

Effects of Communal Conflicts on Socio-Economic Activities in Oju Local Government Area of Benue State

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Abstract

Peace is the foundation upon which every society thrives. However, communal conflicts in Oju Local Government Area disrupt the peace, thereby affecting several livelihood activities. This paper examined the extent to which communal conflicts affect socio-economic activities in Oju Local Government Area of Benue State, Nigeria. The paper adopted a descriptive survey design to assess the disruption of key socio-economic activities, including agriculture, trade, culture, and recreation. A total of 375 respondents were selected using purposive and simple random sampling techniques. Data were collected through questionnaires and key informant interviews. Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, and Pearson Correlation, while qualitative data were unbundled using content analysis. Findings revealed that communal conflicts significantly disrupted major socio-economic activities in the area. Crop farming, was greatly affected by destruction of farmlands and displacement of farmers, leading to food shortages and economic hardship. Trading activities declined due to insecurity, which hindered market operations and supply chains. Religious gatherings and cultural events were disrupted by fear and mistrust, reducing social cohesion and communal unity. Similarly, sports and other recreational activities that previously fostered youth engagement and peace were abandoned, thereby increasing youth involvement in violent activities. The Pearson Correlation result ($r = 0.074$, $p = 0.03$) confirmed a statistically significant relationship between communal conflicts and disruptions in socio-economic activities. It was concluded that communal conflicts erode economic stability, social cohesion, and peace-building opportunities, which exacerbates poverty and deepen divisions among communities. The paper recommends that Local government, extension services, community leaders, and security agents should protect farmlands, grazing and fishing areas, markets, transport routes, recreational centres, cultural and worship centres to avert conflicts and ensure safe access and sustained agricultural and livestock productivity, cultural and recreational events.

Keywords: Agriculture; Communal conflict; Cultural disruption; Peace building; Socio-economic activities.

Introduction

Every society needs peace as the basis for stable socio-economic activities. Without peace, production drops, development initiatives stall, and community social cohesion starts to collapse. However, communal conflicts threaten this vital stability in many parts of the world, upsetting livelihoods and impeding economic development. According to Dekera (2019), communal conflicts occurs when two or more communities engage in either violent or non-violent confrontations, over issues like resource control, land ownership, and religious or political differences. Unlike other forms of conflict that may involve state actors, organized armed groups, or ideological movements, communal conflicts are typically localized, occurring among groups with long-standing social, cultural, or kinship ties (Doki & Boh, 2014).

Communal conflicts exist in all communities around the world. In early Europe, The Reformation movement, which involved a severe break in Christendom's unity, sparked a variety of confessional difficulties that provoked and justified communal conflicts especially in countries like Transylvania, Prussia, Lithuania and Poland. These clashes were primarily between Catholics, Orthodox, Calvinists and Lutherans as well as Antitrinitarians (Lisy-Wagner & Murdock, 2015). This violence included verbal insults, the destruction of sacred images, and even a full-fledged massacre.

In Asia, communal conflicts have significantly impacted several countries, including India, Myanmar, and Sri Lanka. In India, for instance, the Gujarat riots in 2002 and the Muzaffarnagar riots in 2013 led to severe disruptions in socio-economic activities (Singh, 2014). The violence and displacement did not only cause humanitarian crises but also severely affected agricultural productivity and trade in the Rakhine State, leading to increased poverty and food insecurity (International Crisis Group, 2020).

In Africa, the 2015 Human Development Report, reveals that over half of the 20 countries with the lowest levels of human development have experienced significant levels of communal conflicts since 1990. According to Bahati (2019) armed conflict has costed Africa over \$18 billion between 1990 and 2018. Driven by ethnic, religious, and political tensions, notable examples of communal conflicts in Africa included the ethnic violence in Rwanda during the 1994 genocide, the ongoing clashes between herders and farmers in Nigeria, and the sectarian violence in South Sudan (Alabi & Famakinwa, 2017). Communal conflicts have crippled economic growth by bringing immediate loss of lives, displacing populations,

destroying infrastructure, and reducing access to markets (Rolandsen & Daly, 2016; Krause, 2020).

In Nigeria, communal conflicts have persisted during the past two decades. Generally, clashes in Nigeria dates back to 1914 when Southern and Northern protectorates were amalgamated (Alubo, 2006). These historical antecedents culminated into the Nigerian civil war between the Hausa and Igbo ethnic groups that lasted for some two and half years (Okafor, 2007). The post-independence Nigeria continued to witness conflicts mainly resulting from boundary disputes between neighbouring communities. Some of these conflicts were the conflict between Ife and Modakeke in the present day Osun State, Aguleri and Umuleri, the Osile and Ogbunike conflicts all in the present day Anambra State, the Tiv and Alago conflict in Nassarawa State, the Tiv and Udam conflicts in Benue and Cross River States, the Tiv and Jukun conflicts in Benue and Taraba States, the Ezza and Ezilo communities in Ebonyi State and a litany of other recorded and unrecorded incidents of conflicts among families, villages, and communities in Nigeria (Dekera, 2019). These conflicts disrupt education, healthcare, and trade, leading to a decline in human capital development and economic opportunities.

