JOURNAL OF AGRICULTURAL ECONOMICS, EXTENSION & SCIENCES
Official Journal of the College of Agricultural Economics and Extension
www.jaees.org
www.uam.edu.ng
Jaees Vol. 12 No.1 2025, Page 146-157
ISSN (Print) 2545-5179, ISSN (Online) 2714-5018

AN OVERVIEW OF THE EFFECTS OF COMMUNAL CONFLICTS ON RURAL WOMEN IN NIGERIA: IMPLICATIONS FOR RURAL AND AGRICULTURAL DEVELOPMENT

***[1]Adzenga, J. I. and [2]Onyenkazi, H. A.**
[1]Agricultural Extension and Economics Department,
National Agricultural Extension and Research Liaison Services (NAERLS),
Ahmadu Bello University, P.M.B 1067, Zaria, Kaduna State, Nigeria
[2]National Cereals Research Institute, Badeggi, Niger State, Nigeria
Email:jakesadzenga@gmail.com

Abstract
The paper is an overview of the effects of communal conflicts and other forms of violence on rural women in Nigeria. The challenges faced by rural women and girls in Nigeria during conflicts and other forms of violence were extensively discussed by examining the various effects of communal conflicts on rural women in Nigeria such as physical effects, economic effects, socio-cultural effects, gender- based effects on access to services, effects on healths status and psychological / emotional effects. The paper also addressed the implication for rural and agricultural development in Nigeria, which are broadly categorized as food producers and active participants in the agrarian sectors, daily household maintenance tasks, small scale income generating activities and general contribution to the wellbeing of their rural community. Among other recommendations is for government to create an enabling environment to ensure women's full participation in peace building and conflict resolution, including building capacity for women organizations, at the national, regional and international levels as well as putting in place an appropriate mechanism which could provide development opportunities and empower women in rural areas.

Keywords: Communal, effects Conflict, women, rural, agriculture development.

1.0 Introduction

Rural women constitute more than 60percent of the population in Nigeria and play significant roles in both industrialized and emerging nations of rural economies. They constitute more than half of the agricultural labour force. Rural women in particular are responsible for half of the world's production and produce between 60 to 80 percent of the food in most developing countries. Yet, despite their contributions to global food security, women farmers are frequently underestimated and overlooked in

developing strategies (Effiong, 2013). Watson (2023) defined communal conflict as violent conflict between non-state groups that are organised along a shared communal identity, which are distinguished from conventional civil wars, whose belligerents are understood to exhibit a higher degree of organisation, and use more sophisticated weaponry.

According to Brosché and Elfversson (2012), when groups employ excessive force to seize control of a contested and deemed indivisible resource, such as a plot of land or local political authority, this is referred to as violent conflict. This is in line with how armed conflict is typically conceptualized. Since neither of the players is in charge of the state or the armed forces, the groups in question are non-state organizations. Since the groupings are structured around a common community identity, the conflict occurs along the lines of group identities rather than being formally organized as militias or rebel groups.

At whatever point of occurrence of communal conflicts, women and children have been known to be most vulnerable group affected by these conflicts. From time immemorial, there have been instances of heinous abuse against women and children. Women who survive these conflicts undergo distinct and unsettling visions of assault, conflict, and death for the rest of their lives. They likewise experience the ill effects of sexually transmitted infections, stigmatization and in some cases unwanted pregnancies**.** The daunting burden of reuniting families after relocation, as well as catering for their families by providing the basic necessity of life such as food, clothes, and shelter amid often-destroyed infrastructure are all considered the major challenges they are confronted with (Madzima, 2013).

2.0 Effects of Communal Conflicts on Rural Women in Nigeria

There exists some level of differences in the control of resources, basic choice making and experience during conflict situations. Even as the whole communities are affected by the occurrence of communal conflicts, women are particularly affected on account of their social standing in the society and gender discrimination. Especially, given the fact that they are mostly affected by conflicts, they are frequently not capable of protecting themselves and rarely involved in negotiation during conflict resolution and fostering of peaceful coexistence. Women are disproportionally precluded from basic leadership roles preceding all through and post conflicts situation, increasing their exploitation. Engaging rural women in conflict situations would help prevent gender predicated abuse including sexual violence, unplanned parenthood, forced prostitution among others (Alawemoand Muterera, 2010).

In the southern part of Nigeria, violence affecting women and girls commonly happen in the form of household violence, felony and conflicts between secret societies with women being mostly affected as well as fall in the unarmed group that are caught up in the conflicts. Domestic violence is prevalent especially in Delta State, however, there have been multiple reported cases of abduction and molestations committed against women related to wealthy politicians or traditional rulers (Aihie, 2010).

