

# Population and Communal Land Conflicts Nexus in Rural Communities of Nigeria: The Case of Obubra Local Government Area of Cross River State, Nigeria

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Doi:10.5901/mjss.2013.v4n2p587

## Abstract

*This article examines the nexus between population and communal land conflicts in rural communities of Nigeria, using Obubra Local Government Area of Cross River State as a case of study. It examines relevant literature and using a sample of five hundred and twelve (512) respondents across all walks of life, and with the use of linear regression analysis, the finding revealed a nexus between population and communal land conflicts. It therefore recommended the encouragement of small family sizes in the rural areas and the need for poverty alleviation programmes to be focused on the rural poor as a way of diverting pressure and conflict on land for subsistence.*

**Keywords:** Population, land, conflict, communal, natural resource

## 1. Introduction

The state of the population is of concern to the Nigerian government, international organisations and non-governmental organisations. This is so because of the linkage or relationship between population and the environment (land) especially in Nigeria where agriculture was the mainstay of her economy before the discovery of oil. According to the 2008 Nigeria Demographic and Health Survey (NDHS), at the time of independence, over 75 per cent of the country's labour force was engaged in Agriculture, which also provided gainful employment and satisfactory livelihood to over 90 percent of the population. Even though the country's economic strength is still derived largely from oil and gas reserves – which make up 99 percent of export revenue, agriculture is second (32.5 percent) compared to other subsectors like wholesale and retail (13.5 percent) industry excluding petroleum (2.9 percent) and others (1.5 percent).

Despite the absence of adequate information about the percentage of Nigeria's resident in the urban areas (Nigeria Demographic and Health Survey, 2008), it is a truism that most Nigerians reside in the rural areas with agriculture as a basic source of income. Thus agriculture is usually practiced on a fixed resource (land) which is not abundantly available thereby leading to its overuse and decreasing fertility.

Many factors can be linked to the above scenario viz: the decrease in Infant Mortality Rate from 81 in 2000 to 75 in 2011 (Makama, 2011) owing to improved medical facilities like Oral Rehydration Therapy (ORT) Vaccination and Immunization Programme. Others included illiteracy, heavy dependence on agriculture, a low standard of living, a fatalist attitude and a widespread desire for heirs, the absence of economic incentives to limit the number of children etc. (Stanford, 1972)

Many research endeavours with regard to the relationship between population and resources in the African context relates to the fact that population growth is beneficial (Boserup, 1965; Clark and Hanswell, 1966). According to Boserup, population pressure on resource is necessary to stimulate agricultural innovation. Clerk and Hanswell maintain that the earth is much more productive than the pessimist will allow for. This group believes that the only way to raise agricultural output is to encourage population growth.

Another point of view among scholars in sub-Saharan Africa with respect to the relationship between population and resources are those who argue that population growth is irrelevant to development in Africa. In contrast, Enang (2006) observed that the above viewpoint is held by mostly researchers in former French colonies probably because of

the fact that almost the entire African low fertility belt falls within the French areas and they seem to have small population sizes when compared with English-speaking ones.

The idea is not new that behavior is influenced by the interplay between aspirations and the resources people have to satisfy their aspirations (Eastertin, 1976) if the resources (land) were unlimited, there would be a chance to avoid communal land conflicts. The very phenomenon of population on our finite planet, however, implies competition, which only creates circumstances conducive to conflict between individuals and groups.

The study attempts to examine how population can trigger communal land conflicts resulting from the unavailability of land to meet upwith its challenges.

**Hypothesis:** There is no significant relationship between population and communal land conflicts in rural communities

## 2. Review of the literature

Although interest in the consequences of population on natural resources depletion (land) are of longstanding, widespread and growing public awareness and concern about the linkage between population and communal land conflicts are relatively recent, today, concern about the environment has risen to the top of international agenda because of the conflicts it has generated across the globe.