The North-Central States of Nigeria consisting of Benue, Kogi, Kwara, Nasarawa, Niger, and Plateau as well as the Federal Capital Territory (FCT), have also witnessed frequent communal clashes mostly in the form of herders-farmers clashes with attendant devastating consequences (Aderinto & Achem, 2019) for affected communities. For instance, for over two decades in Plateau State, communal conflict is prevalent, registering over 5,000 deaths and destroying about 200 villages. The conflicts are typically wielded across ethno-religious lines (Schaub, 2014). These conflicts have far-reaching socio-economic effects. For instance, the destruction of farms and markets, hampers economic activities and stifles development. Moreover, displacement of populations due to violence creates a strain on social services and exacerbates poverty in affected regions (Ojelabi, Akinwale & Uyiha, 2021).

There is plethora of other communal conflicts in Benue State too. Some of these conflicts include; the Tiv/Jukun conflict, the Mbakor/Nongov border conflict in Guma and Tarka LGAs, the Mbaivur/Mbasombo communal conflicts in Gwer East Local Government Area, Mbatyav- Mbazerem conflict in Gboko and Konshisha Local Government Areas, Ugaambe/Mbaiase communal conflicts in Gwer East and Konshisha Local Government Areas of Benue (Kachii, 2019; Iornumbe, 2021). These conflicts have claimed lives that

otherwise would be productive, as well as destroyed properties worth millions of Naira (Doki & Boh, 2014). Dekera (2019), also notes that in the North-East district of Benue State, conflicts directly reduced socio-economic activities like farming leading to severe damage to food security.

Over the past decade, Oju LGA has been plagued by over 15 incidences of communal conflicts, largely stemming from land disputes and ethnic tensions between the Tiv communities of Bonta in Konshisha LGA and Igede communities of Oju LGA (Okoh & Egere, 2020). Several other communal conflicts have also been recorded including those that occurred among Igede communities of Ibilla, Uwokwu and Ukpa communities. According to Ochi (2024), these conflicts have resulted in the deaths of over 200 people, with thousands more injured as well as significant displacement, with an estimated 5,000 to 7,000 people fleeing their homes during periods of intense violence.

Despite interventions by the Benue State government in collaboration with the Oju Local Government Traditional council to curb communal conflicts by holding meetings, setting up peace committees and employing the traditional conflict resolution processes, communal conflicts in Oju still persists with attendant effects on socio-economic activities like agriculture, trade, as well as events like weddings, burial ceremonies and other cultural activities.

It is worrisome that communal conflicts prevail, yet, little scholarly work demonstrate the effect of these conflicts on various socio-economic activities in Oju. Tsuwa and Adorowa (2023) only investigated the impact of communal conflicts on economic development of Bonta/Ukpute-Ainu communities. However, the scope of their study was limited to only two communities which is too limited to understand the nature, extent and effect of communal conflicts on socio-economic activities in the area. Similarly, **Okoh and Egere (2020)** conducted a study on the impact of communal conflicts on agriculture, revealing the causes of the over decades-packed conflicts between communities in Oju and Konshisha. Again, the study limited its analysis only on agricultural activities which is only one out of the many socio-economic activities in Oju. This paper presents the major socio-economic activities and also the extent to which communal conflicts affect these socio-economic activities in Oju Local Government Area. The paper hypothesized that there is no significant association between the communal conflicts and socio-economic activities in Oju Local Government Area of Benue State.

Conceptual clarification

Communal Conflict

Communal conflict is made up of two axiomatic words “communal” and “conflict”. While conflict has been conceptualized, communal is derived from a Latin word “communis” which means “common”. Communal relates particularly to groups, and it involves things commonly used, shared or experienced by a group in a society. Such things can be resources or conflict. Communal conflict is a social conflict that relates to a group or groups in a society. When it occurs within a group, it is known as intra-communal conflict and inter-communal conflict when it occurs between groups (Alimba, 2014). Communal conflict was considered by Azuonwu (2002) as a conflict that occurs between two or more communities. Oboh and Hyande (2006) described communal conflict as involving two or more communities engaging themselves in disagreement or act of violence over issues such as claims for land ownership, religious and political difference leading to loss of lives and destruction of properties. Dzurgba (2006) was of the opinion that communistic violence is that which occurs between two or more communities over territorial land, farmland and territorial water for fishing. From the foregoing, it is understood that communal conflict arises when two distinct groups in a community disagree over jointly shared resources due to the possibility of inequitable distribution or the problem of domination by a group. The development of this kind of conflict in any society has attachment to commonly shared or used resources or elements which can be tangible or intangible. This understanding forms the basis of conceptualisation of communal conflict in this study.

