

**RURAL FARMERS' PERCEPTION OF COMMUNAL CONFLICTS
IN BENUE STATE, NIGERIA**

[‡]Kughur, P.G., [†]Dukut, J. and ¹Katikpo, G.

[‡]*Department of Agricultural Extension and Communication,
University of Agriculture, P.M.B. 2373 Makurdi,
Benue State, Nigeria.*

[†]*Provostry (Farm Unit), Plateau State College of Agriculture, Garkuwa, Plateau State, Nigeria*

¹*Department of Agricultural Education, College of Education Akwanga
P.M.B. 05 Akwanga, Nassarawa State, Nigeria*

[‡]*Corresponding author and e-mail: gyandenkughur@gmail.com*

Abstract

The study assessed rural farmers' perception of communal conflict in Benue State. Multi-stage random sampling was adopted in selecting four Local Government Areas. In each of the local government areas selected, three villages were purposively selected based on occurrence of communal conflicts in the area. Simple random sampling was used in administering structured questionnaire through interview to the 120 respondents. Data collected were analyzed through descriptive statistics and graph. Results of the findings revealed that 57.50% of communal conflicts were caused by land disputes, 38% communal conflicts reduced development, 65% communal conflicts caused social vices and promoted negative cohesion, 62% communal conflicts reduced volume of trade, 22.09% leaders and political appointees of communities involved in communal conflicts should be removed and 12.0% land communities are fighting over it should be taken over by government. It is recommended that proper boundary demarcation should be carried out in all places to avoid communal conflicts.

Keywords: Rural, farmers, perception, communal, conflicts, Benue State

INTRODUCTION

Conflict is that form of social interaction in which the actors seek to obtain scarce reward by eliminating or weakening other contenders. This may take the form of a fistfight, threats, or total destruction (Ekong, 1988). In Nigeria, village/community conflict may arise where there is difference of opinion between group leaders or in situations where one group tends to be exploiting the other. This often triggers off a strong defence reaction resulting in the reappearance of old grievances with each group trying to obtain dominant position over the other. The use of pressure groups by a section of the community to gain advantage over the rest may precipitate conflict (Onigwu and Olawale, 1999).

Competition over scarce resources, particularly land and water, often causes or exacerbates communal conflict (Homer-Dixon, 1999; Kahl, 2006; Ban, 2007). Communal conflict involves groups with permanent or semi-permanent armed militias but does not involve government. However, it can escalate to include government forces, as in the massacres in Darfur, Rwanda and Burundi. These conflicts have the potential to escalate to civil war when government is perceived to be supporting, tacitly or otherwise, one communal group at the expense of the other (Kahl, 2006).

The increase in competition for arable land has often times led to serious manifestation of hostilities and social friction among different user-groups in many parts of the world. Conflicts have not only heightened the level of insecurity, but have also

demonstrated high potential to exacerbate the food crisis in many affected countries due to loss of farmer lives, animals, crops and valuable properties (Cotula *et al.*, 2004).

In their explanation of the spate of conflicts in Africa, analysts have used economic and non-economic factors. One of the often cited non-economic factors is the concept of state failure, which has been blamed for conflict in Somalia, Rwanda, Liberia and Sierra-Leone (Herbst 2002). A state is supposed to provide essential public goods such as law and order, defence, contract enforcement and infrastructure. In Africa, however some states provide very few of these things. Indeed, many states are unable to exercise control over much of their territory, not to speak of providing order or public goods (Richardson, 2002).

Militarization is another concept that has been used to explain conflict in Nigeria. In his study of armed conflicts in Nigeria, Mohammed (2000) found a causal linkage between military expenditure and armed conflict. But Omitoogun (2001) was more cautious, suggesting that the relationship between militarization and conflict was rather tenuous and indirect. Military expenditure, he argued, amasses out expenditure on social programmes and thus reduces the quality of life of citizenry. It is thus, the welfare-reducing effects of militarization that causes conflict and not proliferation of arm in the society.

Angya (2005) conflict is the number one enemy of development. In order for any society to effectively develop through harnessing its human, material and financial resources, there is need for a harmonious and peaceful co-existence. It is within this harmonious condition that development thrives best. For a number of societies, this condition attracts investment and encourages completion of projects. Conflict is not only an enemy of progress but it is also a number one cause of psychological trauma that affects children, women and men. The causalities during conflicts often range from the highly placed to the lowest in the society; it is not a respecter of persons. During conflict, community cohesion and solidarity increase and this positive effect can be directed for a more efficient attainment of group goals.

