



Population Pressures and Communal Land Conflicts in Yakurr Rural Communities in Cross River State, Nigeria: An Exploration of the Linkages

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ABSTRACT

This study empirically investigates population pressures and communal land conflicts with focus on Yakurr rural communities of Cross River State, Nigeria. The findings reported here are unique in the sense that they provide insight into the dynamics of population pressure and its implication on rural development. To carry out the study, a structured interview schedule was designed to collect the required data. The study sample was 750 house-hold heads selected through cluster and simple random sampling techniques. Pearson product moment correlation was adopted to analyze the data generated. Results show that population growth rate in Yakurr is high and display positive linear relationship with rampant communal land conflicts, consequently, creating adverse conditions and rural impoverishment for the people. This study therefore, identified issues in population processes which would be relevant to rural development planners and policy makers as adapted to the stage of Nigeria's socio-economic development. Policy prescription of the study were then derived with due stress on introducing sustainable conflict resolution approach that should target comprehensive rural development based on empirical findings.

Key words: Population pressure, communal land, conflicts, rural communities, rural impoverishment.

INTRODUCTION

It is notable that studies on the impact of population growth seems relatively novel. These studies have assumed wider and alarming dimensions of the consequences of population pressures on urban centers with the understanding that rural areas do not experience population pressures. On the basis of this assumption, government policies are targeted on urban development to the detriment of rural development.

Indeed, the concentration of population studies on urban centers was informed by the large number of people often found in our cities with their associated problems of inadequate housing, overcrowding, unemployment, crime and violence. It is believed by scholars that there is population pressure in cities which generates crisis and scenes of great poverty and discomfort to city dwellers, breeds social disorder

and lawlessness of the cities, and causing slums to become increasingly overcrowded (Nkom, 2008; Ojo, 2012; Udo, 2013). The population pressures in cities is also believed to have generated problems of sewage disposal, housing, education, transportation, health facilities and police protection (Mkpong, 2008). According to Okumnadewas (2006) and Ekpenyong (2013) the steady increase in the influx of people from rural to urban centers has generated many social and economic problems with escalating crime and violence punctuated by sporadic and increased terrorism.

Sikhitbis (2011) affirmed that the population of urban centers is influenced by economic, social, political and technological resources which as the occasion demands provide the stimulus for over-population. The growth of urban population is seen as open and continuous (Adeyemi, 2001). Ayuk (2002) pointed out that the availability of economic and technological resources spurs up large populations as more people would certainly migrate to urban centers in search of employment and survival. Also, Olunha (2000) contended that economic growth and development pull people to urban centers.

The rural area which is important in the analysis of this study tends not to be given prominent attention probably because of the absence of any of the problems associated with urbanization. The population of rural communities as far as population studies are concern would continue to suffer depletion as the young and able bodied ones migrate to the cities, thus, creating population imbalance (Olunha, 2000; Little, 2005). Imoagene (2004) posited that rural areas experience loss of manpower for agricultural development as only the old and children are left behind in the rural areas. This alone hardly seems to do justice to the ambiguous nature of rural population.

In population studies, empirical findings have shown that the population of an area is not a problem simply because it is quantitatively large, rather it is the type of structure of that population in relation to the resources that it need for adequate life and progress, which is very important. Williams, Terima & Benedicta (2009) noted that the rate of increase or decrease in the number of people in an area is in itself, not the crux of the problem but its implication on the resources of the environment. This implies that if the population of an area, be it urban or rural, increases above the carrying capacity of available resources, such an area would experience population pressures. Olym (2007) also affirmed that an increasing concentration of people on a relatively small proportion of resources that cannot sustain it comfortably, would suffer the yoke of population pressures with all its attendant consequences.

According to May (2000) population growth and resources of an area apart from being linked to one another, are progressively complex phenomena in which the effects of changes in one also affect the other. Adejuwon (1995) posited that population growth and resources of an area are interdependent and significant in the analysis of the standard of living of a people. He also supported the assertion that a change in one would invariably affect the other as both are dependent on each other for utilization and exploitation. Where the population growth is not controlled, it would act as a barrier to the realization of socio-economic development of a nation (Eric, 2006 & Hasen, 2008).

Population pressures manifest in diverse ways. Holiday (2007) asserts that in some places, population pressures induces environmental problems such as reckless exploitation of resources and environmental instability. Ottong (2002) also gave relevance to this argument when he stated that in contemporary societies, population growth has brought about processes of social and technological changes which affect environmental and socio-economic development.

Edward & Ngaji (2010) also stated that galloping increase of human population is the prime cause of climate change. On his part, Animashaun (2002) asserts that a rapidly increasing population generates increased demand for food, shelter, clothing and other life supporting needs derived directly or indirectly from the natural environment. Wastes and effluents from homes and industry that pollute the air, streams and water supplies are caused by population pressures (Faniran & Ojo, 2000). Insufficient arable land and food deficit in Nigeria is the result of population pressures (Devey, 2009).

