



Research Article

Farmers Perception on Conflict Resolution as a Tool for Rural Development in Taraba State, Nigeria

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Abstract: The study was carried out on Farmers perception on conflict resolution as a tool for rural development in Taraba State, Nigeria. The specific objectives were to describe the socioeconomic characteristics of rural crop farmers in the study area, identify institutions effective in resolving conflicts in the study area, examine perceived conflict resolution strategies employed by the various institutions in the area and ascertain perceived effects of conflicts resolution on rural development. Multi-stage sampling procedure was adopted in the process of sample selection. Data were collected using well-structured questionnaire administered to 120 respondents, out of which 114 questionnaires were properly filled and returned. Descriptive statistics was used to achieve objectives of the study. Results of socioeconomic characteristics revealed that majority (60.5%) of rural farmers were male, majority (66.7%) of the farmers fell within 31-50 years, majority (50%) were married with average household size of 11 persons. Majority of the farmers are predominantly small-scale farmers with average farm size of 2.7 ha and majority (73.5%) of the respondents belonged to organizations. The result further revealed that traditional rulers are the major (85.1%) arbitrators of conflict in the study area. The major strategies as perceived by farmers are Prohibit open rearing and grazing of livestock (85.1%), Setting up of judicial committee of enquiry (82.5%), compensation and punishment (78.1%) and Killing of farmers on their farm land should be stopped (76.3%). The also showed that conflicts resolution leads to reduction of mortality rate (76.3%), increase rural farm and nonfarm investment (73.7%), reduces poverty of rural dwellers (72.8%), reduced food insecurity (68.4%) and reduced rural-urban migration (54.4%). It was concluded that conflict enact a major obstacle against rural development as well as farmers livelihoods. It was recommended that strategies for conflict prevention and mitigation should be considered of primary interest by government and international aid community.

Keywords: farmers, rural, conflict resolution.

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INTRODUCTION

Agriculture faces many challenges like Conflicts and other climate shocks, exacerbating the impacts on rural food security and livelihoods creating more and more difficult to attain its primary objective of feeding the world each year. Continued conflicts around the world have been a main cause of a rise in worldwide hunger in recent years. Conflicts are also driving the dramatic increase in the number of forcibly displaced people from 40 million people in 2011 to almost 66 million in 2016 (UNHCR, 2017; World Bank, 2017). Rural areas are bearing the brunt of these conflicts, and rural populations in developing countries like Nigeria are most severely affected (FAO, 2017).

Despite with the great potential to increase agricultural productivity and food production particularly in Nigeria, serious conflicts in these areas have deteriorated the already existing challenges to production, such as climate change, poor soils and lack of access to credit and extension services (Owolabi, *et al.*, 2016). In Nigeria, for example Taraba, Benue, Kaduna, Plateau, Zamfara among others states, various violent conflicts over land resources have led to decreased agricultural production, food

insecurity and hunger, the clashes between various ethnic, occupational and resident groups usually result to destruction of livestock and farmland.

In Taraba State, there have been instances of conflict between herders and farmers in Takum, Ussa, Wukari, Lau, Sardauna, Gassol, Ibbi, Bali, LGAs and other parts of the state over crop destruction by cattle, killing of a herder and stabbing of a farmer, following reprisal attacks on different occasions. Farmers-herdsmen conflict is now said to be of co-extensiveness with religious, tribal and culture conflicts in Taraba State. This is because; most farmers likely to be of the same ethnic group and mostly Christians especially in the southern part of the state while most pastoralists are Fulani and mostly Muslims. In an event of a conflict between these groups, they are easily perceived as ethnic or religious conflicts because of their nearness in such lines. A good example of this was 2013-2015 Wukari crises that erupted from communal clashes between farmers and herders where many Christians as well as Muslims have been killed and many valuables were been destroyed. Another example was 2010 Jos crisis that snowballed from leadership tussle between the Hausa residents and the settlers in the area (Aliyu, *et al.*, 2018).