According to Kaufmann (1999), loss of livelihood have many causes in the world today, some of them are amendable policy changes, while others are not and have to be met by addressing the challenges they pose. Nigeria is particularly severely challenged by the social consequences resulting from scarcity of job opportunities in relation to the number required as a result of the unavoidable part of the population increase. Failures to meet such challenges create opportunities for extremely vile crises. The loss of livelihood resulting from environmental scarcity of arable land and water form a special case of growing importance. Although roughly half of human population now at the turn of the century is living in cities, agriculture is still by far the largest single source of livelihood and income. Loss of livelihood as a result of environmental scarcity of arable land and water result to livelihood conflicts (Ohlsson, 1999).

In the twenty-first century, violent conflicts are overwhelmingly a phenomenon of countries with low income per capita, which also suffer from food insecurity (Blattman and Miguel, 2010; Collier *et al.*, 2003; Fearon and Laitin, 2003). Rates of development matter as well as levels of development. Civil conflict, protest, rioting and social conflict are all more prevalent during periods of slow or negative economic growth (Miguel *et al.*, Sergenti, 2004; Blattman and Miguel, 2010). Economic shocks are strongly correlated with civil conflict; economic shocks redistribute incomes and political power and can create incentives for rebellion, while reducing the capacity of governments to repress or accommodate potential challengers (Blattman and Miguel, 2010).

Societies with greater economic inequality experience more civil conflict, though the type of inequality matters. Vertical inequality – inequality across households – has not been robustly linked to political conflict (Cramer, 2003; Hegre and Sambanis, 2006), though there is some evidence to suggest that vertical inequality makes civil and guerrilla wars more likely

when a country's wealth is in the form of immobile assets such as natural resources (Boix, 2008).

Individual perception on issues differ among people, in the case of communal conflicts people view it depending on how it is perceived, to many it is considered to be very disintegrative. In contrast, Ekong (1988) reported that until there is public conflict, people might not know that certain nagging issues exist. Thus conflicts lead to clear definition of issues. Once such issues are identified, it can be resolved amicably. The general objective of the study is to assess rural farmers' perception of communal conflicts, while the specific objectives are to describe the causes of communal conflict; identify the effects of communal conflicts on development; describe the effects of communal conflicts and social vices; find out effects of communal conflicts on volume of trade; ascertain the removal of community leaders and political appointees from communities involved in communal conflicts and find out land communities are fighting over it should be taken over by government.

MATERIAL AND METHODS

Benue State is one of the 36 states in Nigeria. It has one of the longest stretches of river systems in the country (Anon. 2004). Benue State lies in the North-central region of Nigeria and share boundaries with five other states: Nassarawa to the north, Taraba to the east, Cross-Rivers to the south, Enugu to the south-east and Kogi to the west. The state also shares a common boundary with the Republic of Cameroon in the south-east. It is made up of 23 Local Government Areas (LGAs), occupying a landmass of 30,955 square kilometres and has a population of 4,219,244 (NPC, 2006).

The state experiences tropical climate with two distinct seasons, the rainy season which lasts from April to October with annual rainfall of 1500-1800mm, and the dry season which begins in November and ends in March. Temperature fluctuates between 23°C and 38°C in the year. The state is made up of several ethnic groups. Most of the people are farmers, while the inhabitants of the riverine areas engage in fishing as their primary or secondary occupation (Anon. 2004).

Stratified purposive and simple random sampling technique was used. In the first stage four LGAs in the state were purposively selected out of 23 LGAs on the basis of frequent occurrence of communal conflicts. The LGAs were Gboko, Katsina-Ala, Konsisha and Ushongo. The second stage involved the selection of three villages in each of the LGAs. The third and the final stage, in each of the villages selected simple random sampling was used in selecting (20) twenty thus giving a total of 120 respondents. Structured questionnaire was administered to the respondents (people affected by communal conflicts). Data for the study were collected from primary sources only. A 5 point Likert-type scale was used in obtaining data on perception of the respondents. Data collected were analyzed using descriptive statistics and graph.

