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Agricultural Production Amid Conflict: Implications for Africa's Regional Development

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Abstract

Agriculture is fundamental for the thriving and development of all societies. This is more the case in Africa where countless studies have demonstrated that agriculture plays major roles in the well-being of the predominantly agrarian African communities. Premised on the ideological posture that all human activities occur in situated social conditions, this study examines how conflict intersects with and impacts the agriculture economy of African communities and ultimately impedes African development. Using a Nigerian agrarian community as its site, the study appealed to political economy in carrying out this experiment. We employed interviews, direct and participant observation, photography, video and audio recordings, and strove to hew meaning from field data by using tables, graphs, descriptive analysis, and comparison with related studies. The study found that conflict imposes huge anti-development costs on Africa including high death tolls, reduced agricultural productivity, outmigration, displacement of populations, exposure to diseases, endangerment of women's and girls' lives, collapse of social order, discouragement of investors, looting, suspension of education, unemployment, food insecurity, high price of foodstuffs, and lack of effective social institutions for conflict resolution, among others. Limited for not using as many desired participants and leaving out some details, improvement is targeted as the study continues.

Keywords: Africa, development, agriculture, conflict, poverty

1. Introduction

This chapter makes just one case running on the wheels of one argument, namely, that agriculture is the pillar of life for African communities. The fact of the irreplaceable place of agriculture in Africans' lives and African development makes it imperative to strive for a better understanding of all the conditions and factors that define and shape its functioning. This ideological posture in approaching this crucially important subject takes its rise from the fact that, agriculture, like all other human activities, functions in situated social conditions which, individually yet collectively, affect it in many and varied ways. Our take is that it is by subjecting this complex, urgently important subject to extensive ethnographic study that we can come as close as possible to the core of the matter. As such, what is undertaken here is an anthropological inquiry aimed at interrogating how conflict, in all its forms and manifestations, intersects with and impacts agricultural production in Africa and, above all, how it impedes African development. Honing in on Nigeria

as our case study site, the study aims at the generation of some body of scientific, evidence-based knowledge that contributes to the ongoing discourse on Africa's contemporary development. It is of importance to underscore at this point that this exercise is done not just for the purpose of understanding how conflict impacts agricultural production in general but specifically how this agriculture-conflict interface plays out in the region's socioeconomic and overall development.

In its expanded form, the argument sustaining this inquiry is anchored on the assumption that it can never become drab and trite and so cannot be overemphasized that agriculture is the life-wire of African communities. As such, this study is a proposal to the effect that every necessary step should and must be taken toward a much better understanding of how it functions in the context of the multistranded constellation of social, political, economic, cultural, institutional, natural, and/or ecological conditions within which its activities are carried out. The pre- and post-independence economic history of Africa sides with, and evidently supports, the hypothetical assumption that African communities are predominantly agrarian, and that agriculture is something Africans co-evolved with for many millennia. Many scientific studies serve as ready-at-hand corroborating back-ups to support this public knowledge. Following Charles Darwin's firm belief that very important technological inventions and innovations rooted in the earliest histories of mankind owe their origins to Africa, archaeological historians have developed their theories around which they build the argument that modern day agriculture has its roots in Africa where it was originally invented. The foregoing is without prejudice to the fact that "At one time all the human beings in the world were hunters, gatherers and fishers, especially they were collectors of food not producers" [1]. Furthermore, "Until 10,000 years ago people everywhere were foragers" [2]. With the phase of nomadism gradually over in the evolution of Africa giving way to the development of settled communities, earliest Africans adapted to their environment to as far as developing the art of the domestication of some selected plants and animals, that is, cultivation and pastoralism. "This involved manipulating the reproduction of selected animals and plants, so that they were more suited to human requirements" [1]. Strikingly important about this is that it has also been argued that modern day African language has its foundations in these small and settled communities established thousands of years previously. In like manner, "The beginning of modern day history can be partly marked through the introduction and development of agricultural systems" [3].

The essence of factoring in these few points bordering on the archaeology of agriculture in Africa is to further underscore the importance of the region's agriculture economy as not only a means of survival in Africa but also as that which has continually played irreplaceable role in the life and development trajectory of Africa and its peoples on the one hand, and so constitutes a sector of life that must be protected from all incursions that are inhibitive of its progress and of African development, on the other. Even the buzzing nomenclatural wave of (African) *civilization* and all the contentious discourse around it is without merit outside the historical context of agriculture's role in that gradual development called civilization. This fact is especially with particular reference to the invention, improvement, and application of tools with which earliest Africans wrestled with and subdued their natural environment in the form of the domestication of certain plants and animals in their settled communities. This addition aims to make the case, again, that any and everything that stands in the way of agriculture and the role it plays in contemporary African development deserves close study attention as is intended and undertaken here.

Poised to make its case, this study appeals to available scientific data on the contribution of agriculture to the well-being of African nation-states soon after

their independence in the late 1950s and early 1960s. We recall that, “In Africa 50 to 80 percent of the population lives in rural areas, and this rural population is predominantly peasant farmers. Agriculture accounts for about 40 percent of gross domestic product, 30 percent of exports, and 75 percent of employment” [4]. In addition to agriculture being the key provider of 90% of domestic food supply, which is thanks to the productive industry of smallholder rural farmers [5], other studies have documented that agriculture employs about 60% (or more) of the workforce [6, 7]. For the same reason of the primacy of place agriculture occupies in the life of African communities, it has been argued over time that any successful development plan in and for the region must target raising agricultural productivity in rural areas [8] which is considered a Green Revolution to raise food output [9]. For, in addition to minimizing hunger, poverty, and avoidable costly pecuniary value which the region wastes on food importation, we argue that emphasis on agriculture within and among African communities creates many jobs as it also discourages and reduces outmigration especially among young adults.

Some other compelling reasons explain the urgency of this kind of field study; they also shed light on the relevance and merit of this undertaking. First among them, we observe that Africa is a region very easily and quickly associated with poverty and it correlates; this stands in sharp contrast to the fact that agriculture not only portends to reducing poverty and hunger but also has the ability to redirect and sustain Africa's development trajectory in different ways. In other words, we argue that it is troubling that Africa is well-disposed to attaining enviable heights in development but is at the same time associated with the ravages of hunger, poverty, and food insecurity among other social plagues as though these were the region's exclusive earmarks. This is more so the case when discussions focus on the sub-Saharan African (SSA) sub-continent characteristically noted for population increase outpacing food production per capita, which often leads to the region's high rate of food importation [10]. There are some available scientific studies that are used to support the assertions about Africa's telling poverty indicators. Among some of such instances, it has been argued that post-independence African nation-states have performed far below their development potential, which is part of the reason Africa is easily described as one of the poorest parts of the world. For, as recent as 2016, the continent was still identified as taking the largest pie in hunger and poverty experiences:

There are large differences among continents in the prevalence of severe food insecurity. Approximately 27.4% of the population in Africa was classified as severely food insecure in 2016, which is almost four times as high as any other region.