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Conflict resolution is a tough field of assiduous with many reliant kinds of activities. Their causes and destructive consequences of conflicts imply that, practical steps must be employed to resolve these conflicts irrespective of the level and nature of conflict (Chikaire, *et al.*, 2018). Conflict resolution is the situation where by the conflicting parties enter into an agreement that solves their central incompatibilities, accept each other's continued existence as parties and cease all violent actions against each other (Wallenstein, 2002). Despite the efforts of resolving the conflicts, there have been the tendencies of re-occurrence of the conflicts. Farmers-herders conflicts like any other conflict do not vanish simply through the invisible hand of God. Therefore, there is a gap on the benefits of conflicts resolution to the rural populace and development in Taraba State and Nigeria at large. This paper tries to fill the gap by examining the mechanisms in resolving conflict between farmers and herdsmen in Taraba State and the benefits. The specific objectives were to;

- describe the socioeconomic characteristics of rural crop farmers in the study area;
- identify institutions effective in resolving conflicts in the study area;
- examine perceived conflict resolution strategies employed by the various institutions in the area; and
- Ascertain perceived effects of conflicts resolution on rural development.

METHODOLOGY

The Study Area

This study was conducted in Taraba State, Nigeria. Taraba State was formed out of the former Gongola State on the 27th August, 1991. The State has 16 Local Government areas and Jalingo as its capital. Taraba State is situated in the North-eastern part of Nigeria, and it lies between Longitude 9^o 30'E and 11^o45'E and Latitude 6^o25'N and 9^o30'. Taraba State shared border with plateau, Nasarawa and Benue State to the West, Adamawa and Gombe State to the North and to the East with republic of Cameroon. There are 73 spoken languages in Taraba State; the major languages are Wurrkum, Jukun, Mumuye, Fulfulde, Kaka, Jonjo and Kona just to mention few. The State was named after the Taraba River which transverses the Southern part of the State. The mean annual rainfall shows a decrease from south to north (100mm-150mm). The raining season commences in April in the north to maximum of 200 days in the south. The dry season extends from October to early June and is marked by the hot north easterly harmattan. The population of Taraba State is 2,294, 800 people (NPC, 2006). It has a land area of 54, 428km². Agriculture is the major occupation of the people of the State employing over 70% of the total population. Cash crops produce in the State include coffee, tea, Groundnut and cotton. Crops such as maize, rice, sorghum, millet, cassava and yam are also produce in commercial quantity. Livestock production such as poultry, cow, goats, sheep and pig farming are fairly in large scale.

Sources and Method of Data Collection

Data for this study were collected from primary source using well-structured questionnaire. Multi-stage sampling procedure was adopted in the process of sample selection. The first stage was the purposive selection of Takum, Lau, Ardo-kola, Ussa, Bali and Sardauna LGAs base on the high incidence of

farmer-herdsmen conflict in the state. The second stage involved the purposive selection of two farming communities in each Local Government Areas selected, where conflicts have occurred making a total of six villages.

Thirdly, ten arable crop farmers were randomly selected from each village, thus giving a total of 120 farmers were selected for the quantitative data collection. A well structured questionnaire was administered to 120 respondents, out of which 114 questionnaires were properly filled and returned. Analysis for this study was done based on the number of questionnaires retrieved.

Data Analysis

Descriptive statistics such as frequency, percentage, mean and ranking was used to achieve all the objectives of the study.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Socio-Economic Characteristics of Respondents

Results on socioeconomic characteristics of rural farmers in the study area are shown in Table 1. Table 1 indicates that 60.5% of rural farmers were males while 39.5% were female, meaning that the dominance of males in farming probably because men are more energetic and capable of involving in tedious production activities associated with farming than women. This result collaborates with that of Dimelu *et al.*, (2017) who found that 85.2% of crop farmers were males.

Majority (66.7%) of the farmers fell within 31-50 years with mean age of 41 years indicating that the farmers are still in their active and productive years. Consequently, they may respond violently to conflict or aggression from herdsmen due to youthful behavior. In rural communities, marriage is a respected and prestigious institution that bestows social status and recognition on people. Majority (50%) were married with average household size of 11 persons. Rural farmers have a large household size which may have resulted from the need for family labour with the consequence of more dependant family members. This is in line with the finding of Olobatoke and Omowumi (2017) who revealed that majority of the farmers are married implies that they may be able to utilize family labour to reduce input costs and increase productivity. Majority of the farmers are predominantly small-scale farmers with average farm size of 2.7 ha. This may be because they acquire land for farming mainly by inheritance and may indicate the practice of individual system of land ownership. It is in confirmation with the study of Dimelu *et al.*, (2017) who reported that the respondents are subsistence farmers with average farm size of 2.9 ha. With respect to education, about 86.7% of the rural farmers had formal education. This could positively affect the farmers' perception of conflict situation and subsequently their behavior and altitude to conflict resolution. Majority (73.5%) of the respondents belonged to organizations. This is not only a veritable tool for enhancing production through economy of scale, but more importantly, an instrument for conflict resolution and sustainable peace when effectively harnessed. According to Ekong (2010) membership of social organization in the rural areas is of immense value if such organizations could help members accomplish tasks an individual cannot achieve alone.