Likert-type scale ranking:

SA = Strongly Agreed = 4

A = Agreed = 3

Ni = Undecided = 0

D = Disagreed = 2

SD = Strongly Disagreed = 1

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Table 1: Distribution of Respondents According to Causes of Communal Conflicts

Causes	Frequency	Percentages
Land disputes	69	57.50
Livestock grazing	21	17.50
Political positions	18	15.00
Militant groups	12	10.00

Results in Table 1 depicted that land disputes 57.50%, livestock grazing 17.50%, political positions 15.0% militant groups 10% are major causes of communal conflicts. Majority (57.50%) of the respondents communal conflicts were caused by land disputes. Land is essential for farming, therefore the need for every farmer to acquire land which is a scarce resource necessitated conflicts. Without land there is no farming, land is necessary for farming and the bigger a piece of land, the more the quantity of crops planted and harvested which in turn boost both the social and economic status of a farmer. The finding is similar to Failola and Ihonvbere (1995); Angya (2005) who reported that the major occupation of most Nigerians is farming, hence the need to acquire and use land for farming which has been a root of several crises. Similarly Bur (2000) also reported that communal conflict has destroyed a lot, for instance, the Ipav and Ukan communal clash of 2004 in Benue State which led to the death of hundreds of people and displacement of many others was linked to land dispute.

In contrast, Kughur *et al.* (2017) reported that communal crises were caused by religion, because of the increasing employment of religion as a political weapon in the struggle for power, people preach in their places of worship drawing a distinction line between various religions. This has created a lot of disparity between Muslims and Christians. The findings corroborate Onigwu and Olawale (1999) who reported that farmers, pastoralists, fishermen, foresters, have clashed throughout Nigeria over control and use of land resources.

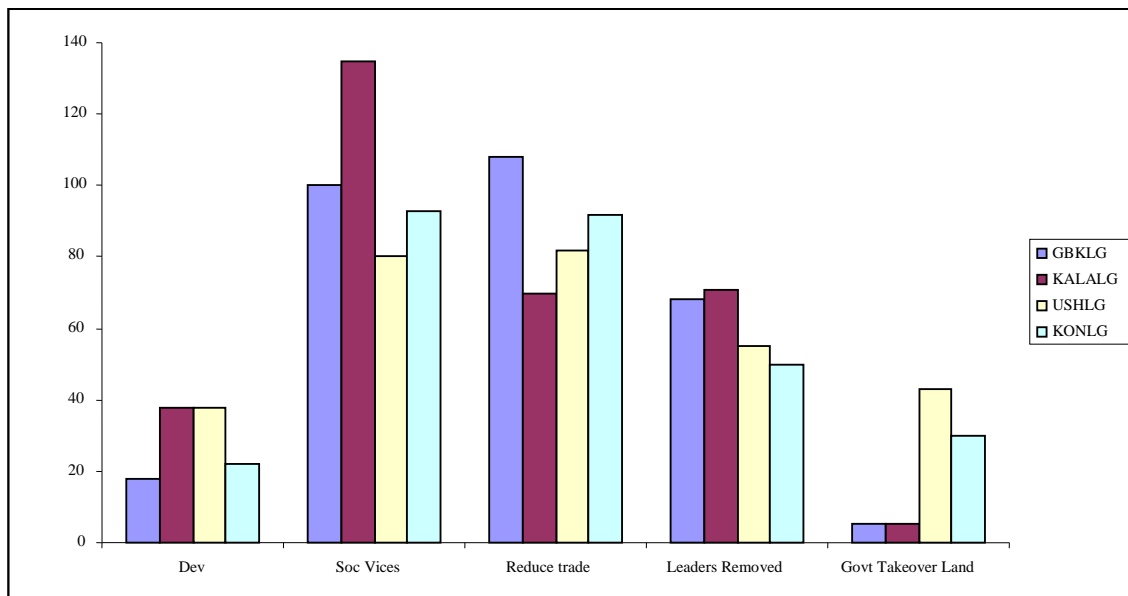


Figure 1: Distribution of Respondents According to Effects of Communal Conflicts on Development

Figure 1 showed that Katsina-Ala and Ushongo LGAs have the highest proportions of 38.0% and Gboko LGA has the lowest proportion of 17.0% indicating that communal conflicts does not encourage development. During conflict, residents of areas involved in conflict do not have time to concentrate on other issues except to run away for their life. Konshisha and Katsina-Ala LGAs share boundaries with Taraba and Cross-Rivers States, therefore during conflict; people especially young able-bodied men who are able to loot property of victims of communal conflict tend to acquire wealth within a short period of time and it is seen as a positive development to the residence of the two LGAs. On the contrary, other people involved in the looting to acquire wealth during communal conflicts may lose their lives. The issue of looting to acquire ill-wealth during communal conflict may lead to persistent conflicts especially inter-state communal conflicts.