## 3. Population and the evolution of society

As the number of people competing for local resources increases, techniques for augmenting those resources also increases, but in addition, rules scheduling and restricting access to those resources become more detailed, more formal, more restrictive, and more powerful. As the number of "others" increases, formal categories emerge to reduce information load by simplifying anticipation of their behavior, and rules of etiquette as well as barriers of clothing and architecture emerge to limit the range and extent of behavioural interactions. As the increasing number of people threatens to impede individuals in pursuit of their goals, and as the ability to depart is lost, rules increasingly define private spaces for personal action and limit the range of potential intrusion by others.

Cohen (1977) asserts that hunter-gatherers adopted agriculture in various parts of the world, beginning about 10,000 years ago as a response to the pressure of population on resources. This suggests that farming was adopted independently in a number of regions of the world in a context of growing population, and that it occurred at the time when space available to each group was increasingly limited by the presence of others, so that geographical expansion was ceasing to be possible as a means of resolving further population growth. The emergence of early states in the archeological record is commonly, if not always directly preceded by evidence of population growth. Recognizing this fact, scholars have put forward a number of theories of state formation that emphasize the role of population growth in their emergence (Boserup, 1965; Fried, 1967). However, these theories largely ignore several of the consequences of crowding – lack of control and privacy, information load and congestion – and focuses heavily on the state as an apparatus developed to compete for, or organize access to scarce resources or to assure control over resources that could not otherwise provide reliably for growing numbers of people.

Perhaps the most influential and ambitious modern proponent of the role of population growth and resulting conflict in stimulating the development of early states was Robert Carneiro (1970). He argued that the first states were stimulated by the competition, conflict, and conquest of dense populations in particularly confined or "circumscribed" area where spatial adjustments to growth were particularly limited.

From the foregoing, it seems that modern industrial societies generate their own peculiar problems of crowding. One major factor distinguishing industrial from pre-industrial society is the rate of change. It has been argued, for example, that because modern society changes so fast, individuals can no longer prepare single-mindedly for particular familial specialisations as they could in many pre-industrial societies (Gellner, 1978). As a result, although most individuals ultimately specialize and, in fact, engage in narrow and more finely coordinated specialties than in pre-industrial societies, they must first be generally prepared by the formal educational institution of their societies. The effect is that the social and cultural distance between specialists is minimized. Society is homogenised, reducing in part the information load as people become similar. Yet at the same time congestion and competition for scarce social and natural resources are exacerbated. Rapid change also contributes to a sense of loss of control. In the end, the potential for social pathology and interpersonal conflict is high, and perhaps we are witnessing more than just the potential for such conflict in our societies.

#### 4. Population and Environment (land)

Boserup (1981) asserts that population might in part have destroyed more land than it improves it. Brown (1981) also accepts that with increase in population, humanity would be faced with a worldwide shortage of crop-land, acute land, hunger in many countries and escalating prices for farmlands almost everywhere. Boserup (1965) also noted that as population grows in relation to land, there is a tendency to use land more intensively, by reducing fallow time and increasing labour per units of land. As rapid population growth under the norms of partible inheritance of land that is typical of rural communities in particular and Africa in general, it often leads to conflict as a result of land shortage created by population pressure (Lele and Stone, 1990). In a similar vein, Clausen (1984) in presenting the World Bank President's view in 1984 in his address to the National Leaders affirms that population threatens what is already a precarious balance between natural resources and people and that where population can contribute to overuse of limited natural resources, such as land, mortgaging the welfare of future generations and thus creating conflict situations. When undue stress is placed on traditional agricultural system and the environment is damaged, the economic wellbeing of the poor is particularly threatened, thus forcing people to compete for land.

In sum, it seems clear that, as human population increases, human societies have adjusted to the potential for adverse crowding effects in a number of groups as it has been shown that as societies become more complex, the aggregate needs of individuals came increasingly to be balanced against (possibly conflicting) needs of others.

#### 5. Purpose and Objectives of the Study

The main objective of the study is to investigate the nexus between population and communal land conflicts in rural communities of Nigeria using Obubra Local Government as a case study. Specifically, the study found out;

1. How population determines communal land conflicts in Obubra Local Government Area
2. To determine the relationship between population growth and communal conflicts.