Socio-Economic Activities

Socio-economic activities refer to the various actions and interactions that individuals, households, communities, and institutions undertake within a society to produce, distribute, exchange, and consumer goods and services, as well as to pursue social and cultural endeavors. These activities are influenced by social, cultural, political, and economic factors and play a crucial role in shaping the overall development and functioning of societies. Medvedskaya (2011), defines social activity as the intensity of the development of potential opportunities provided by society for decent life and human participation in the development of society, personally mediated by a system of motives, motives and conditions associated with the achievement of socially significant goals.

Additionally, socio-economic activities encompass a wide array of behaviours and practices that reflect the interactions between individuals, households, communities, and institutions in the pursuit of economic and social objectives. According to the World Bank (n.d.), these activities include but are not limited to economic production in various sectors such as agriculture, industry, and services; trade and exchange of goods and services in markets; consumption and utilization of resources; employment and labor participation; investment in human capital and infrastructure; and engagement in social and cultural practices such as family dynamics, religious ceremonies, and community events.

Effects of Communal Conflicts on Socio-Economic Activities

Communal conflicts have far-reaching effects on socio-economic activities, including production, distribution, culture, and recreation. Agricultural production is severely undermined as conflicts destroy farmlands, crops, and infrastructure. In Langtang North, Plateau State, Nigeria, communal crises caused significant declines in crop quantity and value (Kughur, Daudu, & Iornenege, 2017). Similarly, Bolarinwa, Saghir, and Oyekunle (2009) observed reductions in crop and livestock production in rainforest and savannah regions, with many farmers losing access to productive land. Conflicts also disrupt farm operations and labour availability; fear, displacement, and curfews prevent timely planting, weeding, and harvesting, leading to decreased productivity. In Benue and Adamawa States, these disruptions resulted in declines in yam output and overall crop production (Oriko, Ismaila, & Ogbaini, 2022; Silas, Gambo, & Hassan, 2023). Displacement carries additional economic, fiscal, and social costs, pushing households into poverty and food insecurity (Verwimp & Van Bavel, 2013).

Input supply and investment in conflict-prone areas are also affected. Access to seeds, fertilizers, machinery, and extension services is limited due to insecurity or damaged infrastructure, reducing agricultural efficiency and innovation (Effiong & Owolabi, 2021). Livestock production is similarly disrupted; grazing, water access, and animal health suffer, leading to reduced yields and loss of draught power, manure, and income diversification (Addah & Zezebi, 2008; Cameroon study, 2024). Conflicts increase risk aversion, prompting farmers to cultivate smaller areas or lower-risk crops and avoid long-term investments, ultimately reducing income and livelihoods (Kwaghtser, 2019).

Distribution networks are heavily impacted as transport infrastructure is damaged or rendered unsafe, causing delays, higher costs, and spoilage of perishable goods (ProjectClue, 2012).

Disruption of market information and extension services impairs planning and coordination, discouraging trade and investment (Adzenga, Umar, Olaleye, Ajayi & Onyenkazi, 2019). Displacement further disrupts supply chains, leaving abandoned farms, storage, and transport assets, which exacerbates food insecurity and lowers dietary diversity (Olanrewaju & Balana, 2023).

Cultural and recreational activities are also compromised. Conflicts lead to cancellation or scaling down of festivals, rituals, and ceremonies due to insecurity or loss of venues, threatening intergenerational transmission and continuity of cultural practices (Okonkwo, Udegbunam, & Chris, 2023). Participation declines as fear, displacement, and trauma reduce community engagement (Nwangbo, Ukeje, Njoku, & Ololo, 2023). Cultural events may be politicized, commodified, or simplified, altering their original meaning and reducing inclusivity (Suleiman, Wunti, Adamu, & Yahaya, 2023). Communal conflict also erodes social cohesion and trust, discouraging participation in recreational and community development activities, as observed among the Ogoni people (Deekor & Kpurunee, 2021).

Overall, communal conflicts not only destroy physical and economic assets but also disrupt livelihoods, reduce production and income, limit access to markets and inputs, undermine cultural identity, and weaken social cohesion. Their cumulative effect hampers sustainable development, increases poverty and food insecurity, and alters the social and cultural fabric of affected communities.

Theoretical Framework

The study adopts the Randall Collins's Social Conflict theory to explain the effects of communal conflicts on socio-economic activities. Rooted in Marx's ideas, the theory emphasizes struggles over power and resources, but Collins focuses on micro-level social interactions as the basis for broader conflicts. Through his concepts of interaction ritual chains and emotional energy, Collins explains how shared activities and cultural practices generate group loyalty while fostering hostility toward outsiders. In communal conflicts, these dynamics intensify aggression and reinforce "in-group" versus "out-group" divisions, often escalating into cycles of violence or conflict chains. Such tensions disrupt socio-economic activities by damaging infrastructure, displacing communities, and halting agricultural, trade, and investment activities. Negative emotional energy erodes social capital like trust, cooperation, and cohesion and undermines collaborative efforts in farming, trade,

and local enterprises. Consequently, communal conflicts reduce productivity, income, and economic stability, perpetuating poverty, food insecurity, and long-term socio-economic stagnation in affected areas.