The finding contradicts Angya (2005) who reported that communal conflict is the number one enemy of development. Alcira (2000) similarly reported that initiation, development and completion of project can only take place in an environment characterized by peace. The finding also contradicts Kughur *et al.* (2017) who reported that during communal conflict, depending on its intensity lives are lost and other property destroyed which inhibits development.

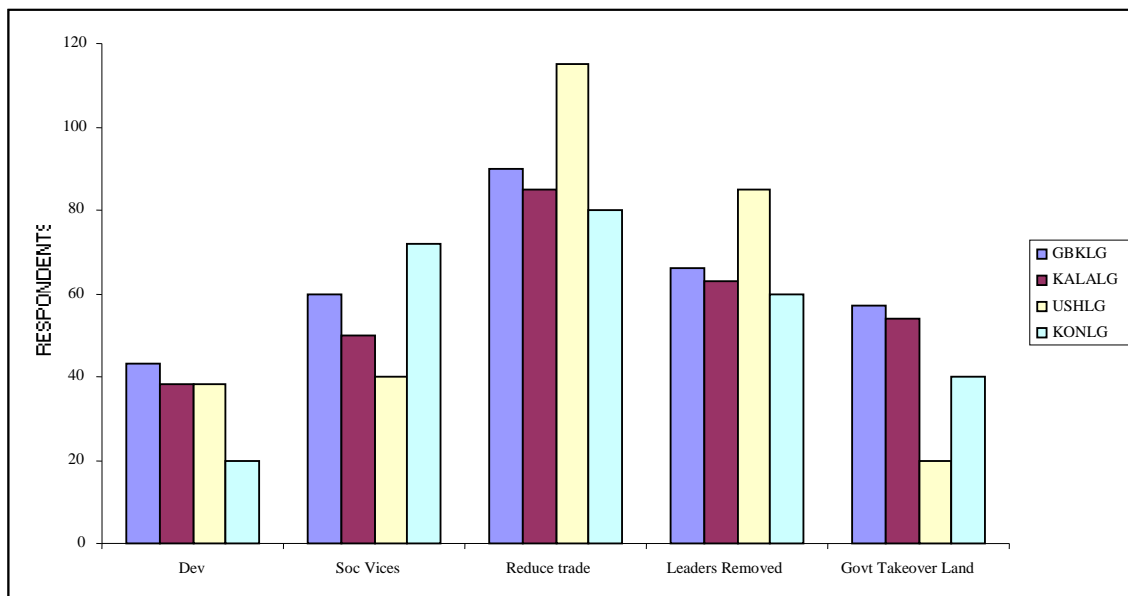


Figure 2: Distribution of Respondents based on Communal Conflicts cause Social Vices

Figure 2 showed that Konshisha LGA has the highest proportion of 65.0% and Ushongo LGA with the lowest proportion of 40.0%. A major (65.0%) proportion of the respondents in Konshisha LGA, communal conflicts cause social vices. Konshisha LGA shares boundary with Cross-Rivers and Taraba States. Due to frequent communal conflicts experienced in the area residents hardly have time to embark on meaningful development projects. During conflicts; lives, crops and other property are destroyed.

Communal conflict causes social vices; this is clearly seen in destruction of life and property by the stronger community involved in the conflict. During communal conflict, youth within the warring communities engage in looting of property especially where residences of such areas have fled to other areas to escape being lynched by the crises. Conflicts leads to destruction of existing cordial relationship that has been built over several years, and also physical structures.

In contrast, Ekong (1988) observed that until there is public conflict, people might not know that certain nagging issues exist. Thus, conflicts lead to clear definition of issues, once such issues have been identified, they can be resolved amicably.