Alarmingly, food insecurity is on the rise, specifically in sub-Saharan Africa. From 2014 to 2016, food insecurity increased by about 3% [11, 12].

The above underscores the daunting challenges before the region in light of attaining the Sustainable Development Goals 2 (SDGs) created in 2016 by the United Nations. It is evidently clear that the situation, rather than improving, has been getting worse over the years. This is starkly real from previous studies on the same global poverty measures in which Africa was described as the “the poorest part of the world” [13], indeed, the “ultra poor of the world” [14]. Some other social taxonomies such as less developed, underdeveloped, backward continent, and Third World are also used to refer to Africa's poverty indicators.

The foregoing points act as provocations to raise the question as to how agriculture could have lost its leading role in standing up to the assaults associated with poverty and underdevelopment in Africa. For, it is noteworthy that in the immediate post-colonial moments of African history, the region registered very impressive

economic growth performance to which agriculture was a major contributor to the GDP for the period 1965–1987. This historical fact is in spite of the intervening episodes of fall in output mainly due to drought especially in the Sahel countries of SSA [15] followed by hikes in oil prices and an increasingly adverse effect of international debt during the decade under reference [15]. However, in spite of the aforementioned drop, the contribution of the agriculture sector to the GDP of parts of the region ticked up a little again to 1.3% per annum for the period of 1980–1987, and rose even higher at the end of the decade resulting in an incremental growth rate of 2.1% between 1987 and 1990. Lamentably, these initial trends in growth thanks to the contribution of the region's agriculture sector soon tilted and faded away for various policy and other reasons.

We argue that among those other reasons, wars and incessant conflicts rampant across Africa often account more than any other for the consistent decline in the contribution of the region's agriculture economy to its overall economic development. While many contemporary social inquirers simply lament the general socioeconomic backwardness of Africa [16], this study rather stands with poised optimism and hope for improvement anchored on investing more in agriculture but only by simultaneously and consistently pushing back on everything associated with conflict as an arch enemy of the former. Thus, whereas there is overwhelming evidence in recent decades that Africa has not enjoyed economic and social progress like other parts of the world are doing, we argue that "Improvements within the sector can unlock the door to social and economic improvement. Indeed, agriculture must be the engine for the economic and social progress" [14] of the African region. We opine that all the efforts African governments and international bodies mount in recent times aimed at increasing agricultural productivity and general development of the region will not fructify in any meaningful degree if they fail to simultaneously craft socioculturally and politically appropriate, sustainable, and responsive conflict management toolkit.

The hallmark of our argument for this study runs thus: whatever stands in the way or swims against the current of agriculture in Africa is the arch enemy of African development. We contend that typical of such social snag in the way of agriculture and of African development is the social phenomenon of incessant intra- and inter-ethnic conflict. Unfortunately, rather than being scanty across the face of the continent, there are many such waves blowing across the region and eroding the development potential of African communities. More telling is the fact that often such conflicts that impede the progress of African communities and sometimes decimate them hide and operate in the hardly noticeable hinterland niches characteristically known for agricultural activities. This lends even greater and more compelling cogency as to why conflict in Africa must be given closer and sustained attention first, by examining its causes and detailed human and socio-economic costs and, secondly by installing institutional mechanics toward abating it where and when it cannot be completely eradicated. These constitute the core aims of this study, which at the same time stand as its merits, contributions, and relevance.

2. Study methodology

Since it is the case that the type of social phenomenon to be studied determines the study methodology applied, we adopted the analytic tool of political economy as our ideological inspiration and guide for the collection and interpretation of field data in this study. This choice is informed by the conviction that political economy opens a wide leeway for the exploration of factors impacting agricultural

development in rural parts of Nigeria as with other parts of Africa. Central to this leaning to the political economy ideological framework is the insight that taking up a definitional stance should start with social practices, not fully formed concepts since meaning of ideas is forged in concrete social practices [17]. If the concept of political economy, among other things "... encompasses studies of production, circulation, accumulation and consumption of goods, services and value" [18], then, the social practices involved in these activities and other related factors intertwined with them, in space and time, need to be explored for much better understanding. This is why we chose to approach this study from the perspective of socially grounded etymology [17]. As such, certain specific Nigerian agrarian milieus that had experienced and or are currently going through the horrors and hazards of conflict were chosen for this project. The study pitched its main tent of data collection in Ukum Local Government Area (LGA) of Benue State in Central Nigeria to track how conflict impacts agricultural production but above all with the view to examine how this agriculture-conflict strange marriage in turn affects the community's development experience. We compared our field data from this principal study site with what obtains in other rural farming parts of Nigeria and, by extension, in other parts of Africa and by appealing to extant literature on the subject. For the scientific exercise of data collection and analysis, the study applied such techniques as individual and group interviews, direct and participant observation, photography, descriptive vignettes, video and audio recordings. To hew meaning from field data, the study used tables, charts, graphs, descriptive analysis, and comparison with extant literature on related studies. With this study toolkit answers were sought to such questions as: What is the meaning of conflict in the Nigerian and African social context? What is the relationship between agricultural production and conflict? In what ways does conflict impact agricultural production in Nigeria? What specific consequences does conflict have on community and general development in Nigeria? What are the causes of conflict especially in agrarian rural Nigeria? Who are the actors of intra- and inter-ethnic conflicts in Nigeria? What institutional instruments of conflict control and management are there in place in Nigeria? If there are such tools, how effective are they? These and related curiosities informed the questions with which our study participants were engaged in the process even as this ethnographic inquiry stretches on into the future for more extensive exploration.

3. Situating the study

To get to the core of the subject of this study—on how conflict impacts the agriculture economy and general development of Nigeria, and ultimately of Africa—the ethnography crafted to experiment the ideological framework engineering it was carried out using the earlier stated methodological tools and experimented in Ukum community of Benue State, Nigeria. **Figures 1** and **2** show the country and main site of the study respectively. Ukum is one of the 23 LGAs of Benue State in Central Nigeria. By virtue of its geographical location, it shares borders with Taraba and Nassarawa States in Northern Nigeria as is shown in **Figure 1**. Like other parts of Benue and sometimes much more, Ukum is heavily engaged in commercial agricultural production and is a major source of supply of both tuber crops, citrus, and a wide range of vegetables to other parts of Nigeria. Ukum is also replete with many markets that operate all week with Zaki-Biam being the largest.