#### 6. Methodology

In order to achieve the specific objectives, questionnaires were designed and administered on five hundred and fifty three (553) respondents which were drawn from twelve (12) communities, three (3) from each of four clans of Obubra Local Government Area. Only five hundred and twelve (512) questionnaires were retrieved and used for the research.

##### 6.1 Data Analysis

Data, having been collected through the use of the questionnaire, were analysed using tabulated frequency count and percentage as well as correlation and linear regression analysis to determine the relationship (if any) between population and community land conflict in rural communities of Obubra.

**Table 1:** Distribution of respondents by experience of communal conflicts in their clans

Response	CLAN									
	ADUN		OKUM		OFUMBONGHA		OSOPONG		TOTAL	
	Freq.	(%)	Freq.	(%)	Freq.	(%)	Freq.	(%)	Freq.	(%)
Yes	161	31.45%	126	24.61%	42	8.20%	121	23.63%	450	87.89%
No	10	1.95%	21	4.10%	13	2.54%	18	3.52%	62	12.11%
<b>Total</b>	<b>171</b>	<b>33.40%</b>	<b>147</b>	<b>28.71%</b>	<b>55</b>	<b>10.74%</b>	<b>139</b>	<b>27.51%</b>	<b>512</b>	<b>100.00%</b>

Table 1 contains analysed data on respondents' experience of communal conflicts. While four hundred and fifty (450) (87.89%) of the respondents accepted to have experienced communal conflicts resulting from land, only sixty-two (62) respondents, representing 12.11% claimed not to have experienced any. This affirms that the issue of population growth vis-à-vis land availability and conflict is a reality in most communities and clans.

**Table 2:** Distribution of respondents by cause of communal land conflicts

Response	CLAN									
	ADUN		OKUM		OFUMBON-GHA		OSOPONG		TOTAL	
	Freq	(%)	Freq	(%)	Freq	(%)	Freq	(%)	Freq	(%)
Population	104	23.11	81	18.00	3	0.67	78	17.33	266	59.11
Farmland fertility	17	3.78	14	3.11	16	3.56	15	3.33	62	13.78
Farmsize allotment	15	3.33	9	2.00	2	0.44	5	1.11	31	6.89
Tenancy right abuse	16	3.56	8	1.78	1	0.22	6	1.33	31	6.89
Cash crops planting	9	2.00	14	3.11	20	4.44	17	3.78	60	13.33
<b>Total</b>	161	35.78%	126	28.00%	42	9.33%	121	26.89%	450	100.00%

The result of the analysis on the above table revealed that majority of the respondents attribute conflict to the problem of population (59.11%) while others, 13.78% blame it on the struggle to retain fertile pieces of land to the detriment of others as it guarantees bumper harvest.

### 6.2 Test of Hypothesis

This section presents the test of the hypothesis formulated to guide this study. The test was conducted with linear regression analysis which indicates whether there is a relationship between population and communal conflicts.

H<sub>0</sub>: There is no significant relationship between population and communal land conflicts in rural communities.

H<sub>1</sub>: There is a significant relationship between population and communal land conflict in rural communities.

Table 3 (see appendix A) which is the output table shows that at the alpha level of 5 percent of n-2 (2) degree of freedom, the critical value of t is less than the calculated value of t. Therefore H<sub>0</sub> is rejected and H<sub>1</sub> accepted. The conclusion is that the data provides strong evidence to accept the alternate hypothesis that communal land conflicts has a significant relationship with population.

### 7. Conclusion

The findings confirmed that population is the main determinant of communal land conflicts in Obubra Local Government Area. Population is viewed negatively because of its implications for food shortages, economic strains as well as social upheavals. Majority of the respondents (87.89%) admitted to have experienced communal land conflicts. This results is supported by Boseurp (1981) assertion that population might have in part destroyed more land than it improves. Hanson (1939) writing on the late eighteenth century affirmed that technological progress depended upon a minimum population size and capital saving, excess population would eventually result in sever pressure on the environment and possibly generate conflict.