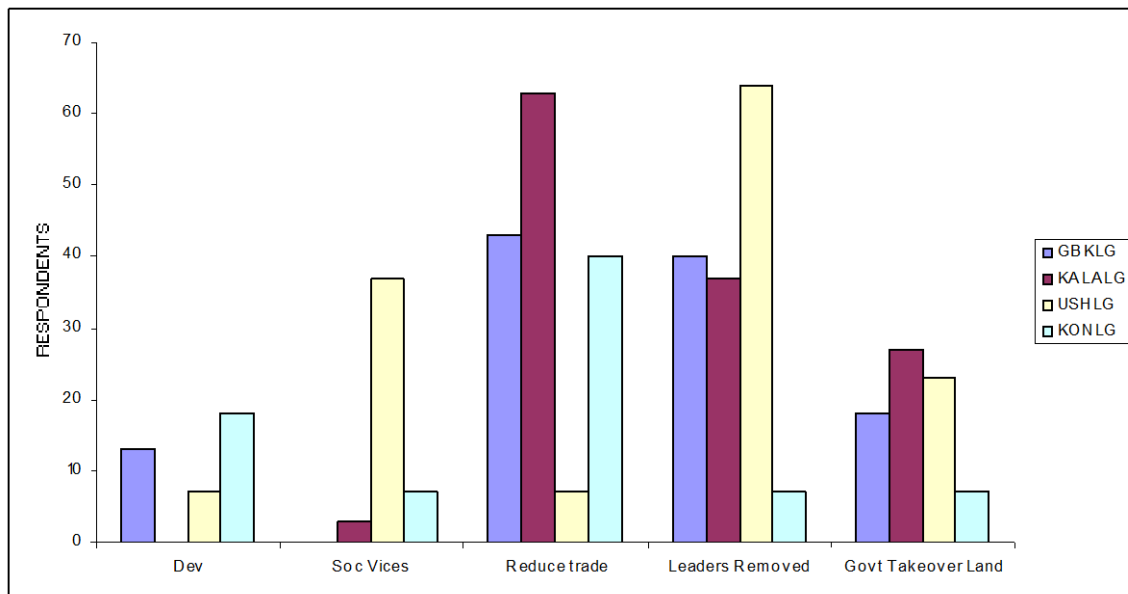


Figure 3: Distribution of Respondents by Effects of Communal Conflicts on Volume of Trade

Figure 3 indicated that Katsina-Ala and Ushongo LGAs have the highest and the lowest proportions of 62.0% and 7.0% respectively. Majority (62%) of the respondents' communal conflicts reduced volume of trade. During communal conflict, relationships that have been built for many years are destroyed and physical facilities like buildings, roads/bridges, livestock, farms and markets places among others things are destroyed. The destruction of market places/centres leads to reduction in volume of trade because agriculture is mainstay of the rural settlers the income generating activity can no longer be practiced, market places that were used for the exchange of goods and services no longer exist. Human beings who are the main participants in the exchange of goods and serves also flee the conflict areas for the fear of been killed. Conflicts lead to displacement of people who are the main stakeholders in trading.

The finding confirms Deininger (2003); Justino (2011) who reported that communal conflicts reduce market efficiency. Contraction in the supply of goods and higher transactions costs cause price increases and reductions in the size of trade. Similarly, Abadie and Gardeazabal (2003); Justino and Verwimp (2013) observed that conflicts lead to decline in aggregate agricultural production also drop in household income and consumption.