Methodology

Descriptive survey design was adopted for this study. This research design allowed for the description of features, behaviours, attitudes, and opinions on the extent of the effect of communal conflicts on socio-economic activities within Oju Local Government Area. Oju is located in the southern part of Benue State Nigeria. The area lies between latitude 6° 45 north and longitude 8° 30 east. Created in 1976, Oju shares a common boundary with Obi local government and Cross River State in the south and in the East and west with Konshisha and Ado local government areas respectively (Orpin, Manyi, Bem, & Mzungu, 2016). The 2006 Nigeria Population Census puts the population of Oju local government area at 168,491 and at 2.3% annual growth rate, the population was projected to be 243,300 in 2022 (NPC, NBS, 2022). The area has a total of 11 council wards namely; Adokpa, Ibilla, Idelle, Iyeche, Oboru-Oye, Oju, Okpokpo, Okudu, Owo, Ukpa/Ainu-Ette, and Ainu council wards. Igede is the dominant ethnic group in the local government and the people speak the Igede dialect.

This study captured both the male and female population between 18 years and above living in Oju Local government area. A sample size of 375 respondents was drawn from a total population of 243,300 people from Oju Local Government Area using the Taro Yemane's formula for the determination of sample size for known population. The study utilized both purposive and simple random sampling techniques. Purposive sampling technique was used to select council wards that had overtime experienced communal conflicts. The reason for this technique was to limit data collection to areas with people who had adequate knowledge on the subject matter. This allowed for a focused data collection and guarantee reliability of findings. Therefore, out of the 11, only five council wards including Ibilla, Ukpa/Ainu-Ette, Oju, Adokpa and Oboru-Oye were selected. Simple random sampling technique was used to select respondents. Prior to visiting the sampled areas, the researcher drafted codes "Yes" and "No" on separate pieces of papers in equal numbers, squeezed accordingly and mixed into a single basket. After this, the researcher visited the sampled areas and presented each respondent with the codes in the basket and asked them to pick one piece at a time and those that picked the "Yes" code were selected to participate in the study.

A semi-structured questionnaire was designed by the researchers and used to obtain quantitative data. The questionnaire was validated by two senior research fellows who made minor observations before it was corrected and administered by the researchers by hand. Similarly, a semi-structured Key Informant Interview (KII) guide was used to collect qualitative data. KII was adopted to ensure that only people who possessed the in-depth knowledge of communal conflicts and were part of security briefings in the area like traditional rulers, security agents, women leaders and youth leaders qualified to be part of the interview. To select informants, a formal written consent was drafted and submitted to the heads of the five sampled council wards during a preliminary visit to the area where informants were identified. From there, the researcher arranged for the date, time and venue of the interview. In each of the sampled council ward, one key informant was selected making a total of five informants. The researchers conducted five interview sessions through the face-to-face method and each session lasted between 30 – 45 minutes. Mobile telephones as well as writing materials were used to record discussions.

Data obtained through questionnaire were analysed quantitatively through the application of Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS, v.25) with statistical tools comprising descriptive statistics like percentages and frequencies distribution. To test hypothesis, Pearson Correlation and Chi-Square was used. On the other hand, data collected through key informant interviews was analyzed qualitatively through content analysis because this method allowed the data to be coded into themes and these themes represented the objectives of the study. Quantitative data was presented in tables with a follow-up analysis, while qualitative data was presented in thematic narratives and indented accordingly.

Results and Discussion

Socio-demographic Attributes of Respondents

Table 1: Socio-demographic Attributes of Respondents

Attributes	Categories	Frequency (N = 375)	Percentage (% = 100)
Gender	Male	274	73
	Female	101	27
Age (in years)	18-35	138	37
	36-64	157	42
	65 +	80	21
Marital Status	Single	95	25
	Married	221	59
	Divorced/Separated	29	8
	Widowed	30	8
Highest Educational Qualification	No formal education	18	5

Occupation	Primary education	40	11
	Secondary education	260	69
	Tertiary Education	57	15
	Farming	258	69
	Civil/Public service	48	13
	Trading	55	15
	Others	14	3

Source:Field Survey, 2025

The data on Table 1 shows that 274 (73%) of the respondents were males, while 101 (27%) of them were females. This implied that males participated more actively in the study. This was possible because in most African societies, including the Igede culture, men are spokespersons on community-related issues, thereby increasing their response rates. On the other hand, women, are more restricted to domestic affairs which limits their level of participation in the study. The age of respondents showed that 138 (37%) of the respondents were between the ages of 18-35 years; 157 (42%) of them were between 36-64 years; and 80 (21%) were between 66 years and above. The middle-age category dominated the study. This category of respondents obviously has greater responsibilities for livelihoods, businesses, and family sustenance, making them prone to respond to questions on issues relating to communal conflicts, compared to the younger or elderly people. The result on the marital status of the respondents revealed that 95 (25%) of the respondents were single; 221 (59%) were married; 29 (8%) were either divorced or separated; while 30 (8%) were widowed. This indicates that the married respondents were more available for the study. Married respondents dominated the study because they were more directly affected by disruptions in livelihood, security, and family welfare. Communal conflicts often lead to displacement, economic instability, and loss of income, affecting married people responsible for household sustenance. On the educational level of the respondents, the study showed that 18 (5%) of the respondents had no formal education; 40 (11%) attained the primary level of education; 260 (69%) had secondary education; while 57 (15%) had attended tertiary education. This result indicates that most of the respondents were educated. This means they were literate enough to understand the questionnaire. The occupation of the respondents revealed that 258 (69%) respondents were farmers; 48 (13%) were civil/public servants; 55 (15%) were traders; and 14 (3%) belonged to other occupations. There were more farmers in the study areas because agriculture is the primary livelihood occupation in many rural communities affected by communal conflicts. Farmers were directly affected through land disputes, displacement, and restricted access to farmlands.

Major Socio-Economic Activities in Oju Local Government Area of Benue State

Table 2: Respondents' opinions on the major socio-economic activities in Oju LGA

Socio-economic activities	Categories	Frequency (N=375)	Percentage (%=100)	Remark
Production	Crop farming	172	46	1 st
	Livestock rearing	76	20	2 nd
	Fishing/Hunting	33	9	5 th
	Handicraft	57	15	3 rd
	Agro-processing	37	10	4 th
Distribution	Trading	218	58	1 st
	Transportation services	99	26	2 nd
	Storage and Warehousing	58	16	3 rd
Cultural	Religious gatherings	141	38	1 st
	Traditional festivals	114	30	2 nd
	Meetings/Get togethers	74	20	3 rd
	Rites of passage	46	12	4 th
Recreational	Sports	150	40	1 st
	Dance/Entertainment	121	32	2 nd
	Traditional games	44	12	4 th
	Hiking/Adventures	60	16	3 rd

Source:Field Survey, 2025

Table 2 categorises four socio-economic activities carried out by people in Oju LGA. From the data shown, out of the five production activities, crop farming was revealed to be the most activity with 172 (46%) of the respondents agreeing to this opinion. This was followed by livestock rearing (goats, sheep, rabbits, cows) [76 (20%)], handicraft (pottery moulding/clay works, wood carving, rope weaving, brooms and basket weaving, masquerade masks) [57 (15%)], agro-processing activities (palm oil production, rice milling, gari production) [37 (10%)] and lastly, fishing/hunting [33 (9%)]. This shows that crop farming is the major production activity in Oju local government area. Crops cultivated by people from Oju include guineacorn (sorghum), soybeans, beniseed (sesame), millet, maize, yam, rice, cassava, groundnut, and plantain and palm plantations.

In terms of distribution activities, results showed that 218 (58%) of the respondents said the major activity in this category was trading of both processed and unprocessed goods; followed by transportation services [99 (26%)] and then storage/warehousing (including crops like guineacorn (sorghum), soybeans, beniseed (sesame), millet, maize, yam, rice, cassava, groundnut, as well as processed palm oil) [58 (16%)]. From the results, trading of goods was the major activity under distribution activities. Trading unusually involved the use of trucks for both intra and inter State delivery of agricultural produce.

Regarding cultural activities, 141 (38%) of the respondents were of the opinion that the major activity here was religious gatherings like church services, mosque congregational prayers and inter-faith meetings. In order of ranking, the second major activity was traditional festivals (the Igede Agba yam festival) [114 (30%)], meetings/get togethers (family meetings, birthdays, youth associations gatherings, old students' meetings, elders' meetings, women associations meetings, political meetings) was ranked third [74 (20%)] and rites of passage ceremonies (naming ceremony, burials, marriages, taboo enforcement events) [46 (12%)]. The result indicated that religious gatherings was the most cultural activity among people in Oju local government area.

Concerning recreational activities, sports (football, track and field, volleyball, basketball, tennis) was ranked first [150 (40%)], followed by dance and entertainment (adiya, ogirinye, abekpa, aje, and otopo dances, masquerade performances, beauty contests, folk performances, storytelling events) [121 (32%)], hiking/adventures (visiting tourist sites like mountains, rivers, forests) [60 (16%)] and traditional games (seed-and-hole board games, informal wrestling) [44 (12%)]. The result on recreational activities indicated that sport activities were most practiced in Oju local government area.

Responses from key informants further relates the major socio-economic activities in Oju LGA, centring on production, distribution, cultural and recreational aspects. A 35 year old female security agent in Oju said thus:

The socio-economic activities here revolve around agriculture, particularly crop farming, which remains the backbone of the local economy. Production focuses on crops like yams, rice, plantations, and cassava among others, while distribution occurs through local markets and traders (KII, 2025).

In Ibilla Council Ward, a 65 year old male community leader had this to say about the socio-economic activities in the area:

Our primary socio-economic activity is crop farming, but also distribution mainly occurs within the village, but we also trade with nearby towns. Cultural activities such as drumming, dances, and festivals are also practiced, where elders pass on traditions to the younger generation. We also have recreational activities like sports, especially football, to keep the youths engaged and reduce social tensions (KII, 2025).

From the above analyses, it is clear that though there were other socio-economic activities in Oju LGA, the major ones were crop farming, trading, religious gatherings, and sports. Crop farming served as the primary source of livelihood, ensuring food security and

income generation for households. **Trading** facilitated economic exchange, connecting farmers and consumers while boosting local commerce. **Religious gatherings** played a crucial role in fostering social cohesion, moral guidance, and community support. **Sports activities** promoted youth engagement, physical well-being, and unity. This finding relates to Usman, Ahmed & Obodumu (2015), on livelihood activities among rural dwellers in Otukpo LGA, Benue State, which revealed that agriculture remains the primary occupation, with over half of the respondents engaged in farming. Other significant activities included weaving and various forms of trading. These occupations provided income and employment, fostering economic stability and community development.

Effects of Communal Conflicts on Socio-Economic Activities in Oju Local Government Area of Benue State

Table 3: Extent of Effects of Communal Conflicts on Socio-Economic Activities

Main Activities	Specific activities affected	Extent of the effect	Frequency (N) = 375	Percentage (%) = 100
Production	Crop Farming	Reduction in cultivated area	35	9.3
		Decline in crop yield/output	120	32.0
		Limited access/unsafe farmlands	220	58.7
	Livestock Rearing	Reduction in herd size/loss of animals	115	30.7
		Restricted access to grazing routes	100	26.7
		Increased livestock theft/mortality	160	42.6
	Fishing/Hunting	Decline in catch volume	130	34.7
		Insecurity/restrictions to fishing/hunting grounds	120	32.0
		Loss/damage of fishing/hunting gear	125	33.3
	Handicraft	Reduction in items produced	125	33.3
		Difficulty accessing raw materials	105	28.0
		Loss of tools/workspace	145	38.7
	Agro-processing	Reduced processing capacity	140	37.3
		Shortage of raw materials	130	34.7
		Damage/loss of processing equipment	105	28.0
Distribution	Trading	Reduced market access & sales	140	37.3
		Loss or damage of goods	110	29.3
		Increased transportation/transaction costs	125	33.3
	Transportation Services	Reduced trips and service coverage	135	36.0
		Road insecurity, blockades, or restrictions	140	37.3
	Storage & Warehousing	Higher operational costs	100	26.7
		Damage/theft of stored goods	128	34.1
		Reduced storage capacity/utilization	130	34.7

Main Activities	Specific activities affected	Extent of the effect	Frequency (N) = 375	Percentage (%) = 100	
Cultural		Fear/insecurity around storage facilities	117	31.2	
	Religious Gatherings		Decline in attendance	140	37.3
			Closure or disruption of worship activities	104	27.7
			Fear of assembling for worship	131	35.0
	Traditional Festivals		Cancellation or postponement of festivals	120	32.0
			Low participation turnout	105	28.0
	Meetings/Get-togethers		Disruption of cultural performances/rituals	150	40.0
			Reduced community participation	135	36.0
			Change/relocation of meeting venues	100	26.7
	Rites of Passage		Decline in social cohesion/interactions	140	37.3
			Postponement/cancellation of ceremonies	150	40.0
			Decline in attendance/participation	107	28.5
			Limitation on ritual activities	118	31.5
Recreational	Sports		Cancellation of sports events	140	37.3
			Reduced participation levels	102	27.2
			Fear of gathering for sports	133	35.5
	Dance/Entertainment		Event cancellations	150	40.0
			Reduced audience turnout	107	28.5
	Traditional Games		Decline in performers/performances	118	31.5
			Lower participation in games	140	37.3
			Loss of play grounds/game spaces	93	24.8
	Hiking/Adventures		Fear/insecurity affecting outdoor play	142	37.9
			Reduced access to natural sites	140	37.3
			Fear of attacks during adventures	100	26.7
			Decline/abandonment of outdoor adventures	135	36.0

Source: Field Survey, 2025

The extent of the effects of communal conflicts on socio-economic activities in Oju Local Government Area is presented in Table 3. Results on Table 3, showed that the communal conflicts had a profound effect on crop farming. Limited access to farmland was reported by 220 respondents (58.7%), indicating that more than half of the farmers experienced restricted or unsafe farmland usage. Moderate reductions in crop yield were reported by 120 respondents (32%), while only 35 respondents (9.3%) reported very low effects. This

suggests that crop production is highly vulnerable to conflict, primarily due to land disputes, fear of attacks, or abandonment of farms.

Livestock activities were similarly affected. Increased livestock theft and mortality were reported by 160 respondents (42.6%), highlighting the vulnerability of animals to raiding and theft during communal clashes. Reduction in herd size was reported by 115 respondents (30.7%), and 100 respondents (26.7%) experienced restricted access to grazing routes. This result shows that communal conflicts in Oju LGA directly threaten both the assets (livestock) and the grazing resources necessary for sustainable livestock rearing.

Fishing and hunting activities showed substantial disruption. A decline in catch volume was reported by 130 respondents (34.7%), while 120 respondents (32%) experienced restrictions to fishing and hunting grounds. Loss or damage of fishing/hunting gear also affected 125 respondents (33.3%). The near-equal distribution of these frequencies indicates that both access to resources and actual productivity of fishing and hunting activities are significantly affected by communal conflicts in Oju LGA.

In handicraft production, 145 respondents (38.7%) reported loss of tools or workspace, 125 respondents (33.3%) revealed reductions in items produced, and 105 respondents (28%) experienced difficulties in accessing raw materials. This shows that in Oju LGA, artisanal and small-scale manufacturing are vulnerable to communal conflicts, which disrupt both the production process and material supply chains.

Agro-processing was also affected through reduced processing capacity (140 respondents, 37.3%), shortage of raw materials (130 respondents, 34.7%), and damage or loss of equipment (105 respondents, 28%). This result demonstrates that in Oju LGA, communal conflicts do not only affect primary production but also hinder value addition processes that are crucial for income generation. Production activities are largely dependent on stable access to land, resources, and equipment. The high frequencies and percentages in the “moderate” and “high effect” categories confirm that communal conflicts undermine agricultural productivity, food security, and rural livelihoods.

Table 3 also produced results on the effect of communal conflicts on distribution activities. Under this category, trading was heavily affected, with 140 respondents (37.3%) reporting reduced market access and sales, 125 respondents (33.3%) indicating increased transportation

or transaction costs, and 110 respondents (29.3%) experiencing loss or damage of goods. The high impact underscores the vulnerability of traders to insecurity and market disruptions.

Transportation services also experienced disruption in operational coverage (135 respondents, 36%), road insecurity or blockades (140 respondents, 37.3%), and higher operational costs (100 respondents, 26.7%). These disruptions usually hinder movement of goods and people, reflecting a direct economic loss and increased cost of doing business.

Storage facilities were similarly affected by damage/theft of stored goods (128 respondents, 34.1%), reduced utilization (130 respondents, 34.7%), and fear or insecurity surrounding storage locations (117 respondents, 31.2%). This indicates that communal conflicts reduce the safety and effectiveness of warehousing infrastructure, which is critical for supply chain stability. The high percentages in the “moderate” and “high effect” categories across distribution activities illustrate that conflicts severely affect logistics, trade continuity, and the flow of goods. These disruptions cascade into reduced incomes, higher costs, and economic instability in affected areas.

The effect of communal conflicts on cultural activities was also reported in Table 3. Here, a decline in attendance at religious events was reported by 140 respondents (37.3%), closure or disruption of worship activities affected 104 respondents (27.7%), and fear of assembling for worship affected 131 respondents (35%). Religious practices are central to community cohesion, and these disruptions indicate both social and psychological impacts of conflicts. The results also revealed cancellations or postponements of festivals as it affected 120 respondents (32%). There was low participation turnout that involved 105 respondents (28%), and disruption of cultural performances that affected 150 respondents (40%). This indicates that communal conflicts threaten the preservation and continuity of cultural heritage.

Communal conflicts were also reported to affect meetings as results indicated reduced community participation as was reported by 135 respondents (36%), relocation of meeting venues reported by 100 respondents (26.7%), and decline in social cohesion or interactions by 140 respondents (37.3%). These results highlight the social fragmentation caused by conflicts. Communal conflicts caused the postponement or cancellation of rites of passage ceremonies as reported by 150 respondents (40%). Meanwhile a decline in attendance was reported by 107 respondents (28.5%), and limitations on ritual activities affected 118

respondents (31.5%). Cultural rites are crucial for identity and social structure; disruptions can have long-term societal implications. The high levels of disruption in cultural activities reflect the social consequences of communal conflicts, including weakened social cohesion, reduced cultural participation, and loss of traditional knowledge.

Regarding recreational activities, results in Table 3 revealed that there was cancellation of sports events as reported by 140 respondents (37.3%), reduced participation by 102 respondents (27.2%), and fear of gathering for sports by 133 respondents (35.5%). Regarding dance and entertainment, results showed that there were cancellations of events due to communal conflicts which affected 150 respondents (40%), there was reduced audience turnout as reported by 107 respondents (28.5%), and a decline in performers or performances as reported by 118 respondents (31.5%). Traditional games were also affected. There was lower participation in games as reported by 140 respondents (37.3%), loss of play grounds by 93 respondents (24.8%), and fear or insecurity affecting outdoor play by 142 respondents (37.9%). There were reports of reduced access to natural sites by 140 respondents (37.3%), fear of attacks by 100 respondents (26.7%), and abandonment of outdoor adventures by 135 respondents (36%). Recreational activities are essential for physical health, social interaction, and community cohesion. From the results, it is clear that communal conflicts significantly reduce participation and access to recreational spaces, indicating both physical and psychological impacts on communities.