Besides, and in addition to the foregoing, the Ukum community of Benue State was selected for this study for two major reasons: first, it purely represents the main features and heavily agrarian character of almost all the rural communities of Nigeria and Africa where incessant conflict looms amid the stages of agricultural

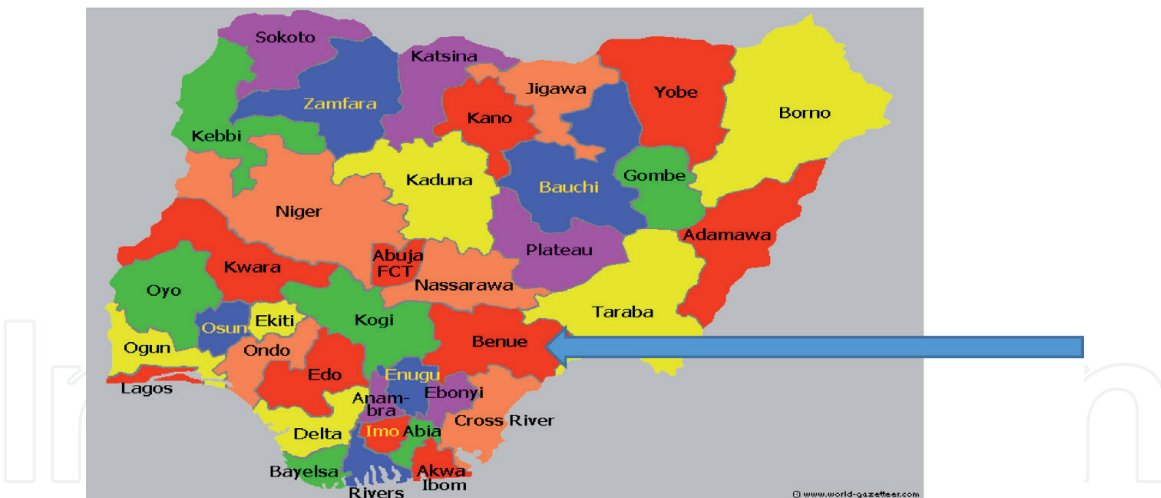


Figure 1.
Map of Nigeria with the 36 states of the country and showing the location of the study site (the map of Nigeria above was directly adapted from the Web).

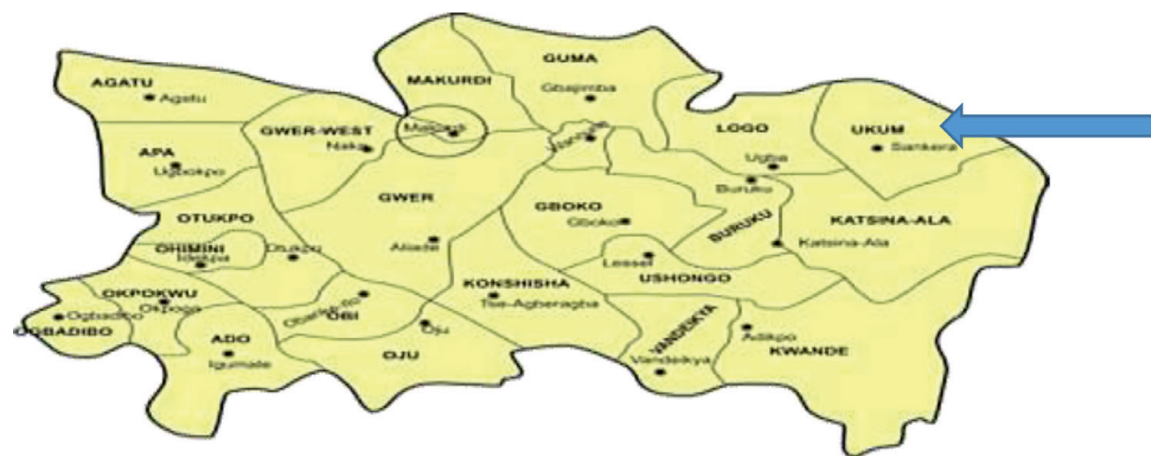


Figure 2.
Map of Benue state showing UKUM local government area (LGA) as the study site (the map of Ukum LGA above was directly adapted from the Web).

production. On the other hand, Ukum of the Tiv world characteristically typifies the tens of hinterland populations where conflicts are incubated and, in fact, frequently occur in Nigeria. Writing about the mainstream economic occupation of the people, an official statement of Ukum LGA states: “In fact, the Local Government is the pivot [...] of the Food Basket of the Nation¹ for which Benue State is known” [19]. Writing more inclusively about the whole state in relation to the vast human and natural dispositions that conduce to the people’s extensive, productive engagement in agriculture, our source continues:

Benue State is richly endowed with natural resources of different types. The State has vast and fertile land which is worked by an enterprising rural population. Agriculture forms the back-bone of the Benue Benue State economy, engaging more than 70 per cent of the working population. Bush fallowing using simple tools is the dominant system though mechanization and plantation agriculture/agroforestry

¹ See Appendix A as **Figure A1** for “Food Basket of the Nation” symbol and pride of Benue State, Nigeria. We have and reserve our critical caveat over this symbol due to the political asymmetry and above all the core-periphery bipolarity we observed as this symbol represent though hardly spoken of by the indigenes.

are gradually creeping in [...] Though the farms are generally small and fragmented, ranging from less than one hectare to more than six hectares, total output is generally impressive [19].

It is on the same basis of the notorious agrarian industry of the Tiv that some pioneering and outstanding anthropologist of the Tiv world once wrote: “The Tiv are farmers. They produce and trade what they eat and wear...” [20]². Properly described, the ordinary and occupational life of the Ukums is the art of the production and marketing of agricultural goods, and vice versa. It is also the case, as we shall see later, that Ukum lives its agrarian life sometimes amid tremulous trepidations over possible conflict/war that may ensue usually from their Jukun neighbors. As earlier stated, it is on the basis of this dual features—of deeply agrarian character and of their experience of conflict—that the place was selected as the main and typical site for this study.

4. Study findings: data representation and analysis

This section is comprises the representation and analysis of data collected from the field of study and combines findings from the different study techniques applied in the process. First, we represent field data collected from farmers in Ukum, as are displayed in the accompanying tables and charts. This is followed by the representation and analysis of data from questionnaire responses, non-scalable interview responses from Ukum-based investors; and finally, we turn to and focus on data from direct and participant observation.

4.1 Findings from questionnaires and interviews with farmers

Informed by preliminary interactions with farmers from around the Zaki-Biam of Ukum main study site, the questions in **Table 1** were formulated and used to

A/1: Do conflicts bring about significant out-migration in your community?
B/2: Do conflicts bring about high death toll in your community?
C/3: Do farmers abandon their farms when conflict looms or occurs?
D/4: Do conflicts make for reduction in areas of farmland covered?
E/5: Do conflicts go with corresponding fall in output of food crops?
F/6: As a farmer, does conflict discourage you from farming activities?
G/7: Do conflicts enhance the spread of infectious diseases in your community?
H/8: Do conflicts bring about increase in the price of food crops in your area?
I/9: Do conflicts discourage prospective domestic and foreign agro-investors?
J/10: Is there any direct connection between conflict and rate of poverty in your community?