Onima & Odinma (2010) argued that as population increases, there would be a veritable consequence of large household sizes and the demand for food will also increase. This will inevitably lead to over-exploitation of cultivated land which in most cases result to land struggle. Again, Onima & Odinma (2010) argued that struggle for farmland or resources has been on the increase due to increasing

population pressures. According to Oluwatayo (2009) the negative consequence of population growth is land disputes which are very common among rural or agricultural communities. Ottor (2012) has also observed that population pressure has caused impoverishment of people, leading to lower progress and development of an area.

In most rural or agricultural communities, as households grow over time, plots are divided into smaller pieces that are less able to support the members that tend them, and as the members began to expand, they seek to extend their occupations of lands which others have interest too. The end result is land dispute (Hardee, 2008).

Udo (2007) opined that land disputes had been in the increase in recent years especially in agricultural areas of Nigeria. Udo (2007) further added that land disputes in Nigeria has brought untold woes to the people and has been the source of vice and misery for many communities in Nigeria. Gharrey (2009) pointed out that most communities in Nigeria had clashed with other communities over land conflicts which had brought about widespread misfortune to the people. For example, Bowie & Doma (2010) cited the land disputes between the Allele and Donga communities of Zaire to be caused by the high population of farmers who depended on a relatively small portion of land. They added that a large number of farmers lost their lives in the clash.

According to Yomie (2006) land disputes had brought about general low income, famine and poverty, results in general small farm sizes and short period of fallow, increases migration from rural areas to urban centre, observable unemployment, malnutrition and general declining standard of living of the people. Land dispute also affect social services like health, transport, electricity, schools among others (Farrel, 2010). It also causes the disequilibrium between demand and supply of goods and services, which also leads to high cost of living. The hardship imposed by land dispute especially in rural communities often leads to crime waves and outbreak of epidemics (Udo, 2007).

Taslim & Usung (2010) reported that land disputes was harmful to rural development and was primarily responsible for the current low levels of savings and investments, and consequently future output. Similarly, Rafael (2012) opined that land dispute exacerbate the strains on the social institutions, economic growth, the environment and use of natural resources. Preston (2007) noted that in many rural areas, land dispute occur on yearly or seasonal basis, or on each farming season and that land dispute has significant adverse effect on poor agrarian communities, and increased income inequalities among the immediate people. It is against this background that this study examines the basis and processes of population pressures and how it relate to communal land conflicts in Yakurr rural communities of Cross River State, Nigeria.

Theoretical framework

In the analysis of population pressures and communal land conflicts in Yakurr rural communities of Cross River State, Nigeria, the neo classical growth model is adopted. The neo classical growth model is a modified version of neo-Malthusian and has as its proponents, Alfred Mashal and Simon. It is the economic interpretation of population and socio-economic development with emphasis on the law of diminishing returns, the belief in natural tendency to unlimited propagation and the supply side effects of population. According to Brander & Dowrick (1990) the neo-classical growth model attempts to conceptualize and model demographic influence on economic and social welfare with particular emphasis on the following: population influence on household or family income and behavior, population and reproducible capital, population and fixed factors such as land and resources, population and advantages of scale.

Neo classical model has often been combined with age-distributed population of individuals or households, assumed to pursue optimal life cycle consumption and saving (Lee, 1993). According to Brander & Dowrick (1990) the model assumes that a reduction in the number of children would raise the proportion of the population who are of working age and therefore raises GDP per head of population for a given level of labour productivity and that high fertility reduces household resources available for saving and investment.

The model equally assumed that capital accumulation is beneficial to labour and that the rate of wages is a function of labour supply (Cootz, 1979). In other words, if the population grows higher, the wages will come down and vice versa. Lee (1983) posited that the neo classical growth model for the modern sector economy is linked by labour markets and migration to fixed factor (land).

This model has some theoretical implications on this study. Yakurr communities used to be a progressive ethnic entity whose production per capita was above subsistence level. In the 1960s, there was high level of investment, increase in agricultural production and there was unity and peace amongst the communities. But because of the norm for large family sizes and early marriages, the population continues to grow even when the land and resources tend to be fixed in quantity and quality. Consequently, family savings and investment levels began to go down gradually; wages also became low for the labour supply, resulting to rampant land disputes, struggle for farmlands and other resources and poor agricultural production.