Corroborating the above responses, KII results indicated that communal conflicts served as a cankerworm to socio-economic development in Oju LGA. In the words of a 59 year old male security agent from Adopka council ward:

Communal conflicts in this area have severely affected production activities, especially farming. Many farmers have abandoned their farmlands due to fear of attacks, leading to reduced food production. Insecurity prevented people from accessing their crops, and this caused serious food shortages. When conflicts escalated, entire farming communities were displaced, leaving their crops to wither (KII, 2025).

A 33 year old male youth leader from AINU-ETTE council ward was of the following assertion:

Communal conflicts greatly affected farming which has reduced crop production, leading to food shortages. The distribution of farm produce was also affected, as traders no longer felt safe traveling to the affected areas. Culturally, our traditional festivals were affected because people feared gatherings may turn violent. Recreational activities, especially football matches, declined because conflicts created divisions among the youth. These

issues weakened our community bonds, making it difficult for us to progress as a people.

From the above results, it has been observed that in Oju LGA, communal conflicts significantly disrupted major socio-economic activities like crop farming, trading, religious gatherings, and sports. Crop farming, the primary occupation, was affected due to land disputes, destruction of farmlands, and displacement of farmers, leading to food shortages and economic hardship. Trading declined as insecurity hindered market operations and supply chains. Religious gatherings were affected as fear and tension discouraged attendance. Similarly, sports activities that promoted youth engagement and community bonding were disrupted. The effects weakened economic stability, social cohesion, and overall socio-economic development. This is also similar to Nwakamma, Oketa, Oginyi & Edeh (2023), who found that conflicts in certain areas in Ebonyi State resulted in the abandonment of development projects and hindered the growth of small-scale businesses. The instability caused by these conflicts disrupted economic activities, leading to reduced income and development in the affected communities.

Hypothesis

H₀: There is no significant association between communal conflicts and disruption in socio-economic activities in Oju Local Government Area of Benue State

Table 4: Pearson Correlation coefficient showing the relationship between the natures of communal conflicts and increase in socio-economic in Oju LGA of Benue State

Variables	Nature of Communal Conflicts	Socio-Economic Activities
Nature of Communal Conflicts	1	.074
Socio-Economic Activities	.074	1

Note: N=375, p=0.03

Source: SPSS, v. 25

Analysis: Table 4 presents a Pearson Correlation that was conducted to test the association between the nature of communal conflicts and socio-economic activities in Oju LGA. The Pearson coefficient showed an extremely weak positive association between the two variables ($r=0.074$). The value is close to 0, suggesting almost no linear relationship. Thus, the strength of this correlation is negligible. However, the correlation is statistically significant ($p = 0.03$). Since $p > 0.05$, there is strong evidence that the association observed in the sample exists in the population.

Interpretation: Since the correlation is statistically significant, we conclude that there is a meaningful association between the two variables. This means that the observed correlation is unlikely to be due to random chance but of real effect.

Decision: Since $p = 0.03 < 0.05$, we reject the null hypothesis (H_0) and accept the alternative hypothesis (H_1). This means that the nature of communal conflicts affects socio-economic activities in Oju Local Government Area. Communal conflicts in Oju LGA severely disrupted key socio-economic activities such as farming, trading, religious gatherings, and sports. Farmland destruction, insecurity, and displacement reduced food production and market operations, while fear and tension limited social interactions, thereby weakening economic stability, social cohesion, and overall community development.

Conclusion

The objective of this paper was to ascertain the extent to which communal conflicts affect socio-economic activities in Oju Local Government Area of Benue State, Nigeria. It is obvious that communal conflicts significantly disrupt socio-economic activities, affecting production, distribution, cultural, and recreational sectors. The paper concludes that the conflicts erode economic stability, social cohesion, and peace-building opportunities, which exacerbate poverty and deepen divisions among communities in Oju Local Government Area of Benue State.

Recommendations

- i. Local government, extension services, community leaders, and security agents should protect farmlands, grazing, and fishing areas to ensure safe access and sustain agricultural and livestock productivity.
- ii. Ministry of Trade, transport unions, warehouse operators, and law enforcement should secure markets, transport routes, and storage facilities to protect goods, reduce theft, and maintain trade continuity.
- iii. Religious leaders, traditional rulers, community associations, and local government committees should mediate conflicts and create safe, structured events to maintain participation and preserve social cohesion.
- iv. Ministry of Youth and Sports, youth organizations, and security outfits should establish monitored recreational zones and supervised activities to reduce fear and ensure safe sports and outdoor participation.

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