$ ) and broken marriages ( $\bar{x}=0.96\pm0.78$ ).

Conflicts tend to affect food security by creating food shortages, which disrupts both upstream input market and downstream output markets. In areas where there are land conflicts, crop cannot be planted, weeded or harvested thereby decreasing the level of agricultural production. The finding is in agreement with that of Sekeris (2010), Deininger and Castagini (2004) that farm land conflicts hampered and shrink agricultural productivities and do not only affect farmers income but also brought misfortune to the development of whole country. Kariuki (2005) found out that at Nakuru District of Kenya thousands of families have being displaced as a result of conflict over farmland while Nguafu (1992) reported that open confrontation results in rural insecurity and out-migration.

Conflicts over farmland affects different groups in different ways and not only do they generally have a stronger impact on the livelihood of the poor than that of the rich, but they impact differently on men and women, urban and rural populations as well as the minorities and orphans greatly affected.

**Table 3: Distribution of respondents on socio economic effects of land conflicts n = 160**

Socio economic effect	Severe		Mild		Not severe		Mean	S.D	Remark
	F	%	F	%	F	%			
Termination of social interaction and peaceful co-existence	104	65.0	56	35.0	0	0.0	1.65	0.48	Severe
Mistrust among members	97	60.6	63	39.4	0	0.0	1.61	0.49	Severe
Destruction of valuable goods and property	91	56.9	69	43.1	0	0.0	1.57	0.50	Severe
Loss of life	94	58.8	60	37.5	6	3.8	1.55	0.57	Severe
Leading to court cases and litigations	103	64.4	39	24.4	18	11.2	1.53	0.69	Severe
Abandonment of farm /Migration of people to other areas that are peaceful	90	56.2	58	36.2	12	7.5	1.49	0.63	Severe



Socio economic effect	Severe		Mild		Not severe		Mean	S.D	Remark
	F	%	F	%	F	%			
Low agricultural productivity	87	54.4	63	39.4	10	6.2	1.48	0.61	Severe
Low income	86	53.8	63	39.4	11	6.9	1.47	0.62	Severe
Increasing hunger and starvation as a result of poverty	83	51.9	57	35.6	20	12.5	1.39	0.70	Severe
High cost of rehabilitation of affected community	67	41.9	74	46.2	19	11.9	1.30	0.67	Severe
Broken marriages	45	28.1	64	40.0	51	31.9	0.96	0.78	Not Severe

Source: Field survey 2016

## CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The following conclusion was drawn based on the findings of the study. Inheritance system of land ownership is the major source of land for farming in the area and majority of the farmers are peasant in nature cultivating between one to three hectares of land. Major causes of conflicts over farmland in the area were failure to respect boundary, contesting the inheritance of land and abandonment of previously accepted rules of access to and use of land. Conflict over farmlands had a negative effect on the socio-economic activities of rural residents as it lead to termination of social interaction, among people mistrust among members, destruction of life and property as well as low agricultural productivity and income.

Based on the conclusion of this study, the following recommendations were made: Individual and community farm boundaries should be respected to avoid court cases and litigations, which could lead to wastage of resources and loss of manpower days. There must be an effective system of land administration of management to reduce frequent challenges of land ownership. Accepted rules to access and use of land in each area must be strictly adhered to and inheritors should be loyal to the agreement made with their progenitors on the use of land. Public education/enlightenment programmes must be strengthening to reduce the adverse effect of land conflicts .Land conflicts issue should be settled amicably using indigenous conflict resolution methods before degenerating into full-blown war and loss of life.

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