Moreso, as more people (labour) enter the farmland (fixed factor) the fertility of the soil and the yield after a time started experiencing diminishing returns, and the result thereof was poor yield and low standard of living for the people.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The research was carried out in Yakurr Local Government Area, in Cross River State, Nigeria. The data analyzed here were obtained from seven hundred and fifty (750) household heads. These respondents were selected from sixteen (16) out of the thirty three (33) rural communities that make up Yakurr Local Government Area. Cluster samples were drawn from the two state constituencies in the local government area viz: Yakurr 1 and Yakurr 2. From the lists of all rural communities making up each of this state constituency, eight rural communities were selected through the use of simple random sampling technique. Altogether, sixteen rural communities formed the cluster from which the sample for the study was drawn.

The cluster sampling method was adopted because the study covered a wide range of the entire Local government so that with the cluster method, enough concentration was given to each cluster of the study. The instrument used in this study was the structured interview schedule. In each selected community, one hundred and twenty (120) respondents were selected and interviewed. University students were used as research assistants who came from the sampled communities. These students were trained and properly instructed; and all the interviews were carried out in (the local) dialect. The data was collated and then extracted and arranged in Means, Standard deviations and Percentages. Pearson product moment correlation was adopted to analyze the data generated. However, this study was not without some constraints. These include the difficult terrain. In other words, some areas were quite difficult to access because of the bad roads. More so, this work has encountered some setback which include hoarding of Information by some respondents.

RESULT

Result of this study indicates that the calculated r-value of 0.81 is greater than the critical r-value of 0.195 at 05 level of significance with 748 degrees of freedom. This shows that there is a positive significant relationship between population pressures and communal land conflicts in Yakurr rural communities in Cross River State, Nigeria. The result is as shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Pearson product moment correlation analysis of the relationship between population pressures and communal land conflicts in Yakurr rural communities in Cross River State (n= 750)

Variable	$\sum X$	$\sum X^2$	$\sum Y$	$\sum Y^2$	$\sum XY$	Cal -r
Population pressures	3219	4581			19147	0.81*
Inter-communal conflicts	2948	4440				

Significant at 0.5 level, df= 748; critical r-value =0.195

DISCUSSION

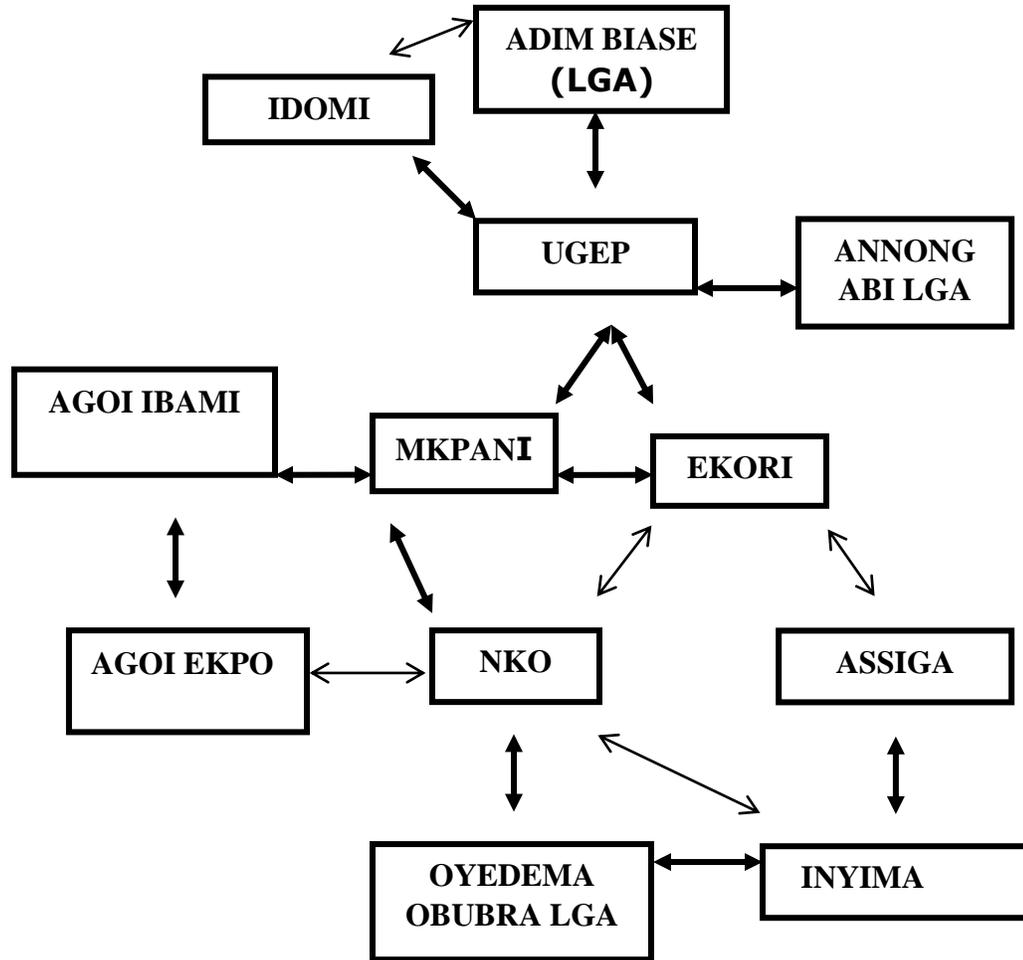
This study shows that a positive linear relationship exists between population pressures and communal land conflicts among the rural communities in Yakurr. Result derived from the study indicate that Yakurr rural communities experienced rapid population growth which was exacerbated by socio-cultural practices such as early marriages, pervasive teenage pregnancies, preference for large family sizes and widespread illiteracy. By the 1991 population census, the population of Yakurr was 134,773 representing 7.05 per cent of the total population of the state while that of 2006 was 196,450 representing 6.80 per cent of the total population of Cross River State. A comparison of the two census figures shows a quantum leap in the population of Yakurr for a period of 15 years with an increase of over 50 percent between the two censuses.