Table 1; Socio-economic characteristic of the Farmers

Variables	Frequency	Percentage
Gender		
Male	69	60.5
Female	45	39.5
Age (years)		
11 - 20	5	4.4
21 - 30	17	14.9
31 - 40	31	27.2
41 - 50	45	39.5
51 - 60	16	14.0
Mean	41	

Marital status		
Single	24	21.1
Married	57	50.0
Widow/widower	33	28.9
Household size		
1-5	12	10.5
6-10	35	30.7
11-15	57	50.0
16-20	10	8.8
Mean	11	
Farm size (ha)		
<1	16	14.0
1 – 2	52	45.6
3 – 4	36	31.6
5 and above	10	8.8
Mean	2.7	
Educational level		
No formal education	15	13.2
Primary education	17	14.9
Secondary education	51	44.7
Tertiary education	31	27.2
Membership of organization		
Agricultural organization	22	19.3
Agricultural organization	49	42.1
Religious organization	33	28.9
Social organization	10	8.8
Non- Membership of organization		
Total	114	100

Source: field survey, 2019

Institutions for Conflict Resolution

Several institutions for resolving conflicts in the study as shown in Table 2. They were ranked in order of their effectiveness in term of conflict resolution. Traditional rulers such as Aku-Uka, Ukwe, Ardos, Bakundi among others are the major (85.1%) arbitrators of conflict in the study area. This means that the traditional rulers in the area are highly respected and any decision taken to resolve conflict are band on people of the area. Also, they place great emphasis on peaceful resolution of disputes so as to restore social harmony to the conflicting parties, and families, while the principles of equity and justice entrenched in their customs and traditions are maintained (Chikaire *et al.*, 2018). Religious leaders is second most effective means of resolving dispute between herders and crop farmers in the area accounted for 76.3% respondents. This means that Pastors and Imam play vital role in time of conflict in the area simply because

most farmers tend to be of the same ethnic group and mostly Christians while most pastoralists are Fulani and predominantly Muslims. In an event of a conflict between these groups, they are easily perceived as ethnic or religious conflicts because of their closeness in such lines (Aliyu, *et al.*, 2018). Another institution for resolving conflict is Social organization (71.1%) such as Miyetti Allah, Kuteb Yatso of Nigeria (KYN), Jukun Development Association of Nigeria (JDAN), Farmers association among others are indigenous institutions for conflict resolution in the study area. All these serve as institutions for the maintenance of peace and the resolution of conflict (Agbu and Bolarinwa 2006). Police is the rarely used institution for resolving conflict in the area. Farmers tend to believe that the police often find a way to exploit the Fulani herdsman and farmers in the event of a reported conflict because they alleged they end up paying more in unofficial fees and fines.

Table 2: Institutions for resolving (managing) conflicts in the study area

Institutions	Frequency	Percentage	Ranking
Traditional rulers	98	85.1	1 st
Religious leaders	87	76.3	2 nd
Social organization	81	71.1	3 rd
Council of elders	72	63.2	4 th
Police	34	29.8	5 th

Source: field survey, 2019

Conflict Resolution Strategies Used in the Study Area

Table 3 showed the conflict resolution strategies used in the study area. The strategies used to resolve conflicts as perceived by farmers in the study area are many and they were ranked in order of importance. The major strategies used are Prohibit open rearing and grazing of livestock (85.1%), intensive system of animal rearing help in curtailing damages of crops by cattle which is often the cause of conflict between farmers and herder in the state. Follow by Setting up of judicial committee of enquiry (82.5%), made up of men and women of high moral character from both conflicting parties to ascertain the actual causes and opinion of people involved in the conflict. compensation and punishment (78.1%) people who lost property and valuables are given money to help offset their sufferings and one who is find guilty should be punish. . Killing of farmers on their farm land should be stopped (76.3%), this allowed farmers