Table 1.
Tracking the impact of conflict on agriculture and development in Ukum, Nigeria.

² It is of great importance to note here that the Ukum (and Tivland) of Bohannan’s ethnographic experience and time has been very irreversibly transformed from subsistence to cash economy with so many causal linkages and implications this social transformation holds out for this population as our study observed it.

Questions	Yes	No	Declined
A/1	20	0	0
B/2	19	0	1
C/3	18	2	0
D/4	18	1	1
E/5	20	0	0
F/6	18	2	0
G/7	15	2	3
H/8	20	0	0
I/9	17	1	2
J/10	20	0	0

Table 2.
Impact of conflict on agriculture and development in Ukum, Nigeria.

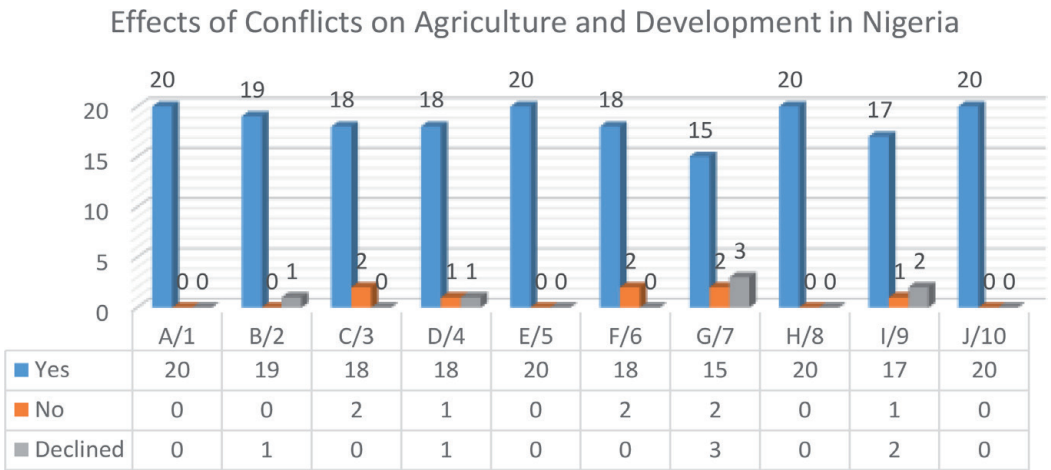


Figure 3.
Impact of conflict on Ukum-Nigerian farmers.

collect data working with randomly selected 20 participants who were also engaged in follow-up one-on-one interviews. The data thus gathered from respondents are laid out in **Table 2** and **Figure 3**.

First, study data make it overwhelmingly clear that there is a direct correlation between the occurrence of conflict and outmigration among Ukum, Nigerian rural farmers; this is the stance of all respondents. With 19 out of 20 farmer-interviewees admitting that conflicts bring about high date tolls upon their communities, it is immediately and directly understandable why migration especially among young adults is usually very high in areas hard hit by conflict. Follow-up accounts of some informants indicate that some of these conflicts are socially engineered by their chiefs and elite whose prebendalist³ agenda is often hidden under the guise

³ *Prebendalism* refers to political systems where elected officials and government workers feel they have a right to a share of government revenues, and use them to benefit their supporters, co-religionists and members of their ethnic group, and whom they, ipso facto, zombie and instrumentalize, but only to boost their purely utilitarian, materialist agenda. The term is commonly used to describe the patterns of corruption in Nigeria, and to point out why its democracy is not working. Though used in other or similar nomenclatural epithets all of which critique and caricature the flawed practice of democracy in Nigeria and other parts of Africa, it was Joseph's (2014) contribution that made it gain higher and projected currency in literature especially on corruption in Nigeria and its African likes.

of community welfare and good. Yet they did not deny the need to stand up to and defend their lives, their land and property and, above all, their pride as a people against any and all attempts of their enemies to bully them out of their right to the land they have occupied from time immemorial.

According to our field data, 18 out of 20 farmers abandon their farmed plots when conflicts strike; similarly, a very high majority of Ukum farmers (18 out of 20) experiences very high drop in crop production, and this is partly accounted for by the telling levels of discouragement among farmers whose motivation to produce is highly reduced. A majority of respondents (15/20) affirmed that conflicts are often correlated with the spread especially of sexually transmitted diseases. Closer follow-up interviews revealed that the two farmers who answered in the negative and the three who declined the question made their responses as a result of the traumatizing, psychological shame and the harrowing embarrassment this question triggers suggesting also either they themselves, their relatives, and/or friends may have fallen victim to this.

On the other hand, it is strikingly noteworthy that all 20 participants stated that conflicts bring about sharp increase in the prices of foodstuffs and other commodities in the immediate conflict zones as in the wider areas of neighboring rural and urban communities. Whereas 17 out of 20 farmers see conflict as directly discouraging to prospective agro-based domestic and foreign investors in their communities, all 20 overwhelmingly concur that conflict inflicts wide-spread and multistranded poverty upon them. When further pressed in interviews in the direction of causality, all respondents agreed that land and related natural and or ecological resources are almost always the reason for conflict. This explanation was given for conflicts within and among communities of Ukum and those that occur between Ukum and other neighboring ethnic populations like the Jukun of Taraba (and Nassarawa) States bordering the Tiv.

4.2 Findings from Ukum-based investors

As follow-ups, questionnaires were floated among investors, traders, and other business people within and around Zaki-Biam market of Ukum LGA. The aim was to pool data to be compared with findings from Ukum indigenous farmers. The same respondents who participated in this section were also engaged in follow-up interviews. As with Section 4.1, the overall aim was to have a better understanding of how conflict affects agricultural production and general community development in Nigeria and Africa at large (**Tables 3 and 4, Figure 4**).

A/1: Have you ever experienced any cases of conflict in Ukumland?
B/2: Do conflicts negatively affect investors' businesses in Ukumland?
C/3: Do you feel secure doing business around the Zaki-Biam market area?
D/4: Have you ever been hard hit by the outbreak of conflict in Ukumland?
E/5: Were your business assets looted during the crisis of conflict?
F/6: Did you witness any persons die during conflict here in Ukumland?
G/7: Have you ever felt discouraged by conflicts from expanding your investment here?
H/8: Are other investors discouraged from investing their resources in Ukumland?
I/9: Do conflicts bring about increase in the prices of food crops and all commodities?
J/10: Do you feel there are effective institutional conflict management tools here?

Table 3.
Impact of conflict on agricultural investment in Ukum, Nigeria.

Questions	Yes	No	Declined
A/1	16	3	1
B/2	20	0	0
C/3	3	16	1
D/4	15	3	2
E/5	16	2	2
F/6	18	2	0
G/7	17	2	1
H/8	15	4	1
I/9	20	0	0
J/10	20	0	0

Table 4.
Impact of conflict on agricultural investment incentives in Ukum, Nigeria.

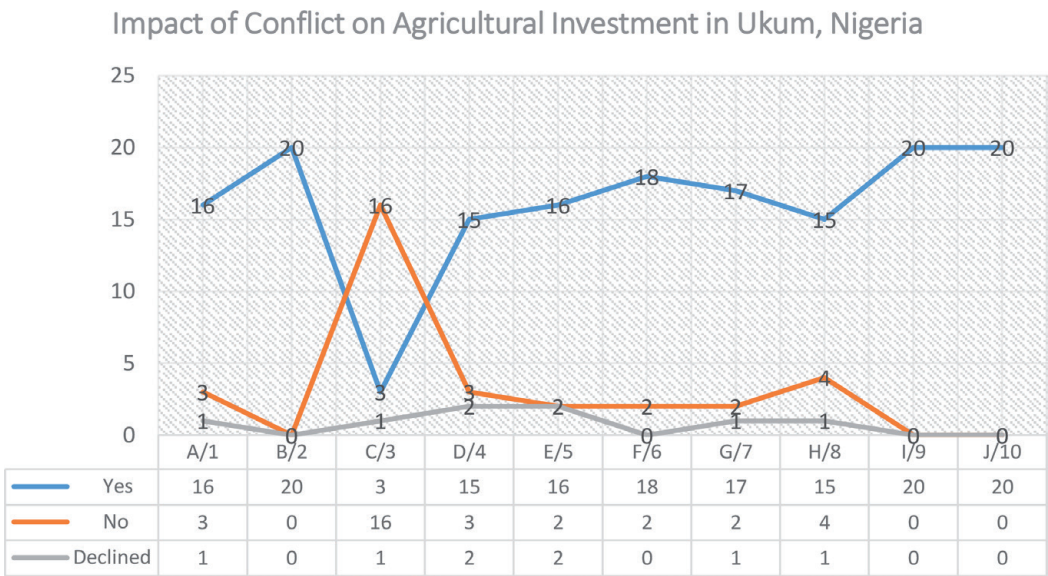


Figure 4.
Impact of conflict on agricultural investment incentives in Ukum, Nigeria.

First, our study found that majority of investors (16 out of 20) who operate businesses around conflict-prone areas of had at one point or the other in the past been directly negatively impacted by conflict. While all 20 respondents admitted that conflicts very negatively affect their investments, 16 out 20 investors expressed feeling insecure around the conflict-ridden areas of Zaki-Biam market in particular and Ukum LGA in general. On the other hand, whereas 15 out of 20 investors stated that they had experienced the occurrence of conflict in the area, which they said impacted their businesses and lives very negatively, 16 of them indicated that, in the heat of conflicts, their business assets were looted especially by indigenes; as a case in point, they referenced the 2001⁴ experience of near genocide in Ukum-Tivland.

⁴ This reference is (frequently) made to the occurrence of the violence of October 22, 2001, when, in response to the ongoing, decade-long Tiv-Jukun conflict, “[...] the Nigerian army killed more than two hundred unarmed Tiv and destroyed their homes, shops, public buildings and other property in more than seven towns and villages in Benue State, Nigeria” (See Amnesty International, 2002; Ciboh, 2014; Vanguard Newspaper, November 19, 2001).

In like manner, 18 out of 20 respondents admitted having seen people killed during seasons of conflict; on the other hand, 17 investor-respondents indicated being discouraged from investment while 15 admitted knowing that conflicts discourage other fellow investors as well. It is not surprising, therefore, that all 20 business investors stated that prices of food crops and all commodities skyrocket when conflicts strike. Finally, all 20 participants also indicated that, as of the time of this study, not much had been done by the government to install reliable and sustainable institutions of conflict management to guarantee security in the area.

4.3 Findings from direct and participant observation

The harrowing experience of conflict and its many-sided impact on agriculture and community development in Nigeria is incomplete and falls short of speaking personally and directly without a firsthand experience by a researcher who is onsite to track this delicate subject. This general lesson was the first among many we learnt in the field when we gained some close encounters with would-be study participants. Many farmers in the hinterland communities of Ukum were too reserved and withdrawn each time attempts were made to involve them in this social study. We think this is attributable to either of two related facts or both: first, they were too easily agitated to discuss it and recount their personal experiences especially when the study probes more deeply to provoke the ever-haunting traumatizing memories of the carnage many families suffered during the horrors of past conflicts. Many easily referenced the history of 2001 conflict earlier referenced on page 8. On the other hand, some individuals were too afraid to discuss the topic as they mistook the researcher for government agent who had come to gather some sensitive pieces of information from them. These two points, we think, created feelings of palpable fear, suspicion, and heart-searing pain for those who had witnessed past intra- or inter-ethnic conflicts in the area. Those two social inhibitions unfortunately partly account for why we were unable to document some statistical nitty-gritty details on the human and social costs of conflict, which we target and hope will happen as this study progresses in the future.

While the above ambition looms, we personally observed some other facts worth representing here. First, moving around Zaki-Biam huge market and other smaller markets in Ukum LGA, we found that prices of locally produced agricultural (and non-agricultural) goods were high as of the time of this study. Our study found that this was due to fears of impending conflict and the political instability associated with it, which made farmers to cultivate less farmlands. A stringent warning from a



Figure 5.
A cross section of a displaced group of farmers taking refuge in an Ukum primary school (the twin pictures above are original to the researcher and were taken on September 4, 2014).

Police Officer who lives in the area for the purpose of giving the people some sense of security and protection was breathtaking.

In carrying out your research, tread with great caution watching the extent to which you go into the hinterlands in search of farmers as no one can guarantee when anything might happen especially during the period of bush clearing which marks the beginning of the farming season when age-long land or boundary related conflicts usually occur [Fieldnotes: 2014, August].

In furtherance with participating in, and personally observing, the goings-on in the life of the Ukum community, we encountered a large group of people inhabiting an elementary school along Ugba road within the Zaki-Biam market area as is displayed in **Figure 5**. Vignette 1 tells the story of the refugees.

Vignette 1. Refugees at home [Fieldnotes collected from Zaki-Biam, Ukum LGA, September 4, 2014]

Story narrated by an appointed “Caretaker” of the refugee group represented in **Figure 5**.

It was on a certain Sunday morning when the Pastor in-charge of St. Anthony’s Catholic pariah woke up to the rude shock that a huge crowd of people had invaded and past the night inside the Church building. The 286 people of all ages and genders were found to have fled death from a crisis that arose in Ibi LGA in Taraba State between Fulani and Tiv communities in Ibi LGA. The group that took refuge in the Church compound are Tiv by origin but are in diaspora as farmers who had lived and settled in Ibi LGA for many decades. This was the first time ever this Tiv group in Ibi of Taraba State had any conflict with the Fulani. They were originally from Guma LGA of the Tiv extraction of Benue State. Fleeing the conflict, they were headed to their ancient Guma-Tiv community of origin but were caught up by night and so decided to sleep in the Church compound to continue with their home-bound journey the following morning. When they woke up and set out to do as they had planned they heard of another bigger crisis between the Fulani and the Tiv at home in Guma LGA and so got stuck at Zaki-Biam. The Pastor of the parish gave them refuge in the school premises, treated many of them who were ill at the parish hospital, galvanized and rallied his parishioners for other social services including clothing and constant raw food supply, appointed a parish member as Caretaker of the group as well as another parishioner who organized for water supply and cooking in the open field. The group took their bath in the field at night but slept on the hard crust of the cement floor at night. The Pastor notified the Bishop of the Diocese who instructed the Peace and Justice department of the Diocese to intervene with more and sustained help. The parish members and all their Church sodalities remained faithful in taking care of the refugee group and some of them had already housed them in their personal homes. The Bishop of the Anglican Communion of Zaki-Biam also stepped in and, with his flock provided the group with water containers and regular water supply. The Pastor of St. Anthony’s Faith-Community wrote the Ukum LGA Chairman, the Inspector of Police, and the Traditional Ruler of Biam Ward; hardly any responses came from them as they all claimed there was no money to take care of them. Instead the Ukum LGA Chairman stated they should go back to their home to be taken care of. He also ordered they should vacate the school buildings, but thanks to the School Head Mistress who offered the group just one block to stay in while the school was in session. Meanwhile the people were consumed in fear as to what next might be their fate. Some of their teenage children were already hiring out themselves for menial jobs in the Zki-Biam market for little feeding money. The very many of the children who were in school before the conflict broke out a year earlier were now out of school indefinitely. The School Head Mistress expressed great concern over the danger women and girls among the group were exposed to including rape, unwanted pregnancy, and the contracting of sexually transmitted diseases (STDs). The oldest man in the group cried out over how they had lost many lives before they fled in addition to many of their family members whom they do not know where they fled to as other groups scattered out to other welcoming communities. He also lamented that their houses were burnt down together with all agricultural goods they stored in their granaries not to mention that many of them lost huge sums of money saved in their homes as proceeds from their farm produce sales as they were used to doing. He added that their aggressors were Fulani-Hausa cattle herdsman whereas they themselves were crop farmers. The conflict arose because the herdsman invaded their cultivated farmlands and let their livestock destroy all they had labored for and extended the destructive measures to them too claiming they were strangers who had no right to the land they had been cultivated for tens of decades unchallenged. The combatants also looted property in their homes including great values in their granaries and leaving them totally dispossessed of all they value and live for.

Vignette 2. A few more cases of refugees at home due to land related conflicts in Nigeria

Across the length and breadth of Nigeria, there are multiple occurrences of intra-inter-ethnic conflicts sometimes happening simultaneously. Regardless of the niches of their occurrence, they have been found to share some features in common: they revolve around land and or land-related resources; they usually kick off during planting season and sometimes at any stage in the farming cycle; they claim thousands of lives with thousand others from the warring parties who flee the scenes and are usually displaced and sometimes become permanent refugees in their own country and in distant communities where they are often unwelcome; farmers abandon their unripe crops as they run away from the rampaging fury of their opposing combatants; agro produce stored at homes are either looted or burnt down together with the houses of the fighting groups; diseases of all kinds spread around; increased food scarcity and hunger ensue; suspension of educational, medical and other social services are halted, that is, where they exist at all; and, shocking yet not surprising, political leaders from both sides of the equation hardly go beyond making official statements condemning the act, among others. These are typified in the most and still ongoing violent feud between Utuma community in Biasa LGA of Cross River State and Isu community in Arochukwu LGA of Abia State both in Southeast, Nigeria. Striking are three notable dates of the incidence of conflict between the two ethnic groups as some Nigerian National Daily Newspapers [21–23] and other human rights-focused international observers reported and condemning the resurgence of this age-long conflict. There is a rich splinter of such conflicts hiding in rural farming communities across Nigeria in particular and Africa at large.

From the foregoing specific case drawn from direct observation, a few outstanding study findings emerge: inter-ethnic conflicts also come from clashes between Nigerian Fulani herdsmen (pastoralists) and their neighboring crop farmer-groups; conflict leads to displacement of farming populations; it causes loss of lives; it increases hunger and poverty as farmers are yanked off their source of livelihood; farm lands and agro products in storages are abandoned; looting also occurs; this in turn intensifies food scarcity; it also increases prices of agro-related and other commodities; women and girls are exposed to many dangers; worse still, there seems to be no hopes for a better future for Nigerian rural farmers with no appropriate, effective conflict resolution institutions in place. It is impossible not to see the how conflict among Nigerian, and all African farming communities is not directly inhibitive of development in the region.

4.4 Seeking patterns from different areas of field data

With the foregoing analyses drawn from a wide range of field data, a complex web of connections among closely related impacts of conflict on agricultural production and general development in Ukum community can be stretched out. In a well-sequenced and corroborated data representation, this study found that when Nigerian hinterland farming communities and their neighbors lurk in conflict, as they often do, many people flee those unsafe niches first in order to save their lives. Among those who escape conflict-ridden environments, young adults who constitute the heart of the requisite labor force assume the greater majority. Follow-up interviews on why youths are the age range who flee most, our study gathered that the political elite of their communities often play opportunism by fronting and sponsoring young men to go into war many of whom die therefrom. However, whether they die in the field of conflict or flee their communities, the study found that they invariably abandon their farms and aged, frail, and vulnerable family members behind. With this and subsequent drop in areas of farmland subjected to cultivation in the next farming season, the communities experience corresponding sharp fall in agricultural productivity. With these food shortage ensues; this is further aggravated by the fact that a good number of conflict-affected farmers are already down with debilitating diseases associated with hunger, malnutrition, exposure to malaria infection in the wild of refugee camps and forests, and STDs in the case of women and girls.

In the face of the insecurity created by ethnic conflicts, investors find no compelling reasons to cast their treasure in the affected communities especially as many of them lose their business assets to looters most of whom are indigenes usually from the warring factions of the same locality or from opposable ethnic communities. Overall, therefore, Nigerian farming communities experience the horror of food insecurity, high prices of food stuffs and other commodities, backwardness in socioeconomic development and circular poverty due to constant conflicts.

Engaged in interviews on the issue of why Nigerian farming communities experience many and sometimes persistent conflicts among themselves and with their close and distant neighbors, some telling explanations bordering on causality were adduced. First, many held to the ideology that conflict is unavoidable among them because they and their neighbors are either farmers and so always in need of more land against the pressure mounted by increased food need and population growth. The second explanation appealed to the primordial conflict which led to the fission of the original Tiv group during the first stages of its migration and settlement where it is now. Incidentally, those who participated in the interviews would not see that the human and social cost of conflict, usually high and horrendous, is enough reason to stop or deter them from employing conflict in asserting their right over their land when it is contested by another group. Instead they cited the many conflicts within and around their area to argue that conflict is unavoidable and the other inevitable side of their lives as farmers. Particularly, they blame the official government for not making enough effort to institute effective conflict management mechanics in their communities. It was also found that when the government does step in during conflict, privileged officials politicize the moment as opportunities to further enrich themselves and gain more economically motivated social and political positions in society on the one hand and, on the other, that government intervention during conflicts between and among communities is often conducted in such ways that favor some communities to the detriment of others making it rather more difficult for the conflict to end peacefully.

5. Discussion: conversation with related studies

We did not kick off with this study on the assumption that it is the first and pioneering attempt to explore this subject; rather we began in the acknowledged awareness that ours is another attempt in the same direction of an ongoing social science inquiry that is however in need so much more to be done. As such we appealed to many earlier studies to seek meaning of and from what we gathered in the field as our contribution to the ongoing dialogue.

In keeping with the multilayer findings of our study, many other studies have also documented the agricultural production and above all African development costs of ethnic conflict in Africa. Some scholars have documented that massive loss of lives, destruction of property, and exposure to diseases on the one hand, and hindering of man power growth and labor strength, socioeconomic development, collapse of social cohesion and political stability on the other, are some of the costs of conflicts in many parts of Africa [24, 25]. Some other studies have underscored that conflicts in Africa threaten women and girls with reproductive health problems including STDs, unwanted pregnancy, and maternal mortality [26]. Not alone in that conclusion, others have also conducted studies corroborating that finding and push it further to include the dire consequences of conflicts on women and girls demonstrating that the confusion ensuing during and immediately after conflicts disrupts sources of livelihood and socioeconomic activities of women [27]. In like manner, some other studies have found that conflicts and civil wars, by forcing

communities into refugee camps, greatly increase the risks of infectious diseases with the usual sexual violence they bring upon women and young girls [28]. This is in addition to the fact that the male folks in their lives—their husbands, brothers, and sons, who are the main combatants in conflicts—are often either seriously injured or killed, while the women themselves are subjected to the horrors of rape or even killed too. In addition to these findings, others studies [23] have linked conflicts with trauma which is in turn associated with poorer daily functioning, physical limitations, and chronic medical conditions.

Pushing the conversation further, a joint study of some scholars found that between 2011 and 2013, conflicts led to the loss of many lives. This is besides dozens of people who were rendered morbid, displaced, and thus became homeless and destitute [29]. It is also documented that in the long-drawn inter-communal conflict between Aguleri and Umuleri of Southeast Nigeria over land/boundary, in which automatic weapons and dynamite were used and thus described as the theater of fratricidal war, thousands of people fled for refuge in schools and public buildings, more than 300 people were killed, another 120 people were killed in the renewed episodes of the conflict. Still on the general implications of conflicts for economic development in Africa, it has also been documented that conflicts keep affected communities on a very low level of agricultural and general economic performance especially as they often decimate huge numbers of the warring populations [30]. On account of this situation it has been concluded by some scholars that “... conflict imposes costs beyond destruction” [31].

On the impact of conflict on agricultural production specifically—and by implication on African development in general—some studies [27] record that ethnic conflicts lead to diminished fortunes in agricultural productivity especially when they occur during farming seasons, which causes most farmers to abandon their farms and flee for fear of being attacked; this in turn results in low agricultural productivity in the following harvest season. They also found cases of the destruction of farmlands, farm crops, and the killing of cows all of which result in real and quantifiable material losses. A World Bank Development report [32] lays out a wide range of findings including that conflicts lead to high rate of youth unemployment, high incidence of circular poverty, low per capita income, overall economic decline, double loss caused by diverting valuable resources to destructive activities, more backward economic growth, forced migration, reduced access to education and health care, increased risk of predatory and contagious diseases in refugee camps, and increased mortality rate.

In groping specifically for causal explanations of conflicts in Africa, an army of scholars hone in on the fragile post-independence historical and political landscape directly precipitated by European colonial legacy which, from all intents and purposes, successfully but unsuccessfully imposed indirect rule on African communities aimed at hegemonizing populations that otherwise co-existed separately even in the face of their sociocultural differences [33–40]. By so doing, these students of contemporary Africa argue that colonial rule distorted by separating and amalgamating populations in such ways that made “... the struggle for political power, and control” [27] the epicenter of life in post-independence Africa. This is typified in the Nigerian case as is aptly captured in this historical backdrop:

The state of Nigeria was an artificial British imperial creation whose major groups—the Hausa-Fulani of the north, the Yoruba of the west, and the Igbo of the east—were each larger than most individual African states. Britain fostered strong regional governments and, moreover, encouraged a sense of regional rivalry, maintaining the balance between the three great regions from the center. There was no historical basis for the unity of these three and their different ethnic groups,

except British imperial convenience. At independence, therefore, the new Nigeria inherited three powerful regions whose interests tended to draw them away from central authority and, once the British had departed, there was intense rivalry as to who should control the center [39].

In sum, this economically driven colonial balkanization and amalgamation of regions that ordinarily had nothing in common—except as they would later have oil in common to fall apart on in the Nigerian case, for example—would almost immediately be put to the test “... by inter and intra, regional and sectional disagreements...” [27]. It was this unhealthy political atmosphere that ruptured and culminated in the full-blown, total war of 1967–1970 in Nigeria with its multi-stranded fratricidal consequences, the rippling effects of which still linger across the nation till date.

Another crowded field of social scientists [24, 27, 41–45] argue that disputes over land and ecological resources, population explosion and the need for more land, boundary, territoriality, domination, oppression and exclusion, indigene-settler divide, chieftaincy and power relations and religious differences are specific causes of a particular character of conflicts classified as inter-intra-ethnic conflicts. Still more [46] use sing the 1992 Ugep-Idomi boundary conflict in Cross River State of Nigeria as a case in point to further the land resources-related causal account and arguing that boundary in relation to “... land, water, oil wells or other important natural resources...” is at the root of violent feuds between communities, and that these have continued to be on the increase in Nigeria. Other inquiries on the region’s development experience further elongate the list of studies that fan the embers of the argument linking conflicts in Nigeria and Africa directly to land and natural resources found therein [24, 27, 28, 37, 41, 47, 48].

While not differing from the foregoing theoretical stance, other scholars [27, 49–51] talk rather specifically of “ecological resources” in their account of causes of conflicts in the region. As such, the case of natural resource conflicts in North-Central Nigeria has been used to exemplify this ideological interpretation contending that natural resource conflict is more dispersed than sociopolitical conflict. Natural resource conflicts usually occur, the study argues, in inaccessible hinterlands and often go unreported regardless of the fact that such conflicts are “...an important factor in the recurrent food crises characteristic of sub-Saharan Africa, since it deters those in rural areas from investing for increased production” [52].

Focusing on age-long conflict resolution mechanisms in Nigeria, and using the Mbaduku-Udam crisis bordering on territoriality to make a case, an extensive study [53] identifies “...land space and the resources available as one of the causes of...conflicts in Nigeria”. Not alone on that stance as other scholars [54, 55] also argue in the same light and conclude that territoriality in the sense of land area occupies centrality in inter-intra-ethnic conflicts adding that some of such conflicts date back to historical moments before the independence of Nigeria in 1960. One offers a deeper reason why conflicts rage around land: “The major occupation of most of ethnic groups who inhabit the North-Central Nigeria is farming. The need to acquire and use land for farming has, therefore, been at the root of several crises in this region” [51].

These ideologically differentiated accounts of conflict in Africa sometimes athwart each other seem to fall within the wider anatomic ambience captioned “Structural Causes of Conflict” by The Institute for Peace and Conflict Resolution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria [56]. According to the afore-cited institute, structural causes of conflict consists of four main manifestations including security-related manifestations of conflict further broken down into proliferation of small arms, corruption of law-enforcement agents, and vigilante groups; political manifestations of conflict including political conflicts, succession and dethronement

conflicts, and territorial disputes; economic manifestations of conflict comprising general poverty and inequality, resource competition, unequal development, and market competition; and social manifestations of conflict including ethnic and communal conflict, youth unemployment, the situation of women, breakdown of social values, and psycho-cultural dispositions.

Varied and different as these contextually and ideologically driven accounts of conflicts in Nigeria and Africa seem, it is our argument that it would be an unsuccessful attempt at making any clear-cut differentiations at the level of causality in matters concerning conflicts in the region. Instead, from insights furnished by our study data and the findings they lead to, we argued that these shades of causes of conflict in Nigeria in particular and Africa at large are intricately interwoven so much that any attempts at understanding one must invariably make for understanding the rest. Even the IPCRFRN document earlier cited admits the intricate interconnectedness of causes of conflict across SSA.

A particular conflict locale may exhibit the signs of more than one category (manifestation) of conflict. The conflict in the Niger Delta, for instance, is an economic one (struggle for benefits derivable from an oil producing community), an ethnic/communal one (the economic benefits...accrue to communities and the ownership of the land where the oil is located is therefore crucial to the enjoyment of benefits), a political one (political authorities must be those sympathetic to competing claims and all efforts to ensure that each party's candidate carries the day is put in), and one about traditional institution (the Urhobo and Ijaw contest of the claim of the Itshekiri to exclusive indigeneity of Warri and even the title of the paramount ruler of the Itshekiris as the Olu of Warri). Other conflicts in the country exhibit this multiple character trait. Actors in these multiple "battle fronts" are often the same [54].

It is easy to see the evidence-based persuasion behind the conclusion on the interconnectedness of causes of conflicts in Africa underscoring also that economic development is often accompanied by violent ethnic conflict. In light of the foregoing, therefore, this study refuses to be glued to only one explanatory mode in tracking the micro (agricultural development) and more so the macro (overall regional development) causes and impact of conflict in Nigeria and Africa at large. Not even the selective, persuasive argument that "Of all forms of group conflicts, it would seem that ethnic conflicts have remained the most entrenched and intractable in Nigeria" [24] seems ideologically compelling enough to sway the findings of our study in that direction. At least for now, we note that all forms of conflict in Nigeria and Africa as a whole as anywhere else in the world produce one common feature: conflicts halt human activities; they lead to stagnation of economic performance; and they bring about breakdown of social order and political stability necessary for any societies to function well. As these and many other studies have argued, this study infers that social disintegration and economic decline are the most probable outcomes of conflicts in Nigeria and Africa.

6. Conclusion

This study set out to make a case in favor of boosting agricultural productivity in Africa especially in conflict-prone agrarian environments in order to ultimately guarantee the contribution of the agriculture sector to the region's overall development. The main aim of the study was to inform and educate the general public but more so those who have positions of power in relation to peace and stability among African farming communities so that they could carry out their work without

being disrupted by conflicts between and among themselves. The study sought evidence-based data to generate a body of scientific knowledge to achieve its set target. To carry out the experiment, we selected a Nigerian agrarian community we found as ideal and involved people from different sides of the dialogue on the agriculture-conflict interface to track how the impact of conflict ultimately affects Africa's development experience. To further enlighten ourselves on what we found from the field of ethnography, we consulted as many related studies we found relevant on the subject. Our project led to finding on how conflict amid agricultural production constitutes a most unfriendly environment ending in many very costly consequences for farmers and society at large.

This study found that intra-inter-ethnic conflicts in Nigeria as with other parts of Africa almost always revolve around land and resources related to land on the one hand, and that whereas conflict between communities and ethnic populations is unavoidable it has however become something so intricately entrenched in politicization by the elite from both sides of the warring camps, on the other. This, in itself, contributes to why no meaningful resolutions are achieved when communities lurk in conflict. This is besides the claim of many that the official government of the land does not seem to have any interest in installing and maintaining effective, responsive, sustainable conflict management apparatus. This makes people feel on edge especially in those areas that are characteristically conflict-prone. In line with the foregoing, it was found that the consequences associated with conflict amid agricultural production include loss of human lives and property; destruction of farmers' farms and granaries, looting of both farmers' and investors' assets; fall in agricultural productivity directly associated with fall in the area of land farmers cultivate; displacement of farming communities that usually end in unsafe refugee camps; hunger and malnutrition; high cost of agricultural and other goods; exposure to different diseases especially the endangering of women and young girls who are preyed upon and end up with sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) that further debilitate them; prolonged hold placed on education, medical and other social services; fear and horror in addition to protracted trauma and lasting psychological shock; increased outmigration especially by young adults who leave behind their vulnerable family members. The ultimate effect of all these impacts of conflict among conflicting farming populations is that they produce a constellation of drawbacks that militates against regional development in Africa. For, it takes healthy, able-bodied human beings operating in healthy, socially and politically stable environments to remain productive in what they do in order to develop themselves and develop their communities. It takes healthy human beings who stay on in production and in self-development to realize and sustain the ideals of development in Africa, all of which is in keeping with the defined ideals of the democracy of development in Africa and everywhere.

It is our conclusion, therefore, that where and when farming communities lurk in conflict over land and related resources, everything comes to a halt as their communities separately yet collectively stop growing especially in situations when government leaders take too long to take action and sometimes none at all, as our observations so far suggest. We suspend all policy-related recommendations at this time till more is done on this ongoing study. As such we project ourselves into other desired but yet unexplored aspects of this study including but not limited to engaging government officials in conversation beyond what is said in official publications; spending more time with farmers for more detailed data collection on statistical figures in light of the human and social cost of conflict in order to better inform policy recommendations. In pursuit of these goals, this self-sponsored study intends to involve more participants hoping to get to needed funds to break into these new grounds.

A. Appendix



Figure A1.
Symbol of Benue State Pride—“Food Basket of the Nation” (the picture above was captured at Makurdi, Benue state capital on July 20, 2013 by the researcher).

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