The study revealed that the population growth in Yakurr generate increased demand for farm land and other resources and tend to have a positive linear correlation with the prevalence of communal land disputes. To understand the kind of issues involved in this relationship, a set of questions were asked such as what are the farm sizes vis-à-vis their family sizes in the past ten years compared to what is tenable now? Later, after several different issues had been raised they were asked if large family size had anything to do with scarcity of farmlands, and if the answer is yes, they were asked if the prevalence of communal land disputes could be linked to scarcity of farmlands. Worthy of note is the fact that respondents identified a positive relationship between increasing population and scarcity of farmlands since cultivation is now spreading fast even to swamps and fragile lands.

The study also reveal that population pressure co-varies with increasing communal land conflict in Yakurr. But an interesting feature of the survey which demands absolute care in interpretation is whether they would like to forsake their belief in large family sizes as a way of eliminating land scarcity and communal land conflict in the area. Analysis of data indicated that less than 40 per cent would like to reduce their family sizes to solve this problem. Majority however cited rural transformation, provision of employment and social basic amenities as alternative option. Inference is however made to the fact that being predominantly farmers who depend mostly on land, such an option may not solve the problem.

Another feature of the survey which deserves comment is the decreasing nature of cultivated land surface, in the face of an increasing population in the area which has resulted to small sizes of farmland apportioned to each person. Though most respondents did not know their farm sizes and it was also not possible to measure farm sizes during the survey because the respondents did not like the idea. It became clear that all of them desired more farm land. The loss of soil fertility due to continuous cultivation on the same piece of land without proper input also made them desperate, restive and confrontational, a situation which very often pushes them into land struggle. It is also observed that a great number of land cases were pending in the court of law, some of which may have been resolved already but cannot be ascertained by this study.

Data have shown that 75 per cent of the respondents have been directly involved in one land dispute or another. In all cases, each respondent claimed to be the rightful owner of the disputed land while the other party was the trespasser. The study also observed that apart from inter-communal land cases which were rampant, there were intra-communal clashes between the Yakurr communities and their neighbouring communities over land struggle. Figure 1 shows the different communities in Yakurr that had fought each other on account of land struggle, resulting to wanton destruction of lives and property.



Key:

↔ Arrows showing communities as they have engaged in open battle war over land conflict

→ Arrow showing communities in cold war /court cases over land conflict

Source: Fieldwork 2015

Fig 1: shows inter-communal conflict between one community and another over land dispute in Yakurr Local Government Area

As data reveals, Ugep and Idomi fought over land in 1986; Ugep and Adim in Biase Local Government Area fought each other in 1989 and in 2000; Ugep and Ekori also fought over land in 1972; Ugep and Mkpiani in 1983; Ugep and Anong in Abi Local Government Area in 1971; Mkpiani and Ekori in 1998; Mkpiani and Nko in 1990; Inyima and Oderega/Oyedema in Obubra Local Government Area in 1996 and in 2006; Nko and Oderega in Obubra in 1996, 2010 and 2013.

CONCLUSION

From the evidence presented in this study, the uncontrolled population growth in the rural communities of Yakurr, Cross River State, Nigeria exacerbated by their norm for large family sizes has resulted to the frequent and rampant communal land conflicts and the consequent rural impoverishments. Therefore, it is

expedient that the rural communities in Yakurr stop bearing the burden of population pressures by introducing family planning programmes and a vigorous population education campaigns in all the rural communities of Yakurr in order to enlighten the people on the dangers of large family sizes. The government should bring the rural communities of Yakurr into the mainstream of national development programmes. The emphasis should be placed on achieving increase in farm yields and efficient utilization of farm lands through sustainable development as well as infrastructural development, employment opportunities as this would help to reduce the restiveness and desperation which push the people to engage in communal land conflicts.

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