Violence against women takes the form of insurgency and abduction most particularly in the North Eastern part of Nigeria and increasingly the North Western region. This is turning out to be very noticeable in recent years within the region where insurgents continue to be on the increase and abduction of females is widespread. Violence against women occurs in the Middle belt and North Western regions of Nigeria in the form of forced marriages and domestic violence and inter-communal conflict, particularly between herdsmen and local communities with sexual abuse of young

females are very common. In States like Benue, Nasarawa, Plateau, Kaduna and Kano, these abuses have quite often been linked to prevalence of communal conflicts and banditry, with female members in the affected communities falling victims of the numerous confrontations among factions resulting in the decimation of households and livelihood activities. Reprisals attacks have also been carried out against women in response to their stance on social wrongs frequently meted out on them regarding issues of rights to cultivated land and farm animals (Relief web, 2015). Other forms through which communal conflicts impact negatively on rural women are as follows:

(i) Physical effects: Overwhelming proofs abound about serious forms of physical assault that women are subjected to with the occurrence of communal conflicts. Sexual abuse is prevalent in all stages of communal conflicts and perpetrated by armed troops, militants or other residents which may result into unplanned motherhood for the victims. Offsprings resulting from improper conception tend to deal with childhood atrocities, marginalization, abandonment, and prejudice with their mothers as well likely to bestigmatized and marginalized by their own communities. Female members of communities continuously face assaults associated with family relationships throughout occurrence and post conflict periods and it could be exacerbated in the context of widespread food shortages, marginalization and dissatisfaction which are common occurrences as a result of displacement from their communities (Poornima et al., 2023)

(ii) Economic effects: Conflicts are accompanied with its consequent negative cost, especially for rural women negatively affecting their sources of livelihood. The society's capacity to develop is negatively affected by an atmosphere of insecurity, particularly in terms of provision of fundamental facilities like schools, hospitals and

markets. Female members of communities primarily engage in trading of agricultural produce and other smaller goods to help sustain their families as well as valuable revenue addition. As a result of insecurity in the area, their freedom of movement is constrained as well as their ability to engage in livelihood activities are seriously affected as a result of insecurity. Furthermore, they are faced with very harsh economic hardship as well as the direct impact of losing their partners (Tadesseet al., 2010).The economic effects of communal conflict could be seen in terms of losses associated with destruction of homes, farmlands, community assets and household properties. These damages have been well documented in relevant official sources even though they have not been properly quantified. Besides, there is diminishing fortunes of agricultural productivity in the communities affected. When conflicts occur during the farming season, the tendency is that most farmers would not go to farm for fear of being attacked. Agriculture, including crop farming, livestock rearing and trading are the sectors hardest hit by communal conflicts. The implication of this is the possibility of low agricultural productivity in the following harvest season. Besides, the conflicts have resulted in actual damage of farmlands and volumes of farm crops and produce, all these translating into real and quantifiable material losses (Mercy Corps, 2015).

Economic conditions of women who are mostly engaged in petty trading and farming are often worsened by communal conflicts, disrupting their income-generating activities and undermining the welfare of individuals and households. During the violence conflicts, they experience indiscriminate attacks on their business' areas which, in some cases are looted and may be destroyed. Furthermore, the public or open market which brings most buyers and sellers together becomes inaccessible during violence break out. Farmers produce perishable goods but are not able to access the

market for security reasons. Associated with the issue of inaccessibility to the market is the problem of transportation which becomes disrupted, undermining farmers´ ability to convey their produce to the market (Mumuni, 2016).

(iii) Socio-cultural effects: Women are not actively involved in communal conflicts, and therefore unable to engage in self-defence, whenever their communities are threatened. Compared to other members of the communities, they experience more injuries and fatalities then their spouses and other household members. When a woman loses her partner, she typically must either have to forfeit part of means of livelihood or otherwise taken over by her spouse's close family members as a wife. Such women most often are not fully accorded much recognition in the society compared to the legitimate spouses as well as more prone to being kidnapped and sexually abused during conflict situations. Female members of the community may not be able to move freely during periods of insecurity, thereby affecting their daily existence and other socioeconomic activities as well as inability to establish social bonds in their communities and the adjoining clan (Tadesse et al., 2010).

(iv) Gender-based effects on access to services: Access to essential goods and services such as food, water, shelter, and health care, is a problem faced by many displaced women as a result of communal conflicts. Female-headed households encounter discrimination when access to services and goods arecontrolled by men. Decisions about food distribution in Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) camps, for example, are often made in consultation with male leaders who have little understanding of the needs and circumstances of the women who prepare the food. Women may find it difficult to access general or reproductive health care in situations of communal conflicts. Services (e.g., gynaecological services) may be absent, inappropriate (e.g., only male medical

staff may be available, this is culturally or religiously unacceptable), or inadequate. In some situations, women may have to seek permission from male relatives before they can access health services (Agbonifo, 2020).