### 8. Recommendations

From the above findings and conclusions reached in this study, the following recommendations are made:

- i. There is the urgent need to check population growth especially in the rural areas through the encouragement of small size families. Such actions should be matched with socio-economic improvement as well as increase effort in family planning.
- ii. Poverty reduction programmes should be focused on the bottom 30 percent of rural poor to reduce the competition for land as such policies can help diversify their source(s) of daily income.
- iii. There is also the need to incorporate population programmes in resource development and conservation.
- iv. Traditional system(s) of birth control should be incorporated into population education programmes and policies.

## 9. Suggestions for Further Studies

This study used questionnaire to collect primary data which formed the bases of the findings, conclusion and recommendations. A further study can be conducted using a supplementary data collection method like the indepth interview. The study itself can still be replicated.

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## APPENDIX A

### DATA ANALYSIS FOR TEST OF HYPOTHESIS

#### HYPOTHESIS I:

**Table 3:** Population (X) and communal land conflicts (Y)

Y	X	Y <sup>2</sup>	X <sup>2</sup>	XY
37	1132	1369	1281424	41884
28	962	784	925444	21936
13	666	169	443556	8658
25	904	625	817216	22600
<b>103</b> <b>ΣY</b>	<b>3664</b> <b>ΣX</b>	<b>2947</b> <b>ΣY<sup>2</sup></b>	<b>3467640</b> <b>ΣX<sup>2</sup></b>	<b>100078</b> <b>ΣXY</b>

$$\text{Mean Y} = 103/4 = 25.75$$

$$\text{Mean X} = 3664/4 = 916$$

$S_{XX}$

$$r = \sqrt{S_{XX} S_{YY}}$$

$$Y = a + b(x)$$

Where  $a = Y - b(\text{mean } x)$

$$S_{XY} = \Sigma XY = 1/n(\Sigma X \Sigma Y) = 100078 - \frac{1}{4}(103 \cdot 3664) = 5370$$

$$S_{XX} = \Sigma Y^2 - \frac{1}{4}(\Sigma X)^2 = 3467640 - \frac{1}{4}(3664)^2 = 111416$$

$$S_{YY} = \Sigma Y^2 - \frac{1}{4}(\Sigma Y)^2 = 2947 - \frac{1}{4}(103)^2 = 294.75$$

$$b = \frac{5370}{111416} = 0.051$$

$$111416$$

$$a = 25.75 - 0.051(916) = -21 \text{ (approx.)}$$

Thus the predictive equation for the relation between population and communal conflicts is  $y = -21 + 0.051(x)$

$$r = \frac{5730}{\sqrt{111416 \cdot 294.75}} = 0.9999$$

$$r^2 = (0.999)^2 = 0.9998$$

Estimated Standard Error of Gradient –  $\text{ese}(b) = \sqrt{\frac{S^2_0}{S_{xx}}}$   
 Where  $S^2_0 = 1/n^2[S_{yy} - (S^2_{xy}/S_{xx})] = 1/4^2 [294.75 - (5730)^2/111416]$

$$\text{ese}(b) = \sqrt{\frac{0.0313}{111416}} = 0.00053$$

$$T\text{-test} = \frac{t}{\text{ese}(b)} = \frac{b - \beta}{0.00053} = \frac{0.051 - 0}{0.00053} = 96.23$$

Calculation of line of best fit:

$$y = a + b(X_H) = -21 + 0.051(1132) = 37 \text{ (approx.)}$$

$$y = a + b(X_M) = -21 + 0.051(916) = 26 \text{ (approx.)}$$

$$y = a + b(X_L) = -21 + 0.051(666) = 13 \text{ (approx.)}$$

Where  $X_H$ ,  $X_M$  and  $X_L$  are the highest, mean and lowest values of population (X) respectively.

The line of best fit is shown graphically as:

