

THE EFFECTS OF COMMUNAL CONFLICTS ON AGRICULTURAL DEVELOPMENT: A CASE OF ISHIELU, EBONYI STATE, NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

The study examined communal conflicts in Ishielu, Ebonyi State, Nigeria, focusing on their perceived socioeconomic effects on farmers' agricultural activities. Ninety-six farmers were sampled using multistage and purposive sampling techniques. Data were collected using a structured interview schedule and analysed using frequency, percentage, mean, and standard deviation. The findings showed that the primary causes of communal conflicts include political rivalry ($\bar{x}=2.97$), land disputes ($\bar{x}=2.96$), and cultism ($\bar{x}=2.93$). The major consequences or effects identified were death and dearth of farmers ($\bar{x}=5.00$), destruction of crops ($\bar{x}=4.97$), reduced disposable income ($\bar{x}=4.93$), and destruction of storage houses and facilities ($\bar{x}=4.92$). The Proposed solutions to these conflicts include access to information ($\bar{x}=4.94$), provision of effective communication channels ($\bar{x}=4.89$), and the provision of wholesome training for the youths ($\bar{x}=4.86$). The study inferred that consistent communal clashes have grave negative effects on agricultural activities, and the socio-economic effects could result in a reduction in crop yield, increased poverty, and the displacement of farmers, among others. Addressing these challenges requires policy interventions, conflict resolution strategies, and investment in rural security by the government. Strengthening institutions and conflict resolution mechanisms, particularly dialogue-based approaches, is essential for ensuring sustainable agricultural development and rural stability.

Keywords: Agricultural development, communal conflicts, effects of conflicts on agriculture

INTRODUCTION

Agriculture remains a vital segment of the Nigerian economy, employing over 70% of the labour force and serving as a key driver for economic diversification and development (Adenekan *et al.*, 2019; Chima & Ajie, 2024; Okelola & Adeyolanu, 2024). It plays a crucial role in poverty reduction, food security, and economic stability (Chima & Ajie, 2024; Gomina *et al.*, 2024). Additionally, the agricultural sector significantly contributes to the Gross Domestic Product (GDP), supplies raw materials for agro-allied industries, and generates foreign exchange (Gomina *et al.*, 2024; Okelola & Adeyolanu, 2024). Until the early 1970s, agricultural exports were Nigeria's primary source of foreign exchange earnings (Adenekan *et al.*, 2019). However, agricultural development in Nigeria faces numerous challenges, including inadequate policies, land degradation, industrialization, poor agricultural support services, and, most notably, communal conflicts (Abdul Rahman *et al.*, 2024; Chima & Ajie, 2024; Olatinwo *et al.*, 2025).

Communal conflicts refer to disputes involving communal groups. It arises from deep-rooted identity issues, often exacerbated by political, social, and economic factors (Klosowicz, 2020; Mangiarotti, 2024). These disputes typically involve groups defined

by ascribed identities, such as ethnicity or religion, leading to widespread violence and societal fragmentation (Oji *et al.*, 2015; Klosowicz, 2020; Thaker & Bhadauriya, 2024). In Nigeria, these conflicts are fueled by competition over resources and perceived injustices, and manifest in various forms, including land disputes, ethnic and religious tensions, and herder-farmer clashes (Daudu *et al.*, 2024; Fatai *et al.*, 2024). Ethnic conflicts, often caused by cultural or religious differences, frequently escalate into violent confrontations between neighbouring communities or religious groups (Daudu *et al.*, 2024). Herder-farmer conflicts in Nigeria, predominantly involving Fulani herders and crop farmers, have severely impacted agricultural activities, particularly in the Middle Belt states of Benue, Plateau, and Taraba. Between 2004 and 2011, and again in 2015, these conflicts resulted in over 2,700 fatalities (Armed Conflict Location and Events Data Project, 2018). Communal conflicts disrupt agricultural activities by destroying infrastructure, displacing farmers, and diverting essential resources (Oji *et al.*, 2015; Awuzie *et al.*, 2023; Seid *et al.*, 2024). The forced migration of farming populations leads to labour shortages, while violent confrontations result in the destruction of farmsteads, storage facilities, and private investments (Eteng & Agbor, 2018). According to the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (2015), armed conflicts can permanently damage political, social, and economic institutions, further hampering agricultural development.