Widowhood is one of the consequences that many women face in situations of communal conflict. Widowhood frequently changes the social and economic roles of women in the household and community. While the impact varies widely between communities and societies, widows may struggle to gain access to basic goods and services, may have their rights to inheritance and land challenged as the relatives of men killed in the violence often evict widows from their farmland and may be relegated to a position of lesser social status in their community (International Crisis Group, 2017).

(v) Effects on health status: The effects of conflicts on women can be devastating to their physical, emotional and social wellbeing. Violence has both direct and indirect consequence on women's health and can also increase their risk of future ill-health and disability. Some of the health problems experienced by women during conflicts are: physical injuries due to beatings, rape, miscarriages, excessive bleeding or injuries sustained during flight from the attackers. Sexually transmitted diseases, malnutrition, irregular menstrual cycles and psychological disturbances such as nightmares are some of the health problems that women experience due to conflicts. Essential services such as primary and reproductive health care are often disrupted or inaccessible during conflict situations and even when available, the services are not enough to cater for their needs while they have to queue for a long time since many people are waiting to be served (Akpehe et al., 2021).

(vi) Psychological/emotional effects: Women who survive conflicts often have to live with the vivid and terrifying images of violence, destruction of homes, killing of family

members, rape and so on for the rest of their lives. They also suffer from sexually transmitted diseases, stigmatization and sometimes unwanted pregnancies. The psychosocial consequences of sexual violence suffered by girls include: shame, depression, stigma, illness and at the worst - suicide. Unmarried girls are the most affected and some are too ashamed to go the hospital due to stigma and shame unless they were suffering from very high complications (Madzima, 2013).

Women are faced with the daunting task of keeping families together after displacement, providing food, clothing and shelter in what is in most instances, destroyed infrastructure, for their children and their families. The loss of a spouse may alter a woman's life and status in ways that affect her ability to survive. The international community has responded by viewing women as more vulnerable and in need of special assistance. The effects of the identification of women as particularly vulnerable, on one hand, sometimes leads to more problems for women and on the other, that it can lead to neglect of the suffering experienced by men. The vulnerability of any group (men, women, the elderly, children, etc.) differs according to its exposure to a given problem and its capacity to tackle it (Alawemo and Muterera, 2010).

It is vital that the women themselves are asked about the issues they would like to address and the manner in which they would like to receive assistance. Involving women in the planning, design, implementation, and evaluation of psychosocial programmes is crucial to their success. In addition, programmes that seek to address general psychosocial issues in a population need to be gender-sensitive by taking into account the situation of women, the particular problems they face, and the ways in which they deal with them. Women have different coping mechanisms from men and this need to be recognized and strengthened. Capacity building is a much-used term but in the

context of empowering women to face the challenges of post-conflict or post-emergency societies, it should form part of psychosocial programmes whose aim is to help people cope (Niaz and Tariq, 2020).

3.0 Implication for Rural and Agricultural Development

Given their position at the domestic and resource management levels, rural women constitute potential and critical agents for rural transformation. They command a diversity of experiences in their daily management of resources, ranging from participation in crop and animal farming, provision of food, water and fuel for the family, in addition to other livelihood activities. Despite these contributions, their voices are hardly heard, while their efforts and contributions are never mainstreamed in local and national development policies and practices in Nigeria (Ogoloma and Ukpere, 2011). Akpan (2015) noted that extensive contribution of women to rural development in agricultural and non-agricultural activities even with extremely primitive technology and with severely stretched time resources. The roles of women in rural and agricultural development have been broadly categorized as:

(a). Food producers and active participants in the agrarian sectors.

(b). Daily household maintenance tasks

(c). Small scale income generating activities and

(d). General contribution to the wellbeing of their rural community.

Within these categories, the role of women in rural development in Nigeria can be analysed. In the agricultural sector, women have been useful in small scale farming activities that support the household food security, provide significant employment opportunities, and generate some income for other livelihood pursuits. From the perspective of home management, women's roles have been significant at various

levels. Household tasks involving water fetching, domestic sanitation, fuel wood collection, food processing and preparation, child care and upbringing, family welfare, are all within the realm of women activities. These are crucial to family stability, progress as well as the overall development of the community. Women's direct control over income and family resources have been known to translate in better economic, social and improved nutritional levels for the family (Akpan, 2015).

Rural women are the backbone of food security and agricultural development. Without their contribution in food processing and marketing, the problems of food insecurity and malnutrition would be worse than there are today. Women play a vital role in food production, distribution, and utilization- the three components of food security. They also undertake a range of community-level activities that support agricultural development, such as soil and water conservation, afforestation and crop domestication (Venkateswarlu,2023).The women-in-agriculture programme in Nigeria, which was established in cognizance of the shortcoming in extension services for women farmers, has been a huge success. Women's groups, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and civil societies have empowered and given rural women farmers a voice and effectively championed their cause. Women farmers now have better access to farm inputs and credits, although many barriers remain and would have to be addressed to further enhance their roles. Rural women farmers deserve better recognition and greater appreciation of their tangible contributions to agriculture, rural development and food security (Ogunlela and Mukhtar, 2009).

4.0 Conclusion and Recommendations

Women bear disproportionately the consequences of conflicts and suffer violations of human rights in situations of armed conflict as they endure lifelong social

and psychological trauma. Peace and security are essential for economic growth, development and empowerment of women; and women need to play an equal part in securing and maintaining peace. To that end, they must be empowered politically and economically, and be represented adequately at all levels of decision-making. This has been reaffirmed by the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and Security Council resolution 1325 (2000), which requests Member States to increase the political representation of women; include them in decision-making, peace negotiations and conflict-resolution mechanisms; and protect them in armed conflict given that women represent one of the most vulnerable segments of the society during wars and conflicts.

References

Agbonifo, J. U. (2020). The plight of internally displaced women: A gender and intersectional analysis of the experiences of internally displaced women in IDP Camps Borno, Nigeria. Master of Arts Thesis, International Institute of Social Studies, Erasmus University Thesis Repository. https://thesis.eur.nl/pub/56137/RP

Aihiem O. N. (2010).Prevalence of domestic violence in Nigeria: implications for counselling. Edo Journal of Counselling, 2(1), 1-8.

Akpan, N.S. (2015). Women and rural development in Nigeria: Some critical issues for policy consideration. Social Sciences, 4 (5), 110-118.

Akpehe, G. A., Akor, D. N., Dewua, R., Mase., Igbudu, J. T.and Onah, S. O. (2021). Communal violence and the health security of rural women in Benue State-Nigeria. International Journal of Recent Innovations in Academic Research, 5(5),19-30.

Alawemo, O.andMuterera, J. (2010).The impact of armed conflict on women: perspectives from Nigerian women.International Journal of Sustainable Development, 2 (5), 81-86.

Brosché, J. andElfversson, E. (2012). Communal conflict, civil war, and the state. Complexities, connections, and the case of Sudan. African Journal on Conflict Resolution, 12 (3), 8-32.

Effiong, J. B. (2013). Challenges and prospects of rural women in agriculturalproduction in Nigeria. LWATI: A Journal of Contemporary Research, 10(2), 183-190.

International Crisis Group (2017). Herders against farmers: Nigeria's expanding deadly

conflict. Africa's Report No.252, Brussels, Belgium
Ogoloma, F.I. andUkpere, W.I. (2011).The role of women in peace making, conflict and rehabilitation management in Elele, Ikwerre Local Government of Rivers State, Nigeria.African
Journal of Business Management, 5(33),12711-12714.
Ogundela, Y.I. and Mukhtar, A.A. (2009) Gender issues in agriculture and rural development in Nigeria: The role of women. Humanity and Social Sciences Journal 4(1), 19-30.
Madzima-Bosha, T. (2013).Effects of conflicts on women and children. Retrieved from https://www.insightonconflict.org
Mumuni, V. S. (2016). Female livelihoods in conflict situations: Case from Bawku-Ghana. Master thesis in Peace and Conflict Transformation, The Arctic University, Norway.
https://munin.uit.no/bitstream/handle/10037/9784/thesis.pdf?
Niaz, U. andTariq, Q. (2020).Challenges in Women's mental health: care in conflict and post-conflict situations. In: P.Chandra, H. Herrman, J. Fisher and A. Riecher-Rössler (eds).Mental Health and Illness of Women.Mental Health and Illness Worldwide. Springer, Singapore. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-10-2369-9_
Poornima, B., Bhatt, K. and Pattanshetty, S.(2023). Concealed scars beyond the frontlines: Women's health in conflict zones. Observer Research Foundation. https://www.orfonline.org/expert-speak/
Relief Web (2015). Violence affecting women and girls, First Quarter Report, 2015. Retrieved from http://reliefweb.int/
Tadesse, B., Tesfaye, Y. andBeyene, F. (2010).Women in conflict and indigenous conflict resolution among the Issa and Gurgura clans of Somali in Eastern Ethiopia.African Journal ofConflict Resolution,10(1),85-110.
Venkateswarlu, C. H. (2023).Women and the problems related to food security in rural area.Kuni
Khyat Journal, 10(4), 103-108.
Watson, D. C. (2023).Rethinking inter-communal violence in Africa. Civil Wars,1–30. https://doi.org/10.1080/13698249.2023.2180924