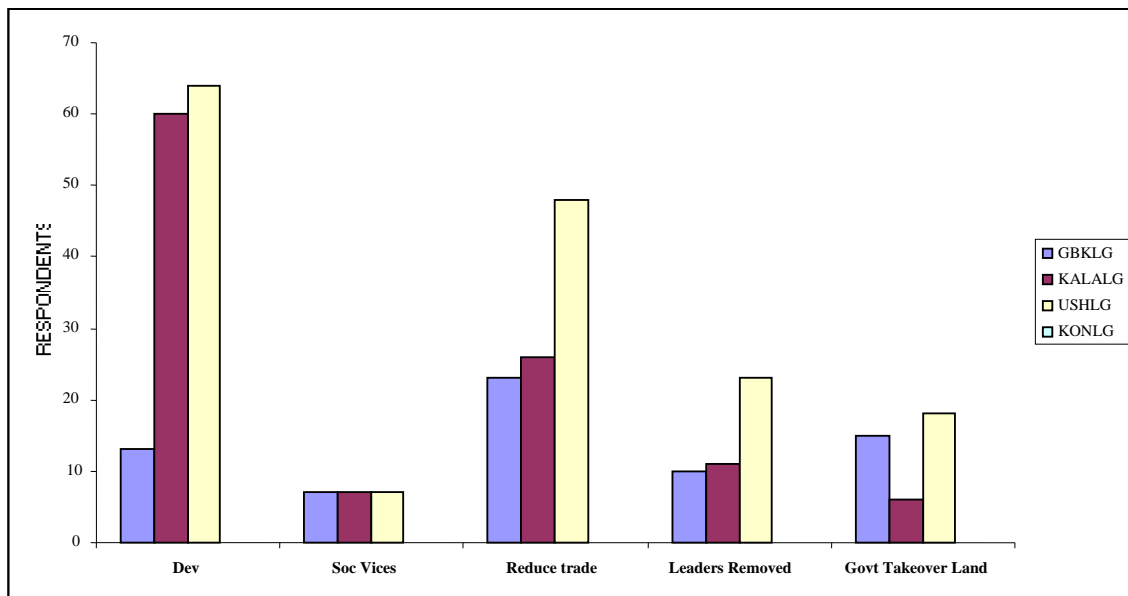


Figure 4: Distribution of Respondents by removal of Community Leaders and Political Appointees of Communities involved in Conflicts

Figure 4 depicted 22.09% of the respondents in Ushongo LGA and 7.0% in Katsina-Ala LGA. The appointment of both community leaders and political office holders is done on rotational basis within the political districts that make up a communal/political area in Benue State. The traditional rulers and political appointees would try to do everything humanly possible to ensure that there is no communal conflict within their domain during their time as traditional ruler or political appointee. On the contrary, their opponents would attempt to instigate communal conflict so that those appointed to such exalted positions are removed.

Similarly, the financial incentives attached to such positions are very attractive which make many people compete for it. On the other hand the removal of some people appointed to such positions would create more anarchy. Angya (2005) affirmed that political and traditional positions are symbol of authority. Therefore, those who have ascended to such positions always wish to remain there mostly in African and this often causes serious crises.

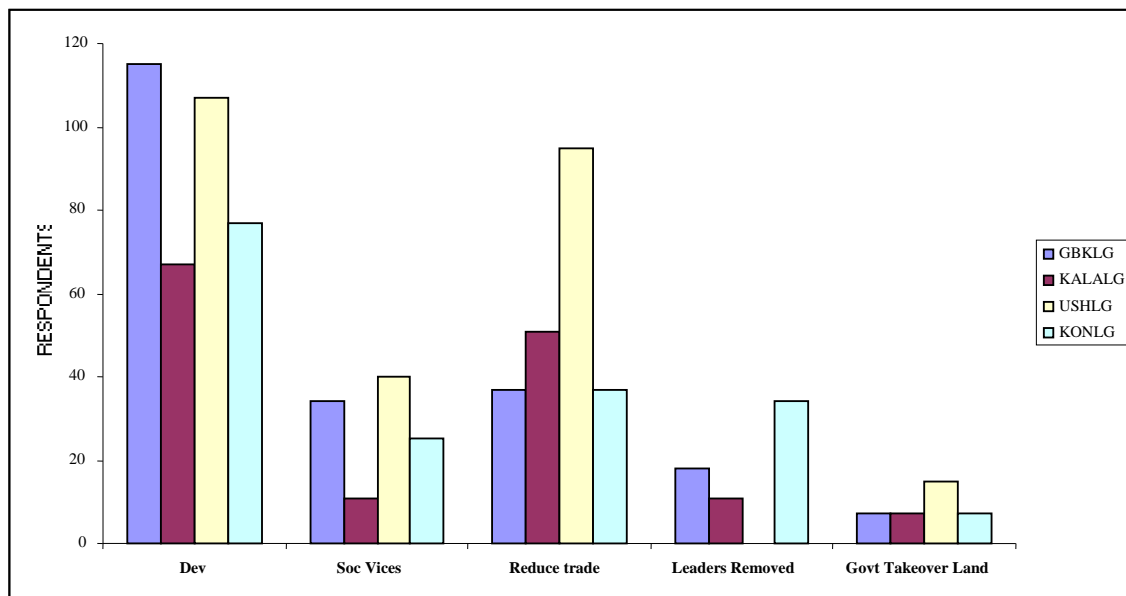


Figure 5: Distribution of Respondents based on Land Communities are Fighting over it should be taken over by Government