Okeke *et al.* (2018) and Otu *et al.* (2024), noted that communal conflicts severely threaten farming communities due to their heavy dependence on natural resources for survival. Such conflicts not only disrupt agricultural activities but also threaten the sustainability of farming and pastoral production in rural communities (Busari *et al.*, 2020; Otu *et al.*, 2024). Agriculture provides essential resources that households rely on for survival. Conflicts restrict access to these resources, forcing affected individuals to seek alternative means of sustenance or compensate for losses through increased efforts in securing needed assets (Ajaero & Aminu, 2021; Otu *et al.*, 2024).

This study examined the effects of communal conflicts on agricultural development in Ishielu, Ebonyi State, highlighting their socioeconomic impact on farmers and the overall agricultural sector. It also analysed the root causes and potential solutions to these conflicts, providing insights that can inform policy interventions and promote peaceful coexistence for sustainable agricultural growth.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Study Area

The study was executed in Ishielu Local Government Area (LGA) of Ebonyi State, Nigeria. It is located in the Northwestern part of Ebonyi State with a land area of 872 km² and a population of 151,048 (National Population Commission, 2006). Its

administrative headquarters is located in Ezillo town. The main crops produced in the area are rice, yams, oil palm, cocoa, maize, groundnut, plantain, banana, cassava, melon, sugarcane, beans, fruits, and vegetables.

Population and Sampling Procedure

The population for the study comprised all farmers affected by communal clashes in Ishielu LGA in Ebonyi State. A multistage sampling technique was adopted. In stage one, four conflict-affected communities in Ishielu LGA were purposively selected. In stage two, three villages constantly bedeviled by communal clashes were selected from each of the communities, giving a total of 12 villages. In the final stage, eight respondents (people affected by communal clashes) were selected from each village, giving a total of 96 respondents for the study.

Instruments for Data Collection

Primary data was collected using a structured interview schedule validated by the staff of the Department of Agricultural Extension, University of Nigeria, Nsukka.

Measurement of Variables

Prevalent causes of communal conflicts were ascertained using a three-point Likert-type scale of least prevalent cause =1, prevalent cause =2, and the most prevalent cause=3 against a list of possible causes of conflicts from the literature. The values were added to obtain 6, which was divided by 3 to obtain a mean value of 2.0. Any response option with a mean value greater than or equal to 2.0 was regarded as significant, while those with a mean value less than 2.0 were regarded as not significant. Perceived effects of the conflicts on farmers' agricultural activity and output were determined using a five-point Likert scale of strongly agree=5, agree=4, moderately agree=3, disagree=2, and strongly disagree=1 against a list of possible effects. The values were added to obtain 15, which was divided by 5 to obtain a mean value of 3.0. Any response option with a mean value greater than or equal to 3.0 was regarded as significant, while those with a mean value less than 3.0 were regarded as not significant. Conflict resolution institutions and the method of resolution were identified by a response option of either Yes or No against the listed items. The constraints to conflict resolution were examined using a four-point Likert-type scale of very large extent=3, large extent=2, little extent=1, and no extent=0 against a list of possible constraints. The values were summed up to 6 and divided by 4 to give a mean value of 1.5. Any response option with a mean value greater than or equal to 1.5 was regarded as significant, while those with a mean value less than 1.5 were regarded as not significant. Possible solutions to communal conflicts were determined using a five-point Likert scale of strongly agree=5, agree=4, moderately agree=3, disagree=2, and strongly disagree=1 against a list of possible solutions. The values were added to obtain 15, which was divided by 5 to obtain a mean value of 3.0. Any response option with a mean value greater than or equal to 3.0 was regarded as significant, while those with a mean value less than 3.0 were regarded as not significant.

Data Analysis

Data for the study were analysed using frequency, percentage, mean, and standard deviation.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Prevalent Causes of Communal Clashes

Table 1 presents the prevalent causes of communal conflicts. The findings show that political rivalry (\bar{x} =2.97), land disputes (\bar{x} =2.96), and cultism (\bar{x} =2.93) are the most significant contributors to communal conflicts. These results align with previous studies that highlight political power struggles and land ownership disputes as primary triggers of violence in rural communities (Verjee, 2022; Rahman & Korobi, 2024). Cultism, often linked to youth unemployment and social discontent, further exacerbates conflicts in affected areas.

Table 1: Prevalent causes of communal clashes

Causes	Mean	Std. deviation
Political rivalry	2.97*	0.00
Land dispute	2.96*	0.00
Cultism	2.93*	0.00
Exploitation violations of human rights	2.67*	0.10
Chieftaincy tussle	2.66*	0.10
Non-tolerance and discrimination	2.60*	0.20
Domination and oppression	2.47*	0.22
Accusations of neglect	2.39*	0.19
Illiteracy	2.03*	0.40
Unequal distribution of wealth	2.02*	0.26
High level of poverty	1.84	0.36

* Significant

Other significant causes include exploitation and human rights violations (\bar{x} =2.67), chieftaincy tussles (\bar{x} =2.66), and non-tolerance/discrimination (\bar{x} =2.60). These findings correspond with research by TTchatchoua et al. (2020), Ajiteru et al. (2024), and llelah et al. (2024), who assert that governance issues, traditional leadership disputes, and social inequalities frequently lead to communal clashes in Nigeria. Domination and oppression (\bar{x} =2.47) and accusations of neglect (\bar{x} =2.39) also contribute to conflict, as marginalized groups often resist perceived injustices, leading to violence.

Lower-ranked causes include illiteracy (\bar{x} =2.03), unequal wealth distribution (\bar{x} =2.02), and high poverty levels (\bar{x} =1.84). While these factors are important, their relatively lower significance suggests that immediate political and land-related issues take precedence in triggering communal conflicts in Ishielu. However, researchers such as Duyile (2023) and Erundu (2024) emphasized that long-term solutions must address systemic poverty and educational disparities to reduce the likelihood of recurring conflicts.

In summary, this agrees with Ibenwa and Uroko (2020) who posited that communal conflict does not just happen, they are rooted in some basic dissatisfaction or grievances that await detonation at the slightest opportunity, some of which are products of unresolved political differences, perceived social marginalization, unhealthy socio-economic relations, and colonialism.

Perceived Effects of Communal Clashes on Agricultural Activities

The results presented in Table 2 highlight the severe and multifaceted consequences of communal clashes on agricultural activities. The perceived effects with the highest mean values

underscore the devastating impacts of these conflicts, with all the significant effects scoring above 4.4 on a 5-point scale. This suggests a widespread consensus among respondents regarding the adverse outcomes of communal violence on farming communities.

Table 2: Perceived effects of communal clashes on agricultural activities

Perceived effects	Mean	Std. deviation
Death and dearth of farmers	5.00*	0.00
Destruction of crops	4.97*	0.17
Reduced disposable income	4.93*	0.39
Destruction of storage houses and facilities	4.92*	0.27
Thefts and burglary	4.89*	0.40
Destruction of livestock	4.85*	0.35
Rural-urban migration	4.84*	0.39
Exposure of women and children to risks such as rape and starvation	4.81*	0.46
Restriction of movement	4.71*	0.45
Reduction in farm produce as a result of reduced cultivated areas	4.68*	0.55
Spoilage of farm produce as a result of neglect out of fear	4.64*	0.55
Inaccessibility to market	4.51*	0.66
Indiscriminate consumption of crops by stray animals	4.44*	0.62
Over-exploitation of safer land areas	4.44*	0.73
Loss of household resources	2.97	0.54
Massive trampling of farmland by fighters causing soil compaction	2.94	0.57

* Significant

The most severe consequence, as indicated by the mean score of 5.00 with no deviation, is the death and dearth of farmers. This finding aligns with previous studies (Soomiyol & Fadaïro, 2020; Obikaeze *et al.*, 2023; Ehiane *et al.*, 2024; Shipurut *et al.*, 2024), which documented how violent conflicts directly led to loss of lives, thereby depleting the agricultural labour force. The absence of standard deviation suggests unanimity in perception, reinforcing the gravity of this issue. Closely following is the destruction of crops ($\bar{x} = 4.97$, $SD = 0.17$), reflecting the widespread burning, trampling, or theft of farmlands during communal clashes, as observed in studies by Obikaeze *et al.* (2023) and Ehiane *et al.* (2024). This destruction significantly undermines food security and disrupts local economies.

The economic consequences of communal clashes are also evident in the respondents' perception of reduced disposable income ($\bar{x} = 4.93$, $SD = 0.39$) and destruction of storage houses and facilities ($\bar{x} = 4.92$, $SD = 0.27$). When conflicts erupt, farmers lose both their immediate harvest and their ability to store agricultural produce for future sales or consumption, exacerbating financial instability (George *et al.*, 2020; Shipurut *et al.*, 2024). This finding corroborates studies indicating that prolonged communal crises lead to economic downturns in rural agrarian settings (Allen, 2020; Soomiyol & Fadaïro, 2020).

Other significant perceived effects include thefts and burglary ($\bar{x} =$

4.89, $SD = 0.40$) and destruction of livestock ($\bar{x} = 4.85$, $SD = 0.35$), further emphasising the role of conflict in exacerbating insecurity and livelihood losses (Ajibefun, 2018; Manaye *et al.*, 2023). Additionally, rural-urban migration ($\bar{x} = 4.84$, $SD = 0.39$) is a notable consequence, reflecting the tendency of displaced farming populations to relocate to urban areas in search of safety and alternative means of survival (Abado, 2022; Shuaibu *et al.*, 2021). Table 2 also underscores the social repercussions of communal clashes, particularly the exposure of women and children to risks such as rape and starvation ($\bar{x} = 4.81$, $SD = 0.46$). This aligns with findings by Yasya (2018), Abdulahi (2024), and El Bizri *et al.* (2025), who documented increased vulnerability of women and children during conflicts, leading to heightened cases of gender-based violence and food insecurity. Similarly, restriction of movement ($\bar{x} = 4.71$, $SD = 0.45$) and inaccessibility to markets ($\bar{x} = 4.51$, $SD = 0.66$) illustrate how conflict disrupts supply chains, limiting farmers' ability to sell produce or purchase essential inputs, as corroborated by Yahaya and Tinab (2015), and Abdulahi (2024). Environmental impacts are also noted, particularly massive trampling of farmland by fighters, causing soil compaction ($\bar{x} = 2.94$, $SD = 0.57$). Though not marked as significant, this issue aligns with literature emphasising the long-term degradation of arable land due to conflict-related activities (Bonchkovskiy *et al.*, 2023). Additionally, over-exploitation of safer land areas ($\bar{x} = 4.44$, $SD = 0.73$) points to the increased pressure on limited agricultural land, which can result in reduced soil fertility and long-term sustainability concerns (Makarenko *et al.*, 2022).

Overall, the findings from Table 2 reveal the profound and interconnected impacts of communal clashes on agricultural productivity, economic stability, and social structures. These insights reinforce the urgent need for conflict resolution strategies, improved security measures, and policy interventions to safeguard agricultural communities and ensure food security.

Institutions for the Settlement of Conflict

Table 3 presents the major institutions responsible for conflict resolution in affected areas. Local government committees play the most significant role, accounting for 45.8% of conflict resolutions. Their involvement is crucial due to their direct connection to affected communities and governance structures, as highlighted by Oladipo (2022). Traditional rulers follow with a 21.2% involvement rate, reinforcing the historical significance of indigenous leadership in conflict mediation (Lamidi & Olaleye, 2023; Kifle & Mekonnen, 2024).

Table 3: Major institutions for the settlement of conflict

Institution	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Local government committees	44	45.8
Traditional rulers	21	21.2
Farmers association	17	16.3
Police	8	9.7
Law court	6	7.0

Farmers' associations contributed to 16.3% of resolutions, demonstrating the role of collective action in addressing disputes. According to Siregar *et al.* (2023), such associations provide a platform for dialogue and compensation negotiations. The police, with a 9.7% resolution rate, play a secondary role, often limited by community distrust and resource constraints. The formal legal

system, represented by law courts at 7%, is the least utilized institution, likely due to bureaucratic delays and financial burdens. This approach has yielded limited success due to several challenges, including high litigation costs, procedural complexity, hostility, slow proceedings, inconvenience, and lack of privacy.

Major Methods of Resolving Communal Clashes

Table 4 highlights the major methods used to resolve communal clashes in affected communities. The most commonly employed approach was amicable dialogues and peace talks, accounting for 58.5% of resolutions. This method was favoured due to its ability to foster reconciliation and long-term stability (Ifemeje and Obi, 2020). Studies by Kifle and Mekonnen (2024) and Lamidi (2024) confirmed that community-led peace talks are crucial in addressing the root causes of conflicts and preventing future hostilities. Verbal warnings, representing 17.4% of resolutions was another common approach. This method was typically used by traditional rulers and local government committees to caution individuals or groups involved in conflicts. While effective in some cases, verbal warnings may lack enforcement power, limiting their impact. The reallocation of new plots accounts for 13.5% of conflict resolutions. Land disputes were a major trigger of communal clashes, and redistributing farmland can help mitigate tensions. However, this approach requires careful planning to prevent new grievances.

Finally, payment of compensation (10.6%) was used as a means to address losses incurred during conflicts. Financial compensation can help victims recover from economic setbacks. However, studies suggested that compensation alone is not a sustainable solution unless accompanied by broader conflict resolution strategies (Yusuf & Bolarinwa, 2020).

Constraints to the Resolution of Communal Clashes

The resolution of communal clashes was hindered by several constraints, as reflected in Table 5. The most significant impediment, according to the data, was the lack of effective communication and mediation, with a high mean score of 3.96 and a standard deviation of 0.65. This finding aligns with previous research (Gjerazi, 2023; Ismail, 2025), which emphasized that open communication channels and mediation strategies are crucial in resolving conflicts. The inability to foster dialogue often leads to misunderstandings, misinformation, and entrenched hostilities that exacerbate tension.

Table 5: Constraints to the resolution of communal clashes

Constraints	Mean	Std. deviation
Lack of effective communication and mediation	3.96*	0.65
Unwillingness to compromise	3.86*	0.34
Conflict resolution apathy among local leaders and the government	3.79*	0.43
Sense of unfairness in judgment	3.73*	0.47
Poor collaborations with peace-building and keeping agencies	3.71*	0.52
Corruption in the political structure	3.66*	0.55
Vengeful mission	3.59*	0.61
Poor planning of resolution programmes and processes	3.57*	0.59
Lack of compensation of affected parties	3.56*	0.61

Unwillingness to admit the problem	3.54*	0.52
Philosophical differences	3.33*	0.66
Illiteracy	2.42*	0.85
Migration of illustrious and influential sons of the land to other parts	1.34	0.74

* Significant

Following closely is the unwillingness to compromise, with a mean of 3.86 and a standard deviation of 0.34. As posited by Bobrovnyk (2022) and Mitroff (2022), compromise was a fundamental element in conflict resolution, and its absence prolongs disputes. Stubborn adherence to individual or group interests without flexibility hampered negotiations and peace agreements. Similarly, conflict resolution apathy among local leaders and the government, scoring 3.79 (SD = 0.43), further complicates the resolution process. Studies by Umeh (2023) suggested that when leadership lacks the political will or interest to intervene effectively, communal clashes persist due to a vacuum in authoritative intervention.

A sense of unfairness in judgment, with a mean of 3.73 (SD = 0.47), was another significant constraint. Perceived bias in adjudication and decision-making can intensify grievances and lead to further conflicts (Joshua, 2013). This sentiment is often compounded by poor collaboration with peace-building and keeping agencies (\bar{x} = 3.71, SD = 0.52). Effective resolution requires multi-sectoral approaches involving governmental, non-governmental, and international actors, as advocated by Akpan (2010). Without strong inter-agency cooperation, interventions are often disjointed and ineffective.

Corruption in the political structure (\bar{x} = 3.66, SD = 0.55) further exacerbated communal clashes by undermining trust in governmental institutions. When political figures manipulate conflict resolution processes for personal or partisan gain, affected communities lose faith in formal mechanisms. Closely related to this is the issue of vengeful missions, which, with a mean of 3.59 and a standard deviation of 0.61, underscores the deep-seated animosities that fuel cycles of violence.

Poor planning of resolution programmes and processes (\bar{x} = 3.57, SD = 0.59) reflected the inadequacy of structured approaches to conflict resolution. Osadola (2024) asserted that without well-structured conflict resolution frameworks, interventions become reactionary rather than preventive. Similarly, the lack of compensation for affected parties (\bar{x} = 3.56, SD = 0.61) suggested that unresolved grievances continue to fuel tensions as victims of conflicts feel abandoned and aggrieved.

The unwillingness to admit the problem, with a mean of 3.54 (SD = 0.52), reflected a psychological and sociopolitical barrier to conflict resolution. Acknowledging a conflict is the first step toward its resolution. Philosophical differences (\bar{x} = 3.33, SD = 0.66) also contributed to conflicts, particularly in pluralistic societies where ideological divides influence group interactions Olanrewaju *et al.*, 2017).

Interestingly, illiteracy (\bar{x} = 2.42, SD = 0.85) is perceived as a less significant constraint, though still relevant. While illiteracy can impede understanding of resolution mechanisms, it is not as crucial as structural or political factors. Finally, the migration of illustrious and influential sons of the land (\bar{x} = 1.34, SD = 0.74) appears to be the least significant factor. This suggests that while influential figures may provide leadership, their absence does not directly contribute to the escalation of conflicts.

Overall, these findings reinforced the complexity of communal conflict resolution. Effective strategies should prioritize

communication, compromise, and strong institutional frameworks to overcome these challenges. Integrating insights from previous studies and best practices in conflict resolution will be critical in addressing these constraints sustainably.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The findings indicated that communal clashes severely disrupted agricultural activities through human casualties, crop destruction, financial instability, and migration. Conflict resolution was hampered by ineffective communication, unwillingness to compromise, poor political will, and structural corruption. Addressing these challenges requires policy interventions, conflict resolution strategies, and investment in rural security by the government. Strengthening institutions and conflict resolution mechanisms, particularly dialogue-based approaches, is essential for ensuring sustainable agricultural development and rural stability.

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