to go to farm. Mediation by traditional rulers and community leaders (71.9%), the leaders from both parties mediate between farmers and herders for peaceful coexistence. Conflict resolution provides an opportunity to interact with the parties concerned, with the hope of at least reducing the scope, intensity and effects of conflicts. Those who organize conflict resolution exercises or meetings usually constitute the third party in a triangular arrangement and consist of traditional rulers (Chikaire *et al.*, 2018). Others strategies are Imposing a curfew on the area (46.5%), Peace education/teaching (35.1%), Military or police security to be beefed up in order to maintain peace in the area (65.8%), the leaders of the herdsman in various communities should be made to control the activities of the herdsman (67.5%) and interpersonal agreement/ personal intervention (55.3%). According to the farmers all these suggested solutions could be effectively implemented when the parties involved in the conflict

play the right role in facilitating the peace process in the affected communities. To accomplish this, they must have the responsibility to promote "common feeling" or denounce the existence of multiple loyalties and by and large consolidate existing expectations of mutual benefit as a consequence of cooperation (Bolarinwa *et al.*, 2012). However, Ruga

settlement/cattle colony creation has the least score (20.2%), this means that farmers in the area feel that the Ruga settlement is played by the federal Government to amass their ancestral farm land which is their major source of livelihoods for the exclusive benefit of Fulani pastoralists.

Table 3: Perceived Conflict Resolution Strategies Used In Study Area

Conflict Resolution Strategies	Frequency	Percentage	Ranking
Setting up of judicial committee of enquiry	94	82.5	2 nd
Imposing a curfew on the area	53	46.5	9 th
Peace education/teaching	41	35.1	10 th
Prohibit open rearing and grazing of livestock	98	85.1	1 st
Creation of Ruga settlement/ cattle colony	23	20.2	11 th
Killing of farmers on their farm land should be stopped	87	76.3	4 th
Military or police security to be beefed up in order to maintain peace in the area	75	65.8	7 th
The leaders of the herdsmen in various communities should be made to control the activities of the herdsmen.	77	67.5	6 th
Mediation by traditional rulers and community leaders	82	71.9	5 th
Compensation and or punishment	89	78.1	3 rd
Interpersonal agreement/ personal intervention.	63	55.3	8 th

Source: field survey, 2019

Effects of Conflict Resolution on Rural Development

A well-managed and resolved conflict situation nurtures growth and development to the benefits of all rural dwellers and inhabitants. Table 3 showed that conflicts resolution leads to reduction of mortality rate (76.3%). The death occur during and continues to occur if conflicts are not resolved and managed, stoppage/reduction of deaths will take place if conflicts are resolved (Chikaire *et al.*, 2018). Others benefits of conflict

resolution area increase rural farm and nonfarm investment (73.7%), reduces poverty of rural dwellers (72.8%), reduced food insecurity (68.4%), reduced rural-urban migration (54.4%), promotion of educational opportunities in the area (46.5%), increase rural credit and insurance market (29.8%), reduces rate of unemployment (28.1%) and Promotion of socialization and interaction (20.2%).

Table 4: Perceived Effects of Conflicts Resolution on Rural Development

Effects of conflict resolution on rural development	Frequency	Percentage	Ranking
Reduction of Mortality rate	87	76.3	1 st
Promotion of educational opportunities in the area	53	46.5	6 th
Reduced rural-urban migration	62	54.4	5 th
Increase rural credit and insurance market	34	29.8	8 th
Reduced food insecurity	78	68.4	4 th
Reduces poverty of rural dwellers	83	72.8	3 rd
Increase rural farm and nonfarm investment	84	73.7	2 nd
Reduces rate of unemployment	32	28.1	9 th
Promotion of socialization and interaction	23	20.2	10 th
Reduction in destruction of social infrastructures	43	37.7	7 th

Source: field survey, 2018

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Agriculture holds a critical importance to sustainable growth, development and economic opportunities for rural dwellers. Therefore, conflict enact a major obstacle against rural development as well as farmers livelihoods and its occurrence may generate long-lasting effects able to smother the possibility to escape from poverty. For this reason, conflict resolution is critical to achieve a sustainable peace and so, strategies for conflict prevention and mitigation should be considered of primary interest by government and international aid community.

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