Figure 5 revealed that a meagre proportion of the respondents 12.0% in Ushongo LGA strongly disagreed that land communities are fighting over it should be taken over by government, while Gboko, Katsina-Ala and Konshisha LGAs have the same proportions of 8.0% each. Land is a very important resource to all human beings, apart from its use for farming it is use for construction of residential and recreation centres among others.

Land is an important resource for human beings. Apart from its use for cultivation of crops it can also be sold to get money therefore, people in the study area would not want government to take over their land irrespective of whatever situations. Majority of the people in study area are farmers who use land for planting of crops, livestock grazing among others hence, any attempt to take over their scare resource because of communal would be resisted.

Faiola and Ihonvbere (1985); Angya (2005) affirmed this, when they stated that the major occupation of Nigerian is farming and the need to acquire and use it for farming is the root cause of several crises.

CONCLUSIONS

The rate of conflicts in the world today is very high; in Nigeria, conflicts occur within and between communities, it could be farmer-farmer, politicians and farmer-herdsmen among others. The perception of people on conflicts differs depending on how it affects them. The study revealed that communal conflicts in the area were caused by land disputes. Communal conflict is an enemy of development, it caused a lot of social vices, reduce volume trade and community and political leaders of people involved conflicts should not be removed and land communities are fighting over should not be taken over by government.

REFERENCES

Abadie, A. and Gardeazabal, V. (2003). The economic costs of conflict: A case study of the Basque Country. *American Economic Review* 93(1), 113-132.

Alcira, K. (2000). Creating partnership for disaster mitigation. The Disaster Management of the World Bank. *Journal of Agricultural and Rural Development*. (1)15,16. World Bank Bonn, Germany

Angya, C.A. (2005). Theatre as a tool for peacemaking: A tool for peacemaking: Another look at inter-communal conflicts in Benue State. Taming the Tiger 1 Conference on Causes of Conflict in Benue Valley. The Centre for Peace and Development Studies, Benue State University, Makurdi. March 16,17

Anon. (2004). Anonymous Benue State Government Dairy

Ban, K. (2007). A Climate Culprit in Darfur. *Washington Post*, 16 June.

Blattman, C. and Miguel, E. (2010). Civil War. *Journal of Economic Literature* 48(1): 3–57.

Boix, C. (2008). Economic Roots of Civil Wars and Revolutions in the Contemporary World. *World Politics*, 60 (3): 390–437.

Brück, T. (2004). The welfare effects of farm household activity choices in post-war Mozambique. DIW Berlin Discussion Papers No. 413.

Bur, A. (2000). Communal Crises and its Impact on Community Development: In Bur (ed). *Communal Relation: Conflicts and Crises Management Strategies*. Aboki Publishers, Makurdi, Nigeria

Collier, P., Elliot, L., Hegre, H., Hoeffler, A., Sambanis, N. and Reynal-Querol, M. (2003). *Breaking the Conflict Trap: Civil War and Development Policy*. Oxford, Oxford University Press.

Cotula, L., Toulmin, C. and Hesse, C. (2004). Land Tenure and Administration in Africa: Lesson of Experience and Emerging Issues, IIED. Retrieved on Oct. 10 2005, from <http://www.iies.org/drylands/pubs/documents/LT-cotula.pdf>.

Cramer, C. (2003). Does Inequality Cause Conflict? *Journal of International Development*, 15(4): 397–412.

Deininger, K. (2003). Causes and consequences of civil strife: micro-level evidence from Uganda. Oxford *Economic Papers* 55(4), 579-606.

Egwu, G.S. (2001). Ethnic and Religious Violence in Nigeria Research Monograph, African Centre for Democratic Governance.

Ekong, E.E. (1988). *An Introduction to Rural Sociology*. 2nd edition. Dove Educational Publishers, Uyo, Nigeria.

Eteng, I. (1996). Understanding the Nature and Roles of Civil Society in Democracy in Nigeria, the Mass Media and Democracy. A Publication of Civil Liberties Organization. Lagos, Nigeria.

Faiola, T. and Ihonvbere, J. (1985). *The Rise and Fail of Nigeria's Second Republic, 1979-1984*. Zed Books Ltd., London.

Fearon, J.D. and Laitin, D.D. (2003). Ethnicity, Insurgency, and Civil War. *American Political Science Review*, 97(1):75–90.

Hegre, H. and Sambanis, N. (2006). Sensitivity Analysis of Empirical Results on Civil War Onset. *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, 50 (4): 508–535.

Hembe, G.N. (2000). The Political and Economic Impact of Communal Crisis in Tivland : in Bur (ed). *Communal Ration: Conflict and Crises Management Strategies*. Aboki Press Makurdi, Nigeria.

Herbst, J.T. (2002). *States and Power in Africa; Comparative Lessons in Authority and Control*. Princeton University Press

Homer-Dixon, T. (1999). *Environment, Scarcity, and Violence*. Princeton, Princeton University Press.

Justino, P. (2011). *War and poverty oxford handbook of the economics of peace and security* in M. R. Garfinkel and S. Skarpedas (ed). Oxford, Oxford University Press.

Justino, P. and Verwimp, P. (2013). Poverty dynamics, violent conflict and convergence in Rwanda. *Review of Income and Wealth* 59(1): 66–90.

Kahl, C. (2006). *States, Scarcity, and Civil Strife in the Developing World*. Princeton, Princeton University Press.

Kaufmann, K.H. (1999). The role of demographic and resource-stress in Kosovo conflicts. Accessed from <http://www.igc.org/desip/stressInKosovo.html> on July, 2007

Keen, D. (1998). *The Economic Functions of Violence in Civil Wars*. *International Institute for Strategies Studies*. London 320:301 – 320.

Kughur, P. G., Daudu, S. and Iornenege, G. M. (2017). Effects of communal crises on selected crops production among farmers in Langtang North Local Government Area of Plateau State, Nigeria.

International Journal of Education, Culture and Society, 1, 33-37.
<http://www.sciencepublishing-group.com/j/ijecs>. doi: 10.11648/j.ijecs.20170201.15

Lamachand, R. (1989). Burundi: the killing fields, revisited. *Journal of Opinion* Vol. 18 No.1.21

Lewis, A.C. (1969). *Continuities in the Study of Social Conflict*. The Press, New York, USA

Miguel, E., Satyanath, S. and Sergenti, E. (2004). Economic Shocks and Civil Conflict: An Instrumental Variables Approach. *Journal of Political Economy*, 112(4): 725–753

Mohammed, N.A.L. (2000). Civil Wars and Military Expenditure. www.worldbank.org/research/conflict/parameter/civil.htm accessed on 15/08/2005.

NPC (2006). National Population Commission. National Population Housing Census.

Ohlsson, L. (1999). Environment, Scarcity and Conflict – A study of Malthusian Concerns. Department of Peace and Development Research, University of Goteborg. <http://www.padrigu.gu.se/ohlsson/files/esl.html>. accessed on 20/05/2009.

Omitoogun, W. (2001). Military Expenditure and Conflict in Africa. *DPMN Bulletin* **Vol. viii.** (1):8-13

Onigwu, O. and Olawale, I.A. (1999). *Community Conflicts in Nigeria Management, Resolution and Transformation*. Spectrum Books Ltd, Ibadan, Nigeria

Renner, M. (2000). Working for the Environment: A Growing Source of Jobs. *World Watch* Paper No. 152. *World Watch Institute*.

Richardson, J. (2002). States and Power in Africa. *Journal of Economic Literature*. **Vol. XI**

Tseor, T. (2005). Crisis of Conflict Management in Contemporary Nigeria. A Case Study of the 2001Tiv Massacre. Taming the Tiger 1 Conference on Causes of Conflicts in Benue Valley. The Centre for Peace and Development Studies, Benue State University, Makurdi. March 16-17.

Tyubee, B.T. (2005). Influence of Extreme Climate on communal Disputes and violence in Tivland, Benue State: In the proceedings; taming the Tiger I Conference on causes of conflicts in Benue Valley. The Centre for Peace and Development Studies. Benue State University, Makurdi 16-17 March.